

Study 12: Faith's Hall of Fame

A large part of the remainder of the book (from the latter part of chapter 10 onwards) is dealing with the practical implications of the doctrinal issues that the writer has now established – the two key issues of:

1. Jesus is the Messiah, and
2. There has been a change of Covenant.

The writer now presents a great hall of famous (and some not so famous) people whom he later describes as “*a great cloud of witnesses*”. This is one of the most well known chapters in the Bible – and rightly so. But importantly we need to consider what **is it** that the writer is trying to convey to us by telling us all about the faithful people?

What is the definition of “faith”?

In the cases that are presented, what did faith result in?

The examples of faith

What do we notice about the lives and faith of these people in the Old Testament?

What implication of their faith does the writer make in vs 11:39-40?

Homework:

Read the notes, as a review of the study.

- *How do we grow in our faith, and how do we demonstrate our faith? What are some of the practical ways?*
- *Why is it impossible to please God without faith?*
- *How do faith and works fit together?*

Read Chapter 12 in preparation for next week.

Study Notes for: Study 12: Faith's Hall of Fame

The Hebrew writer presents a great hall of famous (and some not so famous) people whom he later describes as “*a great cloud of witnesses*”. This is one of the most well known chapters in the Bible – and rightly so. But before we start to look at the examples that the writer is giving us, I want to note “how the chapter is placed in the book of Hebrews” – what **is it** that the writer is trying to convey to us by telling us all about the faithful people?

A large part of the rest of the book (from the latter part of chapter 10 onwards) is dealing with the practical implications of the doctrinal issues that the writer has now established – the two key issues of:

3. Jesus is the Messiah, and
4. There has been a change of Covenant.

This being the case, then the Hebrews must not go back to the old ways, for that would subvert the perfect sacrifice and the perfect forgiveness that we have in Christ. As Hebrews, there will doubtless be pressure from their fellow Jews to continue in the old ways. What is important is remaining faithful in spite of the pressures, and keeping focused on Jesus. Notice the introduction to chapter 11, in 10:39

HEB 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (NIV)

As the first argument towards continuing in the faith, he presents a list of well-recognised names that were faithful to God despite the odds at the time. But it is interesting that there are some not-so-famous people thrown into the list. We know who they are because they are in Hebrews 11, but to the Jew (without Hebrews 11 to learn from), they might have known the name, but not necessarily the fame.

What is important out of this is that the “insignificant” (un-famous) people can be just as recognised by God for their faith as the great men of action – and the practical implication for us to be faithful just as they were.

What is the definition of “faith”?

Faith is described as the “substance”, the “evidence”, the “conviction” the “assuraty”, the “confidence”.

It is the *confidence* that we have in the things that we *know*, even though we have not seen them. So, the question is *how do we know?* How is it that we can know and trust and believe in things that we have not seen? There are many unbelievers in the world who accuse christians of having *blind faith* – that is that we believe in things without having any basis on which to believe. But that is not what our faith is about at all! In fact on the contrary, we believe based on *evidence!*

None of us have ever seen the wind. What we have seen is *the effect of the wind* – ie we see the evidence that tells us the wind is there. Likewise, how many of us have ever seen a nuclear submarine? Yet we know that they exist, because we have seen and heard reports about them. Why do we believe the reports? Because we trust the source of the report, and it provides evidence to us that is totally credible and believable. Not many people would say that nuclear submarines don't exist on the basis that they have never

seen one and the reporters do not provide accurate enough information! Or that the wind does not exist because they cannot actually see it with their eyes!

We have accurate reports about God, from the accounts of eyewitnesses. Their reports are credible. They were written at a time when there were thousands of people alive who could challenge the accuracy of their reports if they were not true. We have the evidence of the physical creation. The evidence leads us to one of two possible conclusions – either matter has always existed and the universe and intelligence in man (and to a lesser extent in other animals) was just an accident, OR that God has always existed, and God created what we have and gave us the intelligence. Whatever our conclusion, we draw it based on evidence. The evolutionist draws a conclusion based on the evidence that he sees, and his faith in the assumptions that he has made. The christian draws the conclusion of special creation based on the evidence from “order” in the universe, the existence of “intelligence”, the writings of the prophets that was confirmed by special works in the presence of witnesses, and faith in the accuracy of the things that we are told. [This subject has occupied many many books, and we cannot deal with it to any degree of depth in this study.]

The writer is making the point that *we* have faith in God. We might not actually *see* what it is that God has revealed to us, but we believe it because of the trustworthiness of the messenger, and we are prepared *to act* on that basis. **That** is our faith in action!

There are two specific examples that the writer presents to confirm his argument:

1. The elders obtained a good testimony
2. The creation of the world came from nothing by the word of God.

The writer has introduced the letter to the Hebrews with “*God spoke in times past to our forefathers...*”, and it is now the same group that he is reminding them about. They obtained commendation from God “*a good report*” (KJV) because of their faith. He is about to extol some of the examples of faith to them.

The second point we have discussed above (somewhat), but he asks them where they think the world around them came from?

James also defines faith for us, in a very practical way. He points out that faith is much more than just belief, and that it must result in action on our behalf or it is totally worthless:

JAS 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

JAS 2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. (NIV)

In the cases that are presented, what did faith result in?

Throughout this great chapter on faith, the writer brings time and again support for what James says, by way of example. Their *faith necessitated action*, or to put it another way, there is no faith that is held up as an example that was isolated from the actions that they did. To say that we have faith in God, and then do nothing about it, means that we didn't really believe in the first place. Paul makes this point in Rom 10:16 “*...the reason that they did not obey the gospel, is because they did not believe the gospel...*”

The examples of faith

The writer begins with Cain and Abel, almost immediately after creation.

Examples	Actions
Abel	<i>offered</i> a more excellent sacrifice
Enoch	he <i>pleased</i> God
Noah	<i>moved</i> with Godly fear, <i>prepared</i> the ark,
Abraham	<i>obeyed</i> when called, <i>went out</i> not knowing where it was that he was going.
Sarah	
Abraham (<i>again</i>)	<i>offered</i> up Isaac
Isaac	<i>blessed</i> Jacob & Esau
Jacob	<i>blessed</i> each of the sons of Joseph
Joseph	<i>gave instruction</i> concerning his bones
Moses (<i>his parents</i>)	<i>was hidden</i> by his parents
Moses (<i>himself</i>)	<i>foresook</i> Egypt, <i>kept</i> the Passover, <i>crossed</i> the Red Sea
Joshua	<i>encircled</i> the city of Jreicho, & walls fell down
Rahab	<i>received</i> the spies with peace
Gideon	
Barak	
Sampson	Each one of these battled overwhelming odds, with (seemingly) little chance of success. However, they each knew that with God on their side, success was assured, and they did not flinch in the battle.
Jepthah	
David	
Samuel	
“the Prophets”	

What do we notice about the lives and faith of these people in the Old Testament?

The obvious thing that the writer is pointing out is their strong faith commitment, and their *action* of obedience to that faith.

But when we take a closer look at these characters, we do not find any of them that are “perfect”. Even David, who is described as a man after God’s own heart turned to deception, effectively murder, and adultery. And yet for all of his faults, he is held up as a great example of faith, and not only here but throughout the scriptures.

Sometimes we think that we have to be perfect, and live perfect lives in order to be right with God. Well, that was the way it was under the Old Covenant that the writer has been going to great lengths to tell us was a burden that we are no longer required to live under.

Our righteousness with God does not come from perfect lives, but from the perfect forgiveness that we have through Jesus blood, because of our faith and our obedience to that faith. ***AND THAT IS THE POINT THAT THE WRITER IS MAKING HERE!*** These great examples of faith, who lived imperfect lives just as we do, were regarded as great men of God when they demonstrated their unswerving faith by putting it into action. We are in exactly the same position as them, and God regards us as great men of faith on the same basis.

What implication of their faith does the writer make in vs 11:39-40?

Despite the faithfulness of the fathers, they did not actually receive their reward in their own lifetime. Even the entry into the Promised Land did not come until after some of them were dead and their bones were carried in by their descendants.

The implications for us are that we need to remain faithful – just like the fathers – with the full assurance that God will deliver on His promises! In fact, the promises that are laid ahead for us are far greater than the promises that the fathers received – because for us the promise is that of eternal life in heaven. But that promise is not for us alone, but is also for the fathers.

Salvation is for all of God’s children, not just the Jewish forefathers (even although they were outside of Christ, they were God’s children under the Law), and not just the Christians (since it also includes the forefathers).