

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 197**

**Hebrews 11**

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Many Christians refer to Hebrews 11 as the “hall of faith.” The label is appropriate, but the chapter raises questions. Why did the Old Testament individuals listed in Hebrews 11 “make the cut”? Was there something extraordinary about them? This episode explores the relationship of this famous passage to its far less famous context: Heb 10:35-39. Those in the “hall of faith” are not there because they were shining examples of moral purity, or because they never had doubts about what God was doing, or because they weren’t tested. Rather, they are there because they all held fast to faith—they did not “shrink back” from their believing loyalty in what God had promised. Hebrews 11 illustrates that we must have faith in what God has done for us, not our performance.

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 197: Hebrews chapter 11. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Happy 2018, Mike!

**MH:** Yep, we finally made it. We have crossed the line.

**TS:** We're going to have to get used to saying 2018. It's never easy for me to switch gears, but here we are!

**MH:** My wife had to redo a couple checks today because she already forgot it. [laughter]

**TS:** That's all right.

**MH:** That's just the way it goes. What can you do?

**TS:** Real quickly, I just wanted to remind everybody that we're calling for Hebrews questions specifically. We're going to do a Q&A on that if we get enough good questions, at the end of our covering of Hebrews. Email me (treystricklin@gmail.com). Hopefully we'll pick a few that can add to the conversation on the book of Hebrews. And Mike, I guess with chapter 11, what

do you think is the over/under of you saying the word "faith"... ? [laughter] What's the spread on you saying the word "faith" for chapter 11 here?

**MH:** Probably 40 or so times. Are you going to count 'em?

**TS:** I'm going to say the over/under is 50 and a half. We'll get Brenda to count 'em for us. We'll see. Are you going to take the over or are you going to take the under?

**MH:** I'll take the over.

**TS:** I was going to go over. Do we need to go like 60?

**MH:** No, 50 is a good number.

**TS:** All right. Fifty and a half.

**MH:** All right, I'll take the under so you can take the over. How about that?

**TS:** Sounds good.

**MH:** So do we win anything?

**TS:** Well, no, because you could dictate who wins, because if you're getting close to 50 mentally, you can stop saying it.

**MH:** I'll never be able to count that.

**TS:** I don't know, do we put something on the line here for this?

**MH:** You could dub in a sound or something [laughs]... I don't know.

**TS:** We'll have to think of something. I don't know.

**MH:** Yeah, well, we could top that because it's Hebrews 11. I remember as a fairly new Christian, the first time I read the chapter I just thought it was awesome. This was the only really extensive passage in scripture that I really tried to memorize. It's a long chapter. I think I got basically the whole thing. That was in the King James, though, so I may lapse into King James quoting part of this, even though I use the ESV for the podcast. If that happens, you'll know why.

We're going to go through the whole chapter. I'm not going to read it all ahead of time. We're just going to spend a little time here in the very first verse because it's foundational (really the first few verses). Then we'll work our way through the chapter. There's something specific as we read through the chapter that I want

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people to be thinking about that ties into the last episode of our series on Hebrews. So if you listened to that, I sort of dropped a little something at the end about the nature/character—the kind of people—that wind up in Hebrews 11. I'm going to be repeating that here, and I'm going to keep returning to the theme because I think it's an important lesson. These were not supermen and superwomen. They were actually pretty ordinary.

Let's just jump in here to the first verse, again, reading ESV:

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

That's the first verse. We're going to stop there. Right away, we need to talk about faith (*pistis*) in Greek. The context for this, lo and behold, is the immediately preceding verses, which would be Hebrews 10:35-39. I'm going to read those verses because when the writer jumps into "Now faith..." here in chapter 11, he's thinking about what he just wrote. So here's the end of Hebrews 10, verses 35-39:

**<sup>35</sup> Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. <sup>37</sup> For,**

**"Yet a little while,  
and the coming one will come and will not delay;**

**<sup>38</sup> but my righteous one shall live by faith,  
and if he shrinks back,  
my soul has no pleasure in him."**

**<sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.**

Now, you could go back again to the end of chapter 10. We talked about these verses. It's the same thing that we've been talking about: faith is not just sort of an intellectual assent (you pray a little prayer, you turn the gospel into an incantation, and then we're done with that now and I can more or less believe anything I want to from that point forward because I said the magic words). Faith is enduring. You have to believe, and you have to keep believing. The kind of faith that the writer of Hebrews is talking about—the saving faith he's talking about—is not an incantation. It's something that endures—that persists—despite struggles, despite doubt, despite persecution, despite our own character flaws, despite moral failures. Because the gospel has nothing to do with achieving moral perfection or having more moral pluses than minuses. That is not the point. It's about believing, and believing in an enduring, tenacious way.

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So the faith here is of a different quality than we might be thinking about. It's more, as well, than wishful thinking. In other words, if we're talking about faith and belief, the writer is not talking about wishful thinking, as in a sentence like, "I believe the Bills can win the Superbowl." Or "*I believe the Bills can win the Superbowl.*" In other words, it's something you hope happens—that you wish for. This is something different, because all the way through the book of Hebrews, the writer (and he's going to do it again here in this chapter) has grounded faith... He uses words like "belief" and "confidence" and "assurance." He's going to do it here in the first few verses of Hebrews 11. He doesn't ground it in our wishes. He grounds it in the realities of what Jesus has done and our belief that Jesus has done what is necessary and that's the end of the story—and that we continue in that belief. We have believing loyalty to what Christ has done—to the cross event—and that is what salvation is about.

So it's not wishful thinking. It's also not intellectual resignation, as in a sentence like, "Well, given no better alternative, I believe so." That's not it, either. It is a firm assurance that endures. This faith, to quote Hebrews 10 (to draw on Hebrews 10 because this is what's in the writer's head when he says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for..."), doesn't shrink back. It doesn't shrink back—that's the language of Hebrews 10. It doesn't shrink back from the confidence the writer has talked about to this point—in other words, the object or the basis of belief.

Now let's go back real quickly to Hebrews 3:6.

**<sup>6</sup> but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.**

Verse 14 of Hebrews 3:

**<sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.**

Hebrews 10, back a little further in verse 19:

**<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus...**

The writer has been talking about confidence. Again, it's not confidence in our performance. It's not confidence that we have more pluses than minuses. It's not confidence that we never have any questions or we don't get angry or God or we don't question what God is doing. We're going to do that, of course, because—news flash—we aren't God. We're also not omniscient. We don't know everything

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that's going on or what God intends. None of these things are what this is about. This kind of faith is a tenacity. It's a persistence—a persistent belief, a persistent believing loyalty in what Jesus has done at the cross event. And then that becomes the basis for confidence—not something we've done, not something we've talked ourselves into, not something we wish, not something we sort of resign ourselves to because we can't see a better alternative. It is confidence in something done for us, not something we do or something we can understand in terms of it clearing out struggle and frustration. So it's a not-shrinking-back. That's the quality that's characteristic of all the examples that follow.

10:00

This is what I want people to latch onto in this episode. The Hall of Faith (as Hebrews 11 is called)... All of the people that are listed as examples in this chapter have one thing in common. Well, they have more than one thing in common. Except for Enoch (because he's taken off Earth), they all have struggles. They were suffering. They had moral lapses—a number of them. They had lapses in judgment—a number of them. But they're still here! They're still in this list! It wasn't about the perfection of their performance or that their performance was mostly good and less bad. What they share at the end of the day—the reason they're in—is that their faith persisted. They never shrank back—they never forsook their faith. They never forsook their believing loyalty in the promises of God and what God was doing, as opposed to what they were doing. They're not examples, to put it negatively... The people listed in Hebrews 11 are not examples of never having a problem, never making a bad decision, never sinning. Quite the contrary. They are examples of (positively) never trading in their faith, never worshiping another god (or no God at all), and they maintain belief despite life—despite persecution, doubt, and their own failure. So to go back to Hebrews 11:1...

### **Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for...**

Assurance here (interestingly enough, and building on what I just said) is the same word as "confidence" in one of the verses we just read (Hebrews 3:14). It's the same word. And again, interestingly enough, it's the same word that occurs in Hebrews 1:3, which we didn't read and I'll read now. Speaking of Jesus:

**<sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**

The word here for "assurance" in Hebrews 11:1 is *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασις)—same as in Hebrews 3:14, where it's translated "confidence." Here, it's the idea of Jesus in a qualitative sense... Jesus is the exact representation. It's a little hard to capture in the wording because "confidence" doesn't really work. Again, he is the imprint. Jesus is the imprint of God's *hypostasis*—God's nature, God's reality.

Jesus is the exact imprint of the reality of God. That's really what the term is used to convey there in Hebrews 1. So recalling all that, Jesus is the objective reality of the glory of God—of the nature of God, the character of God. And by using this term (*hypostasis*) in Hebrews 1 about Jesus being the objective reality of God and then using it here in Hebrews 11, he ties the two thoughts together. He ties Hebrews 1 and Hebrews 11. Hebrews 1 is about Jesus, Hebrews 11 is about the faith as our assurance of things hoped for—which, of course, is grounded in Jesus. So by using the term in both places, the writer wants us to see that the object of our faith is an objective reality whose name was Jesus. And that is why we should be confident, and that is the thing that is the object of our faith. That's the source of our confidence and our assurance—not our performance, but on what Jesus (who is, again, the exact imprint and the objective reality of God to us) did. Not what we do, but what he did at the cross event.

Luke Timothy Johnson in his commentary has a little thing in it here about this that I want to read, tying in Hebrews 11 with this thought and even what follows in Hebrews 12. He says:

The heroes of faith here presented are precisely the models they are to imitate, culminating in the “pioneer and perfecter of faith,” Jesus himself (12:1–3).

Not surprisingly, then, this recitation strikes certain notes repeatedly, echoing exhortations from earlier in the composition (especially 10:19–39) and building to the climactic exhortation in chapter 12. . . . (Heb 12:1-3).

15:00 Let's just think about Hebrews 1-11, in terms of chapters. It begins with Jesus as the *hypostasis*—the objective reality of God to us, to humankind. And because of what that person (what Jesus) does... We've talked about incarnation a lot because Hebrews talks about incarnation a lot. We've talked about Jesus' role as high priest. We've talked about the cross event. But because of what this person did (this person who is the objective reality of God and God's will and what God wants and the salvation God offers)—all of that—then we can have confidence. Again, it's the same term! It just gets translated in different ways. There's this objective thing—this thing that's real.

And so the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 is saying that our faith is a thing that's real because the object of it is real—it was Jesus who did this stuff on the cross. He ties the two things together. But interestingly enough, if we're thinking about chapters 1-11, it begins with Jesus' incarnation, priesthood, all this kind of stuff (the objective reality of the cross event) and you get up here to chapter 11 and then we have examples of people refusing to shrink back from that confidence. They're refusing to shrink back from believing loyalty in the cross event. In other words, they're refusing to worship any other god or no God at all. Believing loyalty. Again, that's the phrase I use in *Unseen Realm* and I use it a lot here on the podcast. That is what salvation is: believing loyalty. It's not believing

performance. It's not believing doubtlessness or never-having-a-question-ness (if that's a word, and of course it's not). It's believing loyalty. It's saying, "This is the means of salvation and there is no other, and this is where I'm at, come what may." That's what it's about. And it's interesting... You go through all those 11 chapters and then you hit chapter 12 (as Luke Timothy Johnson just said) and what does the writer write?

**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...**

He goes right back to him. He's the basis for the whole thing. Now back to verse 1 [Hebrews 11]:

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

Lane has a nice comment here. This is from the Word Biblical Commentary. He writes:

The second clause ["the conviction of things not seen"], which stands in apposition to the first, is equally daring: faith demonstrates the existence of reality that cannot be perceived through objective sense perception. As the complement to *ὑπόστασις*, "reality," [this objective reality] *ἔλεγχος* [translated "conviction"] must be understood in the objective sense of "proof" or "demonstration," the evidential character that deprives uncertainty of any basis.

Why do we have this assurance? Because our faith is in an objective reality and the objective reality that is God to humanity (that's Jesus), and the objective reality of what was done at the cross—the death and burial, and of course, then the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Hebrews talks about all these things—especially resurrection and ascension there in chapter 1.

**After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...**

That phrasing has occurred several times in the book of Hebrews. So this is not a wishful thought. It's not a resignation. It's a confidence in something done for us that basically it was God's plan, Jesus did it, and that's good enough. Not a performance-based system or way of looking at things. Luke Timothy Johnson comments again (going back to his commentary). He's going to comment on this *ἔλεγχος* term that Lane just did. This is the only time in the New Testament where

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that particular term occurs, so it gets some attention from scholars. Luke Timothy Johnson has this to say about it. He says:

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This is the only occurrence of the noun in the New Testament. In the wider Greek world, the noun has two meanings. The first is the same as the verb form *elenchein* that is used in the New Testament (1 Cor 14:24; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2) in its sense of reproof or reproach (see also Homer, *Od.* 21.329; Prov 12:1; 13:8; 15:10; Wis 2:14; 11:6). This clearly cannot be the meaning here. The second meaning of the Greek noun is an argument of disputation or refutation through cross-examination (Plato, *Phaedrus* 276A; Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1410A; Philo, *On Punishments* 4). But it can also be used in the sense of a proof or demonstration (Plato, *Apology* 39C), or even for evidence used in a proof (Thucydides 1.135).

Like sort of a legal kind of argument. So Jesus is both the objective reality of God and the objective proof of that reality. Jesus is both the object (the basis of the faith) and he's the evidence of the faith. It all goes back to the cross event. None of these terms have anything to do with human performance. Period. That's not even in the picture. It's not even on the radar. But yet for us and for so many Christians, it is. This is how we think about salvation. "Yeah, I prayed a prayer, but now I've fallen into sin. I need to stop doing that, either so that God can give me my salvation back," assuming that we lost it because of our moral imperfection, which is to misunderstand the gospel, or "I know God didn't take it away, but I need to do this, that, or the other thing so God still loves me like he did before—so I can keep God happy with me." Usually when it gets to that kind of talk, it's not repenting of sin, it's doing works. "I need to observe these particular days. I need to read my Bible X number of minutes. I need to be in church X number of minutes. I need to do, do, do, do, do to keep God happy with me. That is a complete misunderstanding, not only of the gospel, but also of the nature of God. Your performance—your activity, your behavior, your busyness— isn't what gives God a loving disposition toward you. Because God had that while we were yet sinners. It just doesn't make any sense, but this is where our minds drift all the time.

Now as we go through these examples... Those were preliminary comments. I'll just read the first few verses again because we're going to get into actual examples here.

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.<sup>2</sup> For by it the people of old received their commendation. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.**



We're not going to lapse into verse 3. We've talked a little bit about the "universe" word there in verse 3 back in Hebrews 1—that it can be plural and plural "worlds" and all that stuff. If you're interested in that rabbit-trail you can go back there, but we're going to just jump into the actual examples, because this is what I want the takeaway to be from this episode as we go through the rest of the chapter. *Notice how one or more of the following items applies to each person listed in the Hall of Faith of Hebrews 11: suffering, moral failure, and doubt.* There's only one exception—that's Enoch, because he was taken and we have next-to-nothing said about him. But you're going to find with everybody else that somewhere in their life—somewhere in the biblical story—you're going to have one or more of those three things. As you're familiar with these personalities, you're also going to notice that giving up the faith applies to none of them, because that's what this is about. It's about believing loyalty. So jumping into verse 4:

**<sup>4</sup>By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.**

He suffered for doing the right thing, for believing the right thing, for honoring God and believing whatever it was that God told them to do. We're not given much information in Genesis 4, but Abel's heart—the reason that he did what he did and did it in a certain way—was acceptable to God. Again, we're not told about any conversation related to sacrifice. We're just not given information way back in Genesis. But his sacrifice is acceptable and Cain's was not, and he suffers for it. We don't have in the biblical story (and we certainly don't have any indication here) that when Abel came under attack, that all of a sudden he changed his believing loyalty. No—that's just not part of the story. Based on Hebrews 11 here, that didn't happen. He endured.

**<sup>5</sup>By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. <sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**

Notice here: faith and pleasing God are connected, and pleasing God is also, in turn, connected with the idea of drawing near to God and seeking God. So pleasing God has something to do, in this context, with having a relationship. Now, that's important because this passage has been taken by some as an indication that we're going to talk about lost people here—people who are outside of Christ, who aren't believers. This verse has been taken by some as an indication that lost people can never please God—ever. Ever, ever, ever. That everything a lost person does draws the wrath of God or turns it up a notch. That

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is also tied to a certain view of depravity. If you think I'm caricaturing things, let me read you a quotation here. This is from Reymond's *Systematic Theology*. He comes from the Reformed tradition, and he writes:

Because man is totally or pervasively corrupt, he is incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption. He is unable to discern, to love, or to choose the things that are pleasing to God.

Well, if we're talking about doing something thinking that you're going to merit God's favor, well, of course God's not going to be happy with that. But this notion that a lost person can't do anything that God would approve of is, I think, nonsense. I'm going to quote here from a section of my *60 Second Scholar*, book 3—a little entry on this. Please don't send me emails about, "Why can't I get the *60 Second Scholar* books?" You can Google it or search on my website and you'll find out what's going on with the series. The series will be re-released in May. But I wrote this:

Several verses are offered to support this contention [this idea that a lost person can never please God], most notably Rom. 8:7-8: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

The problem is that this idea—and its understanding of passages like Rom. 8:7-8—is flatly contradicted by other passages. Acts 10, the story of the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius, is perhaps the best case in point. Cornelius was a "God fearer," a man who respected Judaism and its God, but who nevertheless had never heard the gospel. When Peter heard how Cornelius was visited by an angel—who commanded him to summon the apostle to his home—Peter exclaimed: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35).

**I guess Peter hadn't read Romans 8 or Reymond's *Systematic Theology*!**

The passage is clear. While no one can please God in the sense of meriting salvation (see Day 25), unsaved people can please God—they can do things that are acceptable to God. Paul said the same thing in Rom. 2:14 [Paul's the guy who wrote Romans 8, by the way], that Gentiles not possessing God's law nevertheless at times do what's in the law. It's incoherent to think that a Gentile who lives in accord with God's law at any given moment is displeasing God by doing so. The point of Rom. 8:7-8 is to contrast those controlled by the Spirit versus the flesh—with respect to lifestyle and being a child of God. It's not that unbelievers can never do anything that pleases God. Cornelius shows us otherwise.

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Again, I would suggest to you that the lost person who refuses to cheat on his wife... They may not understand the gospel and may not believe it, but they're thinking, "I agree with that Ten Commandment stuff and I just don't think I should cheat on my wife. If there is a God, I think this is a good point, so I'm not going to cheat on my wife." So God looks at that and says, "Oh, I'm even angrier!" We understand that a works mentality to try to cajole God into giving you salvation... God's not going to approve of that. He's not going to be happy with it. But when the Gentiles do the things that are written in the law because they have the law of God written on their hearts, God isn't angry when people follow his rules for righteousness and justice. They're not going to solve the sin problem; they're not going to close the gap that is there because of your estrangement from God. You don't work your way to heaven. That's clear. But God is honored when people who don't even have the law do it because they have this law of God written on their hearts. God likes when people obey him, but he knows if they're thinking, "When I obey God, God's going to have to give me something in return." That's going to irritate God. But that's not what every situation is. Every situation doesn't devolve into that.

Let's go back again and think about, what do we mean by "pleasing God?" Making God happy? What do we mean by *that*? Do we mean to produce agreement or satisfaction? When the writer of Hebrews says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God," what's going on here? Without faith it's impossible to make God happy? What would that even mean? What's happiness? Do we mean to produce agreement or satisfaction—to gratify? Without faith it is impossible to get God to gleefully accept a person, as though there's nothing wrong with their relationship? What do we mean by "happiness?" What do we mean by "pleasing?" Again, I would say God would certainly agree with a lost person's decision to follow the law of God. He'd be gratified. He'd be glad. But that doesn't mean the act of obedience solves the problem of right relationship. Relationship is really what's being talked about in this passage in verse 6.

**<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**

It's about having the relationship. This is what God really wants. It doesn't mean God is so pleased that anyone has earned salvation, does a good thing, gets into heaven by doing a particular good thing. That just isn't what the picture is. I would suggest this: Why don't we define "pleasing God" here (God's happiness) as a state of being content? "Without faith, it's impossible to have God be content." Think of happiness and being pleased in the sense of being content. Without believing, it's just not possible to make God satisfied—to make God happy, in the sense of being content. Why? Because what he wants most of all is for you to believe. That's what he wants most from every person. He wants relationship, and the relationship hinges upon faith—belief. So yeah, without faith it really is impossible for God to be content or for God to be happy in that sense of

fulfillment—that everything's okay now. That requires faith. God can look at a lost person and say, "Yep, I'm glad you didn't cheat on your wife. I'm glad you didn't do X, Y, Z. This shows you have a sense of my justice. Even if you don't have the law of God, it's written on your heart. You know right from wrong. This is something I've woven into the fabric of the world." When God sees someone doing the right thing in living according to his principles of justice and righteousness... God isn't angry when people obey him. But it doesn't fill God up. God is still empty if there's no relationship, if we can put it that way. God is still not happy. He's still not content because there's no relationship. For that you need faith—you need believing loyalty. I think that's what the point of the passage is.

To get back to our examples, we'll continue on into verse 7. Again, as we go through these, notice how one or more of these items applies to each person: suffering, moral failure, or doubt. We're up to Noah in verse 7.

**<sup>7</sup> By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.**

Now, you notice that Noah's believing loyalty there is a precursor to the flood—it's pre-flood. Noah doesn't have perfect moral character thereafter. We have the episode with drunkenness in Genesis 9. Does that invalidate his faith? Does it disqualify him? No, he's still in Hebrews 11. Again, his moral imperfection isn't the issue. It's his believing loyalty—his faith—that's the issue. Verse 8:

**<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.**

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Abraham—a perfect, moral, upright character here? You have the whole incident with Hagar. He decides that he wants to redefine or maybe second-guess or

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maybe take matters into his own hands about fulfilling the promise of God. He goofs. He blows it. God has to rebuke him.

Sarah doesn't believe that she's going to have a son. Genesis 18—she laughs when she hears it! But she came around, she understood. And she's in Hebrews 11, as well. Both of them... Abraham lies about Sarah being his half-sister and so on. He shades the truth; he lies. He does these things. He makes his own contribution to God's plan and messes that up. But none of these things are the issue. None of those things are the issue. The issue is their believing loyalty. They didn't throw their faith—their believing loyalty—to some other deity or no God at all. They believed, even when it was hard. Verse 13:

**<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.**

**<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." <sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.**

Let's just stop here. Abraham is tested by God, with the whole episode of offering up Isaac there in Genesis 22. And the comment is made here that he considered that God was able to raise him up from the dead. Does the passage say that Abraham never had a question, never had a doubt? "What's God going to do? Man, if I offer up Isaac, how does that *work*, because God told me it's through Isaac that all these descendants... as the stars in the sky (back to the covenant promise)... that all of that's going to come from Isaac. I know it's Isaac and nobody else because I messed up with Hagar and God had to call me on the carpet for that—that Isaac was the child of promise. So if I kill him, how does that work?" If you don't think Abraham at least asked that question ("how does this work?"), I think you're deluding yourself. Having questions—having uncertainties—is not unbelief. The writer of Hebrews has told us consistently how he defines unbelief, and that is bagging it—going somewhere else, turning to another god or no God at all—just saying, "I do not believe." The operative words aren't, "I have a question. I don't understand. I'm just not sure." Those are all

different than saying, "I don't believe this." Again, the issue at the end of the day is, do you believe?

We could rabbit-trail here a little bit, and I think it's a little bit worth it. Is this discernable from the Old Testament account—this whole idea of Abraham... you can't really say "figuring it out," but sort of presuming that, "Well, I'm going to go through with this, because even if I offer up Isaac and kill him, God has to be faithful to this promise, so I guess God will bring him back from the dead." To me, that's not a stretch. We can't look back at the Old Testament account and say that there's something cryptically there and we're going to be able to figure this out—that Abraham was certain. Here's what you can't say: that Abraham was *certain* that he knew how this was going to turn out. But he did believe what God had said (God's promises)—that God would deliver. He could have reasoned that God would raise up Isaac after he was dead. After all, God had produced Isaac supernaturally in the first place, and Isaac was to be the means by which the original covenant promises were fulfilled (Genesis 12:1-3). So I don't think Abraham would necessarily have known exactly what was going to happen here or how God would do it, but I do believe that he believed God would do something to keep his promise. I think that's what the writer of Hebrews is alluding to.

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Now if you go back to Genesis 22, I would also say that I don't think Abraham was lying to the servant in Genesis 22:5. If you remember the scene, they get to the place where the sacrifice is going to occur and you read this in verse 5:

**<sup>5</sup> Then Abraham said to his young men [servants], "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."**

All the verbs there are plural. "I and the boy... we will go over there... we will worship, and we will come again to you." It hints at Abraham believing that God would do *something* here. We can't really necessarily say Abraham had this whole thing figured out. I would think he had questions, obviously. But he believed God would make it good. And if you think about it, that's really a great illustration of what the writer of Hebrews is asking his readers/hearers would do. You're going to have questions. In Abraham's case, he also had moral failures. This is just reality. This is life. But believe. Just *believe!* Believe God will do what he said he would do. In the case of the context of the book of Hebrews, what God said he would do is that he would give you eternal life. He would make you part of his family (this goes back to Hebrews 1 and 2). He would make you part of his family on the basis of what happened to Jesus at the cross and his resurrection and his ascension to complete the job/task. So what we're asked to believe is that God was satisfied with Jesus doing what he told Jesus to do—actually what he and Jesus had agreed to do (back to Hebrews 10 from the last episode). That's the basis for our confidence. It's not in what we do, it's what's done for us.

Back to verse 20. Again, be thinking about each one of these characters suffering moral failure or doubt.

**<sup>20</sup> By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. <sup>21</sup> By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. <sup>22</sup> By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.**

Do you think Isaac and Jacob never had questions—never had doubts—about what was going on? Look at the whole Joseph situation—the whole story there. Basically, what do you think Isaac is thinking with the way Jacob treats Esau and how that whole thing deteriorates? Their whole relationship with each other just burns up in flames in front of his eyes. Esau wants to kill him, Rachel has to send Jacob away... It's a chaotic household! I'm sure Isaac's thinking, "Well, good grief! This doesn't look real good here. I didn't figure that this was going to be the way things turned out. We're following the true God here. Why isn't life better?" It's very natural for life to just get in the way. Joseph suffered terribly, but he never turned his believing loyalty to anybody else—to any other god or not God at all. Verse 23 (talk about someone with moral failure... Moses is superseded there only by David, but Moses has lots of problems):

**<sup>23</sup> By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. <sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter [so he has some sense of what his heritage is!], <sup>25</sup> choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.**

In other words, he had figured that out before he killed the Egyptian.

**<sup>26</sup> He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. <sup>27</sup> By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king [that was certainly justified], for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. <sup>28</sup> By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.**

He's just sounds spectacular, doesn't he? He's a murder. When God calls him, he hems and haws endlessly about it. He doesn't believe that God... He makes all sorts of excuses about why he's not the one, why he can't do this, why he can't do that. "I need help." He's a *whiner!* He's sort of a faithless whiner when it

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comes to this particular task. But at the end of the day, he goes. He believes that God will do what he said he'd do. And God condescends to him. We had a whole episode on this about the Melchizedek priesthood and God giving Moses Aaron as a concession to help Moses out. God is gracious to him. We're not going to rehearse all that territory, but at the end of the day, Moses says, "Okay, got it. We're good now. God gave me some help. We can do this. God's going to be with us." At the end of the day, he does believe. And then when he sees God work, his faith gets stronger. He's not just stuck in that whole problem of doubt. But he goes through it. Lo and behold, he winds up in Hebrews 11.

This line about "he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" has drawn a lot of attention because we don't get words like *Christos* in the Old Testament—"Christ." We get *mashiach*, but we don't get that vocabulary anywhere in Exodus in the Moses story. So it looks like the New Testament writer is intentionally tying Jesus to the whole situation. That is probably a bit of an overstatement here, because this idea of "considering the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" refers to Moses' disposition—his decision before the Sinai event and before the burning bush. So this, likely, is not an allusion to some Second Power (Second Yahweh figure) encounter because of the chronology of what we're dealing with here. I like the way Hagner approaches and summarizes this. He writes:

The reference to Christ is an **anachronism** explained by the final clause of verse 26: "for he was looking to the reward." As we have repeatedly seen, an essential quality of having faith is being motivated by the future and the unseen [MH: believing that it's going to be real]. The basis for the anachronistic statement is located in the unity of salvation history and the unity of God's people. When Moses suffered reproach because he was loyal to God's people (v. 25), in effect he suffered reproach for being loyal to God's Messiah, who is so closely identified with God's people. The anachronism very deliberately has the readers in mind, since they are the ones called by their faithfulness to bear the reproach of Christ (see 13:13). The reward that Moses would enjoy in the future, and that he counted upon in his faith, was far greater than the treasures Egypt had to offer.

That's just another way of saying that the anachronism here is deliberate on the part of the writer because the writer wants to connect loyalty to God and loyalty to God's people (which, of course, is certainly characteristic of what Moses was about)... He wants to connect all that with the messiah because the messiah was a representative of God's people. The messiah was the individual son of... the collective son of God, which was Israel. All these themes... If you've read *Unseen Realm*, some of this should be familiar to you. The writer wants to connect these associations with messiah to Moses and his readers. That's going to matter, because they're the ones being called upon to essentially behave like Moses did—to consider the reproach of Christ, or to consider their faith decision—that it will lead to something superior/better than the world has to offer. And even more



importantly, something better than any other god has to offer, or no God at all. In other words, we're back to the same theme of tenaciously believing, and Moses becomes an example of that. Back to verse 29. Again, be thinking how these things apply to each person: suffering, moral failure, doubt. Here's a good one in verse 29:

**<sup>29</sup> By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land,**

Think about [laughs] how many times the Israelites complained and moaned and whined. *But* when God opens up the sea—when he parts the waters—they do go through. They believe. They see it; they believe it. They've put their lives on the line. They could be thinking, "Boy, we go in here and what's going to happen?" They do it; they believe.

**<sup>29</sup> By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. <sup>30</sup> By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.**

Do you think any of the Israelites there going around the city in their little parade are wondering, "What in the world is God going to do?" Do you think they ever had a question? They're doing by faith what God asked them to do. They are believing. They're not stopping halfway through and thinking, "Aw, this is kind of silly. If we had a better god, we wouldn't be doing ridiculous stuff like this." They're not thinking that. They believed that God will do something in response to his own promise that he would. They believe there's something to it.

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**<sup>30</sup> By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. <sup>31</sup> By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish...**

Moral failure, okay? She's not a believer initially—she's a Canaanite.

**<sup>31</sup> By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.**

We could go back to the Jericho story, and it's very clear that Rahab is in the party (the very small party) that believes this is the true God. "We've heard about what's going on here—what happened to the Egyptians—we've heard about that." And she's like, "I want to be on the side of that god. That god is God." That's why she's here. She shows her faith by welcoming the spies. She doesn't earn salvation by not reporting the two Israelite spies. God doesn't look at her and say, "You're in. You're just over the hump there. That was a good performance so I'm going to give you eternal life." No, what she does illustrates the fact that she believes. It shows what she believes. She believes that the

power here is with this god. Any god who can do this IS God. That's why she's in Hebrews 11. Verse 32... Here we get a good bunch of characters:

<sup>32</sup>**And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon,**

Doubt, please! How many times did this guy doubt?

**Barak,**

He wasn't like the pinnacle of courage. He had some problems with that. He had some doubts there.

**Samson,**

Hello! Moral judgment?

**Jephthah,**

Here's another screw-up, and he winds up sacrificing his daughter because he's a theological idiot. He's not a theologian—let's just put it that way. Jephthah is not the guy you go to with your theological questions. He's a screw-up. He's got some good qualities, but having all his theological ducks in a row is not one of them. But he knows where his believing loyalty is. He knows which God he has aligned himself with, and he's not budging. He doesn't know a whole lot, but he's not moving.

**of David**

Fill in the blank with David's offenses.

**and Samuel and the prophets—**

There are issues of suffering there. You could say there are issues of moral judgment on Samuel's part because his kids are so awful. You have to read between the lines there, but scripture does make the notation that Samuel's sons were evil. Samuel does get scared when God tells him in 1 Samuel 16 to go anoint David. This is when God has to come up with a ruse for Samuel's sake, to put his fears at ease (1 Samuel 16). Again, these aren't perfect people. You can spot problems with the prophets and questions, doubts—suffering, certainly, with the prophets. You get the whole list. Verse 33:

**<sup>33</sup> [All of these people] who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.**

You think this list doesn't mean something to his readers and his listeners? This is the Diaspora! They are scattered and under persecution. This is exactly what they need to hear.

**<sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— <sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.**

I'd love to hear somebody in the Prosperity Gospel circle preach this passage. "Oh, they just didn't have enough faith." Pardon me, but this is Hebrews 11! They had enough faith. They had the faith that mattered. They had the faith that leads to eternal life, not that leads to gullibility so that you can be manipulated. These people are not super-human beings. They suffer like people today suffer. When these things are happening to them, it hurt. They could bleed, they could die, they got hungry. They're not super-human beings. Of course they would have had questions. Of course they would ask with Job, "Where are you, God? Why is this happening to me?" Look at Elijah. Good grief... He goes from one miracle and then he's running away from Jezebel. Like, "Where's your head at?" He gets scared! He worries. He has a question. But he never gives up. He never (to use the language of Hebrews 10) shrinks back from his faith. He does things that are less than admirable, but he never trades it in. He never bags it. That's the whole point of the chapter.

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You get to the end here, in verse 39:

**<sup>39</sup> And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us,**

Two important words: for us. "God had provided something better *for us*." Again, do you think his listeners need to hear that? Do you think they need to have it sink into their heads? Of course.

**...God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.**

I like the way Hagner puts this, and Lane. I'm going to read you two excerpts here because I like the way they express this connection between the people in Hebrews 11 from the Old Testament, who are all commended for their faith but they never received what was promised because God had provided something better for *us*.

**...that apart from *us* they should not be made perfect.**

We're connected to them. This has something to do with a plan of God. God had something going on here in his mind. So Hagner writes this:

As wonderful as God's work was in the past, it pales in comparison with what God now has done in Christ. We have reached a new stage in the history of salvation. This is modestly expressed as "something better for us" (v. 40). We have repeatedly seen the word "better" in Hebrews used to describe the advantages of the new covenant over the old.

Let me stop there and just editorially say, "Hey, if it's better, then you should want that instead of the thing that isn't as good." Back to the quote:

But now our author insists that those of the past also will participate in these better things. Old covenant saints and new covenant saints have the same inheritance.

I'm sorry if that offends your eschatology, like "two peoples of God" and that kind of stuff, because that is, frankly, a bogus idea. Hagner is correct, and he's basing it off the comments here in these two verses.

Old covenant saints and new covenant saints have the same inheritance. The result is that those of the past cannot be brought to the ultimate goal ("be made perfect") apart from us. In the grand story of salvation, all will come together to enjoy one great final and perfect salvation perfectly realized. This will be the reward of those who believed and who expressed their faith, so giving faith substance and providing evidence of the unseen and of things yet to come.

Anyone watching—anyone paying attention. That's Hagner. Now, Lane puts it this way about these last two verses:

In its context, v 40 places the emphasis on the final realization of the relationship with God. The writer has argued that the sacrifice of Christ secured all that is necessary for the enjoyment of the eschatological blessing of **τελείωσις**, “perfection”: a definitive putting away of sin, consecration to the service of God, and glorification.

**Christ has secured all of that. That's what's necessary.**

It is therefore clear that the perfecting of faithful men and women under the old covenant depended upon the sacrificial death of Jesus; the promised eternal inheritance that was offered to them has become attainable only by virtue of Christ's sacrifice (cf. 9:15). The exemplary witnesses of the old covenant were denied the historical experience of the messianic perfection as a totality. But now that Christ has accomplished his high priestly ministry, they too will share in its blessings.

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Don't miss the point. The overall point—the takeaway—here as we close: The Hall of Faith isn't filled with super-men and super-women. They suffered, they had doubts, they had moment of weakness, moral failures, and whatnot. But they never shrank back from believing. That's why they're there. They believed in spite of their circumstances, which is what the writer of Hebrews hopes for his hearers and his readers. The goal isn't that they perform better. It's that they keep believing.

**TS:** Mike, I don't know how we could say it any clearer than that. Faith is faith, and with all the science and technology that we have today and people trying to merge the two... Faith is faith. It is what it is.

**MH:** It's not performance, it's not omniscience, it's not having the answer to every question. [laughs] It is what it is.

**TS:** It's not having all the answers—it's faith. It is what it is. All right, Mike. I think you went over on the 50 and a half.

**MH:** So you won!

**TS:** Maybe, we'll find out!

**MH:** We'll look for Brenda to be the referee there!

**TS:** There you good. All right, Mike. That was a good one. We're getting close to the end of Hebrews, and then we'll have our 200th episode and then we'll have some single topics. Shortly after that, we'll vote on the next book. I'm curious to see what it may be. Hopefully we'll stay in the New Testament, but maybe we'll

journey back into the Old, and a long one. I'll bet Jeremiah wins, Mike. I don't know...

**MH:** [laughs] Well, we could change things up, too, and throw some other things in there. You never know.

**TS:** Sure, we could. All right, Mike. Chapter 12 next week. With that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.