



## Hebrews - Chapter Eleven

### III Hebrews 10:19-12:29 - Call to faith and endurance (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Eleven

Hebrews has now reached a plateau from which there is an excellent view of those who have gone on before in the OT. Looking at them, the readers can discover for themselves what is up ahead, what they will need to cope with it, and the fact that, when they get there themselves, there will be a great welcome. All they need to complete their journey is faith.

The section starts with a summary statement of faith before looking at the faith of three antediluvian characters: Abel, Enoch and Noah, whose family were the only survivors from that era.

The writer then gives a longer exposition concerning the faith of the father of the Hebrew nation, Abraham, who left his own homeland to follow the call of God and travelled to a land that he did not know anything about. Despite the fact that he was old and his wife Sarah was barren, he held to the promise that they would have a son together and that, through him, a great nation would come into existence. The author then provides summaries of the faith and blessings in the lives of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his two sons.

The account then moves on to the great Hebrew leader Moses, who had all the riches and comforts in the world as a member of Pharaoh's household, but gave it all up to rejoin his own people and faithfully fulfil God's call on his life.

Many other OT heroes are then named as living by faith, none of whom would receive the final reward during their lifetimes. However, their faith was revealed in that they trusted the Word of God and looked forward to a time when the promises would come into being.

What this chapter shows is that the Jewish nation needed to look back at the examples in their heritage of the achievements of people who had faith in the promises of God. They needed to keep the story alive in their own generation, as do Christians today.

### III.b Hebrews 11:1-40 - By faith

Faith consists of persistent hope in the promises of God, and it is such faith, as indicated by: <<***But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved***>> (Hebrews 10:39), which obtains salvation on the last day. Here faith is illustrated from OT examples.

#### III.b.i Hebrews 11:1-3 - The meaning of faith

The writer commences this chapter with a summary description of faith, the key ingredient needed for anyone wishing to follow God.

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

#### Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Faith, for the writer of Hebrews, is always closely linked to hope. Faith is looking at God and trusting him for everything, while hope is looking at the future and trusting God for it. Verse 1 actually defines faith in relation to hope: it is one thing to have hope, but when you have faith underneath it gives it assurance. Thus, this type of hope is much more than mere optimism about life.

Assurance is the Greek *hypostasis*, also translated confidence: <<***For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end***>> (Hebrews 3:14).

Hoped for. Hope is a theme that permeates the whole letter, and indeed the whole human experience, when they are in a relationship with God through Jesus: <<***Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope***>> (Hebrews 3:6), <<***And we want each one of you to show the same diligence, so as to realise the full assurance of hope to the very end***>> (Hebrews 6:11), and: <<***Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful***>> (Hebrews 10:23).

The conviction of things not seen. By defining faith, Greek *pistis*, as assurance and conviction, the author indicates that biblical faith is not a vague hope grounded in imaginary, wishful thinking. Instead, faith is a settled confidence that something in the future – something that is not yet seen but has been promised by God – will actually come to pass because God will bring it about. Thus biblical faith is not blind trust in the face of contrary evidence, not an unknowable ‘leap in the dark’; rather, biblical faith is a confident trust in the eternal God who is all-powerful, infinitely wise, and eternally trustworthy; the God who has revealed himself in his Word and in the person of Jesus Christ, whose promises have proven true from generation to generation, and who will: <<***never leave nor forsake***>> his own (Hebrews 13:5). Such faith in the unseen realities of God is emphasised throughout Chapter 11 and has provided confidence and assurance to all who receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.

## Hebrews 11:2

Indeed indicates that the writer believes his statement is a forceful argument.

Our ancestors or elders, Greek *presbyteroi*, especially those listed as examples of faith throughout this chapter, received approval or commendation in the form of a good testimony from God. The author does not focus on their failings, such as those recorded in Genesis 9:20-27, 12:10-20, 17:17-21, and 18:11-15, since his goal is to positively illustrate what faith looks like and to connect the current people of God with this: <<*cloud of witnesses*>> (Hebrews 12:1).

<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

## Hebrews 11:3

God's creation of the worlds or universe was accomplished by the Word of God, Greek *rhēma*.

So that what is seen was made from things that are not visible is consistent with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, the Latin phrase meaning 'from nothing', but is not itself a full statement about this reality. It does, however, seem to correct Greco-Roman notions about eternally existing matter.

The idea that God created the visible universe out of some other kind of invisible, i.e. not visible, matter is not in the author's mind; rather, he is saying that God did not make the universe out of any pre-existing matter as humans know it, which is close to saying that he made it 'out of nothing'. This fits with modern scientific understanding that prefers to think of everything coming from a quantum singularity, which seems to have come from nothing.

Accepting that God is the creator of all things seen and unseen, known and unknowable, does itself require a step of faith, which is at the root of both Judaism and Christianity. This fundamentally has two aspects: belief in both judgment, for God is the creator and therefore he takes responsibility for putting the world back to rights; and resurrection, for God loves the physical world he has made, therefore he intends to remake human beings even more gloriously physical than they are at the moment.

Further support for the author's idea is found in: <<*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth*>> (Genesis 1:1), <<*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm*>> (Psalm 33:6-9), <<*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God*>> (Psalm 90:2), <<*All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people*>> (John 1:3-4), <<*Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them*>> (Acts 14:15), and:

*<<as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations') – in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist>> (Romans 4:17).*

### III.b.ii Hebrews 11:4-7 - The examples of Abel, Enoch, and Noah

The writer now embarks on a brief history of key figures from the past and, here, he focuses on three antediluvian patriarchs as examples of men who were faithful to God's call on their lives, as well as evidence of their faith.

<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks.

#### Hebrews 11:4

Abel was the second son of Adam and Eve, who became the first murder victim in history, the victim of fratricide at the hands of his older brother Cain.

Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God: *<<In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it'>> (Genesis 4:4-7), and: <<Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar>> (Matthew 23:34-35), while Cain's was not: *<<We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous>> (1 John 3:12).**

One way to explain why God had regard for Abel and his offering, but not for Cain, is to argue that Abel's offering, being of the firstborn of his flock, is a more valuable offering, expressing greater devotion. Another way to explain the difference is first to observe that both offerings are recognisable parts of the later Levitical system: for Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground is an offering expressing consecration, and Abel's offering of the firstborn of his flock is a kind of peace offering, a meal in God's presence.

However, at no point does the Bible suggest that offerings work automatically, as if the worshiper's faith and contrition did not matter; and Cain's fundamentally bad heart can be seen in his resentment toward his brother and in his uncooperative answers to God in the rest of the passage. But the point here, this becomes clear as the chapter progresses, is that God accepted Abel, and will reward his faith through and out the other side of death. Although he is dead, the account of his faith is still a powerful witness to others so much later in history.

Through this he received approval as righteous. The acceptance of the offering was evidence of God's acceptance of the person, as noted in Genesis 4:7.

He died, but through his faith he still speaks. The story of Abel's faith, as recorded in the Bible, still speaks to generation after generation. His death, a human tragedy, was a triumph in the great scheme of God's promises. This mention of Abel's faith indicates that, from the very outset of human history, some OT figures were saved by means of faith although: <<**For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins**>> (Hebrews 10:4), reminds readers that the faith of those OT saints was effective only because of the future sacrifice of Christ, which animal sacrifices and even human death foreshadowed.

<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and 'he was not found, because God had taken him.' For it was attested before he was taken away that 'he had pleased God.'

### Hebrews 11:5

Enoch was taken. The text: <<**When Enoch had lived for sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah for three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him**>> (Genesis 5:21-24), indicates that Enoch did not die but that God took him into heaven alive. He became almost a cult-like figure in early Jewish writings because he had escaped death, lending him a special aura and mystique.

This passage from Genesis twice states that Enoch <<**walked with God**>>, and this phrase is interpreted in the Septuagint as Enoch having pleased God, a powerful achievement for anyone in life.

<sup>6</sup> And 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.

### Hebrews 11:6

To please God. The Septuagint version of Genesis states that certain patriarchs pleased God, using Greek *euaresteō* to translate the Hebrew for <<**walked with God**>>: Enoch in Genesis Chapter 5, Noah in Genesis 6:9, Abraham in Genesis 17:1, 24:40, and 48:15, Isaac in Genesis 48:15, and Joseph in Genesis 39:4. Each of these men are discussed in Hebrews Chapter 11.

Faith includes belief in God's existence, possibly a reference to v.3, and especially in God's trustworthiness to keep his promise to reward his followers (v.26), as well as: <<**Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful**>> (Hebrews 10:23), and: <<**Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward**>> (Hebrews 10:35).

Approach is the Greek *proserchomai*, which can also be translated as 'go to' or 'draw near'. It is used consistently in Hebrews to represent a person approaching God. The encouragement to draw near to God's throne implies that Christians have the privilege of a personal relationship with God.

<sup>7</sup> By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

### Hebrews 11:7

Noah was the one man who remained faithful to God in his own generation and that faithfulness prevented the human race from being extinguished. Genesis 6:9-9:29 provides the historic account of Noah, his family and the great flood.

Events as yet unseen is similar to v.1 and commented on there. Noah's reaction shows that no one has to be shown anything in order to have faith in God.

Respected the warning is also translated as 'reverent fear', and is implied as such in: <<*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission*>> (Hebrews 5:7), and: <<*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe*>> (Hebrews 12:28), where such an attitude is also commended.

To save his household was a visible example of God's salvation.

Condemned the world means that Noah's righteous obedience to God showed, by contrast, how sinful the world was to reject Noah's message, and God's moral standards: <<*and if he did not spare the ancient world, even though he saved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood on a world of the ungodly*>> (2 Peter 2:5).

World in Hebrews generally signifies creation: <<*For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, 'As in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest"', though his works were finished at the foundation of the world*>> (Hebrews 4:3), and: <<*for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself*>> (Hebrews 9:26), although here it especially pictures sinful humanity, see v.38, which is confirmed in: <<*If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you*>> (John 15:18-19), <<*Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*>> (James 4:4), and: <<*Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world*>> (1 John 2:15).

An heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith. Noah is called righteous in: <<*Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation*>> (Genesis 7:1), after his faithful response in building the ark: <<*Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him*>> (Genesis 6:22).

### III.b.iii Hebrews 11:8-22 - The faith of Abraham

Abraham was the man that God called to establish his presence in the Promised Land. He has always been revered as the father of the Hebrew nation and it has been accepted that all the promises made to him by God were for the nation of Israel. However, it can now be seen that the promises were intended for those who have chosen to follow Jesus, for they too are spiritual children of Abraham.

The account here shows that he obeyed God's call on his life to give up his family home, living a life of faith because he trusted that God would fulfil his promises, either during Abraham's own lifetime on earth or in the life that was yet to come in heaven.

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

#### Hebrews 11:8-9

God called Abraham to leave Haran, which was probably in modern day Iraq, and go to the land of Canaan, which now encompasses Israel, Palestine, Syria, Jordan and the Lebanon: *<<Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 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 shall be blessed.'* So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran>> (Genesis 12:1-4).

Obeyed. Faith leads to obedience according to God's promise and calling.

An inheritance is also used to refer to salvation through Jesus as the Christ: *<<For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant>>* (Hebrews 9:15).

Not knowing where he was going should be understood in the same context as: *<<The conviction of things not seen>>* (v.1).

He stayed for a time. Abraham lived in the region for the remainder of his earthly life. This is but a short time in all eternity.

The land he had been promised. God promised that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Palestine: *<<On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites'>>* (Genesis 15:18-21).

The writer had earlier shown that God can be relied upon to keep his promises: <<*When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and multiply you.'* And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise>> (Hebrews 6:13-15).

That Abraham was being called to a foreign land is further confirmed and commented on in vv.13-16.

Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. Isaac was Abraham's only son with his beloved wife Sarah and was the son given according to God's promise. Jacob and his older twin Esau were the sons of Isaac, but it was Jacob who inherited the promise to raise up the people of God's nation.

<sup>10</sup> For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

### Hebrews 11:10

For he looked forward. Abraham is portrayed as yearning for the heavenly city, a theme developed further in vv.13-16, Hebrews 12:22-24 and 13:13-14. Even Jerusalem, the city of David, would pale into insignificance with this promised place whose architect and builder is God himself.

The city that has foundations indicates that it will be built to endure for all time.

<sup>11</sup> By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old — and Sarah herself was barren — because he considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.'

### Hebrews 11:11-12

Sarah was Abraham's half-sister and his wife. Although Sarah herself was barren and Abraham was considered too old to father children, they had a son Isaac through God's intervention as told in Genesis 21:1-7. That Sarah laughed, apparently in unbelief, when she heard she would bear a child when she was 90 and her husband 100 years old, see Genesis 18:9-15, is potentially problematic for her role as an example of faith. However:

1. The author is happy to speak of the true faith of Sarah despite her failings.
2. Sarah apparently later had a change of heart, as her laughter became a genuine expression of joy at the birth of Isaac: <<*Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me'*>> (Genesis 21:6); Isaac means laughter.

Received power of procreation, which literally means 'power for the foundation of seed'. Although the use of he makes Abraham the subject, it is best to take Sarah as the subject here, as the ESV translation does, because:

1. Both Sarah's name and herself, Greek *autē*, are in the nominative case, indicating the subject of the sentence.

2. Making Abraham the subject requires either an unusual grammatical understanding of the words for Sarah herself, or an assumption that an early copyist made an error in transcribing those two words.

That God kept his promise of a child in such remarkable circumstances was more than sufficient proof, if proof were needed, that God could be relied upon to keep his promises about a homeland for Abraham's descendants. Abraham and Sarah never possessed the land, just a small burial plot within it. However, they had faith that they would inherit a possession in a future time.

He considered him faithful who had promised. Confident hope in God's promises stems from God's trustworthy character: <<*Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful*>> (Hebrews 10:23). Abraham had placed his trust and hope in the creator God.

The stars of heaven, the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore indicate just how large a nation God would produce for himself, both physically and spiritually, from the bodies of Abraham and Sarah. This statement is an allusion to God's promises: <<*I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted*>> (Genesis 13:16), <<*He brought him outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.'* Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be'>> (Genesis 15:5), and: <<*I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies*>> (Genesis 22:17). This means that the descendants of Abraham will be so numerous to be beyond counting.

<sup>13</sup> All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth,

### Hebrews 11:13

Died in faith indicates that the patriarchs named so far remained faithful even unto death.

Without having received the promises. Abraham and Sarah especially exemplify this. Called to an unknown land and promised innumerable offspring, they merely embraced these promises while living nomadically in a land not their own, and where they had just one son together.

Strangers and foreigners on the earth is a recurring theme, for Abraham: <<*I am a stranger and an alien residing among you; give me property among you for a burying-place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight*>> (Genesis 23:4), for Moses: <<*She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, 'I have been an alien residing in a foreign land'*>> (Exodus 2:22), and for all the people of God: <<*The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants*>> (Leviticus 25:23). This physical reality for the descendants of Abraham was applied spiritually in the Psalms: <<*Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears*>> (Psalm 39:12), and: <<*I live as an alien in the land; do not hide your commandments from me*>> (Psalm

119:19); and again elsewhere: <<*For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope*>> (1 Chronicles 29:15), <<*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*>> (1 Peter 1:1), and: <<*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul*>> (1 Peter 2:11).

<sup>14</sup> for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

### Hebrews 11:14-16

The author says that the people he has mentioned in vv.1-13 were seeking a better heavenly country, which would be their true homeland:

1. If Abraham for example, were looking for an earthly homeland, Greek *patris* refers to a place of one's fathers, he could have returned to Haran (v.15); but he persisted in following God's leading and focusing on his promise.
2. The Psalms' spiritual application of exile terminology to this whole mortal life indicates the expectation of a life to come as noted by King David in Psalm 39:12 and Psalm 119:19.

What is being made clear is that Abraham and Sarah were not just looking for a land that their descendants would inherit. As this letter has stated, the OT was only a pointer to something that was not contained within Judaism but something that was beyond it. Abraham and Sarah were looking forward to a future inheritance that they too could share in with their descendants!

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. This is an absolutely amazing insight into the character and love of God, who is prepared to associate himself so openly with those he created despite all their faults and sinful nature. Even those key people named in this chapter so far are shown to be flawed in the texts about them, something confirmed by the apostle Paul: <<*But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*>> (Romans 3:21-24).

Prepared a city for them. This new heavenly city was first referred to in v.10, and is written about elsewhere in this letter: <<*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel*>> (Hebrews 12:22-24), and: <<*Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for*

*the city that is to come*>> (Hebrews 13:13-14).

Hebrews does not dwell on the details or location of this city. However, it is later revealed not to be in heaven but the new Jerusalem that is brought to a new or renewed earth: <<*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*>> (Revelation 21:1-2).

<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom he had been told, ‘It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.’ <sup>19</sup> He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead – and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

### Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac is the story, told in Genesis 22:1-19, where God had commanded Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son but was prevented from doing so at the last moment, thus Isaac was returned to his father, i.e. he did receive him back from death.

The Greek for tested is *peirazō*, which appears also in Genesis 22:1 LXX. The word, also translated as trial, occurs elsewhere, although mainly with a focus on temptation to sin: <<*Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested*>> (Hebrews 2:18), <<*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin*>> (Hebrews 4:15), <<*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing*>> (James 1:2-4), <<*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted, should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death*>> (James 1:12-15), <<*In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed*>> (1 Peter 1:6-7), and: <<*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you*>> (1 Peter 4:12-14).

His only son is the Greek *monogenēs*, and is used in both Genesis 22:2 and 22:12, where it reads: <<*your only son*>> in Hebrew, but ‘your beloved son’ in the Septuagint. Although Abraham also had Ishmael, whose mother was Sarah’s maid Hagar, refer to Genesis Chapter 16, and other children by his second wife, whom he married after Sarah’s death: <<*Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah*>> (Genesis 25:1-2), this word designates Isaac as Abraham’s unique son, the son who is ‘one of a kind’, his only heir and, therefore, the only recipient of covenant promises: <<*But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you*>> (Genesis 21:12), and: <<*Abraham gave all he had to Isaac*>> (Genesis 25:5).

Raise someone from the dead. Although God had demanded the sacrifice of his son, Abraham expressed confidence that he would return with Isaac: <<*Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you’*>> (Genesis 22:5). Hebrews makes a figurative analogy between resurrection and Isaac being saved from the sacrificial knife. Some interpreters perceive here an Isaac-Christ typology such as was common in the post-apostolic church fathers: as Isaac, Abraham’s only son, was offered in sacrifice and raised, so Jesus, God’s only Son, was sacrificed and raised. Others doubt that such typology is intended.

<sup>20</sup> By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau.

#### Hebrews 11:20

The account of Isaac blessing his two sons, Jacob and Esau, can be found in Genesis Chapter 27. These predictive future blessings, especially Genesis 27:28-29, and 27:39-40, demonstrate Isaac’s hope for the future.

<sup>21</sup> By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, ‘bowing in worship over the top of his staff.’

#### Hebrews 11:21

The blessings by Jacob of Manasseh and Ephraim, the two sons of Joseph born in Egypt, can be found in the account given in Genesis 48:8-22. Similar to Isaac, Jacob’s future hope, predicated on God’s promises, retold by Jacob in Genesis 48:3-6, is evident in his blessing of all Jacob’s sons (Genesis 49:1-27), but especially in his blessing of the sons of Joseph.

<sup>22</sup> By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial.

#### Hebrews 11:22

Joseph’s future hope is his confidence that God will redeem his people through the exodus and lead them to the Promised Land, thus allowing Joseph’s own bones to be moved to that land. The instructions about his burial were: <<*Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’ So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, ‘When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here’*>> (Genesis 50:24-25).

### III.b.iv Hebrews 11:23-28 - The faith of Moses

The theme continues with the focus now shifting to Israel's great leader Moses, who was raised up by God to lead the Hebrews out of Egyptian slavery, and through the wilderness for 40 years before reaching the borders of their land.

<sup>23</sup> By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

#### Hebrews 11:23

Moses was hidden by his parents. Pharaoh had decreed that all male babies born to Hebrew slaves were to be killed at birth, the king's edict: <<*Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live'*>> (Exodus 1:22). The parents of Moses preserved his life in hope.

The child was beautiful is confirmed in: <<*She was going to have a baby, and she gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months*>> (Exodus 2:2 NLV), and: <<*At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father's house*>> (Acts 7:20).

<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, <sup>25</sup> choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. <sup>26</sup> He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward.

#### Hebrews 11:24-26

Moses refused the sinful privileges of Egypt, including those of being the son of Pharaoh's daughter: <<*When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water'*>> (Exodus 2:10). Instead, he identified himself with the Hebrew slaves: <<*One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand*>> (Exodus 2:11-12), thereby choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God; thus he sought God's reward: <<*Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward*>> (Hebrews 10:35).

The fleeting pleasures of sin are contrasted with eternal reward: <<*You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore*>> (Psalm 16:11).

Abuse suffered for Christ. As Christ, the true Israel: <<*Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son'*>> (Matthew 2:14-15), truly suffered on behalf of the people of God, so too Moses, who similarly suffered

on behalf of the people, is said to bear Christ's reproach. Hence Moses serves as a model for Christians to endure such reproach: *<<But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated>>* (Hebrews 10:32-33), and: *<<Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured>>* (Hebrews 13:13).

Moses' example of giving up wealth and privilege to serve God and help those in poorer circumstances was probably a motivation for others, including Francis of Assisi, the apostle Paul and, ultimately, Jesus.

He was looking ahead to the reward. Although Moses had hoped to lead his people into the Promised Land and see them settled, the writer here is referring to something that is beyond this life on earth, the coming of the Messiah. Moses knew by faith that God had planned something far better for the people than they could ever achieve for themselves.

<sup>27</sup> By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible.

#### Hebrews 11:27

By faith he left Egypt refers to Moses' escape from Pharaoh: *<<He answered, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.' When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well>>* (Exodus 2:14-15).

The reference to Moses seeing him who is invisible is most likely a reference to the burning bush as recorded in Exodus 3:1-4:17. Although another prophet sees it differently: *<<Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour>>* (Isaiah 45:15).

<sup>28</sup> By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

#### Hebrews 11:28

By faith he kept the Passover. Moses celebrated Passover before seeing the deliverance it would bring, recorded in Exodus 12:1-32. This tells of the Lord Jehovah, the destroyer of the firstborn, who brought death to all the first born children and animals of Egypt but passed over the houses marked as being inhabited by the Hebrew slaves.

The Passover was one of the most important annual festivals as it reminded the Israelites that God had brought them out of slavery to create their nation. It is even more significant today as it is now seen as a pointer toward Jesus becoming the true Passover sacrifice, birthing a new covenantal nation.

### III.b.v Hebrews 11:29-40 - The faith of Other Israelite Heroes

The writer now concludes the chapter by naming other well known historic characters from the scriptures, as well as some more generalised examples of people living by faith, thus receiving their rewards from God for doing so.

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

#### Hebrews 11:29

It took faith to walk through the Red Sea, with walls of water on each side (Exodus 14:10-31), relying only on God's promises in Exodus 14:1-4 and 14:15-18.

When the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. It seems that the Egyptian army failed to recognise this as the work of God or to heed his power, which they had already witnessed in the earlier plagues, and paid a heavy price for their folly: <<*Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.'* So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left>> (Exodus 14:26-29).

<sup>30</sup> By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days.

#### Hebrews 11:30

At Jericho, where the Hebrews had been instructed by God not to attack but march around the city circumference once each day for seven days, although it was seven times they marched round on the final day, until the walls simply collapsed before them. Faith repeatedly caused the Israelites to follow God's commandment before seeing his promised victory, the account of which is found in Joshua 6:1-21. This was no ordinary military assault, for Jericho would have easily withstood such an army given its strong fortifications.

<sup>31</sup> By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

#### Hebrews 11:31

Before the destruction of Jericho (v.30), the prostitute Rahab: <<*said to the men: 'I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we heard it, our hearts failed, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below>> (Joshua 2:9-11). She chose to risk death at*

the hands of her own people by shielding the Israelite spies because she had faith in this awesome God she described. As a Gentile and a sinner, her faith was particularly remarkable.

The following summary in vv.32-40 invokes great names and faithful deeds of OT saints.

<sup>32</sup> And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets —

### Hebrews 11:32

Time would fail me to tell. The stories of these people would have been well known to the intended Jewish readership. For OT references to the people listed in vv.32-38, refer to the supplementary material on the website.

The NT presents a more idealised view of Gideon, Samson and others than what is found in the book of Judges. Here, Hebrews lists Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, along with David, Samuel and the prophets, as examples of those: <<*who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions*>> (v.33). However, to say that these heroes had some measure of faith is not to say that they were consistent models of faith and virtue. Undoubtedly they demonstrated faith at times that allowed God to conquer kingdoms through them, but just as surely, the book of Judges focuses more on other aspects of their character to make a point about the widespread apostasy during the period.

David was held as being Israel's greatest warrior king, through whom it was expected the Messiah would come. However, he too was far from perfect and was punished by God for several of his transgressions, particularly his affair with Bathsheba and subsequently arranging the death of her husband Uriah.

The prophets refers to OT prophets who either wrote the OT Prophetic Books, e.g. Isaiah and Jeremiah, or appear in OT historical narratives, such as Elijah and Elisha, some of whom are clearly alluded to in vv.33-38.

<sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

### Hebrews 11:33

Through faith. The focus remains more on the faith of these OT people than on their deeds alone.

Who conquered kingdoms includes the conquests God accomplished through those specifically named in v.32, even the prophet Samuel. Refer to 1 Samuel 7:3-14.

Administered justice or worked righteousness, which was especially important in the roles of the judge, such as Samuel in: <<*Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all these places. Then he would come back to Ramah, for his home was there; he administered justice there to Israel, and built there an altar to the Lord*>> (1 Samuel 7:15-17), the king, as with David in: <<*So David*

reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people>> (2 Samuel 8:15), and his messianic heir: <<The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'>> (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Obtained promises. God fulfilled many promises to the leaders of Israel: <<She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, 'The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, "Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand"'>> (Judges 4:6-7), <<Then the Lord said to Gideon, 'With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes'>> (Judges 7:7), and to the parents of Samson: <<for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines>> (Judges 13:5). The promises went especially to David and his messianic heir: <<from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings>> (2 Samuel 7:11-14), and: <<For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you'? Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son'?>> (Hebrews 1:5).

Shut the mouths of lions is most likely a reference to Daniel 6:16-28, although Samson and David also fought and conquered lions: <<Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah. When he came to the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion roared at him. The spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as one might tear apart a kid. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done>> (Judges 14:5-6), <<But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.' David said, 'The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the Lord be with you!''>> (1 Samuel 17:34-37), and: <<Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me>> (Psalm 22:21).

<sup>34</sup> quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

### Hebrews 11:34

Quenched raging fire. In light of the reference to lions (v.33), this likely refers to the account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, recorded in Daniel 2:49-3:30, where they defied King Nebuchadnezzar in order to remain faithful to God.

The other descriptions in this verse apply to many OT leaders and prophets; for example, escaped the edge of the sword: <<*Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow'*>> (1 Kings 19:2), <<*and he said, 'So may God do to me, and more, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on his shoulders today.'* So he dispatched a man from his presence. Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, 'Are you aware that this murderer has sent someone to take off my head? When the messenger comes, see that you shut the door and hold it closed against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?' While he was still speaking with them, the king came down to him and said, 'This trouble is from the Lord! Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?'>> (2 Kings 6:31-33), <<*And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son and Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest the secretary Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah. But the Lord hid them*>> (Jeremiah 36:26).

Won strength out of weakness perhaps serves as an example to the audience, who have weaknesses: <<*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin*>> (Hebrews 4:15).

Gideon and David are examples of men who both became mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight.

<sup>35</sup> Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection.

### Hebrews 11:35

Women received their dead by resurrection. Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:17-24, and Elisha raised the son of a Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4:18-37. Jesus returned Lazarus from his tomb to his sisters Martha and Mary: <<*When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go'*>> (John 11:43-44).

Tortured is probably intended in the form of beatings. Note that some commentators compare this to the intertestamental story of Eleazar in 2 Maccabees 6:18-31.

In order to obtain a better resurrection means better than the OT resurrections or indeed that of Lazarus just mentioned, which, although miraculous, they were really just resuscitations back to mortal life, and did not impart a perfect resurrection body.

<sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

### Hebrews 11:36

Mocking and flogging, and imprisonment are to be viewed in much the same way as the experience of some of the recipients of this letter: <<*But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting*>> (Hebrews 10:32-34), and: <<*Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured*>> (Hebrews 13:3). This verse is especially reminiscent of the treatment of Jeremiah: <<*Then Pashhur struck the prophet Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord*>> (Jeremiah 20:2), and: <<*Now Jeremiah was still going in and out among the people, for he had not yet been put in prison*>> (Jeremiah 37:4), although others were similarly abused: <<*The king of Israel then ordered, 'Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son, and say, "Thus says the king: Put this fellow in prison, and feed him on reduced rations of bread and water until I come in peace"'*>> (1 Kings 22:26-27), and: <<*The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy*>> (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).

<sup>37</sup> They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented –

### Hebrews 11:37

Stoned to death, sawn in two. These likely represent the traditional accounts of the deaths of Jeremiah and Isaiah respectively, which were recorded in early Jewish and Christian extra-biblical literature, although other prophets were also stoned: <<*Then the spirit of God took possession of Zechariah son of the priest Jehoiada; he stood above the people and said to them, 'Thus says God: Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has also forsaken you.' But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the Lord*>> (2 Chronicles 24:20-21), <<*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*>> (Matthew 23:37), and:

<<Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, “I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute”, so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be charged against this generation>> (Luke 11:49-51).

Killed by the sword. While some through faith escape the sword (v.34), others do not: <<He answered, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away’>> (1 Kings 19:10), and: <<There was another man prophesying in the name of the Lord, Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim. He prophesied against this city and against this land in words exactly like those of Jeremiah. And when King Jehoiakim, with all his warriors and all the officials, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard of it, he was afraid and fled and escaped to Egypt. Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him to Egypt, and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and threw his dead body into the burial place of the common people>> (Jeremiah 26:20-23). James, the brother of John, was the first apostle to be martyred: <<About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword>> (Acts 12:1-2).

The hairy skins of sheep and goats were the familiar clothing of many prophets, such as Elijah: <<They answered him, ‘A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.’ He said, ‘It is Elijah the Tishbite’>> (2 Kings 1:8), and others: <<On that day the prophets will be ashamed, every one, of their visions when they prophesy; they will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive>> (Zechariah 13:4), and: <<Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves>> (Matthew 7:15). John the Baptist, considered to be the last OT prophet, had a similar appearance: <<Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey>> (Mark 1:6).

<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

### Hebrews 11:38

The world was not worthy. Their presence in the world was itself evidence of God’s grace, for their proclamation of the Word of God to sinful people was a greater privilege than people deserved. The world would, no doubt, look and see some apparently very odd people, living what appeared to be an extreme form of asceticism, a counter-cultural lifestyle. From God’s point of view, these were the beginnings of the new world.

Caves and holes in the ground are especially associated with prophets in hiding: <<when Jezebel was killing off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets, hid them fifty to a cave, and provided them with bread and water>> (1 Kings 18:4).

Reading this list of just some of the people of God, suffering the way they did in his service, is just another example for people to pose the question ‘why does God let good people suffer?’ The fact that they suffered such things, and that they demonstrated that the world was not worthy of them, was a sign both that they believed that God was making a new world in which everything would be better, and that this belief was in fact true.

They were out of tune with their times because they were living by faith in God’s future world, while society all around them was living as though the present world was all there was or ever would be; and God was giving them strength to live like that, thus proving the truth of their claim. They were, in their own lives and sufferings, living beacons of hope, pointers to the fact that the God, who had made the world, was intending to remake it, and that they were the advance guard of that great moment.

<sup>39</sup> Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect.

### Hebrews 11:39-40

Commended for their faith was confirmed in v.2 and vv.4-5.

Did not receive what was promised. Most of those mentioned in this chapter saw only preliminary glimpses of what was specifically promised (v.13), and all were anticipating a greater future hope (v.16).

In light of Hebrews chapters 1-10, something better refers to the new covenant realities of the superior Son of God, with his superior priesthood and the consequent eternal perfection of the faithful. Better is a word that the writer has used frequently throughout the book to describe what God has done by sending his Son into the world as its saviour.

Without us. The saints of the OT, along with those of this era, will partake together of the same end-times perfection, that is, sinless selves in deathless resurrection bodies.

Be made perfect. The perfection of believers is elsewhere the goal: <<*For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*>> (Hebrews 10:14), and: <<*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*>> (Hebrews 12:22-23), accomplished through the work of the perfect Son of God: <<*It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings*>> (Hebrews 2:10), <<*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*>> (Hebrews 5:8-9), and: <<*For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever*>> (Hebrews 7:28).

Perfection is another key word in this book and the author leads the reader to realise that it cannot be obtained through self endeavour, the law or sacrificial rituals. It can only come through a life of faith in the perfect Son of God, who then calls on his follows to be perfect too: <<*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*>> (Matthew 5:48).