

(Devotional #12) **Character Studies from Hebrews 11:1-40**

The Antediluvian Heroes of Faith: Abel & Enoch

(Genesis 4:1-5; 5:21-24; Hebrews 11:1-6)

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel – **Genesis 3:15***
*I say to you truly, if you have **FAITH** the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you – **Matthew 17:20***

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it (faith) men of old gained approval – **Hebrews 11:1-2***

The word faith (Greek πίστις – pronounced ‘pistis’) is used in two distinct ways in the Bible:

(1) **SOMETIMES ‘FAITH’ MEANS ‘THE MENTAL ACTIVITY OF BELIEVING.’**

In Mark 11:22, Jesus tell us: “*Have faith in God.*” In John 6:29, Jesus explains to His disciples what God expects of them: “*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.*” And in Acts 20:21, Paul declares to the men of Ephesus, the essence of his message always has been: “*repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*” In these examples, ‘**FAITH**’ (or in the case of John 6:29, the term ‘**BELIEVE**’), refers to the mental activity of ‘believing.’

(2) **THE SECOND WAY THE TERM ‘FAITH’ IS USED FOLLOWS LOGICALLY FROM THIS AND HAS TO DO WITH THE CONTENT OF WHAT WE ARE ASKED TO BELIEVE.**

FAITH is used, particularly in the Pastoral Epistles, as a body of propositional truth. In this sense, there is an emphasis on knowledge, expressed as a body of propositions. **FAITH IS NOT A FEELING.** Faith must be able to be expressed, and therefore understood, propositionally. The opposite of this understanding of faith is the modern fallacy of faith without an object; **faith in faith is not Biblical faith, nor is faith an end unto itself.** Examples of faith as a body of propositional truth can be found in 1 Corinthians 16:13: “*Be alert; stand firm in the faith.*” And also in Ephesians 4:4: “*There is one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope at your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in all.*”

Today we begin a series of character studies from Hebrews Chapter 11. Sixteen men and women are named, while others are implied by reference to events in which great faith can be seen in those, who have trusted God throughout the ages in a variety of circumstances. As a result, we see that no matter what problem or challenge we face, there is someone in **GOD’S ‘HALL OF FAME OF FAITH,’** who can encourage us.

If you have moved away from family and friends, **ABRAHAM’S FAITH** may be a model for you. If you find yourself in a crowd that is resistant to the gospel message, perhaps **NOAH** can teach you **how to ‘live by faith’** in the midst of sinful culture. If your family is dysfunctional, **JACOB may be your ‘go to guy.’** If you lack hope, **ENOCH** can encourage you ... and the list goes on. The men and women of faith in the Book of Hebrews have encouraged Christians by their examples throughout the ages – and they can do the same for you.

After asserting that Christian Faith is not blind, vague, wishful thinking, but rather a settled confidence in something that is true¹ ... (that **‘something’ being the body of propositional truth about**

¹ Cf. Hebrews 11:1

*Jesus, taught by the Apostles*²) ... the author of Hebrews begins his treatise on faith by looking back in time, before the great flood, to the creation of the universe (*Hebrews 11:3*).

It is a fair question to ask why the author links the central theme of this chapter, the life of faith, to the creation. The answer springs from the assumption that the world as we know it had a beginning. That the world had a beginning affirms the divine will of the Creator. No person observed the creation, so naturally it becomes the first and primary action of faith, revealed to us solely in and by the Word of God. If God is not the Creator, then it would be fair to question whether He is a viable object of our faith.

In Hebrews 11:3, belief in the Biblical record of the Creation is set forth as fundamental; it is the essential act of faith, by which we apprehend and believe in the Creator Himself. From this we know that *'God-as-Creator' is worthy of our faith and trust in all things*. Then in the following verses, the consequences of this belief in *God-as-Creator* can be seen in the individual acts of faith by the great heroes of faith cited for us there. The Creation itself forms the starting point for Biblical faith because as the Creator, God is sovereign over all things that exist in the universe He made³. And as such, He is worthy of our trust.

In this regard, Dwight Pentecost asserted: *"Again, the Bible makes a direct connection between the fact that God created all things as recorded in Genesis, and the believer's faith in God's credibility. To disregard the Genesis record ... is to compromise one's belief in the credibility of God and His Word⁴."*

BY FAITH ABEL [*Read GENESIS 4:1-5; HEBREWS 11:1-4*]

Once he has laid the foundation for faith – viz., *the Creation* – the author of Hebrews turns in verse 4 to the first *recorded example*⁵ of a man, who gained approval with God by faith-alone: Adam's son, Abel.

The account of Cain and Abel is a story most of us know. It marks the spread of sin from the individual to society, but more than that, it is a lesson in acceptable versus unacceptable worship. What determined what was *acceptable* or *unacceptable* to God was faith. *"By FAITH Abel offered a better sacrifice"* – *Hebrews 11:4*.

Sin entered the world through Adam, who was the Federal Head of the Human Race – our designated, official representative before God in the Garden of Eden. Then in Genesis 3:15 (*cited above*), God told Satan there would be a divide, a chasm if you will –between *'the seed of the serpent' (UNBELIEVERS – those without faith)* and *'the seed of the woman (BELIEVERS – those with faith)*⁶. The first manifestation of this promised division in the human race was the murder of Abel by his brother, Cain.

And the human race has followed this pattern throughout history, with *believers (seed of the woman)* aligning themselves with the Lord and His Messiah, Jesus Christ, and *unbelievers (seed of the serpent)* following in the footsteps of *the father of lies* by rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ. In a

² As previously mentioned, regarding 1 Corinthians 16:13; see also Acts 2:42

³ Cf. Isaiah 45:12, 18; 46:9^B-10

⁴ *Faith That Endures*, J. Dwight Pentecost, Pg. 176.

⁵ We assume Adam and Eve responded to the Gospel Message after the Fall, but there is not an existing, explicit citation in Scripture declaring this, though it can be reasonably inferred from God's promises in Genesis 3:15.

⁶ Ultimately these two 'seeds' will play out in history as the Anti-Christ ('your seed') and the Messiah ('her seed'). See also Galatians 4:4.

societal sense, this refers to unbelievers aligning themselves with an anti-Biblical, anti-God worldview that exalts man and rejects God, His Word, and the Moral Law.

1 Timothy 2:14 looks back to the Garden of Eden – then in 1 Timothy 2:15 there is a fascinating phrase: *(she)* “**shall be saved through THE CHILDBIRTH.**” The definite article (*the*) points to **a particular childbirth** ... and beyond all we may infer from this verse, this promise is something God may have explained to Eve in more detail than what is recorded in Genesis 3. Martin Luther made this connection and linked 1 Timothy 2:15 to Genesis 3:15. The meaning, then, would be this: *‘Eve, you blew it; you were led astray by the great deceiver, and you led your husband into sin through your deception; but I am a God of Grace and Mercy, and I am going to bring into the world through the agency of childbirth, a Messiah – a Savior – in whom you and all who follow your example of faith, will find SALVATION.’*

Now with these things in mind, Eve bore a son: **Cain**. In Hebrew, Cain is קַיִן (*Qayin*). His name means ‘**created**.’ In the Bible, names mean something, especially to mothers, so Eve said: *‘God made **(the first) man, and with the help of Yahweh, I have ‘created’** (קָנָה / *qanah* – the verb from which *Qayin [Cain] is derived*) **a second man’** (paraphrased slightly from Genesis 4:1). This statement is full of hope with no hint of the evil that soon will follow.*

Luther and others interpreted this verse to mean, ‘Eve thought in Cain, she had given birth to the Messiah’ (the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15). She soon will find out otherwise, as Cain’s Old Sin Nature will become obvious to her; nevertheless, Cain’s life began in a context of great hope!

Eve then gave birth to another son, **Abel**. His Hebrew name is הָבֶל (*Habel*). Habel means, ‘**vapor, vanity**.’ Eve’s hope of bearing the Messiah in her lifetime vanished as she became all too aware of the effect sin would have on all future generations. And we see this terrible fact played out in the story of her two sons.

Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. One day the boys brought offerings to the Lord. Cain brought a grain offering from his harvest and Abel brought a blood offering from his flock. Now we know from Hebrews 9:22, “**there is no remission of sin apart from the shedding of blood,**” and it is tempting to make this story solely about the nature of the offerings themselves, but offerings are only as good as the attitude with which they are offered. *And we are not told, per se, this was a Sin Offering (as would be defined later in the Mosaic Law⁷) – in fact, the Law ap-proves of offerings of the kind Cain brought to the Lord⁸.*

Two New Testament references draw our attention to *the manner* in which these were offered:

- (1) God rejected Cain’s sacrifice because Cain was ‘**seed of the serpent**’ (*‘not as Cain, who was of the evil one’ – 1 John 3:12*). Notice the word order in Genesis 4:5: “**But for CAIN and for his offering, God had no regard.**” *Cain is mentioned first (not his offering) ... it was because of Cain himself that God had no regard for his offering.*
- (2) In Hebrews, clearly it was Abel’s faith that made the difference (*‘by FAITH Abel offered to God a better sacrifice’*). Abel knew there is no remission of sin without a blood sacrifice – he would have learned this from Adam – and he acted in faith toward the Word of God that Adam had taught him. In other words, Abel, a believer, had a relationship with God, so Abel’s ‘*better offering*’ was accepted – **Hebrews 11:4**

⁷ See Leviticus 4:1 – 5:13 for a description of the sin offering.

⁸ See Deuteronomy 26:2 for an example of an acceptable grain offering (Cain’s offering), and Deuteronomy 15:19-23 for an example of an acceptable blood offering (Abel’s offering).

On the other hand, Cain knew intellectually that God exists, but he did not **BELIEVE** God; he lacked faith. Cain believed two things that were wrong: (1) he believed he could please God by performing a religious act, and (2) he believed as long as he was sincere, God would accept him and his offering. True Biblical faith leads us to obey what God has revealed in his word.

BY FAITH ENOCH [Read GENESIS 5:21-24; HEBREWS 11:5-6]

The account of Enoch is short and probably less well known than the story of Cain and Abel. Cain had a son named Enoch (*Genesis 4:17*), then five generations after Adam, Jared was born (*Genesis 5:18*); he also became the father of a son named Enoch. ***It is this second Enoch, the head of the SEVENTH GENERATION⁹ from Adam,*** of whom we read in Genesis 5:21-24.

In Genesis 5, there is a formula that appears eight times: “_____” *lived ... and “_____” died* (with details in between). Each time, the formula ends with the phrase, “_____” *died*. But this pattern is interrupted by the story of Enoch. Six times prior to the Enoch story, and twice afterwards, we read, “_____” *lived ... and “_____” died*. Moses wrote Chapter Five this way to set apart Enoch from the rest of humanity. Instead of “*Enoch*” *lived*, we read: “*Enoch walked with God,*” and instead of “*Enoch died,*” we read, “*And Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him.*”

The phrase, ‘*walking with God*’ is used in two ways with respect to Enoch:

- (1) In a moral sense, it means, ‘*living an upright life in harmony with God’s ethical ways and clinging by faith to the virtues God has laid out as proper for a righteous man or woman.*’ It is exactly the same as Habakkuk’s exhortation, “*The justified shall live by faith*” – *Habakkuk 2:4*. What makes this statement more astounding is the culture in which Enoch lived. Jude 15 describes it as ‘*ungodly.*’ The world was full of *ungodly men* doing *ungodly deeds in an ungodly way*. It is in this context that ‘*Enoch walked with God.*’
- (2) ‘*Walking with God,*’ also signifies, specifically in the case of Enoch, his removal from this world and miraculous translation into the presence of God.

When you think of ‘*walking,*’ do you think of ‘*great deeds,*’ or ‘*awesome accomplishments,*’ or ‘*spectacular races*’? Probably not! Walking seems normal ... routine ... even boring. There is no single, great event that marks Enoch as special. He did not build an ark like Noah, he was not asked to leave his homeland, like Abram, God did not reveal His Law to him as He did to Moses. ***What makes Enoch stand out is the quality of his life – he had a consistent walk with God for over 300 years.*** Imagine that! Enoch’s life was characterized by a consistent, ongoing, stable fellowship with God for over 300 years. It is no small wonder that the Lord went for a walk with Enoch one day ... and decided to keep him!

The Masoretic Text (*the Hebrew Old Testament*) of Genesis 5:24 simply says, “*And he was not.*” In a literal sense, the term means, “*he vanished.*” The language does not specify the means of this departure from the earth, however, the New Testament is more descriptive. Hebrews 11:5 says: ***Enoch was “taken up so that he would not see death,”*** and then, “***he was not found because God took him up.***” In this sense, Enoch’s unique experience of being taken up by God into His presence, apart from a natural death, foreshadows the Rapture. What God did for Enoch, He one day soon will do for His Church.

⁹ “*All sevenths are favored.*” This was the declaration of the Rabbis, and Enoch was head of the 7th Generation from Adam (Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch).

The central topic of this devotional is the importance of faith to our relationship with God – and it was faith that formed the foundation for Enoch’s translation into heaven. We know this from Hebrews 11:5, which states, “*for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up, he was pleasing to God.*” And the very next verse states: “*Without faith it is impossible to please God*” – *Hebrews 11:6*

So, we know Enoch pleased God because he believed the Word of God and he put what he knew into practice. We are not told why God chose to take Enoch in this way; certainly, men of great faith have left this world by means of death, and some will enter the presence of God at the Rapture ... but the vast majority of us will pass into eternity by means of death.

If Abel demonstrates obedience to the revealed word of God as a mark of his faith, then Enoch demonstrates the importance of fellowship, an ongoing, deep relationship with God in the midst of tough and uncertain times; this was Enoch’s mark of faith.

At the beginning of our chapter, the author wrote, “*for by it (faith) men of old gained approval.*” Approval means, God accepted these heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11, and though our names are not inscribed in Holy Writ, God has accepted us on the exact same basis. God’s acceptance of us ... and of them ... is possible *SOLELY* because Jesus paid the price for the sins of the world when He died on the cross. There is no other way to gain acceptance with God apart from the cross. Man’s role in the salvation process is simple: “*Believe in ... have faith in ... the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*” – *Acts 16:31*. Then, to experience the blessings God has promised us during our life on the earth, “*Believe in ... have faith in ... the Word of God.*” Allow God to empower you with His strength, for though we are weak, His grace is sufficient, and His power is perfected in weakness” – *2 Corinthians 12:9* (*slightly paraphrased*).

Many years ago, a decision was made to build a bridge across a mountain gorge. Once the decision was made, the question became, “*how do we build it*”? How can a bridge be built across such a wide gorge? The builders weren’t even sure where to start. Finally, they decided to shoot an arrow from one side of the gorge to the other. Attached to the arrow was a small thread. The thread was used to bring across a line of twine. The twine was used to bring across a small rope. The rope then carried a cable, and the cable carried the chains. Thus, starting something small, a bridge was built.

Your faith may be weak – uncertain – no stronger than that small thread. But what did Jesus say? “*Have FAITH the size of a mustard seed.*” That is all it takes! When our faith is in the revealed Word of God, it will grow, and it will bring about a consistent walk with God. A life of obedience and fellowship begins with a mustard seed!