

# HEBREWS

Hebrews 11:1-7

## Introduction

“The Hall of Faith” is what some commentators call chapter eleven of Hebrews. The men and women listed are called the “Heroes and Heroines of Faith.”

I understand those titles but I think they can be misleading. They give you the impression that only super-saints have the kind of faith necessary to get into the Hall as Heroes and Heroines. If that were the case, ***you and I would probably never be inducted!***

The purpose of this chapter is not to discourage you by comparison with God’s super-saints. It is to encourage you that **all** God’s saints are capable of living by faith.

The writer mentioned faith in the first few words of verse thirty-eight in chapter ten when he said, “Now the just shall live by faith.” “The just” refers to all believers; it refers to everyone who has been *justified by faith* in Jesus Christ. We are to “live by faith” **exactly the same way** the justified men and women of chapter eleven lived by faith.

We’ll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You’re Living By Faith When You’re Confident Of The Things That Cannot Be Seen, and #2 You’re Living By Faith When You’re Characterized By A Testimony That Can Be Seen.

#1 You’re Living By Faith When You’re  
Confident Of The Things That Cannot Be Seen  
(v1, 3 & 6)

In chapter ten you learned that the Hebrew Christians were suffering from insults, injuries, and imprisonments. They were having their possessions repossessed. In summary the writer said they were involved in “a great struggle with sufferings.”

It is the same for every generation of Christians that waits for the Lord to return. “As the sparks fly upward, man is born to trouble.” All of us either *are* or *will be* involved in some great struggle with sufferings.

In **your** great struggle with sufferings you are to live by faith. Faith is not so much defined in this chapter as it is described. You are told what faith does. What faith does is make you confident of the things that cannot be seen while you wait for the Lord to return.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

“Faith” is a much maligned concept. Believers are sometimes *ridiculed* for their faith; believers are sometimes *ridiculous* about their faith:

1. You are ridiculed for your faith especially by unbelievers who see faith as a blind leap in the dark. They think you put your brain on the shelf when you became a Christian. As J. Vernon McGee put it, to them “*faith is believing what you know ain’t so.*”
2. You can be ridiculous about your faith. There is a popular but heretical movement within Christianity that sees faith as a mystical force that you can tap into by positively speaking just the right words. Once you are initiated you can create unlimited health and wealth by speaking words of faith.

Biblical faith is neither of these things. It is not to be ridiculed because it rests on the sure foundation of the Word of God. Neither should you be ridiculous about it because it is not about mastering some mystical power but rather about submitting to the marvelous Person of Jesus Christ.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for.” “Substance” can be translated a few different ways. It’s basic meaning is *foundation*; it can also mean *assurance* or *title deed*. Sometimes it’s helpful to understand a word by putting all its meanings together: The foundation of your faith is a sure title deed.

What are “the things hoped for”? In Hebrews 9:15 you read,

Hebrews 9:15 [Jesus] is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Jesus died to establish a “new covenant” between God and man. As a result you have “redemption” and “the promise of the eternal inheritance.” “Redemption” looks *back* to God saving you and “the promise of the eternal inheritance” looks *forward* to God completing the good work He has begun in you. Neither of these things can be seen; they are “hoped for.” But your hope is a certainty and you can be confident of these things because they depend entirely upon what Jesus did on the Cross at Calvary.

“Faith is... the evidence of things not seen.” “Evidence” is a word used in court and means *evidence that is accepted for a conviction*. It is something you provide to prove your case. Your “evidence” is the indwelling Holy Spirit. He is sometimes called the “earnest” or *guarantee* “of your inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14). You have within you a Person Who proves that the “things not seen” are real.

There is a long list of the “things not seen.” They include all the spiritual resources available to you through Jesus in His ministry as your great High Priest in heaven. You can’t see them but you can be confident of them because they depend entirely upon the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

I’ve broken up the rest of the verses for thematic reasons. In verse two the writer introduces the observable characteristics of the “elders,” then he discusses three of these men in verses four, five, and seven. Let’s skip to verses three and six where he continues to talk about confidence in things hoped for that can’t be seen.

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

This verse is a great stand-alone text in the debate between God’s special creation and the theory of evolution. People have been taught that to have faith in God's special creation is to somehow abandon the facts of science. It is not an issue of the facts of science versus the faith of Christians! **Both** God's special creation *and* the theory of evolution are faith-belief systems about the past which interpret the same facts existing in the present.

No scientist in the world today, creationist or evolutionist, was present when the world came into existence. We readily admit that God's special creation cannot be proved; but neither can the natural selection processes of the theory of evolution!

The question of the origins of the universe and of mankind comes down to either *speculation* or *revelation*. The theory of evolution looks at the facts which exist in the present and speculates that time, chaos, random chance, and the struggle for survival are responsible for life as we know it. Evolution is not itself an established fact; it is a belief system through which men interpret the evidence.

As such, it is a belief system about the past based on the words of men who were *not* there but who are trying to explain how all the evidence of the present originated.

God's special creation is a belief system, too. But it is a belief system based upon the revelation of a Book which claims to be the Word of One Who *was* there, Who knows *everything* there is to know, and Who *tells* us what happened!

Having said all this, I don't think it was the writer's intent to argue about the theory of evolution. The Hebrew Christians were not having a problem with special creation being undermined in their children's schools. Both the Hebrew Christians and their Jewish persecutors believed in the literal account of Genesis chapters one and two.

The writer's emphasis is not on special creation, **but on how special you are in God's creation!** The phrase "worlds were framed" refers to more than the origins of life. They refer to the oversight of **your** life. "Worlds" can be translated *ages* and refer to the events of history. "Framed" can be translated *prepared* and refer to God's deliberate preparation of the events of human history. In other words, the events of human history are prepared by God and are moving under His oversight toward a desired end.

So are the events of **your** personal history, **of your life!** Your life is not simply a matter of time, chaos, and random chance in a struggle for survival. Your life does involve a struggle with sufferings, but it is

purposeful and meaningful and you can be confident that “all things work together for the good for those who love God.”

Now look at verse six:

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The writer introduced the idea of “pleasing God” in verse thirty-eight of chapter ten. The Hebrew Christians were considering drawing back from God by returning to animal sacrifice. A return to animal sacrifice would relieve their suffering by pleasing the Jews, but it would be displeasing to God. At some point in your life you need to decide you want to please and fear God rather than please and fear man.

Instead of trying to *end* their sufferings they should *endure* them. To endure them they would need to live by faith and this involved two things: “[believing] that [God] is” **and** that “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” They obviously believed God existed; they were Christians. But they needed also to believe God would “reward” them. “Rewards” can refer to *present resources* as well as future rewards. Very simply put the writer was telling them to come boldly to the throne of God and by faith be confident in the spiritual resources that cannot be seen but are nevertheless real.

Are you in a great struggle with sufferings? You can be confident of the things that cannot be seen and live by faith.

#2 You’re Living By Faith When You’re  
Characterized By A Testimony That Can Be Seen  
(v2, 4-5, & 7)

Faith rests upon things that cannot be seen but it always results in a testimony that **can** be seen:

Hebrews 11:2 For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony.

“Elders” are all those who have preceded you in living by faith. “Obtained a good testimony” means they were *witnessed* by their own contemporaries as living by faith.

The writer gives you a number of examples. The first three, Abel, Enoch, and Noah, have in common that they lived before the global flood. I think they have something else in common: Taken together they illustrate spiritual conditions similar to those the Hebrew Christians were facing.

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

Cain and Abel were two of the sons born to Adam and Eve. Abel offered God a lamb taken from his flock, whereas his brother Cain, who was a farmer, brought an offering of his crops. God had established with Adam and Eve that sin required the shedding of blood. Most Bible commentators agree that God received Abel's offering because it involved the shedding of the blood while rejecting Cain's offering because it did not.

Cain and Abel demonstrate the two ways you can approach God. One is by your own works, without blood. The problem with approaching God through your own works is that you would have to be perfect. **No one is perfect!**

Abel demonstrates faith as opposed to works. God required the blood of an innocent sacrificial lamb as a substitute and Abel believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness.

There's a lot more we could say about Abel and Cain if we were studying Genesis. Here in Hebrews they provide the readers a powerful illustration. Cain represents the Jews and Abel represents the Hebrew Christians. Like Abel, the Hebrew Christians were declared righteous through the blood of a sacrificed Lamb. In their case it was Jesus Christ, the final "Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world."

Once Jesus was sacrificed on the Cross as the substitute for their sin all other sacrifice should have ceased. But, like Cain, the Jews continued to offer the wrong sacrifices.

Now listen: Cain and Abel were physical brothers. So were the Jews and the Hebrew Christians. Just as Cain rose up and killed Abel, so

the Jews were rising up against the Hebrew Christians, their physical brothers! None of them had been killed yet but the implication was that their brothers may yet seek to take their lives.

The writer was telling them to imitate Abel even though they were being insulted, injured, and imprisoned... And even though it could eventually cost them their lives.

Next is Enoch:

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, *“and was not found, because God had taken him”*; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Enoch was “taken away so that he did not see death.” The words mean he was *removed* alive from earth to heaven. His “testimony” refers to what his contemporaries saw in his walk with God. He feared and pleased God rather than man. We know from the little Book of Jude that Enoch prophesied about the Lord’s Second Coming with boldness not fearing man but declaring that God would judge the ungodly.

Enoch is a type of the Rapture of the Church. The Rapture is that imminent event in which Jesus will come in the clouds for His Church to take us home to heaven. It can occur at any moment and it will occur prior to the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming.

The writer was telling the Hebrew Christians to be like Enoch. Go on preaching about the coming of the Lord and expect the Rapture to occur at any moment.

Then there is Noah:

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

The “things not seen” implies more than just the prophecy of the global flood. The earth was vastly different prior to the global flood. In all probability Noah and his contemporaries had never experienced any rain. He may not have ever seen a sea-going vessel.

The first century Jews had been warned of an impending judgment. Jesus had spoken of the siege of Jerusalem and the ruin of the Temple. Rather than return to Judaism and the Temple the Hebrew Christians should be like Noah and preach about its impending doom and be ready to escape the wrath that was coming.

These first three “elders” mirrored the situation that the Hebrew Christians found themselves in: They were being despised for the sacrifice they depended upon for their righteousness; they were expecting the Lord to return for them at any time; but if not, they were expecting the Lord to keep them safe from the impending doom about to be visited upon unbelievers.

They were characterized by a testimony that was seen by others. So will you be when you are living by faith.

## Conclusion

Let me give you two quotes about faith:

“True Bible faith is confident obedience to God’s Word in spite of both circumstances and consequences” (Wiersbe).

“Faith enables the [believer] to treat the future as the present and the invisible as seen” (J. Oswald Sanders).

The Hall of Faith is not for super-saints; it’s for all God’s saints, everyone who has been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. It is for ordinary men and women and children like you and I.

You *are* or you *will be* involved in a great struggle with suffering. Men and women of like passions have been involved in similar struggles in the past. Find one of them on the pages of Scripture and be encouraged to imitate them as you live by faith.