

Waiting with God

Companion to "The Hall of Faith Explained" · Hebrews 11 · Bible Connections with Joseph

Hebrews 11 is the chapter everybody knows, and it is almost always taught as a highlight reel — the people who believed and got the thing. Read to the end and that is not what it says. Verse 13 says Abraham, Sarah and the patriarchs died without receiving what was promised; they saw it only from far off. Verse 39 widens that to the whole chapter.

That is the chapter. Not faith that gets results. Faith that holds when the results do not arrive in your lifetime.

Read Hebrews 11 straight through before you start — all forty verses, including the last nine, where the victories and the losses share one passage. Verses 35 to 38 are the ones that make the chapter honest.

1 · Read It — the passage and what's around it

- ◆ Hebrews 11:1 is the definition. Write it out in your own words, without using the word faith.

hypostasis — the word behind “assurance” in 11:1. Outside the New Testament it turns up in ordinary paperwork: a title deed, a record of something owned before it is in hand. Some read the verse against that background. The Greek suggests the picture rather than settling it, and the verse works either way.

elegchos — the second word in 11:1, behind “certainty.” It is a courtroom and evidence word, nearer to proof brought forward than to a feeling of confidence. Both halves of the definition point outward, at something real, rather than inward at how sure you feel.

- ◆ Read 11:32–38. Sort what happens there into two columns — what went well, and what did not.

- ◆ Now 11:39. Both columns get the same verdict. What is it? Then compare 11:33, where some “gained what was promised,” with 11:39, where none of them “received what was promised.” What promise is 11:39 talking about? Read 11:40 before you answer.

2 · Cross Over — who wrote it, to whom, and what was happening

Every name in this chapter was chosen for people who knew the stories cold. The writer does not explain who Gideon or Barak or Jephthah were. He says time would fail him, and he could count on the room to know the stories. What the room did need was the reframe — that some of these people won and some did not, and the faith was the same faith.

And several of them are genuinely uncomfortable choices. Jephthah made a vow that cost his daughter. Samson's story is mostly appetite. The writer names them anyway, which is worth noticing before you read this chapter as a list of people who had it all together.

◆ **Pick one name from 11:32 and go read their story. Would you have put them on this list?**

◆ **What does it mean that the writer did?**

3 · Stand in Their World — hear it the way they heard it

Remember who is reading this. People who had already paid a cost, years in, with nothing visibly changed — and this chapter arrives and says: that is what it has always looked like. They were not doing it wrong. They were in the line. And if that is where you are, you might be living inside the definition of faith this chapter gives.

◆ **You are tired and losing confidence. Somebody reads 11:13 to you — all these people died in faith, without having received the things they were promised. However, they saw them and welcomed them from afar. Does that help or hurt? Be honest.**

kreittōn — “better,” and the word this whole letter is built on. It appears 15 times in the New Testament and 12 of those are in Hebrews. In this chapter it lands three times: a better country in 11:16, a better resurrection in 11:35, and in 11:40 the something better God had planned for us. The word that has been describing Jesus all letter long is turned, at the end, toward the reader.

- ◆ Read 11:13–16. What are they described as looking for, and what does the writer say God did about it?

4 • Verify It — hold it up against the fullness of Scripture

Test the reading, because this chapter gets pulled in two wrong directions. One is the prosperity reading — faith produces outcomes. Verse 39 closes that. The other is the stoic reading — nothing good comes, just endure. But verses 33 to 35a describe real deliverance, and the writer includes it.

- ◆ Find a passage elsewhere in Scripture where faith did produce the outcome. Now one where it did not. Can both be true?

- ◆ Hebrews 11:35 has a hinge in the middle of it — "others were tortured." What is the writer doing by putting those two halves in one verse?

- ◆ Make no assumptions. What have you heard taught from Hebrews 11 that verses 35–39 will not support?

5 • Come Back — put what you found into today's language

Verse 40 is the strangest sentence in the chapter, and it is the point. Only together with us would they be made perfect. The writer is saying the waiting was never an accident of timing — it was so that the story would include people who had not been born yet.

Which means a promise fulfilled after your lifetime is not a promise that failed. It is a promise bigger than your lifetime. That is a harder comfort than the one usually offered, and it is more durable.

◆ Say the argument of Hebrews 11 in one sentence, in ordinary words.

◆ What were you taught this chapter was about? What do you think now?

6 • Carry It Home — what it asks of you, and how it points to Jesus

◆ What are you waiting on that you may not see resolved?

◆ Hebrews 12:1 is the sentence this chapter was building toward. Read it. What is the one thing it asks you to do? Then read 12:2. How does that point you to Jesus?

◆ If you teach Hebrews 11, will you read verses 35–38 aloud? If not, why not?

A note on the steps. This sheet is structured by the six: Read It, Cross Over, Stand in Their World, Verify It, Come Back, Carry It Home. If you counted fewer while watching, that was the short version — six is the full process, and The Six Steps companion works all of them.

You're living inside the fulfillment they only got to believe in from far off. He is the greatest fulfillment of his promises.