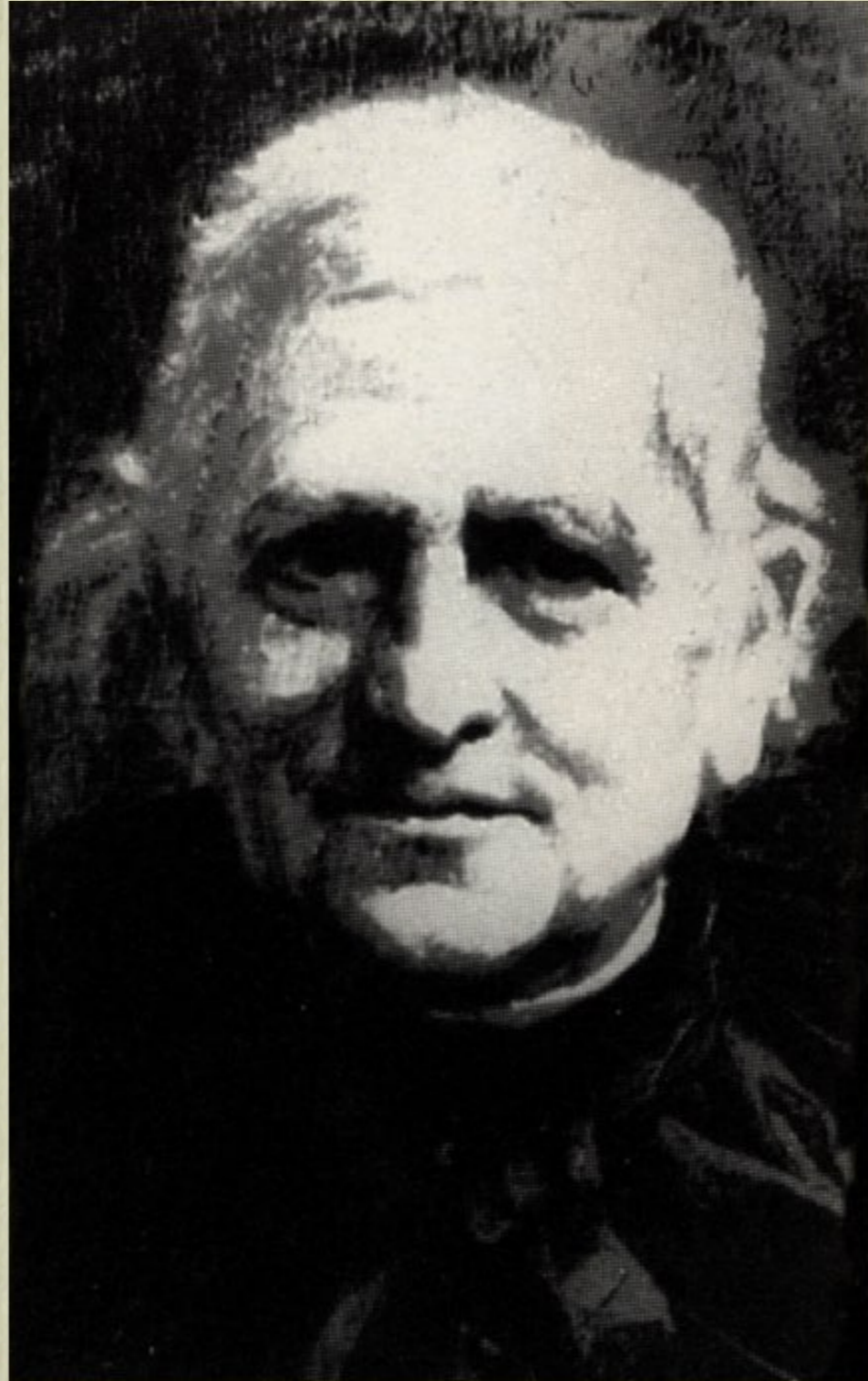


II. Hebrews 11:1 – 12:13



Jules Chevalier

PART FOUR Faith and Endurance 11:1 - 12:13

Hebrews 11:1-3

Now **faith** concerns the underlying reality [ὑπόστασις] of what we **hope** for; it demonstrates conviction about things not yet seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the epochs were arranged by the utterance of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

As he will show from an analysis of Jewish history, faith includes a present commitment of trust that God will bring about in the future what God has promised.

To encourage the community to be faithful, our author turns to the history of ‘our ancestors’ (προεσβύτεροι) – the common Jewish designation for the authoritative bearers of tradition (see Joshua 24:31; Judges 2:7). Their faith is recorded in the sacred scriptures – a demonstration that their faith has God’s approval. These ancestors were faithful in a remarkable way. They kept on trusting in God’s fidelity, sustained by their hope in God’s promises. Our author’s point is that if they were faithful in this way, what does this say to us who, because of Jesus, have ‘a better hope, through which we approach God’ (7:19)?

Echoing throughout this whole section is his earlier exhortation: ‘Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful’ (10:23). There is no excuse for us if we fail to become ‘imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises’ (6:12). For Jesus ‘is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises’ (8:6). We are privileged to have ‘the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance’ (9:15).

At the moment the community is suffering. Like their ancestors, and for greater reason, they must be faithful. Surely we should have faith in God's ability to bring into existence what we do not yet see. This is what happened when by his powerful word he brought creation into being.

As the author of the Book of Wisdom says: 'if people were amazed at the power and working of creation, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them' (Wisdom 13:4).

Likewise Paul: 'Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made' (Romans 1:20).

Hebrews 11:4-16 Faith of their ancestors

1. Abel : Hebrews 11:4

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.

2. Enoch : Hebrews 11:5-6

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" (Genesis 3:24). 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.

3. Noah : Hebrews 11:7

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.

Noah is the first of the ancestors to be explicitly described in the scriptures as ‘righteous’ (Genesis 6:9; 7:1). God told him of the coming flood, but promised: ‘I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark’ (Genesis 6:18). Noah’s faith is shown in his obedience: ‘Noah did all that God commanded him’ (Genesis 6:22). Because of his ‘obedience of faith’ (Romans 1:5; 16:26), he ‘became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith’.

When he speaks of Noah ‘saving his household’, the thoughts of the assembled community necessarily go to Christ who ‘was faithful over God’s house as a Son’ (3:6), our ‘great priest over the house of God’ (10:21).

In the Genesis account, the ark is a temple rising above the waters of chaos, holding within itself all life. It is a source of hope and a beacon against the darkness. It stands as a symbol of the Church of Christ, the ‘household’ of God. As Noah’s household, gathered together in the ark, were saved from destruction, so we, gathered in the Christian assembly, obedient to God’s word, and doing what faith requires of us, will ‘inherit salvation’ (1:14). Christ ‘became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him’ (5:9).

4. Abraham : Hebrews 11:8-12

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. 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. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 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. 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” (Genesis 22:17).

Obedience is an essential element of faith – something our author has already stressed in relation to Jesus (see 5:7-9). It is Abraham's faithful obedience that our author underlines, as he did in speaking of Noah. Notice the points that he highlights. He speaks of 'a place that Abraham was to receive as an inheritance'. The place is not named, and Abraham obeys God's call. He 'set out, not knowing where he was going', thus demonstrating his complete trust in God that God would give him 'things not yet seen' (11:1).

He 'stayed for a time in the land he had been promised'; but this is not 'the place that he was to receive as an inheritance', for he stayed there 'as in a foreign land, living in tents'. Our author is echoing Abraham's own words: 'I am a stranger and an alien residing among you' (Genesis 23:4).

It was the same for his son and grandson. The promised place which they continued to ‘look forward to’ because of their faith in God was not Canaan. This was only the place where they wandered while they waited for that which God promised: ‘the city that has foundations’. The description is traditional for Jerusalem, ‘the city founded by the Lord’ (Psalm 87:1).

Our author is thinking of what he will speak of shortly as the ‘homeland’ that we are seeking (11:14), ‘the city God has prepared’ for us (11:16), ‘the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem’ (12:22), wherein is the sanctuary entered by Christ our high priest and into which all who are united in faith with Christ are invited.

He spoke earlier of God's promise to Abraham: 'I will surely bless you and multiply you' (6:14). There he stressed Abraham's patient endurance. Here the accent is on his faith. God whose powerful word created the world 'from things that are not visible' (11:3), made it possible for one who was 'as good as dead' to engender life in a barren womb. Paul stresses the same thing when he writes: 'Abraham did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb' (Romans 4:19).

Hebrews 11:13-16

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, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. 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.

‘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).

11:17-19 Faith of Abraham

By faith **Abraham**, when put to the test, offered up Isaac (see Genesis 22). He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you” (Genesis 21:12). He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

God is able even to raise someone from the dead

- Isaac raised from the ‘dead’ womb of Sarah.
- Jesus (13:20)



11:20-22 Faith of Isaac, Jacob & Joseph

By faith **Isaac** invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau.
(Genesis 27:27-40).

By faith **Jacob**, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph,
“bowing in worship over the top of his staff” (Genesis 47:31).

By faith **Joseph**, at the end of his life, made mention of the
exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial
(Genesis 50:24-25.)

Moses' faith : Hebrews 11:23-28

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. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible (see 11:1). 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 (see Exodus 12).

Hebrews 11:29-31

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 (Exodus 14:22).

By faith the **walls of Jericho** fell after they had been encircled for seven days. (Joshua 6:14-20).

By faith **Rahab** the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace (Joshua 2:1; 6:17).

Faith in the Older Testament : Hebrews 11: 32-35

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 – who through faith

conquered kingdoms,

administered justice,

obtained promises,

shut the mouths of lions, (Daniel 6:19, 23)

quenched raging fire, (Daniel 3:19-28, 49-50)

escaped the edge of the sword,

won strength out of weakness,

became mighty in war,

put foreign armies to flight.

Women received their dead by resurrection

(1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37).

Hebrews 11: 35

Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection.

The Second Book of Maccabees records the heroic stand taken by a mother who preferred to see her seven sons die than have them commit apostasy.

As one of the seven sons said as he neared death: ‘One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!’ (2Maccabees 7:14). They remained faithful, says our author, ‘in order to obtain a better resurrection’.

Hebrews 11:6-38

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 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 – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Eleazar was placed on the rack and beaten to death (see 2Maccabees 6:18-31); Zechariah was stoned (2Chronicles 24:21, an event recalled also by Jesus; see Matthew 23:35). According to legend, the prophet Isaiah was sawn in two.

Hebrews 11:39-40

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

After a graphic description of the sufferings endured during periods of persecution, our author repeats what he said earlier concerning the patriarchs (see 11:13): ‘though they were commended for their faith, they did not receive what was promised’. It was all so that we would receive the promise. The long journey of faith from Abel on reached its fulfilment in Christ and in the Christian community. If they were so heroic in maintaining their faith in a future promise which they never saw, how can we, the recipients of the promise, fail to believe? How can we, whatever sufferings may be entailed, give in to fear and ‘drift away from’ (2:1) or ‘neglect so great a salvation’ (2:3)?

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with **perseverance** the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the champion [ἀρχηγός, 2:10] and perfecter [τελειωτής] of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him **endured** the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Jesus kept his eye on the finishing line. He was never distracted by sin, and he endured in his faith throughout the terrible and humiliating ordeal of the crucifixion. God was faithful to Jesus who now 'has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God' (see 1:3; 2:9; 8:1; 10:12). They are being asked to endure in faith in a hostile environment. Let them keep their eyes fixed on Jesus. He, too, suffered hostility, but he is now in glory, and has opened the way to glory for us as well.

Hebrews 12:4-8

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children — ‘My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves (Revelation 3:19), and chastises every child whom he accepts’ (Proverbs 3:11-12). **Endure** trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children.

Hebrews 12:9-11

Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For our human parents disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12: 12-13 : Introducing Part 5

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.