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## Into Thy Word Bible Study in Hebrews

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### Hebrews 11:1-16: *What is Faith?*

**General idea:** The answer to the question, “what is Faith?” is both simple and profound, yet it is not simplistic. Genuine faith is our full confidence, trust, and assurance that are exercised in that what we hope for will indeed happen. It is the passion and conviction of our faith that Jesus Christ is real, even when we cannot see Him or what He has for us. We come to the realization that the experience of our knowledge and practice is impacting and not an esoteric or academic idea. Christ is real for us, both in our daily lives and in eternity. Thus, we have authentic hope—the response of our faith, evidenced as we live out our lives. We also have the confirmation of God’s approval through real, effectual faith. God did this for the people of old as well as for us, the people of now—for you. We can live out our Christian lives with eyes and trust upon Christ and not on circumstances. We can understand what is incomprehensible—such as the universe—when we know the One who made it and gave command to it; what is not seen can be seen by seeing Him—we have trust and faith for living. Throughout redemptive history, regular people stepped up; the faith they had—we can have too. They were no better than we are other than they saw God and trusted in Him; they made mistakes, yet they persevered because of their convictions and confidence of faith. One example would be Able who brought a better sacrifice and showed righteousness when Cain displayed evil; even though he is dead, his legacy lives on. Enoch was another example who God took up to heaven because he pleased God. We cannot please or serve God without exercising faith. Noah also demonstrated faith when his entire culture/people did not believe, yet God used him to build an ark to save humanity while He condemned the rest of the world’s depravity.

### Contexts and Background:

This passage in Greek is a literary masterpiece called “anaphora” using the same phrase for each stanza, (*by faith*), and using *encomiastic* (praise summaries) biographies that show the virtue, accomplishments, and endurance of people of faith. So, you can do it too! This should motivate us to examine our attitudes, to see if there is room (and there should be lots of it) for improvement in our relationships with both God and those around us! Our endurance will communicate encouragement for our *staying power*; it is contagious as in “you can do it, too!” When God seems far away and no one seems to care about injustice or your concerns, God is still there caring! He will vindicate and care for you, turning your suffering into His glory and a benefit to others, too (Ex. 33:11-23; 34:30-35; Ecc. 44-50; Acts. 7; 13:14, 42; 16:13; 20:7; Heb. 10:32-39).

### Commentary: Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Now faith is.* Here referring that faith is not just a reward, it is a duty for us to embark on here and now. Our faith is based on the knowledge given by God through His Word, and evidenced in His creation and people's testimonies. Faith is not just simple trust; faith is not blind trust either, because we know the One who is leading! We as people of faith must live by faith as this is the only thing we can do to show to others that Christ is real and concrete (1 Cor. 1:22-30)!
- *Being sure/assurance.* This is a title deed; it is substantial evidence as the Greek refers to an important business document in which we can trust. What we have in Christ has a real basis and foundation. In contrast, a lack of faith will lead one to hopelessness and despair, which leads to bad choices because of our sin and refusal to place God first in our lives.
- *We hope/things hoped for.* Meaning confidence in God for our future that is in His hands. Faith sees what is ahead when our eyes and thinking cannot. If we see what he has done in the past, we can have hope for the future too. Also, a future time when we are with God for eternity; it is a Jewish metaphor for heaven, which also means an unshakable conviction in what must be, such as the North Star that guides ships; without it, a ship would be lost, but we know the Star will not go away. This is where we get the assurance of faith. Faith is not mere belief; it is real, as in genuine and authentic so we are sure in Whom we trust and to whom we go to live for righteousness.
- *Certain/conviction.* Means God's promise is real and tangible even when we do not see it (Rom. 1:16-17; 5:1-11; 10:14-17; Gal. 3:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; James 2:14-26).
- *Do not see/not seen.* Means that our faith is valid and true because it is based on historical evidence, logical reasoning, and legitimate testimonies. Refers to what is eternal, as in heaven, and also what has not happened yet as this applies to those who are still living, that they may have confidence in Christ. (It is interesting to note that some liberal commentators say the Jews had no concept of heaven or an afterlife; this is ridiculous and shows their ignorance or refusal to research Jewish culture and how metaphors for important events are used in their writings.) Jewish ideas and scriptures for heaven (Deut. 10:14-15; Psalm 9:17; 14:3; 55:15; 73:24-25; Isaiah 2:4; 14:15-16; 51:6-8; 53:6; 61:7; 65:17-25; Dan. 12:2-3).
- *Commended for/gained approval.* Means God declares us righteous; we merely demonstrate it by modeling His precepts with our faith that is our devotion and submission in action. This allows anyone to be a hero for the faith as the people in this list. Faith gives us what we build upon to gain a testimony of the evidence of God at work in our lives that is contagious to others, a legacy of God's work in our lives. We receive approval for pursuing

righteousness, trusting in God, and then obeying what He says. This is the evidence God uses to see what we have done with what He gives us and thus declares us righteous on the Day of Judgment. This is a fruit and a result of our gratitude for our salvation that we receive by grace alone. This is also what produces more faith and Fruit (James 2:14-25).

- *The universe was formed at God's command.* Referring to creation and that God is in command and is Creator of all that is, seen and unseen. Even though we did not see Him create the universe, the evidence is obvious and is a testimony to His power and provision. Thus, we have confirmation of things not seen, real substance by which to have faith and apply it (Gen. 1; Psalm 33:6-9; Prov. 3:19-20; 8:22-31)
- *By faith Abel.* Abel was the first martyr, who gave his life for rightful deeds over to one who was evil and represented corruption. Cain's sacrifice was rejected because it was offered by obligation and formality and thus without faith. No sacrifice is good unless it has faith and sincerity of devotion behind it (Gen. 4:3-10; Matt. 23:35; Heb. 10:4; 12:24).
- *By faith Enoch.* For the Jews, he is seen as the most righteous human who ever lived; he was idolized and represented perfection because he walked with God, as in, had an intimate relationship with and thus pleased God. *God took him* may refer he went directly to heaven without dying or God killed him before he was about to sin. Either way, he is in glory and has a legacy of faith. Enoch also represents the assurance that Christ will deliver those He elects and who put their faith in Him, as He delivers us from death and gives us new life (Gen. 5:18-24; Psalm 49:15; 73:24).
- *Without faith it is impossible to please God.* It is by faith we draw near to God; Christian faith is our occupation and righteousness is our journey and destination. This is also the true definition of worship, seeking to give our life and devotion and gratefulness to Christ as Lord (Rom. 4:13; 12:1-2; Phil. 4:8; 1 Thess. 2:4; Heb. 10: 35; 12:17, 28).
- *By faith Noah.* The flood was not visible for Noah; he had to trust this was going to happen and endure the mockery of his neighbors. Noah was vindicated as he demonstrated righteousness by active faith; he was father of the second advent of humanity and was very much renowned by Jews. In their apocryphal writings, they have a miracle birth narrative for him, like Moses and Jesus (Gen. 5:28-9:29).
- *Holy fear/moved with fear.* Meaning a reverent, wondrous admiration and awe as well as worship of God, with the knowledge of His Holiness (Prov. 1:7; 3:5).

- *By faith Abraham.* He is the ultimate patriarch and father of the Jewish faith and lineage. His example of obedience was to respond to God by leaving his homeland and going to an unseen destination. He could not see, but trusted in God for a promise, a future inheritance as well as waiting actively upon God; as a stranger in a foreign land, he was an example of faith. This was not blind faith, rather complete confidence in God because He is trustworthy. All of this is paramount to show obedient faith when things are not evident. Because of his faith and obedience, God declared him righteous and made him the quintessential representative for faith and righteousness (Gen. 11: 31-32; 12:1-3; 16:1-4; 17:17-18; Rom. 4:1-22; Gal. 3:7, 9, 29).
- *City with foundations, whose architect.* God is the Builder of our lives, who works our faith and future for us. God gave the land, but the land was not the main thing; He is! This is also a metaphor for heaven and our *rest* to come. God's reward for the faithful is His guidance now and then the *rest* to come (Psalm 137: 5-6; 147:2; Isa 62:5; Gal. 6:24; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21: 2-4, 9-27).
- *Sarah.* She conceived a child when she was way past childbearing age. She is the prime matriarch of the Jewish faith, model of women of faith, and example of faithfulness; her greatness was extolled in Judaism (Gen. 11:30; 18:11-12; 21:5; Rom. 4:19).
- *Stars in the sky...sand on the seashore.* Metaphors of numbers without limits and beyond what we can fathom; faith goes beyond human reasoning (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 1 Kings 4:20).
- *Living by faith.* Faith must have an object or it is useless and meaningless. Christ is our object, and our call is to pursue Him. We are sojourners of faith in daily life, just as the Hebrews were drifting among the nations before they reached the Promised Land. The point is that we do not belong to humanity and culture. Rather, we belong to God. We are made for heaven and not for this world; our life here is just where we learn to practice faith (Gen. 23:4; Lev. 25:23; Jer. 29:13).
- *Saw them...from a distance/afar.* The day when the land that was not yet in possession will be awarded, and more importantly the day when the Messiah, Christ, comes. This is the model to us as Christians; we are strangers in the world, destined for our promised land, heaven, or Christ's second coming that is still to come. As Christians, our ultimate hope and reality is eternity. Yet, while we are here, we are to make the most of our lives and to work in but not be contaminated by the world—to learn, grow, and model our Lord (John 8:56; 1 Pet. 1:1-5, 17; 2:11; Rev 21:2).

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

*By faith?* Christian living is about our lives being centered in Christ and trusting Him for our provision, yet not waiting around, doing nothing. Faith calls us to action, not to complacency or foolishness. Real, effectual faith is our conviction of trust and confidence—that we do not merely believe, for even the demons do that, but that we have assurance beyond doubt. It is the object of our faith that is paramount, and that is Jesus Christ. He is the substance that gives us hope. We do not have blind faith because what we seek and place first is evidenced and supported. As Christians, we do not have fables and myths; we have reality. The evidence is the reality of history, archeology, and personal, life-changing testimonies of countless people, as evidenced in this passage, throughout history, and today; we can be centered in Jesus Christ. Even science points to a Creator who is perfect in character, possessing the fullness all the Omni attributes, Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence.... In addition, God is not only righteousness—He is personal and involved in our lives, and calls us to be righteous in our thinking and living so we can take His lead and live a life that is all about trusting God. This does not mean perfection; it means we strive to do our best for His glory. Yes we can; with our eyes and ears, we can see and feel His presence just as we can see what the wind does even when we do not see the wind itself. God leaves a visible wake that ripples through all times and peoples, which we can ride on by faith for our betterment and His glory. What He has for us is better than what we think we want (Psalm 119:142-151; John 6:64 ; 7:5; Rom. 1:16-17; 5:1-11; 8; 10: 14-17; Gal. 3:1-14; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:5 ; 2:18; James 2:14-26; 2 Pet. 1:16; Jude 3).

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. What verbs and adjectives can you think of to describe faith and hope?
2. What do you expect to do and receive in the Christian faith? What does God expect you to do and be? How are these different or similar?

3. How would you describe what it means to have full confidence, trust, and assurance in Christ?
4. When have you exercised in what you hoped for and it happened? How did you feel? What about when it has not yet come about?
5. How have you exercised a deep conviction of trust and confidence in something? A stock tip? A school? A job? A family member or friend? How does this relate to how you trust in Christ?
6. How do you know that what you *hope* for is in line with God's will? What must our real hope be in? How can you implement this more?
7. What can you do to know and feel that Jesus Christ is real when you can't see Him or physically behold what He has for you? How do you know He is real?
8. What gets in the way of your having more authentic hope? How is your response of faith evidenced as you live out your life? What about during times of stress and confusion?
9. How does it make you feel that you have God's approval when you exercise real and effectual faith?
10. How is your life centered in Christ? Where does trusting Him for your provision come into play? How have you seen this at work in your church? What happens when we just wait and do nothing? What is a balance between the right timing and when we are to act?
11. How has faith called you to action? How has complacency or foolishness or apathy gotten in the way of what Christ had or has for you? What do you need to do now about developing more faith?
12. What can you and your church do to communicate encouragement or *staying power*; so it is contagious for others, as in "you can do it, too?"