

## The Letter to the Hebrews

### Lesson 6

*Hebrews 11:4 – Hebrews 12:3*

The souls and salvation of the heroes of the faith were anchored to the unseen Savior of the world. Their relationship with the Lord granted them the honor of being included in this list by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews 11:2 states the following about their faith:

**Hebrews 11:2** *For by it the men of old gained approval.*

These heroes lived with an assurance of God's promise and the conviction of His future coming. They were not unfamiliar to the Jews in the church, who had heard their stories from childhood.

**Hebrews 11:4** By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

**ABEL** – The two boys of Adam and Eve brought their offering to the Lord one day. Cain, the older, was a farmer and his offering was from the vegetation of the ground. Abel, the younger, was a herdsman and his offering was a slain animal. According to Genesis 4:4, the Lord accepted the offering of Abel rather than the offering of Cain. Cain would not control his anger and countenance and killed his brother in jealousy. Even at the beginning, a blood sacrifice was required for the penalty of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord did not cover them with clothing of vegetation; He killed an animal and covered their sin with the clothing of a blood sacrifice. The offering of Abel satisfied the Lord and redeemed him from his sin. The spilt blood of Abel spoke from the ground as a witness against Cain. Likewise, the shed blood of the Lord does the same thing for all of mankind; on one hand, it pays the penalty of sin in full; on the other hand, it marks the guilt of sin on those who fail to accept the offering.

**Hebrews 11:5** By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. **6**And 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 seek Him.

**ENOCH** – Seven generations from Adam, Enoch walked beside God all his life and God loved him. **Genesis 5:24** says "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." When all the facts of this passage are considered, it can be determined that Enoch pleased God, believed in God and was rewarded by God for his faithfulness. We should be imitators of Enoch in our daily lives.

**Hebrews 11:7** By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he

condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

**NOAH** — Year after year, Noah proved his faith in God as he built the ark. The world had never seen a flood before; it had not even seen rain. Noah took the word of God at face value by believing a rain would come that would flood the world. Like Enoch, the Scripture records that Noah was blameless and walked with God.

**Genesis 6:9** *These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.*

Noah established his faith in God and brought salvation to his family through the devastation by faithfully following the Lord's instructions.

**Hebrews 11:8** By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; **10** for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

**ABRAHAM** — Three times the Lord called Abraham and directed him on his journey from Ur to the land of Canaan. We find those callings in Genesis 12:7, Genesis 13:15, and Genesis 17:8. The Lord was testing Abraham by not telling him where He was taking him. Abraham passed the test. Once in the land, he sojourned from place to place with his large extended family, never building a dwelling or officially owning a piece of the Canaanite land; yet they lived on the land as heirs. They put their faith and trust in the knowledge of heaven and the promise of the future.

**Hebrews 11:11** By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; **12** therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.*

**SARAH** — Abraham's wife was numbered among the faithful. Although she lacked faith in the beginning and offered the Egyptian servant as her substitute, in the end she was faithful and gave birth in her old age, beginning a line of innumerable descendants.

**Hebrews 11:13** All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. **14** For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. **15** And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

**A BETTER COUNTRY** – Perhaps Ur did not satisfy Abraham and that is the reason he was willing to leave it behind and follow the Lord's instructions. But we should not be short-sighted and fail to recognize that the Lord was in control of all the circumstances there in Ur as well as all over the world. Abraham and Sarah were looking for a better country, but, in reality, they were looking for God and they found Him. He directed their paths, protecting and providing for them all their lives. After putting themselves in the hands of the Lord, the only land they ever owned was a cave for the burial of their earthly bodies. Sarah was buried there as well as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No doubt many others of his family were buried there also.

**Genesis 23:4** *"I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."*

**Hebrews 11:17** By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; **18** it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." **19** He considered that God is able to raise *men* even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.

**ABRAHAM** – Recorded in Genesis 22, the offering of Isaac as a blood sacrifice to the Lord was probably the major test in Abraham's life. The Lord directed Abraham to take Isaac to Mount Moriah. There the wood was laid out for the fire, and Isaac asked his father where the animal was for the sacrifice. Abraham's answer was "the Lord will provide." Abraham laid his son on the bundle of wood and took his knife to slay his son, but the Angel of the Lord stopped him and provided a ram for the sacrifice. The Angel of the Lord was pleased with the faithfulness of Abraham and said,

*"By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. "And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."* **Genesis 22: 16-18**

**Hebrews 11:20** By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

**ISAAC** – The story of Isaac's blessings of Jacob and Esau can be found in Genesis 27:28-40. It is a troubling story of deception and desperation, yet it shows the faithfulness of the father to keep his word. It also shows the revelation of the Lord to this faithful follower in allowing him to see into the future, discerning the hearts of his sons and their futures. Esau had agreed to sell his birthright to Jacob for a simple meal - his total inheritance, forfeited in his desperation for food. When his father was old, Jacob deceived Isaac into giving him the blessing that should have been given to Esau. When Esau came to his father after a hunting trip, both he and his father discovered the deception, but Isaac would not go back on his word. Esau begged his father for a blessing, but the blessing Isaac gave Esau was more of a curse.

**Genesis 27:39-40** *Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the*

*dew of heaven from above.* **40** "And by your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck."

Esau never expected that his father would recognize his selling of his birthright, but he did, and he would not change his blessing of Esau.

**Hebrews 11:21** By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.

**JACOB** – By this time, Jacob had been tested by the Lord, wrestling with the angel all night. His character had changed, and his name was changed to Israel. As was common in those days, the father blessed each of his children before he died. Such was the case with Jacob and his twelve sons. In the process of giving the blessing, Jacob asked his son Joseph to grant him a promise. Found in Genesis 47:29-31, Jacob asked Joseph to bury him in the same cave where Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, and Rebecca were buried. Joseph agreed and Pharaoh allowed Joseph to return to the land of Canaan to keep the promise.

**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.

**Joseph** – Like his father, Joseph blessed his children on his death bed. Joseph, too, looked to the future and the land that was promised. Four-hundred years after the death of Joseph, his children's children would carry his body from Egypt and bury it where he had buried his father in the cave with Abraham and Isaac. He knew the future and had faith that the Lord would keep His promise.

**Hebrews 11:23** By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. **24** By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; **25** choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; **26** considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. **27** By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the first-born might not touch them. **29** By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though *they were* passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

**MOSES** – The story of Moses is well-known and can be quickly read in the Old Testament book of Exodus. Five times this passage speaks of the faith of Moses. The Lord provided the means by which Moses, born as a Hebrew in Egypt, would be protected and adopted within the walls of Pharaoh's home. He grew up with the best that Egypt had to offer, yet he never forgot his roots or the promise the Lord had made to his ancestors. He spent forty years in royalty in Egypt, forty years as a shepherd in Midian, returned to Egypt for a short period, and then spent forty years in the wilderness. The Lord spoke regularly with Moses. He followed the Lord in faith and brought the Lord's people to the waters of the Jordan River, ready to enter and

claim the promise of the land of Canaan. Finally, Abraham's descendants would own the land promised when the Lord called him out of Ur, but they would have to fight for the land in order to own it.

**Hebrews 11:30** By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days.

**ISREALITES AND JERICHO** – The second generation of Israelites crossed the Jordan River on dry land and faithfully directed their attention to the capture of Jericho. Unwavering in their faith, they quietly marched around Jericho six days, but on the seventh day, they faithfully followed the instruction of the Lord and marched around the city seven times and then blasted their trumpets in resounding joy. The whole world knows the outcome of this faith walk; the walls came tumbling down.

**Hebrews 11:31** By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

**RAHAB** – Shortly before the march around Jericho, the Hebrews had sent spies to search out the land. They found themselves in danger in the city of Jericho and their salvation came at the hands of a harlot named Rahab. When the city walls fell, Rahab and her entire family were saved by the Lord in accordance with the promise of the spies whom she hid. She had put her faith in the God of Israel and worshiped with the Jewish people. Later, her marriage to Salmon, a prince of the tribe of Judah, resulted in her being in the ancestral line of Mary and Joseph.

**Hebrews 11:32** And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup>who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup>quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

**THE JUDGES** – The list provided by the writer represents several of the faithful judges in the land of Canaan between the death of Joshua and the second king David. David as well as King Saul and all the rest of Israel's rulers operated as judges during their terms in office. Specifically, the judges listed in this passage relied faithfully on the Lord, completing all He desired them to do in the life of Israel.

**Hebrews 11:35** Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; <sup>36</sup>and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup>They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated <sup>38</sup>(*men of whom the world was not worthy*), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

**Certain Women** – Rahab was mentioned because of her faith, but there were many other women who faithful served the Lord during their lives. Blessings came to them, even miraculous blessings as having their loved ones raised from the dead.

They believed in the resurrection and saw it first-hand. It gave them hope in the promised ultimate resurrection. But not all the women were blessed in their faith; some were poorly treated as the text indicates, yet they remained strong in their faith. Most of the tribulations described in this passage can be easily substantiated in the Old Testament; however, this Hebrew record is the only accounting of women or men being sawed in half. These people of faith endured all the trials and tribulations; they were found faithful to the end.

**Hebrews 11:39** And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, **40** because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The lives of these heroes received a good testimony from the Lord for their faith in Him. Although they did not live to see the coming of the Messiah, God did fulfill many special promises for them on earth, and He provided a greater reward for their faith in eternity with Him. The foresight of God and His provision of grace in the Lord were not due to any merit on their part, specifically on the part of the Jews. The writer is speaking to the Jews in the church and indicates here that the perfection of the saints is not due to the faithfulness of the nation of Israel. The perfection of the saints is wholly due to the grace of the Lord and His promises to Abraham. All of these heroes are just part of the myriads of witnesses to the faithfulness of the Lord.

**Hebrews 12:1** Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of 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. **3** For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

When the author uses the phrase "cloud of witnesses," we think of clouds in the skies, but the meaning behind the metaphor is different from our assumption. The metaphor refers to a stadium built with tier after tier of seats rising to the sky. In most stadiums spectators fill the seats cheering on the athletes, but not so with this metaphor; these seats are not filled with spectators but with witnesses who can testify from their own lives about God fulfilling His promises. All the witnesses represent the heroes of the faith that faced a test from the Lord. Like an athlete, they ran the race and finished their task on earth in faith. They are now witnesses to the runner to show him that if he will run the race in the faith of the Lord, God is faithful. Before a runner entered the stadium, he would lay aside his clothing. He ran the race almost nude, if not fully nude. With this metaphor in mind, the background is set for more practical advice.

#### *Practical advice*

- Lay aside the weights which handicap, such as doubt, fear and pride.
- Lay aside the sin which, in this case, is rejection of Christ as Savior.
- Understand that Jesus is the cure for doubt and hesitation, keeping those in the race strong and refreshed.
- Run the race, not with impatience, doubt, or despair, but with endurance, focused on Christ.