

Believe!

Lessons from Hebrews 11

Student Workbook

Name: _____

Prepared By: Orville Vaughn
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*Orville Vaughn
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Believe!

Lesson 1

Introduction

*“For we are not of those who draw back to perdition,
but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”*

Hebrews 10:39

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the context preceding the examples of faith found in Hebrews 11.

Text:

Hebrews 10:19 – 11:3

Commentary:

The writer of the book of Hebrews was urging brethren who had come out of Judaism not to go back. Up to this point in the letter he has shown indisputably Christ’s superiority over angels, and the Levitical priesthood. He also has shown Christ’s new covenant to be far superior to the old covenant given to Moses and the sacrifice of His own blood (which was offered once to take away sins forever) far superior to the sacrifice of bulls and goats (the blood of which could never permanently remove sins). Having established all these things, beginning in chapter 10 verse 19 the writer shifts his focus to faith: a complete trust in God.

- “Therefore...
- “let us draw near with a true heart in full **assurance of faith**...
- “let us hold fast the confession of **our hope** without wavering,
- “for He who promised is **faithful**.

If the Hebrews were to continue their journey as Christians and not go back to Judaism, it was going to require faith. But faith is not a new thing. God has always required those who love Him to believe Him, obey Him, have faith in Him. What better way to bolster their faith (and ours) than to recall the faith of so many others who have gone before and that is what is found in chapter eleven.

Some have called this chapter the “hall of fame of faith.” That is probably a good description but, at least in sports, when we think of a hall of fame we expect everyone who met the criteria to be in the hall. That’s not the case with this hall of fame. This is just a sampling of those in the hall. “*And what more shall I say? For time would fail me...*”(vs. 32). The writer says he just doesn’t have enough time to list everyone deserving to be on this list but you get the idea. Let’s take a look at these stalwarts of faith and let their examples inspire us to greater faith and greater works.

Questions for Discussion:

1. The Hebrew writer begins chapter 11 with a definition of faith. In your own words explain this definition of faith. What does faith mean to you?
2. Who do you suppose were the elders mentioned in 11:2? How did they receive a good testimony by their faith?
3. Before giving us any examples of faith, the writer (inspired by the Spirit of God) takes us back to the very beginning and reminds us that faith is required for us to understand how God created the universe (11:3). Is this a blind faith or has God provided sufficient evidence for us to believe that He and He alone created heaven and earth? Please explain.
4. In chapter 10 verse 23, we are told to “*hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.*” What is the confession of our hope?
5. Compare Deuteronomy 17:2-6 with Hebrews 10: 28-29. Why would the punishment be worse for the one “*who has trampled the Son of God underfoot...*”?
6. Are we ever tempted today to leave Christ and go back to the world? If so, in what ways are we tempted?

7. If God is a loving God (and we know beyond doubt that He is), how do we reconcile this with Hebrews 10:31: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*? Will God actually punish those who do not believe and obey Him?

8. It says in Hebrews 10:36 that we need endurance. What is endurance? Please explain in your own words why endurance is necessary

9. Hebrews 10:37-38 is quoting a passage from an Old Testament prophet. Which prophet is being quoted and what does it mean i.e. why did the writer choose to reference it here?

10. In Exodus and Numbers, what happened to the Children of Israel who did not believe God but wanted to go back to slavery in Egypt? Compare their slavery in Egypt to our slavery in the world if we turn back from Christ. What is the promise to those who believe God and trust Him (Hebrews 10:39)?

So What?

Christ said that no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). He also said that if we are not for Him we are against Him (Matthew 12:30). Joshua told the Children of Israel to *“choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...”* (Joshua 24:15). We all have a choice to make. We can either stand up for Christ and proudly wear His name or we can go back to serving Satan and the things of this world. Which will it be? The fate of our souls hangs in the balance. Choose wisely.

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Lesson 2

Abel and Enoch

*“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.”*

Hebrews 11:6

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the examples of faith that Abel and Enoch have given us and to make application in our lives.

Text:

Hebrews 11:4-6

Commentary:

The writer of Hebrews begins his list with two examples of faith that occurred not long after creation, in Genesis chapters 4&5. It was important for the Jews to understand that faith did not start with Abraham or Moses or the prophets but faith has always been a requirement in order to please God.

Abel and Cain were brothers. They were the sons of Adam and Eve. As a consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden (Genesis 3:17-19) they had to work. Abel was a keeper of sheep while Cain was a tiller of the ground. Just like us, working was not an option but obeying God was (and is) a choice. God has given each of us free will. We can choose to believe Him and obey Him or we can choose not to believe Him. Abel chose to reverence God and, when called to offer a sacrifice, he offered a sacrifice that was in keeping with God’s command. Cain did not. As a result, God was pleased with Abel’s sacrifice (because he obeyed God) and he was not pleased with Cain’s offering. Rather than recognizing his sin, repenting, and making correction, Cain became jealous and, in a rage, killed his brother. But *“through his faith, though he died, he still speaks”* (Hebrews 11:4 ESV). Abel’s faith was demonstrated by what he did.

From what little we know about Enoch, he was a very unique man. According to the genealogy found in Genesis 5, Enoch was the son of Jared and was born about 622 years after the creation of Adam (Genesis 5:1-3). Enoch only lived 365 years, which seems to be an incredibly long time to us but was a very short life span considering that his father lived to be 962, his grandfather lived 895 years, and his son Methuselah lived to the ripe age of 969 years (the oldest man on record in God’s Word). However, Enoch’s relatively short life-span was actually a blessing because it is said that he *“walked with God; and he was not, for God took him”* (Genesis 5:24). Why is he included in this elite group of people with great faith? We are simply told here in Hebrews that *“before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God”* (11:5). He had done something (or

some things) very pleasing to God. This is one of the central messages in this chapter: if you want to please God, trust Him. Without a doubt (since God holds him up as an example of faith), Enoch trusted God.

One other thing should be noted about Enoch: he is mentioned in the book of Jude (verses 14 & 15). In these verses, he is referred to as a prophet (or preacher) who prophesied that God would bring judgment against the ungodly and the things they had spoken against God. Sadly, just a few generations after Adam, corruption and ungodliness were already filling the hearts of men. It is encouraging to read of faithful men like Enoch who boldly spoke against their ungodliness. Unfortunately, the sin and ungodliness of mankind continued to grow after God took Enoch. Noah was Enoch's great-grandson and we know how corrupt things had become in the days of Noah.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Abel? Was he pleasing to God? Why or why not?
2. Who was Cain? Was he pleasing to God? Why or why not?
3. Does God ever require of us anything that we cannot do? Why is this important?
4. Has God given us free will to choose to obey Him or dis-obey Him? Why is this important?
5. Why do you think God included Abel in this list of people who had great faith?
6. Who was Enoch?
7. Enoch lived to be what age?

8. We know that we all will depart from this earth one day (Ecclesiastes 12:7). What was unique about Enoch's departure?

9. What do we learn about Enoch in Jude 14,15?

10. Why do you think God included Abel in this list of people who had great faith?

So What?

People like Abel and Enoch get very little mention in God's Word (merely a few verses). They certainly are not central figures in God's narrative to us and yet they were so pleasing to God that he proudly recounts to us their amazing faith. No one is unimportant in God's sight. Don't sell yourself short. God knows your troubles and He knows your triumphs. And He is not idly standing by but every day He is equipping us to be victorious. *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run the race that is set before us"* (Hebrews 12:1). Run the race!

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Lesson 3

Noah

*“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,
And that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth,
And He was grieved in His heart.”*

Genesis 6:5-6

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the example of faith that Noah has given us and to make application in our lives.

Text:

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.”

Commentary:

What great faith Noah must have had. Just imagine:

- He believed that something catastrophic would happen that not only had never happened before but there was no indication that it was even remotely possible. Thunderstorms may have been on the earth prior to this but not torrential downpours that continued unabated for 40 days and nights. Prior to this the fountains of the deep had never been broken up and allowed to spread their waters over the earth. Following human logic, a flood of this proportion was simply not conceivable but Noah believed God against all conventional wisdom. If God said that a flood would consume the entire earth, then Noah knew that it would happen. This took tremendous faith. Noah believed in something that he had never seen.
 - What about us today?
 - Have we seen heaven? Do we believe in something we have not seen?
- Noah’s faith compelled him to obey God and build an ark of enormous size. This not only took years to build but almost certainly brought on much ridicule and derision. He was willing to endure this because he trusted God.
 - What about us today?
 - Do we believe that Christ will return one day and that this earth will be destroyed (not by water) but by fire (2 Peter 3:10)? Are we making preparations for that event? Is our faith as strong as Noah’s?

6. In Matthew 24:36-39 Christ compares the “days of Noah” with His second coming. Read those verses and comment on this comparison. What was Christ’s point?

7. Read 2 Peter 3:3-7 and comment on the scoffers today and in Noah’s time.

8. In Hebrews 11:7 it says that Noah “condemned the world.” What does this mean? In what way(s) did he condemn the world?

9. Was Noah’s faith an active faith? In other words, did his faith compel him to act?

10. While Noah constructed the ark according to God’s specific instructions, one could argue that it was God who provided the ark to Noah as a means of protection and deliverance from the impending judgment against the world. Compare the ark in Noah’s day to the church today. Has God provided a means for us to escape the corruption of the world and survive the storm? Comment on this.

So What?

How can you have a faith similar to Noah’s faith? What are the warnings that God is giving you and what action is He telling you to take? Noah’s faith did not save him and his family until he took action. Likewise, your faith will not save you unless you act on it. Resolve today to trust God with all of your heart and to put your faith in action.

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Lesson 4

Abraham

*“And he believed in the Lord,
and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”*

Genesis 15:6

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the faith of Abraham and make application.

Text:

Hebrews 11:8-10; 17-19

Commentary:

The Hebrew writer cites two incidences of Abraham’s faith and both are equally impressive.

“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.”

- It is most likely that Abram was living a very comfortable life in Ur of the Chaldeans and later in Haran when God called him to *“get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.”* What? He was probably living in a nice house in a walled city and enjoying many comforts. And God said in essence to pack up and go to a distant country hundreds of miles away, leave your house and walled city and prepare to live in tents for the rest of your life. What? And we should note that Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. He was not a young man simply looking for adventure.
- Why did Abram (later to become Abraham) leave his country and the comforts of home? Because he believed God’s promises to be true. He trusted God more than the riches and comforts of his own country and his own home. He believed God promises that *“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing”* (Genesis 12:2). Did God keep His promises? Yes. Was it worth it Abraham? Because of his faith, God continued to bless him and it is through the seed of Abraham that all the nations of the earth are blessed. Jesus the Christ our Lord came through the seed of Abraham. Yes! We can be confident that Abraham would say it was worth it.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead...”

- Could there be a greater test of faith? Could there ever be any test greater than this for a father? Yes, he may intellectually know that God can raise his son from the dead BUT this is his son! He is killing his son. Abraham, what will you do? His faith never wavered. He trusted God completely and had every confidence that God, being a loving and just God, would somehow and in some way preserve Isaac, this son of promise. As with Noah but to a much, much higher degree, Abraham could not understand or comprehend but he believed. On an even higher plane, God Himself, knew exactly the agony that Abraham felt. *“For God so loved the world that **He gave His only Son** that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Abraham? When did he live? Is he of any historical significance (not only in God’s Word but in the history of mankind)?
2. Why did Abraham leave everything to follow God?
3. Read Matthew 19:29. In this passage, Christ promises something to those who leave things (or relationships) to follow Him. How is this similar or different from the promises God made to Abraham if he would leave his home and native country and follow Him?
4. Did Abraham prosper in the land of Canaan (provide some Bible passages)?
5. Did God make Abraham a great nation? Were all the families of the earth blessed through Abraham (Genesis 12:3)?
6. How old was Abraham when Isaac was born? How old was Sarah?

7. What did Abraham do when God told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice?

8. Why do you think God tested Abraham with such a severe test?

9. Compare Abraham's willingness to offer his only son, Isaac with God's willingness to offer His only son, Jesus? What is similar? What is different?

10. What can we learn from Abraham and his great faith in God?

So What?

Abraham was told to do some things that were very hard. Sometimes God will require hard things of us too. These hard things can make us stronger and God knows that we will never grow if our faith is not tested. As a loving father, He disciplines us for our own good so that we might grow, become stronger and produce fruit. The next time life gets hard read Hebrews 12:5-11. It just might be that God is helping us to grow in our faith.

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Lesson 5

Sarah and Isaac

*“And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said.
And the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.
For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age,
At the set time of which God had spoken to him.”*

Genesis 21:1-2

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the faith of Sarah and Isaac

Text:

Hebrews 11:10-11; 20

Commentary:

Sarah was 90 years old and had never given birth to a child. She was well passed child-bearing age. The thought of her conceiving and having a child at this time in her life was against all human probabilities. Here is another case of one's faith superseding all human logic and experience. As the commentator Albert Barnes stated it: "Nothing else but faith could have led her to believe that in her old age she would bear a son."¹

Sarah is perhaps best known for her lack of faith (Genesis 18:11-13) when first told that she would bear a child in her old age. So, it might seem out of place that she is mentioned here along with her husband and so many others of great faith. However, just because there was an instance in her life when she did not display faith, that did not define her. And perhaps she is included here as an example of one re-considering her lack of faith and developing a deep and strong faith. We are not told the back-story. We only know that the Spirit of God included her in this illustrious "hall of fame" because of her faith. *"By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised."*

Isaac blessed both of his sons: Jacob and Esau. Why did he do this? He pronounced his blessings on his sons because he believed that God was faithful and would approve of and complete his blessings. He trusted in God to continue the promise given to his father Abraham in his sons. He did this even though there was deceit on the part of Rebekah and Jacob. He was greatly troubled (the scripture says he "trembled exceedingly") when he learned that he had given the blessing intended for Esau to Jacob but he must have seen the hand of God in all of this and proceeded to extend blessings to Esau as well. God's had indeed was in it all and God recognized Isaac's faith and specifically calls him out because of it. *"By faith Isaac, invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau."*

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Sarah? Who was her husband?
2. Was Sarah pleasing to God? Why or why not?
3. How old was Sarah when she gave birth to her first child? Was this unusual?
4. Sarah is mentioned in Hebrews for her faith. Was there ever a time in her life when her lack of faith was noted? What can we learn from this?
5. Sarah is also mentioned in 2 Peter 3:6. What is the context around this verse and for what was Sarah recognized and commended?
6. Who was Isaac? Who were his parents?
7. Did Isaac have any children? If so, which of his children are mentioned in God's Word?
8. Which of the male children was the firstborn? What did he do with his birthright? Did he receive a blessing from his father, Isaac?
9. Which of the male children was the second born? Did he receive a blessing from his father, Isaac? Anything unusual about this?

10. God recognizes Isaac as an example of faith. Why? What did he do?

So What?

It appears that Sarah's faith was mainly inside her heart. She had a strong belief that God would do as He had promised. This must have given her comfort and strength. She believed when others would have doubted. There may have been initial shock and disbelief on her part but no more. She knew without a doubt that she would have a son. God keeps His promises. There may be things troubling you and causing you to waver in your faith and doubt God. Look to Sarah and let her faith lift you up. There is nothing too difficult for God. And, when your faith grows on the inside, it's going to start to show on the outside.

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Lesson 6

Jacob

*“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised,
But having seen them and greeted them from afar,
And having acknowledged that they were
Strangers and exiles on the earth.”*

Hebrews 11:13

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about the faith of Jacob and how knowing about his faith can help us today.

Text:

Hebrews 11:21

“By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.”

Commentary:

Jacob had twelve sons and, before he died, he addressed each of them with words that were more prophecy than blessings (Genesis 49). He told them things that would happen to them and their descendants (some good some not good) after his departure. However, prior to speaking to his sons, he bestows blessings on the first two sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) and it for this that he is recognized in Hebrews 11. Joseph was Jacob’s favorite son and he is now the ruler in Egypt (second only to the Pharaoh). Jacob trusts God’s promises that his descendants will not remain in Egypt but will return to the land God had promised to Abraham (Jacob’s grandfather), the land of Canaan. When they do return, he wants it known that these two sons of Joseph will receive equal inheritance in the land as though they were his own sons and not his grandsons. He expresses this thought in 48:5-6 and again in the blessing he bestows upon them, 48:15-16. Jacob had faith that not only would God bring his descendants back to the promised land to possess it, but Joseph through his two sons would have a double portion. God was pleased with Jacob’s fervent, unwavering faith in Him.

Isn’t it interesting that Jacob, the second born after Esau, gave preference to Ephraim, the second born after Manasseh, when he blessed them.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Jacob? When and where did he live?

2. Who was Jacob’s father?

3. Did Jacob have any children? If so, what do we know about them?
4. Did Jacob have a favorite child? Did this cause problems later on?
5. What is mentioned here in Hebrews 11 regarding Jacob's faith?
6. Who were the sons of Joseph?
7. When Jacob pronounced a blessing on the sons of Joseph, was the oldest blessed first? Compare this with Isaac's blessings to his sons.
8. What blessings can we give our children and grandchildren before we die?
9. What blessings can we give our children and grandchildren every day?
10. Did God promise any spiritual blessings to His children who are His adopted sons and daughters in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14). If so, what are these blessings?

So What?

In addition to giving blessings to our children and grandchildren, we can be blessings to other people too. Think about the things you can do for others regularly. Can you give someone a ride to the assembly? Can you help pick up some groceries for those who are not able to get out? Can you simply go over a visit with someone who could use some company? We can be blessings in many ways. We just have to look.

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Lesson 7

Joseph

*“And Joseph said to his brethren, ‘I am dying;
But God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land
To the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’
Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel saying,
‘God will surely visit you, and you will carry up my bones from here.’”*

Genesis 50:24-25

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about the faith of Joseph and how his example can help us today.

Text:

Hebrews 11:22

“By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.”

Commentary:

One of the most inspiring people in the Bible is Joseph. God could have mentioned numerous examples of this man’s great faith.

- Sold by his own brothers as a slave and sent to Egypt but remained faithful to God
- Falsely accused of sexual assault and thrown into prison but remained faithful to God.
- Forgotten by those he be-friended in prison but remained faithful to God.
- Alone, forgotten by family and friends, serving time in prison in a foreign country for a crime he didn’t commit yet he remained faithful to God.

Joseph is definitely one of my heroes. Where did he get the courage? Where did he get the stamina? His story is a amazing story of faith. So amazing that Hollywood would almost certainly reject it if someone submitted it as a script for a movie. Who would believe it? But it is all true.

So which of these instances does God use as an example for the Hebrew Christians and for us to consider? None of the above. The writer, inspired by God, reminds us of Joseph’s faith in those things yet to come. One day, almost 400 years into the future, God would deliver His people from Egypt. Through his faith, Joseph knew this would happen and, when it did, he wanted his coffin carried with them back to the promised land to be buried with his people.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Joseph? What do you know about him?

2. Did Joseph have any brothers? What was his relationship with his brothers?

3. Who were Joseph's father and mother?

4. How did Joseph end up in Egypt?

5. Was Joseph willing to forgive his brothers?

6. Are you willing to forgive others when they do you wrong?

7. What challenges do most of us face when it comes to forgiveness?

8. What specific instructions did Joseph give concerning things he wanted done after he died?

9. In what ways did Joseph show his faith?

10. What is the most important lesson you have learned from Joseph?

So What?

Joseph went through some rough times. He was treated harshly by his brothers, and his employer but he never lost heart. He kept his faith in God regardless of how he was treated and regardless of his present circumstances. When it comes to our individual faith we need to have a similar resolve. Things will not always be rosy. Others may treat us harshly and we may suffer for things we did not do. We, like Joseph, must never lose heart. In the end, Joseph prospered more than all those who had mistreated him. None of us knows what tomorrow may bring but, if we remain faithful to God, we know things will work out just fine in the end.

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Lesson 8

Moses

*“But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses,
Whom the Lord knew face to face.”*

Deuteronomy 34:10

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about the faith of Moses

Text:

Hebrews 11:23-28

Commentary:

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the writer of Hebrews begins his description of Moses' faith by talking about his parents' faith.

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.”

We learn a lot from our parents. If we are blessed to have parents who choose to be present, they are usually our most influential teachers. A few years ago, I was preaching a weekend series of lessons at a small church in Minnesota. After one of the lessons, some of the members invited me and my wife Debra to go to a local café for a bite to eat. During the meal, one of the elderly members got up a couple of times, once to go to the rest room and once to re-visit the buffet. I noticed that every time he got up, a young sister in the church (early to mid-twenties) always got up with him to help him, took his arm and escorted him. I was so impressed with her actions that I later made a point to compliment her. She humbly accepted the compliment but said it was nothing out of the ordinary; they always looked out for each other. I thought to myself, sadly it is out of the ordinary these days. We are living in a very me-centered society where people are so focused on themselves that they rarely notice that others may need some help. And then I thought: what this young woman did is really a testament to her parents. Someone took the time to teach her about being considerate of others, to notice an elderly brother or sister who could use some help, to realize that you are not the most important person in the room. I have never met this young woman's parents. She and her husband moved to this area (where I was holding a meeting) for school. I have never met them but I know they are good people. I know because I have met their daughter.

So, I am glad the example of Moses' faith begins with his parents. They believed! And, even though Moses was raised in Pharaoh's house, I'm thinking his parents and their influence were close by (we are told that Moses' mother served as his nurse maid and care giver at least in his younger years).

Next, in Hebrews, we see Moses as a grown man, forty years old and making his own decisions.

- *“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”*

Moses had to make a choice and he chose Christ. The Jewish Christians in the first century had to make a choice and many of them were choosing the treasures of Egypt instead of Christ. Christians today must also make a choice and it is no different. Choose the easy way or choose the hard way. Notice the wording. The writer says *“He (Moses) considered the reproach of Christ **greater wealth** than the treasures of Egypt.”* Now that takes faith! I’m going to choose to suffer now because I am looking down the road to the end game. In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ used the example of two roads and two gates: a wide gate leading to a broad road and a narrow gate that led to a difficult road. We all are standing in front of these gates and we must make a choice. I like the observation the Bible commentator Matthew Henry made about this choice:

“No man in his wits, would choose to go to the gallows, because it is a smooth, pleasant way to it, or refuse the offer of a palace and a throne, because it is a rough, dirty way to it; yet such absurdities as these are men guilty of, in the concerns of their souls.”

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Moses?
2. Did Moses have a hard life or an easy life?
3. How old was Moses when he came back from Midian to lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land? Comment on this. Does that seem a little old for such an important job?
4. The Hebrew writer mentions that Moses was willing to bear the reproach of Christ? Christ would not be born as a man for hundreds of years. What do you think this means?

5. How did Moses' parents help him?

6. How did Moses display his faith in God?

7. Were the children of Israel always eager to follow Moses? If not, how did Moses handle this?

8. What do you think made Moses a good leader?

9. Read Numbers 12:6-8 and talk about the relationship that Moses had with God. How was it different from any other we read about in God's word?

10. What is the biggest lesson you have learned from Moses?

So What?

Moses did not take the easy way in life. He could have but, instead he chose to follow God knowing that sometimes that would mean hardships. Would you make that same choice? If you were living in a palace and had everything you wanted at your fingertips, would you be willing to give it all up and live a life with few comforts and much uncertainty? Unfortunately, that's a hard question for most of us. It shouldn't be but it is, if we are honest. And the true answer lies in what we are actually doing today. How about you? Are you holding on to the treasures and pleasures of Egypt or have you chosen the narrow gate and the hard road? "Lord, help me to do what is right; not what is easy."

Believe!

Lesson 9

Rahab, Gideon, and Barak

*“And all these, though commended through their faith,
Did not receive what was promised,
Since God had provided something better for us,
That apart from us they should not be made perfect.”*

Hebrews 4:12

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about the faith of these courageous people.

Text:

Hebrews 11:32

Commentary:

Rahab

The story of Rahab appears in Joshua chapter 2. She lived in Jericho, the first city on the other side of the Jordan and the first walled city of any size that the Israelites would attack. Word had spread quickly to the inhabitants of Jericho and all of Canaan about the victories of the Children of Israel and they were greatly afraid but they had a walled city. Sadly, the citizens of Jericho put their trust in a stone wall. In a city of thousands, only Rahab had the faith and courage to recognize their impending doom and do something about it. In the face of overwhelming odds, she had great faith.

*“And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted;
neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you,
for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”*

Joshua 2:11

All the other citizens of Jericho either put their faith in their wall or shrunk back in fear. Only Rahab had faith that drove her to take action and her action saved her and her family. Rahab's great faith in the God of the Israelites resulted in her name being included in two very exclusive lists: her name appears here among the great people of faith before the time of Christ and her name appears also in Matthew 1. Matthew began his gospel with the “genealogy of Jesus Christ.” Under the Old Covenant, the names of women were typically not included in the genealogies, only the names of the men were included. In Matthews's genealogy of Christ, two women are named and neither of them were Jews: Ruth and Rahab. Indeed, she is greatly honored by God.

Gideon

Gideon was one of the judges in Israel. He lived in a time when the children of Israel were being greatly oppressed by the Midianites (Judges 6-8). When others were shrinking back, Gideon believed God and took action. He trusted God and it showed when he:

- Risked his life by tearing down the altar of Baal and building an altar to God in its place.
- Reduced his army from 22,000 down to 300 men because God told him to.
- Led this army of 300 men against an army of 120,00 soldiers and scored one of the greatest victories in the history of armed warfare.

As a result of his trust in God, and the faith that drove him to action, their enemies were driven out and the land had rest.

*“Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel,
so that they lifted their heads no more.
And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon.”*

Judges 8:28

Barak

Barak also lived during the time of the Judges but he himself was not a judge. Rather he was a great commander of the Israelite army. Deborah was the judge over Israel at this time (Judges 4-5) and they were being greatly oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan and the commander of his army, Sisera. Directed by God, Deborah told Barak to go into battle against Sisera and his army and God would give Barak the victory. Then Barak did something very remarkable. Even though he led an army of ten thousand men, the army he was facing was much greater and even had “chariots of iron.” He knew that victory could only come with God’s help. Wisely, and with great humility for a army general, he said to Deborah:

“If you go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!”

Barak’s confidence in battle was not in his great courage or leadership skills, it was not in his army of brave soldiers. It, quite frankly was in a woman. His trust was in God and the woman God had put in place to judge Israel at this time. Deborah accompanied Barak in the battle, Sisera’s army was routed, and Sisera himself was killed by another woman, whose name was Jael... but that’s another story.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Rahab and why do you think she was mentioned here in Hebrews 11?
2. Rahab took a great risk in helping the Israelites. How do you think she justified taking this risk?

3. Is Rahab mentioned anywhere in the New Testament (besides Hebrews 11)? If so, where and why?
4. Who was Gideon and why do you think he was mentioned here in Hebrews 11?
5. What was Gideon's 300?
6. What is the biggest lesson of faith you have learned from Gideon?
7. Who was Barak and why do you he was mentioned here in Hebrews 11?
8. What is the biggest lesson of faith you have learned from Barak?
9. Who was the judge over Israel in the time of Barak?
10. How was Gideon able to defeat the Midianites? What strategy did God give him?

Making Application

All of the heroes of faith we have studied had one common trait: they all trusted God. Even Rahab who was not one of God's chosen people, knew about the God of Israel. She believed in him and had great faith that he could deliver her and her family. You may have come to know God later in life but that does not mean he will love you any less or not deliver you from destruction. Believe! And act!

Believe!

Lesson 10

Samson and Jephthah

*“And so it was, when the people of Ammon
Made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead
Went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob.”*

Judges 11:5

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the faith of these men: Samson and Jephthah

Text:

Hebrews 11:32

Commentary:

Samson

Samson was the twelfth judge of Israel and he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines (Judges 15:20). Much is said about Samson in God’s word (Judges 13-16) from his birth to his death. He is perhaps best known for his tremendous physical strength and his physical weakness when it came to women but Samson was much more than that. God includes him here as a reminder to the Hebrews and to us of his great faith. Samson was essentially a one-man army. Almost single-handedly (the Spirit of God was always with him in his battles) Samson killed dozens and even thousands of God’s enemies.

- *“Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men...”* 14:19
- *“So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter...”* 15:8
- *“When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it.”* 15:14-15

Samson was fearless. He was also a great man of faith. He knew that his strength came from God. He asked God to help him and acknowledged God’s help when he was victorious in spite of overwhelming odds. Samson’s weakness in the flesh was finally his demise but even when God’s enemies were successful in capturing him, tormenting him, and ridiculing him, he trusted God to help him one final time.

*“Then Samson called to the Lord, saying ‘O Lord God, remember me, I pray!
Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God,*

*that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines
for my two eyes!” 16:28*

God heard his prayer “...and he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.”

Samson should be an inspiration to those of us who struggle with our flaws and weaknesses. His faith should inspire us.

Jephthah

Jephthah was the eighth judge of Israel. He is described in Judges 11:1 as “*a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot.*” Because of circumstances over which he had no control (his mother was a harlot), Jephthah was an outcast. He was disowned by his family. Well this fellow wasn’t going to amount to anything was he? The world was against him! How many young men and women today have been written off like this? They are told they will amount to nothing due to who their parents were (or were not) or where they grew up. God’s message to us through Jephthah? Don’t buy into that! Don’t write your life off just because others have. You still can make something of yourself with God’s help. God will never write you off.

In a time of great trouble and distress, Jephthah’s kinsmen from Gilead turn to him for help. The young man whom they unkindly dismissed, was the one they now looked to as their savior. Understandably, Jephthah was a little skeptical.

“Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father’s house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?”

When the people of Gilead agreed to make him “*head and commander over them*” Jephthah came back. He never gave up on himself and, through all the trials and difficulties, he kept his faith in God. With God’s help, Jephthah went on to accomplish great things and this outcast ended up in the hall of fame.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Samson?

2. Samson was: (hint: he was two of these things)
 - a. A judge
 - b. A prophet
 - c. A king
 - d. A nazirite

3. What do you remember most about Samson?
4. Why do you think Samson was included in this list of people with great faith?
5. What was Samson's final act before he died?
6. Who was Jephthah?
7. How did Jephthah's family treat him (in his early life)? Why?
8. What lessons can we learn from how Jephthah was treated?
9. Why do you think Jephthah was included in this list of people of great faith?
10. When given the opportunity to come back and help his brethren, how did Jephthah respond?

So What?

Jephthah had a rocky start to his life. He had a lot to overcome but he did. We too can resolve to not let the circumstances dictate who we are or who we will become. It doesn't matter who you were or how poor your circumstances. With God, the sky's the limit. Don't limit yourself and your potential. Resolve to be all you can be every day!

Believe!

Lesson 11

David

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Psalm 23:1

Lesson Goal:

To better understand some of the aspects of the faith of this mighty man of God.

Text:

Hebrews 11:32

Commentary:

Where to begin to speak of the faith of David? Nearly his entire life was one of unwavering faith in his God.

- When as a boy, he showed more faith than all the warriors in Saul’s army, went out alone and unarmed (except for a sling and some smooth stones) and defeated the mighty giant, Goliath.
- When as a young man, he knew that God had chosen him to be king but he waited and honored Saul. Numerous times he could have killed Saul and taken over the throne but his faith caused him to wait on the Lord.
- When as king, he was victorious in battle after battle because he knew that “the battle belongs to the Lord.” He was faithful and gave God the glory.
- When preparing a place to build the temple (which his son Solomon would construct) he insisted on paying full price to Ornan for this plot of land saying “*I will not take what is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing*” (1 Chronicles 21:24).
- And numerous other examples we could cite.

He was not perfect and God does not hide his flaws and warts but, when taken as a whole, his life is a beautiful portrait of a man devoted to serving his Creator. It was only said of David, that the Lord had found “*a man after His own heart.*” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22).

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was David? Who was his father? Did he have any brothers?

2. What do you think was David’s greatest accomplishment?

3. Why do you think David is included in Hebrews 11?
4. What do you think it means that David was a “man after God’s own heart”?
5. After Samuel anointed him king, how did David treat Saul?
6. Why do you think David was victorious in so many battles?
7. Which of David’s sons followed him as king of Israel?
8. Which of David’s sons tried to wrest the kingdom from David with force?
9. Would you say David had an easy life or a hard life? Please explain.
10. How old was David when he became king and how long did he reign?

So What?

At a young age, David was given great responsibility. With only a few exceptions, he rose to the occasion. He did not shirk his responsibility but did his best to lead the people in a righteous way.

Many people would like to be king but few people want the responsibilities that come with being king. None of us will likely become a king, or president, or governor but all of us have responsibilities. We are husbands or wives or fathers or mothers or children or brothers or sisters, etc. These may seem like small responsibilities but they make a big impact if we neglect or abuse them. It can be argued quite forcefully that that break down of a nation begins with the breakdown of the nuclear family. How are you doing in your role and with your responsibilities? What you do, makes a difference and what we all do collectively can change the course of a nation. Pray about it and believe!

Believe!

Lesson 12

Samuel and the Prophets

*“Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.
And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah.
And he judged Israel in all these places.
Then he would return to Ramathaim, for his home was there,
And there he also judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the Lord.”*

1 Samuel 7:15-17

Lesson Goal:

To learn more about the faith of Samuel and the prophets

Text:

Hebrews 11:32

Commentary:

Samuel

The story of Samuel and his great faith begins with his mother, Hannah. Once again, we see the effect a godly parent has on their child. Hannah was barren and she made a vow to God that, if He opened her womb and blessed her with a son, she would give the child back to the Lord to be in his service all the days of his life. This was a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6) which was normally for a set period of time but in some instances (like this) it could be for life. Samson and John the Baptist were also under the Nazarite vow from the womb (Judges 13:5 and Luke 1:15). God heard her prayer and she gave birth to Samuel. Samuel was a judge of Israel; and also a prophet (spokesman for God). In his lifetime he saw the transition from judges to kings (Samuel was the last judge over Israel and Saul was the first king). Samuel anointed the first two kings (both chosen by God) to rule over Israel: Saul and David. As a boy, Samuel served under the priest Eli and his first prophecy was against the house of Eli for his sons were very wicked. Samuel was greatly revered by the people and by the kings. He was first and foremost a man of God and was not shy about rebuking those who sinned, even if it were the king himself. He:

- Prophesied against the house of Eli.
- Judged Israel for 20 years.
- Warned the people about the dangers of having a king and what it would cost them.
- Anointed Saul as the first king of Israel.
- Rebuked Saul for not obeying God’s command and told him that God had rejected him from being king.
- Anointed David to be the king over Israel.
- Told Saul that he and his sons would die in battle the next day. Samuel’s spirit was called up by a medium at the request of Saul which didn’t make

Samuel very happy. Saul was probably hoping for some good news but it was too late for that.

Samuel lived a full and very godly life. His inclusion in this list of people with great faith is very fitting.

The Prophets

The life of a prophet was a hard life. Some of the hardships listed here in Hebrews 11, certainly fit with what we know about what happened to many of the prophets of God.

“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

Want a cushy life? Don't be a prophet of God. While this list in Hebrews 11 is looking back to those before Christ and showing what great faith these people had who were looking forward to the Messiah, the same could be said for the Apostles of Christ. They lived hard lives because of their faith and their determination to preach the message of the risen Savior. They were beaten, stoned, driven out of town, had their reputations ruined and yet Paul was able to say... you know, that really doesn't matter. *“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ”* (Philippians 4:7-8). The same could be said for the early Christians. Some were martyred, fed to lions, or crucified for not denying Christ. Some lost their jobs and were outcasts of society. And through the ages since then, there have been periods of intense persecution against God's people. It is not even too hard to imagine persecution happening to Christians in this country some day. The winds seem to be blowing in that direction. The prophets are our examples. They didn't shrink back but pressed on. May we like they and like the apostles say *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:13-14).

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who was Samuel?

2. Who was Samuel's mother? What effect did her life have on his life?

3. Why do you think Samuel is included in this list of people who had great faith?

4. Samuel was so greatly respected that someone even had his spirit called up from the dead. Who wanted to speak to Samuel even though he was dead? How did that work out?

5. Under God's direction, did Samuel anoint any kings? If so, who were they?

6. Who is your favorite prophet in the Old Testament? Why?

7. Generally speaking, was the life of a prophet a hard life or an easy life? Explain.

8. Compare the lives of the prophets in the Old Testament with what we know about the lives of the apostles in the New Testament.

9. How would you define the word "prophet?"

10. Are there prophets today?

Making Application

The prophets who were faithful (not false prophets) prophets spoke what God told them to say. They were not at liberty to make up their own stories, commands, or instructions to the people. Similarly, today if we are teaching others what to do to become a Christian or how to remain faithful as a Christian, we must not teach what is convenient or popular but only what God has said. We are not God. We are merely his messengers and servants. Be careful in how you handle God's word. It contains the message of eternal life and from it one day we will be judged.

Believe!

Lesson 13

Summary and Lessons Learned

*“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,
Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame,
And has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Hebrews 12:2

Lesson Goal:

To summarize the key points and lessons from our study of Hebrews 11

Text:

Hebrews 11

Chapter Summaries:

So, what have we learned? What are some take-aways that we can continue to ponder and meditate on?

- Abel
 - Obeyed God’s commands without question.
- Enoch
 - Faithfully preached to world that didn’t want to hear.
- Noah
 - Believed God even though what God told him would happen had never happened before and, through human logic, couldn’t possibly happen.
- Abraham
 - Put total confidence in God’s promises. Left his home and set off for a place he knew nothing about
 - He was willing to offer his son as a sacrifice, trusting that God would raise him up.
- Sarah
 - Overcame her initial shock and unbelief and developed a strong faith in God and his promises.
- Isaac
 - Trusted God to preserve the blessings he bestowed on his sons.
- Jacob
 - Trusted God to deliver his people from Egypt one day and, knowing this, wanted Joseph to have a double portion in the land of promise.
- Joseph
 - Like his father, he believed God’s promises to Abraham and Isaac regarding the promised land, and wanted his bones taken there when they returned.

- Moses
 - Chose God and His people and suffering over the temporary pleasures in Egypt.
- Rahab
 - Believed in the God of the Israelites and the power of His might that she was willing to risk her life to help the spies.
- Gideon
 - Trusted God enough to take an army of 300 up against an army of 120,000 and won!
- Barak
 - Believed that God would give him victory over his enemies and insisted that God's judge over the people be by his side.
- Samson
 - Defeated the Philistines in numerous battles knowing that God was with him. Was willing to die with the Philistines in one final show of strength. God empowered him one last time.
- Jephthah
 - Overcame odds that many would say were insurmountable to become the leader of God's people. A man of faith and perseverance.
- David
 - Throughout his life, trusted God completely.
- Samuel
 - Faithfully served God from his childhood to his final day.
- The Prophets
 - Suffered greatly but had their eyes firmly fixed on the reward.

What a list of greatness and inspiration. And we could add to the list but in this marvelous chapter in Hebrews, God has made His point. All of these witnesses are telling us to not turn back! They were faithful in spite of trials and insurmountable odds and we can be too. We've just got to believe!

Questions for Discussion:

1. Similar to what I have done above, in one word or one (or two) sentences, write down what comes to mind when you think of these people:
 - a. Abel
 - b. Enoch
 - c. Noah
 - d. Abraham
 - e. Sarah
 - f. Isaac

- g. Jacob
- h. Joseph
- i. Moses
- j. Rahab
- k. Gideon
- l. Barak
- m. Samson
- n. Jephthah
- o. David
- p. Samuel
- q. The prophets

Making Application

So what are you going to do now? What will you do with this information about so many great people of faith? The easy thing would be to do nothing. You can dismiss this as an interesting study but not something that really applies to you. If that's the case, then the study has been a failure. God's word is intended to move us to action: to get up and do something! I challenge you to at a minimum do these 3 things:

- Evaluate your faith (are you praying regularly and reading God's word?).
- Evaluate your service to God and to others.
- If your faith and/or service are not what they should be, make a plan (set some goals) to improve them today and then do it!

**“You will never get
What you've never had
Until you are willing to do
What you've never done.”**

God Bless.

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