

Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

Chapter 11

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

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I. Introduction

While Hebrews chapter ten gave us valuable applications regarding the negative behavior which believers facing the Tribulation ought to avoid, chapter eleven gives us important perspectives which are very beneficial to keep in mind under any sort of personal pressure, and thus will be all the more valuable to remember and keep close to our hearts during the Tribulation itself. Many of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem at this time were falling into serious spiritual trouble by participating in a religion which, by virtue of Christ's fulfillment of the Law, had now become a mockery of His sacrifice. This situation will be repeated during the Tribulation after antichrist and his false prophet take over the newly erected temple and transform genuine worship of God into worship of the beast – who will claim to be Christ (he is, after all "anti-Christ") – and of his father, the devil. Others in Paul's day were succumbing to Gnostic influences which also twisted the truth, but into a false and antinomian "spirituality" instead of godless legalism. This development will be repeated in principle during the Tribulation as well when the beast's false

religion co-opts every other religious and theosophic group and movement – with the exception of true, biblical faith in Jesus Christ. Just as the Jerusalem believers allowed themselves to be seduced into these false expressions of worship of their day, so scripture is clear that during the Tribulation, not only will the entire unbelieving world be drawn into this devil-worship but also many believers – weak in their knowledge or faith or spiritual resilience – will likewise be corrupted into joining in with antichrist's religion (e.g., Dan.8:10; 2Thes.2:3; Rev.12:4).¹

(10) "And at that time many will fall away (i.e., will apostatize) and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved."
Matthew 24:10-13

Knowing to keep away from what is evil and eternally destructive is salutary, and careful attention to Hebrews chapter ten will provide any prudent reader with all necessary caution regarding involving him or herself in false religion of any sort. Chapter eleven provides all believers who desire to cleave to the good and eschew evil with a catalog of wonderful case studies of believers of the past who have done just that, encouraging us to follow their marvelous examples both for our spiritual security but also in order to win the rewards Jesus Christ wants us to win by following their examples. By remembering and studying these great warriors of the faith, we come to identify with them and are motivated to emulate them. This catalog describes believers as we all should be, and it was undoubtedly Paul's intention that the Jerusalem believers of his own day would do just that, and commit to spiritual recovery by following in the footsteps of all of these great witnesses to the power of the truth of the Word of God.

II. Translation

(1) It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen. (2) For it is by this [very faith] that believers of old received their divine approval.

(3) By faith we understand that the ages have been constructed by the Word of God, so that what we see (i.e., the material world) has not come into being from the things presently visible.

(4) By faith Abel offered a more valuable sacrifice to God than Cain did, through which he received testimony of being righteous, for God Himself gave that testimony regarding the gifts [he had offered]. And through this testimony Abel still speaks to us, even though dead.

(5) By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. (6) Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

(7) By faith, Noah, when divinely informed about things which were not yet

¹ See Coming Tribulation, part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy".

visible, in reverent piety constructed an ark for the deliverance of his family, through which [ark] he condemned the world [by responding to God in faith] and became heir to the righteousness which is [awarded] according to faith.

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of that city (i.e., the New Jerusalem) whose architect and builder is God.

(11) By faith, Sarah too received the ability to conceive a child, and she did give birth past the normal time of life [to do so], because she considered faithful the One who promised her. (12) Thus from one man, and him being dead at that [so to speak], there sprang "as many as the stars of heaven in their multitude and like the sands of the seashore which cannot be numbered" (Gen.22:17).

(13) These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. (16) But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem).

(17) By faith Abraham offered up Isaac when he was tested, and was on the point of offering up [in sacrifice] his one and only son, the one who [about whom he] had received the promises, (18) about whom it had been said, "In Isaac shall your seed be called", (19) [for Abraham was] reckoning that God was able to raise [him] from the dead, whence (i.e., from the dead) he did receive [Isaac] back even metaphorically (i.e., Isaac was as good as dead but God delivered him through the substitute of the ram, a type of Jesus Christ).

(20) By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things [destined] to come.

(21) By faith, Jacob, on the point of dying, blessed each of his sons, and "worshiped [the Lord] while [resting] on the tip of his staff".

(22) By faith, Joseph, when he was about to die, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

(23) By faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that their child was special, and they did not fear the king's command.

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, (26) because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than [all the] treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward. (27) By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. For he grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye

on the invisible Lord Jesus Christ). (28) By faith, he kept the Passover and the [command for the] pouring out of the blood [on the lintels and doorposts], so that the Destroyer might not touch their firstborn.

(29) By faith they crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land – though when the Egyptians tried this they were drowned.

(30) By faith, the walls of Jericho fell, after they had been encircled for seven days.

(31) By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with her unbelieving [countrymen], having received the spies in peace [instead of betraying them].

(32) Now what shall I say more? For time would fail me, were I to go on and relate the stories of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, (33) who through their faith defeated kingdoms, accomplished acts of righteousness, received the fulfillment of promises, shut the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the power of fire, fled the mouth of the sword, were made strong in weakness, were made powerful in war, defeated enemy armies, (35) women even received back their dead. (36) Some [of these great believers of the past] were tortured, refusing release, that they might obtain a better resurrection (i.e., worth more to them than their lives; cf. Ps.63:3). Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. (38) The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth.

(39) And through their faith, all of them though they became witnesses [to the world] (lit., "were martyred"), yet they did not receive the promise (i.e., resurrection and reward), (40) since God was looking forward for our sakes to something better, so that they might not be made perfect (i.e., resurrected and rewarded) without us.

III. Summary and Paraphrase

Faith is the foundation of everything in the plan of God as demonstrated by the catalog of Old Testament heroes.

We have established that faith is the key characteristic of those who persevere unto salvation. What then is faith? Faith is what gives us confidence in the inevitability of the things upon which we have set our hope: the resurrection and our eternal reward. Faith therefore "proves", so to speak, the reality in our eyes of those things which our eyes cannot yet see. The great believers of the Old Testament had their mettle tested and were approved by this very faith, because it is this trust – in God – which is what the Christian life is all about; and the greater the faith, belief, trust in Him no matter what, the greater the validation, approval, reward for those who exhibit it under the pressures of life. While the world doesn't believe it, we know by faith, because the Bible says so, that the entire universe was created by God – not natural forces – in the blink of an eye, supernaturally.

Abel's faith was demonstrated by his sacrifice of an animal showing that he understood the need for a Savior. He did as God commanded him, unlike Cain who did what he

himself saw fit to do irrespective of the will of God. The former is true righteousness, doing what God wants us to do, believing in Him and following what He says regardless of our own feelings or anything else – which is what you all should be doing in Jerusalem. That is the sort of trust, belief, faith, and faithful obedience which lasts beyond this life into life eternal and results in our coming reward as is the case with Abel – so stop being like Cain, doing things your way instead of God's way.

Enoch's faith resulted in his unique departure from this life which never happened before and will never happen again. If we please the Lord by trusting Him, all manner of wonderful things are possible because, after all, it is our faith-response that our Lord wants from us, to trust Him more than what we see and hear and feel, and to demonstrate that faith by following through in faithful response to Him in this life, trusting Him to bless us and protect us without compromising on the truly important spiritual matters (as you in Jerusalem are doing). The Lord rewards those who put their trust for deliverance in Him, both now in this life and also with an eternal reward beyond our present imagination. Believing those truths strengthens our faith to deal with everything else in this life in a virtuous and self-reinforcing cycle (as opposed to the vicious circle of doubt, disbelief and disobedience).

Noah believed what the Lord warned him about even before he could see it with his own eyes. The result of his obedient faith was the reception of God's righteousness we all likewise possess through faith in Christ, resulting in his salvation in eternity and his deliverance (from the flood) in time – although the world which did not believe or respond to the truth was entirely condemned and destroyed (temporally then and eternally at the future judgment).

Abraham obeyed the Lord and left what he knew behind to venture into a strange place he knew little about – because he trusted the Lord: obedience and faith, trust and faithfulness always go hand in hand. He and his family after him were content to live as sojourners rather than putting down roots in this temporary world because he and they trusted that the Lord had something better: an eternal reward better than anything in this life.

Sarah likewise trusted the Lord that what He promised was true, and as a result received the son she and Abraham longed for even though they were both well past the age of this even being possible to human lights. As a result, from barrenness and infertility came an innumerable progeny.

These great believers serve as examples we should follow: they were looking forward to the resurrection and their eternal rewards just as we should be, and they ended their lives without either coming to pass – yet. But they did see them – with the eyes of faith – and greeted them, so to speak, even though still a long way off, making it clear by their trust in God, that the Lord could and that the Lord would at the proper time bring both about in spite of their intervening physical deaths. They all had the sojourner mind-set: they all recognized and demonstrated by their actions, by their faith and faithful behavior, that this present life meant nothing to them, that they were instead looking forward to their

resurrection and eternal reward. They accepted that they were strangers and aliens here in the devil's world. Instead of compromising with it, seeing this world as the place of happiness, they were looking forward instead to the inheritance that God would provide, the inheritance, the land, the country, the city that is going to come down from heaven. If that were not the case, they could have easily retreated back to the places they had come from, back to the old – just as YOU are going back instead of persevering in marching forward with the Lord. But *those* believers pleased God and He is not ashamed of them – as you are tempting the Lord to be ashamed of *you* – and He has indeed prepared a wonderful habitation for them with "many mansions" (Jn.14:2), the New Jerusalem – and for us too, if we do not grow weary of this fight so as to give up.

Abraham showed us the power of faith by trusting and obeying God when commanded to sacrifice the son he loved so much, the very son upon whom all the promises made to Abraham depended. He trusted that somehow, since God commanded it, God would work it out for good (Rom.8:28; cf. Gen.50:20), even if it meant that He had to raise Isaac from the dead – which in a manner of speaking is just what God did in sparing the boy's life at the last moment. Isaac represented Christ and what our Savior would do in dying for us – and now that Christ has died for us, what are you doing making sacrifices meant to look forward to that victory already won by our Lord on the cross? Instead, like Abraham, we all ought to trust the Lord "no matter what" – for we see in this example both the goodness of God and also the benefit of trusting Him, even when eyes and ears and emotions and anxious thoughts . . . and people . . . tell us not to.

Isaac, in spite of the prophecy about the elder serving the younger (Gen.25:23; cf. Rom.9:12), was so absolutely sure that God's promise which he had been given about his blessing of his sons was solid that he tried to put Esau whom he preferred over Jacob, knowing in faith that God's Word would stand – as it in fact did.

Likewise, Jacob had absolute faith that what he had been given by God to prophesy about his children would come true, and thus rallied his strength at the end of his life to pay tribute to the Lord as he did so.

Likewise, Joseph was absolutely convinced about God's prophecies regarding the coming deliverance of Israel from Egypt that he gave explicit orders for his burial there to be temporary, intending to give the Israelites a sign and a symbol of their future inheritance of the land of promise.

Likewise, Moses' parents had enough confidence and faith in the Lord's goodness and mercy to protect their innocent child, having been given to see that God had plans for him and believing that this was so, doing what was right and trusting God in spite of the danger of doing so.

Moses chose the Lord and the things that cannot be seen over a life of security, wealth and power. He had and kept his eyes on the Lord, not on this world, and trusted Him through thick and thin. Moses did as God commanded and precisely so, trusting in godly

fear that what He said was true, with the result that the firstborn of Israel were spared while those of the Egyptians all perished at the first Passover.

The Israelites had sufficient faith in God to cross through the opening God had made in the Red Sea, while the Egyptians who had none were destroyed in the same attempt – but after the crisis was over, our ancestors soon turned back to Egypt in their hearts . . . as you are apparently doing as well, in spite of the suffering you also successfully endured previously. The next generation had enough faith in God to do precisely what He told them to do in marching around Jericho seven times, even though there was no obvious worldly reason to do so, and as a result the most powerful defenses in the land fell before them without any effort on their part. They kept marching around and nothing happened for seven days . . . until it did. You too need to have sufficient faith to persevere in this same way, regardless of how things appear to your fleshly eyes. If you do, God will act on your behalf in His good and perfect time (seven representing the perfect timing of God).

Rahab shows us that God is no respecter of persons: anyone who puts their trust in Him will not be disappointed. Rahab saved not only her own life by her faith in Him but also those of her entire family.

I could go on at great length about all the wonderful believers of the past, about all of the wonderful feats they accomplished by trusting the Lord, about all that they suffered – as you have suffered – and yet still did not relinquish their faith one bit. I wish I could say the same about you. Yes, they suffered even more grievously than you, demonstrating that they were better than this world and deserved better than this world. And yet, they left this world behind without receiving what they hoped for, what they knew by faith was their divine inheritance, their resurrection and reward. They did not receive it because, if they had, we would have been denied ours. God is waiting until the entire Bride of Christ has been formed until Christ returns to collect His Church, and at that time they and we and all the believers to come until that time will rise together to meet the Lord in the air, together as one Body of Christ forever. That is definitely "something better", much better than the mess of pottage for which some of you are bartering away your eternal inheritance.

IV. Verse by Verse Commentary

Verses One through Two

(1) It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen. (2) For it is by this [very faith] that believers of old received their divine approval.

Hebrews 11:1-2

The word we are translating "substantiates" in our context is actually a noun in Greek: *hypostasis*. It means substance or existence and is derived from the preposition *hypo* meaning

"under" and the verbal root *sta* meaning "stand". Etymologically, therefore, it has the sense of "understanding" but in a physical rather than a mental way, "undergirding" or "foundational support", the bedrock of all things. This is what faith really is. It is the foundation of "what we hope for". We have a right to be absolutely confident in the things to which we look forward as believers in Christ, and it is our unswerving faith which provides that "knowledge". Just as we know that an apple will fall down to earth when it releases from its branch and not fly up to the sky instead, so also we know that what our Lord has told us, what He has promised us in His Word, will come true – and with stronger reason. Because while God can change the laws of physics at will, the Word of God can never be broken. We know that by faith.

For we walk *by faith*, not by sight.
2nd Corinthians 5:7 NIV

For we are walking [our Christian walk] *through faith* [in the Living and written Word], not through appearance (i.e., what we see).
2nd Corinthians 5:7

What, then, is faith? First and foremost, faith is confidence, belief, trust in an *object*. Faith does not exist, cannot exist, without the "something" or "someone" we have faith "in". It is popular today for prominent individuals, especially in the political sphere, to ballyhoo their "faith" without ever getting around to explaining or revealing what it is or who it is they trust in and believe and why (if, in reality, they have faith in anyone or anything). Secondly, faith is confidence, belief, trust not only in the existence of something or someone but also in their predictability of behavior. Most human beings have faith in the law of gravity, whether or not they would ever express things that way; they are confident that if they drop a stone from their hand it will travel downward and not upward. They believe this, moreover, without really understanding the "how and why" of it – as indeed modern physics has not completely unraveled the mysteries of gravity. The "what" is understood and was explained definitively by Newton. The "how and the why" are still matters of scientific investigation. But in spite of not being able to understand "how" gravity works or "why", any normal human being has confidence that it will "work" according to the predictable pattern of behavior we all have experienced since birth. People may occasionally have faith in other human beings and, in some rare instances, this faith proves justified over time in the case of rare individuals of exceptional integrity and character who behave according to predictable standards regardless of pressure, cost or circumstances. In our verse, Paul takes it for granted that his readers understand that the faith he is talking about is *faith in God*.

It is not uncommon in Greek for the objects of sentences to be left out (ellipsis), and that is the case here in verse one. Clearly, it is faith in *God* and in *His truth* that is meant, there being no essential or practical difference from the believer's perspective between the One who speaks to us and what He says to us.

I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.
Psalm 138:2 KJV

(10) "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
(11) So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."
Isaiah 55:10-11 NKJV

(1) The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God. (2) This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. (3) Everything came into being through Him, and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being.
John 1:1-3

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life, [Jesus Christ].
1st John 1:1

The Bible calls Christians "believers" (lit., "believing ones":), not because we are prone to put our faith in just anyone or anything, but because we have chosen to put our faith in the one true God and His Son our Savior Jesus Christ. We have faith and confidence in His integrity and character. We believe that He will always do exactly as He says, and this faith – in Him – and in His Word is the guiding principle of our lives after salvation. We trust in God the Father, in our Master Jesus Christ, in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in the Bible, the written Word of God, as the truth, worthy of absolute and unwavering acceptance with complete confidence and trust. This is the "faith" which Paul defines in verse one, the bedrock and foundation of every Christian's spiritual life.

(4) For everyone who has been born from God overcomes the [devil's] world. And this is the victory that has overcome the [devil's] world: **our faith** [in Jesus Christ]! (5) For who is the one who overcomes the [devil's] world except the one who **believes** that Jesus is the Son of God.
1st John 5:4-5

Indeed, without faith – in God and in His truth – a person is not even a believer. And only believers are saved.

The one who **believes** in Him is not being judged, but the one who does **not believe** has already been judged on the grounds that he has **not put his faith** in the Name (i.e., the

Person) of God's only Son.
John 3:18

God is absolute. His integrity is absolute. His truth is absolute. But human beings are fickle and fallible and mercurial. People of character, even relative character, are the exception in this world, not the rule, and especially in this late Laodicean day. No one possessed of a sin nature can be perfect. Therefore, although God's faithfulness is absolute, no human being's faith can be – but it can grow. We started out as unbelievers. When we first put our faith in Jesus Christ, our faith was small, small as a mustard seed. But as we began to learn more about the Lord and His truth, as we began to trust Him and what He has told us therein more and more, as we began to actually live like believers who do trust Him more than what we see or hear or feel in this world, our faith grew . . . or at least it should have done so. Like everything else in this volatile world at present, amid the noise and churn of the unseen conflict and its all too visible material manifestations, no one's faith is static. Faith can grow or weaken. As long as we are in this world, we are going to have our faith tested. If we are continuing to grow in our knowledge of the truth (2Pet.2:18), believing that truth and making it part of our internal treasury through believing it in the power of the Spirit and then acting upon said truth by trusting the Lord in all manner of testing and worldly pressure, then our faith will grow. But if we are not, it won't. And if we are doing as the Jerusalem believers were doing, turning back to the world out of cowardice or lust, then our faith will diminish. And if we are not careful, that process of diminishment will continue until it evaporates completely, in apostasy.

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up.

Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root [of faith] in themselves, but are only temporary [believers]. When tribulation or persecution because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up.

Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed of faith fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but in time of testing they apostatize.

Luke 8:13

We believers understand how it is that our faith grows, namely, through learning and believing and applying the truth, with tests of our faith accelerating that growth when we trust the Lord to bring us through whatever valley of the death shadow we are presently facing (Ps.23). Though it starts small, if we are willing to be pruned, willing to respond, our small seed of faith will not perish in the heat of testing, nor will we allow it to be choked by the thorns and thistles of life; our faith plant will grow to full maturity and produce an abundant crop which glorifies our

Savior who gave His all for us, and we will be blessed forever with the rewards we win by following Him faithfully. This is the motivation for believers to follow Jesus Christ, avoiding all bad results and striving to finish our race in good stead, and Hebrews chapter eleven is designed to invigorate that motivation by reminding us of so many wonderful examples of believers of the past who did do the right things to the glory of God and to their own ultimate blessing – in spite of the tests and trials and persecutions of this temporary world. "Go and do likewise" (Lk.10:37) is the message of this chapter, with "going and doing" requires faith, growing faith, ever greater trust in the Lord that He will help us through all the way to the end of whatever trouble we are facing, "even unto death" (Ps.48:14).

"Arise and be doing! And may the Lord be with you!"
1st Chronicles 22:16b [index]

(31) Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, (32) which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."
Matthew 13:31-32 NKJV

(1) I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch [that is] in Me which does not bear fruit (2) He removes, and every branch which does bear fruit He prunes so that it might bear more fruit. (3) You have already been pruned because of the Word I have spoken to you. (4) Stay part of Me, and I will [stay] part of you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains part of the vine, so you too cannot [bear true fruit] unless you stay part of Me. (5) I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.
John 15:1-6

It is to believers who are doing things the right way that this verse, Hebrews 11:1, applies and for whom it makes sense. It is just such faith, growing faith, trust in the Lord, in His faithfulness and integrity, absolute belief that He will honor all of His wonderful promises to us, that "substantiates what we hope for". In other words, we *know* that His promises to us are true in the same way that unbelievers "know" that gravity is "true" – because we believe in Him. We believers have experience of His faithfulness. He has never failed to answer us, to protect us, to deliver us. He has blessed us with blessings upon blessings since the moment we put our faith in Him and He has *never* let us down.

(23) The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; (24) though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand. (25) I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.
Psalm 37:23-25 NIV

(3) Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. (4) He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. (5) You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, (6) nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. (7) A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. (8) You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. (9) If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling, (10) no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. (11) For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; (12) they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

Psalm 91:3-12 NIV

At least this is the way it should be. In the same manner as in our Lord's teaching and in that of the apostle John, Paul presents the expected standard to which all believers should adhere as the norm: we all should always have nothing but absolute faith in the Lord and in His Word. And while it is true that more is expected of those who have been longer in the faith, of those whose mustard seed and plant of faith has had time to grow into a full tree, purity of faith is expected of us all at all times. All of our spiritual victories come from trusting the Lord with just such absolute "blind" faith (Is.42:19); all of our defeats from pointless doubting (Jas.1:6-8).

(26) When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. (27) But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (28) "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." (29) "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. (30) But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (31) Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Matthew 14:26-31 NIV

We believers should take this example to heart and aspire to be of great, not little, faith. We should trust the Lord that, if He calls us to do something, even the impossible will be possible – and only impossible if we doubt Him and His Word. Taking this perspective as his point of departure, Paul begins his catalog of spiritual heroes by stating the principle, the standard to which the Lord expects us to conform: we believe Him, we believe His Word, we believe His promises, we believe in His perfect character and integrity, more than what we see with our own eyes or hear with our own ears. Our absolute trust in Him and His Word is what "substantiates what we hope for" and what "provides [absolute] proof of things unseen".

Just as unbelievers cannot see gravity but "have faith" that it will behave consistently, how much more should we, who have tasted that the Lord is good (Ps.34:8; 1Pet.2:3; cf. Heb.6:5), not be absolutely confident of Him being true to His promises to us? Unbelievers know that gravity will make a rock sink in water without fail, but we believe the Lord and His Word, so that if He tells us to walk on the water we know *by faith* that we will *not* sink – even though our entire prior human experience tells us otherwise. It is this pure, childlike faith which forms the basis

for all spiritual growth, progress and production.

"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Luke 18:17 NIV

The heroes of chapter eleven saw things in just these black and white terms. Doubt and skepticism are sophisticated attributes of world-wise adults. The type of child-like faith which "substantiates what we hope for" and which "provides proof of things unseen" is not subtle or jaded, it is not based upon monumental learning or special teaching, nor informed by "the school of hard-knocks". Rather it is simple, pure, and innocent. Just as we entered into the Body of Christ through a single, unpretentious act of faith, so also we need to continue in our Christian lives in this same innocent and guileless way in our attitude to the truth, trusting our Savior and His Word absolutely in all things and at all times.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.
Colossians 2:6 NIV

But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!
Philippians 3:16

It is this unadulterated and unbending faith which needs to underpin our entire being and life as believers in Jesus Christ. Faith is the living plant that grows up in good soil to produce an abundant crop for our Lord (Matt.13:8; Matt.13:23; Mk.4:8; 4:20; cf. Lk.8:8). Faith, believing that what our Lord has told us is true, is *how* we know that all of the good things He has promised us will indeed come to pass (Heb.1:1). We know *by faith* that just as surely as apples fall from the tree down to the earth, so also everything He has promised us will be done in its proper time.

Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.
Joshua 21:45 NIV

"Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed."
Joshua 23:14 NIV

"Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses."
1st Kings 8:56 NIV

Proof of Things Unseen:

(1) It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen.

Hebrews 11:1

The second half of verse one means the exact same thing as the first half. Paul "glosses" his initial statement both to make it clearer and also to emphasize it – so important is this fundamental biblical principle. Just as faith gives substance/reality to things we are still only hoping for which have not yet been realized, so also this same faith provides proof of these things which we cannot yet see with our fleshly eyes. The things hoped for and the things unseen are the same things, God's blessed promises to us upon which our entire Christian faith rests: our resurrection, our coming reunion as one complete Body of Christ when our Savior returns for us, our eternal rewards and millennial offices, our homes and blessed eternal lives in New Jerusalem in the presence of Jesus Christ and the Father forever. We hope for these things, that is, we have confidence in them coming to pass, even though at present they have not yet been realized (Rom.8:24; Heb.11:13; 11:39-40). *That* is the hope of the Bible, namely, not some vague wish for the future but the absolute confidence, the absolute *faith* of God's promises proving true at His perfect time. And our faith is both what gives substance to these invisible hopes and at the same time proves the reality of them even though we cannot see them. To the world, this is madness; to believers, this is the essential definition of our faith. We do not believe in the promise of salvation because it is untrue but because it *is* true. And we know indisputably in our hearts that it is true through the witness of the Holy Spirit who affirms the truth in which we believe.

But you have an anointing from the Holy One (i.e., the universal indwelling of the Spirit to believers), and you all know [this] (i.e., the anointing is so powerful that every believer is aware of His presence).

1st John 2:20

But as for you, the anointing which you received from Him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you [this (i.e., v.26 and previous)]. But just as His anointing teaches you about all things and is true and not false, so also as He has taught you, remain in Him.

1st John 2:27

Moreover, our faith has grown since the hour we first believed. We have had innumerable verifications by the Spirit and in the Spirit of the truth of everything in God's Word, of His faithfulness to us in all of the trials and tribulations of our lives, in His constant superintendence of us on every day according to the prayer we daily pray: providing for us, forgiving us, delivering us (Matt.6:9-15; Lk.11:2-4) – without fail in His perfect integrity. So while we believers have indeed believed the Spirit's testimony about salvation by God's grace through putting our faith in His Son and His work for us on the cross (Eph.2:8-9), we have also had our confidence built up through countless demonstrations of God's perfect faithfulness to us. Our faith, though once as small as a mustard seed, through responding over time to His infinite and perfect faithfulness, is producing an unshakeable confidence that grows as our experience of His integrity grows. He has never let us down and so He never will. That is the "proof" of faith to which Paul refers.

In civil trials, preponderance of evidence wins the day. In criminal trials, proof beyond a reasonable doubt prevails. But we have proof beyond even a shadow of a doubt that God will do as He says on each and every occasion. That is what true faith is, and that is the standard of perfect confidence in our Lord to which Paul is calling us all in the Spirit, the standard to which all of the great believers of the past to whose great deeds of faith Paul will soon appeal, consistently adhered, the standard to which he is calling the Jerusalem believers of his day to return, the standard to which we believers today need to rise if we are to survive and spiritually thrive in the dark days of testing soon to come (Rev.3:10).

This is the victory that has overcome the world, even *our faith*.
1st John 5:4b NIV

"The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken my seat with my Father on His throne."
Revelation 3:21

Unbelievers "know" apples fall to the ground when they detach from a branch, and can predict the fall with formulae. We believers "know" *by faith* that all of God's promises will come true for us – at His perfect timing and in just the right way. We have faith that He is doing all He has said that He would do, even though we don't presently see it. Our faith is the "proof" of everything He has promised us.

And we *know* (i.e., by faith), that, for those who love God, He works *everything* together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan.
Romans 8:28

The Testimony of the Elders:

For by *it* the elders obtained a good testimony.
Hebrews 1:2 NKJV

We are translating verse two as follows:

For it is by this [very faith] that believers of old received their divine approval.
Hebrews 1:2

The antecedent of "it" is faith: by means of faith the believers of old (not old people or old men, or elders necessarily, but those believers who lived prior to us and prior to Paul's day, famous for their godly feats in the Old Testament), "received a good witness", literally. We would say, "they gave a good witness" or, as we are translating it, "obtained a good testimony".

The root of the verb used here, *martyreo*, is the same as that of the Greek derived word "martyr", meaning "witness". We have specialized the meaning "martyr" in English because of the fact that so many obtained their good witness through suffering, often unto death. Physical death for the Lord, "martyrdom", as we would say, is not at all a necessary prerequisite for obtaining a

good report from the Lord. The spiritual triumphs of the believers named in chapter eleven only occasionally included death on our Lord's behalf. But whether through great suffering or not, what all these believers have in common, what all spiritually impressive exploits have in common, is that those who achieve them do so "by means of their *faith*". Because it is only by believing in God and His perfect character that they, that others, that we can stand our ground under great pressure and do what is right in our Lord's eyes. Having great faith and acting upon it, therefore, is *the* way to receive a good report from Jesus Christ in this life and the next – and thus to give a "good witness" to others while we are still here on earth fighting this fight. That is the way believers in the past did so; that is the only way we do so now as well.

- (2) Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful.
(3) For you should keep in mind that this testing of your *faith* develops perseverance. (4)
So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.
James 1:2-4

Verse Three

By faith we understand that the ages have been constructed by the Word of God, so that what we see (i.e., the material world) has not come into being from the things presently visible.
Hebrews 1:3

The religion that modern science has become rejects out of hand the supernatural as a possible causation of the universe. Whereas earlier generations of scientists such as Newton embraced God as the Creator of the natural laws they discovered and described, modern science has elevated the creation over the Creator, exactly according to the devil's plan (Rom.1:25). This is exactly the opposite of God's intention in His provision of natural revelation meant to lead humanity towards the truth.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.
Romans 1:20 NIV

This trend, towards adopting satanic lies in place of the obvious conclusion "written in the hearts" of all human beings by God at birth (Eccl.3:11), is in fact not a new one. Mythology is essentially a similar attempt to supply alternative interpretations to the clear testimony of the heavens and of nature itself: as anyone with even average intelligence can see, there must be an all-knowing, all beneficent Creator as necessarily inferred from this amazing creation of His.

Even in antiquity, when knowledge and empiricism first began to grow, starting with the pre-Socratics in ancient Greece, materialistic theories neatly ejected the one true God from their calculations – just as is the case today. Gnosticism, a great problem in the Jewish world of Paul's time as we have seen, essentially combines the mythological and scientific deceptions into a

toxic mix antithetical to faith in the truth. But we believers know and understand that whatever other religions or any mythology or science or evolution or any other false teaching may claim, our God made everything in an instant of time, just as His Holy Spirit testifies at the very beginning of His holy Word.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
Genesis 1:1 KJV

Before all else, God created the heavens and the earth.²
Genesis 1:1

This is the truth, regardless of all mythological or scientific theorizing to the contrary.³ Science was not present "when I laid the earth's foundation" (Job 38:4; cf. Prov.8:22-31). Speculation based upon models which in turn are at their core based upon one false assumption after another is necessarily flawed – and it has to be, because science today *ipso facto* rejects the **actual** cause of creation: the Will and the creative act of the Creator, our Lord and our God.

(3) Keep this foremost in your mind: in the end times cynics will ridicule [the truth], acting out of their own selfish lusts (4) and saying, "Where is that 'return' He promised? Everything is the same now as it was since the beginning of the world, since the time our forefathers passed on." (5) But it escapes their notice in asserting this, namely, that there were heavens long ago too, and an earth, which was [re-]established (Gen.1:2ff.) out from under water (i.e., the "waters below") and through [the midst of] water (i.e., the "waters above") by the Word of God – (6) [and that it was also] through these two [sets of waters] that the world of that time (i.e., in Noah's day) was deluged by water [from above and below] and destroyed. (7) Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men (i.e., at the end of history). (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., the final "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise as some think; rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar (i.e., at the end of the Millennium), the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection] (i.e., the last judgment). (11) Since then all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with apprehension and eager expectation the advent of the Day of God (i.e., the 2nd Advent). For on that day (i.e., at the end of it) the heavens will burst into

² For an explanation of the correct translation here, see SR 2: The Genesis Gap, section I, "Linguistic Evidence for the Genesis Gap".

³ See in particular in SR 5, section II.8.e, "The Problem of Science and the Bible".

flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where [only] righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:3-13

Despite science, despite skeptics, despite scoffers, despite so-called "evolution", we believers know that the material world "has not come into being from the things presently visible" (Heb.1:3). How do we know? By *faith!*

Verse Four

By faith Abel offered a more valuable sacrifice to God than Cain did, through which he received testimony of being righteous, for God Himself gave that testimony regarding the gifts [he had offered]. And through this testimony Abel still speaks to us, even though dead.

Hebrews 11:4

While we are not given specific information about the exact communications that the Lord had with Abel and with the other members of Adam's family after the expulsion from paradise, nor exactly how this came about (i.e., whether through dreams or direct address, whether through Adam as the patriarch of that time or to each one individually), this statement by the Spirit leaves us in no doubt about the fact that God did tell Abel what was right to do, directly or indirectly, because Abel did it: he *believed* in the Lord and in His words and acted according – after the same pattern that all believers have followed from the beginning to the present day. Abel acted "by faith", trusting the Lord that to do what He says is always the right thing. That is the righteousness to which Paul refers here, the righteousness that comes by faith in the Lord and not from works. It is on account of this "justification by faith", that is, being considered just and righteous by the Father on account of our putting of our trust in His Son and His death on our behalf, that we believers are considered fit for the kingdom of heaven in spite of our imperfection.⁴ We are sinners by birth and not righteous, but we have God's own righteousness by virtue of being in Christ through our faith in Him.

And [Abraham] *believed* in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for *righteousness*.
Genesis 15:6 NKJV

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but *believes* on Him who *justifies* the ungodly, his faith is accounted for *righteousness*.

Romans 4:4-5 NKJV

Abel's sacrifice, his doing what the Lord told him to do is the evidence of his faith and therefore of the righteousness which he had through faith.

⁴ See BB 4A: Christology, section II.8, "Justification".

(21) Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (22) You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. (23) And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.
James 2:21-23 NIV

As Paul reminds us, it is the Holy Spirit who testified to the rightness of Abel's sacrifice, which right sacrifice in turn gave proof of the righteousness he had received by faith: for righteous *believers* do righteous things but unrighteous unbelievers do not.

And Abel also brought an offering – fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering.
Genesis 4:4 NIV

Cain had sought to preempt Abel's sacrifice by first offering vegetables instead of a blood sacrifice, being proud of his own efforts in raising them and expecting God to be impressed with these efforts as well. Abel, on the other hand, did what *God* required, offering a blood sacrifice which spoke entirely of God's goodness in providing the Sacrifice to come who would save us from our sins. No human effort can provide salvation, and it is the height of arrogance, legalism in the extreme, to ever assume that God needs anything from us or that He should be impressed by what we "do for Him". Those who do what He says in putting their faith in Him and in His Word are righteous; all others are following in the footsteps of the devil.

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,
And put your trust in the Lord.
Psalm 4:5 NKJV

[We] know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.
Galatians 2:16 NIV

(8) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – (9) not by works, so that no one can boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV

In Genesis we are told that Cain brought his offering before Abel did. Given that the two were brothers and there were very few human beings on earth at this time (four only), it is fair to assume that these two had spoken about the matter and that Cain had attempted to convince Abel to sacrifice his way instead of God's prescribed way. "What difference could it make?" But of course it made all the difference in the world: sacrificing one's own works in arrogance so as to ostensibly obligate God as opposed to carefully following His instructions that manifest the Sacrifice whereby alone anyone could be saved.

In spite of his elder brother's attempts to persuade him, and in spite of the precedent Cain set in sacrificing first, Abel decided to do things God's way, come what may. It is doubtful that Cain threatened Abel, but he surely pressured him. Abel nevertheless resisted the bad example of his older brother and the subtle intimidation he no doubt exercised and did what God wanted him to do. The result was God being pleased with Abel, even as he was displeased with Cain. And why was He displeased with Cain? Because Cain was acting religiously, doing works of legalism, essentially sacrificing to his own ego rather than to God, and in so doing making it clear that he despised the Word of God – that he was an unbeliever. And why was God pleased with Abel? Because Abel, in genuine humility, believed what God told him and acted accordingly – as all believers should.

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

1st John 3:12 NIV

Unable to convince God to accept his abhorrent sacrifice of works (cf. Acts 7:41), Cain decided to destroy his brother who had done what God required – as if to leave God with no choice but accept him as the only surviving brother. This is very reminiscent of Satan's thinking in seeking to put God "in a box" with his own rebellion. But just as in that former case, arrogant opposition to God always fails to anticipate the perfect assessment and redress of the righteous One with whom we have to do.

[And you have come to] to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Hebrews 12:24 NKJV

The actual blood of Christ is of course infinitely "better" than the ritual of blood sacrifice which merely foreshadowed it. But by doing things God's way, Abel demonstrated that he was looking forward to God's solution to the problem of sin, whereas Cain saw no problem at all and merely sought to advance himself by doing things his way instead of God's way. Ironically enough, the Jerusalem believers of Paul's day were following Cain's example even as they were indeed making animal sacrifices, continuing with the rituals which foreshadowed Christ's coming sacrifice even though that sacrifice had by then been accomplished. "What difference does it make?" As in the earlier case, it makes all the difference in the world whether we are doing things God's way or our own way. Believers are called to do the former; doing the latter is *modus operandi* of the unbeliever.

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

1st John 3:7 NKJV

Though Abel died for his faithfulness, yet his example still speaks to us today, and the reward stored up for him in heaven is doubtless great. Abel was a man who accepted and understood the gospel message when he heard it, one who was persecuted for so doing and "martyred" as a result, that is, he "became a witness" with "God Himself witnessing" to the righteousness of his

deeds giving proof of the righteousness Abel possessed through faith. Abel is thus a pattern for us all, especially in light of the soon to come Tribulation where the pressures to do things the wrong way, Cain's way, will be great, and the penalty for doing them God's way in despite of the world its present ruler may well be martyrdom in the manner of Abel.

If anyone [is marked] for captivity, he is going into captivity. If anyone [is marked] for death by the sword, by the sword [he must] be killed. Therefore endurance and faith [on the part] of [my] sanctified ones is [called for].

Revelation 13:10

Cain had heard the same gospel message as Abel had, proclaimed the first time to our original parents in the clothing of skins that God provided for them to cover their nakedness, the death of the animals in question covering the manifestation of their sin being unmistakably clear in its symbolism.⁵ But Cain, in his arrogance and disregard for God, sought to advance his own self-righteousness rather than to respond to God's demand so as to receive God's true righteousness in the only way that sinful human beings can, namely, *through faith*.

(7) But whatever I had gained [in my former godless life], compared to Christ I have come to consider these things as losses. (8) Indeed, I consider everything to be a loss compared to the surpassing importance of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of everything, and consider [everything I have lost] as garbage, compared to gaining Christ, (9) and being found in Him – *not* having a personal righteousness [developed] through [following] the [Mosaic] law – but having that *righteousness* [that comes] through *faith* in Christ, that *righteousness* [that comes] from God based on *faith*.

Philippians 3:7-9

Verses Five through Six

(5) By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. (6) Now without *faith*, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must *believe* that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:5-6

Enoch: While scripture doesn't say much about this wonderful believer of the past, the unique and early (relatively, compared to others of his time) departure the Lord gave him from this life is a testament to his spiritual greatness. When Hezekiah was informed that he was about to be taken home, he besought the Lord with tears and was granted fifteen further years on this earth (Is.38:1-5). Believers who really do esteem the Lord more than anything else in this life, however, have the opposite attitude and understand that this early removal was not only a great honor for Enoch but a great blessing.

⁵ I.e., the *protoevangelium*.

(20) I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (21) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (22) If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! (23) I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is better by far*; (24) but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (25) Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, (26) so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Philippians 1:20-26 NIV

Paul would have rather been taken home earlier as well, and as we see from the passage above was willing to remain – and eager to do so – only because of the necessary ministry he knew the Lord wanted him to perform down here. Enoch had finished his course so that further time on earth was superfluous. He had "pleased God" through fulfilling the mandates we are all given, to grow, progress and produce for the Lord. And in terms of production, we know that Enoch had indeed produced a good crop through ministering the Word to his contemporaries. We see only a small glimpse of this from scripture, but because of his special status, a part of Enoch's ministry is preserved in the Word of God forever:

(14) Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, (15) to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."⁶

Jude 1:14-15 NKJV

Pleasing God requires us to do what He directs us to do, and faith is the basis for everything we think and say and do which God finds pleasing. For three hundred years, Enoch "kept walking with God" (Gen.5:22; 5:24: Hebrew *hithpael* indicating repetitive action and meant to express intimacy; cf. Gen.6:9), listening to His counsel and following it and encouraging others to do the same. He "kept walking with God", a phrase which the Septuagint version of the Bible translates as "pleased God". Paul endorses that interpretation in the Spirit with his words here: "for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God". When Enoch had earned a full reward, the Lord "took him" home (Gen.5:24), having proved himself someone with whom the Lord was well pleased on account of his consistent and faithful ministry over very many years.

Reward Motivation:

Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

⁶ For commentary on this passage, its validity, and the fact that it has nothing whatsoever to do with the apocryphal "Book of Enoch", see under "Verses 14-15" in Peter #39.

Hebrews 11:6

Taking Enoch's pleasing of God as his departure point, Paul now explains just how it is that faith is essential to achieve that pleasure on God's part. God is pleased when we trust Him, when we believe what He tells us and follow through in our hearts and with our hands. That is what Abel did; Cain did precisely the opposite.

(24) Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. (25) The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" (26) He replied, "**You of little faith**, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.
Matthew 8:24-26 NIV

(22) And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."
(23) But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." (24) But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (25) Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" (26) But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." (27) And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." (28) Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, **great is your faith!** Let it be to you as you desire."
And her daughter was healed from that very hour.
Matthew 15:22-28 NKJV

We can see from both of these passages that faith which is pleasing to God is not just a matter of accepting certain information as true. "Great faith" responds with words and deeds; "little faith", on the other hand, fails to apply what it ought to "know". The Syro-Phoenician woman persevered in her request in spite of being ignored and then rebuffed twice – because she was absolutely convinced of our Lord's ability to do what she asked and of His goodness in responding to those who trust in Him – and she was rewarded with the immediate healing of her daughter, commended by our Lord Himself for her "great faith". The disciples, on the other hand, who woke our Lord because they imagined that if they did not that they would all drown, failed to apply truths which by this time they should not only have understood but taken deeply into their hearts in full belief and faith. Jesus is the Son of God. **Of course** He was not going to drown – and therefore neither were they. All evidence to the contrary, they should have realized that the Creator was right there with them so that they had nothing to fear from the storm as long as they were properly respectful of Him. As a result, they are rebuked by our Lord for failing this test. But if they had possessed a perfected fear of God, they would have had no need to fear anyone or anything else.

In God I have put my trust;
I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?
Psalm 56:11 NKJV

The Lord is on my side;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?
Psalm 118:6 NKJV

"I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass."
Isaiah 51:12 NIV

If the former lauding of the Syro-Phoenician woman seems exaggerated to us, we might well consider all of the times we personally have petitioned the Lord and have not received an immediate positive response resulting in our slacking off in our request rather than becoming more vehement – and yet He is right here with us just as much as He was there with her (Eph.6:18; cf. Lk.18:1-8). And if our Lord's criticism of the disciples seems overly harsh, we should take note of our own failures on this score as well, because whatever "boat" we happen to be in at any given moment, the Lord is right here with us as well – and is in no way asleep or unaware of our predicament, large or small.

Therefore it should be our intention always to please the Lord by being people of "great faith", trusting Him to get us through whatever crisis we are experiencing, rather than those "of little faith", giving way to doubt just because our eyes and ears and anxious thoughts tell us that all is lost. For "without faith, it is impossible to please God", and we believers ought to have it as our chief goal to please Jesus Christ beyond everything else in this life. That requires faith. That requires trusting Him. And that faith, that trust, is tested and validated when we continue to think and say and do what He desires, in spite of the pressures of this life. True faith, "great faith", is seen in its confident response to the Lord in times of trial and stress.

(21) Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (22) You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his *faith* was made complete by what he did. (23) And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham *believed* God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. (24) You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. (25) In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?
James 2:21-25 NIV

(3) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, (5) who *through faith* are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (6) In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of *trials*. (7) These have come so that the *proven genuineness of your faith* – of greater

worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1st Peter 1:3-7 NIV

As in the case of the Syro-Phoenician woman, we are motivated to please God because of the good things that He has and will give those who are faithful to Him. As in the case of the disciples in the boat, we *should* be motivated to please God because of the bad things He has and will deliver us from when we are faithful to Him (and, as in their case, often even if we are not). We rejoice over the reception of both blessing and deliverance, and we ought to be fearful of missing out of either one (and of failing the tests which come to us all).

So we make it our goal *to please him*, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is *to fear the Lord*, we try to persuade others.

2nd Corinthians 5:9-11a NIV

As we anticipate our Lord's judging us for what we have accomplished in this life, we are rightly eager for the eternal reward we have earned and at the same time rightfully anxious about our failures. We know that we have passed from death to life with no further worries on that score (1Jn.3:14), so that our trepidation has to do with potential loss, not with punishment (which is for unbelievers only once this life is over). That is the believer's proper perspective in this life, namely, deeply desiring to hear our Lord say "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt.25:21), and deeply desiring to avoid a massive bonfire of our worldly efforts in place of that commendation (1Cor.3:10-15).

Drawing Nearer to God

For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6b

Our God is a God who is both nearby and far away (Jer.23:23) – near to those who love Him and who trust Him, and far away from those who do not (Ps.138:6). He will draw nearer to us if we draw nearer to Him in the only way it is possible to do so, namely, through trusting Him, believing His Word, and acting accordingly.

(18) Herein we have then a revoking of the prior commandment (i.e., the Law) on account of it being weak and ineffectual (i.e., unable to bring fulfillment to the plan of salvation), (19) – for the Law fulfilled nothing – and instead the bringing in of a better hope through which we [actually do] draw near to God.

Hebrews 7:18-19

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

James 4:8 NIV

Believe that He Exists: This may at first seem a strange thing for Paul to say in the context of our drawing closer to Him and receiving a good reward for pleasing Him as a result. "Of course God exists!", we might be tempted to say. "What believer doesn't understand that! Even the demons accept that (Jas.2:19)!" But Paul's statement has to be understood in the context of what these Greek words mean in relation to their Hebrew equivalents.

"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, ***I am!***"
John 8:58 NIV

As in our context, the words in bold above come from the verb "to be" in Greek but mean much more in this phrasing than mere existence. They convey the notion of unique deity, being the Greek equivalent of the tetragrammaton (YHVH), the holy Name for our God, indicating not only that He does "exist" Himself, but that He is ***the source*** of everything else that exists as well (Jn.1:4).

(14) Then God said to Moses, "I shall be who I am. This is what you will tell the sons of Israel: 'I am sent me to you.' " (15) And God also said to Moses, "Thus you will say to the sons of Israel: 'the Lord [the "is": YHVH], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob sent me to you.' This is My Name forever, and this is how you are to think about me for all generations."
Exodus 3:14-15

The divine name "Lord" (YHVH), explained in these verses as being based on "I am/shall be", can potentially be derived from either the Hebrew verb "to be" or the verb "to become" (the two verbs being very close in the Hebrew). Likewise, the form YHVH (יהוה) is a unique form which appears to be a cross in Hebrew between an imperfect (indicating repeated action irrespective of time as in "I shall be/I am") and an infinitive absolute (summing up the meaning of a verb at one throw: i.e., the very essence of "being/becoming"). What we have then both in the verses above and in the Name itself is a declaration that the Lord is the very definition of being and existence without regard to time or physical phenomena. In other words, He alone is the Creator having created all things, all of space and time, from nothing in an instant (Gen.1:1; cf. Heb.1:3: "By faith we understand that the ages have been constructed by the Word of God, so that what we see has not come into being from the things presently visible").

And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, ***I am.***"
Luke 22:70 NASB95

Paul's first requirement for being rewarded by God is that the believer in question not merely accept in an academic way His existence but also comprehend that He is ***the*** existent One from who all creation – all life – originates, that He is "being/becoming" itself, and that apart from Him there would be nothing at all. In terms of theology, this requirement, namely, to "believe that He exists" is essentially a mandate to understand and accept all that scripture says about God's infinity, His spirituality, eternity, immeasurability, uniqueness, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. To qualify to compete for eternal rewards, believers need to have a basic understanding of God's ***infinite nature*** made solid in their hearts through believing these truths,

namely, who He "is" eternally, apart from His relationship to us here in time.

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me."

Isaiah 46:9 NIV

Earnestly Seeking Him: What does it mean to "seek God"? Nowadays we hear a lot about "seeking" and "being a 'seeker'". We even hear of "seeker friendly churches". Sadly, what the church-visible mostly means by this is "Christians who are not tied to the traditional approach or to a single denomination". And while that is not bad in and of itself, the effect of this "independence" usually means being entirely eclectic about what a person chooses to believe or do in their Christian life, being a truly independent agent, church-hopping, website-hopping, picking one teaching from column A and another from column B with no doctrinal mooring apart from what "feels right". Churches that cater to this "philosophy" are doing very well at present, and it is an easy thing to accomplish too. All that is needed is to have no commitment whatsoever to what the Word actually says and a willingness to pronounce any point of truth dispensable if it offends a potential money-giving member. We who love the truth understand that the above is not at all what Paul is saying. Seeking God, seeking Him earnestly, is impossible without the truth. How could we know anything at all about Him, about His *infinite nature*,⁷ without what He tells us in His Word? And how could we possibly know what He has done for us in Jesus Christ and what He wants from us in return apart from the Bible, the truth it contains, the teachings actually present within it (as opposed to the fruits of impressionistic dabbling)?

He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?
Micah 6:8 NKJV

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."
Matthew 22:23 NKJV

We believe that God "exists", that is, we understand and accept from scripture and from proper teaching something about the infinite nature of God. That is the first requirement in pleasing Him, in "drawing near" to Him. The second requirement has to do with learning about, accepting by faith and responding to God's *perfect character*, His goodness, faithfulness, holiness, sovereignty, love, justice and life. To draw near to Him, to please Him, requires us to *respond* to Him, and there is no way for us to do so without understanding and believing who He "is"

⁷ For the infinite nature and perfect character of God, see BB 1: Theology, section I, "The Essence of God: Nature and Characteristics".

independently of His creation (His infinite nature), and who He "is" in relationship to His creation (His perfect character). We strive to be good, because He is good. We strive to be faithful, because He is faithful. We strive to exercise the image of God in a godly way, using our free will to respond to Him in the way He desires, because He is *the* Sovereign. We strive to love Him with all our hearts and our fellow believers as ourselves because He *is* love. We yearn for life eternal because He is life and has caused us to be reborn through faith in Jesus Christ. And we strive to be just and righteous in all we do, responding justly and righteously to His righteousness which we possess through faith, because He is justice itself. His character is perfect, and we make it our heart's desire to respond to His perfection, emulating it through following the truth and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In practical terms, we strive to follow the example of Jesus Christ who is God, now incarnate as a true human being, the One who has won the victory of sin and death that we might have the chance to be saved and to take up our cross, our mandate, and to follow Him, to carry out this mission of pleasing God through spiritual growth, progress and production to the hoped-for end of an eternal reward.

"I am the way: the truth and the life."
John 14:6

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.
1st Corinthians 11:1 NIV

For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6

We draw near to Him through faith in the truth, understanding, believing and responding to who He is, His infinite nature and perfect character, manifest in the person and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, spelled out for us in scripture, and illuminated by the Spirit when seek Him earnestly, putting the truth – learning it, living by it, sharing it – first in our lives. That is the way, the only way, to please God and to earn a good reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ.⁸

(32) "Now then, my children, listen to me, [Wisdom]; blessed are those who keep my ways. (33) Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it. (34) Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. (35) For those who find me find life and receive favor from the Lord. (36) But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death."
Proverbs 8:32-36 NIV

What, then, is the basis for our reward? Faith. Faith in God, who He is and what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. And faithfulness. Responding to Him, doing what He wants us to do. Drawing near to Him. Earnestly seeking Him. Making Him and His truth the focal point of our lives: growing in truth, living by the truth, serving our Master by spreading the truth according to

⁸ For the process and basis of eternal rewards, see CT 6: Last Things, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

whatever gifts, ministries and opportunities we have been given for the edification of the Church of Jesus Christ.

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying [goal] of belief in and full-knowledge of the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity of the fullness of Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.
Ephesians 4:11-16

Verse Seven

By faith, Noah, when divinely informed about things which were not yet visible, in reverent piety constructed an ark for the deliverance of his family, through which [ark] he condemned the world [by responding to God in faith] and became heir to the righteousness which is [awarded] according to faith.
Hebrews 11:7

Noah is the last and possibly the greatest of the pre-Abraham gentile believers to whose faith Paul attests, and the principle of faith being the basis for eternal rewards is perfectly demonstrated by his example. We please God by believing in Him, who He is, His infinite nature, and by responding to His perfect character by faithfully carrying out His mandates to us. To be rewarded, we have to believe His word and we have to follow His word. This Noah did in an exceptional way and to an exceptional degree.

When Noah "was divinely informed", that is, when God made His word and will clear to Noah, Noah not only believed but acted in belief and faithfully so – for many years and in many unusual and no doubt trying circumstances. Noah did so in spite of the fact that of the flood God warned him about there was as yet no visible indication whatsoever – and would not be until the day the rain began.⁹ Noah "took God's word for it", and that is the essence of all we believers do and have done from the beginning when we respond properly to the Lord. That is how we are saved, that is how we grow, that is how we progress and produce, namely, but trusting the Lord that everything He tells us is the truth regardless of what we may see or hear or feel or think in our anxious thoughts. That is the faith that is required to do the great things God would have us do –

⁹ Before the seismic changes to the earth occasioned by the great flood, there was no rain upon the earth (cf. Gen.2:5-6). For this other changes wrought by that cataclysmic event, see SR 5, section II.8.e, "The Problem of Science and the Bible".

like build an ark for the preservation of our family and the entire line of faith as Noah did. We will not be called upon to build any literal ark, obviously, but each of us is indeed being called to build, through ministry, a vehicle of spiritual preservation for those to whom we minister and for ourselves as well.

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1st Timothy 4:16 NIV

The difficulties Noah faced in carrying out God's plan for his life were in many ways unique. Noah was, quite literally, the "last man standing", he and his family, that is. We have seen before how that these were the last truly human "human beings" left on the face of the earth after the devil's plan to corrupt the human race through angelic infiltration/cohabitation had reached its acme.¹⁰ While it is possible that by the time the great flood occurred there were others still alive who were not nephilim, most if not all of their progeny was, so that the line of the Messiah came dangerously close to eradication – and would have suffered that fate but for Noah. But God extirpated this horrific threat to the human race (and therewith to the Messianic line), by means of the great flood and through Noah's efforts in building the ark in response to God's word in order to preserve genuine humanity.

The story of Noah is one that has fascinated many people over the centuries, but it is telling to note that while Noah himself is frequently adduced as a model of faithfulness, in all of the biblical references outside of the Genesis narrative the ark which Noah was directed to build is only mentioned a few times, and then only peripherally and subordinate to the example given by its builder (Matt.24:38; Lk.17:27; 1Pet.3:20). The animals "two by two" which so dominate the story when it is told outside of scripture are never mentioned again in the Bible. This is because, of course, it is Noah's faithfulness to God that is the real point of the entire event.

It is difficult for us to fully appreciate the challenge Noah faced during the some 120 years it took him to build the ark according to God's precise specifications (Gen.6:3; cf. 1Pet.3:20). His diligence in undertaking and completing this project is something which perhaps we can appreciate to some degree. But which of us could remain faithful over such a long period of time so as to come in for this high praise from the Spirit?

Noah did *everything* just as God commanded him.

Genesis 6:22 NIV

It is easy to miss the import of this statement. Add to this the fact that the physical construction of the ark was perhaps not the greatest challenge Noah faced. Certainly he would have met opposition to his project from the corrupt half-human generation that populated the world at that time (Gen.6:5-8; 6:13; 2Pet.2:5; cf. Matt.24:37-30; Lk.17:26-30), no doubt motivated by the "disobedient" spirits who had engendered these nephilim in the first place (Gen.6:1-5; 1Pet.3:19-

¹⁰ See SR 5, section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

20; 2Pet.2:4-10; Jude 1:5-7). Of course, God helped Noah at every turn, but we would be wrong to discount the harassment, ostracism and threats to himself and to his family that this work of God on his part must have brought down upon him. Is there ever any legitimate work for the Lord which the evil one does not oppose? How much more so when the man and his work are the last obstacles standing in the way of a satanic plan that, unopposed, meant to prevent the Messiah from ever coming into the world? But Noah persevered, and in spite of the great load laid on his shoulders, "did *everything* just as God commanded him" (Gen.6:22).

Reverent Piety:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

Psalm 111:10 ESV

The word translated here "reverent piety" is the Greek word *eulabeo* which, etymologically speaking, means to "take care", but which is always employed in reference to the care (or reverence) with which mere human beings should approach deity. In other words, anyone with a lick of common sense, "wisdom", would do well to be circumspect in any and all dealings with God – for He is God and we are merely dust.

Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes."

Genesis 18:27 NIV

This reverence, this godly fear of Him who made us is appropriate, and the fact that it is exceedingly rare nowadays – even among believers – is no brief for failing to exercise the appropriate attitude of respect whenever we approach the Lord. That is what biblical "piety" really is, not some sort of self-righteous, holier-than-thou, affected religious behavior. Appreciated to at least some degree, the vast difference between almighty, holy God and ourselves when we pray to Him and listen to Him is the basic "wisdom" upon which all subsequent response to the Lord is based.

(12) And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, (13) and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 NIV

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

Psalm 19:9 NIV

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:7 NIV

Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.
Proverbs 18:12 NIV

(2) The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord – (3) and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
Isaiah 11:2-3a NIV

How does one exhibit proper respect for God? By believing what He tells us in faith, and by faithfully doing what He tells us to do. God is our Father. Is this not the way in which we responded to our earthly fathers (at least when we were behaving correctly)? How much more then should we not treat our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who paid for all of our sins on the cross with at least the same measure of reverence and respect? It is pious to do so. It is impious to fail to do so.

Noah receives praise in this passage for responding appropriately to the warning and the directive given to him by God. He believed what the Lord told him was going to happen, and then he faithfully carried out the mandates he was given. Likewise we – and the Jerusalem believers to whom Paul wrote – should believe all the words of truth in the Bible and then faithfully carry out the mandates therein which, in general terms, means committing to a course of spiritual growth, pushing through the opposition we receive, in faith that God will deliver us, and then helping others do the same through whatever ministries the Lord gives us. Failing to do so is not reverent, it is not pious. It is disrespectful to the One we are supposed to love more than anyone or anything in this life. But doing the exact opposite of what we are being told to do and violating direct commands such as the Jerusalem believers were doing is not just disrespectful. It is dangerously arrogant. That is what Noah's contemporaries were doing and we know what they suffered as a result, being swept away by the great flood. That is what many of the Jerusalem believers were doing and in a few short years they would be swept away by the Romans. And that is what far too many putative believers today are doing as well. It would not be surprising to see such individuals swept up into antichrist's false religion so as to fall away from the faith (as one third are prophesied to do) and suffer the consequences for that worst of all possible decisions.

(9) A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, (10) they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name." (12) This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who **keep his commands** and **remain faithful** to Jesus. (13) Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."
Revelation 14:9-13 NIV

Noah believed the Lord, though he could not yet see the coming judgment; the result of his obedient belief was the righteousness we too all possess through faith in Christ, resulting in his salvation in eternity and his deliverance in time, while the world which did not believe or respond to that same truth was entirely condemned and destroyed (physically then and destined to suffer the second death at the last judgment).

(5) Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (6) And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. (7) So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." (8) But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.
Genesis 6:5-8 NKJV

Heir of Righteousness: [index]

. . . through which [same] faith [by responding to God] he condemned the world and became heir to the righteousness which is [awarded] according to faith.
Hebrews 11:7b

Noah "condemned the world" by his faith and his faithfulness, condemned it, that is, by demonstrating that, all satanic lies to the contrary, he would choose to *believe* what God had told him and promised him, and to act faithfully in response. In doing so, Noah became "heir to the righteousness" which comes to all those who believe in Jesus Christ so as to be considered righteous by God on account of that faith, i.e., "justified by faith".¹¹

Abram *believed* the Lord, and he credited it to him as *righteousness*.
Genesis 15:6 NIV

(21) But now apart from the law the *righteousness* of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. (22a) This *righteousness* is given through *faith* in Jesus Christ to all who *believe*.
Romans 3:21-22a NIV

(9) Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's *faith* was credited to him as *righteousness*. (10) Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! (11) And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the *righteousness* that he had by *faith* while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who *believe* but have not been circumcised, in order that *righteousness* might be credited to them.

¹¹ I.e., "justification", being considered "righteous" by God on account of our faith: Rom.1:17; 3:22-24; 3:28; 4:1-25; 5:1; 5:9; 5:16-21; 8:30; 9:30; 10:4-6; 1Cor.1:30; 6:11; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.2:16; 3:24; Tit.3:7. See BB 4A: Christology, section II.8, "Justification".

Romans 4:9-11 NIV

(30) What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue *righteousness*, have attained to *righteousness*, even the *righteousness* of *faith*; (31) but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. (32a) Why? Because they did not seek it *by faith*, but as it were, by the works of the law.

Romans 9:30-32a NKJV

For Christ is the fulfillment (lit., "end") of the Law, resulting in *righteousness* for everyone who *believes* [in Him].

Romans 10:4

Noah believed in the Lord and he believed what the Lord told him. The result of his obedient faith was the reception of God's righteousness which all believers possess through faith in Christ, resulting in salvation. But Noah *also* followed through in a faithful way to do what the Lord told him to do. Thus the "heirship" mentioned here refers not only to our common salvation received through faith in Christ whereby all believers are *considered righteous* by God, but also to his eternal reward based upon his subsequent following through in faith so as to *live righteously*, doing what the Lord desired him to do. That is the theme of this section of Hebrews as we have seen.¹² Not only did Noah have the righteousness we all possess by virtue of being "in Christ" through believing in Him. Noah also *was* righteous, someone who "did right" by doing what God wanted him to do. That has always been the basis for receiving the higher rewards that accrue to believers who do more than just believe, those who actually follow through to fulfill the mandates of growth, progress and production our Lord desires us all to embrace.

Noah's ark was a witness to the world of the power of faith, the power of God, and the goodness of God: a means to deliverance from the destruction about to be unleashed – for all who were willing to accept the truth of what Noah "preached"; and a means to deliverance from eternal condemnation for all who were willing to accept the truth about eternal salvation.

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a *righteous* man, and perfect in his generations. Noah, moreover, made a habit of walking with God.
Genesis 6:9

The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you *righteous* in this generation."
Genesis 7:1 NIV

[God] did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a *preacher of righteousness*.
2nd Peter 2:5 NKJV

"Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only

¹² See Hebrews Chapter 2, under verse seven, "Our Inheritance in Christ".

themselves *by their righteousness*," says the Lord God.
Ezekiel 14:14 NKJV

In secular culture, Noah is famous for the ark. But in scripture, as these passages show, Noah was famous for righteousness: he was righteous as a believer by position in Christ (as we all are); but he was also a man who did what was "right" in the eyes of the Lord, pleasing Him in spite of opposition from virtually the entire world of that time (not to mention from the satanic forces who had created the situation for which the flood was the only cure). Noah not only believed but also grew in grace and came fully into the ministry the Lord had for him. He not only built the ark, but, "preacher of righteousness" that he was, he used it to spread the gospel message of repentance.

In the end, Noah found few takers (only his immediate family). Yet he is included in this catalog of heroes of the faith who serve as examples of those who "please God" by their faith and faithfulness so as to be highly rewarded. Just as from the sequel we suspect that Paul probably found few takers for his message of warning in Hebrews, his reward in heaven is great as well, reminding us that it is not the visible and putative results seen by human eyes that God honors but genuine and godly efforts accomplished in the Spirit that count in our Lord's books. Could God have miraculously created an ark without any help on Noah's part? Obviously He could have. But that would not have sent the necessary message to the world of that time nor would it have demonstrated so vividly the great faith of this righteous man. The ark is thus not meant to be a curiosity. Rather, it is a memorial to the power and the value of faith and faithfulness.

Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him (i.e., desiring to do what He wants us to do).

Hebrews 11:6

Verses Eight through Ten

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of that city (i.e., the New Jerusalem) whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

Abraham Obeyed:

(1) Now the Lord said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;

(2) And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
(3) And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."
Genesis 12:1-3 NASB95

As related above, God "called" Abraham (Heb.11:8).¹³ And He calls us all who then respond and believe (Rom.8:29-30). But not everyone who is called is chosen, because not everyone who is called responds to God's call in faith.

For those called [to salvation] are many, but those chosen [for salvation] are few.
Matthew 22:14 (Matt.20:16)

And just as we respond to God's call, His gospel appeal so as to be saved through faith in Christ, so also God wants us to respond to His mandates for living our Christian lives thereafter.

(28) "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' (29) 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. (30) Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. (31) Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you."
Matthew 21:28-31 NIV

It is all well and good to exult in our salvation – and well we should. But it is only those who thereafter actually respond to God's will to grow, to successfully endure testing, and to produce a crop for Christ who are pleasing to Him so as to earn a substantial eternal reward.

For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him (i.e., desiring to do what He wants us to do).
Hebrews 11:6b

Abraham "***obeyed and went forth***" even though the place to where he was headed was completely unknown to him. In a similar way, after we accept Christ, even though we have already received spiritual gifts at the point of believing, none of us has a clear idea at that point of just exactly how the Lord is planning to use us for the edification of His Church. Those of us who want to live according to the righteousness we have received, whether immediately or eventually, embrace this pilgrimage to which we have been called, keeping our eyes on the prize of eternal life and the rewards that come to those who live their lives for Jesus Christ.

¹³ See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.3, "Biblical Role Models: Abraham".

(5) Happy is everyone whose strength is in You. Their hearts are set on the highways [of pilgrimage to Zion]. (6) As they pass through the [dry] valley of Bachah (i.e., the wilderness of life), they make it a place of springs. Even the early rains enwrap it with [their] blessings. (7) They go from strength to strength, until they appear before God in Zion.

Psalm 84:5-7

When we embark on our own journey in response to the Lord, we likewise do not know exactly where we are going, but like Abraham, God does give us many wonderful promises to encourage us (e.g., Gen.12:1-3). Our part is to *believe* His promises and to act accordingly. We have a right – a duty and an obligation – to motivate ourselves through looking forward to the fulfillment of those promises, striving to win the rewards the Lord has for those who do respond in this life and carry out the mandates He has given us: spiritual growth, spiritual progress, and production for the benefit of His Church.¹⁴

(7) I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith. (8) In the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that [great] day [of judgment] – and not only to me, but to all who have loved His appearance (i.e., who have exercised consistent love for Jesus Christ in anticipation of His return).

2nd Timothy 4:7-8

Blessed is the man who stands firm in testing, because when he has been [tested and] approved he will receive the crown of life which [God] has promised to all who love Him.

James 1:12

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in the glory which is about to be revealed, (2) pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will carry off in victory the crown of glory which will never fade.

1st Peter 5:1-4 (cf. Heb.13:17)

Our job in this world is to believe these promises and act accordingly – just as Abraham did. Settling in to "enjoy life" with no concern for what the Lord actually desires from us or what His Church needs from us will not produce a crop "30, 60 or 100 fold". But turning back to the world (as many of Paul's contemporaries were doing) is to risk *everything* for an ephemeral mess of pottage. That was the situation in which many of the Jerusalem church found themselves. And that is the situation soon to confront many woefully unprepared believers today in time shortly to

¹⁴ For the process and basis of eternal rewards, see CT 6: Last Things, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

come. Will they refuse the mark of the beast and put their "enjoyable life" at issue? Or will they choose not to give up Jesus Christ by (finally) embracing Him earnestly despite the cost – something we should all already be doing now.

Sojourned as an Alien: Although the Lord did bring Abraham into the land of promise, this was a foretaste of the blessing to come, not the actual possession of the entire land immediately. God gave Abraham plenty of encouragement and unmistakable promises as to what he would one day inherit, but in some respects these required an even greater measure of faith on his behalf. After all, for him to be "the father of many nations" and for his seed to inherit, possess and rule the land he was journeying through as a stranger would require for him to *have* physical progeny. As we all remember, Abraham was required to wait a very long time until the "son of promise" was born to him and to Sarah (cf. Gal.4:28).

(16) Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (17) As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. (18) Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (19) Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. (20) Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, (21) being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (22) This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gen.15:6).
Romans 4:16-22 NIV

Abraham *persevered* (Lk.8:15; 21:19; Rom.2:7; 5:3-4; 8:25; 15:4-5; Gal.6:9-10; Jas.1:3-4; Heb.12:1; Rev.3:10).¹⁵ He trusted the Lord to make good on all the wonderful promises made to him and did so without wavering in his faith, even though many years went by without the necessary heir being provided. He trusted the Lord in spite of what he saw with his own eyes – and his faith was rewarded with the birth of Isaac through whom the entire nation of Israel was begotten, including "Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom.1:3).

For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, *and that He will reward* those who earnestly seek Him (i.e., desiring to do what He wants us to do).
Hebrews 11:6b

Persevering in faith does mean to hold onto our belief in Jesus Christ "firm unto the end" (Heb.3:6; 3:14; cf. 1Pet.1:10-11), staying faithful to Him by continuing to do what He wants us to do, come what may. But part of that faith and faithfulness is to never waver in our absolute confidence that God *will* be true to all of His wonderful promises to us: resurrection, eternal life

¹⁵ See Hebrews Chapter 10, verses 32-39 under "Keep Persevering".

with all of our brethren in the Church, and wonderful rewards that will delight us for all eternity even as they glorify Him. And a place of our own in New Jerusalem forever.

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

John 14:2 KJV

A City: In Abraham's day, Jerusalem was a gentile city, inhabited by Jebusites. The only biblical record of Abraham ever having anything to do with it was when Melchizedek, the king and high priest of Salem came to meet him after his rescue of Lot and the captive people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.14:8ff.). And in Paul's day as well, Jerusalem was still not the eternal city of promise nor has it yet become so in our day. Abraham was not setting his hopes on any such earthly city, but upon the eternal habitation of God Himself, a city "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb.11:10). So should we be too. Nothing on this present earth is permanent; everything here is imperfect. We believers are looking forward to an eternity in New Jerusalem – just as Abraham was. Just as Paul's readers should have been. And the fact that we have been given more blessed information about our eternal home than Paul's contemporaries had at the time (before the writing of the book of Revelation), and considerably more than Abraham was given, then it is all the more regrettable if we fail to use these wonderful truths to motivate ourselves to do what Jesus Christ wants us to do. Abraham was "looking forward to his reward" (Heb.11:26) as should we all, convinced, as we all should be, that God not only exists in His infinite nature but also that in His perfect character not one of His promises could even conceivably fall to the ground unfulfilled: "He *will* reward those who earnestly seek Him" (Heb.11:6), not only and not exclusively "in time" but particularly and very importantly in eternity.

(9) One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you *the bride, the wife of the Lamb.*" (10) And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. (11) It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.
Revelation 21:9-11 NIV

Verses Eleven through Twelve

(11) By faith, Sarah too received the ability to conceive a child, and she did give birth past the normal time of life [to do so], because she considered faithful the One who promised her. (12) Thus from one man, and him being dead at that [so to speak], there sprang "as many as the stars of heaven in their multitude and like the sands of the seashore which cannot be numbered" (Gen.22:17).

Hebrews 11:11-12

As these verses affirm, Sarah also trusted the Lord to fulfill the promises He had made to her and

to her husband.¹⁶ We need to understand that this was no small thing since, in the eyes of the world and our collective experience, what had been promised had long since become absolutely impossible. At her age and at Abraham's age, "obviously" childbearing was by that point "inconceivable". More than that: it had been so for many years, many decades. Who would continue to believe in something so impossible after so much time had passed without so much as a sign of it coming true? But Sarah did.

(9) Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent."
(10) And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) (11) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. (12) Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my Lord being old also?" (13) And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' (14) "Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." (15) But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"
Genesis 18:9-15 NKJV

Although initially skeptical, Sarah embraced this promise. She came to have faith that the Lord would transform her laugh of incredulity into a laughter of pure joy – and so He did. Nothing is impossible for the Lord. Nothing. We just have to believe that and persevere in our steadfast faith until the Lord brings it to pass, no matter how long that takes. Just like Sarah did.

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"
Genesis 18:14 NKJV

"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?"
Jeremiah 32:27 NKJV

"The Lord of armies says this: 'If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?' declares the Lord of armies."
Zechariah 8:6 NKJV

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
Matthew 19:26 NKJV

"For with God nothing will be impossible."
Luke 1:37 NKJV

But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."
Luke 18:27 NKJV

¹⁶ See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.3, "Biblical Role Models: Sarah".

Without the faith of Abraham, without the faith of Sarah, faith that grabs hold of God's promises and refuses to relinquish them despite all physical evidence to the contrary, we will never get anywhere in this Christian life.

But without faith it is *impossible* to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6 NKJV

But if we *do* trust the Lord to deliver us, to solve our insoluble problems, whatever they may be, He will do it – if it requires Him to move a mountain on our behalf to do so.

"For assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and *nothing will be impossible* for you."
Matthew 17:20b NKJV

It is true also that neither Sarah nor Abraham were perfect. They both made mistakes along the way (trying to artificially achieve the promise through Hagar, most significantly: Genesis 16:1ff.). This should be an encouragement to us too. Even if we have not been perfect in our faith and trust in the Lord yesterday in whatever test we are undergoing, that does not mean that we cannot commit our entire heart to Him *today*. If we have but a mustard seed's grain of faith, and if we water that seed *today*, it will grow. And if we continue to do so, day by day, it will anon reach the size of a massive tree so that, in the manner of Abraham and Sarah, if we consider the Lord faithful to carry out His promises to us, for us as well as for them there will spring spiritual results and blessings "as many as the stars of heaven in their multitude and like the sands of the seashore which cannot be numbered" (Heb.11:12).

Verses Thirteen through Sixteen

(13) These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. (16) But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem).
Hebrews 11:13-16

Had Not Received the Promises: While God does bless us in this life, and while we have been told of many of the wonderful answers and deliverances that these great believers did receive in this life (Isaac, "the son of promise" being given to Abraham and Sarah, e.g.), the most important promises are never realized in this earthly life. Whatever we do receive here is not nearly as

important as what is coming, because what is coming is eternal while everything down here is only temporary – and that is one of the main reasons why mature believers can endure with patience whatever we are called upon to suffer through here and now.

(17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him. (18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) ***This is the hope with which we were saved.***

Romans 8:17-24a

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. ***But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.***

2nd Corinthians 4:17-18

Yes, we all have needs and legitimate desires here and now. We pray daily and continually for the resolution of troubles for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters in Christ. But we also know – and hold tightly to the confident expectation, the hope – that what is coming is so much better.

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalms 16:11 NIV

The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (9) In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Isaiah 25:8b-9 NIV

[A]nd the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Isaiah 35:10 NIV

"For behold, I am going to create New Heavens and a New Earth, so that the former things will not be remembered, nor will they [even] come to mind."

Isaiah 65:17

(13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. (16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes".

Revelation 7:13-17

(4) And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will no longer be any death, or cries of pain, or grief. For the previous things have passed away.

Revelation 21:4

We believers in Jesus Christ have absolute faith in all of our Lord's promises to us about what the next life will be like. We know that we will be resurrected, given a perfect body like unto His (1Jn.3:2), one that never grows old or knows pain or distress of any kind (Rom.8:23-24; 1Cor.15:35-58). We know that we have an eternal place in New Jerusalem designed for us personally by the Architect Himself (Jn.14:1-3). We know that we will be enjoying fellowship with the Father and the Son and with each other and the entire family of God forever in a unity presently unimaginable (Heb.12:22-24). And we know that whatever suffering we are enduring now in our quest to earn a good reward will not disappoint, that whatever we have earned will be ours forever and wonderful in ways beyond our present ken (Matt.6:19-21; Is.65:18). So whatever trouble we have to endure now, whatever deferral of petitions and needful desires we presently have to patiently accept, they truly are not to be compared to the "eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation" upon which we have fixed our hopes (2Cor.4:17). God has promised us, and in His perfect integrity He will most definitely fulfill these promises absolutely and completely.

By faith, Sarah too received the ability to conceive a child, and she did give birth past the normal time of life [to do so], *because she considered faithful the One who promised her.*

Hebrews 11:11

Caught Sight of and Saluted: The two verbs express the two aspects of the proper response to the Lord which all of these great spiritual heroes of Hebrews chapter eleven had in common. First, through their response to the Lord and His Word and subsequent spiritual growth they came to recognize the basic truths of our purpose here in this life. We are here to glorify the Lord, to please the Lord, to respond to the Lord, and if we do so, we will indeed be rewarded

for that proper response when we stand before Him at the judgment.

For all who have learned, accepted and fully internalized that spiritual reality, it organizes and directs and concentrates our entire outlook on this world and on this life we are leading in our few days on the earth. We come to understand that we are not here for ourselves or our personal (temporary) benefit, to enjoy ourselves and to "have a good life". These things are not wrong in and of themselves and may indeed be given to believers who have "caught sight" of the more important heavenly realities, but they also cannot be idols to which we give our allegiance. As in the common marriage vow, we who have been wed to the Lord are striving to be found pleasing to Him "for better or for worse" in regard to our worldly circumstances – as the world sees things. In truth, however, if we are doing what Jesus Christ wants us to do, it is always "better", even if "better" may cost us in worldly terms. We who love the Lord are willing to pay that price because we have "caught sight" of the more important spiritual realities, the great eternal blessing waiting for us on the other side of this temporary life, so that we esteem and consider a "well done!" from Jesus Christ as of far more worth than any successes or pleasures or wealth of this world. Because this world and the things of this world are passing away (1Cor.7:31), but we who do the will of God will abide forever – and so will our rewards (1Jn.2:17).

(19) "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; (20) but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 6:19-21 NKJV

After "catching sight" of these eternal truths, the next common characteristic of the spiritually great is to "salute them". That is, once we come to understand that something is of the utmost importance, the next step is to acknowledge that in our hearts, to embrace that truth and to commit ourselves to living – thinking, speaking and acting – accordingly. All the heroes of Hebrews chapter eleven proved by their deeds of faith, actions motivated by the truth they had believed and deeply so, that they understood what was really important in this life and made living up to it their top priority. If pleasing our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in order to be praised and rewarded by Him on that great day to come really is our principle heart's desire, then that will be reflected in everything we think and say and do. It will be obvious to all – all who have occasion to pay attention – that Jesus Christ is our life, just as He was to the great believers of the past. And this will certainly not be lost on our Lord either.

(17) "On the day when I act," says the Lord Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. (18) And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."

Malachi 3:17-18 NIV

Strangers and Sojourners:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to *the strangers scattered* throughout Pontus, Galatia,

Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.
1st Peter 1:1 KJV

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To *the pilgrims of the Dispersion* in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,
1st Peter 1:1 NKJV

This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to God's chosen people who are *living as foreigners* in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.
1st Peter 1:1 NLT

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, *exiles scattered throughout* the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.
1st Peter 1:1 NIV

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect *exiles of the Dispersion* in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,
1st Peter 1:1 ESV

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those chosen, living as *exiles dispersed abroad* in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen
1st Peter 1:1 CSB

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as *strangers, scattered throughout* Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen
1st Peter 1:1 NASB20

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as *aliens, scattered throughout* Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen
1st Peter 1:1 NASB95

As is evident from the varied translations of the word *parepidemios* (which occurs in our context and also in 1Pet.1:1), "dwellers around" is a challenging word to translate. That is because historically it refers to individuals who are neither citizens nor permanently resident aliens. In terms of our own culture, "refugees" or "illegal aliens" possibly comes closest to the mark. Because of the biblical context, summing up the experiences of the likes of the patriarchs who were pilgrims in the land of promise, moving about in tents, the word "sojourner" seems the most apt. For that, indeed, is what we believers are in this world. We are only moving through it. We have no permanent toehold on it. Nor does anyone else. But we at least realize that critical fact – or at least we should. Using this word, in conjunction with "stranger", Paul hopes to remind his readers that friendship with this world is vain and dangerous precisely because we are only here for the Lord, and only for the brief spot of time He has given us here to carry out the particular

mission He has for each one of us.¹⁷

You adulterously unfaithful people! Don't you know that *friendship with the world* means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God.

James 4:4

(15) *Do not be a lover of this world*, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

Fools store up goods not knowing who will possess them after they die (Ps.39:6; Matt.6:19-21), foolishly assuming that they will live forever, when they might well have their lives taken this very moment.

Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him.

Psalms 49:16-17 NIV

(15) Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." (16) And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. (17) He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' (18) Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. (19) And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' (20) But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' (21) This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

Luke 12:15-21 NIV

For believers walking through this world in humility and with a proper fear of God, we know that all this we see with our eyes is fleeting, we know that we are here on this earth for but the blink of an eye, and we have embraced the proper godly mind-set that sees our lives as a short journey through an inhospitable land, the devil's world (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2Cor.4:4; Eph.2:2; 1Jn.5:19), where we truly are strangers, outcasts, pariahs, exiles, pilgrims merely sojourning down here below until like the creation itself our groaning finally comes to an end with the liberation we crave, the resurrection of these temporary bodies and the commencement of the glorious eternity with our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for which we so eagerly hope

¹⁷ For more on this subject, please see SR 4: Satan's World System, section I, "Strangers in the Devil's Realm", and BB 3A: Hamartiology, section V.1, "Sojourners in the Devil's World".

(Rom.8:17-24; 1Cor.15:35-41).

[We] who are awaiting the blessed hope, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears).

Titus 2:13

Until that glorious day, it should be our deepest desire to be found pleasing to our Savior in every way (2Cor.5:9), redeeming the time we have been given (Eph.5:16; Col.4:5), until in the course of God's perfect timing and in company with all our beloved brothers and sisters we see our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ face to face, making our way through this world of tears in the meantime as sojourners who are looking for something better (Ps.84:5-7; Matt.25:35; 25:38; 25:43-44; Eph.2:12; 2:19; 1Pet.1:1; 2:11).

(5) He who, in spite of weeping, goes forth in resolution, carrying seed to sow, (6) will doubtless return rejoicing, bringing in his sheaves.

Psalm 126:5-6

A Better Place:

(1) "Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God [the Father] – believe also in Me. (2) There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also."

John 14:1-3

We believers have absolute confidence in our Lord's words. They are true and we know them to be true to the very depths of our hearts. We are looking forward to a much better place than anything we see here on this temporary earth. We are looking forward to a home in New Jerusalem, one made for us by God Himself who alone knows us and what delights us, far better than even we do ourselves. We are looking forward to an eternity enjoying each other's company in the presence of the dear Savior who bought us at the highest possible price. We are looking forward to a perfect body that will never die or age or experience pain or sorrow or suffering of any sort, one with amazing capabilities at which scripture only hints. And we are looking forward to enjoying the rewards that Jesus will give us individually on the basis of the legitimate work we are doing for Him here and now, growing in grace (2Pet.3:18), taking pains to progress in drawing ever nearer to Him through whatever tests may come (Jas.1:12), helping our brethren do likewise through the ministries that flow from the multifaceted grace of God (1Pet.4:10). Our toil for the Lord is never wasted effort (1Cor.15:58; Gal.6:9), because the other side is better beyond imagination.

I am torn between the two [alternatives], desiring to depart and to be with Christ, for that [condition] is better by far.

Philippians 1:23

Not Ashamed: It is no small thing to please our God, to please our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That, after all, is what we all should be striving to do at all times in our lives here on earth. Of course, since we are sinners, since we are human, none of us is ever going to get to the place of perfection on that score and we can all always do better. But this passage reassures us that in looking forward to what God has promised instead of to the things of this life (Heb. 11:13), and by acknowledging that we are transients on this earth who are anticipating the blessings to come instead of yearning to return to the things of this life and of this world with which unbelievers are preoccupied, we have every reason to anticipate *not* being "ashamed" at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2Cor. 5:10).

However, it is only thus, by demonstrating through our faithful following of Jesus Christ that we have no intention of ever turning back to this world, but are instead "zealous for a better place, a heavenly one", that we are entitled to embrace the "therefore" (i.e., for those very reasons) of this passage, confident that our God is "not ashamed to be called our God". This is the sojourner attitude of those who are looking for something better than what this world offers, faithfully following Jesus Christ as a result. That is what God finds pleasing, and it is this way that we will earn a good reward, receive a "well done!" from Him on that great day to come, and be richly received into the confines of New Jerusalem as a result (2Pet. 1:10-11).

(13) These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. (16) But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem).
Hebrews 11:13-16

Opportunity to Turn Back: The Greek word *kairos* can often be translated as "time", meaning a specific time or occasion, and that is the idea of its use here. But since it also often means "favorable time" (cf. 2Cor. 6:2), "opportunity" seems the best rendering, a deliberate irony on Paul's part meant to call attention to the dubious "opportunity" many of his readers were grasping to abandon and forsake all of their previous good work for the merest pottage of the uncertain and temporary security of this world – in starkest contrast to the completely opposite good application of the heroes of this chapter who refused to do so in spite of hard testing.

(9) And [so] let us not grow weary of doing the good [work of God], for at [the appointed] time (*kairos*) we will reap [our reward], provided that we do not give up. (10) So then as long as we have this *opportunity* (*kairos*), let us keep accomplishing the good [work of God] towards all [people], and especially to the family of faith.
Galatians 6:9-10

A City:

(22) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, (23) to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.

Hebrews 12:22-23 NKJV

While it is true that these great believers of the Old Testament were not given the extensive revelation about our future home that we are blessed to have above and in Revelation chapters 21-22, it is also the case that we ourselves know far less than we would like to know about our blessed future. But just as the sparsity of detail (in comparison for our thirst to know more) does not in any way detract from the hope we have for that blessed future, the same has always been true for those who love the Lord, for all who believe in Him and who have put their hope in Him.

Now [Abraham] had believed in the Lord, and [the Lord] considered him righteous because of it.

Genesis 15:6

Therefore, the promise [of salvation] comes through faith, so that it may rest on the basis of grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the Law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all.

Romans 4:16 NKJV

It is this very "faith of Abraham" that we believers have in common. Like our forefather in the faith, we are traveling to a place we have never seen. Yet we are motivated to endure all manner of trials and tribulation to get there *not* because we know exactly what is waiting for us, but because we have absolute *faith* in the Lord that it *is* good in every possible way. We are making this pilgrimage not by sight, but *by faith* (2Cor.5:7).

(10) And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, (11) having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Revelation 21:10-11 NKJV

[index half way]

Verses Seventeen through Nineteen

(17) By faith Abraham offered up Isaac when he was tested, and was on the point of offering up [in sacrifice] his one and only son, the one who [about whom he] had received the promises, (18) about whom it had been said, "In Isaac shall your seed be called", (19) [for Abraham was] reckoning that God was able to raise [him] from the dead, whence (i.e., from the dead) he did receive [Isaac] back even metaphorically (i.e., Isaac was as good as dead but God delivered him through the substitute of the ram, a type of Jesus Christ).

Hebrews 11:17-19

Tested:

(1) Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. (2) Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

Genesis 22:1-2 NIV

Has any believer ever been tested with the likes of this test to which the Lord put Abraham?¹⁸ And which of us in all honesty can say that we would have passed this most difficult test as Abraham did? And how could Abraham have passed it without possessing a tremendous and legendary faith (Rom.4:16)?

(18) Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (19) Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. (20) Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, (21) being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Romans 4:18-21 NIV

Waiting so long for his heir when both he and Sarah had passed far beyond the point of being able to have children without the miraculous divine intervention which produced Isaac was, as Paul describes above in the Spirit, incontrovertible evidence of exceptional faith. But being told now that Isaac had grown up to young adulthood to sacrifice him! This would be an impossible test for even the most mature believer among us regarding any of our children. How much more was that not the case for Abraham who had spent his entire life awaiting this heir of promise and who had "hoped against hope" for him, trusting the Lord to provide him in spite of all visual evidence to the contrary!

While we can perhaps put ourselves in Abraham's place to some degree, the uniqueness of his situation makes full comprehension of the pressure this test put upon that great believer impossible. We can only affirm that there has never been a more difficult test than this one. When we are called upon to endure some difficult situation, we have, or at least we ought to have, faith that the Lord is going to see us through according to all of His many promises to that effect. In Abraham's case, there was no place for wondering about the issue at hand since the Lord told him personally what he must do: give up that which was most dear to him in this life, dearer by far than his own life. And there was no doubt about the necessity since the directive came directly from the Lord Himself in an entirely unambiguous way. There was only one question. Would Abraham do as he was told or not?

Notice that Abraham did not question the Lord. The Lord had given explicit and clear

¹⁸ See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.3, "Biblical Role Models: Abraham".

instructions. Abraham did not fight back. He did not argue. He did not find fault. He did not waver in his faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of Hosts, the One who had spoken with him on numerous occasions – the One who had always proven faithful, working all things out for him for the good. Instead of doing what, sadly, if we are to be honest, many of us would have done, wept and wailed and resisted, Abraham followed orders. He loved his son more than we can imagine. But he also **trusted the Lord** to such a great degree that he was absolutely convinced that **whatever** He directed was good and right and righteous in every way – even something so seeming terrible as was this unwelcome command to sacrifice his son. That is faith. Trusting the Lord in spite of everything the world tells us, in spite of everything our resentful emotions say, in spite of everything **we** may want or prefer or desire. Putting Him and His Word first regardless of every other consideration is how we who would be rewarded as Abraham will be follow in his footsteps (Rom.4:12).

Metaphorically: The details of this amazing event show us unmistakably that Abraham maintained absolute faith in the Lord throughout (Gen.22:3-14). Abraham followed through all the way to the end in his obedient response to the Lord's directives. It wasn't possible to "do it and be done with it". The necessity of traveling some distance and then preparing the sacrifice in a proper way gave ample time to "turn back" and to refuse the Lord's command. This Abraham did not do, even when his son so movingly questioned him about the sacrifice (Gen.22:7). "God will provide", he said (Gen.22:8), in full confidence that the Lord **would** provide, that there **would** be a solution to this terrible test, that the Lord **would** be true to His promises that Isaac would be his heir – even if that meant raising him from the dead. This was not rationalization. This was unbreakable faith in the Lord, having complete confidence in His faithfulness, His integrity, His goodness, His mercy, His love. If we truly knew the Lord as Abraham obviously knew Him, it would be a small matter to trust Him no matter what trial He is leading us through – because in that case we would have absolutely no doubt that He **would** lead us through, no matter what.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Psalm 23:4 KJV

Abraham's steadfast faith in carrying through with the Lord's command, trusting Him completely right up to the point of carrying out the sacrifice was perhaps the only way that the Lord could make it clear to him – and to us – the depth of Abraham's faith and the power of such faith. If we too had such faith, we truly could move mountains (Matt.17:20; 21:21). And it was perhaps only through this demonstration of Abraham's great faith that we believers could be given to see the great love that the Father and the Son have for us all. After all, Isaac was **not** sacrificed. Isaac was spared through the provision by God of a substitute, a ram divinely provided which symbolized **the** Substitute who would be sacrificed for the entire world, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ paying for all of our sins on the cross.

The sympathy we feel for Abraham when we contemplate the emotional trauma that Abraham and Isaac too must have undergone throughout this difficult test gives us some small inkling of what it cost the Father to offer up for sacrifice His one and only dear Son on behalf of us all, and

what the Son must have undergone in anticipating the cross (Matt.26:38; Mk.14:34). How much more then in actually going through with the sacrifice of sacrifices from which Abraham and Isaac were spared!

(10) Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. (11) But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. (12) "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (13) Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. (14) So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." (15) The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time (16) and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, (17) I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, (18) and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, ***because you have obeyed me.***"

Genesis 22:10-18 NIV

How can we hope to similarly "obey" the Lord when called upon to face severe testing? Only by walking in the same faith of Abraham, trusting the Lord no matter what, having confidence in His perfect faithfulness and integrity, in His great love and mercy, He only wishes our absolute good, an absolute good that He will bring about – if only we continue to believe in Him and His Word.

And we know that, ***for those who love God***, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan.
Romans 8:28

Verse Twenty

By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things [destined] to come.
Hebrews 11:20

When his blessing was purloined by Jacob, why was Isaac so furious? Because Isaac had complete confidence that the Lord would bring about that blessing precisely as he pronounced it just as He had said He would.¹⁹

Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!"
Genesis 27:3 NIV

¹⁹ See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.3, "Biblical Role Models: Isaac".

Isaac's wrath at being deceived, therefore, merely serves to demonstrate the absolute confidence he had in the Lord and in His Word. A man of lesser faith – or one who did not fear the Lord as Isaac did – might well have just taken back that blessing. But Isaac knew "by faith" that what he was given to say by way of blessing and cursing would come true – because he trusted the Lord that it would. Perhaps Isaac should have known all along that by preferring Esau he was resisting the prophecy that the Lord had made to Rebecca to the effect that "the older (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob)" (Gen.25:33). But in spite of his preference for Esau, once the blessing had left his lips, Isaac was absolutely convinced that Jacob's blessing would stand no matter what. Because he was absolutely sure that God's prophecy which he had been given about his blessing of his sons was rock solid, so that even though he had tried to put Esau whom he preferred over Jacob, he knew "by faith" that God's Word could not be contravened. Isaac had sufficient respect, "fear of God", not to attempt any change once he had given the blessing (Gen.31:42; 31:53).

(7) Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, " where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (8) Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.
Genesis 22:7-8 NIV

Finally, in the entire context of the sacrifice on Mt. Moriah, there is not a hint of Isaac being disobedient to his father Abraham in spite of the terrifying situation. Isaac clearly respected his father with an uncommon reverence, one seen also in his grateful acceptance of the life-partner his father secured for him in Rebecca. In God's institution of the family, the father stands in the place of God, having been given God's authority for the discipline and training of children. Those who respect their parents are much more likely to have a similar respect for God and His authority, because if a person does not respect the authority of the parents he can see, how would he/she have respect for a God who is invisible (cf. 1Jn.4:20)? As Isaac had exceptional respect, reverence and godly fear for his earthly father, so also did he fear God (Gen.31:42; 31:53). Once the blessing was a fait accompli, Isaac accepted God's will absolutely without any reservation whatsoever (even though it went against his wish to bless Esau). Isaac feared God as we all should. For that is where true wisdom begins.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Proverbs 1:7 NIV

Verse Twenty One

By faith, Jacob, on the point of dying, blessed each of his sons, and "worshiped [the Lord] while [resting] on the tip of his staff".
Hebrews 11:21

Like his father Isaac before him, Jacob had absolute faith that what he had been given to

prophecy about his children would come true.²⁰ So he rallied his strength at the end of his life to pay tribute to the Lord as he did so.²¹ This must not have been easy to do. It required physical effort to assume a reverent posture for these final blessings. It was a struggle to do so, but Jacob rose to the occasion. He "wrestled with God" to the very end. Israel's life, "he who wrestles with God" (Gen.32:24-32), was a struggle from the time he surreptitiously received his father's blessing to the very end. Yet in all of his troubles, Jacob never let go of the Lord.

(24) So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. (25) When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. (26) Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (27) The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. (28) Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Genesis 32:24-28 NIV

Despite all of the vexations, burdens, privations, disappointments, dangers and losses he had to endure in his life, Jacob continued to trust in the Lord, hanging onto Him, so to speak, and never letting go. Both the Hebrew root *'aqebh* (from which "Jacob") and the Hebrew root *yasar* (from which "Israel") indicate persistent, determined actions. Jacob refused to let go of Esau's heel, and in the end he did "supplant" him. Jacob's wrestling with the Angel of the Lord represents resisting at first the will of God (representing the historical reluctance of a good part of the Jewish people to follow the right path initially), but then, after being injured, refusing to let go without being blessed (representing the resilience of faith of so many Jewish believers after being humbled by the Lord). This before and after stubbornness of Jacob transformed into the tenacity of faith of Israel very much reminds us in both parts of Saul before and Paul after being blinded on the road to Damascus. It is a common testimony of many believers today who have become dedicated to spiritual growth, progress and production that, before coming to the decision to follow the Lord zealously no matter what, they were highly resistant to the Lord's will. Rather than lamenting the past, those of us who fall into this category should take Jacob's example to heart and determine to hold fast to the Lord come what may. He has a new name for us too (Rev.2:17; 3:12), and He much prefers the cold to the lukewarm – precisely because the former, when given the right prodding, is much more likely to turn into the kind of zealous believer that Jesus Christ prefers.

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!"

Revelation 3:15 NIV

²⁰ See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.3, "Biblical Role Models: Jacob".

²¹ The Hebrew text of Genesis 47:31 reads, "So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed". The Spirit's preference for "while [resting] on the tip of his staff" instead indicates that the Masoretic text is incorrectly pointed. Instead of מִטָּה (*mittah*: "bed"), the correct reading is מַטֵּה (*matteh*: "staff"). This correction does not require any alteration of the consonantal text.

It is certainly possible to argue that Jacob experienced more trouble, travail, and heartache than any of the other patriarchs. Yet he demonstrated on each occasion that his faith in the Lord never wavered. Throughout his difficult life, Jacob is thus an example of the perseverance and persistence of faith all believers should exhibit and worthy of our emulation.

"If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you."

Gen 31:42 NIV

And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."

Gen 47:9 NIV

Why, then, of all the struggles and spiritual victories Jacob experienced, did Paul choose this incident as the one to focus on? No doubt because it demonstrates that Israel, "he who wrestles with God" and with men persisted to the end. Jacob's faith was strong through all of the trials and tribulations of his life, and his faith in the Lord and the Lord's promises never wavered regardless of all the suffering he endured. He worshiped God in a reverent way as his last act to show us just that fact. Jacob was victorious *in faith*. And we have a right, a duty, an obligation as believers, people *of faith*, to strive to do likewise whatever may betide for us in our lives, likewise "wrestling" by holding the Lord and His truth fast on the one hand, and resisting the opposition of the world which seeks to wrest us from our grasp of faith on the other. If we wrestle as Jacob did, never letting go of our Lord Jesus Christ and never allowing the world to "pin" us, we too will experience the ultimate victory which leads to great reward.

In all this we are decisively *victorious* through Him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

(54) And when this corruptible [body] puts on incorruption and this mortal [body] puts on immortality, then will be fulfilled this prophecy which has been written: "Death has been swallowed up in *victory* (Is.25:8). (55) Where is your victory, O death? Where is your stinger, O death (Hos.13:14)?" (56) Now the stinger of death is the sin [nature] (i.e., it produces our sin), and the power of sin is the Law (i.e., it reveals our sin). (57) But thanks be to God who gives us the *victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ!

1st Corinthians 15:54-57

For everyone who has been born from God *overcomes* the [devil's] world. And this is the victory that has *overcome* the [devil's] world: *our faith* [in Jesus Christ]! For who is the one who *overcomes* the [devil's] world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1st John 5:4-5

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is

victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.
Revelation 2:7 NIV

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is *victorious* will not be hurt at all by the second death.
Revelation 2:11 NIV

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is *victorious*, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.
Revelation 2:17 NIV

To the one who is *victorious* and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.
Revelation 2:26 NIV

The one who is *victorious* will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.
Revelation 3:5 NIV

The one who is *victorious* I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.
Revelation 3:12 NIV

To the one who is *victorious*, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was *victorious* and sat down with my Father on his throne.
Revelation 3:21 NIV

(2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] *winning the victory* over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb.
Revelation 15:2-3a

Those who are *victorious* will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.
Revelation 21:7 NIV

And this is the victory that has *overcome* the [devil's] world: *our faith* [in Jesus Christ]!
1st John 5:4b

Verse Twenty Two

By faith, Joseph, when he was about to die, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.
Hebrews 11:22

Just as Isaac was (Gen.27) and just Jacob was (Gen.48-49) absolutely convinced about the prophecies they were given to pronounce about the future of Israel, so also Joseph had complete faith regarding God's promise of the coming deliverance of Israel from Egypt.²² So much was this so that he gave explicit orders for his burial there to be temporary, intending to give the Israelites a sign and a symbol of their future inheritance of the land of promise.

Joseph was a man of spiritual integrity who never let go of his faith nor of his purity of life in spite of the most grueling of circumstances and disappointments: sold into slavery by his brothers, wrongly cast into prison by his master, seemingly abandoned by the Lord – to human eyes. But Jacob never lost faith, and in the end he could say in all integrity that all that had happened to him had been meant by God for good "in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Gen.50:20 NKJV). As in the case of his father Jacob, the Spirit leads Paul to focus on the end of Joseph's life precisely in order to demonstrate that he held fast to his precious faith all the way to the end, and, being completely convinced of God's future redemption of Israel, used that death as a means of helping future generations likewise keep their eyes on the Lord and His promises: Jacob was absolutely convinced of the truth of what God had said as all could see from his temporary burial.

Concentrating on the blessings to come, on the future fulfillment of God's many wonderful promises to us, is a skill that all believers need to cultivate in emulation of all of these great believers. It was a skill that the Jerusalem believers had evidently allowed to atrophy as they had become so concerned about present troubles so as to allow their faith to be endangered through the compromises with the world they were engaged in. In our present day as well, we see all too many Laodicean believers fixated upon the desires and troubles of their own lives rather than looking forward to New Jerusalem. In the soon to come Tribulation, looking forward in hope to the glories ahead and steeling ourselves to endure the trials right before our eyes will be of equal importance in order to navigate that most difficult time with faith intact. Let us therefore keep in mind Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, men who never relinquished their grip on the Lord and His truth, even keeping their gaze directed to the eternal future, in spite of troubles and in spite of temptations of this short life – the very point upon which the believers to whom Paul was writing were floundering.

Verses Twenty Three

By faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that their child was special, and they did not fear the king's command.
Hebrews 11:23

²² See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.3, "Biblical Role Models: Joseph".

The "faith" being spoken of above is, of course, that of Moses' parents, Amram and Jochebed (Ex.6:18; 6:20). And as we know, Amram and Jochebed also had a daughter, Miriam, who, based upon her actions as described in scripture (Ex.2:4ff.), must have been at least close to pre-teenage at the time of Moses' birth, and another son, Aaron, born three years earlier (cf. Num.33:39). We glean from this that the decree of Pharaoh to expose all newborn Hebrew boys was fairly recent when Moses was born.

The "king's command", as we know from Exodus 1:22, was Pharaoh's decree, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive" (NKJV). Moses' mother, we are told (Ex.2:1-4), when she saw that her newborn son was "good", hid him as long as possible, then placed him in an ark of bulrushes smeared with tar and pitch, and set it in the Nile while Miriam looked on. We glean from this that Moses' parents took the only course open to them to give their son a chance to survive, and that doing what they did entailed a considerable risk since their actions did not comport with the spirit of Pharaoh's new edict in regard to which his officials were doubtless scouring the Hebrew neighborhoods to ensure that it was carried out. But Amram and Jochebed feared God more than they did Pharaoh and thus acted in faith that He would protect them and work things out for good for their newborn child. Clearly, without any power of their own, direct defiance would have been ineffective, but by protecting their son in the only way they could, they made it possible for Pharaoh's daughter to find him and rescue him – according to the Will of God.

We are not told whether or not the couple received any guidance from the Lord in this matter. We are told that they were given to recognize that Moses was special, meaning, in this context, marked out by God for something special. So instead of obeying Pharaoh, they put their fear of the Lord above any consequence which man might bring upon them, trusting Him to bring about deliverance, acting in faith rather than in fear. This would have been a good lesson for the Jerusalem believers to take to heart, those who were more afraid of the consequences of ostracism and persecution emanating from their unbelieving brethren than they were of violating God's will and denigrating Jesus Christ. It is a good lesson for us today as well, for us "upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1Cor.10:11). For in short order choosing between what God tells us to do and what evil demands of us in order to preserve our lives in this temporary world will be the issue all believers must face.

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

Revelation 14:12 NIV

Verses Twenty Four through Twenty Eight

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, (26) because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than [all the] treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward. (27) By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. For he grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye

on the invisible Lord Jesus Christ). (28) By faith, he kept the Passover and the [command for the] pouring out of the blood [on the lintels and doorposts], so that the Destroyer might not touch their firstborn.

Hebrews 11:24-28

Moses Refused:

(18) "Then 'a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.' (19) He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. (20) At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. (21) When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. (22) Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. (23) When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. (24) He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. (25) Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. (26) The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?' (27) But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? (28) Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" (29) When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons. (30) After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai."

Acts 7:18-30 NIV

We know from this passage and from Exodus chapter two that Moses was set in the Nile when he was three months old, and that when Hatshepsut found him, she hired his mother to nurse him. Exodus 2:10 tells us that Moses' mother brought him to Pharaoh's daughter "when he had grown", but we are not told just how old Moses was when he entered Pharaoh's household. We do know that Hatshepsut gave him the name "Moses", a Hebrew name which means "drawn out", "Because I drew him out of the water" (Ex.2:10). This name, the close proximity of the Jewish people to the abode of Pharaoh (as this very story indicates along with all of the other events in Exodus), and the fact that Moses clearly knew Hebrew and was privy to all Jewish customs and traditions, along with the relationship he had clearly maintained with his siblings, Aaron and Miriam, all demonstrate that Moses never lost his Jewish identity in spite of his unique upbringing. More to the point as our passage makes clear, Moses was never even tempted to exchange his Jewish roots for the far more rich and powerful position that clearly could have been his, had he abandoned them. Instead, as the sequel shows, he was willing to abandon all Egyptian privilege for the sake of maintaining his relations with "the people of God".

Further, it was not just his people that Moses preferred to the Egyptians. It was the God of his people to whom he was intent on staying loyal. The incident which occasioned Moses' flight from Egypt took place, as the passage in Acts quoted above relates, when he was forty years old. Moses had thus enjoyed his life of power and privilege for many years before events required

him to flee into the desert. We must assume that throughout this long period, Moses had steeped himself in Jewish ways and knowledge just as much as in "the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), and preferred the former to the latter. That is to say, the incident which necessitated his flight was not occasioned by a momentary mishap but was rather the result of a lifetime of choices for God rather than against Him. As scripture says, Moses had thought "that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them", no doubt seeing the position he had been given as having come from God and being analogous to the one into which Joseph had been placed for a similar reason. And Moses was right – he was just wrong about the timing. It would be forty more years before the Lord would call upon him to fulfill that role, not of caring for Israel *in* Egypt but of bringing her *out* of Egypt altogether.

Not all the "treasure vaults" of Egypt or the power and prestige of being ruler over the most powerful country in the world at the time could compare in Moses' heart to doing what God wanted him to do, regardless of whatever he had to suffer to do it. Abiding poverty and powerlessness is difficult enough for anyone, but most difficult, it would seem, for those who did once possess riches and dispose of power, especially for those who did so exceptionally. But none of that budged Moses from his dedication to the Lord, since he considered "the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches" than anything on earth. And why? Because "he was looking to his reward". Moses knew "*by faith*" that what God had for him in eternity put the best of what this earth and this life can offer completely in the shade. Moses could not be bought, not even at the princely sum of rulership and riches beyond earthly ken. But the Jerusalem believers of Paul's day lacked sufficient faith to resist the pressures of poverty and ostracism in a comparable way – something they might have been able to do if they had taken Moses' approach and adopted his proper, godly perspective. This life means nothing – except for how we are living it in response to the Lord. That is a good lesson for all of us believers today to keep in mind as well as we find ourselves on the brink of terrible times to come when similar pressures will befall all of God's people. Emulating Moses' faith and the victory it wrought for him will make all the difference.²³

[But in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him], the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing to receive the mark or worship the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] *their faith* in Jesus (viz., even though it may cost them their lives).
Revelation 14:12

Moses – the very person to whom the Lord *gave* the Law on which these people were erroneously depending – had embraced "reproach for the sake of Jesus Christ" despite all consequences. Now, Paul's contemporaries were essentially ashamed of Him, and were returning to the Law which was now defunct, dishonoring Jesus Christ in the process.

Seeing the One who Cannot be Seen:

Though you have never laid eyes on Him [our Lord Jesus Christ], yet you love Him. And

²³ See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.3, "Biblical Role Models: Moses".

though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have *faith* in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come.
1st Peter 1:8

As was the case with Moses, especially before God revealed Himself to him at the burning bush, like him we also have not seen Jesus Christ with our physical eyes (1Jn.4:20).²⁴ That does not mean, however, that we do not know Him – indeed we do. Believers who are growing spiritually, reading their Bibles daily, engaging with Bible teaching, praying regularly, are constantly building up a "heart picture of our Lord". To whom do we pray, if not to the Son and to the Father? And about whom are we reading and learning, if not about God, if not about the Word of God, the Son of the Father who is the *Logos*, the very plan of God incarnate?

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) *turning our gaze unto Jesus*, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.
Hebrews 12:1-2

Obviously, being occupied in our hearts with Jesus Christ takes effort, effort empowered by the Spirit, not worked up through emotion. To some extent this focusing on our Lord, who He is as the perfect God-man and what He has done for us in dying for our sins and thus opening up life eternal for us, is a natural result of spiritual growth. But spiritual growth takes effort. Non-meritorious effort, it is true, in the sense that God supplies everything we need to grow and the Holy Spirit produces that growth – but *only* for those who are willing to do the not inconsiderable "work" of engaging with the truth, learning the truth, believing the truth, and applying the truth. It also takes effort, again, not effort about which we have any basis for boasting, since we are all unworthy servants who are only doing what we are supposed to do (Lk.17:10), and since we have received gratis from God absolutely everything we need to grow (1Cor.4:7; 2Pet.1:3), but effort nonetheless.

If spiritual growth were automatic, we would not see so few believers in Laodicea accomplishing it. If keeping our eyes on Jesus Christ were automatic, we would doubtless never have a moment of personal emotional upheaval ourselves. But in fact just as growth takes effort, so also setting our gaze to pierce through the mist of this world and see our Savior in spite of all worldly distractions is a skill all mature believers need to cultivate, especially in light of our present position on the eschatological clock. Moses was able to disregard any fear which the hostility of the most powerful ruler on earth directed at him personally would have certainly occasioned in anyone of less spiritual courage . . . because of his solid, mature faith. Jesus Christ's opinion was more important to Moses than anything else in this world. He held fast to what he knew by faith

²⁴ Jesus Christ has always been the revealed member of the Trinity, often appearing in the Old Testament as He did to Moses at Mt. Sinai as *the* Angel of the Lord. See BB 1: Theology, section II.C.3, "Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament".

to be true, regardless of what he saw or heard or felt, preferring "the reproach of Christ" to all else.

"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. **Be faithful** until death, and I will give you the crown of life."
Revelation 2:10 NIV

It is fair to ask how Moses was able to reach such a high pinnacle of spiritual growth without a Bible. For as we know, there was no Bible at all before he himself was given to write its first five books (the Pentateuch). Before that time, believers had to rely on the oral tradition passed down by their believing ancestors. This is not as problematic as it sounds. Jacob, after all, was Moses' great-great-grandfather, so that only six generations separated him from Abraham, the first patriarch. Furthermore, while we are not given the details in the short accounts of Genesis, we can tell from the similar spiritual greatness of all of Moses' ancestors that much time and effort did go into sharing with their progeny absolutely everything that God had done for them, **and** everything He had communicated to them.

Before scripture, these patriarchs were the means that God used to disseminate or "dispense" His truth, and of the first three we know for certain that God communicated to them directly and through other means as well (via dreams and third parties such as Melchizedek).²⁵ We also know that the Holy Spirit, while not permanently indwelling all believers as has been the case since the apostolic period, nevertheless performed the same ministry of spiritual enlightenment as He does today, and in a miraculous manner for those who chose to devote themselves to the Lord in an exceptional way such as Moses did (Jer.30:21). So if the great blessing of detailed truth we believers today enjoy through having the entire Bible was completely lacking for Moses and his contemporaries, yet truth **was** given to all who desired it in sufficient quantity to achieve whatever any individual believer was willing to achieve. As in the case of a small versus a large wire, sufficient voltage may still suffice to provide the necessary current. And with the Holy Spirit superintending and facilitating the process in every way, it is easy to see how that a man like Moses who was willing to do God's will to such an extraordinary degree was also empowered to learn and believe and apply what truth he had been given sufficiently to attain spiritual maturity of an exceptional sort. Indeed, it is not too much to suggest that Moses, if not on top of the list for the most spiritually successful believer of all time must certainly be close (Zech.4:14; Matt.20:23; Mk.10:40; Rev.11:3-12).

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. For he **grew strong by seeing** the One who cannot be seen.
Hebrews 11:27

The spiritual growth which gave Moses the inner strength to defy Pharaoh and to choose an uncertain future of exile and flight was precisely this love of the Lord above all else in this life.

²⁵ See SR 5, section II.5, "The Five Dispensational Divisions of Human History"; and Hebrews Chapter 1, section 1.e, "Dispensations".

If we are more concerned with Jesus' opinion than anyone else', if we love Him and fear God with all of our hearts, then decisions of the sort Moses was forced to make – in choosing God's people over his personal success and comfort – are possible.

I have kept the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved.

Psalm 16:8

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

Instead lift up Christ as Lord in your hearts [above all else].

1st Peter 3:15a

If we see our Lord "ever before us" in our mind's eye, if He is our life, if He is first and foremost in our hearts at all times, then the otherwise daunting prospect of defying the beast in the soon to come Tribulation will also be possible.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives [even unto the death]."

Revelation 12:11 NKJV

Possessing the entire Bible and having the Holy Spirit indwelling us as all believers do today, what excuse do we have for not doing what Moses did, putting the Lord, His truth, and our service to Him in absolute first place in our lives? None at all – but then, that has been true of every believer since the garden of Eden and will be until the Father's kingdom comes.

Rather than being too hard on ourselves for failures of the past (of which we all partake), let us instead resolve to make better use of the opportunities we are being given *today*, emulating Moses, and remembering that we are all potentially going to find ourselves in similar straits, with our lives threatened by the archetypical "Pharaoh", antichrist, in short time to come. If we do take advantage of everything the Lord has given us, we will find that enduring that terrible time of testing *will* be possible, whether martyrdom or staying faithful to the end be our lot. This is the path of victory, and the concomitant expectation of great eternal rewards when our Savior returns.

"However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:8b NIV

"Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Luke 21:36 NIV

The Passover: In carrying out the inaugural celebration of this festival which is all about representing the cross of Christ, Moses did as God commanded and precisely so, trusting in

godly fear that what He said was true, with the result that the firstborn of Israel were spared while those of the Egyptians all perished. This is no small thing. Obedience to the Lord is the manifestation of faith. In contrast to Moses' obedience, countless times in Israel's future history, her people would fail to carry out even the simplest of the Lord's instructions.

"For they have not listened to my words," declares the Lord, "words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 29:19 NIV

As a result, God "thrust Israel from His presence" (2Ki.17:20; Jer.52:3), and, because of the backsliding and spiritual compromise on the part of the recipients of Paul's letter, He was about to do so again. Every historical indication we have is that these believers did not repent upon receipt of his magnificent and gracious epistle. And all that was being asked of them was to refrain from putting our Lord to open shame in returning to the rituals of the Law which had now been fulfilled. Moses saw to it that the first Passover was kept properly. As a result, the Destroyer "passed over" the homes of the Israelites so that their first born were spared while those of the Egyptians were slain. Paul's countrymen were not being asked to do anything difficult at all. They were merely being warned to *stop* engaging in rituals that now put Christ to an open shame, and to trust the Lord that He would protect them if only they trusted in Him. Keeping the requirements of the Lord has always been the issue for believers (1Cor.7:19).

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8 NIV.

(29) "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 11:29-30 NKJV

While doing what the Lord actually requires has never been onerous, violating God's direct commandments has always been devastatingly dangerous, and especially in the case of individuals who proclaim that in so doing they really are doing "the will of God" (as in the case of the Pharisees and all who followed their legalistic ways). We may not always understand the "why?" of God's instructions to us, but He always makes it clear what we are supposed to be doing and what we are not supposed to do, just as in the case of the Passover (which represented the future cross and faith in Him who would endure) which Moses had the Israelites keep perfectly and also in the case of communion which all believers in Jesus Christ after the cross are expected to engage in respectfully as well (for it is a remembrance of Him and what He did in dying for us). Violations in the case of the latter had resulted in much trouble for the Corinthian believers who abused communion.

(27) Therefore whoever eats the [communion] bread or drinks the [communion] cup of the Lord in an unworthy way is guilty [of offense against] the body and the blood of the Lord. (28) So let [each] person evaluate himself and in this manner (i.e., following

confession of all sins remembered in such reflection) let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (29) For the person who eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment for himself if he does not evaluate his body [aright] (i.e., refusing first to repent and confess). (30) It is for this [very] reason that many among you are sick and infirm – and not a few have passed away (i.e., have suffered the sin unto death). (31) But if we were evaluating ourselves [so as to repent and confess], we would not be falling under judgment. (32) And when we are being judged [for this offense], it is by the Lord that we are being disciplined, to the end that we might not be condemned (lit., "terminally judged") along with the world.

1st Corinthians 11:27-32

What the Jerusalem believers were doing in returning to the sacrifices of the Law – including celebrating the Passover which required the slaughter of a lamb representing our Lord's death for us on the cross – was similarly offensive to the Lord. They may not have understood "why?" they needed to refrain, anymore than Moses' contemporaries understood "why?" they needed to carry out the instructions for the Passover to the letter. All that was required of either group was do what God commanded. Refusing in the first instance would have meant the death of their first born. In the case of the recipients of Hebrews, refusal was going to mean the destruction of the entire city and the recalcitrant believers therein with it.

But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."

1st Samuel 15:22 NIV

We may not always understand the "why?" of what the Lord wants us to do or get through or to suffer in this life. But we do know that we are responsible as those who belong to Him to do as He tells us to do: to *trust* Him to see us through (Ps.40:4; 84:12; Jer.17:7-8). Moses himself may not have been given to fully understand the significance of all of the rituals involved in Passover at the time of its first celebration.²⁶ But for Him, God's command was enough. For he knew *by faith* that doing what the Lord requires is always for the best.

"If you love Me, keep My commandments."

John 14:15 NKJV

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are *not burdensome*.

1st John 5:3 NKJV

Verse Twenty Nine

By faith they crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land – though when the Egyptians tried this they were drowned.

²⁶ For the symbolism of Passover, see SR 5, section II.8.c.I.1, "Passover".

Hebrews 11:29

The "they" here are the children of Israel. We know all about their spotty track record not only after having crossed the Red Sea but also before. We recall their faithless responses to Moses prior to this miraculous deliverance.

(19) And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, "You shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota." (20) Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. (21) And they said to them, "Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."

Exodus 5:19-21 NKJV

(10) And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. (11) Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? (12) Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

Exodus 14:10-12 NKJV

Despite this lack of faith, when Moses encouraged them and after the Lord parted the sea, the Israelites *did* cross over. That took a certain amount of faith as our verse attests. They trusted that the Lord was indeed behind this miracle and that He would bring them safely through. He did just that, as we all are well aware, and after their safe passage of the sea as if on dry land, the Lord destroyed Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian army when they attempted to pursue them. At this miraculous deliverance, the people greatly rejoiced (Ex.15:1-21). But that was the high point of their proper response to the Lord. Immediately thereafter and for the duration of their lives, that generation failed to trust the Lord and instead continually put Him to the test.

(22) "Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, (23) they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it."

Numbers 14:22-23 NKJV

Having started well in their responsive crossing of the Red Sea "*by faith*" (Heb.11:29), that generation ended horribly badly – because they failed to *continue* trusting the Lord. In this, they served as a cautionary example to those among Paul's contemporaries who were flagging in their faith, even though they too had proven to be faithful believers in the past (Heb.6:10; 10:32).

(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about the fact that our [spiritual] forefathers (i.e., the Exodus generation) were all under the cloud (i.e., protected by the

Glory). (2) And all of them were baptized into Moses (i.e., closely identified with him) in both the case of the cloud and of the sea (i.e., received the same protection and deliverance as he did). (3) And all of them ate spiritual food (i.e., divinely provided manna). (4) And all of them drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them and their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result. (6) And in this they have come to serve as examples for us, so that we might not lust for wicked things as they lusted for them. (7) So do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play (i.e., feasting followed by indulgence in idolatrous rites)". (8) And let us not commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in a single day 120,000 of them. (9) And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested the Lord and [as a result] were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) All these things happened to them as an *example* to us, and were written *to warn us* – we who live at the culmination of the ages.

1st Corinthians 10:1-11

Paul repeatedly made reference to the generation of the exodus for the same reason he does so in our context. It is all very well to make a good start in the Christian life, but of what advantage is that if a person later on departs from trusting the Lord so as to live a life of debauchery (and end in the sin unto death) or to abandon faith entirely (so as to lose our "so great salvation")?

"But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away."

Luke 8:13 NKJV

(28) "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it – (29) lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, (30) saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'."

Luke 14:28-30 NKJV

Verse Thirty

By faith, the walls of Jericho fell, after they had been encircled for seven days.

Hebrews 11:30

If Israel had refused to follow the very precise instructions given to Joshua, if they had found marching around Jericho for seven days too onerous, and seven times on the seventh day even more so, that would have constituted a lack of faith. For it would have meant either that they did not believe that God would actually cause the walls to fall or that they doubted the need to follow His orders. In either hypothetical case, we can expect that they would have experienced something akin to what followed shortly after Jericho's fall in the incident at Ai, where a small group of Canaanites defeated a much larger group of Israelites because of one man's

unfaithfulness (Josh.7:2ff.). But as it was, that later incident was an anomaly. Under Joshua the children of the exodus generation not only entered into the land but conquered the greater part of it so thoroughly that we never even hear of any Jewish casualties or setbacks. They feared the Lord sufficiently enough to do exactly what He told them to do through Joshua and thus demonstrated that they trusted the Lord. Jericho's walls fell "by faith" as did the rest of the promised land.

Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.
Joshua 24:31 NKJV

We too may be called upon to "keep marching onward" even when to fleshly eyes we are not accomplishing anything. But if we have faith, we will do as God commands us, confident that whatever He tells us to do is the right thing, trusting that He knows where He is leading us, even if we cannot yet catch sight of Zion. This Christian life requires perseverance and perseverance is based upon faith. That was true for Joshua's people, that was true for Paul's readers, and that is true for us today before the Tribulation starts – and how much more so after it begins!

The Israelites had to march around Jericho seven days in a row and seven times on the seventh day (Josh.6:3-5), seven being the number of perfection and representing God's perfect timing, perfect, even for those who fail to realize the perfection of it. Similarly, we believers today may be called upon to faithfully endure seven years of trouble with the last being the most intense. But at the end of that time, just as the long trumpet blast and the great shout preceded the fall of Jericho's walls, so also at the very end of the Tribulation we will hear the Lord Himself "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (1Thes.4:16 NKJV), on that great day when all the fortifications of the evil one come crashing down, "in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall" (Is.30:25 NKJV; cf. Is.2:12-18). At that trumpet call, the dead in Christ will rise and we who are still alive will likewise be gathered up in resurrection (1Cor.15:51-52; 1Thes.4:16b) – *if* we keep faith with the Lord, as the Israelites under Joshua did, as the Jerusalem believers in Paul's day should have done. That is the way to enter into the blessings of God.

(43) So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. (44) The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hands. (45) Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.
Joshua 21:43-45 NIV

Verse Thirty One

By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with her unbelieving [countrymen], having received the spies in peace [instead of betraying them].
Hebrews 11:31

Except for Sarah, Rahab is the only woman in Paul's catalog of great witnesses of the past, but she is doubly significant because of her position in his narrative. Rahab is the *last* person to receive individualized praise as someone who triumphed "by faith". Paul includes a handful of other men in the next verse but without commenting on their exploits. Paul gives Rahab the honor of putting the finishing touch on his catalog of spiritual heroes whose exploits are described. She is the crown that completes that list.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

James 2:25 NIV

James only adduces *two* examples of believers who demonstrated their faith by means of what they did out of faith, Abraham and Rahab, so that, together with Paul's positioning of her as the capstone of his catalog, we get some idea of what a great believer this woman was. While many would look down on her on account of her profession, Rahab did not allow that or her life-circumstances to keep her from putting her faith in God. She trusted Him, no matter what anyone else thought or did about her or anything else. The entire citizenry of Jericho perished in their unbelief, not only dying physically but condemning themselves to the second death for their refusal to do what Rahab did do: trust in the only One who could rescue her from death and destruction.

"When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, *for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*"

Joshua 2:11 NIV

Rahab was a believer, and in spite of the absolute peril she exposed herself to by protecting and saving the two Israelite spies, she persevered in her dangerous course of action *because of her faith*. Faith – in the Lord – is more important than anything else in life, more important than our physical lives, more important than our past failures or successes, more important than what anyone else thinks of us. Faith is everything. Faith is the *only thing*.

(3) So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land." (4) But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. (5) At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." (6) (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.)

Joshua 2:3-6 NIV

God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom.2:11; Eph.6:9; Col.3:25; Jas.2:1-9): anyone who puts their trust in Him will not be disappointed (Is.28:16; Rom.10:11). Rahab saved not only her own life *by her faith in Him* but also those of her entire family. In time soon to come, we too, like Rahab, may have to take our lives in our hands and put our entire trust in the Lord to bring us through whatever trials the Tribulation may bring upon us. May we all exhibit the same

courageous faith that Rahab did, fearing **God** more than man.

In God I trust; I shall not be afraid.

What can man do to me?

Psalm 56:11 ESV

As a result of her courageous faith, Rahab saved her own life and her family's lives, and has a great reward awaiting her at the resurrection. Rather than perishing with the unbelievers of her home town, she survived – and went on to marry Salmon, one of the two spies whose lives she had saved, and through her son, Boaz, entered into the genealogy of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ (along with Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba: Matt.1:1-6).

(34) Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism (35) but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

Acts 10:34-35

We believers, those who have faith in Jesus Christ, are all one in Him; and in Him there is no longer any distinction between Jews and gentiles, men and women, slaves or freemen – not in His eyes. To our Lord, what is important is our **faith**, and how we use that faith to follow and to serve Him.²⁷

Verses Thirty Two through Thirty Eight

(32) Now what shall I say more? For time would fail me, were I to go on and relate the stories of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, (33) who through their faith defeated kingdoms, accomplished acts of righteousness, received the fulfillment of promises, shut the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the power of fire, fled the mouth of the sword, were made strong in weakness, were made powerful in war, defeated enemy armies – (35) women even received back their dead. (36) Some [of these great believers of the past] were tortured, refusing release, that they might obtain a better resurrection (i.e., worth more to them than their lives; cf. Ps.63:3). Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. (38) The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth.

Hebrews 11:32-38

What Shall I Say More? Paul could certainly have mentioned many others. And he could have given much longer treatment to those previously mentioned to the point where this letter could have expanded exponentially. Hebrews is a long letter as it is, so clearly the Spirit put on some restraints to prevent excessive length from damaging the overall intended reception.

²⁷ Please see in Peter #37, "Great Women of the Bible".

But why does Paul stop where he does? After the fall of Jericho (and Rahab's deliverance on account of her faith and faithful service to the two spies), the Israelites finally entered into the land and received their promised inheritance. Paul stops precisely where the special, miraculous provision to Israel stops.

(10) Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. (11) And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. (12) Then *the manna ceased* on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

Joshua 10:12 NKJV

Stopping his detailed treatment of famous believers of the past where he did, focuses Paul's readers on the same objective these wonderful men and women had in mind: the reception of the promises God has given us *though faith*. It is true that for them as well as for us, the most important promises, the *eternal* inheritance to which we all aspire, has not yet been received. But Israel did enter into the land at this point and did receive the temporal inheritance long promised by the Lord, an inheritance which symbolizes and stands as a pledge for the greater one we long for.

Ending his detailed treatment of spiritual heroes at this juncture thus makes that point that it is by *staying* faithful, by winning the victory of faith that they and we receive God's promises now and eternally – and so encourages us to stand fast with the Lord until we likewise "enter into the land of promise".

(13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you were *sealed* by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is a *pledge of our inheritance* for redeeming its [full] possession (i.e., through our resurrection), to the praise of His glory.
Ephesians 1:13-14 [index]

Gideon: This is an interesting choice for Paul's "short list", especially considering those he has left out (Joshua, for example). To some degree that is true of all of the named individuals on this second list, since every one of them had noticeable and biblically related foibles. We glean from this that even great believers are not perfect. Sometimes the Bible gives us to see their feet of clay in great detail, sometimes only in passing; sometimes their errors seem to stand out in the Word more so than their spiritual victories. We should take encouragement and draw confidence from this. For we ourselves are not perfect either. So it is a great comfort to be reminded that even though we may have made some very big mistakes in our lives, even though we may not have done some of the things the Lord wanted us to do, nevertheless, though the "bonfire" of our pointless pursuits may be large when we stand before our Lord on that Day, yet we *will* be rewarded for everything we *have* done which was worthy of reward, even the offering of a cup of water in Jesus' Name (Matt.10:42).

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].

1st Corinthians 3:10-15

(3) I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. (4) My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. (5) Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

1st Corinthians 4:3-5 NIV

Gideon was a great believer, no question. In a time of general backsliding and apostasy, a time where Baal worship was engulfing the land so that the Lord allowed Israel to be seriously harassed by her enemies as punishment, so much so that in their distress they finally called out to the Lord for help (Jdg.6:1-10), in all the land there was but one man who was not willing to turn away from the Lord or accommodate to the worship of any foreign god, a man who would demonstrate exceptional courage in the service of the Lord so that the Lord used him to deliver Israel with a very small force that they might learn the truth of the scripture . . .

It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.

Psalms 44:3 NIV

Great as Gideon was, courageous and inspiring as his deeds were, yet the Spirit records a number of instances where Gideon acts in less than a spiritually admirable way. When we first meet him, he is threshing grain in a wine press so as not to be seen (Jdg.6:11). Later, when the Lord commands Gideon to tear down his father's altar to Baal along with its wooden image and sacrifice to the Lord, he obeys, but out of fear does so at night so as not to be seen (Jdg.6:27). When the Lord commands him to summon Israel to battle, Gideon obeys, but demonstrates less than impressive faith by asking the Lord for a test, not once but twice (Jdg.6:36-40). The Lord graciously grants him another encouragement before the battle, suggesting that, again, it is to buck up Gideon's courage (Jdg.7:10). After his great victory, Gideon wisely refuses to become king when that position is offered to him (Jdg.8:22-23), but then asks for the golden earrings as his share of the plunder and has them made into a golden ephod which "became a snare to

Gideon and to his house" (Jdg.8:27). Gideon also took "many wives" and at least one concubine as well, practices which, as anyone who has read scripture can affirm, are no mark of spiritual maturity inasmuch as such behavior always leads to unnecessary trouble (as it did for Gideon's offspring after his death).

How are we to assess this great believer, a man of signal spiritual victories but clearly not a perfect individual? First, we can say that any one of us in Gideon's place might well have committed the same errors and even more and worse ones. Second, we can note that few of us can say with confidence that we would be as courageous and zealous for the Lord as he actually was in spite of the difficulties he faced. Thirdly, the encouragements the Lord gave Gideon with the fleece and with the night patrol to the camp of the Midianites were no doubt needful in spite of Gideon's courageous nature. We can glean from this that the Lord knows exactly what we all need, and will never fail to provide for us, even in our imperfection. He did that for Gideon, so that Gideon was able to live up to the Lord's salutation of him.

And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!"
Judges 6:12 NKJV

Finally, the fact that Gideon was not perfect and yet achieved much for the Lord – even making it onto Paul's short list of significant believers as we all ought to remember – encourages us as we consider that even though we too have made errors and failed in the past (and in many cases spectacularly so), nevertheless we can still earn the highest eternal rewards, just as Gideon undoubtedly has, if only we keep fighting the fight of faith day by day, doing what the Lord would have us to do today, even if we have experienced some questionable yesterdays. In the end, only the great tomorrow of the Judgment Seat of Christ will matter.

(10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (11a)
Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.
2nd Corinthians 5:10-11a NIV

Barak: For those who know their Bibles, two things come immediately to mind about this mention of Barak next on the list. First, chronologically the battle of Mount Tabor occurred *before* Gideon's defeat of the Midianites but is set here afterwards. Second, in many ways, Deborah was the real hero of that battle in terms of its joining in the first place: she was the judge who summoned the Israelites to battle; while Jael was the real hero of its aftermath, since it was she who killed the enemy general, Sisera. When called by Deborah to receive the Lord's charge, Barak reacted as follows:

(8) Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." (9) "Certainly I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.
Judges 4:8-9 NIV

In the sequel, Barak *does* lead the army to victory, and in her song, Deborah *does* give him full credit for his part in the victory the Lord brought about, a song which scripture also attributes to him.

(1) On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: (2) "When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves – praise the Lord!
Judges 5:1-2 NIV

" 'Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song! Arise, Barak! Take captive your captives, son of Abinoam.'
Judges 5:12 NIV

"The princes of Issachar were with Deborah; yes, Issachar was with Barak, sent under his command into the valley."
Judges 5:15 NIV

Barak is doubtless second here instead of first because he was reluctant to immediately obey what "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you" (Jdg.4:6), *but* he is still on this list because he did come around and do what the Lord wanted in the end. Like the brother who did not immediately do his father's bidding but, after consideration, did enter into his field and, as a result, actually did his father's will as opposed to his brother who only obeyed with lip-service (Matt.21:28-32), so also we who have been reluctant in the past to do as our Savior wanted us to do should, rather than be wracked with guilt about the past, instead rejoice that we are doing His *will now*. For that we *will* be rewarded. And if, in the end, lost opportunities mean that we didn't earn quite the reward we might have done in a perfect response, instead of being upset about that we ought to be overjoyed at the reward we *are* earning. In spite of his initial hesitancy, Barak *did* then do the Lord's will, and, as a result, he is on this honor role of great believers forever. That is impressive, even if he is second rather than first on this short list.

Finally, the fact that we all think of Deborah and ask wonder about her absence is, in the end, just as good as her actually being on the list. For we give her more thought and consideration than otherwise we probably would have done as a result of Barak being here instead of her – and scripture is very clear about her prominent role in the actual events. Thus we are reminded also that it often takes a good, godly woman to prod a good godly man to get moving and to do what God wants him to do.

Samson:

(24) So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. (25) And the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol. (1) Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. (2) So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." (3) Then his father and mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my

people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well." (4a) But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord – that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines.

Judges 13:24 - 14:4a NKJV

Samson was a Nazarite "from the womb", prophesied to "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Jdg.13:5). From birth, "the Lord blessed him" (Jdg.13:24), and when he was grown, "the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him" (Jdg.13:25). Samson's marriage and the conflict it caused between him and the Philistines was also "of the Lord", brought about by Him in order to seek "an occasion to move against the Philistines" (Jdg.14:4). In all this, and in all that followed immediately, Samson's marriage, his violent repayment of his debt, his destruction of the Philistines' crops, his revenge upon those who killed his wife, and his annihilation of the Philistine army at Lehi, while actions that most normal human beings would not only be unable to accomplish but also would be unlikely to even contemplate, were from the Lord who knew Samson better than he knew himself.

(14) Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. (15) He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it.

Judges 15:14-15 NKJV

After this, Samson "judged Israel for twenty years" (Jdg.15:20), and Samson might not be on Paul's short list were it not for the events which followed. Without any doubt, Samson's liaison with the prostitute in Gaza (Jdg.16:1-3) and his relationship with Delilah (16:4-21) were wrong. And not only wrong. They were spiritually dangerous. It was Samson's inability to refrain from telling his wife the secret to his riddle that had brought about the initial feud with the Philistines through the uncovering of information best kept secret. While scripture does not say specifically that the prostitute in Gaza betrayed him, it is clear that had Samson not gone there he would not have been placed in the jeopardy he was. Even though he easily extricated himself on that occasion, both of these prior incidents demonstrated a pattern and a vulnerability which came to fruition through Delilah's betrayal of him. Even great believers, greatly blessed by the Lord, can be gravely damaged through unwise involvement with unbelievers.

Don't let yourselves be mismatched together in the yoke with unbelievers (i.e., in any close, intimate association). For what partnership does righteousness have with immorality, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement is there between Christ and Belial (i.e., the devil)? What agreement is there between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the Living God, just as God has said: "I will dwell among them and walk among [them], and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore come out from the midst of them (i.e., the ungodly) and separate yourselves" says the Lord, "and do not touch anything unclean. Then I will receive you and will be to you as a Father, and you will be to Me as sons and daughters" says the Lord Almighty. 2nd Corinthians 6:14-18

In the end, the Lord gave Samson a final victory over his enemies in spite of everything, so that "he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life" (Jdg.16:30 NKJV). We who are nowhere the equal of Samson should take note of the fact that even the mightiest can be laid low through bad judgment. And we who have also made our share of bad decisions in this life should also take note of the Lord's great mercy. For those who make it their heart's desire to stay close to the Lord in spite of mis-steps, He will forgive us and He will give us victory in the end.

(19) I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. (20) I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. (21) Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: (22) Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. (23) They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (24) I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." (25) The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.
Lamentations 3:19-25 NIV

Jephthah: Jephthah is another interesting choice. The Bible calls him "a mighty man of valor" as well (Jdg.11:1), and when his kinsman who had previously driven him out call him back to help them and he asks for reassurance from them, he says, "*if the Lord* gives me victory" (Jdg.11:9). Jephthah's message to the king of the Ammonites bespeaks impressive knowledge about Israel's history and, when he is rebuffed in his attempt at a peaceful solution, it is "the Spirit of the Lord" who comes upon him and precipitates the battle in which Israel is victorious. Finally, it is "the Lord" who delivers Israel's enemies into *his* hands (Jdg.11:32).

(30) And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, (31) then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."
Judges 11:30-31

For all the clearly godly things Jephthah is described as doing and for all the things which the Lord did for him, evincing a strong relationship between him and the Lord, this vow has troubled many readers of scripture, especially on account of its outcome. For as all Bible readers know, it was Jephthah's daughter who first came out to meet him, and so "he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed" (Jdg.11:39). Did Jephthah offer his daughter as a human sacrifice? Or did he "merely" consign her to a single life as a servant to the Lord (as in the case of Samuel who vowed him to the Lord: (1Sam.1:11)? We can say with assurance that human sacrifice was never acceptable to the Lord: as He says, "which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination" (Jer.32:35; cf. Jer.19:5). But whatever Jephthah did or did not actually do in fulfilling his vow, he did, in fact, fulfill it – even though it pained him tremendously to do so in any case. Jephthah stands as a premier example of the problem of taking vows in the first place, and a reminder to all believers today *never* to make them.

(33) "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' (34) But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; (35) nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor

by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. (36) Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. (37) But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."
Matthew 5:33-37 NKJV

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes " be "Yes," and your "No " "No," lest you fall into judgment.
James 5:12 NKJV

After all, God's purpose will always stand regardless of what we want *or what we vow*. Better to trust the Lord and rely on Him rather than on some vow we make to Him – as if He needed anything from us. But if we are incontinent enough to make them, we had better follow through on them (Eccl.5:6).

(8) "I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices
Or your burnt offerings,
Which are continually before Me.
(9) I will not take a bull from your house,
Nor goats out of your folds.
(10) For every beast of the forest is Mine,
And the cattle on a thousand hills.
(11) I know all the birds of the mountains,
And the wild beasts of the field are Mine.
(12) If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.
(13) Will I eat the flesh of bulls,
Or drink the blood of goats?
(14) Offer to God thanksgiving,
And pay your vows to the Most High.
(15) Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."
Psalm 50:7-15 NKJV

The Jerusalem believers of Paul's day were continuing to make vows according to the Law and in contravention of our Lord's direction and that of the Spirit (Matt.5:33-37; Jas.5:12). No doubt it is at least in part for this reason that Paul mentions Jephthah here as a reminder that this too was part and parcel of their faulty, legalistic approach. For even a great believer can be led into error by what he utters precipitously and thoughtlessly with his mouth. In spite of this, Jephthah has a place on Paul's honor roll, approved by the Holy Spirit, so that there is hope for us as well, even if we have made grave mistakes in the past. But if such a great man can be tripped up through impulsive and impetuous words, the rest of us ought to take notice and exercise greater care in "putting a guard over our mouths" (Ps.141:3).

Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.
Proverbs 17:28 NIV

In spite of the difficulties Jephthah had in his life, ostracized by his brothers, deprived of his inheritance and forced from his home, yet instead of blaming the Lord he relied on the Lord and in this way became the "mighty man of valor" scripture relates. Likewise we all ought to refrain from reacting negatively to bad things which may befall us in this life, remembering that we are here for the Lord, that the Lord loves us, and that He is working things out for the true good, whether it may seem that way to us while we are suffering or not. This would have been beneficial for the Jerusalem believers to have recalled during the persecution they were suffering. It will be important for every believer to keep this firmly in mind during the travails we are all about to experience once the Tribulation begins.

Finally, while Jephthah's vow was unwise and bespoke a lack of trust in the Lord – as if success had to be garnered through some sort of deal-making – nevertheless he is to be praised for sticking with the vow he made even though its consequences were very painful. Jephthah's daughter was his only offspring, and consigning her to life-long virginity meant the end of his line. For anyone, and for Israelites in particular, this was a heartbreaking prospect. But Jephthah feared the Lord more than he did anything in this life. Had the Jerusalem believers done likewise, fearing the wrath of their Savior more than that of their fellow countrymen, they never would have reverted to the Law. The lesson for the rest of us is simple enough. During the Tribulation, all of the world's pressures will be directed against believers to take the beast's mark on pain of suffering, starvation, imprisonment and death – everything, in short, the world fears. But we who belong to Jesus Christ need to commit ourselves to walking closely with Him in godly fear come what may, so that while we may lose these physical lives of ours, our life eternal will never be in jeopardy: if we truly fear the Lord in a good, godly and reverent way, loving Him with all our hearts, then we will have nothing to fear from mortal men.

(1) "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. (5) But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."
Luke 12:4-5 NIV

(9) Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, (10) he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." (12) Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.
Revelation 14:9-12 NKJV

David: One could write a book about David – and indeed many have.²⁸ Paul's inclusion of this great believer on his list is surprising only in that one is tempted to wonder why David wasn't given greater treatment in the earlier catalog. One thing that suggests itself in this respect is what

²⁸ See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.3, "Biblical Role Models: David".

Paul says in preface to this short list: "time would fail me, were I to go on and relate the stories" (Heb.11:32). That is certainly true of David.

(10) Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The Lord has not chosen these." (11) So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep " Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."

1st Samuel 16:10-11 NIV

All indications are that David's life of hardship began early on, possibly as a result of his mother dying in childbirth (Ps.27:10; 51:5; 76:6-7), and that his father's dismissive attitude towards him when Samuel came calling was nothing new. It was certainly shared by his brothers.

When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle."

1st Samuel 17:28 NIV

But in spite of all disadvantages, his hard youth, being relegated to the role of sheep herding under dangerous and trying conditions (1Sam.16:11; 17:28; 17:34-36), his difficult early life, narrowly averting murder at the hands of jealous king Saul on many occasions, pursued by him relentlessly, David never lost his essential joy in the Lord. His love for the Lord literally sings forth in all of the psalms he was given to write in the Spirit. David was truly a man "after the Lord's own heart" (1Sam.13:14). David's story is so inspiring, his victories so amazing, that none of us would dare to compare ourselves with him, yet we believers are one with David as we are with all the great believers of the past as part of the Bride of Christ, "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" along with David and all of our other brothers and sisters in the Lord (Rom.8:17).

Of course we all remember as well that David also had some monumental failures, his murder of Uriah after committing adultery with his wife being the most appalling. But David was forgiven (2Sam.12:13). But David recovered spiritually. But David endured the waves of divine discipline that came upon him as a result – and never lost his joy in the Lord or his dedication to Jesus Christ.

(5) And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, (6) because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." (7) Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

Hebrews 12:5-7 NIV

Perhaps this is precisely why Paul brings David in here at this place and in this way, namely, to remind the Jerusalem believers that God loves them in spite of their spiritual failings. To remind them that recovery is possible. They will be forgiven as well, just as David was, even if for a

time there is some divine discipline to endure. But in the end, if they will only do what is right, repent and come back to the Lord with all their hearts, there will be joy restored.

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

Psalm 30:5 NIV

Samuel: Samuel is an interesting choice for the anchorman of Paul's short list. He was a great believer, no question. He had to grow up without his mother and was a temple servant from the time he could walk and talk. Unlike Eli's sons, he did what was right before the Lord and the Lord honored him with a very close relationship.

The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground.

1st Samuel 3:19 NIV

Chronologically, however, David came after Samuel. And, one could easily argue, in spiritual terms that it is surprising that David, great as he was, is not given the honor of finishing off this list. Further, Samuel was at least in part responsible for the need for a king in the first place, inasmuch as he failed to keep his sons in check thus necessitating a change in administration (1Sam.8:1-5). He appointed them as Israel's judges but "they turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice" (1Sam.8:3b). It is perhaps this last issue, namely, putting one's family over the good of the people and the Lord's will, that Paul is wishing for the Jerusalem believers to recall (as they too no doubt must have asked themselves why Samuel is mentioned last). For many in that city were also putting their personal interests and those of their families in front of what the Lord wanted from them, focusing on temporal security and prosperity instead of being willing to suffer ostracism and the hardships it brought for the sake of the Name of Jesus Christ.

(12) And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. (13) Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

(14) For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Hebrews 13:12-14 NIV

This, too, provides a lesson for us "upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1Cor.10:11). For we too will soon face a very similar choice. Are we willing to put the Lord before material concerns, both for ourselves and our families? We had better be, if we wish to enjoy New Jerusalem in the company of our brothers and sisters and in the presence of our dear Savior Jesus Christ.

(16) And he (i.e., the false prophet) compelled everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to allow [his clergy] to place a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, (17) so that no one would be able to buy or sell except those with the mark, [consisting of] either the name of the [first] beast or the number of his name.

Revelation 13:16-17

The Prophets: Depending on how one does the counting, there are upwards of a hundred prophets in the Bible whether mentioned by name or not, whether given that title or not, and some of them have already appeared in this chapter. Samuel was a prophet and so was David. A prophet of God is a man specially gifted by Him to deliver the Word of God through the Holy Spirit, whether or not it was the will of God for the message to be written down as part of the Bible (Heb.1:1; 2Pet.1:21). We know more about some of these men than we do about others. In the case of the man of God and the old prophet who lied to him (1Ki.13:11-34), we don't know either of their names, and the only record of them is in the passage referenced. In the case of the major and minor prophets of the Bible, almost everything we know about them definitively comes from the books they were given to pen in the Spirit. Sometimes, as in the case of, e.g., Jeremiah, this is rather a lot. Sometimes, as in the case of, e.g., Nahum, this is next to nothing. There are extra-biblical traditions about most of these prophets who were given to write scripture, but even the most ancient and seemingly authentic must be taken with a grain of salt at least. We can depend absolutely on whatever the Bible says about them; nothing else can be verified absolutely.

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:
"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for Us?"
Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."
Isaiah 6:8 NKJV

(4) Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: (5) "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a *prophet* to the nations." (6) Then said I: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth." (7) But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. (8) Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: (9) "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."
Jeremiah 1:4-9 NKJV

Whether enthusiastic volunteers like Isaiah (cf. 1Ki.17:1; 19:19-21), or reluctant draftees like Jeremiah (cf. Ex.4:10-16; Jon.1:3; 4:2), being a prophet of the Lord was always a difficult road and generally involved reproving His errant people so as to suffer the concomitant opposition such remonstrances this readily provoked. Many of the examples of suffering listed in the following verses (Heb.11:35ff.) befell these very prophets, but along with that suffering will come a great reward.

(10) Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of *suffering*, take *the prophets* who spoke in the name of the Lord. (11a) As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered.
James 5:10 NIV

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to *suffer* for a time through various trials (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in *praise, glory and honor* for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

1st Peter 1:3-7

Though not named individually, *all* of God's prophets are thus an example to us needful of remembering. Although they were called upon to endure many things the rest of us never could have abided (e.g., Is.20:2-4; Jer.27:1-2; Ezek.3:24-25; 4:4-12), yet now "we count as blessed those who have persevered", recognizing that they will be honored at the Judgment Seat of Christ on that glorious day of evaluation. Every believer needs to remember their example every time we read them and their words in scripture, taking pains to follow their example of putting the Lord first and foremost in their lives in spite of the opposition and persecution they suffered as a result. In the end – and there will be an end – it will be much better for them and for all who do follow in their footsteps than for those who shy away from whatever mission the Lord has given us. But to completely turn away from the Lord because of suffering, actual or feared, is to risk not only a prophet's reward but salvation itself. This the Jerusalem believers should have remembered. This we who stand on the threshold of the Tribulation cannot afford to forget.

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

Through Faith:

(33) . . . who through their faith defeated kingdoms, accomplished acts of righteousness, received the fulfillment of promises, shut the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the power of fire, fled the mouth of the sword, were made strong in weakness, were made powerful in war, defeated enemy armies, (35) women even received back their dead.

Hebrews 11:33-35

Paul now gives us ten examples of victories accomplished *through faith* (to be followed by fourteen examples of exceptional suffering endured likewise through faith). For those who know their Bibles, some of these examples are general enough to suggest many possible biblical referents; others are so unique that they lead us to suppose specific instances and individuals. Moses, Joshua, Ehud, Jephthah, David, etc., "defeated kingdoms", but all of the great believers "accomplished acts of righteousness" and "received the fulfillment of promises". Indeed, while we believers have no aspirations or expectations of physical conquest, we all are striving to do what is right in our Lord's eyes (Rev.19:8), and anticipate *through faith* that all of His promises to us are being and will be fulfilled (2Cor.1:20; 7:1; 2Pet.1:4). It was for Daniel that the Lord "shut the mouths of lions" . . .

(22) "My God sent his angel, and **he shut the mouths of the lions**. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty." (23) The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, **because he had trusted** in his God.
Daniel 6:22-23 NIV

. . . and it was for his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego), that He "quenched the power of fire":

(22) The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, (23) and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. (24) Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." (25) He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." (26) Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, (27) and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.
Daniel 3:22-27 NIV

But every believer whom the Lord protected in battle can be said to have "fled the mouth of the sword", and many have been "made strong in weakness", and not only in battle. Throughout the Old Testament, godly believers "were made powerful in war" and "defeated enemy armies" (and Paul has already given us some specific examples of just this previously in his two lists). However, the number of "women [who] even received back their dead" is a very small and unique list, most notably including: the Syro-Phoenician woman through the intercession of Elijah (1Ki.17:17-24); the Shunammite woman through the intercession of Elisha (2Ki.4:8-37); the widow of Nain, through our Lord's miracle (Lk.7:11-17). In all three of these cases, and, indeed, in all of the examples on this list of victories the common thread is that they were given by the Lord to believers who **had faith** that God could and would do these things for them.

(22) A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." (23) Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." (24) He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." (25) The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. (26) He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." (27) "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." (28) Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, **you have great faith!** Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.
Matthew 15:22-28 NIV

Tortured: The Greek word *tympanizo* means, literally, "to beat like a drum", so that "torture" is perhaps our closest English equivalent. When Paul was physically abused by the Roman and Jewish authorities on many occasions, while the word "torture" might not necessarily be the first one to spring to our modern minds, this sort of treatment is what he is conveying here with this word.

(23) These men are servants of Christ? I must be deranged to say so. But even if that is their claim, mine is stronger. I have served through severe difficulties, too numerous to mention. I have been imprisoned too often to recount. I have been beaten excessively, and have often been in danger of losing my life. (24) On five occasions I received from the Jews the "thirty-nine lashes". (25) On three others I was beaten with the [Roman] lictor's rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked – once left to float in the water for an entire day and night. (26) I am constantly journeying and continually in danger – dangers from river-crossings and dangers from bandits, dangers from my own people and dangers from all other nationalities, dangers in cities and dangers in the country, dangers on the sea and dangers from pseudo-Christians. (27) My lot has been one of laboring and toiling, often doing without sleep, of going hungry and thirsty, and often lacking any sustenance whatsoever, of braving the cold, though lacking adequate clothing – (28) and on top of all these external things there is this pressing concern I constantly feel for all the churches.

1st Corinthians 11:23-28

How can a Christian endure such things? Only *by faith*. That is how Paul was able to do what he did. And the same is true of and all of the other great believers of the past, be they listed in scripture or not, who have successfully endured torture and physical abuse for the sake of Jesus Christ. They did so by keeping their eyes on Him, considering His good pleasure of more value than their own bodies, than their own lives.

(40b) They called the apostles in and *had them flogged*. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. (41) The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing *because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name*.
Acts 5:40b-41 NIV

This attitude of heart requires a complete reversal of thinking from what the secular mind is conditioned to think from birth. Believers who want to be able to negotiate personal tribulation in the manner of the apostles need to transform our thinking (Rom.12:2). We need to see ourselves as dead to the world and alive to Christ (Gal.6:14). This requires spiritual growth and subsequent progress in passing the maturity tests that hone and refine our faith, helping us learn how to look beyond this temporary world to the blessings of eternity to come.

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and *our faith* in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be

unveiled at the end of time. (6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials (7) to the end that *your faith* may be shown to be genuine. This validation of *your faith* is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But *your faith*, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you *have faith* in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of *this faith of yours*.

1st Peter 1:3-9

Giving ourselves over to the virtuous cycle of spiritual growth, progress and production is the only way to prepare for what is coming, whether to us personally or to all believers collectively once the Tribulation begins. Failing to engage in what the Lord wants from us will eventually result instead in the vicious circle of spiritual malaise and decline – dangerous always but how much more so once the time of testing surpassing all others arrives (Matt.24:21). Even as the Jerusalem believers would soon be facing the Tribulation in a microcosm in just a few short years after the reception of this letter (and only those who responded would be assured of holding onto their faith and eternal reward, come what may), so also believers of our day are likewise faced with the choice of preparing for what is coming or, alternatively, allowing themselves to be blind-sided by the most challenging time of testing the Church has ever faced – and being wholly unprepared for it at that.

Refusing Release: The release here is from the physical abuse mentioned above. Abuse is pressure, and those who apply it often want something in return for relieving the pressure. Pressure thus pushes those receiving it toward compromise. But in all of the unnamed cases summed up here by Paul, the believers in question refused to compromise what was most important to them: their relationship with the Lord, that is, *their faith*.

The Jerusalem believers are hereby asked to examine the compromises they were making specifically to avoid the pressure of ostracism and hostility from their unbelieving neighbors. Returning to the Law, returning to the traditions of their ancestors, returning to their practice of attending synagogue, was clearly compromising the faith they had previously embraced. This may have relieved the pressure; this may have ended the ostracism and retaliation and provided a renewal of physical comforts. But it was also damaging their faith, possibly terminally so. The believers to whom Paul alludes in our context refused all such compromise. They continued to endure the physical abuse meted out to them. Not because they enjoyed it, certainly. Not just to be stubborn. But because they were looking forward to a "resurrection" which was much "better" than any possible earthly relief. We believers who are walking closely with Jesus Christ know very well that the smallest measure of His good pleasure on the day He evaluates us is worth more than the entire world. For us indeed, living is Jesus Christ, and dying is nothing but gain (Phil.1:21). And we also know that nothing, absolutely nothing, is worth endangering the blessed eternal life we will have with Him and with all of our brothers and sisters in New Jerusalem

forever. Certainly not a mess of rotten pottage here in the devil's world.

(15) The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

(16) It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, (17) so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.

Revelation 13:15-17 NIV

Ridicule: Absent actually enduring ridicule, it may seem at first, in the comfort of one's armchair, that this trial does not rise to the level of other things on this list such as physical torture. After all, only sticks and stones break bones. But as anyone with any life experience understands, words can indeed sting, and very bitterly at that. For many stronger individuals, moreover, the endurance of physical pain may be easier than the emotional pain of being put to shame and ridicule. Certainly the combination of the two is worse than bearing up under either alone. But we believers need to be able to suffer through either or both, if so wills the will of God, and not allow either or both to cause us to turn away from the One person who can help us endure and persevere. Instead, we need to keep our Lord's own example firmly in mind. After all, we are called to be walking in His footsteps (Matt.16:24; 1Jn.2:6; cf. 1Cor.11:1).

(67) Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him (68) and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?"

Matthew 26:67-68 NIV

(27) Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. (28) They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, (29) and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. (30) They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. (31) After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Matthew 27:27-31 NIV

(41) In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. (42) "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. (43) He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (44) In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Matthew 27:41-44 NIV

Our Lord never reacted to all this tremendous abuse, humiliation beyond anything we can imagine ourselves enduring – because we never could. We know that He will never ask us to bear anything which is actually impossible for us to bear (1Cor.10:13), but we do need to accept the fact that we too may be called upon one day to endure "the shame of the cross".

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

If such be God's will, we need to resolve ahead of time to bear such ridicule and humiliation nobly and honorably, just as the great believers of Hebrews chapter eleven did, following the footsteps of our Lord.

(12) Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness. (14) If you are [indeed] being reproached on account of Christ's name, you are [truly] blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of power, even the Spirit of God, rests upon you (i.e., to support you in the trial). (15) Now let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler, (16) but if [anyone should suffer for being labeled] as a "Chrestian" (i.e., a "goody-goody"), let him not be ashamed of it. Let him rather glorify God under that name. (17) For it is time for the judgment to begin, starting with God's household. And if it first begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not believe God's gospel? (18) For [as it says], "If the righteous man is barely saved, where will the ungodly and sinful turn? (Prov.11:33)". (19) Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives – while doing what is good – to a Creator who is faithful.

1st Peter 4:12-19

If we "leave it to the Lord" instead of reacting badly, we will be honoring Him in the way He wishes, and we will soon see our vindication from Him.

(23) From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. "Get out of here, baldy!" they said. "Get out of here, baldy!" (24) He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys.

2nd Kings 2:23-24 NIV

Beatings: Unlike torture which may go on for an indeterminate time, a beating or a flogging comes and goes. No doubt it is very painful, but so, of course, is any sort of torture or physical abuse. Paul is given to add this to the list of things great believers in the past endured not just because it was a standard punishment under the Law and in his day under Roman rule, but also because of the humiliation that physical abuse brings (cf. Deut.25:3). Flogging can leave

physical scars; ridicule may leave psychological ones as well, at least for all who are not accepting undeserved suffering in the right spirit.

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.
1st Peter 2:20 NKJV

For those believers who will endure beatings for the sake of Jesus Christ during the difficult hour of testing to come, we will have every right to do as Paul did and consider it a mark of honor (cf. Acts 8:4).

From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.
Galatians 6:17 NKJV

Chains and Imprisonment: It is true that these two things are pretty much the same, especially in the context of the ancient world where "chains" is a metaphor for prison (Phil.1:7; 1:13; 1:16; Col.4:18; Phm.1:10; 1:13; Heb.10:34), so that it might be possible to take this as a hendiadys. However, it is certainly possible to imprison someone without having them literally chained up as well.

And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.
Acts 12:6 NKJV

(23) And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. (24) Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.
Acts 16:23-24 NKJV

In both of the passages above, the chains and stocks are meant as an extra measure of security, roughly equivalent to our "Supermax" prisons in this country as opposed to low security institutions designed for much lesser crimes. However, we are speaking here of wrongful imprisonment which is thus unjust and for that reason a burden to endure beyond the basic fact of being in jail. In such a context, the chains bespeak an additional level of harassment: i.e., no relatively easy term of imprisonment in a "club Fed" equivalent, but rather a very difficult prison experience designed to be punitive.

"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed." This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.
Revelation 13:10 NIV

However difficult this sort of situation was for believers of the past or will be for believers during the Tribulation, as in all of the other tests and trials related in this chapter, we understand that the Lord will be with us – just as He was with Joseph – all the way to the end, whatever that

may be in the will of God.

"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Revelation 2:10 NKJV

(6) "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the Gentiles,
(7) To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the prison,
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house."
Isaiah 42:6-7 NKJV

Stoned: While stoning can be a legal form of execution (e.g., Ex.19:13; Lev.20:2; 20:27; 24:13-16; Deut.17:5; Josh.7:25), more often than not it represents the ancient world's equivalent to lynching wherein a crowd is outraged with the victim for some reason and take the law into their own hands (Ex.17:4; 1Ki.12:18; Matt.21:35; 23:37; Lk.13:34; Jn.8:59; 10:31-32; 11:8; Acts 7:58; 14:5; 14:9; 2Cor.11:25). This too then represents unjust execution, with the unfairness of it constituting an extra burden to bear.

Sawed in Half: There is some tradition extent which suggests that Isaiah suffered this particular fate. We cannot say for certain (since that attribution is not in the Bible), but since Paul is given to write this by the Spirit we can say that some believers in the past did suffer martyrdom in this way. This too is, obviously enough, represents unjust summary execution (as opposed to a corrupted legal process), and one that is designed to be punitive and cruel in order to exact mental as well as physical pain in the process of taking away the victim's life.

We believers who stand on the threshold of the Tribulation understand that martyrdom for refusing to take the beast's mark is a very real possibility in the not too distant future. We do not know what specific form that martyrdom may take, but equally cruel methods are possible, if not worse ones. What we *do* know is that the Lord will "never abandon or forsake" us (Deut.31:6; 31:8; Josh.1:5; Heb.13:5). Just as the Lord delivered Daniel's three friends from the fiery furnace, so He can protect us from and deliver us through whatever it may His will to have us face. And just as He delivered Daniel from the lions' den, so He has the power to protect and deliver us from anything and everything we might fear. Therefore we have no reason to be afraid (Rev.2:10). Indeed, nothing on this earth or in this life can touch our human spirits or damage our eternal life. Therefore it is the Lord alone whom we need to hold in godly reverence, not the minions of the devil whose end will be far worse than anything we could possibly imagine for ourselves.

(4) "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. (5) But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear

Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (6) Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. (7) But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Luke 12:4-7 NKJV

[But in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him], the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing to receive the mark or worship the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] *their faith* in Jesus (viz., even though it may cost them their lives).

Revelation 14:12

Killed by the Sword: While it is true that the standard Roman method of capital punishment for Roman citizens in Paul's day was beheading (cf. Rev.20:4), the way the Greek puts this, literally "they died by slaughter of (i.e., with) the sword", indicates that completely illegitimate violence and murder are meant here rather than formal execution at the hands of the authorities (i.e., "lynching" rather than "hanging" after a show trial). Of course, the victim is dead either way, but murder, being killed by mob violence, is reasonably placed in a separate category of its own because it brings with it an extra measure of testing specifically *because* of its absolute illegitimacy. It may be quicker than formal proceedings, but it is also completely unfair, even in comparison with the judicial executions that will characterize antichrist's reign, and that very unfairness can be a test in and of itself. We are all prone to react against such unfairness, especially when we ourselves are the objects of it. Doing so when it is the Lord's will for us to suffer and die in this way is a mistake (which is why Paul is given to include this as a separate category). Instead of reacting, if such is the Lord's will for us, we need to keep His example firmly in mind.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

Isaiah 53:7 NKJV

(21) For it is indeed to this purpose that you have been called (i.e., sharing in the sufferings of Christ); for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps: (22) "He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth" (Is.53:9b). (23) He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but He entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously.
1st Peter 2:21-23

General Persecution of the Faithful:

(37b) They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. (38) The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the

mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth.
Hebrews 11:37b-38

Paul's final summation of the trials and tribulations of the faithful believers of the past is sufficiently graphic so as not to require much elaboration. It also mostly stands in stark contrast to what most believers today and to what his contemporaries in Jerusalem were actually experiencing. For that reason, we today ought to be very circumspect about complaining of our circumstances (as they then should have been as well), and still less of using them as an excuse to avoid doing what the Lord wants us to be doing. Whatever we are suffering, as this passage reminds us, there were many faithful believers of past who endured far worse, even if we do not know their names yet. We will. On that day, we certainly do not want their victorious faith which stayed strong despite all their terrible suffering to be a witness against us. Do we really want our Lord to have to point out to us that we did so much less with so much more?

Sheepskins and Goat Hides: This represents the most basic and crude clothing, analogous in our day to rags or wearing a barrel. No one with any particular means would be so crudely and so uncomfortably clad. Very few believers today, especially in the west, have been reduced to such a state. That day may come, once the Tribulation begins. If so, we would do well to remember what Paul told us:

(6) But godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (8) But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

1st Timothy 6:6-8 NIV

Deprived: Literally "lacking" and also often translated as "destitute", this verb describes the situation of not even having a level of food and clothing which anyone would deem sufficient. Perhaps not starving but very close to it. Cold and hungry – yet not quite to the point of losing one's life as a result.

(16) And he (i.e., the false prophet) compelled everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to allow [his clergy] to place a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, (17) so that no one would be able to buy or sell except those with the mark, [consisting of] either the name of the [first] beast or the number of his name.

Revelation 13:16-17

Refusing to take the mark – which of course all believers must and will refuse – may well bring about this state of affairs during the Great Persecution of the Tribulation's second half. Despite such deprivation, however, believers can never afford to forget that the Lord will always remain faithful to us regardless of worldly circumstances even when things look or even may be impossible from that worldly point of view. The Tribulation will be a time of shortage (Lk.21:11; Rev.6:5-8; 11:6), but we know that our Lord can cause manna to drop from heaven if we need it (Ex.16:14-18). He can send ravens with our necessary food (1Ki.17:4), or otherwise miraculously provide our daily bread (1Ki.17:14; 19:5-8; 2Ki.4:42-44; Matt.4:11; 14:13-21). We cannot say that believers deprived of normal sustenance during the Tribulation will receive such

miraculous means, but our Lord *will* provide, just as he did for these believers of the past.

In famine He shall redeem you from death,
And in war from the power of the sword.
Job 5:20 NKJV

You shall laugh at destruction and famine,
And you shall not be afraid of the beasts of the earth.
Job 5:22 NKJV

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,
On those who hope in His mercy,
To deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine.
Psalm 33:18-19 NKJV

The Lord knows the days of the upright,
And their inheritance shall be forever.
They shall not be ashamed in the evil time,
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.
Psalm 37:18-19 NKJV

I have been young, and now am old;
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken,
Nor his descendants begging bread.
Psalm 37:25 NKJV

The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.
Proverbs 10:3 NIV

Persecuted: The Greek verb here, *thlibo*, is the root of the noun, *thlipsis*, "tribulation". Thus the persecution here is being subjected to tribulation at the hands of the minions of the evil one, suffering unfair and punitive treatment simply for the sake of their faith in the Lord. The threat of this sort of treatment was what was tripping up the Jerusalem believers and leading them into spiritual compromise. When the only relief from such persecution will be the rejection of Jesus Christ so as to worship the beast instead, truly, death is preferable – if such be the witness the Lord chooses for us.

"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."
Luke 17:33 NKJV

But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death.
Revelation 12:11

Abused: Literally, to subject to bad treatment, this verb indicates oppression of every sort doled out by one's enemies. This is punitive treatment and harassment inflicted out of cruelty – of the sort with which any student of the holocaust is familiar (arm bands identifying the person as inferior, forcing said individual to step aside and bow in the presence of their superiors, forcing them to complete menial tasks for the sake of humiliation, etc.). The believers who endured this sort of test had to put humility before their natural pride, to do as Moses did and consider such reproaches for the Lord's sake as "greater than the treasuries of Egypt" (Heb.11:26), and to do as our Lord did, putting us and our salvation above all personal considerations.

[Let us be] turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, *endured the shame* of the cross, *treating it with despite*, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

The World was not Worthy of them:

Jesus answered [Pilate], "My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting on my behalf so that I might not be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my Kingdom is not from here".

John 18:36

Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

James 4:4 NIV

(15) Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. (16) For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. (17) The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1st John 2:15-17 NIV

We who believe in Jesus Christ have turned our backs on this present, temporary world. We have no love for it, and it has no love for us. If there were anything worthwhile in this world, if this world had any redeeming value, then the world would have appreciated those great believers of the past and it would appreciate us now too as well (even though we don't measure up to their greatness). But just as we have no desire to be friends with the world, so also the world has no use for us. And since we are the elect (1Pet.1:1), the light-bearers in this dark world (Phil.2:15), the salt that preserves whatever is worth preserving (Matt.5:13), by disdaining the children of

God, the world proves absolutely that it is worthless, not being worthy of the presence of believers through whom alone God blesses it.

(18) "Though the world hates you, know that it came to hate Me first. (19) If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. Now because you are not [a part] of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you."
John 15:19

"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."
John 17:14

Wandered:

They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth.
Hebrews 11:38b

We believers are all merely sojourners on this earth, unloved by the world and not loving it. We are only here for a brief moment, and we alone, of all who live here, appreciate that fact. Because we are the targets of the devil's ire in the absence of our Savior, we may be persecuted; we may be driven away from human society as the great believers of the past referenced in this verse were. But whether we are forced to live in physical isolation or merely understand that we are spiritually apart from society even as we live within it, either way we understand that as those who belong to Jesus Christ we are not of this world (Jn.17:14). Whether merely socially so or more tangibly and physically separated from the world, either way we are outcasts in the world's eyes and in our own as well (1Pet.1:1).

(5) Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage. (6) As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools. (7) They go from strength to strength; Each one appears before God in Zion.
Psalm 84:5-7 NKJV

(5) Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "***I am the way***, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."
John 14:5-6 NKJV

Though the great believers of the past who were forced into the wilderness were wandering in those desolate places in a physical sense, they knew exactly where they were going. Their hearts were set on Zion, on the Kingdom of God, and they were progressing on that pilgrimage daily in the only way possible, ***through faith***.

(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (17) For in it the

righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Romans 1:16-17 NKJV

Although the world sees our efforts on behalf of Jesus Christ as laughable and pointless, "wandering" without purpose, we know that in due time we will complete our wilderness journey and stand before our Lord. At that time we will have no regrets whatsoever for a single thing we have done in the power of the Holy Spirit, for even a cup of cold water given in our Lord's Name will not fail to receive its due reward (Matt.10:42).

(1) "Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God [the Father] – believe also in Me. (2) There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also."

John 14:1-3

We believers may not be living in mansions at present. Few of us are doing so, as "not many mighty" and "not many well-born" are called (1Cor.1:26; cf. Matt.19:24; Jas.2:5). And we are not bent on pursuing wealth as most of the world is (Matt.6:32; Lk.12:30). Our treasury is in heaven, and it is the spiritual rewards that will last forever upon which we have set our hearts (Matt.6:21). We have homes in New Jerusalem that will put the finest mansions on this corrupt earth to shame, delighting us forever. So if it be our lot as it was for the believers referenced in our context to be driven from hearth and home, to be forced to dwell in "caves and fissures of the earth" for a spell, we cannot afford to take that to heart. If so wills the will of God, we believers are willing to endure that test and more for the sake of Lord Jesus Christ, for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This the Jerusalem believers who were compromising to avoid it should have remembered. This the believers who must endure the trials of persecution in the Tribulation cannot afford to forget. Our kingdom "is not of this world". Our God and Savior is our true dwelling place, throughout this life, until we see Him face to face.

(1) A Prayer of Moses the man of God.

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

(2) Before the mountains were brought forth,

Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,

Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

Psalms 90:1-2 NKJV

All of the above is very important for us on the verge of the end to remember because abuse and privation can weigh heavily on the heart, especially for those who are not properly prepared. In the troubling time soon to come, the alternative to martyrdom will be, in many cases the same sort of testing these great believers of the past had to endure. Thus, having our lives taken from us quickly once the Great Tribulation begins is perhaps not the worst thing. For those who are given to survive, things will be worse in one critical respect: their suffering will continue as opposed to being brought to a glorious end. And after all, from the divine point of view, the one

we should all be adopting, dying is gain – if we are truly living for Jesus Christ (Phil.1:21). As Paul said in that same context, departing so as to be with Jesus Christ is "better by far" than having to remain here in this terrible world – and that will be especially true during the Tribulation (Phil.1:23).

Verses Thirty Nine through Forty

(39) And through their faith, all of them though they became witnesses [to the world] (lit., "were martyred"), yet they did not receive the promise (i.e., resurrection and reward), (40) since God was looking forward for our sakes to something better, so that they might not be made perfect (i.e., resurrected and rewarded) without us.
Hebrews 11:39-40

Through their Faith: For the twenty fourth time in this chapter, Paul reminds us, as he concludes this catalog of biblical heroes, that they achieved what they achieved for the Lord *through their faith*. Believers only become believers, "people who have faith [in the Lord]", by believing in Him, His person and His work on the cross, *through faith*. And we only grow up spiritually, and we are only able to pass maturity testing, and we are only able to become prepared for ministry and persevere in it *through faith*.

We believe in Jesus Christ and that belief, that faith, characterizes, colors and guides everything we are and everything we do. We grow as our faith grows and vice versa. What all of the heroes of chapter eleven have in common, whether named or unnamed, is the exceptional faith they had in the Lord. They believed what He told them *and* they proved that they did by following Him *through faith*. This, of course, is precisely what we have all been called upon to do as well, Paul's audience at the time, we believers today who stand on the very cusp of the end, and every generation of believers in between. No one is saved without faith. No one makes it safely to the other side without faith. No one can grow or progress or help others do so without that same faith, a belief in Jesus Christ, who He is as the God-man and what He has done for us in dying in our place. That is the bedrock of who we are as Christians, and all those who would follow in the footsteps of the great witnesses to faith described in this chapter must do what they did: build that faith day by day and act on it consistently come what may as we persevere in our pilgrimage through this world on our way to Zion.

For we walk *by faith*, not by sight.
2nd Corinthians 5:7

Witnesses: As we saw earlier, the verb used here (*martyreo*) "to witness", is the origin of our English word "martyr". Etymologically, that is what a "martyr" is, namely, someone who gives witness. In biblical usage, that witness is always on behalf of the Lord and His truth and is often accompanied by suffering and sometimes even by death. While not always imprisoned, tortured or put to death for their faith, the spiritual heroes named in chapter eleven have in common that the witness they consistently gave to the Lord and His truth was ever faithful in spite of "dungeon, fire and sword" or any other trial or tribulation.

To be dependable in reflecting well on Him who is our Savior, to be "good witnesses" to Him and for Him, required of all of these great believers of the past to commit to prior spiritual growth and unflagging application of the truth thereafter, regardless of the exigencies of their circumstances. And the same was true in Paul's day, even though many of his Jerusalem contemporaries were giving a very poor witness indeed. And the same is true today – so that all of us would do well to consider what sort of witness we are giving for the Lord. That witness may occasionally take the form of what is called in evangelical circles "witnessing" (i.e., sharing the gospel with others), but in much greater part it has to do with the reflection of Him we are shining forth to the world, one that can only be truly good if we have fought the fight of spiritual growth, progress and production to which He has called us. Only then, and not by superficial Pharisaical attempts to put on appearances, will our witness become one with which our Lord is genuinely pleased, for *those* are the "good deeds" which glorify Him.

(14) "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."
Matthew 5:14-16 NIV

(17) For the Lord and the Spirit are one, and wherever the Lord's Spirit is, there is also freedom (i.e. the opportunity and power to do God's will). (18) And every one of us, when we reflect [like a mirror] the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being transformed into the same image (i.e., becomes more Christ-like) so as to reflect an ever greater degree of glory – exactly what is to be expected with the Lord's Spirit as the agent of our transformation.
2nd Corinthians 3:17-18

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.
Ephesians 5:8

There is no "finish line" in this life. That only comes when we finally see the Lord face to face. Until that glorious moment, it is imperative for all believers to keep running our race for Jesus Christ. There are no prizes for failing to finish.

You were running well! Who knocked you off your stride so as not to believe the truth?
Galatians 5:7 (cf. Gal.2:2; Phil.2:16)

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus. (15) So as many as are [spiritually] mature, let us have this attitude (i.e., of focusing on our spiritual advance

and reward and not getting hung up on what lies behind: vv.13-14), and if in any matter your attitude is off-center, God will reveal that to you (i.e., assuming you are mature and are advancing as you should). (16) But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!
Philippians 3:12-16

Likewise if anyone engages in athletic competition, he does not win a crown if he fails to compete according to the rules.
2nd Timothy 2:5

(1) Since then we too [just like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us, [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith.
Hebrews 12:1-2a

Even if it be our lot to suffer, as was the case for many of the heroes of chapter eleven and for the believers in Jerusalem in Paul's day, we must hold fast our faith, "firm until the end" (Heb.3:6; 3:14), come what may. We have only good things to look forward to, even if it is our Lord's will to be martyred for Him. If it is, His purpose is for us to give a witness to His truth, and we have no cause to worry about that whatsoever.

(11) "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, (12) for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."
Luke 12:11-12 NIV

(1) "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. (2) They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. (3) They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. (4a) I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them."
John 16:1-4a NIV

"And they overcame [the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives [even un]to the death."
Revelation 12:11 NKJV

The Promise: As believers in Jesus Christ, we, just as much as the great spiritual heroes of scripture and the Jerusalem believers of Paul's day, have received many "exceedingly great and precious promises" (2Pet.1:4; cf. Heb.6:1; 6:12-13; 6:15; 6:17; 7:6; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9; 11:13; 11:17; 11:33). These wonderful promises that God has made to us, promises from God who cannot lie validated through swearing to them by Himself (Heb.6:13), are all empowered through the cross, the sacrifice of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, on our behalf. Therefore, as the citations above demonstrate, the promise is one (singular) or consists of multiple "promises" only

depending on one's point of view. We believers are promised . . .

- Eternal life: no more death but only perfect life without end (Lk.18:30; Jn.3:15; 17:2-3; Rom.2:7; 5:21; 6:23; Tit.1:2).
- Resurrection: a perfect and eternal body that will never tire or age or become ill or die, a body like unto that of our resurrected Lord (Jn.11:25; 20:26-27; 1Cor.15:35-58; 1Thes.4:13-18; 1Jn.3:2).
- Reward: crowns of reward for all who excel in our response and service to the Lord, with not even the least good work failing to receive a reward that lasts forever (Matt.10:42; 2Tim.4:8; Jas.1:12; 1Pet.5:4; Rev.2:10).
- Inheritance: a place in New Jerusalem designed for us by the Architect Himself (Jn.14:1-3; cf. Matt.5:5; 19:29; 25:34; Rom.8:17; Gal.3:29; 4:7; Eph.1:11; 1:14; 1:18; 3:6; 5:5; Col.1:12; 3:24; Tit.3:7; Heb.1:14; 6:12; 6:17; 9:15; 11:7; 11:9; Jas.2:5; 1Pet.1:4; 3:7; 3:9; 5:3; Rev.21:7).
- Freedom from all that is bad: no more want, or need, or pain, or grief, or need to be concerned about any trouble or threat or privation ever again (Rev.7:17; 21:4).
- Joy in all that is good: no more cause for anything but great gladness and rejoicing in what our God is going to do for us (Is.65:18; 1Pet.1:8).
- Fellowship: no loneliness in eternity where we will all be "one" as one perfect Bride of Christ with a unity that delights us more than we can presently imagine, basking in the glory of our Savior and our heavenly Father together forever (Gal.3:28; Col.3:11; Rev.21:9ff.; 22:3-4).

Everything that is ours in that glorious time to come is completely dependent upon the sacrifice of our dear Savior for us. Through Him alone we have the promise/promises to which our hope of eternity is anchored (Heb.6:19). All the more reason never to let anything undermine our faith in Him.

For I tell you that *Christ* became a servant to the circumcision for the sake of God's truth, that is, to confirm the *promises* made to their ancestors – and also so that the gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.
Romans 15:8-9b

As many *promises* of God as there are, *in Him*, [Jesus Christ, they are] "Yes!" So also through Him the "Amen!" [we say] to God results in [His] glory through us.
2nd Corinthians 1:20

Something Better: While the blessings and victories and vindications which the Lord provided all of these great believers in time were immense, impressive and cause for great rejoicing both then and now, we understand, based upon a quick perusal of the partial list above, that they pale in comparison with all the wonderful things to come for us in eternity. Just as the Israelites' inheritance in the land of promise is merely a shadow of the ultimate inheritance in New Jerusalem, so for us everything we have received in this life for our gracious Lord, all the blessings we are enjoying now and hope to receive in the future while "down here below", are as nothing compared to what is coming.

We rejoice when we are healed in answer to prayer, but how much better a body that will never ail or age? We rejoice when our Lord provides our daily bread, but how much better the fruit of the tree of life in New Jerusalem? We rejoice when the Lord protects us and delivers us from the trials and tribulations of this world, but how much better the time to come when "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev.21:4 NIV)?

Had the resurrection already occurred, had these great heroes already received the eternal reward and inheritances they are due, all of us who have followed them in the faith would be foreclosed from the same. But they are still waiting, because we are still growing, still being tested, still working at the ministries the Lord has given us – because we are still in the process of earning our own rewards and adding our names to the Lord's list of spiritual heroes who have won the ultimate victory, the victory *of faith*.

In all this we are decisively *victorious* through Him who loved us.
Romans 8:37

This is the *victory* that has overcome the world, even *our faith*.
1st John 5:4b NIV

"The one who wins the *victory*, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the *victory* and have taken my seat with my Father on His throne."
Revelation 3:21

This perspective, the eternity perspective, is absolutely essential for believers to embrace in order to victoriously overcome the tests and trials which come every believer's way. When we are suffering, if we concentrate on the suffering, it is very difficult to maintain our spiritual equilibrium. Instead, we need to take a page out of the book of these great believers in the past and focus instead on Jesus Christ our Lord, and on all of the wonderful promises we have been given in Him – promises that in their most important and sublime aspects have to do with the eternal *future* and *not* with the very temporary present. Whatever blessings and deliverances we receive from the Lord in this life, while we are very grateful for them and are right to yearn for them when we are under pressure, yet they are temporary and have to do with this imperfect world. But the eternal blessings which result from all of God's promises to us, promises soon to be fulfilled in the life to come, are forever . . . and they are absolutely *perfect* to an infinite degree.

However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" – [these are] the things God has prepared for those who love him.
1st Corinthians 2:9 NIV

The spiritual heroes of our chapter all left this world behind without receiving what they most hoped for, what they knew *by faith* was their divine inheritance: their resurrection and their eternal reward. They did not receive these promises because, if they had, we would have been

denied ours. God the Father is waiting until the entire Bride of Christ has been fully formed before our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ returns to gather up His Church. At that time all of these heroes, along with all believers who have since been taken to heaven to await that glorious day, and all of us who may belong to the number of those "who are still alive and remain" at His return, will rise together to meet the Lord in the air, together as one perfect Body of Christ forever. That is definitely "something better" and worthy of enduring whatever we may have to face in this life in order to achieve it.

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord. (18). So encourage each other with these words [of truth].

1st Thessalonians 4:15-18 [index]