

## 11. Jesus, Author and Perfecter of Our Faith(1Q 2022— In These Last Days: The Message of Hebrews)

**Biblical Material:** Heb.10:35–39; Rom. 1:17; Hebrews 11, Josh. 2:9–11, Heb. 12:1–3.

### Quotes

- “What is the foundation of your faith?” If asked that question, a Seventh-day Adventist today might respond, “Jesus Christ, of course!” or “The Bible,” or even “Our special lifestyle.” But our earliest pioneers would no doubt declare, “The sanctuary and the 2300 days!” *P. Gerard Damsteegt*
- There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. *SDA Fundamental Beliefs, #23.*
- If the work of God could be comprehended by reason, it would no longer be wonderful, and faith would have no merit if reason provided proof. *Pope Gregory I*
- And the Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And he was buried and rose again; the fact is certain because it is impossible. *Tertullian*
- Of course, say the true believers, religion rests on faith, not intellect. But if all you need to do to prove I am wrong is to have faith that you are right, then no discussion is possible. *Philip D. Harvey*
- The deepest sin against the human mind is to believe things without evidence. *Thomas H. Huxley*

### Questions

What does faith really mean? Does Hebrews 11:1 encourage “blind faith”? What role does evidence play in our faith? Is it true that if we were sure, there would be no need for faith? What is our assurance based on? What generates faith—is it some emotional experience, is it some cold dogma? How do we put these issues together and have the right understanding?

### Bible summary

Heb.10:35–39 tells us to hold onto our trust and confidence in God. “In the good news God is revealed as good and right, trustworthy from start to finish. As Scripture says, ‘Those who are right with God live by trusting him.’” Rom. 1:17 FBV. Hebrews 11 details heroes of the Old Testament who showed their trust in God, including some surprising ones. Josh. 2:9–11 is Rahab’s testimony. Because of the example of those who trusted God as recorded in Hebrews 11, “We should keep on looking to Jesus, the one who begins and completes our trust in God.” Hebrews 12:2 FBV.

### Comment

Hebrews 11 is the great “faith” chapter. Past examples of those who have placed their full confidence in God are presented. Yet as we review these examples, some questions come to mind over the specifics of the lives of these “faith pioneers.” It’s clear that not everything they ever did could be commended as great examples of trust in God—for example Abraham’s

identification of his wife as his sister, Noah's drunkenness, Jacob's duplicity, Joseph's arrogance, Moses' anger, and so on. The important aspect that Paul is emphasizing is their confident trust in a trustworthy God. It is not some mysterious thing we have ("faith") that does anything, it is the actions of this trustworthy God. Our trust is what allows him to act in our lives.

Some of the examples are surprising. "By faith the prostitute Rahab" is hardly a phrase we would want to use as a contemporary example in a church bulletin! What about Jephthah—is he being commended for human sacrifice? We need to understand what faith really is. Is it some mystical component that we possess? Is it some body of truth ("the faith")? Is it misplaced confidence? We are frequently called to "have faith," but what should it be based on?

*Faith is evidence-based trust.* Without the evidence, we would be foolish to trust. But without the trust, we are on our own, hopeless and helpless. The important lines are at the end of the chapter. Paul is making the point that despite all their trusting confidence in God, they did not receive the totality of God's promises. The future leads on, and God will eventually fulfill all his promises to those who place their trust in him. This is not pie in the sky by and by; rather it is the completion of the trust relationship that has begun—full presence of the Lord as he truly is, forever. God's assurance of ultimate perfection (v.40) is to be with all of us—see Rev. 21:3.

Some people believe in "blind faith," and think that this is superior to trust based on evidence, as a couple of the quotes above show. According to this view, faith is absolutely blind, and should be defined as belief in what you cannot prove, cannot argue for, cannot give any logic for. More than this, such blind faith should be the more valued because it is blind, that there are no logical reasons for belief—assuming the idea that if you have reasons, you don't need faith.

The problem with such blind faith is that it can be used to defend any belief or action. As critics of faith clearly point out, if there are no reasons, you can blindly accept by faith whatever you want, and there can be no argument, since all is accepted on faith. Says noted critic Richard Dawkins, "Blind faith can justify anything. If a man believes in a different god, or even if he uses a different ritual for worshipping the same god, blind faith can decree that he should die—on the cross, at the stake, skewered on a Crusader's sword, shot in a Beirut street, or blown up in a bar in Belfast." As a consequence, many reject such a frightening prospect. In the words of Kurt Vonnegut, "Say what you will about the sweet miracle of unquestioning faith, I consider a capacity for it terrifying and absolutely vile." We too should reject such blind faith, and trust in the God who has shown how trustworthy he truly is.

### **Ellen White comments**

The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is an intelligent faith.... Christ would have His followers use their intellect in spiritual matters... He desires them to think deeply. {ST July 28, 1898}.

He [God] gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence.... God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe. {5T 675}.

You should walk by faith, not by feeling. We do not want a sensational religion; but we want a religion founded on intelligent faith. {RH April 9, 1889}.

Faith rests not on certainty, but upon evidence. {16MR 112}

We may have an intelligent faith; we may not only say we believe, but we may in meekness and confidence be able to define what we believe, and why we believe as we do. We should exercise living faith, not a blind credulity. {ST March 31, 1890}.