

## SESSION TWENTY-FOUR

### THE FAITH WE SHOULD EMULATE

#### *Heb 11:1-40*

Comment: The notes for this session are intended to provide an overview of the chapter. For a more detailed discussion of the interpretation of various verses, the reader is encouraged to check my commentary on Hebrews 11.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The second major movement of the book consists of Heb 8:1–10:39. In the closing to this unit, the author exhorted the readers to respond positively to the doctrinal exposition of the perfect sacrifice of Christ by *drawing near* to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (10:22). If, on the other hand, they "throw away their confidence," they are warned that they will face God's judgment (10:26-31). After all, even under the Old Covenant, God brought temporal discipline upon His people for disobedience. To turn their backs on the New Covenant and Christ the mediator would surely demand severer punishment from God.

Yet the author is not ready to give up on his readers, for he remembers their former sacrifices and sufferings as believers (10:32-34). Their real need is to exercise "endurance," which they can do by responding in faith and living by faith (10:35-39). The Old Testament is full of examples of believers who responded to God's will and leading by faith, and our author recounts numerous cases in point (Heb 11). We would also do well to recall Heb 6:12 and its mention of "those who through faith and steadfast endurance inherit the promises." Even in that context, Abraham was cited as an example for the New Covenant community (6:13-15). Not surprisingly, Abraham (the father of the nation) takes the limelight in chapter 11 among those who made a believing response to the promises of God.

#### II. THE STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTER 11

The structural organization of Hebrews 11 is not easy to discern or describe. Hodges (*The Bible Knowledge Comm.*) and Victor Rhee come to radically different conclusions regarding the overall structure of Hebrews 11, despite their recognition of certain common units within the chapter.<sup>1</sup> They both would agree that verses 1-3 provide a prologue to the chapter and that verses 39-40 are a conclusion. In the midst of the chapter, verses 13-16 serve as some sort of an interlude or summation section.

Hodges sees a two-fold division of the chapter with the main break at 11:17. He takes the position that following the prologue in 11:1-3, we have one section in 11:4-16 (stressing the divine acceptance of faith) with verses 13-16 serving as a "summation" to this first section. Then, we have

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<sup>1</sup> Zane Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*; and Victor (Sung Yul) Rhee, "Chiasm and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 11," *BibSac* 155:619 (Jul-Sep 1998): 327-45.

a second section in 11:17-40 (stressing the variegated experiences of faith) with verses 39-40 serving as a "summation" to this latter section.

Rhee, on the other hand, sees the entire chapter structured in a carefully composed chiasmus. According to him, the opening prologue in 1-3 is paralleled by the conclusion in 39-40. There are several "rings" of composition, with 11:13-16 being the innermost element. Hence, 11:13-16 is the focus of the chapter, and thus the most important part. Despite their different approaches, they both would agree that the units 1-3, 13-16, and 39-40 are quite strategic to the chapter.

A third approach can be seen in the work of Lane in his commentary. He sees the whole chapter bounded by an *inclusio*: the words πίστις and μαρτυρέω occur in both 11:1-2 and 11:39-40. He notices that the rhetorical repetition of the words "by faith" (at the beginning of clauses) is characteristic of 11:3-31 but not in 11:32ff. Also, we have material dealing with Abraham and his descendants in 11:8-22 but with Moses and the conquest generation in 11:23-31. On the basis of these observations, Lane divides the chapter into four sections: (1) 11:1-7; (2) 11:8-22; (3) 11:23-31; and (4) 11:32-40. He also tries to establish validity for this four-fold division by examining the internal structure of each section based on the presence of *inclusios* and linking terms. For instance, the first section in 11:1-7 is framed by an *inclusio* based on the word βλεπομένων ("things seen") occurring in both verse one and verse seven. Then, the word "heir" (κληρονόμος) at the end of verse 7 (in the Greek text) becomes a "linking term" to the next section which is introduced by words speaking of the reception of an inheritance (λαμβάνειν εἰς κληρονομίαν).

Within the unit dealing with Abraham and his descendants (11:8-22), we have a commentary on the biblical record placed at the center of this section, namely, 11:13-16. Lane notes the significance of this: "By placing his most important affirmations at the center of the paragraph, he indicated the perspective from which the whole unit is to be understood" (2:321).

The mention of "the exodus" in the final verse of the second section (i.e., vs 22) becomes a "link term" to the third section which deals with Moses, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the conquest. Within the fourth and final section of 11:32-40, Lane notes a break at 11:35<sup>b</sup> beginning with the words "and others." He writes (2:322), "Within this paragraph a sharp change of tone and of subject in v 35<sup>b</sup> serves to subdivide the unit and to emphasize the contrast between those who triumphed through faith (vv 32-35<sup>a</sup>) and others who experienced humiliation and martyrdom because of steadfast faithfulness to God (vv 35<sup>b</sup>-38)."

All three structural models provide helpful insights, but each has certain weaknesses as well.

### III. OVERALL CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHAPTER 11

Chapter 11 does more than just give examples of faithful responses to God. Notice these other contributions:

- 1) It defines what faith is: an assurance or confidence of things we hope for, and a conviction in that which we have not yet seen. In light of the examples cited, the author has in mind an assurance about things God has revealed or called a person to do (not simply for things we wish to happen).

Chapter ten had ended with the statement about those who have "faith to the preserving of the soul." Now the author proceeds to define and describe (by way of numerous examples) what he had in mind by a steadfast endurance in faith. Victor Rhee raises the question as to whether ὑπόστασις should be understood in an active subjective way (= assurance, confidence) or in an objective sense (= reality, substance). He concludes that the latter is to be preferred, and the same would apply to ἔλεγχος. He writes,

"If the objective understanding of ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος is correct, then the definition of faith in verse 1 may be stated in this way: Faith is the reality (or substance) of the things hoped for, the proof of the things not seen."<sup>2</sup>

The option of the *objective sense* of these words, however, is doubtful in my opinion. This tends to overlook the author's use of key terms from verse 1 in other portions of the epistle. For instance, ὑπόστασις was used with a *subjective sense* in Heb 3:14: "if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm until the end." Clearly, this was a *confidence* understood to be expressed by the readers. The synonym παρρησια ("confidence") used in the previous chapter would tend to confirm this (note 10:19 and 10:35). Furthermore, though the verb ἐλπίζω ("to hope for") is not used elsewhere in Hebrews, the noun form ἐλπίδος is (note 3:6; 6:11,18; 7:19; 10:23). In particular, the "hope" we have is the blood of Christ that has been shed as our perfect sacrifice.

Thus, when the author speaks in the *subjective sense* about having a "confidence in things hoped for," in the back of his mind he is thinking first and foremost of our confidence in the shed blood of Christ as our grounds of a perfect standing before God. This is a confidence that should not be given up! One retains this confidence in the blood of Christ by faith. Yet the author generalizes this aspect of faith in order to show that it is in keeping with the heroes of faith from the Old Covenant.

- 2) The author wishes to underscore the point that men and women of faith "gained approval" (from μαρτυρέω) from God. This word is used four times in the chapter (2,4,5, and 39). Notice that this makes an *inclusio* to the book.

<p>Heb 11:1-2          “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old <b>gained approval</b>.”</p>	<p><i>Examples</i></p>	<p>Heb 11:39-40          “And all these, having <b>gained approval</b> through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”</p>
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<sup>2</sup> Rhee, 343.

- 3) Furthermore, such approval results in *reward* from God. This is initially brought out in 11:5-6. Enoch "gained approval" (note use of μαρτυρέω in vs 5!) and was thus "pleasing to God." In 11:6, the author makes clear that only through *faith responses* can men please God. In particular, the author is thinking of those who "draw near" to God (note the verb προσερχόμενον - same verb root as in 4:16 and 10:22!) by availing themselves of God's throne of grace. We "draw near" by faith with a view that God will rightly reward us ("He is a rewarder of those who seek Him"). Consequently, *promises, rewards, and inheritance* are emphasized in the chapter.
- 4) But rewards for faith do not come easily. The chapter also stresses *testing, ill-treatment* that may be encountered in following God faithfully. Notice how the motifs of faith, ill-treatment, endurance, and reward are exemplified in the life of Moses:

"By **faith** Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure **ill-treatment** with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering **the reproach of Christ** greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the **reward**. By **faith** he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he **endured**, as seeing Him who is unseen." (Heb 11:24-27)

The author of Hebrews is obviously writing these things with his particular audience in mind, because they are facing the external pressures to abandon their New Covenant position and to turn away from confessing Jesus as the Messiah.

- 5) Finally, the author wishes to point out that we must be patient about the reward and realize that God will bring these to pass only after much waiting and in keeping with His long-range goals. This is why the author stresses (11:13-16 and 11:39-40) that these Old Testament saints did not really experience the complete fulfillment of God's promises. "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises" (11:13). God has a plan by which He will fulfill His promises, but it will be in a grand heavenly way, not a mere earthly way. Hence, our sights should be set upon the "heavenly city" that God has prepared (11:16). This is something so marvelous that God wants all the saints of all the ages to experience it together at the same time (11:40). We must have a forward-looking faith to the eschatological blessings that will be ours in the long-run!