

The Hall of Faith

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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,

¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

²⁰ By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.

²¹ By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of

- Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.
- ²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.
- ²³ 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.
- ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
- ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.
- ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.
- ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.
- ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.
- ²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.
- ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.
- ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.
- ³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets--
- ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice,

obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,
34 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.
35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some
were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might
rise again to a better life.
36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and
imprisonment.
37 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--
38 of whom the world was not worthy-- wandering about in
deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.
39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did
not receive what was promised,
40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart
from us they should not be made perfect."

12:1 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,
2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who
for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,
despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the
throne of God.

Hebrews 11:3-12:2

The Great Hall

SEVEN YEARS AGO, our family had the opportunity to take a three-week road trip out east. On our way home, I wanted to go to the [Pro-Football Hall of Fame](#). Since I had been on a trip with a car load of girls, I had stored up enough good credit going to see things like the Anne of Green Gables house and various educational reenactments like the Old Sturbridge Village, the Plymouth Plantation, and Jamestown that I got my wish (and the fact that one of the girls really wanted to go didn't hurt). So we headed on down the road to Canton, OH.

You arrive at this circular building with a very odd looking cone sticking out of the top. I think it is supposed to be a football, but it reminds you of a sports version of an ancient fortress and tower. When you go inside, you begin your tour. They take you on a hundred-year journey of the game's history. You start in the early days of leather helmets and make your way to the modern game of high tech equipment, the equivalent of going into battle with a hand full of rocks vs. full metal suit, sword, and steed. You go from the do-everything samurai who protected his mates

and played for the love of the game to the super specialized ninjas, modern hired assassins. Finally, you come to the hall proper where the bronze busts of nearly 300 of the very best players are proudly displayed for the love of all the fans. At its heart, the Hall isn't really about the game, but about honoring and praising the players who persevered through pain and proved themselves preeminent among all their peers. They are the best of the best.

Perhaps in more ways than just the look of the building is the Pro-Football Hall of Fame our countries version of the great medieval castles of Europe and Asia. Those strongholds take you back to ancient days when kings fought on the front lines and knights earned glory on the battlefield. Warriors would then begin to tell tales shrouded now by the mists of time. Songs were crafted by the bards of the great deeds of valor and heroism. These became the legends and stories of our grandfathers' grandfathers. Over time, someone would commission those stories be portrayed in giant tapestries to be hung in like spectacles in [the great hall](#). [“Here stands king so and so over the dead bodies of his enemies long ago.”](#) [“Here rides Sir Knight into the fray of a hopeless battle only to come through the last survivor.”](#)

Two halls separated by great lengths of time, but both telling the same basic story of a culture's heroes in battle.

Ancient writers had a way of erecting shrines like these not out of weapons or wall-hangings, but ink-wells and writing. They too were a kind of memorial of fame, but more than a memorial. These they used to powerfully persuade people of some point they wanted to make. The heroes served some greater purpose.

Quite popular among Greeks and Jews was the custom to compose **a list of exemplars**. Made up of famous heroes from the past, these were used to make an impassioned plea of some kind.¹ Deuteronomy starts off this way, recounting the long history of Israel from beginning to end, listing off people and events in summary fashion as a way of bringing the hearer to a climactic point that where they are right now is exactly where others have been in the past. It concludes, **“And now, O Israel, listen...” (Dt 4:1)**.

Hebrews has been doing this as well. You may

¹ **Michael R. Cosby**, “The Rhetorical Composition of Hebrews 11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988): 257-73. He cites 25 known lists. Quite a few are in Jewish literature (4 Ezra 7:106–111, Wisdom 10), including other places in the Bible (Dt 1-3; Ps 78; Ps 105). See also 3 Macc 2:2–20; Sirach 44-50; 1 Clement 4-6. Some of these are in the wonderful, Christ-centered article **Merland Ray Miller**, “What is the Literary Form Of Hebrews 11?”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 4 (1986): 410-17.

remember it saying, “Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard” (Heb 2:1). But Hebrews 11 takes this to a whole new level. This is why it is often said to be a great hall. Today, I want to look at the whole chapter—the hall if you will, while in weeks to come we will look at the individual heroes who line its walls.² What is this hall for? What is it made up of? What do we need to take away from it?

First, let’s look at **its composition**. Hebrews 11 stands out as the high rhetorical point of the whole sermon. It has been called “**famous and moving ... eloquent and majestic.**” Allow the form of the writing itself to become important to you, because surely this is one of the reasons the chapter is so memorable. It is trying to persuade you of something, and it is using the best traditions of the old orators to do so.

This is not just a willy-nilly list written down in haste, like he had forgotten to do his sermon until Saturday night and this was just space filler. The Apostle took his time, thinking through exactly what he wanted to say and how he

² As of this moment, my basic outline for future weeks will be to look at Faith and the Commendation (2, 4-6, 39). Faith and the Reward (7-16, 26-27, 39). Faith and Death/Suffering (17-27, 35-36, 39). Faith and obedience (28-31). Faith and the Old Testament (32-40). This is liable to change.

wanted to say it. He uses rhymes, similar word endings, alliteration—a multitude of literary devices in order to, in the words of Cicero, use speech to draw back his arm and with his hand whirl about to bring the sword down, slashing the hearer’s ear with long blows of verbal sound, while with the next figure piercing his heart through with quick and repeated sounds,³ so that you, the hearer, will utterly succumb to the power of his persuasion in how you have chosen to deliver your message. When you read this chapter, do you not feel lifted up to new heights to do exactly what he says for the fathers and mothers of old did? Much of this is because of the form of the writing.

Unfortunately, we English speakers can only get a hint of this in our language.⁴ Still, we do see hints. The most obvious is its use of a repetitious phrase (called anaphora).

³ Cicero, *Rhetoric: For Herennius* 4.19.26. Cited in Cosby, 264. This work is usually attributed to Cicero, but no one knows the actual author. Curiously, it dates to around 80 AD, making it perhaps contemporary with Hebrews.

⁴ This is the point of Cosby’s article, and it is an excellent introduction for the interested reader to see just how the biblical author uses the best of ancient rhetorical persuasion. Among other devices he uses anaphora, exempla, asyndeton, polysyndeton, paronomasia, isocolon, and antithesis (I had to look them all up myself). The point is, God’s word is hardly shy about employing worldly forms of communication, not because it feels the need to steal from the pagans such techniques and rely upon them, but because the pagans are simply capturing and learning about the way God himself wields the Sword and woos with his Word, even if they don’t give him the credit. The Bible is the greatest piece of *literature* ever written. But it is living literature, infused by the Life Giving Spirit and Word of God.

“By faith! By faith! By faith,” he cries some eighteen times only a dozen more verses. “By faith! By faith! By faith!” Nineteen, if you count the theological statement of the righteousness that comes by faith (11:7b). The rhythm generated by it gives the impression that you could listen to examples of it for the rest of your life. That is exactly what Hebrews 11 does with faith. This is why it has often been called the *Hall of Faith*.

A second thing he does is, like Deuteronomy, recount biblical history through the actions of the OT heroes. Some have called the chapter a moral retelling (called an *exempla*) of the Old Testament in order to get us to live the way they did. When connected to the catch phrase “by faith,” it teaches us in the words of one commentator, “God’s people have *always* lived by faith, believing that they would one day receive God’s promises which they could not see except through the eyes of faith.”⁵

Finally, it has been called an *encomium*, which is a work of literature written in praise of someone or something.⁶ But what is being praised? Is he praising their actions, showing

⁵ Michael R. Cosby, “The Rhetorical Composition of Hebrews 11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988): 261.

⁶ L. Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 201.

that faith is not alone, but is always accompanied with works, even if those works spring forth from faith alone? Is he praising their faith? Is it both? Is there something more going on?

At the very end of the list, after he has given over a dozen examples by name, he moves to this quick fly-over of others who get no name. These are the people who were sawn in two or were stoned or killed with the sword. The fact that they are nameless should be a sign that this isn't really about the people themselves.

The way this is written in Greek is almost poetic and the purpose is to reinforce that he would go on all day talking about this stuff, but he just doesn't have time:

Vs. 37:

elithasthēsan epristhēsan
en phonō machairēs apethanon periēlthon
en mēlōtais
en aigeiois dermasin
usteroumenoi
thlibomenoi
kakouchoumenoi

So he finishes his OT survey in a way that is memorable but

allows him to move on. For the fact of the matter is, he could go on all night like this. To make this point more practical, someone has said, “He understood what one of my seminary professors understood and continually reminded me of: the head can only comprehend what the seat of the pants can endure!”⁷

Let’s now look at our hall. First, let’s think about **what our text should be**. If you were going to teach your children about the Hall of Faith, where would you start and where would you end? Properly speaking, the list begins in **vs. 3**, with **vv. 1-2** as a definition of faith. Because of the chapter insertions, you would probably stop at the end of ch. 11. It seems natural to do this. However, if we were to do this, you would really miss the point of the Hall and how it is that these saints and their faith are not actually an end to themselves. Yes, there is beauty and encouragement and rapture and wonder when we look at what these saints did and endured. But looking only to them would be like being walking into the hall of the king, looking at the tapestries, but never noticing the throne at the end of the room where

⁷ Anthony T. Selvaggio, “Preaching Advice from the ‘Sermon’ to the Hebrews,” *Themelios* 32, no. 2 (2006): 43.

He is presently sitting. Therefore, we need to go through Hebrews 12:2 in our study of this amazing passage.

Finally, let's consider the four corners into which our various tapestries are arranged. These are **four ideas** that capture the essence of the faith of our fathers as found in the chapter. The first is **sacrifices**. The second is **suffering**. The third is **unseen**. The fourth is **resurrection**. What the various scenes will capture through past examples are the obedience, resilience, and hope that come from faith. But when we look beyond the tapestries to the throne, we find that all four have their climactic embodiment in the one who now sits enthroned at the right hand of majesty. And this, not the heroes of old, not their deeds of valor or enduring, is the source and root of all faith.

The Sacrifices of Faith

First, let's look at **the sacrifices of faith**. By this, I don't mean what our ancestors in the faith sacrificed for God in their own flesh. That idea would fit better with the sufferings of faith. No, I'm talking about literal sacrifices. This becomes the chief way that obedience is viewed in

Hebrews 11.

The Bible teaches us two paradoxical things about faith. The first is that we are saved by faith alone. You are justified not by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. The second is that faith without works is dead. It is a matter of order. The faith that God gives a believer alone justifies them (**Eph 2:8-9**), but it is itself not alone. Rather, it is accompanied by all manner of good works which we were predestined in Christ Jesus to do (**Eph 2:10**).

In the passage, there are **four sacrifices**. The first is the sacrifice of **Abel** (**Heb 11:4**). Second, that of **Abraham** (**17**). The third is that of **Moses** (**28**). “**By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain**” (**4**). Immediately after Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden, God had apparently set up a means by which worshippers could still approach him. These two sons came before God, each with their own sacrifice. When we look at this passage more next week, we will see that there are two things Abel did right. This verse gives us one. He had faith, and God accepted his sacrifice. This faith believed that even though God is unseen, he would accept the offering as pleasing, thereby allowing Abel to draw near. But the other thing he did was offer a

sheep. In this way, his sacrifice was a precursor of the Lamb of God who offered himself for the sins of the world.

The second is that of Abraham. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac” (17). This is no animal sacrifice, but a human sacrifice! This refers to the incredible story of Abraham being called to Mt. Moriah to offer up his “only begotten son” (*monogenes*). The language used here and in Genesis 22 likewise typifies the coming sacrifice of the only begotten son Jesus Christ on the very same mountain 2,000 years later.

The third sacrifice is the Passover. “By faith he [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood” (28). On that night of wailing and death, the destroying angel killed the first-born of Egypt, but would not touch his own firstborn, if they had put the lamb’s blood on their doorposts. The meal of unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and roasted lamb was offered in faith of that which they were told was coming, but was not yet upon them. But this sacrifice also shows us the Lord Jesus, as it was on the night of the Passover centuries later that he took the bread and the wine and said, “This is my body. This is the new covenant in my blood.”

Now, let's not forget how truly amazing these acts of sacrifice were. They were the very height of obedience, especially when you consider the cost. Abel was killed for his obedience. Abraham almost killed his own son for his obedience. Moses heard the wailing of Egyptians all night long. Sacrifices like these strike at the obedience of worship. Worship is the chief end of man. It is why we are here today.

Yet, worship is something that many of us think costs us nothing. It should be easy. It should be fun. It should have no strings attached. But consider the very word: sacrifice. A sacrifice is **something that you give up** in order to worship. These men are held up as examples of how we are to worship with our lives—by faith that acts in obedience to the command of God.

Enter here a whole series of acts of obedience that, while not sacrifices in the same way as these, were certainly sacrifices of a different kind: the people crossed the sea into a dry, barren wilderness (29); they marched around city walls for seven inexplicable days (30); a prostitute invites spies into her house putting herself in severe danger (31); and so many more (32, 33, 34). These are the acts of obedience that are found emblazoned on pictures hanging

from these walls.

Therefore, like Rahab offer your bodies as living sacrifices in the church, offerings made to God on behalf of his people. The worship of God is not merely vertical, as in singing a song and going home. It is also horizontal. When we offer a cup of cold water in his name, we are worshiping God. Are these needs that you see? Tithes to give? Places to get involved? People who are lonely? People who are struggling? Offer yourselves. That is what faith does, even at great personal cost. If you do not, then you are not following the examples of our fathers and you are being disobedient in what you do not do for Christ's church.

But how interesting that he would choose three sacrifices from the OT, all of which [foreshadow the death of the Lord Jesus](#). This is not accidental. If we go to the climactic example of faith in our passage, we actually see that it is Jesus himself. In [Hebrews 12:2](#) it tells us, "[looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.](#)" This refers to his sacrifice. It refers to his going to the cross for our sins, and dare I say it, by faith. He was absolutely sure of what he hoped for and certain of what he did not see. The Lord Jesus

died because of absolute faith in his God. He is held up as the greatest example of faith.

And yet, his example of going to the cross is not just an example. The point is that his sacrifice brings an end to all of those OT sacrifices which the saints of old had to offer because his had not yet come. So this is much more than him being an example. I mean, which one of us can die on a cross to bring other people reconciliation to God? No one. That is why he becomes the object of our faith when we think about obedience. We trust in his faith, his obedience, his sacrifice, and in doing so, it opens up obedience for us to consider in light of his work for us.

The Suffering of Faith

The **second** thing we want to consider is **the suffering of the OT saints**. This also becomes an example for us, but only as we understand that they underwent these things *by faith*. The first sufferer is, again, **Abel (4)**. He, along with almost everyone else in this list dies. Some, like **Jacob (21)** and **Joseph (22)** die “normal” deaths. Nevertheless, death is certainly a suffering. Abel was murdered, and this form of

suffering was for the name and sake of Christ, in fact in ch. 12 it becomes a foreshadowing of Christ. These sufferings are summarized in vs. 13, “These all died in faith.” The end of the list contains a host of suffers who were mocked, flogged, chained, and imprisoned (36). Others were destitute, afflicted, mistreated (37). Some were stoned, sawn in two, killed with the sword (37).

In the chapter, Moses is held up as the center sufferer. He barely made it out of infancy alive (11:23). He grew up and refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter (24). When born into nobility, who does that? He chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin (25).

This is all brutal suffering, and the Hebrew Christians were just said themselves to have been undergoing their own fair share of like sufferings. All of these people, however, endured the suffering because of faith. It is faith alone that caused the Disciples to consider it a joy to suffer for the name (Acts 5:39), or to be imprisoned and still sing songs to the Father (Acts 16:25), or even to boast in their sufferings—“I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am

strong” (2Co 12:10). How many of you regularly go around saying things like that? Instead, do we not beg God to keep us from suffering? Why would we do that knowing that it is through suffering that God conforms us into the image of his Son? These men are held up as examples of how to be content in the midst of the absolute worst that the world has to offer.

But how? **By faith. By faith. By faith.** Faith placed where? Look again at **Hebrews 12:2**. While Moses is the central sufferer surrounded on both sides of history by a whole line up of others following in his footsteps, it is actually Jesus who is the Great Sufferer, Isaiah’s Suffering Servant. We have just seen this with him enduring the cross. But now let’s add, “**Despising the shame.**” Not only was Jesus put to death, but prior to it, it is difficult to imagine a more disgusting display of deliberate persecution meant to mock, ridicule, taunt, and tempt the Son of God. This is God we are talking about, not just some guy. God despising shame and enduring the cross? Christ is the terminus for suffering by faith. This is why throughout the NT he is constantly held up as the reason we endure suffering. We do it for the sake of the cross. He did not despise it; therefore

we do not despise it. He is the great example, for if God himself could undergo such a thing, why can't you? But more than an example, his suffering on our behalf sets us free when we look to him the author and perfecter of our faith.

The Unseen Hope of Faith

Third, we have the unseen hope of faith. Perhaps more than the others, this theme takes us back to the definition of faith, being certain of what we “do not see.” The great tapestries of this hall of faith actually begin here, in creation. “By faith we understand that the universe was created ... so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Heb 11:3). Notice the focus on **sight**. We believe that however God did it, he did not use pre-existing visible “stuff” to do it. The visible universe is not eternal. The unseen became seen by the power of the word of God.

The focus on the unseen continues with **Enoch**. It says of Enoch that he believed that God exists (one needs to do this because one cannot “see” God), and that he rewards those who seek him (11:6). Then Noah is warned of “**events as yet unseen**” (7). Thus, he built an ark. Abraham did not

realize where he was going (8). He and the other elders only saw the promises “from a distance” (13). He longed for a “heavenly city” (16) while his son Isaac was blessed concerning “future things” (11:20).

This is all exactly what we see in the definition of what faith is. It is a hope and an expectation that is sure and confident in the promises of God to bring the future to pass just the way he says he will. It is our hope of heaven, of new bodies, of sinless eternity, of mansions in heaven, of Jerusalem above, of the church eternal. It is an upward and outward gaze.

Again, **Hebrews 12:2** finds us at the end point of all this. “Looking to Jesus.” Notice the focus on sight again. We look to Jesus, the one who is now invisible because he “**is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**” He has ascended into heaven where he not now seen with human eyes. But he is the object of our faith. Though our eyes do not see him, faith apprehends him. Look to Jesus in whom all of these hopes begin to find their future fulfillment. For in him, the new Jerusalem has even now come down out of heaven and is filling the earth with the glory of the Lord from sea to sea, just as it was promised. People are being

saved, set free, reconciled, forgiven. The hopes of the patriarchs are finding their fulfillment already in Christ.

Faith in the Resurrection

This takes us to the fourth point, which is about **resurrection**. There are three, perhaps four things in this list that show us the resurrection. In the OT, they are shadowy yet substantive. **By faith, Abraham considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:19)**. Why would Hebrews use this language? By faith, women received back their dead by resurrection (**35**). This refers to stories like **Elisha** raising a woman's son from the dead in the OT (**2Kg 8:5**). Again, why *this* language? Perhaps a third hint of resurrection is found in the story of **Enoch** who, though he was not technically raised from the dead, also did not ever actually die. His "rapture" if you want to call it that was a foretaste that those in Christ who die are not really not dead, but are only sleeping. One day God will raise them all from the dead to live forever with him.

But **yet again**, this all finds its terminus in **Hebrews 12:2**. The tapestry points to the throne. Remember the ascension,

that Christ is at the right hand of God in heaven. But what else could this mean, if after having endured the cross and was killed how now been **raised to life**? Jesus is the great hope of all the saints of old for in him we find the faith of resurrection from the dead sure and confident. Jesus rose from the grave. What glorious words those are, words that were apprehended by the disciples when he literally opened their physical eyes so that they could see him, but for us our spiritual eyes who do not see him. The Lord Jesus is alive, friends, and he holds the keys of death and hades in his hands. Whoever comes to him shall have life and have it abundantly, because he is Life itself. Is this where you are looking by faith?

Their Faith, Our Faith

As we conclude our look at the hall of faith, I want to focus on just a couple more very important points. The first is that for the vast majority of the text, the focus is on **their faith**. By faith so and so did this or that. They had faith. Look at how they all had faith. The impact is that all of the saints of old had faith. Nothing could be any clearer than this from

our chapter. And as we saw last time, Hebrews itself has rooted these statements in the OT Scripture which say “**the just shall live by faith**” and so on.

But there are two remarkable exceptions to this pattern. They come at the beginning and at the end. Did you notice that he does not start with Abel’s faith and then move on to Enoch, Noah, Abraham, etc.? Rather, he begins with *your own faith*. “**By faith we understand that the universe was created...**” (11:3). This is personal right from the beginning. Only after establishing that we are God’s children by faith, does he then even begin to tell us about the faith of others. For it takes faith to apprehend the faith of another. If you don’t have faith, the rest of the chapter will just make you scratch your head. Do *you* understand that God created the universe? This is the first assertion of the Bible itself. Genesis 1. “**In the beginning God created...**” The very first words presuppose faith. It doesn’t get any more foundational or basic than this. Yet, many intelligent people today stumble over the very first words of the Bible. How then will they believe anything else that is written in it?

The next use of “we” does not appear until 12:1 (though “us” is in the previous verse). After a litany of choruses

singing about the faith of our fathers, “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, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”

Hebrews takes you from your faith to their faith and then back to your faith as it comes to you from Jesus. He is the giver of faith. He is the one who completes it. He is its object. And it has ever and only been this way. Perhaps the most stunning thing of all about Hebrews 11 is how all of our subjects today (sacrifices, suffering, the unseen, and resurrection) all have their completion in Jesus in **Hebrews 12:2**. And yet, when we look at the whole unit, we actually see that Jesus begins our passage, is in the middle of our passage, and finishes our passage. He is the point of faith. He is the point of our faith and of their faith. This is the last point of the day.

When you walk in the door of the hall you come to **Hebrews 11:3**. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God. Not the “words” of God. The Word of God. It should be capitalized. This is the same word that is living and active who himself discerns the thoughts of

men earlier in the book. This is John's *Logos*,⁸ “In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the word was God” (John 1:1). How remarkable that he would begin with focusing our attention on Christ here.

The middle of the hall has this amazing couple of verses that hit both on the suffering theme and the unseen theme we have discussed. Note carefully what he says, “He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Heb 11:26). Moses knew and considered Christ. The word is *Christos*. It refers to the Lord Jesus. Anyone who tells you that OT saints did not know Christ simply hasn't read the Bible carefully enough.

This is contrasted in the next verse with Moses leaving Egypt. He did not fear the wrath of the Pharaoh, but rather endure because he had “see[n] Him who is unseen.” To whom does this refer? It refers to the same Jesus, for that is

⁸ Hebrews uses the word *rhema*, a common enough word for “word,” which is sometimes used in the OT to identify the Second Power in Heaven (cf. Gen 15:1 LXX). Attridge writes, “Cf. 1:3 for the cosmic effect of the Son's ῥῆμα [*rhema*]. The motif of God's creative word is, of course, commonplace. Cf. Gen 1:3; Ps 33(32):6; Wis 9:1; 2 Bar. 14.17; Philo *Sacr. AC* 65; 1 *Clem.* 17.4; *Od. Sol.* 16.19; John 1:3. For Philo (*Fug.* 137) ῥῆμα and λόγος [*logos*] are synonyms.” Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 315 n. 117.

how he knew him. Christ appeared to Moses many times, in a bush, on a cliff, in a tabernacle. Moses knew the Lord Jesus and talked with him face to face. Seeing the unseen, he glimpsed the invisible God through the Mediator in the OT.

What I'm trying to help you see is that Jesus does not just suddenly pop up out of the blue for some random reason here with Moses. Rather, the Apostle has woven his tapestries in this hall of faith so that from beginning to middle to end, these saints who all had faith would be seen to all have faith in him. Some have tried to argue that this chapter is an encomium of praise to the faith *of the saints*. But this misses the point. Rather, it is an encomium of praise *to the Lord Jesus himself*.

They aren't an end to themselves. Rather, they were waiting for something greater too. The last words of chapter 11 are stunning in what they say. “**And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect**” (40). Woah! While they endured such hardships and suffering and underwent such heroic feats of obedience in faith, they still had to be made perfect themselves – through the coming

works of Jesus Christ. But the Apostle includes us in all this.

What is the purpose? In part, it is to keep you from idolizing the saints of old, for these were flawed and sinful men who simply lived by faith as we do. The meaning is this. “God provided something better by including us (the readers) with them (Old Testament saints) so that all his people would be made perfect in Christ.”⁹ That captures it and brings our minds back to the Lord Jesus whom this hall really has in mind all along.

What a magnificent hall. What splendid tapestries. These tell stories of our ancestors who died in the faith, looking forward to coming promises, having endured great hardships, having performed amazing feats and miracles, having obeyed God in the most difficult times or with terrible repercussions for their obedience. But the hall and her art are here to point our gaze farther and farther into that hall, where at the far end, in the middle and on the throne, sits the one who is enthroned above the cherubim. The suffering sacrifice of a lamb. The risen pride of a lion. Humbled and full of faith. Exalted and Lord over all. His

⁹ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 567.

word is the power of life. This is his hall, this is his fame, this is his faith.