

Sent: Wednesday, January 18, 2017 12:55 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Hebrews 11:1-4

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval! By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though dead, he still speaks!"

This passage of Scripture was the basis for our lesson last nite! It's obviously about "faith"! The first five verses introduce one of the best-known and loved chapters in the New Testament, even the entire Bible! As Hagner notes, "readers can take heart from the author's review of famous people in Israel's history who encountered the difficult and the unknown, and those who knew suffering, but whose faith sustained them and made it possible for them to endure"! The author had earlier written (in Heb. 6:12) that he wanted his readers "...to become imitators of those who through faith and patience inherited the promises of God"!

So, what is faith? Hard to beat the King James version in calling it "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." But, more importantly, it was what gained the approval of God--and what still does! Verse 6, which will be part of next week's lesson, says that "without faith it is impossible to please God! For he who comes to God must believe that He is (i.e., that He exists!) and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him"!

Interesting that the author of Hebrews actually uses his readers (and that would include us as believers too!) as the first examples of faith at work! Verse 3 says: "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of the things which are visible"! We can easily see how faith in creation, as God's handiwork, fits the definition of faith as described in verse 1. Faith is confident that the creation we see is really the product of what isn't seen! Namely, creation is the work of an unseen God! And if the world was created out of nothing, then the things that are now seen originated from what was not seen! (Interesting science lesson!)

A question should be asked upfront: how does one get this faith? The apostle Paul wrote, in Romans 10:17, that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"! The Bible! And, in Ephesians 2:8-9, that it's "...by grace that we're saved, through faith! And that not of ourselves! It is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast"!

So, what was it about Abel's offering to God that made it better than Cain's offering--and through which he was proclaimed "righteous" before God? It obviously had something to do with his "faith"--unlike that of Cain! The full story (what little we have of it) is told in Genesis 4:1-16. Abel, it says, "brought of the firstlings of his flock." MacArthur notes that, while it's not recorded in Genesis, Abel's offering was in every way obediently given according to what God must have revealed! Among other things, both Cain and Abel must have known about God's promise (in Gen. 3:15) after the fall, to send someone--a Redeemer--to deal with Satan and clear up the sin problem created by his father, Adam. They must also have known how God Himself had "made garments of skin to clothe Adam and Eve" after the fall (thus requiring the slaying of

an animal, and presumably a lamb). So, it's certainly interesting, to say the least, that Abel's offering also required the slaying of a lamb, and the shedding of blood--which was certainly symbolic, if not also a foreshadowing of the Levitical system instituted later, at the time of Moses. But, more significantly, of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who would one day be offered as the one and only all-sufficient sacrifice for the sin of the world! So, it doesn't take too much imagination to understand why God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice! But, according to Hebrews, it was Abel's faith--unlike Cain's which made all the difference!

Hebrews 11:4 also includes the thought that "through Abel's faith, though he is dead, he still speaks"! All of which makes the point that this life is not the "termination" of life for the people of God! But more importantly, is the idea of Abel's blood "crying out for justice"--against Cain! Requiring a penalty for sin! The author of Hebrews would later challenge his readers to "come to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel"! How interesting! While the blood of Abel "cries out for justice" and a penalty for sin, the blood of Christ satisfies God's justice, covers our wretchedness, provides "grace," and cleanses us from sin!

What a great lesson of faith and, of the example of Abel, who lived it out--and who was declared "righteous" by God! But the good news is that we too can be declared "righteous" and be "saved," not by our own works, but by simple faith in the finished work of Christ, the same "bloody" Gospel that was at work in the old and new testaments alike!

And so, we can conclude that while old testament saints, like Abel, were saved by grace though faith in looking forward to the coming of a Savior--a Redeemer--who would deal with the sin problem by "saving His people from their sin," we, as 21st century believers, can look backwards and receive that same salvation by trusting by faith in the now finished work of Christ on the cross!

Can we somehow relate this lesson to our own story of trusting and receiving, by faith, Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of our lives? And by committing to continuing a "walk by faith"?

On to another example of faith next week as we look back at the life of Enoch, in Hebrews 11:5-6, and Genesis 5:21-24. That would be the Enoch who, the Bible says, "walked with God"!

May God bless your week!

Lowell