

Hebrews 11: Persevere in Faith

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Through the first nine and a half chapters, the writer of Hebrews has made his case theologically for the superiority of faith in Jesus Christ to Old Testament Judaism. Because of Jesus' infinite and final sacrifice for sin and because of his eternal priestly ministry, they can come to God with confidence. Furthermore, in spite of persecution, the readers must persevere in their faith in Jesus Christ. If they turn away from Jesus Christ, they can only expect judgment and destruction (cf. 10:35–39).

Fact: Persevering faith is foundational to pleasing God (11:1–3, 6).

Faith is not a whimsical feeling or crazy emotion; it is a settled assurance of something which we anticipate, a certain conviction about things that cannot be immediately verified by empirical evidence (11:1). This assurance remains unshaken by difficulties and persecution. To profess faith in Christ is one thing, but to persevere in faith through persecution demonstrates the reality of that profession. Persevering faith through persecution is nothing new: godly men and women from Jewish history pleased God by their persevering faith (11:2). Faith in God is the foundation of our understanding of everything (11:3). Ultimately, it is only by faith that we can please God (11:6; cf. 10:38; 11:2, 4, 5, 39).

Fact: Persevering faith was the hallmark of Old Testament believers (11:4–38).

This idea of persevering in faith in spite of difficulties was nothing new; a quick walk through Old Testament history demonstrates that the godly men of the past had something in common with the readers: they all persevered in faith through difficulty. Genuine faith is not just waiting until one receives what is promised; it perseveres even if it never receives the promise (11:13–16).

- Abel demonstrated his faith by obeying God and bringing a sacrifice. Although his brother murdered him, God was pleased with his obedience (11:4).
- Enoch pleased God and God took him up, sparing him from death (11:5).
- Noah obeyed God and demonstrated his faith by building an ark for 120 years when no rain had ever fallen. The flood proved his obedience was right (11:7).
- Abraham left his family and his homeland and obeyed God, even though he never actually inherited all the land God promised to him (11:8–10).
- Sarah believed God's promise that a great nation would come from her and Abraham, even though she never lived to see the nation of Israel (11:11–12).
- Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac in obedience to God, even though he knew that Isaac was the promised son. As far as Abraham could figure, the only way the situation could work out was if God raised Isaac from the dead (11:17–19).
- Isaac demonstrated faith by blessing Jacob, his younger son, over Esau (11:20).
- Jacob blessed Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, over Manasseh (11:21).
- Joseph demonstrated his faith by charging his descendants to bury his bones in the Promised Land (11:22). This did not take place for more than four hundred years.
- Moses demonstrated faith throughout his life as he led the children of Israel out of Egypt and to the Promised Land (11:23–30). He made choices based on God's revelation and not

on what appeared to be best from human standards.

- Rahab demonstrated faith by siding with Israel against her own people (11:31).

Others also demonstrated faith by obeying God and were victorious in their exploits (11:32–35a). Yet others endured persecution—does that sound familiar?—even to the point of being martyred for their faith, but still remained faithful (11:35b–38). The thing all these Old Testament believers had in common was that they believed God and obeyed the revelation he had given, even though they never received the eternally complete salvation that we now have available in Jesus Christ (11:39–40; 13–16).

Now the readers stand before the final and complete salvation that these great men and women of faith never enjoyed. If faith had compelled them to persevere then, how much more ought those who have placed their faith in Christ persevere? Why would anyone turn away from “so great a salvation”?

To Think About:

Would turning back from faith in Jesus Christ—even to Judaism—please God?

What is the significance of the phrase “without faith it is impossible to please God” in terms of Old Testament saints? How might the readers have expected OT believers to please God?

What might these OT men and women of faith say to a reader of the epistle who was contemplating turning back from following Christ to Judaism (cf. 11:39–40)?

Praying through epistle of Hebrews:

For my own heart: to hold fast the confession of my hope (10:23)

For my brothers and sisters in Christ: to please God with persevering faith (11:6)

For my church: that WBC would encourage one another to pursue Christ (10:25)