The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 11

Another long one so we shall get right into it.

A] Hebrews 11: 1 through 3; (read)

1] “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

As we closed out the last chapter, by the time we got to verse 26, the writer began pointing to looking forward and to look forward requires having faith that things are better there, recognizing that what we had in the past, was not all that good, and the past is something that is gone. We can never reclaim it.

However, looking forward is looking in faith to a new and better promise or hope. That is what faith is, the hope of that something tangible I can see and feel. The word substance can also read ‘essence, 'and as some scholars try to explain, the things hoped for might be that what is hoped for from the scripture, except the folks back them only had the Words of the Apostles and their letters as there was no well circulated Gospel at that time, just the old prophecies.

2] “*For by it, the elders obtained a good testimony.”*

This is a mixed bag; for one, some scholars refer to the apostles and their close followers, who believed and taught in faith of the promises through Christ’s redemptive work on the Cross and the promise of eternal life through Him. The other possibility is many other scholars refer to the ‘elders’ in regard to the Jewish meaning for the ancients who believed in the coming Messiah or those who prophesied about it, and the Messiah’s redemptive work on earth, and the surrounding promises from that act of redemption.

3] “*By it 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.”*

There again, by ‘it’ just means by faith, and the ‘worlds’ comes from the Greek word (aionas = ages, ever or vast period of time). The etymology gives us the word ‘eon’. How it came to mean ‘worlds’ in Hebrews is a bit of a mystery. Some scholars rightly attribute it to ‘ages.’

However, we are saying that it IS by this faith that we know all through time, we believe its history by faith because we never lived there. We just believe what others have told us. We see the earth and skies, and all things around us, but we don’t see with what they were made of do we? We see the physical universe, but it was made by the invisible God.

B] Hebrews 11: 4 through 7; (read)

1] “*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.”*

To me, the scholars of old, try to equate the two sacrifices of Abel and Cain, but in reality, Abel brought the best of his flock, whereas Cain brought just some of his fruits of the fields, not the best, mind you, just some and this reflects in the quality of the two sacrifices, Abel’s was the better, because in husbandry, you select the best male and female to produce and increase the flock, and Abel believed God, to provide the best after he sacrifices the best he had to God. Make sense? Let me ask this, do you come before God with your ‘best’? Do you go to Church dressed in your best? or come as you are? Do I come with my best attitude? Do I give my best attention toward things of God? There is a difference, isn’t there?

2] “*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. 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.”*

There is a short passage regarding Enoch in Genesis 5: 21 through 24; and all it said that during his life he walked with God, and then God took him. Apparently if he walked with God in his lifetime, he was a man whose diligence in worship set him apart from all the others. However, the real point here is, that to have any kind of relationship with God, you have to believe, to have that faith that He is, and exists. As the writer explains this, the gist falls on folks today, How are you remembered? Do folks see your true relationship with God by how you live? And how you talk? How you act in everyday situations?

3] “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.”

Frankly, the old comedy routine of Noah, where, after God tells him to build a boat, he asks “Am I on Candid Camera?” might sound more realistic, but Noah never missed a beat, he accepted the Word of God, and with his sons set about to build a massive boat, prepared for all the animals God requested and did all this despite the negative commentary from the neighbors around him. THAT was FAITH!

Are you seeing what is happening here? The writer, after berating the folks for falling back on the old ways, and bringing them the encouraging word of the saving work of Christ and setting a doctrine of hope for them, then explains that all of this depends on their faith, and now shows the faith of the ancients to prove his point.

C] Hebrews 11: 8 through 12; (read)

1] “*By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going.”*

As we can see, the writer is going right down the old testament stories, from Abel to Enoch, to Noah, now to Abraham. With Abraham we see a young married man who led a fairly comfortable life in Ur, uproot his wife and leave and go to places unknown and also not knowing what he would find there. But believing God and His promises.

2] “*By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”*

Dwelling in tents meant there seemed to be no permanency in their habitation, yet it was faith in something much greater to happen that kept them there. With this I am reminded of our pioneer settlers of time gone past, in this nation, who travelled west in search of a new start, braving the hardships they were to face.

Even in my own family, there were families of Clarys’ who had a good profitable life in the Maryland farmlands, who packed up all their belongings and headed for the free land in the Kansas territory that had just opened up in the 1850’s.

3] “*By faith, Sarah, herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”*

Now the writer glosses over a few incidentals, but essentially, he makes the case that Sarah, was believing, after a few bumps in the road, Like having Abraham use her handmaid Hagar to surrogate a child for her and finally to having her own child while well past child bearing age.

4] “*Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.”*

This then, combines God’s promise to Abraham with the promise to Sarah, and from that child came the future nation Israel. Also from Abraham came more sons and daughters from other wives, one named Keturah, after Sarah died.

D] Hebrews 11: 13 through 16; (read)

1] “*These all died in faith not having received, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”*

Although this faith went unrealized in the patriarchs’ lifetimes, yet there was that vision God had given them of one day being a great and mighty nation. They knew that although this was the promised land, it was not yet time to claim it for their people.

2] “*For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.”*

When we realize, that those like Abraham were strictly sojourners and had no rights or privileges in Canaan and had to barter for a small piece of ground in which to bury their dead, that we understand that at this point they are homeless. At this point they were in no position to claim anything, and going back to Mesopotamia was not really an option, God had told then that in time this would be their land.

3] “*But now they desire a better, that is a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”*

Because of their faith, and their seeking after the hope God has promised, God is pleased. This is the people He took for Himself and they are showing themselves faithful, and truly has prepared a city for all who believe.

E] Hebrews 11: 17 through 22; (read)

1] “*By faith, Abraham, when he was tested offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, In Isaac your seed shall be called, concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”*

We now go from faith by attitude, to faith by action. When Abraham is tested knowing the promises of God, he goes on ahead and offers up his only son with Sarah, as a sacrifice offering, believing God would at least be raising Isaac after the deed because of His holy promise.

2] “*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, concerning things to come.”*

We are back to the patriarchal blessings and this time it is Isaac blessing the two sons even the younger before the elder as we can recall the story, because the Promise continues and it will be the younger who continues it.

3] “*By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.”*

As Jacob is dying, he elicits a promise from Joseph to be buried in Canaan with his father and grandfather, and then has a blessing for Joseph’s sons again the younger before the elder, in faith knowing that the seed of these boys would be part of the family returning back to the promised land in the future.

4] “*By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children, and gave instructions concerning his bones.”*

Joseph believed that his descendants would, one day, be leaving Egypt and be returning to the promised land sometime in the future, he wouldn’t know when, but I would suppose, he did believe in God’s promises also, and he leaves instructions that his remains would be taken back to Canaan and be buried with his ancestors.

F] Hebrews 11: 23 through 29; (read)

1] “*By faith, Moses, when he was born was hidden three months by his parents because they saw he was a beautiful child and they were not afraid of the kings command.*

This faith was not with Moses, by the way, but with his parents, as knowing the edict this Pharaoh issued that all baby Israeli boys be taken to the river and drowned because the Hebrew population was growing larger than the Egyptian population. So, they hid the baby for three months after his birth, and then placed him in the basket and left him floating in the river until Pharoah’s daughter found him and raised him as her own.

2] “*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharoah’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”*

When Moses came to the age of forty, and the writer uses generalizations here, he not so much refused to be called Pharoah’s daughter as much as he probably knew who he really was and defended one of his people from cruel treatment at the hands of an Egyptian overlord, by killing the overlord, and because of the aftermath, left the Egyptian lavish lifestyle to safer fields. He could have left the Overlord to do his job and assured his cushy position in the Egyptian court, but needless to say, he did not.

The esteeming reproach of Christ, probably meant that Moses was accepting the accusatory attitude of the people as Jesus accepting the accusatory attitudes of His own people for comparisons. (Does that make sense?) Remember from the story, His own people hurled accusations at him fearful of the repercussions of the Egyptians, and asked him to leave.

3] “*By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”*

Here, again we seem to have a mixed bag, as it were, as to whether this referred to Moses’ travel into Midian and his making a home there or to Moses leading the Hebrews out of Egypt at a much later time and most scholars generally seem to point to the latter as his escape to Midian was as much out of fear than out of pragmatism. It was at Midian, Moses did meet God in the burning bush and received his initial marching orders from Him. However, it was leading the Hebrews out of Egypt, where he led them not from fear but from faith as God was leading them.

4] “*By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood lest He who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”*

Here it refers to the order to sacrifice the lambs and painting the doorposts at God’s command and this was done in faith, believing God would accomplish His holy purpose with the angel of death.

5] “*By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians attempting to do so, were drowned.”*

The writers is giving a ‘Reader’s Digest” account of the whole exodus in a few short sentences. But it was through the faith of Moses and Aaron that these things were accomplished. Also, frankly, it did take a lot of faith on the peoples’ part to walk through a sea bed where just minutes ago there was lots of water.

G] Hebrews 11: 30 through 39; (read)

1] “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.”

That would take a lot of faith, when you consider the thickness of the walls, the material they were built with and just a bunch of trumpets to blow. But to their credit, Israel did have the faith that God would do a miraculous thing.

2] “*By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.”*

Again we have the story of an outsider, who did believe in God despite her lowly degraded position, and in faith saved the spies from capture and when the Israelites attacked her city, she was saved and actually married into the family.

3] “*And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight, the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again,”*

The writer is running out of ink, I suppose, as he begins to cut short his dissertation on faith so he just points out many other acts of faith of Israeli history without even the minimal detail he was providing. The sum and substance is, all the great accomplishments of Israel, was done through faith in one way or another.

4] “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might attain a better resurrection. Still others trial of mockings and scourgings, yes and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute afflicted and tormented--of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered deserts, and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

The writer and we as well want to bring this chapter to a close to he just notes various acts of valor in the face of certain death by horrible means and the plight of those who suffered for the cause of Christ.----- Many today are suffering much the same way, yet they persevere----- a lesson for all of us, don’t you think?

5] “*And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.”*

This really could take up pages of commentary but for now let us just say that all the ancients who suffered and died for their faith did not live to see the completion of the covenants, but we have, and rejoice in our salvation however, the time will come in heaven when the saving grace of Jesus comes to those who believed and died for their faith.