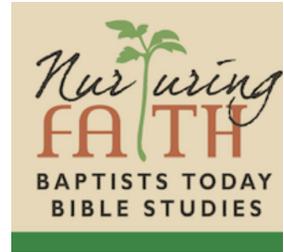


# Adult Teaching Resources

August 7, 2016



## Faith Matters: Lessons From Hebrews (August 7-28)

**You're Not the First — Hebrews 11:1-16**

You're Not Alone — Hebrews 11:29-12:2

All Shook Up — Hebrews 12:14-29

Remember – and Do — Hebrews 13:1-16

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# You're Not the First

## Hebrews 11:1-16

### FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Before the Lesson:** Make copies of the handout “Faith is...” to be given out in the Information session. Bring a wheelbarrow or wagon or some other item that represents being carried, for the Transformation Exercise.

### Fellowship Question

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(Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

When you think of Biblical characters (who are not in the Trinity), who stands out to you as a person of great faith?

What is an organization or institution that you put a lot of faith in?

### Information

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What is faith? Here are some broad categories: [Write these four key words on the board.:] **Belief** (agree to certain doctrines). **Magic** (get enough faith, anything can happen). **Trust** (sit on a chair because you trust it will hold you). **Fidelity** (until death do you part).

There is not total agreement about what faith is, or what one “gets” for having faith.

[Distribute the handout, “Faith is...”]

Take a look through the quotations. We’ll use them again at the end of today’s lesson.

[Allow time for class members to silently read the quotations.]

Hebrews 11 begins with a definition of faith. It is not the only definition in the Bible and it does not include everything there is to say about faith. But if you are going to describe faith, this is a great place to begin.

[Have a class member read Hebrews 11:1-2.]

“Our ancestors”, the author says. For the Jewish readers of the book of Hebrews, this could be taken literally. After all, the book is not called “The Book of Gentiles”. However, for those of us who do not have a Jewish heritage but are Christian, these are our spiritual ancestors as well.

## Information *continued*

The very basic idea in faith is that there is Someone greater than us. There is a God, a Creator.

[Have a class member read Hebrews 11:3.]

If we begin here – the first tenet of faith is that there is a God who created everything – what are some other things that you would suggest are the very basics? [Jot these on the board. Some tenets might be: God is love; God cares about Creation; God created humans in God’s own image; faith in God is based on a relationship; God gave us rules/laws/commandments, etc.]

As we look further through Hebrews 11, let’s look for these ideas and others we might add.

We have a definition of faith. Faith is something internal. But if it is true faith, it is also external, demonstrated through the way we live. So, the author of Hebrews offers a litany – the heroes of faith. Faith is active. It includes belief, but it is more than belief. Faith is an action word.

[Have a class member read James 2:14-17.]

Let’s look at this “Hall of Faith”. We begin with one of the first stories in the Bible. Let’s hear the original story.

[Have a class member read Genesis 4:1-10.]

Why was Abel’s sacrifice accepted, but Cain’s not? We are not really told. But the writer of Hebrews sensed it had to do with faith.

[Have a class member read Hebrews 11:4.]

What do we learn about the person who has faith from the story of Abel? (someone with true faith can become a target; having faith does not mean everything will go well; etc.)

What do you think this phrase means: “he died, but through his faith he still speaks”?

How does this relate to the Genesis passage: “your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground”?

“The good works of a righteous person continue to speak long after the person is gone...But the Preacher thinks of Abel as more than a memory; he imagines Abel still talking to God... Abel’s blood cried out from the ground to God, calling for justice, appealing to set things right and to avenge his murder.” [Thomas G. Long. *Hebrews. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: John Knox Press. 1997. p. 116.]

Abel’s death was no mystery. Cain killed him. But there was another man with faith who did not die.

[Have a class member read Hebrews 11:5-6.]

What do we learn about the person who has faith from the story of Enoch? (some have an extraordinary measure of faith; his faith pleased God; he was rewarded for his faith; etc.)

## Information *continued*

[Have a class member read Hebrews 11:7.]

What do we learn about the person who has faith from the story of Noah? (someone with true faith is willing to do some crazy things; his faith saved Noah and his family; faith involves listening to God and obeying God; etc.)

Now let's recall the story of two persons of great faith – and great doubts – Abraham and Sarah.

[Have a class member read Hebrews 11:8-12.]

What do we learn about the person who has faith from the story of Abraham and Sarah? (God's timetable is not ours – it takes faith to trust God's timing; God can do the impossible through a faithful person; sometimes faith involves years of wandering; etc.)

The book of Hebrews is not a letter. It is more like an extended sermon. So after reminding us about these persons of faith, there is a mini-sermon.

[Have a class member read Hebrews 11:13-16.]

We are looking back at these heroes of faith, but what we notice is the direction they are looking. What direction is that? (Forward.)

In looking forward, these people were demonstrating their faith – and their faithfulness.

“Faithfulness connotes focus, determination, endurance, even risk, and especially love. The heroes of Hebrews didn't just accept the possibility of the result they sought or the goal they aimed for. Many of them doubted, big time! They acted, or they held on, not because of what they intellectually apprehended as reasonable. They did it because they knew Someone who would not leave them and would never fail them.” [Laurence DeWolfe. *The Hall of Fame of Faithfulness*. <http://presbyterianrecord.ca/2013/07/01/the-hall-of-fame-of-faithfulness/> ]

Obviously, these spiritual ancestors lived before Jesus Christ. Yet, “by faith, our ancestors received approval.” (verse 2) Can someone who is not a Christian have faith in God?

Although all of these persons recorded in Hebrews 11 had faith, they did not have all faith or even pure faith. We find pure faith as Jesus trusts in God, as Jesus guards his relationship with his Father.

[Have a class member read Hebrews 12:22-24.]

How is the cry of the blood of Jesus superior to the cry of the blood of Abel? (Abel's blood cried for vengeance; Jesus' blood cries for forgiveness, etc.)

Our faith is not perfect, either.

“Faith is better understood as a verb than as a noun, as a process than as a possession. It is on-again-off-again rather than once-and-for-all. Faith is not being sure where you're going but going anyway. A journey without maps.” [Frederick Buechner. *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*. NY: Harper and Row. 1973. p. 25.

## Transformational Exercise

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If we look at our basic tenets of faith (written on the board), we have some good solid truths here. And what we have learned through the life of Jesus Christ is that we can have faith in this God because this God loves us unconditionally. So, we trust God, even when it seems crazy to do so.

It is like this story:

“Perhaps we are all in the position of the man in Morton Kelsey’s story who came to the edge of an abyss. As he stood there, wondering what to do next, he was amazed to discover a tightrope stretched across the abyss. And slowly, surely, across the rope came an acrobat pushing before him a wheelbarrow with another performer in it. When they finally reached the safety of solid ground, the acrobat smiled at the man’s amazement. ‘Don’t you think I can do it again?’ he asked. And the man replied, ‘Why yes, I certainly believe you can.’

“The acrobat put his question again, and when the answer was the same, he pointed to the wheelbarrow and said, ‘Good! The get in and I will take you across.’

“What did the traveler do? This is just the question we have to ask ourselves about Jesus Christ. Do we state our belief in Him in no uncertain terms, even in finely articulated creeds, and then refuse to get into the wheelbarrow? What we do about the lordship of Jesus is a better indication of our faith than what we think.” [Manning. 177.]

Take a look again at your definitions of faith. Some of them are wrong but most have truth. Which of these has spoken to your spirit today? Which of these do you want to act upon? In the next few moments of silence, I invite you to write a short prayer based on that definition, or on something else that has stirred you in today’s lesson. Then, put that prayer into the wheelbarrow [or wagon or whatever you have to represent being carried]. No one will read these, so write your prayer freely. Put your faith in the God who rolls the wheelbarrow.

[After persons have written prayers and deposited them, close in a prayer something like this:] *We thank you, God, for the Bible and the stories of others’ faith that inspires us to have more faith. Help us to move from inner convictions to outward demonstrations of our faith this week. Amen.*

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**More, please** — The Revised Common Lectionary text for the day is Hebrews 11:1-3 and 8-16, but there’s no good reason to skip over vv. 4-7, so we include them in our study. Next week’s lesson begins with v. 29, but we’ll begin it with a brief look at vv. 17-28, which continue the “Roll Call of Faith” begun in v. 4.

For more on the author and audience of Hebrews, see “The Hardest Question.”

**An exhortation** — As mentioned in the lesson, chapter 11 builds upon an exhortation found at the end of the previous chapter (10:35-39):

*Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet*

*“in a very little while,*

*the one who is coming will come and will not delay;*

*but my righteous one will live by faith.*

*My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.”*

*But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.*

The internal quotation is a paraphrased version of Hab. 2:3-4:

*For there is still a vision for the appointed time;*

*it speaks of the end, and does not lie.*

*If it seems to tarry, wait for it;*

*it will surely come, it will not delay.*

*Look at the proud!*

*Their spirit is not right in them,*

*but the righteous live by their faith.*

The author’s point is that followers of Christ have the same challenge that faced the Israelites: hard times call for endurance in which God’s people hold firm to their faith and live it out day by day.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**One definition, two ways** — Note the similarity of vv. 1 and 6. While speaking of pleasing God, the writer said “without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” This parallels the definition of faith in v. 1: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The two components are in reverse order: believing that God exists compares to “the conviction of things not seen,” while trusting God for rewards corresponds to “the assurance of things hoped for.”

**A second trial** — Abraham passed the greatest challenge to his faith after Isaac was born. He trusted God and stood firm even when the narrator of Genesis 22 said God tested Abraham’s faith by telling him to sacrifice his beloved Isaac, the son of the promise (vv. 17-19). Abraham put feet and hands and heart to his faith, and God gave his son back to him. Abraham learned that God did not in fact desire the sacrifice of human blood, but of the human heart, of the human will.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Who wrote Hebrews, when, and why?

Neither the audience, author, nor date of Hebrews can be determined with certainty. Fortunately, our understanding of the book's basic message does not hinge on being able to identify either of the three. That doesn't mean, however, that it's not worth making some educated guesses.

The book was written anonymously. Paul always identified himself clearly in his letters, but there is no self-identification here. The **author** is clearly Christian, but with a strong Old Testament background and some apparent affinities with ideas common among Christian teachers in Alexandria, a city in northern Egypt that was home to a thriving Christian community by the late first century.

As early as 180 A.D., some leaders of the Eastern churches claimed Paul as the author of Hebrews, some arguing that it was written to the Christians in Alexandria. The Western church did not claim Pauline authorship until the fourth century. Indeed, the book was slow to be accepted as scripture in the western churches, largely because of its lack of attribution to a known and respected author.

Several factors mitigate against Pauline authorship, the most notable being that the book is written in excellent Greek, comparable only to Luke-Acts in the New Testament, and clearly different from the prosaic style of writing in Paul's letters.

The Greek of Hebrews is of an elevated, classical sort with beautifully composed sentences. Edgar V. McKnight described the language as so uncommon that "The original readers' reaction to the classical Greek of Hebrews would be comparable to modern readers hearing or reading a sermon in the language of Shakespeare or the language of the King James Version" ("Hebrews," in *Hebrews-James*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2004], 11).

Clement of Alexandria, writing in the third century, recognized that the Greek was different from Paul's style, but explained the discrepancy by claiming that Paul wrote the book in Hebrew and Luke translated it into Greek. Given that Paul was apparently quite comfortable writing or dictating his other letters without a translator, however, the argument is not convincing.

The themes explored in the book have some relation to Pauline thought, but also show notable differences. For example, the writer spends a great deal of time discussing Melchizedek and the priesthood of Christ, a subject that Paul does not address. Charles Trentham suggested that the writer is both "more Jewish than Paul on the one hand, and more Greek than Paul on the other" ("Hebrews," in the *Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 12

## The Hardest Question *continued*

[Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972], 5).

Apollos is frequently mentioned as a possible author, as he was known for his eloquence (Acts 18:24). Joint authorship by Priscilla and Aquilla has some support. Other early believers such as Barnabas or Silas have also been mentioned, but none convincingly. Apparently, the writer did not find it important to identify himself or herself, which provides a clue as to how much time we should spend in worrying about the matter.

The **audience**, judging from internal evidence, was also made up of Christians who either had a strong heritage in Hebrew traditions, or had adopted a hybridized version of Christianity that retained many teachings and practices transferred or transmogrified from Judaism, perhaps an aberrant sect of Judaism. It seems most likely that they were diaspora Jews who had come to faith in Christ and possibly suffered because of it. In the flush of new faith and with the hope of Christ's soon return, persecution and loss was bearable. As time went on, however, and hard times continued with no sign of Christ's reward at hand, some were tempted to fall away from their faith, which the author considered a distinct possibility.

Some evidence suggests that Hebrews was originally addressed to the church at Rome, the strongest being 13:24, where the author sends greetings from "those who come from Italy." The letter was also known and referenced by the early church fathers Clement and Hermas of Rome, writing just before and after 100 C.E. Others argue that the sermon may have been intended for Christians in Alexandria, but the reference to "those who come from Italy" and the fact that they know Timothy argues in favor of Rome.

The recipients, in any case, were residents of an urban center, and familiar with the pagan practices and government pressures of a first-century Roman city. They appear to have been second-generation Christians who had grown distant in their doctrine and lax in their enthusiasm, perhaps because persecution had become a reality, while the expected second coming of Christ had not. The author is particularly concerned that they do not fall away from the faith.

The **date** one assigns to Hebrews must fall no later than the late first century, because a near quotation from the work appears in the writings of Clement of Rome (1 Clement 36:1-5), dated about 96 A.D.

If the passage "you have not yet resisted unto blood" (12:4) is taken to indicate the presence of persecution, but not unto death, a variety of dates may be suggested, since persecution appeared at different times and with different severity in different places.

Several references to temple worship are written in the present tense, as if such worship was still being practiced. If this is the case, the book would have to be dated prior to 70 C.E., when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed.

Some suggest a date not long after Emperor Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome in 49 C.E., while others prefer a date just before the violent persecutions of Nero began about 64. C.E.

## The Hardest Question *continued*

In any case, the people addressed appear to have been facing some measure of persecution, to the extent that some were in danger of apostatizing, of “falling away from the living God” (3:12). The author believed that the people addressed were immature in their faith, and needed to “be moved on” to maturity in Christ. This is especially evident in the last few verses of chapter 5, where he says they were like babies who still needed milk when they should be grown and teaching others.

The *form* of the book is a hybrid. It has some characteristics of a letter, mainly at the end, but it mainly has the form of a lengthy and eloquent sermon that cites numerous Old Testament scriptures (from the Greek Septuagint) and interprets them to support a series of strong exhortations designed to proclaim the supremacy of Christ and to challenge the recipients to hold firm to their faith and serve Christ alone.

The book may have originated as a sermon that was put in written form and sent to a group of Christians who needed to hear its message. Being found helpful, the letter was copied and circulated to other churches, growing in popularity and acceptance until it was accorded a place within scripture.

## Handout

### Faith is...

Faith is the turning of dreams into deeds; it is betting your life on unseen realities.

[Clarence Jordan. The Cotton Patch Version of Hebrews and the General Epistles: A colloquial translation with a Southern accent. New York: Association Press. 1973. p.35.]

“It’s a matter of your faith. You got one-dollar faith, and you ask for a ten thousand-dollar item, it ain’t gonna work. It won’t work. Jesus said, ‘According to your faith,’ not ‘according to His will, if He can work it into His busy schedule.’ He said, ‘according to your faith be it unto you.’ Now I may want a Rolls Royce and don’t have but bicycle faith. Guess what I’m gonna get? A bicycle.” (Frederick K.C. Price, “Praise the Lord” broadcast on TBN, 21 September 1990).

Faith means you want God and want to want nothing else.

[Brennan Manning. The Ragamuffin Gospel: Embracing the Unconditional Love of God. Portland: Multnomah. 1990. p. 167.]

“Faith is believin’ what you know ain’t so.”

[Huckleberry Finn]

Faith is not being sure where you’re going but going anyway. A journey without maps.” [Frederick Buechner. Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC. NY: Harper and Row. 1973. p. 25.]

How about reading Hebrews 11 and substituting “faithfulness” for “faith”? In most places it works. Faithfulness connotes focus, determination, endurance, even risk, and especially love.

[Laurence DeWolfe. The Hall of Fame of Faithfulness. <http://presbyterianrecord.ca/2013/07/01/the-hall-of-fame-of-faithfulness/> ]

Most of us read [Hebrews 11] and think of it as a list of great deeds by great people. (Which lets us off the hook for applying it to our own lives.) But what if the real point is that all these people shared one important attribute — they all believed that God is going to prevail in the end, AND that such a conviction should inform the decisions they make and the actions they take. [Bruce Maples. Can We Get a Grown-Up View of Faith? <http://brucewriter.com/a-grown-up-view-of-faith-hebrews-11/> ]