

Hebrews Chapter 11 - John Karmelich

1. I would like you to consider the following questions: If we are saved by our faith in Jesus alone, how were Old Testament saints saved? What about those who believe in God the Father, but not Jesus, how does God treat them? How do you know when someone has faith in Jesus anyway?
 - a) Once again my lesson title is a series of questions. In this chapter, we are going to look at a whole bunch of people described in the Old Testament, with the single question for each of them, "How did they live by faith, if Jesus wasn't around back then?"
 - b) The underlying point is, what does living by faith in Jesus mean? What does God think of people who believe in His existence but not Jesus? What do we do with them? Those are the types of questions that this chapter deals with.
2. Ok, forget them, what about me? ☺ Suppose I already believe in Jesus. Why should I care about those people? In other words, "I've got my entrance ticket, why worry about them?" First of all, God calls us on believers to care about others, including those who are not saved. The next thing is to understand why people are and are not saved. Hebrews Chapter 11 teaches us, what to "live by faith" really means. It gives example after example from the Old Testament of what it means.
 - a) In fact, "faith" is even defined to start off the chapter. Then the text goes on to describe many people in the Old Testament about how they were each saved by faith. The idea is to teach us what living by faith means. Chapter 11, (along with Acts Chapter 7) are the only places in the New Testament that give a sweeping history of the Old Testament. They are to get us to think about lots of people what all of them have in common.
 - b) What catches one's attention as one goes through all of these names is how their mistakes are not listed, but only how they did have faith in God the Father. It is as if God is saying about them, "Since they are saved, I will no longer remember their mistakes, but here is how each of them did have faith in Me. I am proud of how they acted on that faith."
 - c) If we were honest, most of us would admit we have messed up a lot of ways in our lives that we would like to forget about. With that obvious statement made, consider that this chapter carefully edits out the mistakes all of these Old Testament saints made and only focuses on how they have had faith in God. That gives me hope that my faith in Jesus will make God forget the mistakes I make. If God focuses on the good they do, so we can we.
 - i) John, are you saying our good deeds will outweigh our bad deeds? Of course not. The point is if we are trusting in Jesus as being both God and the one who guides our lives, then we can also have faith that God the Father will not make us suffer for our sins and even our mistakes. Like the people listed in this chapter, we are only commended by how we have made a difference for Jesus in our lifetime.
 - ii) So if our Christian life is all about having faith in Jesus, why should I study and read about all of these Old Testament people? What is in it for me? The idea is to learn about how and why people trusted in God and what is the eternal benefits for having that trust. In other words, it is much more than saying, "I believe in Jesus, now leave me alone." It is about the concept of, putting our money and our time where our mouth is. The benefit of living that way is the main topic for us.
3. OK John, but what about other people? You started this lesson by asking about other people who don't trust in Jesus. What about them? It is to realize having faith in anything is not enough to spend eternity with God. The issue is not the amount of faith we have, but whom it is we have faith in (that is, Jesus Himself). As far as "nice people", they too are accountable to God, and are in eternal trouble because they refuse to accept God's full payment for their sins through Jesus.
 - a) This chapter is also about knowing that salvation is not just based on believing Jesus died for one's sins. One has to follow through with that faith. The idea is if we do have faith, we are going to want to do something about it. Chapter 11 is a big series of examples to teach us what to "live by faith" is about. With that stated I believe we're ready to start.

4. Hebrews Chapter 11, Verse 1: Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.
- a) Verse 1 defines what faith is. Verse 2 then states, here is what the ancients (i.e., the people who lived thousands of years ago in the Old Testament) did to show they trusted God.
 - b) It is rare in the bible when a concept is literally defined for us. Here in Verse 1, the bible goes to the trouble of defining what is biblical faith. It is interesting to consider the idea that God considers faith so important that He defines the term. The only other time I can think of where the bible literally defines a term, is in 1st Corinthians Chapter 13, where Paul defines what love is, in terms of how God loves us and how we should love others.
 - c) Ok, so how do we live by faith anyway? It is essentially about trusting in a God that we cannot physically sense. I call it believing in God first, and then acting on that belief.
 - i) Many people use a chair as an illustration on this point. Let me explain: "Faith in a chair" is when one believes a chair can hold one's weight. Acting on that faith is when we actually sit in the chair based on the faith that it does hold our weight.
 - ii) However, faith in God is a little tougher. He is asking us to have faith in an entity (Him) that we cannot sense (see, touch, hear, etc). He asks that we believe that He exists and then act on that belief. This chapter is full of examples of such.
 - d) What if I already believe He exists, why should I study this whole lesson? For starters, to see examples of how people acted on that faith. It is also so we can show others how we can act on our faith. To quote an old expression, "I am not impressed with people who say they believe in Jesus. I am impressed with those who act on that belief." The purpose of Hebrews Chapter 11 is to give us examples of how we are to act on that faith.
5. Verse 3: By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.
- a) Note that Verses 1-3 are among the few in this chapter that don't list a specific person and then says in effect, "here is the good that this person based on their faith in God".
 - b) Verse 3 argues against the idea of being an "agnostic" or atheist". Let me explain further: To believe in Jesus, first one has to believe in God the Father's existence. The evidence for His existence is visible to any thinking person, just by looking up at the sky and realizing "this could not have happened all by itself." Whether one believes the universe is only a few thousand years old or billions of years old, the point is it is illogical to consider the idea of making something out of nothing.
 - c) To quote one of my favorite Christian thinkers, (Greg Koukl), "If there was a "Big Bang", there had to be a "Big Banger"". No matter how hard atheists try to explain things, they can't get around the issue of one can't create something out of nothing.
 - i) So where does faith come in to this issue? It is about acting on the belief that God exists in the first place based on the physical evidence that He exists.
 - d) This is pretty basic stuff for us Christian believers. What is the point of telling us this? It is to explain that in order to make a difference based on the faith that God exists, first we have to believe He exists in the first place. I am back to the concept of "First comes faith that He exists, and then comes the necessity to act on that faith". We are going to spend the rest of this lesson discussing how we should act based on that faith. However, before we can discuss how we should act, first we have to establish the proof that a god exists.
 - e) Before I leave this topic, let me talk about why some people are agnostics (those who are not sure God exists) and some are atheists (don't believe He exists at all). It usually comes down to two key issues: The first is people can't deal with evil. They see all the evil that exists and figure that "If God does exist, He must not care". The second common reason why people hold this view is they don't want to be accountable to a god. Therefore, they just assume He doesn't exist. As to the issue of evil (or tragedies), remember that we live in a world cursed by sin and therefore, horrible things do happen. That is why we have faith in a better world to come, then to just trust in this life for our only joy.

6. Verse 4: By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.
- a) From Verse 4 through Verse 38, we are going to list specific individuals that lived during the time era of the Old Testament. As I like to remind us in every lesson in Hebrews, the original recipients of the book of Hebrews did believe the Old Testament was the word of God. Therefore, to describe people from the Old Testament is actually describing those people that most of the original readers did believe really existed at one point in time.
 - b) Let me also quote something Jesus said when He was talking to some "Sadducee's". This group believed that the first five books of the bible were God ordained, but not the rest of the Old Testament. The Sadducees also believed that when one dies, "that is it" and there is no heaven. The way Jesus rebuked them was by quoting from the first five books of the bible (the one's they believed were God ordained) where He told Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". (See Exodus 3:6 and Mark 12:26.) Jesus point being that God did not say, "I was the God of those people, but I am the God". To say it another way, these three people are not dead, but are still alive in heaven. The Sadducee's could not rebuke that argument because they did believe God really did say make that statement.
 - i) I share that story here is so when we start to read of all of these Old Testament people and how they had faith in God, don't just think of them as those who lived many millenniums ago. They still live in heaven, and yes we will meet them one day. As you read the stories of these people, consider that we will spend eternity in heaven and therefore, we will have the time to get to know them.
 - ii) Let me give another idea to consider: If you knew a famous person was coming over to dinner at your home next week, wouldn't you read up on that person so you could ask them questions about their life? The most likely answer is yes. The same with some of these Old Testament saints. If we know we are going to meet them one day, it would help to learn about them before we actually talk to them.
 - iii) It is also interesting to consider that this chapter skips over Adam and Eve and starts with the story of their children, Cain and Abel. Why is that? I suspect it is because Adam and Eve had direct contact with God and in that sense, are not examples of "walking by faith". Therefore, this chapter begins with two of Adam and Eve's children: Abel and Cain.
 - c) Going back to the early chapters of Genesis, both of these men offered sacrifices to God. To summarize the story from Genesis Chapter 4, God accepted Abel's sacrifice and God did not accept Cain's sacrifice. Cain was so angry that his sacrifice was not accepted, that he killed Abel. Before we discuss why Cain killed Abel, and how that is relevant to this study, I need to talk about why Cain's offering was superior to Abel's.
 - i) Some commentators argue that Abel's offering was superior because Abel offered an animal for his sins and Cain offered produce. While that is a possibility, I don't think that is the reason. This verse of Hebrews says that Abel made his offering by faith in God and Cain didn't. OK John, what does that mean? It means that Abel offered up an animal as if to say, "I trust in God to provide for me, and I'll prove it by offering up this animal." Then I picture Cain thinking, "I'm not crazy about all this sacrifice stuff. I know God exists because my parents talk about Him all the time. I believe I have to go through this ritual in order to make Him happy."
 - ii) Remember what faith is: It is looking forward to God's eternal promises coming true for our lives. It is about trusting that our eternal future is based not only on God taking care of our sins, but us living our lives to make a difference for Him. Abel trusted in that future promise by making an offering to show that He trusts God to take care of Him. Cain appeared to make an offering in order to gain God's favor, not gratitude to God for providing for him.

- d) Before I move on, I need to talk a little about why Cain killed Abel over this. Cain was angry that God accepted Abel's offering and not his. The point as it ties to Hebrews, is Verse 4 makes the point that "By faith he (Abel) still speaks, even though he is dead."
- i) John's loose translation: Abel is still alive in heaven. As I stated earlier that Jesus made the comment that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living". (Again, Mark 12:26) when Jesus said in effect that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive.
 - ii) Cain ended Abel's life on earth, but Abel is alive and well in heaven. Therefore God could not let Cain get away with murder because Abel is still alive. The point that Hebrews is making is that Abel is still alive, although he still died back then.
 - iii) So why should I care about this stuff? We as Christians should have faith in what Jesus has done (paid for our sins), is doing (willing to guide our lives) and will do (resurrect us) to eternal life because we have faith in His existence. That faith in what has, is and will do in our lives is what God desires we each have for Him.
7. Verse 5: By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
- a) To give you a time frame, this is many centuries after Abel and Cain. Enoch, who is the topic of these two verses, is the grandfather of Noah. His story is in Genesis 5. The text here as well as in Genesis doesn't say a lot about him, other than he "walked with God" and then one day he suddenly disappeared. So what does that mean?
 - i) First, let me discuss "walk with God". I don't think it means any more or less that what many of us Christians do today: I sort of visualize Enoch spending his days carrying on a conversation with God as if Enoch is standing next to God. If you have ever seen the movie or play, "Fiddler on the Roof", I picture Enoch talking to God like the main character Tevye does in that performance. I believe Enoch cared about pleasing God with his life and lived his life accordingly.
 - ii) Then the text says he was "taken". The Hebrew word that is translated "taken" in the Latin is the word "raptura". That word is where we get the English word "rapture". What struck me is that if a grown man (Enoch) just disappeared one day, how hard others looked for him? Of all the people listed here from the Old Testament, what is so special about Enoch that he got "raptured" (taken) by God? We don't know, other than what the text says: he cared about pleasing God. Does that mean if we talk to God often enough, we can get raptured too?
 - a) My view on this is that it is a word picture of what is to come: Enoch was the grandfather of Noah. There are those who will be raptured before the next great judgment (like Noah's flood). There will be people who will be preserved through the judgment like Noah and his family. Then there are those who will perish because of the judgment. Personally, I would rather be in the "Enoch" group. ☺ Again, it is just a theory based on these verses.
 - b) The important point for us to know about Enoch was that he trusted in God to guide his life. He believed in a God that I doubt he saw any more than you and I can see him. God rewarded Enoch for that trust by taking him up to heaven and he didn't experience death.
 - i) We will have to ask him when we meet him in heaven, why he was "raptured".
 - c) The last thing the text says that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him. Does that mean we get more stuff in this lifetime for being devout Christians? Of course not. The important answer is in effect, "what matters more, the time we have to live on earth, or the eternity we live in heaven?" In a lot of ways, this life is a testing ground for eternity. If it is our desire to be with God forever, He grants that desire. If it is our desire to ignore Him, He grants that request. For many, I am convinced that hell is literally giving people what they want: eternity without the presence of God in their lives. OK, time to move on.

8. Verse 7: By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.
- a) As famous as the story is of Noah and the flood, there is only one verse here on that topic. The important point is Noah did as God commanded him to do. I don't believe Noah went door to door telling people the flood is coming. Since it was a worldwide flood, he couldn't warn everyone if he wanted to. I think the way Noah witnessed to the world was just to build the thing "in his driveway". That act alone showed his faith in God.
 - b) The point is Noah trusted in God to follow through with what He said was going to happen (the flood). Noah was persevered through the flood based on that trust.
 - c) OK John, God has never told me to build an ark or anything of that great a magnitude. How do we walk by faith like Noah if God never gives us any verbal marching orders to go do something? If there is one thing I have learned as a Christian, is that God never says to us, "OK, here is my plan for you for the rest of your life." Instead, in His own way, He often makes it obvious to us what are to do next. Sometimes it is just a matter of going through one's life and looking for opportunities to make a difference for Him. Once we see a need, it is a matter of following through with that need. Once we take a step in faith and make a difference is usually when it is obvious to us what it is we are to do next.
 - i) As I have been taught, if you wonder why God hasn't told you what to do next, it is because He is still waiting for us to complete what instructions He has given us before we are ready for that next step. What if I don't know the last step? Ask Him. Pray about how one can be a good servant for Him today. It has amazed me the answers I have received when I am willing to submit to Him. Even if we don't get a great answer, move forward and look for ways to be used by Him.
 - d) Meanwhile, back to Noah. Somehow, God instructed him to build the ark. Noah showed his trust by doing what he believed God commanded him to do. Noah lived through the flood due to His trust in God. In effect, that is the type of promise God has for us as well. He never promises life will be easy. What He says is that we will be eternally rewarded for trusting Him through whatever we have to deal with in this lifetime.
9. Verse 8: By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.
- a) The text now moves many centuries later after Noah until the time of Abraham. Before I talk about Abraham, remember again that the original recipients of this letter did believe the Old Testament was the word of God. Therefore the writer of Hebrews is discussing many Old Testament characters and giving examples of how they had faith in God. The purpose is to teach us what "living by faith" is all about. OK, onto Abraham.
 - b) As I said in the introduction, it is interesting as one reads through Hebrews Chapter 11 and notice how carefully it is edited so that none of the mistakes these people made are mentioned here. If you read these same stories in Genesis the text gives details of their disobedience to God. My point is that these people are no more special than you or me. I believe that when we get to heaven, God "forgets" about all of our sins as Jesus paid for them all. We still get commended for how we do have faith in Him. That is why these people are commended for us to study: To encourage us to keep on having faith in Him.
 - c) As to the text itself, the point being made here is that Abraham traveled to the land of Israel and lived his whole life in tents, as did his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. So what does the text mean by saying Abraham was looking for a city that "God built"? I'll give you a clue: You will never find it by traveling this planet, nor is it ever described in the Old Testament. Abraham was looking to be rewarded in heaven for trusting God.

- d) A great mistake that any Christian can make is trying to find "heaven" on earth. I will tell you right now, it doesn't exist. You may be with people you love or in a nice place, but none of those good things will ever compare to what awaits the believer in heaven.
- i) What this means practically is that as God calls us to live to make a difference for Him, we shouldn't look for our rewards in this lifetime. But John, didn't God bless Abraham and give him lots of riches? That is not the point. God never guarantees financial rewards in this lifetime unless He has a purpose for us receiving those things again, in this lifetime. It is usually because he wants us to use that "stuff" in order to make a difference for Him.
- ii) Getting back to the text, despite the fact that God blessed Abraham financially, he never built a big home for himself anywhere in Israel. He dwelt in tents all of his life along with his son and grandson as to remind themselves that their true home is in heaven. So does that mean I have to give up my house? No. We just have to remember that whatever benefits we get in this lifetime, are temporary and our true rewards, like Abraham, come in the next life for trusting God to guide us.
- iii) Meanwhile, we are in no way, even close to being done with Abraham:
10. Verse 11: By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹²And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.
- a) To remind us of this story as told in Genesis Chapter 17 and 18, God promised Abraham that he would have a son. That promise did not come true until Abraham was 99 and his wife Sarah was 90. (See Genesis 17:17 and 17:24.) The point being that even though Sarah was past the age where she was able to bear children, she still gave birth to a son.
- b) So how was Sarah faithful? Didn't Genesis (18:2) say she laughed at God's promise? Yes it did and this is another example of Hebrews "editing out" their mistakes. The point is she still agreed to have sexual relations with her husband in her old age in order for God to come through with His promise. Sarah wasn't trusting in a virgin birth, but by faith she agreed to sexual relations with Abraham, in effect so God could fulfill His promise.
- c) The last point to Verse 12 is important to the verses coming up. God promised Abraham that he would have countless descendants through this son who was yet to be born. The point is that even though Abraham was old, he believed in God and also agreed to have sexual relations with Sarah in order to fulfill God's promises to him.
- i) The point for us is that the bible makes lots of promises for believers. God calls on us to trust those promises and we will be rewarded in heaven for having faith in such promises. The top example is faith that Jesus did die for the sake of our sins.
11. Verse 13: All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.
- a) The writer of Hebrews pauses from his "person by person" commentary on those who lived in biblical times to make some observations in these four verses.
- b) The main point here is that if everyone listed in this chapter so far, cared about their lives on earth more than God, they would have just built a nice life for themselves and in effect, "that was that". Because they chose instead to live for God, they choose to look forward to rewards in heaven instead of just settling for a nice life here and now.
- c) I am not saying one cannot enjoy life right now. I am saying one has to see this life in the perspective of eternity. The issue is always, are we living to make a difference for God.

- d) Let me use Abraham as an example. If he didn't move to Israel and live in tents, I'm sure he would have a nice home somewhere else. If that were true, he would never have been famous in history. Same with Noah: If he ignored God's instructions, he probably would had a nice life back then, and then drown in the flood. I'm not saying that we are all going to be as famous as these biblical characters in our lifetime. The point is God calls on all of us to live to make a difference for Him. The point is whatever rewards we get in heaven, will be far greater and last far longer than if we ignore God in this lifetime.
- i) As I have stated in recent lessons, the most valuable thing God gives each of us is our time. The issue always comes down to, how are we using our time? Are we using it to make a difference for Him, or to just built a nice life for ourselves now?
- ii) On that convicting thought, ☺ I'll sneak over to the next set of verses.
12. Verse 17: By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.
- a) If you asked me what is my favorite story in the book of Genesis, far and away, it is story of Abraham offering up Isaac as a sacrifice. In Abraham's mind, God had a problem at this point in the story. That is because God had promised Abraham that he would have lots of descendants through Isaac. Later in the story, God commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. Therefore, Abraham expected God to resurrect Isaac to fulfill that promise about having lots of descendants. If you didn't know, that same location where Abraham was about to offer up Isaac (and God providing an animal as a substitute) is the same location where Jesus was crucified. In other words, I believe Abraham knew he was acting out prophesy by that ritual. (This is all from Genesis Chapter 22.)
- b) That is why Verse 19 says that "figuratively speaking" Isaac was resurrected. The point is that Abraham trusted God to keep His promise about having lots of descendants by Isaac. The point for you and me is that God calls us on us to trust Him especially through things that are difficult in order to prove that we are trusting Him "by faith" to live our lives.
13. Verse 20: By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. ²²By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.
- a) After lots of verses about Abraham, we only get one about his son Isaac in terms of how he acted in faith. Then, we only get one verse here about Isaac's son Jacob. It says that Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons (they were Jacob's grandsons) at the time of his death.
- i) After this we only get one verse about Joseph. To recall, Joseph is one of Jacob's children and there are many chapters in Genesis that explain how Joseph went from being a slave to second in power in Egypt. All that Hebrews says about him is that near the end of his life, he talked about the Israelites leaving Egypt one day and his descendants should carry Joseph's bones with them to land of Israel.
- b) OK, why emphasize the "future" in each of these verses? Why does the text mention Isaac blessing his sons and Jacob blessing his Joseph's two sons both at end of their lives?
- i) Then why does Joseph, near the end of his life talk about his bones being taken to the land of Israel? My point is that these verses in Hebrews all deal with people being concerned with their families' future at the end of their lives.
- ii) The point here is that Joseph has spent most of his adult life in Egypt and Joseph's two sons have spent all of their lives in Egypt living a good life. Jacob was saying to all of them in effect, "Don't look at all of this stuff here in Egypt as being one's reward. You have rewards in heaven far greater than anything you can get here."
- iii) So why did Joseph want his bones buried in Israel? It is simply to show that there is a future for believers outside of the "world" (which Egypt was a model of.)

- c) Let me explain that last point a little more: When Joseph was in power, Egypt was the most powerful country on earth. To be a top guy in Egypt was to have more power than anyone else alive at that time. The point is Joseph near his death did not say, "Bury me here in Egypt as it is the greatest place one could ever want to live." Instead he says in effect, "Bury me in Israel, as I am looking forward to the day when God blesses His people with eternal life." (Not that his physical body will be closer to God, but as an act to show his children, focus on the eternal, not Egypt.) The point being is that God wants us to live for eternity as opposed to just living to make ourselves happy just in this lifetime.
- i) Does this mean God does not want us to enjoy our lives now? Of course not. The idea is to remind us that no matter how much we try to be full of joy without God being involved in our lives, it will never happen. We live for Him and we let Him guide our lives, as that is the road to eternal joy. Yes God wants us to have joy in this life. Happiness is based on our circumstances. If something great happens to us, we will be happy for a while. Joy is a peace one can have despite whatever good or bad things happen at any given moment. Joy comes from knowing God rules over our lives and we have eternal rewards by trusting in Him.
- ii) The point is that each of the characters mentioned in these verses in Hebrews was trying to get the next generation to understand that joy in life comes from trusting in God and not trusting in whatever benefits one can receive in this life. I am not saying we have to take a vow of poverty. I am saying that one has to see this life in the perspective of eternity. If one is going to live forever, should not we care more about preparing for that "forever" than to focus most of our most valuable resource (our time) just living for this life? That is the point of these verses.
14. Verse 23: By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.
- a) All of the characters discussed here in Hebrews 11 so far had their story taken from the book of Genesis. Here in Verse 23, we now move to the second bible book, Exodus. The first bible characters mentioned here are the parents of Moses. Their story is essentially that the king of Egypt at that time gave an order to kill all male Jewish babies in order to cut down their population size. Somehow Moses' parents understood that he was going to be something special. They hid the baby to prevent the soldiers from killing Moses.
- b) We tend to think of faith in God as doing great things or being involved in some gigantic miracle. Yet the faith of Moses' parents was simply that they knew this king's edict was wrong. They made the effort to hide the baby as long as possible. Moses' parents feared God more than they feared the king's edict, so they hid the baby. That is what faith is all about trusting in God, even and especially in difficult and troubling times.
- c) If you don't know the epilogue of that story, the daughter of the king of Egypt rescued the baby. Moses ended up being raised to be a prince in Egypt, which leads to the next verse:
15. Verse 24: By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.
- a) Remember how I said Egypt was the most powerful country on earth at that time? Now picture Moses being raised as the son of the king in that environment. He probably grew up learning all of the wisdom that a prince would be taught, in everything from science to medicine to learning to fight a war. Yet despite all of that wonderful upbringing, Moses choose to go live like the Israelites who were slaves at that time, rather than to enjoy the life that an Egyptian prince would have.
- b) That alone is a wonderful lesson in faith. Faith is trusting God despite the circumstances. Faith is willing to let go of what we have in exchange for something greater. God used Moses because he was willing to let go of all that he had learned as an Egyptian prince.

- c) Now we get to the strange part of these verses. Remember Moses lived between 1,000 and 2,000 years before Jesus came on the scene. Yet Verse 26 says that Moses left the rewards of being an Egyptian prince for the sake of "Christ".
- i) It is important to know that "Christ" is not Jesus' last name. It is simply a title for Jesus. That word is taken from the Greek word "Kristos". That is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah", which refers to an eternal king.
 - ii) Getting back to Moses, he forsake being a ruler in Egypt, because he believed in the God of the Israelites and their belief in a coming Messiah to rule forever. So how did Moses know all of this stuff? Remember that even though Moses was trained as an Egyptian prince, his real mother nursed him as a baby. He kept a relationship with his mother long enough to know the truth about his birth. I'm guessing that the Egyptian leaders even told Moses that although he was born a Jew, he was adopted into the family of Egyptian royalty. Being a prince over a million Jewish slaves, Moses probably needed to learn things about the Jewish religion and culture. My point of all of this is simply that when Moses chose to go live like a Jew, he probably had some understanding of their culture based on his training and background.
 - iii) OK then, so what does all of this have to do with faith in God? The point is Moses had the faith to realize that looking forward to the coming "Messiah" is a greater reward than anything and everything his Egyptian world of riches had to offer.
 - a) For you and me, it means that trusting our "Christ" can and does bring a far greater joy to our lives than anything our present world has to offer.
 - b) On that happy thought, we can go back to the text.
16. Verse 27: By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.
- a) If you know the story of Moses, he actually left Egypt twice. The first time was when he killed an Egyptian. Then he left Egypt in fear of judgment. The second time Moses left Egypt many years later was as the leader of the "Exodus". My point is we know the text is talking about the second time, as Moses had no fear of the king after the plagues occurred.
 - i) There, I just summarized much of the first dozen chapters of the book of Exodus from the perspective of Moses' relationship with King of Egypt. ☺
 - ii) The point is Moses didn't fear the king's punishment because somehow Moses understood God was guiding his life at that point. It means that just like Moses, we can have God guide our lives. But John, God used Moses in a mighty way, what can I do in comparison to that? Remember it is not the size of what God calls us to do, but simply being loyal to what He has called us to do. That is the basis of any and all rewards we have in heaven for our life of serving Him.
 - a) So what does He want us to do? Ask. Live out one's life based on biblical principals and when possible and feasible do what one enjoys doing in order to make a difference for Him. That is what God is looking for in us.
 - b) Meanwhile, back to Moses. The next historical fact given is the original Passover. What we get here is a few details of Exodus Chapter 12. The point is the final plague on Egypt was the death of every firstborn living in Egypt. In order for the Israelites to have their firstborn children spared of this plague, they had to put lamb's blood on their doorpost.
 - i) First of all, the fact that Moses got all of the Israelites to follow his lead (to put blood on their doors) is a sign that Moses acted on his faith and did what he was commanded to do. The fact that the Israelites saw the other plagues convinced them to believe Moses and put lamb's blood on the doorposts of their own homes.
 - ii) OK John, why this ritual? It is to show that God is in charge of life. By putting shed blood on the door, it shows our trust in "His blood" to cover over our sins.

- c) Does this ritual mean we have to do likewise? If you know the story of the Exodus, all Jewish people to this day are required to perform a series of rituals on that anniversary of that event to remember how God has spared them as a nation. The point is to teach them that they too are "covered" by the blood of a lamb if they trust in God's forgiveness and His payment for their sins. Yes it alludes to Jesus, but obviously they didn't see that.
 - i) By faith, we too trust in our "lamb's blood" to cover our sins. That is how we too live by faith and trust God for our forgiveness and guidance of our lives.
17. Verse 29: By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.
- a) In the story of the crossing through the Red Sea, the Egyptian army was in pursuit of the Israelites after they left Egypt. God provided an escape route through that sea.
 - b) Here is something to consider: By faith, the Israelites walked through the Red Sea. The Egyptian army followed them, and then the sea closed on them. Didn't the Egyptian army also have faith to cross the opening in Red Sea in pursuit of their enemy? The difference is the single word "faith". The Israelites crossed based on the faith that God would protect them. The Egyptians saw the sea open and attempted to cross it without having any faith in God. The point of that story is to rely upon miracles without trusting the God who created those miracles in the first place, will only lead to death.
 - c) It is time to remind all of us of something I wrote back in the first lesson on Hebrews: Faith is not about how "strong" is our faith, but the object (Jesus) of our faith.
 - i) For example, someone may say to us, "I don't have the amount of faith that you have to believe all of this stuff". The proper response should be that it is not the amount of faith, but the object we have faith in, which of course is Jesus.
 - ii) The question is not how strong is our faith. It is how much are we trusting Jesus to guide our lives. To put it another way, how much are we trusting Jesus that He has fully forgiven us, so that I can be used by Him despite my own faults and mistakes I have made in life? That is what living by faith is all about.
18. Verse 30: By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. ³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.
- a) We now move from a story in Exodus to a key story in the book of Joshua a generation later. The key point in Verse 30 is simply that the Israelites didn't do anything physical in order for the walls of that city to fall down. In Joshua Chapter 4, after marching around that city for seven days, the Israelites gave a shout, and then the walls fell down. Know that it was not the shouting that brought the wall down. The purpose of the shout is to tell the residences of Jericho "God is in charge" and those residents have been judged.
 - i) The point is the Israelites had enough faith in God to follow this strange plan and do what God commanded them to do. Again, I believe that faith is about putting our money and our time where our mouth is. It is one thing to say one believes in God. It is another to do something about it. The Israelites did obey Joshua as their leader told them to do, probably out of fear of displeasing the God we all serve.
 - b) This leads to the prostitute Rahab. She was a character from that same story. She was a resident of Jericho who hid two Jewish spies. She knew very little about the "God of the Jews". She did hear about the Red Sea crossing. In short, she figured, "All I know is there God is greater than the ones my local people worship, so I'll put my faith in Him."
 - i) It shows how someone with little knowledge of God can still have faith in Him, despite knowing lots of details.
 - ii) Do I believe this non-Jewish hero in the Old Testament is saved? Of course. It is also a simple proof that one didn't have to be Jewish to be saved before Jesus. She too, is a wonderful example of putting our money and time where our mouth is.
 - iii) OK, time to move on to the next set of Old Testament people.

19. Verse 32: And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets,
- a) At this point, the writer of Hebrews in effect throws his hands up in the air by saying, "I could go on for page after page and give lots more examples from the Old Testament of people who have put their trust in God and then had great miracles happen in their life. Not because they were special people, but just because they trusted God to guide them."
 - b) The interesting thing about the first four names on this list is that they are not people one would normally associate with having faith. When one reads of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah in the book of Judges, their flaws and mistakes are discussed just as much if not more than how they trusted in God. So if these guys were so bad, why are they included in this "hall of faith" Chapter 11?
 - i) For starters, it is to remind us that God doesn't see us as flawed people, but simply as those who trust in Him to guide our lives. Did they make mistakes? Horrible ones, just as we as believers do as well. Does it excuse our sins? Of course not. The point is just as God will remember them for what they have done in faith, so we too must realize that God has truly forgiven our sins and He wants us to live our life in order to make a difference for Him. That is why these men are listed.
 - ii) Let me use Sampson as an example. In his story, God gave him great strength, yet most of his story is how he wasted it for his own glory. Yet in the end of his life, he trusted God to return his strength so he could destroy the main enemy of the Jewish people along with his own life in order to make that difference for Him.
 - a) One may think, that is not much of a testimony, to commit suicide for the sake of God. The point of that story was in effect Samson was willing to let go of his life in exchange for God's will getting done. That gave Samson the good testimony here, at least for the last part of his life.
 - iii) The other three names listed in Verse 32 are Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah. Just like Sampson, their stories are all from the book of Judges. Each of them had faults yet each of them used their lives to make a difference for God. I could give wonderful details from each of their stories. The main idea to learn is that despite their fears, they were all willing to submit their lives to God's will despite the consequences of whatever may happen to their own life.
 - c) Meanwhile, a few words about David. This is too big a category to be summarized here briefly. The bible has more text written about David than any character other than Jesus Himself. The point here is that David trusted God to guide his life and despite his many mistakes, God used him greatly simply because David was willing to trust Him to guide his life.
 - i) A similar thought could be said about Samuel. He was a prophet and priest who roughly lived around the same time as King David. The point being made here is that Samuel was willing to submit his life to whatever was God's will, and then and only then could Samuel be used in a great way. Hopefully, each of us are beginning to see the pattern that can be applied to each of our lives.
20. Verse 33: who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.
- a) First, a little "who's who": The phrase "Conquered kingdoms" probably refers to King David as he conquered neighboring kingdoms. The reference to "administered justice" could refer to Samuel, other prophets or even Daniel who lived centuries after David. The reference to "shut the mouths of lions" probably ties to the famous story Daniel when he is in the lion's den. (Based on Daniel Chapter 6). The "flames" reference is probably Daniel's three friends who lived through being inside a hot fire pit (from Daniel Chapter 3).

- b) I could go on from here, but the idea for us is to realize again, that God is willing to use in a mighty way, those who were willing to trust Him to guide their lives.
 - c) One thing I was thinking about the other day was why me? I was considering why God would want to use me to write these studies when I never had any formal training as a bible teacher or a seminary graduate. The response I got from God was in effect, "why not you? I (God) can use who ever I want to use if such a person is willing to trust Me."
 - i) That concept can apply to anyone reading this lesson. If we are wondering why God is asking us to live a certain way or take on a certain task, the answer from God is in effect, "Why not you?" We have to accept the idea that God has chosen each of us to make a difference for Him if we are willing to submit to His will.
 - ii) OK John, I haven't as an example, escaped the mouths of lions like Verse 34 or even written like you have. What can I do? Ask God. Be willing to submit one's life to Him. Go forward, make the best decisions possible and trust that He is guiding one's life. My point is if God can use any of these bible characters, then He can and will be willing to use you or me in a way to make a difference for Him.
 - iii) Meanwhile, we still have a few more people to talk about.
21. Verse 35: Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.
- a) The first sentence of Verse 35 lists another positive thing that happen to those who did trust in God. The last sentence of Verse 35 through Verse 38 lists negative things that happen to people willing to trust in God. OK, why list these bad things here? In other words, John, why are you "firing us up" to make a difference for God? Most of us would like the glory of say, stopping lions or surviving through flames of fire. I can assume that none of us are crazy about the idea of being put in prison or stoned to death or even being mistreated for the sake of the Gospel message. So what gives here?
 - i) The answer is about accepting God's will. We have to remember that rewards for making a difference for Him do not necessarily come in this lifetime or are even recorded for others to read. I could go on for pages, discussing who each of these individuals are that are being referenced in these verses. I can even recommend some wonderful detailed commentaries that discuss who are all the people being referenced here and how they lived and died to make a difference for God.
 - ii) The main point I want each of us to remember is that to be willing to submit to God's will does not necessarily mean we will get glory in this lifetime or even be historically famous like these other biblical characters.
 - iii) OK John, if we don't get the fame now, why bother? In effect, what choice do we have? It is about remembering that eternity is a whole lot longer than whatever lifespan we could have now. Yes we will be rewarded for making a difference for God, but we must remember when, where and how we are rewarded.
22. Verse 39: These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. ⁴⁰ God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.
- a) I just asked why bother?" ☺ These last two verses give the answer. The point is we can't and should not expect rewards in this lifetime. If we believe we are going to live forever, then the only choice we have is to do whatever we can to make whatever difference we can that will last for all of eternity. This comes back to using the most valuable asset God has given each of us, our time, in order to make a difference for Him. How He does that begins with us being willing to submit to Him, and then watching Him work in our lives.

23. With that happy thought stated, let me close in prayer and summarize the key point of what I'm trying to get across in this lesson: Heavenly Father, help us to use the most valuable thing You give each of us, our time to make a difference for You. We don't know what You have planned for us. All we do know is that the best thing we can do with our lives is submit them to You so You can use them for Your glory. Make it obvious to us what it is You want us to do today and help us to use our lives to make a difference for You. Help us to remember not to look to this life for rewards for what we do for You. Help us to trust that You exist, You are willing to guide our lives, and by submitting to You, You are more than willing to use us to make that difference for You. Guide us as we make that difference. In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.