

# JESUS IS BETTER

An In-Depth Study of Hebrews

## Course Outline

<u>Week</u>	<u>Passage</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Hebrews 1:1-4	Introduction to Hebrews, God's Final Word in His Son
2	Hebrews 1:5 – 2:4	Jesus is Greater Than the Angels
3	Hebrews 2:5 – 3:6	Jesus' Sonship is Greater than Moses' Servanthood
4	Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13	Jesus' Rest is Better than Joshua's Rest
5	Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10	Jesus, Our Great Appointed High Priest
6	Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20	Exhortation to Persevere in Light of God's Promises
7	Hebrews 7:1-28	Jesus, The Greater Melchizedekian High Priest
8	Hebrews 8:1-13	Jesus, The Greater High Priest of the New Covenant
9	Hebrews 9:1-22	Jesus' Sacrifice at the Greater Tabernacle
10	Hebrews 9:23 - 10:39	Drawing Near to God Because of Jesus' Greater Sacrifice
<b>11</b>	<b>Hebrews 11:1-40</b>	<b>The Faith of the Ancients in Action</b>
12	Hebrews 12:1-29	Running the Race with Perseverance
13	Hebrews 13:1-25	Concluding Words

## Recap from Session 10

### Hebrews 9:23 – 10:39

- The pastor focuses on the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and contrasts that with the regular animal sacrifices in the earthly tabernacle. These animal sacrifices had to be done year after year, whereas Jesus offered his own body once and for all.
- The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin, but the blood of the Son of God is able to cleanse completely those who believe in him.
- Because of the sacrifice of this high priest, the pastor continues to exhort his hearers to persevere in their faith. We are to hold fast to the hope that we profess together as a community of believers.
- However, if we have received knowledge of the truth and keep on sinning, we only have a fearful expectation of judgement from God.

- The pastor believes that his hearers (and by extension, us) belong to those who have faith and are saved.

## Structure of Hebrews

- **Hebrews 1:1-4 – God has Spoken to Us in a Son Who is also High Priest**
- **Hebrews 1:5 – 4:13 – Jesus’ Greater Sonship**
  - Hebrews 1:5 – 2:4 – Jesus is Greater than the Angels
  - Hebrews 2:5 – 3:6 – Jesus’ Sonship is Greater than Moses’ Servanthood
  - Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13 – Jesus’ Rest is Better than Joshua’s Rest
- ***Transition Passage - Hebrews 4:14-16 – Jesus, the Son of God who is also High Priest***
- **Hebrews 5:1 – 10:39 – Jesus’ Greater Priesthood**
  - Hebrews 5:1 – 6:20 – Exhortation to Persevere in light of Jesus’ Priesthood
  - Hebrews 7:1-28 – Jesus is the Greater High Priest in the order of Melchizedek
  - Hebrews 8:1-13 – Jesus is the Greater High Priest of the New Covenant
  - Hebrews 9:1-22 – Jesus’ Sacrifice at the Greater Tabernacle
  - Hebrews 9:23 – 10:18 – Jesus’ Greater Sacrifice in the True Tabernacle in the New Covenant
  - Hebrews 10:19-39 – Persevere in light of Jesus’ Sacrifice
- **Hebrews 11 – Perseverance by Faith of the Ancients (this session)**
- **Hebrews 12:1-3 – Fix our Eyes Upon Jesus**
  - Hebrews 12:4-17 – Endure God’s Discipline as Sons
  - Hebrews 12:18-28 – We Have Come to a Better Mountain
- **Hebrews 13:1-25 – Concluding Exhortations**

## Faith in Action

The pastor has reminded his hearers of their faith in their early days. They endured suffering because they knew that they had better and lasting possessions. They do not belong to those who shrnk back and are destroyed. Instead, they belong to those who have faith, persevered and as a result, are saved.

However, what is this faith and how does persevering faith looks like? Up until now, there has only been fleeting mentions of faith throughout the sermon. However, as we come to Hebrews 11, we come to the climax of the book, with the pastor emphatically demonstrating to his hearers what persevering faith looks like in action. This serves as a great clarion call for all of us Christians today, to persevere in our faith in a world that is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith.

His graphic narrative is like a grand mural, beginning with creation (11:3) and concluding with consummation at the final Judgement (12:27). The pastor wants his hearers to be aware of their heritage, so he begins by describing the history of the faithful before the incarnation (11:1-40). He accomplishes several objectives in this part of his story. First, the lives of the ancient faithful clarify the nature of faith that the pastor would have his

hearers emulate. Second, the perseverance of those who have gone before serves as motivation for perseverance in the present. Third, the faithful of old provide an alternate society that counters the baleful influence of the unbelieving world in which the hearers live.<sup>1</sup>

## Hebrews 11:1-40

**11** Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

<sup>2</sup>This is what the ancients were commended for.

<sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

<sup>5</sup>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." <sup>p</sup> For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. <sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>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 is in keeping with faith.

<sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup>And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. <sup>12</sup>And 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.

<sup>13</sup>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, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. <sup>14</sup>People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup>If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup>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.

<sup>17</sup>By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, <sup>18</sup>even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." <sup>r</sup> <sup>19</sup>Abraham reasoned

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<sup>1</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 2012), 515.

that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

<sup>20</sup> By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

<sup>21</sup> By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

<sup>22</sup> By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. <sup>25</sup> He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. <sup>28</sup> By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

<sup>29</sup> By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

<sup>30</sup> By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.

<sup>31</sup> By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were put to death by stoning; <sup>y</sup> they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—<sup>38</sup> the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

<sup>39</sup> These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 11:1–40.

## Homework

Chapter Division

What are the major figures that the pastor focuses on? Why?

What do you think he is trying to accomplish with this chapter?

It is not, however, a history of Israel, per se, nor is it written to glorify Israel's national institutions. It is a history of the people of God who have been called into being and sustained by the word of God, now fulfilled in Christ (1:1-4). Thus, this history is written in accord with all that has been said about the sole sufficiency of Christ and the way he has fulfilled and antiquated those OT institutions. These heroes have a faith that anticipates God's future, made available through his Son. Thus, the pastor reinforces community solidarity: by their loyalty to Christ his hearers take their place with God's people of all time.<sup>3</sup>

## Faith

Introduction – 12:1 – “Faith is confidence in what we hope for, assurance about what we do not see.”

The two-fold orientation of faith

(1)

(2)

11:2 – “This is what the ancients were commended for.”

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<sup>3</sup> Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 517.

## Primeval History (Genesis 1 – 11)

11:3 – The forming of the universe (Gen. 1)

11:4 – Faith of Abel (Gen. 4:2-12)

11:5-6 – Without faith it is impossible to please God (Gen. 5)

11:7 – Noah condemned the world (Gen. 6 – 9)

## Abraham and the Patriarchs (Genesis 12 – 50)

11:8-12 – Abraham look forward to the city whose architect and builder is God (Gen. 12ff)

Abraham looked forward by faith

11:13-16 – All these people were still living by faith when they died. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

11:17-19 (Gen. 22)

11:20-22 (Gen. 27, 39, 40, 48, 50)

## Moses To the Conquest (Exodus – Joshua)

11:23-28 – The life of Moses (Ex. 1-12)

11:29 – The parting of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21-31)

11:30 – Walls of Jericho (Josh. 6)

11:31 – Rahab (Josh. 2)

## The Rest of the Ancients

11:32 – Don't have enough time!

- Gideon (Judg. 6 – 8)
- Barak (Judges 4 – 5)
- Samson (Judges 13 – 16)
- Jephthah (Judges 11 – 12)
- David (1 Samuel 16ff)
- Samuel (1 Samuel 1)

“...through faith conquered kingdoms...”

“...the world was not worthy of them.”

11:39-40 – “...God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

## Persevering Faith in Action

The pastor has spent many chapters preaching about how the Son is greater in every way to the Old Testament figures and practices. Now, as he reminds his hearers of their early confidence in their faith, he comes to the climax in Hebrews 11 – what many has called the Hall of Fame of Faith. He has just mentioned that we belong to those who have faith and are saved. What is faith and what does it look like in practice?

Anticipating these questions, the pastor gives us a great definition of faith – “Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Having faith in almighty God who has sent his Son to purify us from our sins through his sacrifices means to grasp hold and to have confidence

in this hope we have in Christ. We have assurance about these things that we do not see – these promises of God that he has given to us in Christ. It means to live our lives in a way that we take hold of what is promised by God as something real and solid, even though we may not see it yet. We live today as if those promises are true in our lives – because they are true! So even though the promises will be fulfilled in the future, it affects our lives today.

The pastor then shows us what this looks like in action. He goes chronologically through the Old Testament storyline and lists out all the different characters and shows how they lived out their life in faith. He particularly focuses on Abraham and Moses – (1) Abraham by faith followed God’s call to go to a unknown foreign country, (2) Moses by faith chose to identify with the people of God, instead of being part of the royal court. After that, he summarises all the amazing things that the people of God had done throughout history *by faith in God*. He praises them highly with words that all of us should aspire for – these are people of whom the world was not worthy. However, this is not because they were so great in of themselves. This was because they had faith in the only one who is worthy – God almighty through the work of the Son applied by the Spirit.

It is no surprise that the major turning point in this grand panorama is the coming of Christ (12:1-3). The history of the past faithful reaches its grand finale in him. By his obedient perseverance he became both the ultimate example of endurance and the one sufficient to enable the faith – whether they lived before or after this coming – to reach the goal of their pilgrimage (11:39-40) and cross the finish line of their race (12:1-3). Thus, this mention of Christ assumes all the central section of Hebrews has said about his effectiveness as Savior. It is the centerpiece of the pastor’s history of the faithful just as the final Judgement (12:25-29) is its goal. With this return to Jesus in 12:1-3 the pastor completes what he began in 3:1-6.<sup>4</sup>

## Homework

**Read Hebrews 12.** As you read the chapter, highlight all the imperatives in the chapter.

## Bibliography

Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Eerdmans, 2012.

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<sup>4</sup> Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 515.