

LIFE Bible Study: Hebrews 11:1-40 – Part 1

Faith's Conviction & Faith's Call

For Discussion: What things make it a challenge for you to not just believe privately but to live out your faith? What makes you doubt, even momentarily, the genuineness of your faith? What brings you back from that doubt in the end?

Read Hebrews 11:1-40

Hebrews 11 consists of four sections that encompass distinct periods in history: **v.1-7** – Creation to Noah, **v.8-22** – Abraham to Joseph, **v.23-31** – Moses to Israel's entry into the Promised Land, **v.32-40** – Period of the judges, kings, and prophets. Taken together, the accounts span the whole of the Old Testament and show on a smaller scale the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption: the inception of the nation of Israel, the preservation of the patriarchs and growth of the nation, Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery, their passage through the wilderness, and Israel's entry into the Promised Land and first victory towards fully possessing it.

For review: In Hebrews 10:19-39, the author issued several exhortations for his readers to live a life in keeping with the relationship they had with God in Christ. These included drawing near to God, holding fast to their confession of hope, and setting their thoughts on how they could stir up one another to love and good works. These practices would be protective of their faith given the ever-present pressure from the world to abandon it, which had already affected some among them. He also gave them a stern warning of God's wrath for those who would obstinately turn away to a life of sin after having tasted the blessings of God and of His people. The author ended the section with the key principle, "my righteous one shall live by faith," which introduces the following chapter where he presents a list of heroes of the faith as an encouragement and as examples for his readers.

From the author's accounts, what value is there in having faith (v.1-7)?¹ What are some characteristics of the kind of faith that God values?² What is the basis for our confidence in this faith (Heb. 6:13-20)?³

¹Faith leads to assurance and certainty in what is hoped for (v.1).

¹God has regard for genuine faith and speaks well of those who have it (v.2) – His approval is the one that matters the most.

¹Faith is absolutely necessary to please God (v.6).

¹Righteousness comes through faith (v.4, 7; Gen. 15:6) – It is outside of us and claimable only by faith (**Rom. 4:3-5, 9, 18-25**).

²Faith is expressed in the context of something that is unseen/unknown (E.g., Noah obeyed God long before there was any sign that what he had been told would happen (v.7), Abraham did not know where he was going when he followed God's call to leave his homeland (v.8), Abraham offered Isaac without fully understanding how God could reconcile His command to sacrifice Isaac with His promise to give him offspring through him (v.17-18)).

²Faith is rooted in truth (v.6) – It is in a right understanding of who God has revealed Himself to be.

²Faith is expressed in action (**Jas. 2:14-26**) – In the accounts provided by the author, faith is described primarily in terms of the words and actions that it prompted.

²Faith is steadfast and enduring – The author cites several end-of-life demonstrations of faith (E.g., Isaac, Jacob, Joseph) that show that, even though these people did not receive the complete fulfillment of God's promises in their lifetimes, they still looked on it as a future certainty and welcomed its approach.

²Faith counts the cost and holds up under testing (**1 Pet. 1:3-9**) – People faced decision points where they could have turned back, but instead decided to persist in their faith because of the reward they were anticipating (v.14-16).

-They followed through on their commitments to God even when, outwardly, they had reason to change their minds. Many suffered more because of their faith and refused to accept relief if their faith was what it would have cost them (v.35b).

³Faith is grounded in the steadfast promises of God, who does not lie. God's inherent truthfulness and commitment to fulfilling His word is the basis for our confidence (Heb. 6:17-18, 10:23).

³We know God's character and His track record of faithfulness (including the accounts the author mentions). The evidence all points in the same direction and provides consistent testimony for God => Faith is not blind trust or belief despite contradiction.

To have conviction is to have a firmly held belief. Where do you see examples/evidence of conviction in the accounts given by the author?¹ As a result of their conviction, what attitudes did these individuals have regarding their specific circumstances or life in general?²

¹Both the author and his readers were convinced that God is the creator of the universe. Including themselves in the list of people who lived by faith puts them in the company of those whose accounts followed. This togetherness with the believers of old is emphasized again at the end of the chapter (v.39-40). Those who came earlier would receive their long-awaited reward alongside the author and his readers.

¹Abraham was willing to uproot his entire family and live nomadically for the rest of his life because he was looking forward to the permanent city that God had prepared for him (v.10, 16).

¹Abraham did not know how he could sacrifice Isaac and still have offspring through him, but he did not allow that limitation to hinder his obedience – In both the call to leave his home and to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham's response was carried out without delay (Gen. 12:1-4; 22:1-3).

¹All of the patriarchs were so convinced of the certainty of God's promises that they included them in the blessings they pronounced on the next generation (v.20-22).

¹Moses' parents (v.23), Moses (v.27), Daniel (v.33), and his friends (v.34) all defied the king without fear. Faith produced in them bravery and a desire to honour God over and above any other authority.

¹Rahab saw that God was with the Israelites and supported their cause, turning against her own people. Despite being a prostitute, her immoral life was not the final determinant of the kind of person she was, God (through her faith) was.

¹Both Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37) were able to raise someone from the dead (v.35a).

¹Many others accepted persecution, suffering, and even death to persist in their faith (v.35-38). Not everyone who acted in faith was spared from their suffering, but their perseverance in their faith in spite of it was the actual victory.

²Reverent fear of God (v.7), looking ahead to God's fulfillment (v.10), considering themselves strangers in the world (v.13), seeking a homeland not on earth (v.14-16), trusting God despite the unknown/uncertainty (v.17-18).

²People accepted affliction for the right cause (v.24-26, 35-38) => Heavenly-minded/willing to suffer for the sake of their faith.

-There was a change in what people treasured as well as a radical transformation in their evaluation of what was worth treasuring (v.26).

²People died in faith, not having received what was promised. In the latter parts of their lives, they did not look back in regret but continued on to the end.

-Like traveling to a city in the distance or ascending a mountain, they could see and have confidence in the end goal, even though they were not near it.

The author associates some of the figures he lists with unprompted acts of faith, while others are shown demonstrating their faith through obedience to specific calls from God. What were some of God's explicit calls to action?¹ In what ways were people's responses to them a demonstration of faith?²

¹Noah was to prepare for God's oncoming judgement by building an ark (v.7).

¹Abraham was to leave his homeland and people to pursue a greater inheritance (v.8). He was later called to sacrifice Isaac (v.17-18) – His dependence on God to build a great family for him had not ended with the birth of Isaac.

¹Moses was to institute the Passover to protect the firstborn of Israel (v.28).

¹The Israelites were to cross the Red Sea to escape their Egyptian captors (v.29). They were later to enter the Promised Land and lay siege to Jericho (v.30).

²Faith has an effect on people that is visible to those around them and clashes with the values of the world. Acting on such a faith is often costly in one way or another and entails a degree of risk.

-Whether or not a person received an explicit call to action, their faith set them apart, which often led to conflict (E.g., with Cain, Pharaoh, surrounding nations).

-The examples given show that God's calls are often for us to accept challenge rather than to accept comfort.

If your story was included in a list of people who lived by faith, what significant event or decision would be given for you?¹ What were you convicted of in that situation and how was that expressed in your response?² Give thanks to God for a faith that is real and applicable and be ready to share your experiences with others as a testimony of God's work in your life and a reminder that He honours those who honour Him (1 Sam. 2:30b).

¹It could be a moment of triumph or it could be a time of perseverance through suffering or a decision to value the things of God or spiritual/eternal matters over something that is worldly/temporal. Perhaps there was a decision to accept the consequences of making such a choice.

²In what ways was your attitude or outlook shaped in that moment by your faith?

Reflection and application

In pointing his readers to the earlier figures of faith, the author shows that their stature and achievements were not a product of their own greatness but a result of their faith. This was to be an encouragement for them to look to these examples and emulate them earnestly (Heb. 6:11-12). Whenever God gives us something to trust in, that truth is never meant to be far removed from our lives, but is rather given to transform them. Right faith changes our outlook on life as well as our values and priorities. As James has expressed elsewhere, faith and obedience, belief and action, are inseparably joined in God's design. When God brings us to conviction, the unspoken call is to place ourselves beneath the authority of that truth and to seek His guidance in living it out in whatever context He places us. Let us hold our conviction firmly to the end and keep our eyes of faith fixed on the prize that we will one day receive with our spiritual predecessors who have gone before us.