

Jesus, Author and Perfecter of Our Faith



Week Eleven

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Hebrews 11–12:17

THE RACE OF FAITH

Hebrews 11 and 12 are probably the most-loved chapters of the book. They describe the Christian life as a race in which we all participate and in which all who stay faithful will receive the reward. They also describe the drama of redemption as a race in which people of faith from the past persevered, despite sufferings, but have not yet received the reward.

And that's because the story ends with us as well, not just them. We are the concluding act. The drama culminates with our entering and running the last part of the race, and with Jesus seated at the goal line at the right hand of God. He provides inspiration as well as the ultimate example of how the race is run. He is the ultimate witness that the reward is true and that He is the forerunner who opens the way for us (Heb. 6:19, 20; 10:19–23).

Hebrews 11 explains that faith is confidence in God's promises, even if we cannot see these promises yet. This lesson will explore what faith is and how it is obtained through the examples of the past but, especially and centrally, through the example of Jesus, "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2, ESV).



inScribe

Write out Hebrews 11–12:17 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Hebrews 12:1–3. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?



Memorize your favorite verse in Hebrews 11–12:17. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

Why is it important to recognize that our faith results from and feeds on God’s faithfulness?

How can we learn more to trust in His faithfulness and the promises He has made to us?



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BY FAITH

Endurance is a characteristic of God’s end-time people, without which they will not be able to receive the promises (Rev. 13:10; 14:12). In order to endure, however, believers need to “hold fast” their faith (Heb. 10:23; 4:14). Paul has shown that the desert generation was not able to receive the promise because they lacked faith (Heb. 3:19). Hebrews portrays believers as also being at the threshold of the fulfillment of the promises (Heb. 9:28; 10:25, 36–38) and needing to exercise faith if they want to receive those promises (Heb. 10:39).

Paul introduces his exposition on faith with a quotation from Habakkuk 2:2–4. Habakkuk had asked God why He tolerated the treacherous people who oppressed the righteous (Hab. 1:12–17). The prophet and his people were suffering; thus, they wanted God to act. God answered, however, that there was an appointed time for the fulfillment of His promise, and they needed to wait (Hab. 2:2–4). Habakkuk and his people lived, like us, between the time of the promise and the time of its fulfillment. God’s message continues in Hebrews, “He who is coming will come and will not delay” (Heb. 10:37, NIV; see also Hab. 2:3).

The message refers to Jesus. He is the Righteous One, the embodiment of faith who pleases God and provides life (Heb. 10:5–10).

Why, then, would He “delay”? He won’t. He has already come to die for us (Heb. 9:15–26), and He will surely come again at the appointed time (Heb. 9:27, 28; 10:25).

God’s message then continues: “My righteous one shall live by faith” (Heb. 10:38, ESV). Paul states the same in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. Romans 1:16, 17 is especially enlightening because it explains that the righteousness of God is “revealed from faith to faith.” What Paul means is that God’s faithfulness to His promises comes first, and His faithfulness produces, as its result, our faith and/or faithfulness. Thus, because God remains faithful to His promises (2 Tim. 2:13), the righteous, in response to God’s faithfulness, will remain faithful as well.

Hebrews defines faith as “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1, NIV). Then it provides a list of faithful people from the history of Israel who exemplify what faith is, and it shows how they manifested that faith by their deeds.

Abraham is probably the most important character in this chapter. Abraham’s last act of faith is especially instructive regarding the true nature of faith.

Hebrews notes that God’s instruction to Abraham that he offer Isaac as a sacrifice seemed to imply a contradiction on God’s part (Heb. 11:17, 18). Isaac was not the only son of Abraham. Ishmael was the firstborn of Abraham, but God had told Abraham that it was all right for him to accept Sarah’s request and cast out Ishmael and his mother because God would take care of them, and also because Abraham’s offspring would be named through Isaac (Gen. 21:12, 13). *In the next chapter, however, God asks Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering.* God’s instruction in Genesis 22 seemed to flatly contradict God’s promises in Genesis 12–21.

Hebrews concludes that Abraham amazingly solved the conundrum by arriving at the conclusion that God would resurrect Isaac after he had offered him. This is amazing because no one had yet been resurrected. It seems, however, that Abraham’s previous experience with God led him to that conclusion. Hebrews 11:12 notes that Isaac was conceived by the power of God from one who was “as good as dead.” Paul also notes that, despite Abraham’s being “as good as dead” and Sarah barren, Abraham believed “in hope . . . against hope, that he should become the father of many nations” because he believed that God “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom. 4:17–20, ESV). Thus, Abraham must have assumed that if God in some sense had already given life to Isaac out of the dead, He could do it again. In God’s leading in the past, Abraham saw an intimation of what He could do in the future.

OTHER CHARACTERS OF FAITH

Moses is the second major example in this chapter of faith. The life of Moses is introduced and concluded by two actions of defiance to the king. His parents hid Moses when he was born because “they were not afraid of the king’s edict” (Heb. 11:23, ESV), and Moses left Egypt, “not being afraid of the anger of the king” (Heb. 11:27, ESV). The most significant action of Moses, however, was that he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (Heb. 11:24). The reference to Moses’ adoptive mother as “Pharaoh’s daughter” suggests that he was slated to be the next Pharaoh. Moses, however, was willing to leave behind the prospect of becoming the ruler of the most powerful nation at that time and to become, instead, the leader of newly freed slaves—refugees, actually.

The greatness of Moses was that he was able to see beyond the promises of the king of Egypt and look toward the unseen, namely, the promises of God. Hebrews says the key was that Moses’ sight was fixed on “the reward,” not on the riches of Egypt. This reward is the same reward mentioned in Hebrews 10:35, which God has promised to all who believe in Him.

Paul’s words about Moses’ decision must have echoed powerfully in the hearts of his original readers. They had been enduring reproaches and insults because of their faith in Christ. They had also been afflicted and lost their possessions (Heb. 10:32–34). Some were in prison (Heb. 13:3). In parallel, Moses chose to be mistreated with God’s people, exchanging the wealth of Egypt for bearing the insults associated with Christ because he believed that the reward of Christ was greater than whatever Egypt could offer.

Rahab is probably the most unexpected character whom we find in Hebrews 11. Rahab is one of two women mentioned by name. She is the tenth in the list, the first nine being forefathers and patriarchs of Israel, and each one was regarded as being righteous. When we come to her, we find that she is not only a woman but also a Gentile prostitute.

The most surprising thing is that she is also the thematic center and climax of the chapter. The list is organized in a unique way. Each entry begins with the repetitive use of the phrase “by faith.” The basic pattern is “By faith So-and-so did such-and-such” or “By faith such-and-such happened to So-and-so.” This repetitive pattern increases the expectation in the reader to hear the climactic assertion that “*by faith Joshua led the people into the promised land.*”

But that’s not what the text says. Instead, Joshua is passed over, and the prostitute takes his place. After the mention of Rahab, the repetitive pattern ends abruptly with, “And what more shall I say?” (Heb. 11:32, NKJV). Then, Paul hurriedly lists some names and events that he does not explain in detail.

Rahab’s deed of faith was that she heard, believed, confessed, and obeyed, even though she did not see. She did not see the plagues of Egypt, or the deliverance in the Red Sea, or water flow from the rock, or bread descend from heaven; yet, she believed. She was a good exemplar for the audience of Hebrews, who did not hear Jesus preach or see Him do a miracle, and for us as well, who did not see any of these things either.

Paul then continues (Heb. 11:35–38) with a list of the hardships many faced. The phrase “refusing to accept release” (Heb. 11:35, ESV) implies that they had the possibility to escape but chose not to, because their sight was on the reward of God.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

What are some of the struggles that you have faced because of your faith?



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inSpect



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Hebrews 10:35–39

Romans 1:16, 17

Joshua 2:1–11

Romans 4:17–20

Revelation 13:10; 14:12

Philippians 2:5–8



What other verses come to mind in connection with faith?

Review your memorized verse from Hebrews 11–12:17.

JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH

The climax of the exposition on faith really arrives with Jesus in Hebrews 12. Paul starts the letter with Jesus, who is the “coming one” and who “will not delay” (Heb. 10:37, ESV), and then concludes it with Jesus the “perfecter” of our faith (Heb. 12:2, ESV). Jesus is the “author and perfecter of faith” (NASB). This means that Jesus is the One who makes faith possible and is the example who perfectly embodies what a life of faith is all about. With Jesus, faith has reached its perfect expression.

Jesus is the “founder” (or “author,” or “pioneer”) of our faith in at least three senses.

First, He is the only one who has finished the race in its fullest sense. The others talked about in the previous chapter have not yet reached their goal (Heb. 11:39, 40). Jesus, however, has entered God’s rest in heaven and is seated at the Father’s right hand. We, together with these others, will reign with Jesus in heaven (Rev. 20:4).

Second, it was actually Jesus’ perfect life that has made it possible for these others to run their race (Heb. 10:5–14). If Jesus had not come, the race of everyone else would have been futile.

Finally, Jesus is the reason we have faith. As one with God, He expressed the faithfulness of God toward us. God never gave up in His efforts to save us, and that is why we will reach the reward in the end if we don’t give up. Jesus ran with patience and remained faithful, even when we were faithless (2 Tim. 2:13). Our faith is only a response to His faithfulness.

In the end, Jesus is the “perfecter” of faith because He perfectly exemplifies how the race of faith is run. How did He run? He laid aside every weight by giving up everything for us (Phil. 2:5–8). He never sinned, ever. Jesus held His sight firmly on the reward, which was the joy set before Him, that of seeing the human race redeemed by His grace. So, He endured misunderstanding and abuse; He stared down the shame of the cross (Heb. 12:2, 3).

Now it is our turn to run. Though we can never achieve what Jesus did in our own strength, we have His perfect example before us, and so by faith in Him, and keeping our eyes on Him (as have the others before us), we press on ahead in faith, trusting in His promises of a great reward, and by His grace are assured of finishing the race and claiming the victor’s crown of life.



inVite

Where is Jesus in Hebrews
11–12:17?



How is Jesus the Author, Founder, Perfecter, and Finisher of your own personal faith?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?



Read more at
www.inversebible.org/heb11-6



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of the passage, what are personal applications you are convicted about faith?

What are practical applications about faith you must make in your school, family, workplace, and church?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
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THE HALL OF FAITH

"Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail. Jesus says, 'Without Me ye can do nothing.' Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way. David says, 'I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.' Psalm 16:8.

"Do you ask, 'How am I to abide in Christ?' In the same way as you received Him at first. 'As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.' 'The just shall live by faith.' Colossians 2:6; Hebrews 10:38. You gave yourself to God, to be His wholly, to serve and obey Him, and you took Christ as your Saviour. You could not yourself atone for your sins or change your heart; but having given yourself to God, you believe that He for Christ's sake did all this for you. By faith you became Christ's, and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking. You are to give all,—your heart, your will, your service,—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must take all,—Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper,—to give you power to obey.

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.

"A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love—this is the subject for the soul's contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness." (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 69, 70.)

"God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.

"It is impossible for finite minds fully to comprehend the character or the works of the Infinite One. To the keenest intellect, the most highly educated mind, that holy Being must ever remain clothed in mystery. 'Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?' Job 11:7, 8." (White, 105.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



What is the relationship between faith and understanding?

Why does faith often come before understanding?

If the Greek word *pistis* can mean both "faith" and "faithfulness," why are both important in seeking to understand what living "by faith" means?

How did the people in Hebrews 11 show, by their faithfulness, the reality of their faith?

What role do we play, if any, in receiving and maintaining that gift of faith?

Why is meditating on how God has led our lives in the past so crucial in maintaining our faith and trust in Him now?

Which character stands out to you in the hall of faith and why?