

## XXVI. Antediluvian Faith

January 15/16/17, 2019

Hebrews 11:4-7

**Aim:** To understand the acts of faith in the lives of those who lived before the Flood and the topical progression they represent: worshiping in faith, walking by faith, working by faith.

*Phillips:* We often think of Hebrews 11 as focusing on the heroes of the faith, on the people themselves, and certainly the writer of Hebrews does draw upon the wonderful histories of the Old Testament and therefore on its personalities. But ultimately it is not these men and women who are on display, in all their variety of experience, but rather the one faith that shows its various facets in their lives. Through these historical and biblical figures, the author personifies the faith he is commending, and we thereby see all the things faith does and the benefits it conveys.

*Phillips:* In Hebrews 11:1-3 we saw two things that faith does. It makes present and real things that are future and unseen. By faith we presently lay hold of our possessions in Christ. Moreover, faith sees the Creator behind the creation; by faith we understand who made and sustains the universe. As we proceed through this chapter, we are going to see more of the many things faith does. Faith pleases God; it does good works; it looks upon a heavenly city; it trusts God's promises; and it conquers over obstacles.

### A. Abel: Worshiping in Faith (Hebrews 11:4)

*Hughes:* St. Augustine understood the story of Cain and Abel and penetrated it to its very core in his famous *City of God* when he explained: 'Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God.' Augustine correctly saw that each was representative of radically different approaches to religion and to God. There was the way of Cain—a way of *unbelief* and of self-righteousness, man-made religion. Jude 11 warns, 'Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain.' In contrast was the way of Abel—a way of *faith* described in verse 4. So the theme of this first example of faith in Hebrews 11 is a contrast of two cities, two streams—the two ways of faith and unbelief. As such, it provides unique insight into the anatomy of an authentic faith—a faith that endures.

*MacArthur:* Adam and Eve could not have been persons of faith in the same way as their descendants. They had seen God face-to-face, fellowshiped with Him, talked with Him, and had lived in the garden of paradise. Until they sinned, they had no need of faith, because they lived in God's very light. Even after they sinned, they had the memory and knowledge of this unique and beautiful relationship with their Creator. Their children were the first to have the need of faith in its fullest sense. Abel was the first man of faith, and it is important to understand that his faith had to do with his personal salvation. Abel's faith led to three progressive things: true sacrifice, true righteousness, and true witness. Because he believed, he offered a better sacrifice. Because he offered a better sacrifice, he obtained righteousness. Because he obtained righteousness, he is for all the ages a living voice saying, 'Righteousness is by faith.'

#### 1. Worship by Faith (11:4a)

<sup>4</sup>*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain...*

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### a) *Approved through Attitude*

*Schreiner*: Abel brought a ‘better sacrifice’ than Cain because of his faith (Gen. 4:3-5). What is remarkable is that Genesis says nothing about Abel’s faith. It simply records what he did. But how does the author of Hebrews see faith when Genesis is silent on the matter? It seems that any act of obedience that pleases God (cp. 11:8) flows from faith. The wellspring of obedience is always an attitude of trust. It follows, then, that the fundamental sin of Cain was unbelief. His offering was not accepted because he didn’t trust God.

*Bruce*: Why was there this discrimination between Abel and Cain? Cain was dejected because his offering was disregarded, but God pointed out to him the way of acceptance: ‘If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it’ (Gen. 4:7). This rendering of the Masoretic text is quite in line with the later prophetic teaching about sacrifice; sacrifice is acceptable to God not for its material content, but insofar as it is the outward expression of a devoted and obedient heart. Let Cain gain the mastery over the sin which threatens to be his undoing, and his sacrifice will be accepted as readily as Abel’s was.

*MacArthur*: The only thing that obtained righteousness for Abel was that, in faith, he did what God told him to do. That is the only thing that changes a man’s relationship to God. It is not how good we are, but whether or not we trust in Him, that counts with God. That trust is evidenced in obedience to His Word. Abel was sinful, just as Cain was. The difference was in the way in which the sacrifices were made. One was made in obedient faith; the other was made in disobedient unbelief.

*Hughes*: The authentic nature of Abel’s worship is explicitly attributed to his faith in the opening sentence of our verse. One reason Abel’s offering was accepted was his heart attitude. Cain’s attitude puts it all in stark perspective. The Scriptures indicate that when God rejected Cain’s offering, Cain became ‘very angry, and his face fell’ (Gen. 4:5), thus revealing how shallow his devotion was. And when God pleaded with Cain to desist and do what was right, warning him with powerful metaphorical language that sin was crouching like a monster at his door and desiring to have him (Gen. 4:6-7), God’s plea was met with ominous silence. Whereas Cain’s mother had been talked into sin, Cain would not be talked out of it. It seems that Cain was determined to stay angry. But Able had come to God with a completely different spirit—a submissive, devoted heart. Abel brought some from ‘the firstborn of his flocks and of their fat portions’ (Gen. 4:4)—his best. This was in accord with the later directives of God’s Word. How God desires devoted hearts in His worshipers! God longs for those who worship Him with the complete devotion of their human spirits (cp. Jn.4:23-24).

*Phillips*: The first example of faith that the writer presents is that of Abel (see Genesis 4:1-5). Hebrews says that Abel’s sacrifice was better than Cain’s because of faith. There are two ways to understand this statement. The first is that because Able was a man of faith and Cain was not, God accepted Abel’s sacrifice while rejecting Cain’s. The issue was not the sacrifices but the men themselves. John Calvin held this view: ‘The sacrifice of Abel was more acceptable than that of his brother only because it was sanctified by faith.... Where did his pleasing come from other than that he had a heart purified by faith?’ You see the logic of this view, a logic we want to heartily endorse. God receives the man of faith and therefore his offering, rejecting the man who lacks faith (cp. Rom. 14:23; Gal. 5:6). According to that standard we see that because he lacked faith, whatever Cain offered had to be rejected, while faithful Abel’s offering was received.

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### b) *Approved through Obedience*

*Bruce:* The Septuagint version, however suggests that there was a ritual reason for the rejection of Cain's sacrifice; according to it, God says to Cain: 'Have you not sinned if you offer it rightly without dividing it rightly?' (Gen. 4:7). Other ancient interpretations explained its rejection, in contrast to the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, in terms of the substance of the two offerings. A more recent variation sees the distinction in that Abel's offering involved the shedding of blood, apart from which, as our author has said above, the law knows no forgiveness (9:22). But it is nowhere suggested in the Genesis narrative that it was a sin offering which the two brothers brought; it was in either case the appropriate presentation of the firstfruits of their increase. The unvarnished Masoretic text makes the situation plain enough; since Cain was told he would be accepted if he did well, it follows that Abel was accepted because he did well—because, in other words, he was righteous.

*Phillips:* We want to affirm this way of thinking, but it does not seem to be a sufficient explanation for what we find in Genesis 4. The Old Testament text seems to emphasize the difference between the two offerings, and not merely between the two men. It wasn't that the two brothers brought the same offering, one that was received because of faith while the other was rejected for unbelief. No, the offerings were different, and in that difference we see the faith of one and the unbelief of the other.

#### (1) The Implicit Command

*MacArthur:* Cain and Abel had a place to worship. Because they brought offerings, some sort of altar must have been used on which to make the sacrifices. There is no mention of their erecting an altar at this time, and it may be that an altar already existed near the east side of the garden of Eden, where God had placed the cherubim with the flaming sword to prevent man from reentering. It seems perfectly consistent with God's grace that, from the beginning, He would have provided for some means of worship. Perhaps the altar here was a forerunner of the mercy seat, a place where man could come for forgiveness and atonement. Very early in man's history God promised a future Deliverer, and very early He provided a temporary means of worship and sacrifice.

*Phillips:* We might begin by asking whether God had given commands or regulations at that time concerning the type of sacrifice His people were to offer Him. 'Just what,' we ask, 'had God revealed to these first children or to their parents, Adam and Eve?' The answer brings us back to the prior chapter, and specifically to Genesis 3:21. There we see God's action to deal with the problem of our first parents, which we must consider central to God's message of salvation because it is His most direct response to sin. God dealt with their sin by slaying an innocent animal, a spotless substitute. God had said that sin would produce death and here we see that it did—not the death of Adam and Eve, although death did come upon their race—but the death of a substitute that would shed its blood in their place and offer its own innocence to clothe their guilty stains. What were the coats that God made to put on our first parents, but types of the application of the merits of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to believers' hearts?

*Hughes:* To do a thing 'by faith,' you must do it in response to and according to a word from God. You hear God's word indicating His will, and 'by faith' you respond in obedience (cp. Rom. 10:17). From this we must understand that God evidently had given explicit instructions to Cain and Abel indicating that only animal sacrifices were acceptable. Very likely they learned this through their parents, Adam and Eve, because Gen. 3:21 indicates that after that couple's sin

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and fall, God provided garments of animals slain to clothe their nakedness—an implicit inference that animal blood was spilled in direct response to their sin. While it is true that the categories of ritual sacrifice were not established until Moses' time, the earliest believers nevertheless met at the altar on the basis of blood sacrifice (Gen. 8:20-22; 15:1-11).

*MacArthur:* I also believe that God had designated a way to worship. Cain and Abel would know nothing about the need for worship or sacrifice, much less the way, had they not been told by God—perhaps through their parents. It is especially significant that the first recorded act of worship was sacrifice, a sin offering, the supreme act of worship in all God's covenants with His people. It is inconceivable that Cain and Abel accidentally stumbled onto sacrifice as a way of worshiping God. The fact that God accepted only the one sacrificial offering also seems to indicate that He had established a pattern for worship.

*Hughes:* Not only had God communicated His will regarding the necessity of animal sacrifices, but if, as we think, He communicated this first to Adam and Eve, then Cain and Abel had been conforming to the practice for some one hundred years, because Cain was 129 years old at this time (inferred from a comparison of Gen. 4:25 with Gen. 5:3). Moreover, Gen. 4:3 says, 'In the course of time Cain brought...an offering,' and 'course of time' is literally 'at the end of days,' indicating the end of a specific period of time—very possibly a time God had designated for regular sacrifice. Therefore, we surmise that both Cain and Abel had known God's word regarding the necessity of animal sacrifice ever since they were children and had obeyed it for years.

*MacArthur:* There seems also to have been a *time* for worship. 'In the course of time' means literally 'at the end of days,' that is, at the end of a certain period of time. It may be, therefore, that God had designated a special time for sacrificing. The fact that Cain and Abel came to sacrifice at the same time also suggests that God had specified a particular time.

### (2) The Explicit Response

*MacArthur:* Abel offered his sacrifice by faith. Since 'faith comes from hearing' (Rom. 10:17), Abel must have had some revelation from God on which his faith was based. He must have known the place and time and way in which God wanted the sacrifice for sin to be offered. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with a grain or fruit or vegetable offering. The Mosaic covenant included such offerings. But the blood offerings were always first, because only the blood offerings dealt with sin. Here is where the life of faith begins, with a sacrifice for sin. It begins with believing God that we are sinners, that we are worth of death, that we need His forgiveness, and that we accept His revealed plan for our deliverance. That is the beginning of the life of faith. It was in such faith that Abel presented his sacrifice to God. And it was because of such faith that his sacrifice was acceptable to God.

*Phillips:* In this way, God revealed the manner by which sinful man was to approach Him. Here He taught sinners what kind of sacrifice they ought to bring. This is how we must evaluate the fitness of Abel's versus Cain's offering: 'Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground' (Gen. 4:3). There must have been much to commend such an offering to Cain. Here was a portion of what arose from his own hard-fought labor. God had said to Adam in His curse, 'By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread' (Gen. 3:19). So what Cain brought to God came only by hard labor, just as farming continues to demand today. Furthermore, it must have been beautiful, pleasing to the eye, and sweet to the taste. What then was the problem with Cain's offering? It did not involve the shedding of blood. This was the key difference between Abel's

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offering and Cain's: Abel 'brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions' (Gen. 4:4). In keeping with the pattern that God had established with his parents, and that had undoubtedly been taught to him by Adam and Eve, Abel brought a sacrifice that pointed forward to the atoning death of a spotless substitute. By faith Abel's sacrifice was better than Cain's, not just because Abel's faith made it better, but because by faith he offered the sacrifice God had established as the means by which he would accept sinful mankind.

*MacArthur:* When Abel did what God said, he revealed his obedience and acknowledged his sinfulness. 'Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain' because God had prescribed a *blood* sacrifice. Somehow Abel, and Cain as well, knew what God wanted. The difference between the two was that Abel gave what God wanted, whereas Cain gave what he himself wanted. Abel was obedient and Cain was disobedient. Abel acknowledged his sin. Cain did not. Cain believed in God, else he would not have brought Him a sacrifice. He acknowledged a supreme being and even that he owed Him some sort of worship. He recognized God, but he did not obey God. He *believed in* God, but he did not *believe* God. He thought he could approach God in whatever way he wanted, and expected Him to be impressed and satisfied. In so doing, Cain became the father of all false religion. Cain failed to acknowledge his sin and refused to obey God by bringing the sacrifice God required. He did not mind worshiping God, as long as it was on his own terms, in his own way. And God rejected his sacrifice and rejected him.

*Hughes:* Abel's faith was an expression of his conscious need for atonement, understanding the substitutionary atoning nature of blood sacrifice. But not so with Cain! He came his own way—'the way of Cain' (Jude 11). By refusing to bring the prescribed offering, and instead presenting his garden produce, he was saying that one's own good works and character are enough. Cain may have reasoned, 'What I am presenting is far more beautiful than a bloody animal. I myself would prefer the lovey fruits of a harvest any day. And I worked far harder than Abel to raise my offering. It took real toil and sweat. And it is even of greater market value! Enough of this animal sacrifice business, God. My way is far better!' Cain's offering was a monument to pride and self-righteousness—'the way of Cain.' Abel, on the other hand, believed and obeyed God. He brought God what God wanted. This was acceptable worship.

*MacArthur:* Cain 'went out from the presence of the LORD' (Gen. 4:16) and into a life of continuous self-will, which is the heart of worldliness and unbelief. By his own decision, his own volition, he turned away from God and God's way to himself and his own way. There are all kinds of people around under the guise of religion, even Christian religion, who are denying God. 'Woe to them!' Jude says, 'for they have gone the way of Cain' (Jude 11). Cain is an example of the religious natural man, who believes in God and even in religion but after his own will and who rejects redemption by blood. In addition to being wicked and unbelieving, Cain was a hypocrite. He did not want to worship God but only give the appearance of worship. His purpose was to please himself, not God. His sacrifice was simply a religious activity designed to suit his own purposes and fulfill his own will.

*MacArthur:* God is not arbitrary or whimsical or capricious. He was not playing a game with Cain and Abel. He did not hold them accountable for what they could not have known or could not have done. Abel's sacrifice was accepted because he knew what God wanted and obeyed. Cain's was rejected because he knew what God wanted, yet disobeyed. To obey is righteous; to disobey is evil. Abel was of God; Cain was of Satan (1 Jn. 3:12). Abel offered a better sacrifice because it represented the obedience of faith. He willingly brought God what He asked, and he brought the very best that he had.

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### c) *Approved by God*

*Phillips:* We learn several important lessons from this episode. First, we see that sinful man is justified, or accepted by God, only by faith in the blood of the sacrifice God has provided. This is a doctrine the Book of Hebrews has repeatedly stressed (e.g., 9:28; 7:27). This means that you cannot come to God any way you choose. You do not just say you believe in God and then decide for yourself how you will draw near to Him. That was Cain's problem. He would decide the terms of his coming to God; he would offer a sacrifice according to his own devising. How bitter he was when God rejected him and his self-righteous worship. There are really only two kinds of offerings, two ways to come to God—those that point to our own work, our own merits, our own righteousness, and those that point to Jesus Christ, crucified in our place to pay for sins. Unless we come to God confessing the guilt of our sin and our need for His grace, and embracing the gift of His own Son to die in our place, we reject the one way that He has provided. We then will be rejected, condemned for our sins, and made to suffer the eternal pains of hell. As 9:22 tells us, 'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.'

*Hughes:* It is very significant that this great chapter on faith begins with a worshiper—because worship is fundamental to everything else we do in life. So there we have it. The opening sentence of our text tells us that faith is essential to acceptable worship: 'By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.' Why? First, because Abel's faith produced faithful *obedience* to God's expressed will and word. Cain did it his way, but Abel did it God's way. Abel brought God exactly what He asked for. Today, if we would come to God, we must come not with our own works, but rather with and through the sacrifice of Christ—the way of Christ, not 'the way of Cain.' Second, we must come with the heart *attitude* with which Abel brought his 'more acceptable sacrifice'—joyously giving his very best from his very first. This is what the Lord is looking for—followers who bring what He asks for with a joyous heart. This is approved, authentic worship, and it can only happen through faith!

## 2. Justified by Faith (11:4b)

*...through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.*

### a) *The Righteousness of Abel*

*Schreiner:* The author considers here the words of Gen. 4:4: 'The LORD had regard for Abel and his offering.' Such regard shows that Abel was righteous in God's sight, though Hebrews emphasizes that such righteousness stems from his faith. In this regard Hebrews matches Paul's teaching that righteousness is by faith. Abel's gifts were the visible expression of his faith, documenting and ratifying the authenticity of his faith.

*Bruce:* How could it be known that it was 'by faith' that Abel brought God a more acceptable sacrifice than his brother? Probably the close association between righteousness and faith in 10:38 'my righteous one will live by faith,' was ground sufficient in our author's eyes for his statement about Abel's faith; moreover, his affirmation in v. 6 below, while primarily applicable to Enoch, is equally applicable to Abel: 'without faith it is impossible to give Him [God] pleasure'—and since Abel manifestly pleased Him, it follows that Abel lived and acted by faith.

*Hughes:* Having taught us that authentic *worship* comes through faith, the preacher in the next sentence shows that authentic *righteousness* also results from faith. Just how God spoke well of (or attested) Abel's offerings is not indicted. Jewish tradition and then Christian tradition have it that fire came down from Heaven and consumed Abel's offerings but not Cain's. And Scripture

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does record fire descending on acceptable offerings in at least five other instances (cp. Lev. 9:23-24; Jdg. 6:21; 13:19-20; 1 Kgs. 18:30-39; 2 Chr. 7:1). However it was, we do know that God spoke well of Abel's offerings and that on account of his faithful offerings he was 'commended as righteous'—a right-living man. In fact, Jesus called him 'righteous Abel' (Mt. 23:35). And St. John emphasized a life of love by contrasting Cain's evil actions with Abel's righteous actions (1 Jn. 3:12). So Abel rightly has a huge reputation for righteous living. Here's the connection: when there is authentic faith, which in turn authentically worships (obediently bringing to God what He asks for in joyful attitude), that faith will produce practical, living, authentic righteousness (cp. James 2:17-18). True, living faith produces faith—living action.

*MacArthur:* Abel's was the kind of faith that allows God to move in on our behalf and make us righteous. It seems to me that God's 'testimony' that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable and that He counted Abel as righteous could have been indicated by His causing this offering to be consumed. On at least five occasions recorded in Scripture, God showed his acceptance of a sacrifice by send a fire to consume it (Lev. 9:24; Jdg. 6:21; 1Kgs. 18:38; 1 Chr. 21:26; 2 Chr. 7:1). In any case, it is clear from Genesis that God made His approval and disapproval of the sacrifices known to Cain and Abel. He did not leave them in doubt as to their standing before Him. Abel was counted as righteous, not because he *was* righteous, but because he trusted God. He stood righteous before God because he had faith in God.

*Phillips:* If there is any doubt about the importance the writer of Hebrews attaches to faith, verse 4 removes any ambiguity. Here he tells us that it was by faith that Abel was declared to be righteous. By faith Abel was declared righteous, or justified, by God. This is one of the great teachings of the Bible: the doctrine of justification by faith. This is why those early Hebrew Christians who first received this letter were exhorted not to abandon their faith, as they were tempted to do: because by faith in Christ alone are sinners justified by God. We are not righteous by works, which declare our supposed merit—that was Cain's mistake and the cause of his rejection—but by faith, which declares our need and our acceptance of God's gracious gift.

*Phillips:* We find this truth emphasized in the Genesis account. Abel was a sinner, being the son of Adam and bearing sin's corruption in his fallen human nature. Yet when he came to God bearing the blood of a substitute, 'the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering' (Gen. 4:4). The blood turned away God's wrath by speaking of the coming of Christ, and on that basis God received Abel with gladness. This acceptance was not available only to him; Cain could have been justified this same way. As God explained to a bitter Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?' (Gen. 4:6-7).

### b) *The Way of Righteousness*

*Phillips:* Although Adam did not immediately die, his sin barred him from the Garden of Eden. He was driven out of the garden by God, who placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life (cp. Gen. 3:24). East of Eden, into the curse-blasted world of sin went Adam and Eve, their way back barred by angels with flaming sword. This imagery would become important later in Israel's history, in the time of Moses, when instructions were given for the construction of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the place where people came to meet with God and where God dwelt in the midst of His people. Just as the cherubim guarded the way to God in the garden with a fiery sword, so the symbolic cherubim on the curtains in the tabernacle kept sinners away.

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*Phillips:* We may infer from this that after their sin and expulsion from the garden Adam and Eve still came to worship God at the entrance to Eden. It was to the guarded way between cherubim that they came with their sacrifices of blood. Likely, this is where Abel and Cain came, one with a sacrifice of blood and the other with an offering representing his works. Abel would have been like the later priests of Israel, able to come to the gate, to the holy place, to live and serve in God's reflected light, but barred from the inner sanctum by the guardian angels, just as the thick veil with the image of cherubim kept Israel's priest out of the holy of holies.

*Phillips:* But that is not the end of the story. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest came and poured the blood of the atoning sacrifice upon the mercy seat between the cherubim. And thus the way that was barred was now open. This provides an important insight about the guardian cherubim: they not only kept shut the way to God without atoning blood, but they also secured the way for the great day to come when the true sacrifice would open wide the gates to Paradise. That one day a year when the high priest came before the cherubim with a blood offering symbolized an entire age that would be opened by the true high priest with the true blood He Himself had shed. God met with His people between the cherubim—not in the garden, but at its gate. God met with them at the place where the blood was poured to cover the breaking of the law. What the angels were looking for all along was Christ, whose coming would end their watch, and therefore they guarded the way to God until His coming.

*Phillips:* The great day for which the angels looked did come. The Gospels tell us about it. The day came when the curtain with its cherubim was not merely pulled aside temporarily but torn from top to bottom, removing altogether, the angels thus relieved of their ancient task (cp. Mt. 27:50-51). Finally, the true high priest had come to the gate between the cherubim, and there He offered His own blood once-for-all. The gate was opened, the angels went their way rejoicing, taking with them the sword of death. Now the way is open wide and secured by Christ Himself, who is the way. Now it is to Him that we come, not merely to the gate but into the garden to walk with God. Between the cherubim, Abel was declared righteous by faith, because He looked to the sacrifice to come.

### 3. Testimony of Faith (11:4c)

*And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.*

*Bruce:* Through his faith, too, Abel continues to speak, even in death. When God accused Cain of Abel's murder, He said: 'The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground' (Gen. 4:10). Our author's point appears to be that Abel is still appealing to God for vindication, until he obtains it in full in the judgment to come. It has been held, on the other hand, that our author simply means that Abel, by his faith, bears abiding witness to succeeding ages; but that more than this was in his mind is suggested by 12:24, where he says that the purifying blood of Christ 'has something better to say than Abel's'—a clear reference to Gen. 4:10.

*MacArthur:* When the Lord confronted Cain after Abel's murder, He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground' (Gen. 4:10). Abel's first 'speaking' after death was to God, asking for his murder to be avenged. Like the souls underneath the altar 'who had been slain because of the word of God' (Rev. 6:9-10), Abel asked the Lord to avenge his blood. His blood also spoke to his brother (Gen. 4:11-12). Every bit of soil on which Cain placed his feet would remind him of his wicked deed. The earth, in effect, rejected Cain as he had rejected God and his brother. Abel, though dead, continued to speak to his brother. The primary meaning of verse 4, however, has to do with Abel's speaking to later

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generations of believers and potential believers. ‘He still speaks.’ He says three things: man comes to God by faith, not works; man must accept and obey God’s revelation above his own reason and self-will; and sin is severely punished. This is Abel’s timeless three-point sermon to the world, which he has been preaching for thousands of years to those who will hear. It could be titled, ‘The Righteous Shall Live by Faith.’

*Hughes:* Now comes the final logic of Abel’s faith: authentic faith produces an authentic witness. In Genesis we see Abel’s blood crying for retribution! But here in the present text, it is Abel’s illustrious example of faith that sweetly calls to us in profound witness—‘And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.’ Though none of his words have been preserved, he had been eloquently preaching for thousands and thousands of years about authentic faith.

*Phillips:* Faith bore testimony to Abel, that he was accounted righteous, and not Abel bears testimony about faith—about its value, its worth, and its power to justify those who trust in Christ. Shortly after making his faithful offering, Abel was killed. Cain tried to silence his testimony; we learn in Genesis 4:8 that instead of repenting, Cain murdered his brother to put away the testimony about faith and the righteousness it brings. And yet the man of faith still speaks to us in the Word of God. God is never silenced, because God Himself keeps alive the testimony of His faithful servants.

*Phillips:* When I think of Abel, I often recall Peter’s statement about the gospel: ‘Even the angels long to look into these things’ (1 Pe. 1:12). Abel’s faith spoke to those angels; it declared to them the wonder that sinners might come back to God, that those under the curse might meet with Him at the place the angels guarded. What a wonder it was to the guardian cherubim when Abel by his sacrifice of faith was accepted and approved of God. The same thing must have happened when Abel was killed: the first man to die, but also the first to appear in heaven. What an event that must have been! For the first time a sinner appeared in the holy courts of glory, cleansed and clothed in the righteousness of God’s Son. How the angels must have marveled at this mystery of grace! Before the time of Jesus Christ, Abel—though dead—spoke of a sacrifice yet to come that would take away our sin, and of faith in the sacrifice that declares the sinner righteous. Now that Christ has come, Abel speaks of it still, with a voice that fully rejoices.

### **B. Enoch: Walking by Faith (Hebrews 11:5-6)**

*Phillips:* Hebrews 11 presents its heroes of the faith in chronological order as they are found in the Bible, yet several commentators point out that there is probably more at work than a historical progression. Specifically, it appears that there is also a topical progression to the points their stories make about the life of faith. This is especially true of the three men who lived before the great flood—Abel, Enoch, and Noah. For example, they are described as Abel, the sacrifice of faith; Enoch, the walk of faith; and Noah, the work of faith. Certainly that is a progression supported by the Bible: first we are brought into a right relationship with God by trusting the sacrifice He has provided in the blood of Christ; second, having been brought into relationship with God, we then walk with Him by faith; and third, only then do we perform the works of faith, practical good deeds that follow as a result of God’s grace.

*MacArthur:* The second here of faith is Enoch. Whereas Abel exemplifies worshiping by faith—which must always come first—Enoch exemplifies walking by faith. God never intended works as a way for men to come to Him. He intended works to be a result of salvation, not a way of salvation. At no time has man been able to approach God on the basis of works. Rather, God

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has always intended that works be a product of the salvation men receive when they approach Him on the basis of faith. In Enoch's story we see a new concept in the book of Genesis. Abel knew what it was to worship by faith, but he did not really understand the concept of walking with God. Revelation in Scripture is progressive. Abel received some revelation, and Enoch received more. Adam and Eve had walked and talked with God in the garden, but when they fell and were thrown out of the garden, they ceased to walk with Him. The ultimate destiny of man is reinstated with Enoch, who stands as an illustration for all men of what it is to be in fellowship with God. In Enoch the true destiny of man is again reached, as he experienced the fellowship with God that Adam and Eve had forfeited.

### 1. Enoch's Faith (11:5)

#### a) Taken Up by God (11:5a)

<sup>5</sup>By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him.

#### (1) Enoch's Life

*Schreiner:* According to Genesis 5:21-24, Enoch was 65 when his son, Methuselah, was born. Enoch 'walked with God' (Gen. 5:22, 24) for 300 years after Methuselah was born. When Enoch was at the age of 365, God removed him from the earth so that Enoch never died.

*Hughes:* Genesis 5:21-24 devotes only fifty-one words (in English) to describe Enoch. Enoch lived on earth 365 years. Though Enoch's tenure was brief in comparison with that of his father and son, it is nonetheless an amazing stint of time-and those three-hundred-plus years were given to righteous living in the midst of a terribly evil antediluvian world that was destroyed precisely because of its depravity (cp. Gen. 6:11-13). Not only that, but Enoch served as a prophet for over three centuries, preaching the unwelcome message of coming judgment (Jude 14-15).

*MacArthur:* That Enoch preached for God we learn only from the book of Jude (vv. 14-15). Judging from this account, his message on ungodliness was brief and perhaps repetitious, but it was inspired. We have no hint as to how effective it was, but Enoch's purpose was to be faithful, not effective. He did what God required of him and left the results to Him. One thing is certain: because of his faithful preaching and faithful living, no one who heard Enoch or lived around him had any excuse for not believing in God. Whether any of these people believed or not, the influence Enoch had on them must have been powerful.

*Phillips:* Now we turn to the walk of faith with the life of Enoch. The Bible says very little about this man. All that we have comes from the genealogy in Genesis 5:21-24. What we know about Enoch, therefore, is that he was the seventh patriarch in the line of Adam through Seth. When he was 65 he had a son named Methuselah. He lived a total of 365 years, after which he mysteriously departed from the earth without dying. So dear was Enoch to the heart of God that He took Enoch to Himself without demanding that he suffer the pains of death. It is no surprise, therefore, to find Enoch in this procession of heroes of the faith. Interestingly, the account of Enoch's life in Genesis 5 makes no mention of his faith. Yet his faith seems to motivate the statement of Hebrews 11:6, that without faith it is impossible to please God. The idea is that we can be sure Enoch was a man of faith, because otherwise he never could have pleased God the way he did.

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### (2) Enoch's Translation

*Schreiner:* The author of Hebrews concentrates on the fact that Enoch didn't die, mentioning it five different times and different ways in verse 5. The writer did not expect the readers to escape death, and so his point is to see an analogy between the reward given to Enoch and the reward promised to believers. Just as Enoch escaped from death altogether, the readers will finally triumph over death when they are raised from the dead. Clearly the author emphasizes that God rewarded Enoch by sparing him from death, reminding the readers that it is 'worth it' to serve the Lord.

*Bruce:* The words 'he was not; for God took him' are rendered in the Septuagint as 'he was not found, because God translated him.'

*Phillips:* Perhaps the most interesting point about Enoch is that he never died. One day this godly man was there and the next he could not be found. People looked for him, but he simply wasn't there. They may never have known what happened to Enoch, but we do. God took him out from this life and into the next life without having to die. There are only two people of whom this is recorded: Enoch and the prophet Elijah, the latter of whom God swept up in a chariot of fire.

*Hughes:* Enoch was a man of immense age and character, but he is most famous for the incredible thing that happened to him, as described in the Genesis account: 'Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him' (Gen. 5:24). God translated him to be with Himself without going through. This understanding is confirmed by Hebrews 11:5. The Scriptures do not say exactly how this happened. Possibly God took Enoch up in a whirlwind as He did Elijah, the only other person in history who did not see death (cp. 2 Kgs. 2:1ff.).

*MacArthur:* After three hundred years of believing and walking and preaching, Enoch went to be with the Lord—in a marvelously unique way. God just 'took him up' without his experiencing death. He pleased God so much that God just reached down and lifted him up to heaven. One moment he was there, and the next moment 'he was not, for God took him' (Gen. 5:24). By faith Enoch was translated. He walked so closely with God for so long that he just walked into heaven, as it were. We do not know the reason God waited three hundred years before taking Enoch to be with Himself. Perhaps it was to allow sufficient time for him to preach and witness to the hard and unbelieving generation in which he lived. Furthermore, we do not know why God took Enoch in that unusual way at all. Perhaps it was to spare him further ridicule and persecution, which he was bound to have experienced. Perhaps it was because God wanted to be even closer to the one who pleased Him so much (cp. Ps. 116:15). Enoch was so precious to the Lord that he bypassed the death stage for this remarkable saint.

#### b) *Pleased God (11:5b)*

*Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.*

*Phillips:* Considering all the information we do not know about Enoch, Genesis 5:21-24 doesn't seem to be much of a biography. But the Bible tells us one vital fact that speaks volumes. Twice in these verses we are told, 'Enoch walked with God.' This wouldn't make a bad inscription on a gravestone. It tells us much about the character and the pattern of the man's life. Far more important than the job titles he held or his attainments in life was his walk with God.

*Schreiner:* What was remarkable about Enoch was that he 'pleased' (*ευαρεστήκεναι*, *euarestēkenai*) God. The author draws on the LXX, for the MT speaks of Enoch walking with

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God. Enoch pleased God, however, by virtue of his faith. His trust in God spurred him to walk with God and to do what was pleasing to Him.

*MacArthur:* In the four verses in Genesis (5:21-24) describing Enoch, he is twice spoken of as ‘walking with God.’ In the Septuagint, this phrase is translated ‘pleased God,’ using the same Greek word (*euaresteō*, ‘to be well-pleasing’) that is used twice in Hebrews 11:5-6. Walking with God is pleasing God.

*Hughes:* The fact that Enoch was taken because he ‘pleased God’ refers to Enoch’s walk with God, because 11:5 is based on the Septuagint for Genesis 5:24 (‘Enoch walked with God’). ‘Walked with God and ‘pleased God’ mean the same thing.

*Bruce:* In the Septuagint the repeated clause ‘Enoch walked with God’ is rendered ‘Enoch pleased God’—from a desire, no doubt, to make the language less anthropomorphic.

*Phillips:* Interestingly, Hebrews 11:5-6 does not focus on the idea of ‘walking with God’ but rather on ‘pleasing God.’ The explanation for this is that the writer of Hebrews is quoting from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) and not from the Hebrew original. This Greek version, which so many apostolic writers used, is noted for its reluctance in using anthropomorphisms, that is descriptions of God in human terms. Because of its hostility to this way of speaking, the Septuagint often removed anthropomorphisms in its translation from Hebrew into Greek. The passage from Genesis 5 on Enoch’s life provides a classic example. Instead of saying that he walked with God, the Septuagint says, ‘Enoch pleased God.’ Following that translation of Genesis 5, the writer of Hebrews comments that Enoch was pleasing to God and therefore must have lived by faith. We need not be troubled by this human intervention in the divine Word, for the New Testament, which is divinely inspired, sanctions this reasonable interpretation of Enoch’s life. We may rightly take this idea of pleasing God as a working definition of what it means to walk with Him. If we want to enjoy God’s fellowship and to feel God’s pleasure, it is going to result from obedience to His Word.

### c) *Walking with God*

*Phillips:* What does it mean to walk with God? First, this speaks of a living relationship, a companionship between a man or woman and God. It implies personal knowledge, an ever-increasing understanding of the one with whom we walk. It implies agreement of mind and heart (cp. Amos 3:3). There is an intimacy, a fellowship, and a joy of company between two who walk together. Walking with God is its own destination, yet at the same time we are indeed going somewhere! We are growing in our knowledge of the infinite and divine; we are growing more like Him in character as He guides us; we are realizing progress in spiritual things. This is the Christian life! It is not a bare knowledge of facts, or a grim recitation of doctrines. To be a Christian is to walk with God, to know Him, and to live in the light of His presence.

*Hughes:* But the metaphor of walking more exactly reveals how Enoch pleased God. Walking with another person suggests a mutual agreement of soul. It is impossible to walk together unless there are several mutual agreements. To begin with, you must agree on the destination. You cannot walk together and go to separate destinations. Enoch was heading in God’s direction. Of course, it is quite possible to be headed to the same destination but by separate paths. But again, two cannot walk together unless they have the same destination and follow the same path. This Enoch did with God! There is one other requirement in walking together. Two must not only be traveling to the same *place* on the same *path*, but they must also go at the same *pace*. Enoch was in step with God. Enoch’s great walk produced two wonderful things—

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fellowship and righteousness. When two walk toward the same *place* on the same *path* at the same *pace* for three hundred years, they are in fellowship! And this is the primary meaning of *walk*: fellowship, sacred communion.

*MacArthur*: The term *walk* is used many times in the New Testament to represent faithful living. Like Enoch, every believer *should* walk with God every day he is on earth. When we get to heaven, we *will* walk with Him forever. 1) The first thing implied in Enoch's walk with God is reconciliation (Amos 3:3). Two people cannot really walk together in intimate fellowship unless they are agreed. Walking together, then, presupposes harmony. If Enoch walked with God, he obviously was in agreement with God. Rebellion was over for this man of faith. Because of his faith, Enoch was reconciled with God; and because he was reconciled with God, he could walk with God. 2) The second truth implied in Enoch's walk with God is that Enoch and God had corresponding natures. Even an unbeliever is created in God's image, but that image has been so shattered by sin, his nature so corrupted, that fellowship with his Creator is not possible—there is no common sphere in which he and God can be agreed. When we are saved, we become citizens of a new domain. In Christ we are given a heavenly nature, His own nature, and we can therefore have fellowship with God. Because Enoch walked with God, he must have had a corresponding nature to God's. 3) Walking with God implies moral fitness as well as a judicial dealing with sin. We could not have a new nature unless God took away sin. Because a person walks with God means that his sin has been forgiven and that he has been justified, counted righteous by God. Only when sin has been dealt with can we move into God's presence and begin walking with Him. God will not walk in any way but the way of holiness. The only persons God walks with are those who are cleansed of sin. Since Enoch walked with God, he had to have been forgiven of his sin and declared righteous by God. 4) Finally, a person cannot walk with God unless he has first come to God by faith. Just so, he cannot continue to walk without continuing to have faith. Walking with God is a walk in faith and a walk by faith. Enoch believed God, and he continued to believe God. He could not have walked with God for three hundred years without trusting in God for three hundred years. Enoch never saw God. He walked with Him, but he did not see Him. He just believed He was there. That is how He pleased God.

### 2. Enoch's Example (11:6)

#### a) *Pleasing God (11:6a)*

<sup>6</sup>*And without faith it is impossible to please him...*

*Schreiner*: The indispensability of faith is explained. One cannot please God without faith. Human beings are summoned to put their faith in God, entrusting the entirety of their lives to His lordship and love. God is pleased with faith because if He is trusted He is also loved, for trust in God cannot flourish without believing that He is good.

*MacArthur*: Absolutely nothing from men can please God apart from *faith*. Religion does not please God, because it is essentially a system developed by Satan to counteract the truth. Nationality and heritage do not please God (cp. Gal. 3:28-29). Good works in themselves do not please God, 'because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight' (Rom. 3:20). 'Without faith it is impossible to please Him.'

*Hughes*: The other side of this coin, the primary side that so pleased God that He decided to take Enoch to Heaven, was Enoch's *faith*. Though the Old Testament does not say Enoch had faith,

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the inspired author of Hebrews says that was his primary characteristic in verse 5. Faith and a righteous walk with God are inseparably joined in the author's mind—just as he had observed about Abel in verse 4. The preacher is saying that *faith* precedes and produces the *walk* with God that so pleases Him. This understood, the way is now prepared for the great statement that the preacher has been leading up to: 'And without faith it is impossible to please Him [God].' Notice that he does not say that 'without faith it is *difficult* to please God, or 'without faith you will have to work *extra-hard* to please God.' He says categorically that it is *impossible*! The great emphasis here in 11:6 is on day-to-day practical faith, which is necessary for anyone, especially believers, in order to please God. In other words, if we are not living a life of faith, we cannot be pleasing to God. We *cannot* have God's smile on our lives without faith. So the question we must pose, and which the text answers, is: what is the faith that pleases God like? The answer is twofold. It is a faith that believes, first, that God '*exists*,' and second, that He '*rewards*' those who diligently seek Him.

*Phillips*: The main point of our passage is yet another proof of the necessity of faith. Enoch pleased God and therefore was taken by God even before he died, which surely would have been impossible without faith. The writer goes on to point out two vital components of genuine faith in the rest of verse 6.

*Bruce*: Apart from faith neither Enoch nor anyone else could ever have been pleasing to God. The faith which our author has in mind embraces belief in the spiritual order, and belief in the promises of God which have not yet been fulfilled.

### b) *Believing in God (11:6b)*

*...for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists...*

*Schreiner*: Two comments are made about faith here. First, faith is grounded upon the object of faith. One won't draw near to God unless one believes that God exists. Such belief in God is fundamental and basic, but it is scarcely sufficient.

*Bruce*: Belief in the invisible spiritual order involves, first and foremost, belief in Him who is 'King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God' (1 Tim. 1:17); and belief in God carries with it necessarily belief in His word. It is not belief in the existence of *a* God that is meant, but belief in the existence of *the* God who once declared His will to the fathers through the prophets and in these last days has spoken in His Son.

*MacArthur*: The first step of faith is simply to 'believe that He is.' This Enoch did. God is pleased with those who believe in Him, even with the first step of believing that He exists. This belief alone is certainly not enough to save a person, but if it is a sincere conviction and is followed up, it will lead to full faith. God is not pleased with belief in any idolatrous substitutes. Believing that the true *God* exists is what is pleasing to Him. Mere recognition of a deity of some sort is not the object of belief in mind here. Only belief in the existence of the true God, the God of Scripture, counts. But it is not enough simply to believe that God exists. In order to please Him, it is also necessary to believe that He is moral and just, that He will reward faith in Him. We must recognize God as a personal, loving, gracious God to those who seek Him. Enoch believed this within the revelation he had. He did not believe God was merely a great impersonal cosmic force. He believed in and knew God in a personal, loving way. You cannot 'walk' with a ground of being or a first mover or an ultimate cause. For three hundred years Enoch had fellowship with the true God, a God whom he knew to be just, merciful, forgiving, caring, and very personal. It is not enough merely to postulate a God. In fact, in order to please

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Him, we must believe that He is personal, knowable, loving, caring, moral, and responds graciously to those who come to Him. It is not enough even to believe in the right God. Many Jews to whom the letter of Hebrews was addressed acknowledged the true God, the God of Scripture. But they did not have faith in Him; they did not trust in Him. Enoch knew the true God and trusted the true God.

*Phillips:* The first of these statements points out that faith must have an object. Today we often hear about the power of faith without anything being said about the object or content of that faith. Mainly we are told to believe in ourselves, and it true that self-confidence will help you accomplish many things. But the faith the writer of Hebrews is describing differs greatly from that. At first glance it may seem that he is asking people to believe only that God exists, to hold at least some abstract assent to the idea of God. On closer study, however, he is being much more specific. A literal translation of the Greek would read this way: ‘It is necessary for anyone who comes to God to believe that He is.’ This wording points to the confessional or doctrinal aspect of faith in a way the original Hebrew audience surely would have noticed. The wording here is reminiscent of the basic creed of Israel, called the Shema: ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one’ (Dt. 6:4). The Shema was the great confessional statement of the Jewish faith, as it still is, and the original Hebrew readers would have understood this as a way of saying, ‘Anyone who comes to God needs to have straight just who God is.’ At a minimum, the original Jewish-Christian audience could not help but see a connection to the great statement God made to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. In the Septuagint, Ex. 3:14 says, ‘Tell them I am the one who exists.’ Pointedly using that very language, our writer says, ‘Whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists.’ Therefore, this first element of faith has to do with its content and doctrine. Faith must identify the God of the Bible, the Lord who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, as the one true God. Faith must be in Him if it is to be saving faith.

*Hughes:* God’s smile is only upon those who believe He exists! This involves three levels of belief. The first level is simply that ‘He is’—as the Greek literally says. This is by no means a given in the modern day. The human race has descended from being pagan theists like the ancients to being modern pagan atheists. In this, our modern culture does not even do as well as the demons, for there is not a demon in the universe who is an atheist (cp. James 2:19). All demons are thoroughgoing monotheists, and Trinitarians to boot! So, believing ‘God is’ is only the beginning. But there is a second level of belief required to believe that ‘God is’—and that is a belief in the great God of the Old Testament as the God who exists. We must believe in the Creator God of Genesis 1, who spoke the creation into existence. We must believe in the personal Creator of Psalm 139 who knit us together in our mother’s wombs (Ps. 139:13). Likewise, we must believe in the miracle-working God of the Old Testament. But for us who live in the glow of the cross, there is a third level of belief incumbent upon us, and that is a belief in the massive God of the New Testament as revealed in Christ the Son. It is not a revelation of a greater God, but a greater revelation of God. Jesus is God’s final Word—His ultimate revelation.

### c) *Seeking God (11:6c)*

*...and that he rewards those who seek him.*

*Schreiner:* Belief in God is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. One must also believe God ‘rewards those who seek Him.’ Trust in God will not exist if there isn’t any benefit. If the readers truly trust God, they won’t depart from Christ and lose the reward of eternal life (10:35).

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*Bruce:* Those who approach Him can do so in full confidence that He exists, His word is true, and that He will never put off or disappoint the person who sincerely seeks Him. The reward desired by those who seek Him is the joy of finding Him; He Himself proves to be their ‘exceeding joy’ (Ps. 43:4).

*MacArthur:* It is not enough just to believe that He is. We must also believe that He rewards those who seek Him. The reward that God gives for faith is salvation. When we trust in Jesus Christ, we become mutual heirs with Him. All that God’s own Son has is ours as well.

*Hughes:* Enoch’s great faith, which led him to walk with God and please him, lies behind the final component of a faith that pleases God. Once we believe God exists, we must also believe ‘that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.’ Enoch was sure of this. It was implicit in his message of judgment (Jude 14-15). The same God who would punish the ungodly would also reward the godly. Enoch knew that God would be equitable with him. Here is the great and grand point: Enoch lived in dark, hostile days that were uncongenial to his faith. However, Enoch resisted the sinful gravity of his culture and walked with God for over three hundred years! He set his goal on the City of God—God’s *place*; so he walked the same *path*—striding in step with God’s *pace*. Three hundred years of faithfulness! Why was he able to do it? First, because he believed that God is, that ‘He exists’ in all His creative and personal power. Second, because He believed that God ‘rewards’ those who earnestly ‘seek Him.’ Enoch was sure God would be equitable to him. As a result, there was great pleasure in Heaven—and God took him. Perhaps the stars echoed with God’s joyous laughter.

*Phillips:* First, then, we have the content or object of faith. Second comes the motivation of faith. We must believe not only that this is the true God, but also that we have to deal with Him, that He is the Judge and Arbiter of our destiny and fortune. As soon as we speak of God giving our rewards, some people get upset; they perceive a threat to the clear biblical teaching of salvation by grace alone. ‘If salvation is a matter of getting your reward, then we must be talking about works-salvation,’ they reason. However, that is very far from the case. This particular statement simply asserts the reality that God is the One who determines blessing versus condemnation. To have faith, we must realize and accept that we have to deal with this God, that His judgment about us is the vital one, and that we had better seek Him; that is, that we had better gain His favor. By calling this second element the motivation of faith, I mean that faith must turn to God as the One who saves; it must come to Him seeking reward, seeking favor, seeking His grace. The alternative is to ignore Him, to think that it doesn’t matter what God thinks of us, what He intends for our future. This is what unbelief is all about.

*Phillips:* The point about Enoch have been translated directly into heaven is that his record tells us of a life after death, and of God’s ability to reward His own with everlasting life. Our reward is the one Enoch received, namely, everlasting life with God—His free gift to all who turn to Him in faith: ‘the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom. 6:23). We see this gift in the experience of Enoch, the man who pleased God by faith, and this is the greatest motive for seeking the Lord. Just as in Abel we saw the power of Christ’s death to restore us to God, so in Enoch we see the power of His resurrection life, the new life we too may enter by faith in Him.

*Phillips:* God is a rewarder of those who seek Him. What, then, will you find if you do seek after Him? Enoch gives the answer. You will find life. Eternal life. That means a life that goes beyond the grave, a life in heaven. But it also means heaven in this life, in this world. It means

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the answer to the problem of death. God spared Enoch death because by faith he was pleasing God. For us it means a similar triumph over death; it means that death will lose its sting. Death shall be an open door to the fullness of the life we begin here by faith. Death will mean the perfection of what here is only imperfectly attained, to walk with God, to rest in Him, to delight in Him, and to know His pleasure, which is faith's greatest reward.

### C. Noah: Working by Faith (Hebrews 11:7)

*MacArthur:* Abel illustrates the worship of faith, and Enoch the walk of faith. Noah, perhaps more than any other person in history, illustrates the work of faith—obedience. Noah was a man of faith, and his life continually showed his faith by his utter obedience to God. 'Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time: Noah walked with God' (Gen. 6:9). He worshiped God faithfully, as Abel had, and he walked with God faithfully, as Enoch had. He also worked for God faithfully.

*Phillips:* Noah shares a distinction with Adam, that every single human being today is one of his descendants, since God restarted the human race through his family after the great flood. The flood from which Noah was saved is one of the great events in the history of our planet. It was an event brought on the magnitude of humanity's sin (Gen. 6:5). Not surprisingly, practically every religion and mythology, from Asia to North America, remembers Noah and the flood.

*Phillips:* The events of Noah's life have great theological significance. The words 'righteousness' and 'grace' first appear in the Bible in his account. He gives us a great symbol of judgment in the flood. His ark provides a symbol of salvation (1 Pe. 3:20). The rainbow remains an enduring symbol of the covenant—a reminder God put in the sky for Himself, standing between us and God's judgment, just as Jesus now is 'the guarantee of a better covenant' (7:22). Noah is perhaps best known today as a conservationist icon, a kind of Santa Claus for the environment movement. The main thing associated with him is the animals he saved, but in Hebrews 11 it is faith for which he is remembered. Everything we have said about Noah proves that he was a very great and significant man, yet it was his faith that made him great in God's eyes.

*Hughes:* Remember God's assessment of Noah's days in Genesis 6—'The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Gen. 6:5). 'But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD' (Gen. 6:8). Noah was the sole ray of light in a world gone dark! It is this singular man, and his great faith amidst the darkness of an unbelieving world, that we will now consider.

#### 1. The Work of Faith (11:7abc)

##### a) *Believing Faith (11:7a)*

<sup>7</sup>*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen...*

*Schreiner:* God instructed Noah about what was not yet seen, informing him that the entire world would be destroyed by a flood (Gen. 6:13-18). Noah exercised faith and thus was persuaded that what was not yet seen would become a reality. We have already seen that faith rests in and is convinced by the unseen promises of God (11:1). Faith can't 'see' how the world was created but trusts that God made all things. Noah had no conception of the torrent of destruction that would descend on the world, but he believed in what God said even though he had never beheld

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it. In the same way the readers should look to the unseen and believe that what God promised would be realized.

*Bruce:* Noah was a righteous man, like Abel; he walked with God, as did Enoch; but what is emphasized here is that when God announced that He would do something unprecedented in the experience of Noah and his contemporaries, Noah took him at His word, and showed that he did so by making practical preparations against the day when that word would come true. Noah received a divine communication that a deluge would sweep over the earth. Such a catastrophe had never been known before, but Noah's faith supplied the proof of 'things not seen.'

*MacArthur:* Noah was 'warned by God about things not yet seen.' He had never seen rain, because it probably did not exist before the Flood. He had never seen a flood, since floods could not have occurred without rain. Noah responded to God's message by faith, 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (11:1).

*Phillips:* Noah is an outstanding example of faith as being 'certain of what we do not see' (v. 1). There were two things Noah believed that were unseen: the great flood that God had promised and the salvation that would come by means of the ark. The key verses describing this are Genesis 6:13-18. Genesis 6:3 tells us that God spoke those words to Noah 120 years before the flood. There had never been an event such as God described, or such a vessel. The ark Noah was told to build was stupendous in size—about the size of a modern battleship—and we can guess that Noah was to build it on dry ground, far from any ocean or sea. That is faith in things unseen! Even though he had not one shred of proof apart from God's Word, Noah nonetheless believed. This shows that faith in things unseen is the same as faith in God's Word, the same as faith in God's promises. We believe God Himself, and that is faith in things unseen. This kind of faith required Noah to stand alone in his generation. Apart from his immediate family members—and the strength of their faith is not at all clear—Noah alone trusted in the Lord.

*Hughes:* Faith must have something to believe—and in this case it was a warning from God, because our text tells us Noah was 'warned by God concerning events as yet unseen.' The primary unseen thing he was warned about was, of course, that the earth's population was going to be destroyed by a monstrous cataclysmic flood—judgment by water (cp. Gen. 6:17). Implicit in this was a second thing not seen and certainly never dreamed of—that God was going to deliver Noah and his family through a great ark that Noah himself was going to build. The phrase 'warned by God concerning events as yet unseen' is meant to direct us back to the opening verse of the chapter: 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' Inwardly Noah came to possess *visual certitude*. He saw a terrible mountain of water come and cover the earth. And he saw an immense ark of cypress wood, the work of his hands, riding high on the tempest. This visual certitude was combined with a *future certitude*, for he had 'the assurance of things hope for'—namely, the promise of salvation for him and his family. Thus a dynamic certainty swept over his soul. *He believed God*. He saw the unseen flood. And this great belief was combined with trust in God, so that he became a man of towering faith. Faith is always more than certainty of belief. Faith is belief plus trust. In an instant Noah entrusted everything to God.

*Phillips:* Noah also provides an excellent example of what we are told in verse 6, that 'without faith it is impossible to please [God].' We know that Noah pleased God because Genesis 6:9, 'Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.' Like Enoch, Noah was an eminent man of faith, with much to say to us. Because Noah is described as

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blameless, many people argue that he was justified or that he pleased God by his works. This fails to recognize what the preceding verse says: ‘Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD’ (Gen. 6:8). It isn’t that he was blameless and thereby found grace with God, but that his blamelessness itself was the result of God’s favor. Indeed, God’s grace was the source of his faith, which in turn was the motivating power behind his works. Hebrews 11:7 insists that Noah did everything ‘by faith.’ Faith was the operating principle for all that Noah did or achieved. He shows us that the same faith that brings us into a right relationship with God also moves us to actions that please God in practical works of obedience.

*Phillips:* Indeed, what God demanded of Noah was far greater than what He asks of us. God required Noah to believe something that had never happened before, something totally unprecedented and seemingly unlikely. By contrast, God asks us to believe things that have already happened, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—things that were done not in a corner but in the full light of history and recorded in the Bible. Similarly, God promised to do something for Noah that was difficult to imagine, that is, to save him through the flood by means of the ark. But God promises us something He has done countless times before, probably in the lives of people we know personal. He promises to forgive our sins through faith in Christ, to give us His Spirit, and to lead us into a new life. Like Noah, we are saved by believing things that are not seen, and we please God only by believing His Word and trusting His promise.

### b) *Working Faith (11:7bc)*

*Phillips:* In addition to showing us a model faith that saved him and his family, Noah also demonstrates that faith always results in works. People are often confused about the relationship between faith and works. The apostle Paul insists that we are declared righteous in Christ ‘apart from works’ (Rom. 4:6). But the apostle James says that ‘faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead’ (James 2:17). One of the most helpful expression in sorting this out is a famous one from John Calvin. Calvin said, ‘We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.’ True and saving faith is always accompanied by obedience, ‘which flows from faith like water from a fountain.’

#### (1) Reverent Fear (11:7b)

*...in reverent fear...*

*Schreiner:* In ‘godly fear’ (*εὐλαβῆθεις*, *eulabētheis*) Noah believed what God said.

*MacArthur:* Noah built the ark ‘in reverence.’ The Greek word (*eulabeia*) can be translated ‘pious care, or concern,’ with *pious* taken in the original sense of genuine spiritual devotion. He treated the message of God with great respect and awe. He was a man of obedient faith even before God called him to build the ark. He had been faithful over smaller things, and now the Lord gave him a great thing to do.

*Phillips:* Hebrews 11:7 tells us two things that proved Noah’s faith, flowing forth naturally from that fountain. The first is one word in the Greek, but three in our English text: ‘in reverent fear.’ The Greek word is *eulabētheis*. F. F. Bruce translates it as ‘out of reverent regard.’ B. F. Westcott renders it, ‘moved with pious care.’ Philip Hughes put it as ‘taking heed’ with careful attentiveness. The point is that Noah had reverence for God, which led to his attentive care to the details of what God commanded.

*Hughes:* First, Noah obeys ‘in reverent fear,’ which I believe is better translated as ‘holy reverence,’ because fear does not fit Noah or the context of Genesis. Noah obeys, not because e

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dreads the consequences of disobedience, but because of the sweet reverence he has for God. If there is any ‘fear’ here, it is that of holy regard and devotional awe. Noah’s obedience is built on a warm heart for God—not a servile fear, but a loving fear like that of a child who does not want to displease his father. Noah’s reverent obedience tells us that at the very heart of a life of obedience, there must be, and there always is, a holy reverence for God.

### (2) Faithful Work (11:7c)

*...constructed an ark for the saving of his household.*

*Schreiner:* Since he was convinced a judgment was coming, Noah constructed an ark for the deliverance (*σωτηριαν, sōterian*) of his household.

*MacArthur:* Though Noah was ‘blameless in his time’ and ‘walked with God’ (Gen. 6:9), he was still a sinner (cp. Gen. 9:20-21). He was saved because of God’s ‘favor,’ because of God’s grace, working through his faith. Noah’s righteousness, just as that of every believer before and after him, was ‘in the eyes of the LORD.’ Noah was *counted* righteous, justified by God’s pure grace, applied because of faith. That Noah’s faith was genuine is proved by his obedience to God’s word. In God’s economy, trust and obedience are inseparable. As we love to sin, there is no other way than ‘to trust and obey.’ Just as Noah trusted and obeyed, God wants all who belong to Him to do the same. He wants us to trust Him in the trial we are going through, the temptation we are facing, the decision we are making. He wants us to worship Him rightly, as Abel did, and to walk with Him, as Enoch did. He also wants us to obey Him, as Noah did.

*Phillips:* There is one great work that both flowed from Noah’s faith and served as its main evidence—Noah’s ark. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the ‘conviction of things not seen,’ and Noah’s ark was evidence that pointed to the flood long before anyone saw the raindrops falling. Noah’s ark provides a classic demonstration of the relationship of faith to works. Why did Noah build the ark? What caused this work? It was his faith. It was ‘by faith’ that he built the ark. That is clearly the case, because unless he believed, it would have been lunacy to do something like this. Noah built the ark only because he truly believed that what God said about the flood was true, that the flood was going to come, and that unless he built the ark, he would be drowned with everyone else.

*Hughes:* Understanding that faith’s obedience is fueled by a reverent heart, we must next understand that obedience must always be practical. Noah got right down to doing what God had told him and ‘constructed an ark for the saving of his household’ (cp. Gen. 6:22; 7:5). He followed the blueprints implicitly. Faith always obeys! It obeys with a *reverential* heart in ways eminently *practical*. And true faith always acts! Bringing this down to where we live, we understand that there was no way Noah could truly believe that the flood was coming without doing what God told him to do to save his family.

*Phillips:* But what if Noah had not built the ark? What would we say about his faith? Imagine Noah insisting that he believed what God had said if he were not busy working on the ark! What would we say to a faith like that? We would say what James did—that such faith is useless and dead unless accompanied by works. If Noah did not even start working on the ark, chopping down trees and making diagrams, then the simple fact is that he could not have believed. But he did believe and therefore he built the ark. That is how faith and works fit together.

*Phillips:* The same is true for us. We always act according to our beliefs, in keeping with our real convictions. If you believed there was a bomb in your room, you would run out of it right

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now. If we trust that it is necessary to repent and believe the good news to be saved, we will flee temptation and at least begin chopping at the trees of our sinful habits and building our faith. It took Noah 120 years to build the ark, and it will take a while for our sanctification. But if we believe, we will at least get to work now. There is no escaping the truth: faith and works are inseparable.

### 2. The Result of Faith (11:7de)

#### a) *Condemned the World (11:7d)*

*By this he condemned the world...*

*Schreiner:* Noah condemned the world by his faith because he showed that he trusted God, had given himself to God, and belonged to God. He didn't give himself over to evil as the culture of his day had. He submitted his will to God. And thus he received a right relationship with God 'that comes by faith.' The world was condemned because it wasn't rightly related to God, and its inhabitants weren't rightly related to God because they didn't trust in Him or obey Him.

*MacArthur:* Noah's obedience included his passing on to the rest of the world God's message of coming judgment. In 2 Peter 2:5 he is called 'a preacher of righteousness.' God called Noah to preach while he built. The preaching was probably more difficult than the building. Hard jobs are always easier to deal with than hard people. The times in which Noah grew up were among the most evil and corrupt in history (cp. Gen. 6:5). If any man had reason to regret the time in which he lived, it was Noah. But he did not complain about when he was born, his lot in life, or his calling. He obeyed as he was and where he was. Noah's job was to warn the people of his time that God would soon judge them because of their wickedness and unbelief. They had had the same opportunity to know God and His will as had Noah. The difference between Noah and everyone around him was not a difference in the amount of light but a difference in response to it.

*Phillips:* Hebrews 11:7 provides a stark comparison of faith and unbelief, as viewed through Noah and his unbelieving generation. Noah can be said to have condemned the world in several ways, but before he condemned the world, we can be sure the world condemned him. We may rightly visualize the mockery and jeering which Noah must have daily faced as he built a huge ship. Had he lived in our day he would have been dubbed, 'Nutty Noah!' Yet Jesus used 'the days of Noah' as representative of the condition of the world before His own return, and indicated that His followers must be prepared to face the same kind of scornful hostility that Noah met day after day.

*Hughes:* There is a beautiful sequence that emanates from true faith: faith involves certitude of *belief*, which produces *obedience*, which in turn produces *witness*. And this is precisely what Noah's faith did because his witness condemned the world. This he did by the witness of his *word* and *life*. The Apostle Peter tells us that Noah was 'a herald of righteousness' (2 Pe. 2:5). This means that for 120 years while he labored on the ark, he preached to all who would listen. His message was a call to faith in God, repentance, and righteous living. Noah faithfully preached righteousness for twelve decades. But along with this was the witness of his life. His continual preparation of the ark was a constant visual witness that judgment was coming. But there was also the powerful witness of the way he lived his life, because Noah was a profoundly righteous man. What a power witness Noah was in the *word* and the *life* he preached. Both eloquently condemned the world and put it in the wrong.

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*Phillips:* Noah's faith condemned the world, first of all through his witness. Second Peter 2:5 calls Noah a 'herald of righteousness.' Surely he would have explained his actions, why he was building the ark, to those who inquired and went on to laugh at him. He would have warned the world of a judgment to come and offered the way of safety in the ark. Likewise, we are to teach and explain the life we lead, the truth we believe, and the salvation we seek. And in its rejection of our message, the world is condemned for unbelief. Noah's witness condemned the world, but we can also say his faith condemned the world. There it was before their eyes, evidence of God's Word, which they rejected or ignored (cp. Mt. 24:38-39). Just like today, the great mass of people paid no attention to spiritual matters; they were indifferent to God's Word as it was proclaimed, and Noah's faith condemned them for their unbelief. John Calvin points out that Noah also condemned the world by his salvation. Noah's salvation proved that anyone could have been saved through trust in the Word of God. Noah's salvation certainly vindicated his faith and his testimony, once wickedly made sport of by the voices of the world.

### b) *Heir of Righteousness (11:7e)*

*...and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

*MacArthur:* Noah's faith was proved by his receiving God's righteousness, which is only bestowed on those who trust in Him. 'A righteous man, blameless in his time: Noah walked with God' (Gen. 6:9). He was the first person in Scripture to be called righteous. All who believe in God are righteous, not always in practice but always in position. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us by faith (Rom. 3:22). The Father sees us as He sees the Son, holy and righteous, because by faith we are *in* the Son. God looks at believers through the lens of His Son, and He sees us as He sees the Son. Thousands of years before Jesus became incarnate, God looked at Noah and saw the Son, because Noah believed.

*Phillips:* This leaves one final statement about Noah. There are two key elements in this last statement: inheritance and the righteousness that comes by faith. The apostle follows a similar line of reasoning in Philippians 3, where he contrasts the righteousness of faith with the righteousness of the law. Paul wants not the righteousness of his own works under the law—which must be flawed at best and therefore useless—but the righteousness of Christ, which comes only through faith in Him. Surely the writer of Hebrews is making the same point about Noah: although he did many good things, he sought not a limited and imperfect righteousness of his own, but the perfect righteousness from God that comes through faith. This righteousness, we are told, came to Noah by means of an inheritance. By faith he became an heir of righteousness. By faith he became a child of God. This is why it was so appropriate for him to act in a godly and righteous way—because by faith Noah was God's child and therefore destined to inherit His riches. Inheritance means that the source of the gift was not his own resources, but the one who granted the inheritance. This is how the righteousness of Christ comes to us: as an inheritance from God to His children and not from ourselves as an achievement. Furthermore, an inheritance is established by a fixed law and procedure.

*Hughes:* This is the author of Hebrews' one and only use of 'righteousness' in the objective Pauline sense of righteousness that comes from God through faith (e.g., Rom. 1:16-17). I like to call it an *alien* righteousness because 'alien' stresses the fact that it does not come from man, but is an objective gift from God. The point we must see here is that this righteousness from God is necessary for salvation. Self-generated righteousness is never enough. Moreover, we can never earn salvation, for it comes by faith (e.g., Rom. 1:17; 3:22; Phil. 3:9). When we have true faith and receive the *objective* gift of righteousness and salvation from God, it enacts in us a growing

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*subjective* righteousness (a righteousness that grows from within). And this is precisely what happened to Noah, as Genesis 6:9 beautifully testifies: ‘Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.’ He was ‘righteous’ within. He was ‘blameless.’ He ‘walked with God’ toward the same *place* on the same *path* at the same *pace*. He lived a beautiful life that pleased God.

*Phillips*: This is what makes the righteousness of faith so secure. When we receive righteousness as an inheritance, by the open hands of faith, it is afterward possessed as a right. It is not something that has to be protected. Children do not hold their inheritance by conquest or by cunning, but as an unbreakable right inherent in their status as children of the father. In just that manner, our righteousness in Christ, received as an inheritance by faith, cannot be lost or taken away. Ultimately, our inheritance is based upon the sovereign will of God and not upon our own will.

*Phillips*: The direct result of Noah’s faith was salvation, while condemnation was only an indirect consequence. Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah’s faith condemned the world. Christians are sometimes encouraged by statements like this to make it their job to condemn the world; they make it their ministry to point out how rotten it is, to fixate on the reigning sins and unite in hysteria over the latest debaucheries. But that does not seem to be the way Noah lived; he charted a different course for us. Everything Noah did was calculated to save. He acted as an instrument of salvation, even though his faith indirectly condemned the world. He was an ambassador of the grace of God, and that is what every Christian is called to be. Noah was ‘a herald of righteousness’ (2 Pe. 2:5). Surely that involved a condemnation of sin and a warning of judgment, but all of that was done in the shadow of the ark of salvation. That is where Noah’s real effort went. His faith set him to work upon the ark. If the world would not seek its open door, then yes, it would be destroyed. But Noah directed his labor to salvation. Our labor must have this same influence: to commend and offer salvation to others, praying that God will grant them faith to believe and be saved. This is the labor of the Christian, by faith in the Word of God.

For next time: Read Hebrews 11:8-16.