



LESSON FIVE

The Unique Way of Faith and its Witnesses

Scripture Reading

HEBREWS 11

- 1 Now faith is the substantiation of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
- 2 For in this the elders have obtained a good testimony.
- 3 By faith we understand that the universe has been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not come into being out of things which appear.
- 4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying to his gifts; and through faith, though he has died, he still speaks.
- 5 By faith Enoch was translated so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had translated him. For before his translation he obtained the testimony that he had been well pleasing to God.
- 6 But without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him, for he who comes forward to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
- 7 By faith Noah, having been divinely instructed concerning things not yet seen and being moved by pious fear, prepared an ark for the salvation of his house, through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.
- 8 By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.
- 9 By faith he dwelt as a foreigner in the land of promise as in a foreign land, making his home in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the fellow heirs of the same promise;
- 10 For he eagerly waited for the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God.
- 11 By faith also Sarah herself received power to conceive seed, even beyond the season of age, since she considered Him faithful who promised.
- 12 Therefore also there were born of one, and that of him who had become dead, as many as even the stars of heaven in multitude and as the sand by the seashore innumerable.
- 13 All these died in faith, not receiving the promises but seeing them from afar and joyfully greeting them and confessing that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth.
- 14 For those who say such things make it manifest that they seek after a country of their own.
- 15 And if indeed they continued to remember that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return;
- 16 But as it is, they long after a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.
- 17 By faith Abraham, being tested, offered up Isaac; indeed he who gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten,
- 18 Of whom it was said, "In Isaac shall your seed be called";
- 19 Counting that God was able to raise men even from the dead, from which he also received him back in figure.
- 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things to come.
- 21 By faith Jacob, while he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshipped God, while leaning on the top of his staff.

- 22 By faith Joseph, nearing his end, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel and gave orders concerning his bones.
- 23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw that the child was lovely, and they did not fear the king's decree.
- 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
- 25 Choosing rather to be ill-treated with the people of God than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin,
- 26 Considering the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked away to the reward.
- 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he persevered as one seeing the unseen One.
- 28 By faith he instituted the Passover and the pouring out of the blood so that the one destroying the firstborn would not touch them.
- 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as through dry land, in which the Egyptians, while making the attempt, were swallowed up.
- 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, having been encircled for a period of seven days.
- 31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, since she had received the spies with peace.
- 32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,
- 33 Who through faith overcame kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,
- 34 Quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong in weakness, became mighty in war, routed the armies of foreigners.
- 35 Women received their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured to death, not accepting deliverance, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection.
- 36 And still others underwent the trial of mockings and scourgings, even, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment.
- 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they died by the murder of the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated
- 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy), wandering over deserts and mountains and in caves and holes of the earth.
- 39 And these all, having obtained a good testimony through their faith, did not obtain the promise,
- 40 Because God has provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

QUESTIONS

Section 1

1. What does it mean to lose our soul today? How is it related to ‘perfection’ and ‘glorification’?
2. Present the way of faith in the first 10 chapters of Hebrews with verse references.

Section 2

1. What is faith? What does it mean to have faith?
2. What makes the believers in Christ a people of hope?
3. What is proper faith? Share of your experience of obtaining proper faith.

Section 3

1. Explain how Abraham did not take the ‘good land of blessings’ as his home.
2. How did Moses bear the “reproach of the Christ” since Christ had not yet come at that time?
3. What is the difference between God’s silence and His miracles?

Section 4

1. What are the two dispensations in God’s economy?
2. How are the old testament saints perfected by the new testament believers?
3. How are the realities in the New Covenant greater than the shadows in the Old Covenant?

THE UNIQUE WAY OF FAITH AND FAITH'S DEFINITION

In the first ten chapters of Hebrews we have a clear, thorough, and complete comparison between God's economy and man's religion. This man-made religion frustrates God's people from going on according to His economy. Due to this frustration, the book of Hebrews was written. After presenting a thorough comparison of Judaism with God's economy, this book charges the Hebrew believers, who were in danger of shrinking back, to live, walk, and go on "by faith" (10:38-39), that is, "not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Then in chapter eleven it continues to define what faith is in a historical way.

Suppose you are driving an automobile and come to an intersection where there are two signs, one indicating that a road is closed and the other indicating that a road is open. Would you drive on the road that has been closed? If you did, you would run the risk of losing your life. It would be much better to drive on the open way. The clear comparison given in the first ten chapters of Hebrews is a sign for our driving, showing which way has been closed and which way is open. Over the old way is a sign—Closed, Terminated. Over the new way is also a sign—Open, Freshly Slain. This contrast is the consummation of these ten chapters. After presenting such a contrast, the writer tells us how to take this open, freshly slain way—it is by the unique way of faith.

Before considering this matter of faith, I would like to say a further word about the gaining of the soul. Hebrews 10:39 says, "But we are not of them who shrink back to ruin, but of them who have faith to the gaining of the soul." The Bible is the most consistent book. Although it has many aspects and uses different terms, its main point is always consistent. The terms glorification, perfection, and the gaining of the soul all point to one thing. As we have seen, glorification is perfection and perfection is the gaining of the soul. We are Christ's followers today. If we would follow Him according to God's economy, we must pay the price. Humanly speaking, in order to follow the Lord we must lose the soulish enjoyments and worldly entertainments. To lose such things is what it means to lose our soul. If we are unwilling to pay the price to lose our soul today, meaning that we do not like to lose any soulish enjoyments or worldly entertainments in this age, we shall not give any opportunity to the law of life to work Christ into us. To lose our soul

today means that we give the law of life the opportunity to work Christ into our being. It means that we do not care for shopping, housing, eating, clothing, or any type of entertainment, and that we only care for the working of the law of life within us. We all must say, "I am willing to pay any price that the law of life might have the opportunity to work Christ into every part of my being." This is what it means to be perfected. This is also for our glorification. Our glorification in the future will be the gaining of our soul. Hence, perfection, glorification, and the gaining of the soul all refer to the same thing.

If we are unwilling to pay the price for this and shrink back, we shall be ruined as the good material for God's economy, as the material in which the law of life can work. If we come forward, we shall remain good material for the law of life to work Christ into our being. Shrinking back ruins the good material by soulish enjoyments, worldly entertainments, and religious activities. The Greek word translated "ruined" is the same word as for destruction. This means that if, as good material for the working of the law of life, you shrink back from God's economy, you will be completely destroyed as far as being material is concerned. In the past years, I have seen much good material that has been destroyed by shrinking back from God's up-to-date economy. Although they saw God's present economy, they were unwilling to pay the price for it. They shrank back and were ruined. We must be careful about this.

As an encouragement to the Hebrew believers to go on in this matter, at the end of chapter ten the writer said that we are of them "who have faith to the gaining of the soul." After presenting a thorough comparison of Judaism with God's economy, the writer charges the Hebrew believers to go on by faith. Immediately after this follows chapter eleven, which covers the unique way of faith.

I. THE UNIQUE WAY OF FAITH

A. To Receive the Word of the Gospel by Faith

In this book faith is first mentioned in chapters three and four. In 4:2 we see that faith is the unique way to receive the word of the gospel. The proper gospel is the gospel of bequests. If anyone would receive the gospel of bequests, he must have faith. Suppose someone would offer you a document which said that a large amount of money had been deposited in your bank account. In order to receive this document, you must have

faith. If you do not have faith, you will say, "This is just a piece of paper. It doesn't mean anything to me." When we preach the gospel, we must infuse people with faith. The power of the proper gospel preaching is that people are infused with faith to such an extent that they believe whatever we tell them. People must have faith if they are to receive the word of the gospel.

B. To Take God by Faith

Hebrews 6:1 speaks of "faith toward God." Since we cannot see God, we must take Him by faith. Although God is great and wonderful, some people say, "As far as I am concerned, God is nothing." If we have faith, God is everything; if we do not have faith, He is nothing to us. Whenever we minister God to people, we must be able to infuse them with faith; otherwise, whatever we minister to them will be in vain. If people are to grasp God, they must have faith.

C. To Enter into the Rest by Faith

Hebrews 4:3, speaking of the Sabbath rest, says, "We who have believed enter into the rest." The only way to enter into the Sabbath rest is by faith. Anyone who does not believe will be unable to enter into it. For this matter we must exercise our faith.

D. To Inherit the Promise by Faith

Faith is the unique way for us to inherit God's promises (6:12). In the Scriptures God has given us many promises. To inherit these promises we need to be infused by God with faith. Since most of the things promised by God are unseen or hoped for, we need faith to substantiate them.

E. To Hold Fast the Beginning of the Assurance Firm to the End

In order to hold fast the beginning of the assurance (confidence) firm to the end, we must have faith (3:14). The word "assurance" in 3:14 means the practical and actual faith, which we have had from the beginning. We must hold fast this practical and actual faith firm to the end, as we did at the beginning.

F. To Come Forward to the Holy of Holies and to God's New Covenant Dispensation in Full Assurance of Faith

We must come forward to the Holy of Holies and to God's new covenant dispensation in the full assurance of faith (10:22). In these messages we have said a great deal about God's economy. If we shut our eyes of faith, there will be nothing, and everything we have said will be in vain. But

if we exercise our faith, we shall see how much there is in God's economy. If we have no faith, everything is gone. But if we have faith, there is great wealth before us. In these messages we have seen the vision of the law of life. We must go on with this vision, not with the knowledge of religion.

G. To Hold Fast the Confession of Our Hope without Wavering

Our hope is Christ. His indestructible life, which has been imparted into us with its functioning law of life, and His kingly and divine priesthood, in which He ministers all the riches of God into us, are also our hope. This must be our confession. We need to exercise our faith to hold fast this confession of our hope without wavering. Only by faith can we realize the confession of our hope in Christ.

H. To Live by Faith in Suffering for the Promise of Reward

To take God's new covenant way and to follow the Lord in this way causes us a lot of suffering in material things. For this, God has promised us a great reward (v. 35) that on earth today we may live by faith and not by sight. The life that follows the Lord in God's economy is a life of faith.

I. To Gain the Soul by Faith

To gain our soul in the coming age of the kingdom requires that we have faith (10:39; 1 Pet. 1:9). If we would not care for today's enjoyments but for the coming day, we must have faith. Furthermore, if we would be sure that we shall have something better in the future and that it is worthwhile to sacrifice the enjoyments and entertainments of today in order to have it, we must have faith. As we shall see, faith is the conviction of things not seen. Since we cannot see into the future, how do we know that a glorious tomorrow is ahead of us? We know it by faith. Deep within me, I am fully convinced that a glorious tomorrow is awaiting me. This conviction comes by faith.

J. The Warning concerning an Evil Heart of Unbelief

In 3:12 and 19 we are warned about having an evil heart of unbelief. In the eyes of God, no one is as evil as the one who will not believe in Him. The unbelieving heart is the most evil heart. Nothing insults God more than our unbelief, and nothing honors Him more than our believing in Him. We must believe whatever God says in His word. If

our heart does not believe God's word, it is in His eyes an evil, unbelieving heart.

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II. FAITH'S DEFINITION

A. Faith as the Substantiating of Things Hoped For

Now we come to the matter of faith's definition. Although faith is realized within our being, it is difficult to define. Faith is just faith. But the writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said, "Faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11:1). Since faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, it is the assurance, confidence, confirmation, reality, essence, supporting ground of things hoped for, the foundation that supports the things hoped for. The Greek word translated "substantiating" here is the same word rendered "substance" in 1:3, "assurance" in 3:14, and "confidence" (which knows it rests on a sure foundation) in 2 Corinthians 11:17 (KJV). It may also be translated confirmation, reality, essence (which means the real nature of things as opposed to appearance), foundation, or supporting ground. The King James Version uses "substance" instead of "substantiating" in this verse. But the meaning here is not of solid matter. The Greek word denotes an action and should be rendered as a gerund, a verbal noun. The paper on which this message is printed is a substance. But by touching it with your hand you substantiate it. You sense, realize, and have a full consciousness of it. This is an act of substantiating. Faith is not a substance; it is a substantiating action. To have faith is not to have a substantial element; it is to have a substantiating ability. Although certain things cannot be seen, heard, or touched, we nevertheless have within us the ability to substantiate them. This is faith. The Bible says that whoever believes shall have eternal life (John 3:15). When we hear this word, we sense that it conveys something real, although no one can see or touch it. Nevertheless, the faith within us substantiates what is conveyed in this word.

The Bible is a will filled with bequests. An unbeliever, however, would say that this is nonsense. To him, the Bible is simply a book which is difficult to understand. But for us, God's called ones, the Bible is a book of bequests. When we hear this, something within us responds to substantiate it. This substantiating is what we call faith. How do you know that you have eternal life? How do you know that the Lord Jesus is in your spirit? We know these things by faith. We

can neither explain nor show people that Christ dwells in our spirit. Although we cannot present this to others, we can substantiate it for ourselves.

This substantiating is not a small thing; it is like a sixth sense. Each of our five senses has a substantiating ability. For instance, our nose substantiates fragrances and our eyes substantiate colors. Faith is a specific and particular sense in addition to our five senses. It is the sense by which we substantiate the things unseen or hoped for.

1. The Believer's Life Being a Life of Things Hoped For

The believer's life is a life of things hoped for, a life of hope which goes together and abides with faith (1 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 13:13; Rom. 4:18). The unbelievers, being without Christ, have no hope (Eph. 2:12; 1 Thes. 4:13). But we, the believers in Christ, are a people of hope. The calling which we received from God brings us hope (Eph. 1:18; 4:4). We are regenerated to "a living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3, Gk.). Our Christ, who is in us, is "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 1:1), which will issue in the redemption, the transfiguration of our body in glory (Rom. 8:23-25). This is "the hope of salvation" (1 Thes. 5:8), a "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), a "good hope" (2 Thes. 2:16), "the hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2; 3:7), which is the "hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2), "the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23), "the hope which is laid up for us in heaven" (Col. 1:5). We should always keep "this hope" (1 John 3:3), and "boast in it" (Rom. 5:2). Our God is "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13), and "through the encouragement of the Scriptures we may have hope" (Rom. 15:4) all the time "in God" (1 Pet. 1:21) and "rejoice in it" (Rom. 12:12). This book of Hebrews charges us to "hold fast the boast of hope firm to the end" (3:6), "show diligence unto the full assurance of hope to the end" (6:11), and "lay hold of the hope set before us" (6:18). It also tells us that the new covenant brings in "a better hope, through which we draw near to God" (7:19). Our life should be a life of hope, which goes together and abides with faith (1 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 13:13). We should follow Abraham "who beyond hope believed in hope" (Rom. 4:18, Recovery Version).

2. Faith Substantiating the Things Which We Are Hoping For

All the things which we are hoping for are substantiated by our faith. With faith, they all are real; without faith, they seem vain. We need to contact God for His infusion of faith that we may

substantiate all the things which He has promised as our hope.

B. Faith as the Conviction of Things Not Seen

Verse 1 also says that faith is the “conviction of things not seen.” The Greek word rendered “conviction” may also be translated “evidence” or “proof.” The word conviction implies action. Thus, faith is not the substance, but the conviction, action, evidence, and proof of things not seen. All things hoped for are things not seen (Rom. 8:24-25). If anything is seen, we do not need to hope for it. As people of hope, we should not aim our life at “the things which are seen,” but at “the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). Hence, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). We are aiming at the Holy of Holies and the New Jerusalem, neither of which can be seen by us. Nevertheless, we have the full conviction of these unseen things. Faith assures us of the things not seen, convincing us of what we do not see. Therefore, it is the evidence, the proof, of things unseen.

Faith, which is the way to realize and enjoy the things of God, is not a part of our natural being. It is a divine ability which has been infused into us. The proper faith is the divine element, even God Himself, infused into our being as the ability to substantiate the things which we do not see. This infused element is our substantiating ability. Whenever we contact God or listen to His word, the substantiating ability which has been infused into our being by God Himself spontaneously begins to realize the things of God, the things hoped for, and the things not seen, and we simply believe. As we have seen, faith is a special sense in addition to the five senses derived from our natural birth. This sense substantiates the things of God, things which we do not see. Since the Christian life is a life of hope and in this life we aim at things unseen, we need more of the transfusion and infusion of God that we may have the ability, the faith, to substantiate the things hoped for and to have the conviction of things unseen.

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THE HISTORY OF FAITH AND ITS WITNESSES

Hebrews 11 is a chapter on faith with its history. From verses 3 through 40 it presents a brief history of faith—from God’s creation, through all the generations of God’s chosen people, to all the

New Testament believers, consummating with the New Jerusalem in eternity—to prove that faith is the unique pathway for God’s seekers to receive His promise and take His way. Everyone involved in this history of faith was a witness. Hence, Hebrews 11 is not only a chapter on faith with its history, but also with its witnesses. In Greek, the word for witness is the same as the word for martyr. Every witness is a martyr, suffering martyrdom for the testimony of faith.

IN UNDERSTANDING THE FRAMING OF THE UNIVERSE BY THE WORD OF GOD

Verse 3 says The universe was framed by the word of God. God spoke and it came into being. We do not know this by our five senses; we know it by faith, by our substantiating sense.

IN NOAH, PREPARING AN ARK FOR SALVATION

Consider Noah’s situation: as he was building an ark for a flood that was to come, no one believed him. The sky was clear and no one expected a flood to come. Nevertheless, substantiating the coming flood by faith, Noah built the ark.

IN ABRAHAM

Abraham has been called the father of faith. By faith he obeyed God’s calling to leave his homeland, dwelling as a foreigner in the land of promise (vv. 8-9). Abraham obeyed God and went out of Chaldea “without knowing where he was going.” This afforded him constant opportunity to exercise his faith to trust in God for His instant leading, taking God’s presence as his map. Verse 10 says that by faith Abraham “waited for the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God.” This is “the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22), “the Jerusalem above” (Gal. 4:26, Gk.), “the holy city, the New Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2; 3:12) which God has prepared for His people (v. 16), and “the tabernacle of God” in which God will dwell with men for eternity (Rev. 21:3).

Abraham also acted by faith in offering up Isaac, “counting that God was able to raise him even from among the dead, from whence he also received him back in a figure” (vv. 17-19). Verse 12, referring to Abraham, says, “Therefore also there were born of one, and that of him who had become dead, as many as even the stars of heaven in multitude and as the sand by the seashore innumerable.”

Verse 13, speaking of Abraham and the other patriarchs, says, "All these died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them from afar and greeted them, and confessed that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth." The Greek word translated "sojourners" may also be rendered "pilgrims," "exiles," "expatriates." Abraham was the first Hebrew (Gen. 14:13), a river crosser, leaving Chaldea, and coming to Canaan, the good land of blessings. Yet he did not settle here; rather, he sojourned in the land of promise as a pilgrim, even as an exile and an expatriate, longing after a better country, a heavenly one (v. 16), seeking a country of his own (v. 14). The writer of this book intended to impress the believing Hebrews that they should follow their forefathers, considering themselves also as strangers and sojourners on the earth and looking forward to the heavenly country, which is better than the earthly one.

IN SARAH, CONCEIVING SEED

Sarah had become an old woman whose function had ceased; yet in the midst of her situation, she believed in God's word.

IN ISAAC, BLESSING JACOB AND ESAU

If you read Isaac's history, you will see that he was not a smart man; he was quite common, and there was nothing special about him. Nevertheless, he did something marvelous—he blessed his two sons, Jacob and Esau. Although Isaac blessed them blindly, he did it in faith.

IN JACOB

When Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, he not only did it by faith but with very clear sight. His inner sight was exceedingly clear. When Joseph attempted to change his hands, being displeased that Jacob's right hand was upon Ephraim instead of upon Manasseh, the firstborn, Jacob refused and said, "I know it, my son, I know it" (Gen. 48:15-19). Jacob knew what he was doing and blessed Joseph's sons by faith.

Verse 21 also says that Jacob "worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff." This is very meaningful, signifying that Jacob confessed that he was a sojourner, a traveler on the earth (v. 13). Jacob's staff also signified that God was his shepherd, having shepherded him all his life long (Gen. 48:15, Heb.). This is the reason that his worshipping, leaning on the top of his staff, is recorded here as a matter of faith.

IN JOSEPH

Verse 22 says Joseph remembered the coming exodus of the sons of Israel and charged them to bring his bones out of Egypt and into Canaan. This took great faith. When the Israelites entered into Canaan, they brought Joseph's bones into the good land (Exo. 13:19).

IN MOSES

Verse 23 says his parents hid him by faith. When he had "become great," he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be ill-treated with the people of God than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin" (vv. 24-25). The Greek word translated "temporary" in verse 25 may also be rendered "for awhile," "short-lived," "fleeting," "passing." During Moses' time, to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter was an enjoyment to the life of the soul. But Moses refused this, choosing rather to be ill-treated with the people of God than to have the fleeting enjoyment of sin. The enjoyment in Egypt, that is, the enjoyment in the world, is sinful in the eyes of God. It is the enjoyment of sin, of a sinful life, and is temporary, short-lived, fleeting, and passing.

In verse 26 we are told that Moses esteemed "the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked away to the reward." When I was young, being troubled by my clock mentality, I questioned how Moses could have suffered the reproach of Christ, since Christ had not yet come. Christ, as "the Angel of the Lord," was always with the children of Israel in their afflictions (Exo. 3:2, 7-9; 14:19; Num. 20:16; Isa. 63:9). Furthermore, the Scripture identifies Him with them (Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:15). Hence, the reproach falling on them was considered also as His reproach, and the reproaches of those who reproached God fell upon Him too (Rom. 15:3). The New Testament believers, as His followers, bear His reproach (13:13) and are reproached for His name (1 Pet. 4:14). Moses, choosing to be ill-treated with the people of God (v. 25), esteemed the reproach of the Christ of God, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt in Pharaoh's palace, for he looked away to the reward.

Because Moses was willing to suffer the reproach of the Christ, he will receive the reward of the kingdom. He was not allowed to enter into the rest of the good land because of his failure at Meribah (Num. 20:12-13; Deut. 3:26, 27; 32:50-52), but he will be with Christ in the kingdom (Matt. 16:28-17:3). By referring to this, the writer

certainly intended to encourage the Hebrew believers, who were suffering persecution for Christ's sake, to follow Moses by esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the things they had lost and by looking away to the reward. The palace of Pharaoh, the royal sonship, the worldly enjoyment and attainment, and all the things in Egypt were there before him. According to his sight, these things were real, but according to his faith, they were not real. Something other than that—the reward—was real to his substantiating sense. Although at that time the reward was far away from him, he looked unto it and was encouraged by it to forsake everything in Egypt.

Verse 27 says that by faith Moses "left Egypt not fearing the wrath of the king, for he was steadfast as seeing the invisible One." At that time, this was a great thing. That great reward was such an incentive to him in fleeing Egypt. This is a full portrait of our life today. Today the world is Egypt and all that it can afford us is a palace. But to our faith, all this is a vanity of vanities. Only one thing is the reality of realities—the coming reward.

IN THE SONS OF ISRAEL

Verse 29 says that by faith the sons of Israel "passed through the Red Sea as through dry land, which the Egyptians attempting to do were swallowed up." Nothing is mentioned in this chapter of the forty years during which the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, since during that time they did nothing by faith; rather, in those years they provoked God by their unbelief (3:16-18).

IN GIDEON, BARAK, SAMSON, JEPHTHAH, DAVID, SAMUEL, AND THE PROPHETS, DOING MANY MARVELOUS THINGS

Although they did marvelous things, many of them also suffered martyrdom. God performed miracles for some of them, but He did not do such things for all of them. Do not think that if you have faith God will always do something for you. Many times the exercise of our faith will only bring us the enjoyment of God's silence. When Stephen was being martyred, the Lord did not rescue him but gave him such a sweet silence (Acts 7:54-60). To suffer persecution without any rescue coming from the Lord requires great faith.

God's silence is greater than His miracles. When the Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross, the mockers said to Him, "If thou be the Son of God,

come down from the cross," and, "If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him" (Matt. 27:40, 42). For at least three of the six hours while the Lord was on the cross, there was silence in the universe. It seemed that there was no God, and the mockers and the blasphemers said whatever they wanted. It was their world and they were the gods at that time. God will remain silent much more often than He will perform miracles. At times, we all must enjoy God's silence by faith.

Verse 35 says, "Others were beaten to death, not accepting deliverance, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection." The better resurrection is not only "the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:4-6), "the resurrection of life" (John 5:28-29), but also "the out-resurrection" (Phil. 3:11, Gk.), the extra-resurrection, the resurrection in which the Lord's overcomers will receive the reward (v. 26) of the kingdom, after which the Apostle Paul sought. Verse 38, speaking of those who endured such affliction by faith, says that the world was not worthy of them.

-----[SECTION 4]-----

TO BE PERFECTED BY THE BELIEVERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

A. The Two Dispensations of God's Economy

Verse 40 says, "God having in view something better concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." This verse implies a great deal. None of the witnesses of faith was ever perfected. They all need to be perfected by the believers of the new covenant. In God's economy there are two dispensations: the dispensation of the old covenant of shadows and the dispensation of the new covenant of realities. All the martyrs and witnesses of faith were under the old covenant of shadows; they were not in the reality. Since the new covenant dispensation of reality in which we are is better than the old covenant dispensation of shadows in which the witnesses of faith were, they need us for their perfection.

Verse 40 speaks of "something better concerning us." The Greek word translated "better" means stronger, more powerful, nobler, and greater; hence, it means better. It is used thirteen times in Hebrews: the better Christ (1:4), a better hope (7:19), a better covenant (7:22; 8:6), better promises (8:6), better sacrifices (9:23), a better possession (10:34), a better country (11:16), a better resurrection (11:35), something better (11:40), and better speaking (12:24). (The other two times are in 6:9 and 7:7, where it is translated

greater.) All these better things are the fulfillment and reality of the things which the Old Testament saints had in types, figures, and shadows. What God had in view at that time was the things to come in the new covenant concerning us, which are the true and real things, better, stronger, more powerful, nobler, and greater than their types, figures, and shadows. The Old Testament saints, who had only the shadows, need us for their perfection that they may share with us in the real things of the new covenant. Thus, why should the Hebrew believers leave the real things of the new covenant and return to the shadows of the old covenant?

Verse 40 says that “apart from us they should not be made perfect.” Both the participation in the kingdom for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6) and the sharing in the New Jerusalem for eternity (Rev. 21:2-3; 22:1-5) are a corporate matter. The kingdom feast will be for both the Old Testament and the New Testament overcomers (Matt. 8:11). The blessed New Jerusalem will be composed of both the Old Testament saints and the New Testament believers (Rev. 21:12-14). Hence, apart from the New Testament believers, the Old Testament ones cannot obtain what God has promised. For the obtaining and enjoying of the good things of God’s promise, they need the New Testament believers to perfect them. Now they are waiting for us to go on that they may be perfected.

B. The Saints in the Shadows of the Old Covenant Expecting to See the Realities of the New Covenant

The saints in the shadows of the old covenant expected to see the realities of the new covenant (Matt. 13:16-17; John 8:56; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). In the past, many of us thought that it would have been wonderful to live during the time of the Old Testament. We were taught that Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, and the other Old Testament saints were outstanding persons and that it would have been better for us to live in their age than in the present age. When I was young, I wished I could have lived during the Old Testament days. This concept, however, is in darkness. We are living in a better age and we have heard, experienced, and participated in better things than the things in the old covenant age. The saints in the shadows of the old covenant wanted to see the realities of the age in which we are living. Matthew 13:17 says, “Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not

heard them.” Even Abraham was expecting to see the reality of the new covenant (John 8:56). Furthermore, the prophets preached of the grace that has come to us. What they ministered was not for themselves but for us (1 Pet. 1:10-12). All the Old Testament saints, including David and Solomon, were not for themselves but for us. Everything they had was a shadow of the reality which we enjoy today.

C. The Believers in the Realities of the New Covenant Being Greater Than the Saints in the Shadows of the Old Covenant

The believers in the realities of the new covenant are greater than the saints in the shadows of the old covenant. Matthew 11:11, a great verse, proves this. “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” John the Baptist was greater than all who had preceded him, including Abraham, David, and Solomon. Nevertheless, he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Since John the Baptist was greater than Abraham and we are greater than John, then we also are greater than Abraham. All the saints in the Old Testament age looked forward to the realities of the New Testament age, but none of them saw anything of this reality. Between these two ages there was a transitory period lasting approximately three and a half years. During this transitory period, John the Baptist came and saw the Christ, whom all the saints in the Old Testament time had been waiting for. Because John saw Him, he was greater than all of them. Although John saw Christ, he did not get into Christ. But we, the New Testament believers, are in Christ. Abraham expected to see Christ, John the Baptist saw Christ, but we are in Christ. Therefore, since we are so much closer to Christ, we are greater than Abraham and John the Baptist. We are not only close to Christ—we are in Christ and Christ is in us. We can even say along with the Apostle Paul, “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). We are greater than Abraham, David, Solomon, and all the Old Testament saints, for they were in the shadows. We are not only in the reality—we are the reality. Because of this, the Old Testament saints cannot be perfected without us. Without us, they could never enter into the enjoyment of the realities which they were looking for.

If we exercise our substantiating faith, we shall sense that Abraham, David, Solomon, and all the overcoming saints who have preceded us are

watching over us like spectators at a football game. They are cheering us on and encouraging us to win the game. Their enjoyment of the reality depends upon us. This is the correct meaning of verse 40, which says that “apart from us they should not be made perfect.” As verse 39 indicates, the Old Testament saints did not obtain the promise because God had in view “something better concerning us.” They all are waiting for us. Even the Apostle Paul and all the New Testament martyrs are waiting for us. They, the foregoing overcomers, are waiting for the fullness of the overcomers. The number of overcomers has not yet been fulfilled. One day the fullness of that number will be reached. Thus, verse 40 was a very strong encouragement to all the staggering Hebrew believers to come forward and to fill up the gap in the number of overcomers.

In His economy, God does not intend to have an individual expression. He desires to have a corporate expression. This expression requires a complete number of overcomers. Only God knows what this number is. As long as it has not been reached, the time cannot come, and the foregoing overcomers will still need to wait for us. What a responsibility we have! They are ready, but we are not. We are truly in the last days. Not only are we greater than John the Baptist, but we are even somewhat greater than all the martyrs in the first few centuries, because we are more important than they were. We can experience more than they did because they were at the beginning and we are here at the consummation. The consummation is always richer, greater, and higher than the beginning. It is not a small thing that we are in the Lord’s recovery today. We are living in the consummating period of God’s economy, and so many foregoing overcomers are expecting to see our completion. We are surely the most blessed people in the universe, for we have the golden opportunity to share in the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose.