

Superior Principle Faith – Part 1

Hebrews 11:1-16

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We're coming to Hebrews 11, and it is truly, truly, truly a classic chapter of the Bible. There are many great chapters of the Bible. Actually, in my library I have several books that are called Great Chapters of the Bible, but there are three that I think of tonight that are great chapters of the Bible. Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on faith; 1 Corinthians 15 is the chapter on hope, it's all about the resurrection and the hope of eternal life; 1 Corinthians 13 is the great chapter on love. If you want to know about love, read 1 Corinthians 13; if you want to know about hope, read 1 Corinthians 15; if you want to know about faith, read Hebrews 11.

The readers needed faith and patience to persevere and to not give up on Christ and go back to Judaism. A reminder, again, in order to understand the verses that we cover, they were Jews who had come to Christ, and because of persecution, opposition, and difficulties they were going to abandon their faith in Jesus Christ and go back to Judaism, back to the old covenant, so the writer of Hebrews is basically trying to encourage them to move on, to persevere. We come to a new section tonight where he wants them to live by faith.

Just a review, in Hebrews 1-6 we have the superior Person—Christ is better than the prophets, He's better than angels, He's better than Moses, He's better than Aaron; then we had the second section, Hebrews 7-10 Christ superior priesthood—He's better than Melchizedek, He's better with the new covenant, He's got a better sanctuary and a better sacrifice. The third section is Hebrews 11-13 we have a superior principle, which is faith. We're going to have examples of faith in Hebrews 11; we have the endurance of faith in Hebrews 12; in Hebrews 13, we have the evidence of faith. We only have three more chapters, and all of them deal with different aspects of faith because the principle is that we must live by faith.

What started this last chapter, go back with me to Hebrews 10:35. Actually, you should start all the way back in verse 32, where he calls them to evaluate their past victories, how they had conversion, how they should have courage, compassion, and conviction. But start with me in verse 35. He says, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward,"—so, don't give up, don't throw away your confidence. Look at verse 36, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. 37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Notice verse 38, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back,"—that's what they were in danger of doing—"my soul shall have no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

In verse 38 he's encouraging them to move forward in this whole closing section of Hebrews 10. In verse 38, he quotes from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk 2:4, "...the just shall live by his faith." That verse, as I mentioned last week, is quoted three times in the New Testament. It's quoted in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and here in Hebrews 10:38. Now, notice it has three sections: the just, shall live, by faith. It's interesting when it appears in those three places

of the New Testament. It appears in Romans 1:17, which deals with the fact of the just or the righteous or the justified. The theme of Romans is the justification by faith. When it appears in Galatians 3:11, Galatians is talking about living in the liberty where Christ has set us free, so we have the second section, which is "shall live." The third quote is in Hebrews 10:38, our passage, and we find "by faith."

The writer uses that theme of "by faith" in Hebrews to go into Hebrews 11, and what he basically does, and we can spend all night just introducing the chapter and we need to get going, is trying to tell these Jews that they need to live now as believers in Christ by faith. They had kind of a ceremonial system in the old covenant with rites and rituals and washings and laws and rules and regulations, and they wanted to go back to that, which was a shadow of the substance, which is Christ. They needed to learn how to live by faith and the importance of faith, so the writer of Hebrews gives them Old Testament references to faith's example. What better way to encourage them, Jews, to live by faith in taking Old Testament individuals and showing them people in the Old Testament that got victory and walked forward and didn't go back, didn't give up, were living by faith.

Hebrews 11 has been called the great "Hall of Faith." It's interesting. When you come to the end of Hebrews 11, Hebrews 12:1, and he wants us to endure by faith, he says, "...we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," which is a reference back to Hebrews 11 and all the individuals of faith in that chapter who lived by faith and trusted the Lord. They were to follow their examples; and we, tonight as believers, are to follow their examples as well. When the Bible says, "...the just shall live by faith," that's you and me, every one of us. You can't say, "Well, may I be excused? Can I not have to walk by faith? May I be able to walk by sight? Can I see what God has promised?" No. We have to be patient, we have to wait, we have to endure, we have to live by faith.

Another little footnote, and I'll develop this as we go, faith does not immune you from sorrows and suffering. You're going to see that these men and there's two women mentioned by name specifically, Sarah and Rahab the harlot, had suffering, had sorrows, they had pain, they had difficulties. Even in some cases it's going to say that others were mocked and persecuted and killed, and they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins and were destitute and afflicted. So, being a man or woman of faith and growing in faith will not immune you from the problems of life. You say, "Well, then, why should I have faith?" Because when the problems come, they give you victory in and through them, not from them. There's a big difference. Faith gives you victory in and through them but not from them, so there's no Christian fallout shelters. God is not going to wrap you in bubble wrap to keep you from the sorrows of life; but if you grow in your faith, you trust the Lord, you can learn to get victory in your sorrows, in your suffering, and through the trials, not from them.

Let me outline where we're going tonight. In verses 1-3, we'll just look at that first, we have the classic description—not a definition—of what faith is. Let's read it. The writer of Hebrews says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good report. 3 Through faith we understand that the worlds,"—that is, in the

Greek, *aiónios*, the ages—“were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Again, there’s so much packed into this description of faith, but it’s important that we understand as New Testament believers what faith is.

There are so many false ideas and misconceptions about true faith. Let’s look at the text. “Now faith is the substance...,” the word “substance” actually is used for something which is put under a foundation. The word literally means stands under. It was used for a foundation, so the concept trying to be conveyed is that it’s foundational for our Christian hope, the foundation of our Christian hope. The concept of foundation also means essence. This would also be used of a literal foundation for a house. When you have a house or build a building, what’s the most important part of that structure? The foundation, right? So, the most important part of a believer and the foundation on which we stand and see the hope fulfilled is our faith in God. It’s also, “...the substance of things hoped for,” so it’s yet future for us. Faith also, we’re going to see, looks back and believes what God did in the past, but it also looks forward and believes God for what will come in the future. Then it says, “...the evidence of things not seen.” The word “evidence” means assurance or confidence. Faith is the foundation or essence of things that we yet hope for in the future, and it’s the assurance or the evidence or confidence of things not seen.

Verse 2, the writer says, “For by it,”—that means faith—“the elders,”—the “elders” there is a reference to Old Testament saints. He’s not speaking specifically about the patriarchs, although he will look at those individually, but he’s talking about the Old Testament saints. “...obtained a good report,”—or witness or testimony. So, they lived by faith, they were commended and blessed by God, and gave us a good example to follow in their steps. Verse 3, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

Before he gets into the examples, beginning in verse 4, he gives us a general statement in verses 2 and 3. By the way, verse 2 is actually a theme summary of the whole chapter, “For by it the elders obtained a good report,” and he’s going to list them for us as we go through. The thought in verse 3 is that through faith we understand something, so faith gives us knowledge or understanding. This looks back. What do we understand? “...the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Basically, what it’s saying is that we, by faith, understand something. We comprehend something. By the way, biblical faith is believing God’s revealed promises in His Word, and when we do that, we get a new knowledge and assurance. In verse 3, he’s talking about God creating the worlds, and I said it’s the Greek word *aiónios* or ages, but it’s talking about the physical creation, time and space, history, matter, that God created the worlds out of nothing. Before the world existed, there was only God. Think about that. For all eternity past, and it’s kind of a mind-blowing concept to think about, “Well, how long was God around before He created?” Eternally.

Our minds can’t go there. When I go back, I can only go not very far back in history. I’m not real good at my history, and my mind just kind of fuses out. The older I get, the quicker it fuses

out. But think about that—before anything else existed, there was God, eternity past, forever and ever and ever. He always has been, He always will be. He didn't come from anywhere, He wasn't made by anyone, He's the eternal, self-existing God. How do we know that? By faith, because we weren't there, obviously.

This verse actually tells us the origin of the universe. The most intelligent, scientific minds cannot really tell you with certainty the origin of life—that's for sure—and they can't tell you the origin of matter. You either believe in some kind of all eternal existent matter or life, or you believe in an all-existent, eternal God. How? By faith. Which takes more faith?

This verse takes us right back to Genesis 1:1, right?, which says, "In the beginning,"—this is the beginning of creation—"God created,"—and the word "created" is the Hebrew word bârâ', which means to create out of nothing. When God created, He didn't have anything to create with. He didn't have any matter to mold into man or the earth, so God just spoke it into existence. It's called fiat. God has the ability to speak and take nothing and SNAP! all of the sudden He creates. That's the creative power of God. So, out of nothing, "...God created the heaven and the earth." He created the worlds.

Now, I probably don't need to bring it up, and I don't want to get sidetracked. There is an unfortunate false teaching on faith that has been around for many, many years in the church promulgated under different terms or titles, but it's most commonly known as the Word of Faith movement. They have an overemphasis that is not just overemphasized, but it's so overemphasized that it's unbiblical and unscriptural because it's not really taught in the Scriptures.

They basically teach that faith is a force. Even in one of their books...and I'll tell you who wrote it, his name is Kenneth Hagin. He's gone now, he's dead, but his Rhema school is still there in Oklahoma. The book was called Faith is a Force. They actually take this very verse of Hebrews 11:3, and try to say and interpret it that God Himself created the worlds by using faith. Nothing can be more blasphemous or ludicrous because faith is only as good as the object it's placed in; so, pray tell me, who did God put His faith in to use faith? So, they misinterpret faith as not believing in God and His promises and what He has revealed in His Word, but they interpret faith as actually a force, that we are little gods, and they teach what's called the little god doctrine—that we have, like God, the ability to speak things into existence so we can create our own reality by the spoken word.

They have a very strong emphasis on confessing—if you feel sick, don't say you feel sick because if you say you feel sick, you are sick. Do you feel tired? Don't say, "I'm tired," because that's a negative statement. Don't do that because then you will be tired, so you can create your own reality; and they're very, very popular on television. I can give you the list of many of them that teach this. I won't go there. You can talk to me after church. I'll be glad to give them to you.

You turn on the television station and so many times it's, "Say this," and "Confess that," and they

put a great emphasis on two areas; Physical healing, they believe that healing is carte blanche in the atonement and that if you speak your healing, SNAP! it will come; they put an emphasis on prosperity and money, and if you speak prosperity, if you speak money, it will come. You can be rich, you should be rich, that we're all King's kids and we should have the blessings of Abraham, which is justification by faith, not salvation. They say Abraham was rich. He had donkeys, goats, herds, menservants and maidservants, and so the blessing of Abraham is wealth or material gain. That's not what the book of Galatians is talking about. They think that you can speak out in faith and create your own reality, so they view faith as an actual force that can be wielded—listen carefully—for your self gain and advantage.

I realize that many of them have good motives, and they've been falsely taught or they believe that they're speaking out something that's promised them in the Bible, but the problem is God has not—and I can't tell you, when I say stuff like this, how many Christians disagree with me—promised perfect health; God has not promised every believer to have abundant wealth. Do I get an, Amen? God has promised, "I'll never leave you or forsake you."

Our bodies have not yet been redeemed. We're waiting for the redemption of our body. We're waiting to be glorified, so we will get sick, we will die. Even the Word of Faith teachers, I mentioned Kenneth Hagin, he got sick and died. Even though they teach that they can choose the time they want to die and that they will speak their own day of death into existence, their bodies will give out and they will die and go the way of all flesh waiting for the resurrection. They're asking God to give them something that God hasn't promised, and they're misinterpreting faith as a force.

Certainly, you can't interpret Hebrews 11:3, that God created the worlds by faith. No. We know and understand and believe by faith that God created the worlds, but God didn't use faith. God used His own divine power and with fiat spoke the worlds into existence, so don't be deceived by the Word of Faith, "health and wealth" prosperity teaching. It's not biblical faith.

Biblical faith involves putting trust in God and specifically, very carefully but specifically, God's promises revealed in Scripture. When you read about Christians having faith, it's always faith in God, and it's about faith that God promised us certain things and us believing those promises and then acting upon them. That's what's called biblical faith.

Beginning in verse 4, down to the end of the chapter (so you know how to outline this), we have the examples of faith. In verses 1-3, we have the description of faith; in verses 4-40, we're going to take a few weeks to get there, we have examples of faith. Tonight, we're going to cover a couple of sections. We first see before the patriarchs, verses 4-7, before Abraham, Sarah, and the patriarchs Issac and Jacob. Follow with me as we read. It says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

There's going to be three pre-patriarch examples: Abel, verse 4; Enoch, verses 5-6; and Noah, verse 7. These examples would run historically from Genesis 1 to 11, so this is pre-patriarchs.

The first is Abel, and the background for that is Genesis 4. An interesting footnote there we're going to see as we go through Hebrews, that Hebrews believed these Old Testament characters were true historical figures. They weren't myth. They weren't allegory. There really was an Abel. There really was a Cain. There really was a Noah. There really was an Abraham. He believed that this Old Testament was historically true, so he says, "By faith Abel."

By the way, just one more quick note on the Word of Faith doctrine. Abel is the first one to be listed as a man of faith, but guess what happened to Abel? He was murdered by his brother. He's listed at the number one spot in the hall of faith, but he was murdered by his brother. That's why it says, "...and by it he being dead yet speaketh." Again, I say, faith does not deliver you from trials and troubles. I'm sure that he had faith, but it couldn't save him from being murdered by his brother, but he did have a good witness.

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." The story is of Cain and Abel. You know the story in the book of Genesis that Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to God. Abel brought a blood sacrifice of an animal which God had prescribed they needed to do—without the shedding of blood there is no remission—and they were certainly aware of this fact. Cain brought the work of his own hands, the labor of the ground. He brought fruit and vegetables. Now, that's not to say fruit and vegetables are bad, in and of themselves, there were fruit offerings you could give to God, but it was required that they give a blood sacrifice. I think it's interesting, some have said that Cain was the one who started the first false religion, that you don't have to go God's way or follow God's prescription, you don't have to trust in the cross of Christ, you can get there by your own efforts, by your own energy. He brought the labor of his own hands, the fruit of his field.

God did not accept Cain's sacrifice. Cain got angry because He accepted his brother Abel's sacrifice, and hatred filled his heart and he murdered his own brother, right? The picture there is of righteous Abel who put his faith and trust in God and obtained witness that he was righteous. He was a man of faith, and, "...he being dead yet speaketh." This is faith worshiping. We must worship God according to His prescribed way. We can't come to God on our own. We can't come to God following our own ideas, we must follow God's prescribed methods.

The second example before the patriarchs is that of Enoch, verses 5-6. Enoch is talked about in Genesis 5. So, right off the bat we have Genesis 1:1, God creating the heavens and the earth in verse 3, and then we have the example of Abel and Cain, which goes back to Genesis 4. Then, we have the story of Enoch, Genesis 5. I like to call Enoch the spaceman because the Bible says, "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." He was the first one to get caught up to God in heaven without going through death. Look at it with me, verses 5-6, "By faith Enoch was translated." By the way, the word "faith," and other aspects that use that same concept, appears 24 times in the book of Hebrews 11, so we have it twice, we have it in verse 1, and we have it in verses 3-6.

Verse 5, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." He was walking with God. Abel was worshiping God by faith, which we need to do, and Enoch was walking with God by faith. It says, "...that he pleased God." Verse 6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," Enoch the spaceman.

I don't believe the rapture is intentionally in the Old Testament, but if you were to find a picture or a type of it, it certainly would be Enoch. Enoch walked with God, and one day God just took Enoch home to heaven. Someone said that Enoch and God would walk every afternoon in the cool of the evening in the garden, and one day they took a longer walk. When they got to the end of their walk, God said, "Enoch, we're closer to My house than we are yours, so why don't you come home with Me?" and he just disappeared. I think about when we get to heaven we're going to meet Enoch. We're going to be there at the last supper and say,

"Hey, can you pass me the mashed potatoes?" That's what I'm going to say. And we're going to say, "Excuse me, what's your name?" He says, "Enoch." "Oh, Enoch. Yeah, I read about you, Genesis 5. You're awesome!"

Do you know what's interesting? The Bible says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die," right? That's a general rule because this is a breaking of the rule. Enoch broke that rule, he didn't die. He was taken. He was translated. The Bible actually says that as the church—we as Christians—some of us will not die but we will be changed, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." In 1 Corinthians 15:51, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep,"—or die—"but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of any eye...For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." Check it out when you get a chance, 1 Corinthians 15:51 to the end of the chapter. It's interesting that at the end of that chapter he says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Enoch was a picture of getting translated, just like one day we will get raptured.

When Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 4, he said, "...and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up,"—the Greek word is *harpazō*—we'll be raptured up—"...to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This is something that we as believers hope for. Amen? And all of us that are true children of God will just get SNAP! caught up, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." We won't have to go through death, we'll just be raptured. When somebody calls you and says, "Would you like to buy a burial plot?" which is perhaps a good idea to do, but say, "No, I'm looking for the upptaker, not the undertaker." I've done that when they call my house, by the way. They say, "Okay. Thank you very much!" and hang up real quick. I'm looking for the upptaker, not the undertaker. So, Enoch walked with God. What a blessing that is in a corrupt time.

Notice that faith pleases God. “But without faith it is impossible to please him,”—and then notice these points—“for he that cometh to God must believe that he is,”—that’s the first foundation of faith, that God exists—“and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” God exists and God rewards. Faith brings reward. If you learn to walk by faith and trust in God and believe His promises and look to Him for strength, you will be blessed. You will be rewarded. In Psalm 46:10 it says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” It’s so wonderful to trust in Him, to look to Him, to wait on Him, to know His goodness and also to know that He rewards you for your faith.

I believe with all my heart, from Scripture and from my life experiences, that if you trust the Lord with all your heart, and you lean not on your own understanding, and every way you go you acknowledge Him, He will make your paths straight. He will bless you. God will not let you down. God will not disappoint you. Through all life’s challenges, hardships, and difficulties, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...thou art,”—what?—“with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” Whatever fear is gripping your heart, faith can drive that out tonight, if you trust Him, you look to Him, and you hope in Him. God will not disappoint you. God will bless you and reward you, verse 6.

We go from Abel and Enoch to Noah. What a guy he was. Verse 7, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” Noah is covered in Genesis 6. It’s interesting that Noah was warned by God of a flood. I believe the flood that was coming in Noah’s day was a world-wide flood. If it was just a local flood, why would God have him build a big boat and spend a hundred years working on that boat when He could just say, “Noah, move to the next county,” or “Move a hundred miles away,” or “Go live up high on the mountain.”

The highest mountain peaks on the whole earth were covered. The whole earth was completely covered, and Noah was, “...warned of God,”—it says there—“of things not seen as yet.” Do you know that Noah had never seen it rain? Before the flood of Noah, the world was moistened by ground water coming up. God just had the whole earth like a Garden of Eden, there wasn’t any rain. He had never seen rain. When Noah was told, “Noah, it’s going to rain,” he said, “I don’t know what that is.” “Water’s going to come down out of the heavens and flood the earth.” Noah had never seen rain. It says, verse 7, “...moved with fear,”—or reverence or faith or trust in God. Thirdly, he, “...prepared an ark,”—boy did he ever! The thing was the size of a football field.

Another footnote, and we don’t have time to do a whole study on Noah, the writer of Hebrews believed in the story of Noah. Which is funny, by the way, a lot of people think the story of Noah and the ark is kind of a cute little kids’ story, and they’ll decorate a nursery with an ark and the animals on the ark and the rainbow. It’s cute. Do you know it’s a story about God’s judgment on a sinful world, so if you decorate your child’s room in Noah and the ark, and then you teach him the Bible story, they may have a hard time getting to sleep that night. The rainbow was a covenant promise by God that He would no longer destroy the earth by flood. Now, He didn’t

promise He wouldn't destroy it by fire, He will; but He's not going to flood it. Whenever the floods get really bad and you think, "Oh no! We're all going to die." No. God put a rainbow in the sky to remind us He won't destroy man by flood.

Notice he also was, "...warned of God...moved with fear, prepared an ark," but what did it result in? "...the saving of his house." Noah's faith saved him, his family, and his household. "...by the which he condemned the world,"—because they did not repent, they didn't believe, they didn't trust in God. I believe that before Noah built the ark, he built a platform and a pulpit. Whenever he's working on the ark and people came to mock, ridicule, and put him down, he would lay down his hammer or saw or his planer and get back up into the pulpit and preach, "God's going to judge this world." People laughed, people mocked, and people ridiculed.

In Matthew 24, Jesus said, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage...And knew not,"—that judgment was coming—"until the flood came, and took them all away." They had totally rejected Noah's message. They were living life like it's just going to keep going on and on and on, and God warned them. They didn't believe the warning of God or the Word of God, which would have been faith, and they were all destroyed in the flood. What a massive thing that was. I believe that there was an actual Noah, an actual ark, and that he saved life upon the earth by building this ark and his family and the animals were all preserved on the earth. It's a historical event.

Noah, "...became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." In Genesis 6:9, it says, "Noah was a just,"—righteous—"man." Notice now, faith working. When we look at Abel, we see faith worshipping; when we look at Enoch, you see faith walking with God; and when you look at Noah, you see faith working. Faith must result in obedience. If you really believe God, then you're going to live for God, you're going to walk with God, and you're going to work with God and do the things that He calls you to do. But it brought blessing, "...the saving of his house," and the preservation of life on the earth.

In verses 8-22, we won't go that far tonight, we have the patriarchs, which covers Genesis 12-50—from Genesis 12, the call of Abraham, to the end of the chapter, the burial of Joseph. The first patriarch, and we're going to come back to him next week, is Abraham, verses 8-10. Let's read about him. It says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." This is Genesis 12-25, the story of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of faith. He was the father of the Hebrew people. He was living in Ur of the Chaldees, which was a pagan area. They worshiped the sun, moon, and the stars. God actually came by grace to Abraham. This is one of those mind-blowing things I can think of is that He picks this one man, living in this pagan place, and chooses to reveal Himself to that

man to start a new nation of people through whom the promised Seed, Christ Messiah, Savior of the world would come; and through whom the Bible in the Scriptures and the promises of God would come. He makes a covenant with Abraham. He makes promises to Abraham, and Abraham believes and obeys God. Now, He called him to sojourn, verse 9, "...in the land of promise." He told Abraham, "Leave your father, your mother, your family. Take your wife and your family and go, "...unto a land that I will shew thee." He didn't tell him where it was. He didn't give him a map. He didn't let him call ahead and make reservations in a hotel. He didn't call a realtor and buy a house. He just obeyed, packed up his bags, and went away.

Some people probably said, "Abraham, where are you going?" "I don't know." "Why are you moving?" "Because God told me to." "What God?" "The God of the creation of the world. The God who made all things." They probably laughed at him, mocked, and scoffed him. They probably laughed and mocked Noah. All these men and women of faith were persecuted and faced opposition in the world because of their faith. This is why he's writing to these Hebrews, they were discouraged wanting to give up because of persecution. He's showing them how these conquered that by faith.

Abraham obeyed God, "...not knowing whither he went...he sojourned in the land of promise," so God promised Abraham, it's called the Abrahamic covenant, that God would give him that land from the Nile River to the Euphrates River, the whole land, which hasn't happened, is still yet future, it will happen in the Millennium, but Abraham went in obedience, following God's promise. He was a stranger and a sojourner, note that in verse 9, and dwelt in tents with Isaac, who followed that example, and Jacob, so there's the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, his son, and Jacob, "...the heirs with him of the same promise."

Abraham obeyed God, followed God's commands, and was blessed; but notice what motivated him, verse 10. This is what undergirded him, his faith, "For he looked," so Abraham obeyed, Abraham sojourned, Abraham looked. The word "looked" in verse 10 has the idea of continually, habitually, ongoingly looking eagerly. The whole tenure of his life was looking for the promise of God. Now, it had two aspects: the earthly aspect, which I believe will be fulfilled in the Millennium, and we're going to talk about that Sunday morning, and it also had an eternal aspect because the Kingdom Age, the Millennial reign of Christ, the thousand years will flow into the eternal state. But God's promises to Abraham will be fulfilled after the Second Coming, during the Kingdom Age, the Millennium, and then he will experience also eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth.

We, too, verse 9, are to be sojourners in this world. We're to be strangers, and we're to have our contact with the world be as light as possible. Abraham's life was marked by a tent and altars. Everywhere he went, he lived in tents. God promised him the whole land, but he never built a house. He just built a tent because, "... he looked for a city...whose builder and maker is God," verse 10. He kept his eyes on the prize, the eternal inheritance and reward. We should do the same.

Verses 11-12, we have the first reference to Sarah; and, as I said, there are only two women

mentioned in Hebrews 11—Sarah, and the reference to Rahab the harlot of Jericho, verse 31. It says, “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age,”—she was 90 years old, been barren, and God gave her a child, Isaac—“because she judged him,”—notice what she did—“faithful who had promised.” By the way, if you want to, when you go through this chapter, highlight, underline, or mark all the references to “promises.” Faith is always a response to the promises of God.

God promised Sarah, her body being dead because she was out of the age of being able to bear children and Abraham her husband was 100 years old! Can you imagine that, too? Abraham telling people, “We’re going to have a baby!” “I don’t think you can have a baby, and I think you’ve lost your marbles, too!” “No, God promised. God promises, God will keep,” Amen? God promised Abraham he would have so many children, they would be, “...so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable.” That’s what we get in our text tonight, “...innumerable,” and they were 80 and 90 years of age! Basically, it was physically impossible for them to have children, but God specializes in the impossible, right? God does what no one else can do. When God makes a promise, it’s sure to be fulfilled because nothing can thwart or hinder it; He’s omniscient, so nothing’s going to come up that He didn’t know about; and He’s omnipotent, nothing’s going to keep Him from fulfilling that promise. What God promises, God will keep. He promised Sarah a son.

Verse 12, “Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead,”—which is a reference to her husband, Abraham—“so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.” Here we have the promise of God and waiting for the fulfillment of it—walking, worshipping, working, and waiting for God to fulfill His promise.

One last section, verses 13-16, it moves to all of the patriarchs. It takes you back to verse 9 where it mentions Isaac and Jacob. When he says, “These all,” he’s referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are mentioned back in verse 9, “These all died in faith,” that’s literally, according to faith. They were living by faith, but they still grew old and died. Granted, they were really old, but they still died. It didn’t prevent their death. “...not having received the promises,”—so they waited, they didn’t receive it, there would be a future fulfillment—“but having seen them afar off,—that is, by faith, they saw by faith—“and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” Again, we need to remember that we, too, are to see ourselves here now in this world as strangers and pilgrims. This world is not our home.

Verse 14, “For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.” If they would have thought about going back to the old ways of life, they could’ve gone back. Again, keep in mind that he’s writing to these Jewish Christians that were in danger of going back to Judaism. That’s why he mentions that they could’ve gone back or returned. Verse 16, “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.” They didn’t go back; by faith, they went forward. That’s the message of this chapter on faith.

They didn't go back, they went forward. They, "...looked for a city...whose builder and maker is God," that God would keep His promises, even if I die.

I think about that sometimes when I think about the rapture of the church. I've been preaching for many years, and preaching the rapture for many years. I know Chuck Smith preached the rapture, and he was waiting for it and believed that God would take him. You might be around long enough that the rapture doesn't happen and John Miller dies, "...to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Don't freak out, I don't have any plans of dying tomorrow. None of us are guaranteed tomorrow. None of us are guaranteed next week. None of us are guaranteed health and wealth. "In the world ye shall have tribulation,"—right? Jesus said, "...but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

How do we conquer? How do we live victorious? By faith in God. Not just faith in God, but faith in Christ and faith in His promises, faith in the promises of God. So, meditate on God's Word, meditate on God's promises, stand on the promises, and be obedient to the promises of God that require us to act upon them. God will keep His side of the bargain. How marvelous that is!

True faith is not believing in spite of evidence, it is obeying God in spite of feelings, circumstances, or consequence. Some people think that faith is just a feeling, "I just believe." That's superstition. Faith isn't believing in spite of evidence, it is believing God in spite of the consequences. It's believing and obeying God in spite of my feelings. It's acting out what I know God has called me to do. We all live by faith, seen in all the men and women that we read about in Hebrews 11, "But without faith it is impossible to please him." Let's pray.