

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



No. 163

October 2023

Be Fully Persuaded

Graeme Smith

Called To Be Saints

Colin Giles

**Notes from a Group Study
of the Epistle to the Hebrews**

BE FULLY PERSUADED

Graeme Smith

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1; NASB). The conviction, to be convinced, is to be fully persuaded (Romans 14:5).

Firstly, from Hebrews 10:23 *“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”* means that we have the faith; and secondly, the need for keeping the faith is because there is a possibility of losing it. And so I would just like to focus on some of the risks which come our way in terms of keeping the faith.

The first one is in Hebrews chapter 6, verses 4 to 6. In the King James version, *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame”*.

Those words, *“if they shall fall away”* indicate that for those Hebrew brethren there was a possibility that they could lose the faith. We are trying to strengthen ourselves spiritually so that we keep the faith. The challenge to do so becomes even more vibrant when we look at the qualifications of those who are enlightened but constrained by human nature. *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened”* could be emphasised because the words indicate that ‘once’ means there is only one chance, one opportunity of being enlightened. And from that situation, *“If they shall fall away, [it is impossible] to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame”*.

And looking a little more closely at those people who were once enlightened; they tasted of the heavenly gift, they were partakers of the holy spirit, they tasted the good word of God and experienced the powers of the world to come. What more could they have done? What other qualifications could they have achieved? Even with all those blessings they were still running the risk of falling away. And if they did fall away, there was no further recourse to repentance.

So, with that in mind, is there any chance of us falling away? At that time it wasn't just the Hebrews' faith at risk. In 2 Corinthians 2:4 also we read Paul's words, prompted by some misunderstanding among them, *“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you”*.

And skipping down to verse 11, *“Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices”*. From this we see that Satan is the root cause of our problem, and if we are aware of some of those devices, it stands to reason that we are then able to better resist the temptations he might give us to put our faith at risk.

That didn't apply only to the Hebrews and the Corinthians, but also to the Colossians. In Colossians 1:1-2; *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse”*.

Those words of caution are important *“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ”*. A saint is one who is sanctified, separated for the master's use. If you are a saint, what risk is there of you falling away? And *“faithful brethren”* ... are they different from saints? Although they're faithful, perhaps they haven't been consecrated to the full extent.

Paul continued, *“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”*. Further on in Colossians, in chapter 2 verse 4, Paul wrote, *“For this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words”*. There's the challenge. He went on in verse 8, *“... beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of man, after the movements of the world, and not after Christ”*. This exhortation was important then and is important to us today.

In our day and age, how much philosophy is there to challenge us?

Let's mention two philosophies which I've met as major challenges. The first one is the resurrection of the dead. Can you tell people about the resurrection of the dead? Are they prepared to listen to the idea of the resurrection of the dead? When we ponder that, we come to know just how significant and how complex the resurrection of the dead is.

First of all, where are the dead? Secondly, what is the meaning of the resurrection? How many will there be in the resurrection? *“... all that are in the grave shall hear his voice and come forth ...”* (John 5:28-29). *“All”*, which must mean everyone who has lived, is a concept that immediately, in my experience, invokes ridicule. Not just disbelief, but ridicule.

How on earth can the world – the world being the planet earth – how can the world possibly hold everyone? There are too many people. How are they going to be fed? We know the situation today, about the food shortages in many countries, so, when people reason it out, they see what the situation is in the world today, and their reasoning is that it's not possible, just not possible, that there can be a resurrection of the dead. And they cast ridicule on the idea.

Another doctrine though, on the other side of the argument, they will also cast ridicule on the attitude that you don't accept the evolution of the species. How can you not believe in the evolution of the species? Science now claims to have indelible proof that we have evolved from some lower order of living things.

So being confronted with those two things it requires us to be fully persuaded in our own minds, about the truth of those two things. First of all, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and that God has means to provide for everyone who will be raised, not just for those few who, at this stage are privileged to have three meals a day. There will be a restitution for the benefit of all who are raised. And secondly, regarding the evolution theory, we need to be fully convinced in our own minds about God's order in creation, and that we're not deceived by the theory of evolution through philosophy and vain deceit.

These are challenging concepts for a person who has no knowledge of the scriptures. What is the counter to these challenges in our time?

Well, the Christians in Berea had a solution. Those at Berea *"were more noble than those at Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"*. If they were searching the scriptures daily, surely, they would be fully persuaded in their own minds about God's creation of the human race, and about God's ability to raise all of those who are dead? We should be fully persuaded in our own mind that these things are true, and that to search the scriptures daily is very effective. Such an approach might not convince the gainsayer, but the first priority for us is not to be deceived.

But there may seem to be a problem here. The Bereans studied the scriptures every day, to determine whether these things were so, and that provided a great shield for them. But not everyone is given to studentship. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"for to one is given by the spirit, the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, by the same spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:8).

There are other gifts which God gave to various people, and although studentship is not mentioned, yet the Bereans undertook study and that's how they solved the problem. They *"studied the scriptures daily whether these things were so"*, in order to provide themselves with protection from being deceived by philosophy and vain deceit.

So then, what should we do?

When we study the scriptures we find that there comes about a wide variety of thought. And that brings out the importance of it being a matter for each individual to be fully persuaded in his or her own mind. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “... *if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not with thy meat for whom Christ died*” (Romans 14:15).

And a point there for us to note is that it's for those of us who have been privileged to study the scriptures, and have a good knowledge of them, to not grieve those who don't understand these deep things of God, such as the creation, the resurrection and the times of restitution.

A good example of how much difference there can be amongst people's understanding of scripture is given in Romans 14:5, where Paul wrote “*one man esteemeth one day above another*”. Isn't that the case today? Fifty years ago Sunday was the Lord's day, and nothing but essential things were done on Sunday. It was the Lord's day. And even then some adhered to that commandment and some didn't.

And then there are Seventh Day Adventists who esteem Saturday as being the proper day to observe the command. Thus one man esteems one day above another in all manner of activities, while some esteem “... *every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*”.

From this comes the question, 'How do we know when we're reaching the right understanding?' Thankfully there are the comforting words in Romans 8:16: “*The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*”. It's a personal matter, for each one of us, individually. And just as a congregation has many members, so likewise, God's chosen ones are different in their various ways. Our job is to be fully persuaded in our own minds because that's what God has given us to do.

So, “*Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*”. Those words deserve much contemplation. “*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*” (Ephesians 6:10-11). To stand against philosophy and vain deceit. That's what Paul wrote about and what is being considered here. We are fighting against the wiles of the devil, the wiles of Satan, and we should not be ignorant of his ways of philosophy and vain deceit, because he is active against us at every step of the way.

Therefore we need to *“put on the whole armour of God, ... For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”* (Ephesians 6:11-12). This is a list of the devices the devil uses. *“We wrestle not against flesh and blood”*. No, our fight is not physical since our temptations come from a higher level, and we need something to combat them. Our flesh and our blood won't combat non-physical things such as temptation from philosophy and deceit.

“For we wrestle ... against principalities”, such as the government of the day. When we search the scriptures they show that governments around the world are misguided concerning many issues. They are the *“influences, ... the rulers of the darkness of this world”*, wasteful and corrupt. And let us not forget that Satan is the god of this world, bringing *“spiritual wickedness in high places”*. Our fight against this spiritual wickedness, which includes the realm of our Christian faith, is a tremendous challenge. How do we decide whether anything is spiritual wickedness or an enlightened view of the scriptures? The only way is for us to examine it ourselves and be fully persuaded in our own minds.

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13). It's a big challenge, and we must not deny that it is a big challenge. If we are saints, separated unto the love of God, then it's a big battle, because Satan is the adversary. The defence of our faith lies in studying the scriptures, strengthened by James' advice to *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).

We need not rest in the promises from the Old Testament as God promised to David, *“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye”* (Psalm 32:8), because we have Jesus as our guide. Together with his example as our guide we have his words of wisdom expressed in the principle, *“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's”* (Mark 12:17).

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

If we take that promise to ourselves, each individually, we will keep our faith; and if we are then fully persuaded in our own mind, won't God keep us safe?

Of course he will.



CALLED TO BE SAINTS

Colin Giles

The subject of this article was prompted by a request to provide information about the word **'saint'**. As a start, Vines Expository Dictionary was consulted to provide a definition of the Greek word, which is 'hagios'. There it is defined as, 'fundamentally signifies separate (among the Greeks, dedicated to gods), and hence, in scripture in its moral and spiritual significance, separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God, sacred'. That definition may not help in the understanding of how sainthood is to be achieved or as a guide to an understanding of what it means, but it gives a starting point for searching further.

The next step was to examine the places where it is found in the Bible such that the usage of the word may give us some guidance as to its meaning. It is generally found at the beginning of Paul's pastoral letters.

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:1-2; NKJV).

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ that are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father" (Colossians 1:1-2).

The introduction to Ephesians uses very much the same words as that of Colossians: *"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 1:1-2). Of interest is the fact that although Paul used two terms, 'saints' and 'faithful brethren' he was referring to the same group of people.

At the beginning of Paul's letter to the Romans, he first established his own credentials before greeting the believers in verse 7; *"to all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"*.

In the phrase *"called to be saints"* in this reference, the words, 'to be' are in italics, which indicates that they were not in the original manuscript but have been supplied. They may be necessary for the meaning, and the word *"called"* indicates their position, since it suggests that those believers were consecrated or set apart by Paul's own special summons, brought within the

sphere and the range of his holy life. They were members of the new Messianic kingdom and shared in all its privileges. The apostle did not let them forget this but held it up before them to reflect upon.

The word “*saints*” is also used in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians and it adds to our understanding of the word. “*Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 1:2-3).

In this reference there are three descriptions of the believers that are linked. They are:

- them that are sanctified;
- called *to be saints*;
- all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From this we gather what being designated as a saint means: that is, they are sanctified and they call upon the name of Jesus Christ. As such, as in Philippians 4:21, they are to salute every saint in Christ Jesus. So we could say that the word “*saint*” applies to all believers who behave in that way, and does not apply to those considered to be of exceptional holiness or to those who had died and were characterised by exceptional acts of holiness.

Thus, it has the sense of separation to God and to the resultant state befitting those so called. This sainthood is not an attainment, it is a state into which God in grace calls believers, yet they are called to sanctify themselves, cleansing themselves from all defilement, forsaking sin, living a holy manner of life and experiencing fellowship with God in his holiness. The saints are spoken of as “*a holy temple*” (1 Corinthians 3:17) and the whole church as “*a holy priesthood*” (1 Peter 2:9).

There are other places, such as 2 Corinthians 1:1-2, where the word “*saints*” is used, but they do not add anything to what has been stated already, that the word “*saint*” is associated with being sanctified, vis. “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints that are in the whole of Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*”.

The earliest use of the word “*saint*” in the New Testament is in Acts 9:13 where Ananias was protesting to the Lord about being sent to visit Saul because he knew that Saul had letters from the High Priest to take any believers of “*this way*” (Acts 9:2) in Damascus back to Jerusalem. “*Now*

there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said unto him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus: for behold, he prayeth; and he hath seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight. But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name.” (Acts 9:10-14; KJV).

Note that in this text Ananias also connected the word “*saints*” with the definition of all that “*call upon thy name*”, that is Jesus’ name. Of passing interest is the earlier description of believers as of being of “*this way*”. This brings to mind such scriptures as John 14:6; “*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life*”, and Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 35:8; “*And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for the redeemed*”.

It is rather surprising that our Lord, during his three-and-a-half-year ministry, did not use the term “*saint*”, as that equivalent Hebrew word (kawdoshe) to the Greek word for saint is found in the Old Testament. It may be that Jesus still saw that those to whom he was sent to preach were of the chosen nation and could be classed as saints, a called-out company.

There are verses in the Old Testament that use the word “*saints*”:

“O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him” (Psalm 34:9).

“For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off” (Psalm 37:28).

“Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Psalm 50:5).

So far the definition of the meaning of the word ‘*saint*’ has been given, so what else is of interest to those so called? It could be said that this is all there is to know about the subject. Then it came to mind in researching this subject that there are many other words in the English Bible that are derived from the Greek word having the sense of sanctified. So following are some thoughts on those other words that are associated with the basic Greek word for ‘*saint*’. There are some English words that are of a different part of speech that help to round out the understanding of this subject, and reference to where they are used as it helps us to understand their meaning.

The words that come to mind are 'sanctification' (a noun), 'sanctify' (a verb) and 'sanctified' (past participle and adjective). The best verse that I can think of to use to explain sanctification is Hebrews 10:10, but I will also include verse 9 so as to explain the argument and so understand how the sanctification comes about. *"Then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*

It is the opening words of verse 10 that need to be understood first; that is, "by which will". *The answer is in verse 9 in the phrase, "Lo, I am come to do thy will", which is a quotation from Psalm 40:6-8, which is by David. The logic of these verses is that he, Jesus, takes away the sacrifices of slain animals that he may establish the doing of God's will. This was achieved when he offered the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:26) through his perfect obedience (Philippians 2:8). In this doing of God's will, which he accomplished, lies our sanctification. But we may still ask, 'How is this so? What is it in Christ's sacrifice that brings about our sanctification?' Sanctification is an individual matter, not something that is imposed on us.*

It would seem that we, along with David, need to come to the acknowledgement that God has given us the means of true obedience. It may also be a combination of a number of influences. In the prayer of Jesus for his disciples he said, "But now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth" (John 17:13-19).

There are a couple of lessons here. The disciples were sanctified by the truth, and also by the fact that our Lord had sanctified himself, which also served to sanctify his disciples.

Another word of interest is the word 'sanctuary' (hagion), which is used for structures. In Vines Dictionary it is defined as the adjective derived from 'holy' (hagios). It is used for those structures which are set apart to God. This word was applied to the Tabernacle in the wilderness. There were spaces within that structure that also were holy, which indicates the meaning of the inner sanctuary being the holy of holies.

That brings me to the next word that has sanctification as the underlying meaning of the word, and that is 'holy'. I will now quote some facts about 'holy' given in The New Bible Dictionary. The Old Testament applies the word 'holy' to human beings in virtue of their consecration to religious purposes, for example priests who were consecrated by special ceremonies of the Law Covenant. It was even applied to the whole of Israel as a people separated from other nations and consecrated to God. It was that relationship to God that made them a holy people, and in that sense it was the highest expression of the covenant relationship.

This idea is not altogether absent from the New Testament as in 1 Corinthians 7:13-16: *“And the woman that hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace. For how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O husband, whether thou shalt save thy wife?”*.

The unbelieving husband is sanctified by virtue of his relationship to the believing wife and vice versa. As the conception of holiness in the Old Testament progressed from ceremonial to reality, it took on a strong ethical significance as found in the New Testament. The following verses illustrate the application of this word, 'holy': *“But like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy”* (1 Peter 1:15-16).

This quotation is found in Leviticus 11:44-45 and 20:7. This statement presents a number of questions. Firstly, the statement by God that *“I am holy”*, was made by God about himself so the meaning relies on a statement about himself. Secondly, what does it mean that we shall be holy because of his nature?

To me the answer to both these questions depends on what God is. Because he is good and true and anything that he does is right, then the outcome of his plans can only be good. The kingdom to which we look forward has, as its defining fact, that of only righteousness dwelling in it, and from which all opposition will be cleansed. It will be totally sanctified; set apart for a holy purpose. His character demands that.



Notes from a Group Study Of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 11:1-7

- 1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**
- 2. For by it the elders obtained a good report.**
- 3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.**
- 4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.**
- 5. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.**
- 6. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.**
- 7. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.**

From consideration of many versions it was thought that a better rendition of verse 1 is *“faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”* (NAS), ‘conviction’ being a stronger word than ‘evidence’. The KJV has some merit in that *“substance”* conveys the idea of reality of things hoped for, as was found in one translation.

In verse 2 *“the elders”* are the pre-Christian faithful, and their *“good report”* was defined as ‘divine approval’.

Verse 3 shows that an understanding of the ages of creation can be accepted by faith, because there is only God’s word that explains that the physical worlds were called into existence by his command from something that was not visible. Their existence is obvious because we can see them, but understanding and accepting their creation is an act of faith. An NIV footnote to Genesis 1:1 has the point that to create is a divine activity, not a human one. From Colossians 1:16 and similar references it may be understood that while God gave the commands, that is, the spoken word, it was Christ, the Logos who carried out the instructions for the creation of all things. He used God’s power for that task (John 1:1-3).

From verse 4 it would seem that there was something better about Abel's sacrifice?'. Abel sacrificed animals while Cain sacrificed some of the "*fruit of the ground*" (Genesis 4:3-5). 1 John 3:12 reads "*Cain's ... works were evil, and his brother's righteous*". God said to Cain "*If thou doest well, shalt thou be not accepted?*" (Genesis 4:7); thus it seems that Cain knew what was right and the consequences of failing, but nevertheless failed in his duty, indicating that his heart condition was wrong. Abel's sacrifice was offered in faith and was accepted, and from that he was imputed to be righteous.

It was suggested that in this episode about Cain and Abel there is a hint of animal sacrifice being concerned in the forgiveness of sin, a principle that is involved in several of God's covenants, particularly the Law Covenant and the New Covenant.

The last clause in verse 4 notes that Abel's faith is an example to all believers. Although Abel was killed by his brother, he and his acceptable sacrifice are still spoken of, showing that a person's actions speak for themselves. This is emphasised by God's act of grace to Cain in putting a mark on him so that no-one would take revenge upon him.

Verse 5 explains that Enoch pleased God and was translated from life to death so that he would not experience dying, that is, he would not suffer the ravages of old age. He was taken as a relatively young man at 365 years of age, whereas his son Methuselah lived to be 969 years old. It is stated in verse 13 that all the men of faith mentioned in chapter 11 died faithful to God. Enoch, who made a prophecy of the Lord's coming, (Jude 14) was not found, which seems to mean that his grave was not marked so that he was not especially revered, a circumstance that is similar to the case of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

The statement in verse 6 is quite straightforward. Faith and obedience are essential to please God, and the way to him is through Jesus Christ. The rewards for faith and obedience granted to the elders of the Old Testament included blessings during their earthly lives, as shown by the accounts of Abraham, Job, David and others, who suffered through trials and then prospered. For the elders of verse 2, they are to be princes in all the earth (Psalm 45:16), whereas for believers in this age, they are to have a place in the kingdom. Jesus told the disciples, "*Fear not, little flock; for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*" (Luke 12:32). Another blessing is that God will not impute sin to them (Romans 4:7,8) because of faith in the new and living way to salvation. For all the faithful in every age, faith will bring fulfilment of the promise of future life through the resurrection.

In verse 7 Noah was convinced to do what God told him although he could not have understood the nature of the flood that was to come. Noah also built an immense vessel according to God's directions, on the assurance that it would save the lives of his family and the animals. Noah's actions highlighted the godlessness of the people of his day, and through his faith he was imputed with righteousness, and he became the heir to God's promise that he would not again destroy life on earth by flood (Genesis 9:11).

Noah's faith was demonstrated during the whole period of building the ark, although the duration of the work may not be determined closer than one hundred years, and it may be more than that, since he was 500 years old when "he begat Shem, Ham and Japheth" (Genesis 5:32), and he "was 600 years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth" (Genesis 7:6). His sons helped in the construction of the ark so its construction could not have started until they were old enough to be of assistance to their father.

Noah was the first person in scripture to be accredited with faith, although there were men of faith before him. He was moved by awe and reverence for God, not fear as in the KJV, a word which is not even mentioned in other translations.

For Abel, Enoch and Noah, faith was inspired by looking forward to the fulfilment of the promises of God. This aspect is confirmed by Revelation 13:8, which identifies Jesus as "*the lamb slain from the foundation of the world*". Faith brought them comfort during their lives, and they did not necessarily have to understand fully the plan God had for mankind. They believed even while they knew that they had to wait, and were encouraged by God acknowledging their faith, with special insights including mankind's need for reconciliation, and blessings both temporal and spiritual.

Justification by faith has always been God's principle for reconciliation.

Hebrews 11:8-16

8. *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

9 *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:*

10. *For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

- 11. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.**
- 12. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.**
- 13. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.**
- 14. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.**
- 15. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.**
- 16. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.**

Verse 8 points out that Abram went to Canaan but did not receive that land, although God had promised it to him as an inheritance. He left Ur, and though he did not know where God would direct him, God showed his favour to him by changing his name to Abraham (Genesis 17:5). He was looking for the city that God had made (verse 10). He and his family lived in tents during their wandering existence among the tribes that lived in Canaan (verse 9), but he owned none of it until he bought some land from the Hittites in order to bury Sarah (Genesis 23). Abraham and his family lived in the land of promise as strangers among the heathen, but he was aware that it was a temporary situation. Abraham's faith was proven by his obedience to God's command to journey from Ur to Canaan, and he remained faithful, although he did not inherit the land that God had promised to him.

Chapter 13 verse 14 shows that the apostles had no enduring city, that is, no permanent place of residence, but they were looking forward to one that was to come. And so was Abraham, who was aware of the coming kingdom, probably revealed to him by God, because Jesus said "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad*" (John 8:56).

Stephen, in his defence to the Jewish council (Acts 7:4,5) said that Abraham did not inherit the land that God had promised to him. However, it would seem that Abraham was motivated to obey God's instructions because of the prospect of reconciliation with God, rather than for the possession of Canaan. God's promise to him of a descendant who would bless all the families of the earth carried with it the assurance of salvation.

In verse 11 Sarah is credited with faith in that she knew that God would enable her to have the son that he had promised to her and Abraham. The NIV credits the faith to Abraham in this verse, but no other version agrees with this. It was noted that both Abraham and Sarah laughed at being told that they would have a son in spite of his age and her barrenness. The account in Genesis shows that she was taken to task for it, but he was not. Although they showed that they were taken aback by God's promise of an heir, Paul established their place as belonging to God's faithful ones.

The multitude that grew from them through Isaac and Jacob, according to the promise, was the Israelites. They became uncountable, just as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the beach cannot be counted (verse 12). The number of Abraham's descendants was compared to the stars only in Genesis 15:5, and to both stars and sand in Genesis 22:17, and also to the sand only in Hosea 1:10. Allusions to both stars and/or sand refer to the single point that their number would be uncountable. It has been suggested that the stars refer to the joint-heirs who gain the heavenly inheritance, and that the sand refers to those who gain the earthly inheritance. This cannot be the case because, firstly, the number of stars is uncountable, whereas the number of the joint-heirs is given as 144,000 (Revelation 14:3), and secondly, earth's final population will be finite with every person approved by Christ, the righteous judge.

That Abraham was considered "*as good as dead*" (verse 12) was thought to indicate only that he was nearing the end of his life, although he lived to the age of 175 years (Genesis 25:7).

Verse 13 groups all the faithful who lived before the time of the Israelites as having been made aware of God's promise of the kingdom to come. They were convinced that it would come to pass, and took it to heart by admitting that they were pilgrims on earth and strangers to the ways of the world. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah were faithful unto death and all believed in the promise of that better country, or city made by God, and looked forward to a time when there would be a righteous government, for all mankind. Thus, they looked forward to the establishment of a different country, or city (verse 14), and looked forward to a time when there would be a righteous government, for all mankind, where God would rule and be freely acknowledged as its ruler (verse 16), and so they were not concerned about returning to their own countries of origin and did not make any effort to do so (verse 15).

Since the heavenly inheritance is for the faithful of the gospel age, theirs is an earthly inheritance to be "*princes in all the earth*" (Psalm 45:16), and thus it is physical, not spiritual. Therefore, the heavenly country of verse 14 is to

come from heaven as the “*holy city*” of Revelation 21:2, that is, not a physical city but a new and righteous form of government, established by God through the work of Jesus Christ and the joint-heirs.

Because of the promise and of their belief in it, these faithful ones were not ashamed to acknowledge God as their heavenly father, and to demonstrate their allegiance to him. In turn, God showed that because they were faithful to him, he was not ashamed of them (verse 16).

Hebrews 11:17-22

- 17. *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,***
- 18. *Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:***
- 19. *Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.***
- 20. *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.***
- 21. *By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.***
- 22. *By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.***

In verse 17 the KJV has “*only begotten son*” and although the Diaglott has the same wording, while some other versions do not, it was thought that since Isaac was the son of promise and Ishmael was not, it was Isaac who was important to God’s promise of the seed to bless all the families of the earth (verse 18). On the question as to whether the figure in this verse referred to Isaac or to Christ, it was thought that according to other versions, Abraham received Isaac from the dead “*in a manner of speaking*”, or “*figuratively speaking*”. In order for the figure to refer to Christ, it would have been necessary for Abraham to have known about Christ’s resurrection. Abraham realised that God has the power to raise people, such as Isaac, from death, according to verses 10, 14, 15 and 16 of chapter 11. Jesus said that Abraham saw his day and was glad (John 8:56) showing that he looked forward to the Lord’s day as the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth, not necessarily that Abraham knew about Christ’s death and resurrection.

The account of Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22) was considered, and although from verses 5 and 8 of Genesis 22 Abraham may have had some hope that Isaac would be spared, it was pointed out by Paul here in verse 19 of Hebrews 11 that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son in spite of the promise that the seed to bless all nations was to come through Isaac, because he “*accounted that God was able to raise him up, even from*

the dead". Abraham's awareness of the resurrection is astonishing in the light of the situation that no-one had been raised from the dead before Abraham's time.

In verse 20 Isaac blessed both his sons, passing the birthright to Isaac because Esau had despised it (Genesis 25: 34). Isaac's blessings on them concerned things to come, which were the seed that would bless all the families of the earth, and that he had been told that the elder brother, Esau, would serve the younger brother (Genesis 25:23).

In verse 21 Jacob blessed Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 48:13,14), accepting them as his sons in place of their father, Joseph, apparently to make up to 12 the tribes of the nation of Israel to occupy the land of Canaan, since the tribe of Levi was not given any land of its own.

Similarly, in verse 22, by faith in God's guidance, and his promise to the Israelites, Joseph knew that, although it would be a long time in the future that the nation would leave Egypt, he gave instructions for his remains to be taken with them to the land of promise.

Hebrews 11:23-29

- 23. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.***
- 24. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;***
- 25. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;***
- 26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.***
- 27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.***
- 28. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.***
- 29. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.***

In verse 23, it would seem that Moses' parents had enough faith to save him from Pharaoh's edict to kill the Hebrew baby boys. That same faith was shown by Moses when he chose to leave Pharaoh's palace (verse 24) to live and suffer with the Israelites, the people of God (verse 25).

The question was asked from verse 25, ‘What is meant by “*the pleasures of sin for a short time*”? Phillips’ version has “*enjoying the temporary advantages of an alliance with a sinful nation*”. It was commented that Moses would have found himself in the lap of luxury in Pharaoh’s court, while he knew that his own people were being overworked and starved. Also, he would have realised that the Egyptians were not God-fearing people, but were idol worshippers, and very cruel taskmasters. It was thought that these factors were involved in the meaning of “*the pleasures of sin*”, in the sense that while Moses lived in Pharaoh’s household he was condoning its sinfulness.

From verse 26 Moses understood through his faith that the reward for serving God for the sake of the anointed one to come, who he could not see except by faith, was far greater than the earthly treasures of Egypt. His conviction that a deliverer would come, as promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, made him unafraid of Pharaoh and strengthened him for the task to which God had called him through the burning bush (Exodus 3:4-6).

In verse 27 the phrase “*saw him who was invisible*” was thought by some to be a reference to the “*eye of faith*” (Matthew 13:13-16) on the part of Moses, who knew that God was with him throughout his life. Others thought it to refer to Moses being permitted to see God’s “*back parts*” (Exodus 33:23) as his glory passed by Moses on the mountain.

From the Diaglott rendition of verse 27, Moses “*was strong as seeing him who is invisible*”, that is, being aware of and convinced of God’s power in his experiences of the burning bush (Exodus 3:2) and the confrontation on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28-30), which strengthened him for his position as the leader of the Israelites.

The night of the Passover (verse 28) was discussed. Those events show that the faith of Moses and the obedience of the Israelites to use the lamb’s blood saved them from the angel of death. The crossing of the Red Sea (verse 29) also demonstrated the faith of the nation in Moses’ leadership and in the power of God revealed to them during the plagues, and in the manner of how Pharaoh’s men lost their lives in the sea.

Hebrews 11:30-40

30. *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

31. *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

- 32. And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:**
- 33. Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,**
- 34. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.**
- 35. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:**
- 36. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:**
- 37. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;**
- 38. (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.**
- 39. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:**
- 40. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.**

The fall of the walls of Jericho (verse 30) was brought about by God so that Joshua and his soldiers could take the city, and their faith was tested in that they had to obey God's command for seven days before the walls fell. It was Joshua, not Moses, who met "*the captain of the Lord's host*" (Joshua 5:14-15).

Verse 31 refers to Rahab and how she had protected the two Israelite spies. Because of her faith she and her household were spared when the walls of Jericho collapsed. Although the walls were five metres thick, they crumbled, but Rahab's house in the wall was not destroyed. She later became a proselyte of the nation of Israel.

A comment was made that God seemed to be cruel to allow a whole city and its inhabitants to be overthrown. However, the record shows that all the cities which Joshua destroyed were filled with idol-worshippers, and for the Israelites to occupy the land of Canaan its cities had to be emptied of godless people. His plan allowed this extreme measure because it also included a resurrection for those who were killed to fulfil his promise to the Israelites.

It was commented that the references in verses 30 to 32 are to the faith of Joshua and his soldiers, to the faith of Rahab, of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, David, Samuel and the prophets; and that their faith was shown by their actions.

They obtained promises, as recorded in verse 33, according to their needs and their circumstances in each individual case. It was suggested that they may have been aware of the promise of salvation to come through the seed of Abraham, but not necessarily so. Through the power of God they subdued nations (Joshua), administered justice (David and Solomon), shut the mouths of lions (Daniel); and from verse 34, quenched the violence of fire (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego), escaped the edge of the sword (Elijah and Elisha), were made strong (Samson) and were mighty in battle (Jonathan and David).

The story of each individual referred to was recounted briefly during the study.

The expression "*weakness turned to strength*" in verse 34 is a general case in that "*the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities*" (Romans 8:26), of which there are many examples in the Old Testament, such as Elijah, as well as the physical example of Samson.

From verse 35, examples of "*Women (who) received their dead raised to life again*" included the widow of Zarephath, whose son was raised by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-23), the Shunamite woman whose son was raised by Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37), the widow of Nain whose son was raised by Jesus (Luke 7:11-15) and Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus.

(Also, an account of belief in the resurrection was presented in a reference from the Maccabees.)

Further testimonies to faith are in the examples of those who were tortured, even to death, refusing to renounce their faith in order to be released from torture, because they believed in "*a better resurrection*".

Whereas those raised to life in the past were still subject to life's problems and illnesses, and died and while it is not defined here, the better resurrection was thought to be to perfection and eternal life in the kingdom of God.

It was suggested that greater suffering might bring greater reward, but the comparison between being raised to life and the resurrection is within the verse, and it is faith that is rewarded with the better resurrection. Also, it seems that there is no implication that after the resurrection there will be any difference in rank in the kingdom associated with the amount, or degree, of suffering or service.

However, Jesus' indication that the lowliest servant in the kingdom will be greater than John the Baptist, of whom he said there was no greater prophet

(Luke 7:28), and the parable of the friends of the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-10) together with the parables of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and of the servants given money by the nobleman (Luke 19:12-26) seem to indicate that there will be different responsibilities for those raised to the better resurrection.

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 15:42-53 indicates that some will be raised as human beings, while others will be raised to become spirit beings. It appears that those who died before Christ's resurrection are of the first case, and they will become the "*Princes in all the earth*" of Psalm 45:16; while those who seek the "*heavenly country*" of verse 16 will be of the latter case, the "*spiritual house*" of 1 Peter 2:5. After the resurrection there will also be "*a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people and tongues*" (Revelation 7:9) which are perhaps "*the dead, both small and great*" standing before God (Revelation 20:12).

Verses 36 and 37 make a generalisation concerning all of the prophets, Jeremiah being a typical example. Some of them were preserved through danger while others were not, but verse 39 shows that in all cases it was their faith that was most important, that is, faith in God's promises and in the resurrection, and from its beginning, faith is the focus of this chapter. Examples of those who suffered different means of affliction during Old Testament times were not listed during the study, except for Naboth who was put to death unjustly (1 Kings 21), and Obadiah, who hid a hundred prophets in caves (1 Kings 18:4).

Because of their faith and worship of God they deserved proper recognition and even honour, but did not receive it because the world was an evil, faithless place, and not worthy of them (verse 38). They held on to their faith for the sake of the honour to come, which was included in the promise that they did not receive in their day.

Comparing verse 33, noting that they "*obtained promises*", with verse 39, which says that they "*received not the promise*", seems to offer a contradiction. However, in verse 33 it says that they "*received promises*", but they did not receive what was promised. What was received at that time was according to their needs and circumstances, whereas the promise of verse 39 is of the resurrection (verse 35), the better country of verse 16, those promises the faithful "*having seen them afar off*" (verse 13).

In verse 39, the "*good report*" was an assessment made by God in the light of their faith. During the Gospel Age, believers are also trying to receive a good report through their faith, even though they are under a different covenant.

In verse 40 it appears that the promise to us is different from the promise to them, because they have to wait for us in order that they can be made perfect. In this verse, defining the identity of “*some better thing*” and “*perfect*” provided much discussion.

One thought was that the better thing was the New Covenant, since Paul had shown in the preceding chapters that it has a better High Priest (chapters 3 to 8), a better mediator, is based on better promises (Hebrews 8:6) and a better sacrifice (chapters 9 and 10). The New Covenant is for all mankind; all are in debt to Jesus with respect to salvation and judgement, thus both “*they*” and “*us*” of verse 40 will be made perfect collectively through it.

Another thought was that the faithful ones of all ages were and are looking for the better country of verse 16, and that better country will be God’s righteous government in his kingdom. That development was promised from olden times and has been made possible through the New Covenant, so that the rewards of faith flow from it.

Those rewards will be different for those under the Old Covenant from those under the New Covenant. There will be a resurrection for “*all that are in the graves*” (John 5:28,29) and the order of the resurrection will start with “*the dead in Christ*” who “*shall rise first*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16) to be “*joint-heirs with Christ*” (Romans 8:17). This is the reward of the “*high calling of God in Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 3:14) which is the better thing of verse 40 prepared for us.

The promises and rewards for all the faithful of all ages has to wait until the completion of the church of God at the end of the gospel age, as is suggested by 1 Peter 1:10-11. Then all the other features of the restitution of all things will follow according to God’s intention.

The evidence from these references supports the inference from verse 40 that there will be a delay before “*they*” can be made perfect, that is a delay until perfection is achieved with “*us*”.

It had been found that the word “*perfect*” (telios in the Greek) is better rendered as ‘complete’ or ‘whole’ or ‘mature’ in most instances. Perfection for all people will be firstly their resurrection to life made available through the terms of the New Covenant. According to 1 Corinthians 15 that will be to eternal life as spirit beings for the joint-heirs, while for the rest of mankind it will be as human beings, and that will include the faithful ones who were not under the New Covenant, so that they can go on to become the “*Princes in all the earth*”. They did not know, as we do, the details of how salvation would come; and therefore will have to be taught the full message before

taking up their positions of responsibility in the kingdom. Therefore, they will receive the reward for their faith, not together with, but after us. The inference may be taken further in that their perfection will depend upon the completion and action of the church.

Thus, the better thing for us is the knowledge of the heavenly calling made through the New Covenant, and for the overcomers the reward of joint-heirship; not the New Covenant itself.

The “ye” of chapter 12 verse 22 was identified with the “us” of chapter 11 verse 40, in which verse there is a double negative, viz: “*without us they shall not be made complete*”, from which it may be drawn that with us they shall be made complete. That completion may be together in time, although the church will be raised first. Or it may be through us, the overcomers of Revelation 3:21. They looked forward to the promise to be fulfilled, not knowing that it would come through a new covenant, and that God’s plan could not go ahead until the end of the gospel age and the completion of the church, the people he is taking out for his name.

The New Covenant is for all people, but the position of the ancient worthies, the “*elders*” of verse 2, made available through it, is different from the position of the faithful of the gospel age. This does not mean that the latter are better than the former. God’s intention is to bring salvation and perfection to all who will accept its terms, and the better thing that the New Covenant offers is the high calling, which is available only through Christ to the very few chosen during the gospel age. The New Covenant is the crux of both aspects of the plan, for us now, for them at the end of this age, and for all mankind during the kingdom age.

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS

The New Covenant News is compiled by an editor responsible to the New Covenant Fellowship.

The thoughts expressed do not necessarily represent the understandings of all the members of the group, and readers are requested to heed the words:

“*Prove all things*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Email: info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au

Website: www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au