

OTHERS FROM HEBREWS 11

Previously we have looked at Abraham and Moses from Hebrews chapter 11, the “faith chapter.” Let us now look at some others of those mentioned in that chapter.

Abel:

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. (Hebrews 11:4).

First, note the focus of the faith is Abel offering a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Of Abel’s entire life, this is his episode of faith the Holy Spirit has us examine.

The Greek used here literally means “more than”, and is the language used in Hebrews 3:3 – **For this man (Christ) was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.** The idea here is that both Abel and Cain offered sacrifices, but Abel’s was better than or more than Cain’s. We see similar usage at the tail end of Matthew 6:25 where we read: **Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?**

By this excellent sacrifice Abel displayed to the world that he was righteous, so much so that the Bible describes him on several occasions in just that way. So, for example, we read at Matthew 23:35 about the **blood of righteous Abel** and at 1 John 3:12 we see that **Cain’s own works were evil, and his brother’s (Abel’s) righteous.**

So, just what was this excellent sacrifice? To answer that, we turn to Genesis Chapter 4, verses 2-5: **And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock**

and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

Abel's outstanding sacrifice signified that he had a regard to, and faith in, the great sacrifice of the Seed of the woman, him who in the fullness of time was to be offered up, and of which Abel's sacrifice was but a type. Abel knew of that coming sacrifice on the cross; he saw it; he believed it -- and his blood sacrifice said so.

And Abel's sacrifice also showed he relied on the righteousness of that slain Lamb. When our text says Abel **obtained witness that he was righteous** that's different from saying he obtained his own righteousness; just that he was righteous. **And he found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.** (Philippians 3:9). This brings it right back to faith, and you really can't say it any better than Paul's writing to the church at Philippi, as just quoted.

Apparently on the spot, God testified to his satisfaction with Abel's sacrifice. How that was done, we are not told. Some believe it was by sending fire and consuming Abel's sacrifice, such as was done several times in the Old Testament, one example being Gideon's offering found in Judges Chapter 6, specifically verse 21: **Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.**

However it happened, God made it plain he respected and accepted Abel's sacrifice and Cain got the message. **And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.** (Genesis 4:5). And of course, the rest of the story is that Cain killed Abel, but though he is long since dead, Abel's historic sacrifice still speaks to us and earns him a place in Hebrews Chapter 11.

Enoch:

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. (Hebrews 11:5).

Again, we need to focus on the result of Enoch's faith which, we are told, was his translation. This is not to say there were no other aspects of Enoch's life displaying his faith, but it seems reasonable to conclude that his translation was, all by itself, the highlight reel. Here is what Jamieson-Fausset-Brown says: *Faith was the ground of his pleasing God; and his pleasing God was the ground of his translation.*

The word "translated" here is a very simple one, denoting merely change of place. The Hebrew here merely says "he was not, for God took him." And this is not to be considered as simply a spiritual translation from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ, or a removal from one part of the earth to another as when Philip was caught away after the baptism of the eunuch (Acts 8:39, 40), but as a translation or removal from earth to heaven.

When considering this matter, it is obvious we are up to our eyeballs with the topic of death. Death is a scary thing to the people of God. Jimmy Carter recently told the world he was "absolutely and completely at ease" with death, which excited the media. Here's a sample: <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/03/politics/jimmy-carter-at-ease-with-death-prayer-service/index.html> But that's to be expected. The Psalmist, when speaking of the foolish, concisely stated: **For there are no bands in their death[.]** (Psalms 73:3, 4).

But when speaking of the children which God hath given Jesus, the author of Hebrews assures us they were **through fear of death . . . all their lifetime subject to bondage.** (Hebrews 2:13, 15). So, again I say, death is a frightening thing to God's chosen people.

Yet that being said, it sometimes seems death is superficial, lacking depth and nearer the surface than we apprehensively imagine. Paul describes it as a departure: **[H]aving a desire to depart,**

and to be with Christ[.] (Philippians 1:23) And recall how slim the line between life and death was for those saints who arose following the Lord's death on the cross. And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. (Matthew 27:52, 53).

But how is it that Enoch was able to avoid death? After all, it is **appointed unto men once to die (Hebrews 9:27), the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) and all have sinned (Romans 3:23).** Enoch obviously was a man who was not sinless. How, then, was he able to avoid that appointment with death we are told awaits every human being?

And if [p]recious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints (Psalm 116:15) then what was this translation in the sight of the Lord? Was it not highly esteemed in God's eyes? The text tells us Enoch was translated that he should not see death, which seems to suggest the translation was a really good thing, likely surpassing precious in the sight of the Lord.

These are mysteries and I don't profess to have answers. But I do know that in addition to Enoch and Elijah – who is the only other reported person to avoid death as he **went up by a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kings 2:11) – others of God's saints will have that wonderful experience. Consider Paul's assurance: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:17).**

Enoch had such strong faith that he avoided death through translation. Let us strive for that level of faith as we go. At a minimum, I think we can safely draw that much from Hebrews 11:5. And Bible commentators seem to concur. So, for example, Benson writes: *To what place these holy men (Enoch and Elijah) were translated is not said; but their translation in the body, . . . is recorded for an example,*

to assure believers that, in due time, they also shall live in the heavenly country in the body, and to excite them in that assurance to imitate Enoch's faith.

And in that context and against that backdrop, take a look at the very next verse in Hebrews 11 and perhaps see more than you previously had: **But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6).**

Now, say what you will – and think what you will – but each individual member of the Lord's sheepfold is going to be changed, which is a form of translation. Our Savior shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. (Philippians 3:21). In another place, Paul talks of a mystery: **We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51).** And though this life is marked with patience and long-suffering, this promised change is going to happen abruptly and quickly. **In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:52).**

And a final point on this guaranteed change, whether it happens by a physical translation (as Enoch and Elijah) or bodily death, we know the victory is ours! **O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Corinthians 15:55).**

Before moving on to the next Hebrews 11 person, please note that Enoch's translation was the direct result of his testimony which pleased God. We find that testimony in Jude 14 and 15: **And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.**

Noah:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. (Hebrews 11:7).

This power-packed verse overwhelms the reader with goodness, but we must stay zeroed in on what the action was resulting from faith. In this instance, it was Noah preparing the ark.

In some way (the precise form of which we're not told), Noah was warned by God of things never before seen, specifically the destruction by flood of the world that then was, and the preservation of his family. The Greek word here means divinely admonished, as we read in Hebrews 8:5 where Moses was divinely admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: **for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.**

Here's the referenced warning: **And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (Genesis 6:13).**

That warning provoked action-producing fear and obedience in building the ark. The Greek word translated "fear" here appears only one other time in the Bible, at Acts 23:10: **And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.** It tells us that Noah was influenced by proper caution and reverence for God, and was careful not to offend God.

The directions for building the ark were detailed and exhaustive, and can be found beginning at Genesis 6:14 and continuing to Genesis 7:5 where we are told that **Noah did according unto all that the Lord**

commanded him. The consequence of this full obedience was the saving of Noah, for we know that God spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly[.] (2 Peter 2:5). For a fact, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. (Genesis 6:8).

This construction of an ark – a massive undertaking – tells us many things that we can apply in our walk, including:

- It was a long haul. Expositors are not in agreement, but their writings suggest this time of ark-building was no less than 52 years and no more than 120 years, which is generally thought to be the timeframe contained in 1 Peter 3:20: **[W]hen once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. Genesis 6:3 states: And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. Looking at when Noah's children were born (as reported in scripture) and it being likely the Lord's direction to build the ark occurred sometime after Genesis 6:3, it is probable the 120 years is the maximum. Bottom line: It was a long haul for Noah and his family.**
- It was an all-consuming enterprise for Noah and those over whom he had influence, including his sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives. (Genesis 6:18). Life's energies were expended in both the construction aspects as well as the loading of the animals and so forth. It was a massive effort. Being kept busy with that work of the Lord proved quite beneficial to Noah and his companions. Occupied hands and minds tend to stay out of trouble.
- It seemed to flesh eyes to be an impossible undertaking. Proof of this is that nobody else in the whole world took Noah's efforts seriously. We know that **all flesh outside the ark died, including**

every man. (Genesis 7:21). Given the magnitude and scope of this enterprise, it belied human understanding to believe it could actually be accomplished. But God's purposes are not limited or restricted by human frailty. Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him? Who hath enjoined him his way? Or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity? . . . Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out. (Job 36:22, 23, 26). And this: Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. (Psalm 147:5). God did not need Noah; he does not need us!

- **It was done in the midst of much drama and mocking. It doesn't take a vivid imagination to envision what life was like for Noah during these many long years working on the ark. Neighbors mocked, whispered and gossiped. Government inspectors haggled him. The media of that day excoriated him and his efforts. Community leaders berated Noah and his family as a scourge on society. Educators frequently flayed Noah in their classrooms. Regulators may have tried to cut-off his website (you never know) or suspend his Twitter account. One thing we do know: **And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5). And we know in those days the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. (Genesis 6:11, 12). So, too, today!****
- **It was incredibly costly. *Doubtless amidst many insults of profane and wicked men, the preparing of such a vessel, or any thing like it, being a new thing on the earth, and not to be effected without immense labour and cost.* (Benson) Estimates that I have found put the cost of building an ark similar to what Noah built to be \$1.5 billion.**

- It was accomplished by years of skillful and diplomatic interaction and intercourse with his neighbors and colleagues. For sure, Noah was separating the precious from the vile and keeping him and his spiritually segregated from the world. But he had to make a living; he had to buy; he had to sell; he had to learn and become somewhat of an expert in many aspects of construction. He was a walking example of what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 5:9, 10 – **I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.**
- It was done in spite of intra-family pushback and treachery. Noah's earnest hard work resulted in great blessing, not only to him but his family. **And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. (Genesis 7:1). In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark[.] (Genesis 7:13).** Yet before it was all said and done, one of the sons (Ham) displayed himself to be a dastard, so much so that Noah ended up cursing Ham's offspring. (Genesis 9:25).
- It resulted in an expected end for Noah; he was an eye-witness to God's assured and spectacular judgments. Stop and think about what Noah and his family saw as the destructive flood waters rose accomplishing their promised results and then receded. **And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days. (Genesis 7:24).** Strong variable winds; fountains of the deep and windows of heaven opening up; **every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground. (Genesis 7:23).** What amazing scenes they had to witness; surely no other living human beings before or since

have had such an experience. God had pledged such to Noah and the pledge proved more than true. **For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.** (Jeremiah 29:11). Faithful adherence to God's directives by His saints will similarly result in final salvation.

In closing, I offer these sound words from Barnes: *Everything which Noah did in reference to the threatened deluge, was done in virtue of simple faith or belief of what God said. It was not because he could show from the course of events that things were tending to such a catastrophe; or because such an event had occurred before, rendering it probable that it would be likely to occur again; or because this was the common belief of men, and it was easy to fall into this himself. It was simply because God had informed him of it, and he put unwavering reliance on the truth of the divine declaration.*

I love you. Amen!