

## **Week Two: Hebrews 11:3-4**

### **Day One: By Faith, We Get It**

#### **Key Verse**

Hebrews 11:3, “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

Hebrews 11:3 begins, “By faith, we understand.” There are things, such as a God’s activity as Creator, that we never understand apart from faith. We can spend a lifetime trying to understand, only to be disappointed. The natural man, operating without faith, tries to learn what he can about the origin of the “worlds.” But until he has faith, what he thinks he knows about the subject will be flawed and incomplete. Such flaws are what give rise to theories of evolution and naturalistic philosophies. Believers understand certain realities through faith that we simply cannot understand without it.

The word “to understand” here in Hebrews 11:3 means “to perceive with the mind, to ponder, consider, understand.” I’ve used a modern expression, to “get it.” What is something you have “understood” by faith that you wouldn’t have understood any other way? It may be something you tried to understand before coming to faith in Christ, but it never made clear sense until after you had done so.

As you go through this study right now, what are some things that you wish you understood better or even at all.

The Scripture says, “the worlds were framed by the Word of God” (Hebrews 11:3). This is a recurring theme in Hebrews. Hebrews 1:2 says, “[God] has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” The Bible consistently affirms that God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The Bible also affirms the role of Christ in creation. For example, John 1:1-3, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

It is likely that there is a play on words here. The universe came into existence by the spoken word of God as He said, “Let there be light,” for example. It is also true that God the Son, who is called the Word of God, formed and framed the worlds. Interestingly, the Bible teaches that all things were not only created by Christ, but all things were created for Christ as well. Colossians 1:16, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:”

Two important observations come out of this truth that God framed the universe. You and I are here not as the result of random processes, but as the result of the intent and purpose of God Himself. He wanted you here. He wanted me here. Therefore, we are here. We exist for His glory. Pursuing the knowledge of Him as our Creator is the highest good anyone can pursue. Life has purpose and meaning, because it is all oriented toward Him.

Another significant implication of God's activity in creation is that it proves "nothing is too difficult for [Him]." Jeremiah 32:17 says, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You." Think about it. If God can speak this universe into existence, then what can He not do?

Can you think of other implications from the reality that God framed the universe?

### **Takeaways:**

- Faith gives us understanding of the mysteries of God's Word.
- Nothing is too difficult for God.

### **Prayer Points:**

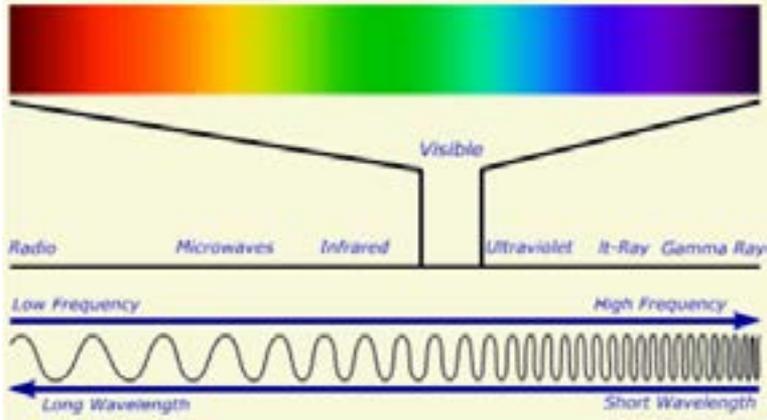
- God, thank You for giving me understanding through faith.
- I also thank You for Your creation, and I confess You as the great Creator.

# Day Two: The Potency of the Word of God

## Key Passage: Hebrews 1:2

“[God] has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”

I want you to read a verse from the first chapter of Genesis. It is a rather familiar verse, but I want you to take special note of it this time. Specifically, I want you to note the remarkable potency of these words: “Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). Working from a literal interpretation of the Bible, it is reasonable to assume that “light” here refers, not to sunlight (which was created day four), but to light itself.



It is reasonable to assume that this complex range is what God created in two Hebrew words, “yehi ‘owr.”

Consider now the absolute chasm between you and God in specific terms of the potency of your words. It is true that the tongue of mankind has the power of life and death (Proverbs 18:21), but God's words are far more potent. Is there anything at all that you can simply say "let there be this or that" and the thing comes into being - literally from nothing at all? You and I cannot speak a single thing, however great or however small, into existence. This is what we call creation ex nihilo - out of nothing. You may recall the story of how Jesus calmed the storm. Mark 4:41 says, "And they [His disciples] feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" The wind and the sea do not obey us. We cannot command the next thunderstorm to dissipate. As the Creator of the wind and sea, Jesus can command their obedience. As Hebrews 1:3 makes clear, there is potency to the words of God. As potent as our words may be, they cannot compare to the potency of God's words. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God," says Hebrews 11:3.

Now, holding in your mind the absolute potency of God's words, take note of what we read in Romans 4:17b, "God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did." In Romans 4, Paul's example is when God declared that childless Abraham in his old age would become the father of a great nation and descendants as numerous as grains of sand. Indeed, God "calls those things which do not exist as though they did."

A significant theme in Hebrews 11 is the promise of God, which has yet to be fulfilled. We read of those who died without having received the promises. And we also read of the potency of the words of God. When God speaks, things happen. He brought light itself into existence in two words. So, to use Paul's example in Romans 4, when God told the centenarian Abraham, "I will give you descendants as numerous as the sand and make of you a great nation," it wasn't all that different from when He stepped out on the edge of nothingness and declared, "Let there be light." He was calling those things which do not exist as though they did. Romans 4:18 tells us how Abraham responded, "[Abraham, the father of us all,]who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.'" He received the promise because of his faith. Faith is the key to receiving the promises of God. To understand God supreme and as Creator, by faith we understand this. By faith we "get it."

We begin to see how this all fits together. We are operating with the vision of God, walking by faith and not sight, when we too can begin to call those things which do not exist as though they did as an echo of His promises. We start to see with the eyes of faith. Our faith in the words of God is the evidence of things unseen and the substance of things hoped for. I love the line in Romans 4:18, "[Abraham], contrary to hope, in hope believed." His faith was the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen.

In today's verse, Hebrews 11:3, Creation is an illustration of this idea. We did not witness God creating the universe; but by faith, we understand. Faith is the evidence of things unseen.

The work of God in creation is a vitally important doctrine. It is a picture of everything else God does, His deliverance, His provision, His power, His sovereignty, His omniscience.

Hebrews 11:3 concludes, “the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” The things that are seen are inferior to the things which are unseeable. Last week we made two lists - things that are temporary and things that are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:18b, “For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” What we are reading in Hebrews has implications for all of life in reorienting our perspectives.

May we not limit our own awareness to things that we can see, things that appear to be true, things for which you have overwhelming evidence. Commit yourself in prayer to the will and ways of God, who sees what you cannot see and knows what you cannot know.

### **Takeaways:**

- God formed all there is with His words. His words have matchless potency.
- The unseen is superior to the seen.

### **Prayer Points:**

- Thank you for the beauty of Creation. Thank you for loving me, even as the vast Creator of the universe.
- With You, God, as my helper, I commit myself to Your will and Your ways.

## Day Three: The Role of Sacrifice in a Believer's Life

The Old Testament sacrificial system was an elaborate system with careful ceremonial and procedural instructions on doing it right. It is easy to see how burdensome such a system could be. The animals sacrificed had to be spotless. In the time of Jesus, this fact led people to wait and purchase their animal for sacrifice at the Temple itself, which then led to Temple officials profiteering off of worshipers that knew no better. As the writer to the Hebrews makes clear throughout the letter, the Old Testament sacrificial system was never intended to do away with sin completely. All such sacrifices ever accomplished was to stay the hand of God's wrath until the next time. Sin was still looming, and wrath would come if the sacrifices ever lapsed.

Then comes Jesus. Hebrews 9:11, "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. (12) Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. (13) For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, (14) how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (15) And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

In Hebrews 11:4, we read, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” It is interesting that the practice of sacrifice predated the Law of Moses. In fact, we find some sort of sacrifice practice going on here in the first family.

Genesis 4:1-5

1. Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.”
2. Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.
3. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.
4. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,
5. but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

The fact that sacrifice and offerings occurred in the first family shows that it was not exclusive to the Mosaic Law. Even Noah (Genesis 8:20) offered burnt offerings many years before Moses was even born. So the practice of sacrifice transcends the Law. What role should the practice have in the life of the believer.

We no longer need a sacrifice for sin. The blood of Jesus was sufficient, glory to God! As Hebrews 10:12 says, “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;” So if Jesus is all the sacrifice we need for our sins, then do we as believers even need to engage in sacrifice at all?

And the answer is yes. We do not engage in sacrifice for any of the same reasons - to stay the wrath of God, to purge our sins. As the hymn says, "Jesus paid it all." There is nothing left for us to pay with regard to our salvation and acceptance into the beloved. As the hymn continues, "all to Him I owe." See, we engage in sacrifice as our "reasonable service." And the sacrifice in which we engage is not animal sacrifice. It is the sacrifice of ourselves. Read Romans 12:1-2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

How would you answer someone who asked, "How much should I give to God?"

Questions about how much we should sacrifice for God or even give to God can mislead us, because God is not after a certain percentage of the whole, when it comes to you and your substance. He wants it all. He wants you to hold nothing back. He wants you to lay every single everything on the altar at His disposal. That is what it means to be a living sacrifice. We should endeavor by the enabling of His Holy Spirit to reciprocate the level of sacrifice that He has made for us in our response.

Connect all of this to what the apostle Paul said in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Does the Bible present to us a picture of God the Father carefully measuring how much He will do for us, how much He will sacrifice for our salvation, and drawing a line between what He will and will not do? Not at all. The Bible presents our loving Father who spared absolutely nothing. What level of generosity and sacrifice is altogether appropriate as a worshipful response to God’s disposition toward us? This is the role of sacrifice in the believer’s life. And it is not something we are commanded to do under penalty of death or eternal damnation, but something that naturally grows out of a redeemed heart.

### **Takeaways:**

- The sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for our sins was sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God for all eternity. Jesus’ blood wipes out our sin permanently. We no longer need to make animal sacrifices. to stay the wrath of God.
- God calls us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, fully surrendered to His will, as our reasonable service.

### **Prayer Points:**

- Thank you God, for the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Jesus. Thank you that we no longer have to present sacrifices each year to postpone punishment for our sins. Thank you for sending Jesus to be our sacrifice.
- Enable me by Your Spirit to present my body a living sacrifice. May Your perfect will be done in my life as it is in Heaven.

# Day Four: He Was Righteous

Key Verse:

Hebrews 11:4, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts....”

How would you explain the concept of righteousness to someone?

Today’s key verse in our study of Hebrews 11, says that Abel (whose Hebrew name means “breath”) “obtained witness that he was righteous.” The concept of righteousness includes the ideas of God’s approval and a judicial innocence. A righteous person is one who is just, one who abides by the will of God. You and I cannot acquire righteousness through keeping the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, nor by offering animal sacrifices. We are declared righteous only through the finished work of Christ on the cross. This declaration of righteousness is called justification.

The method of acquiring righteousness was a hotly debated issue in the first century AD in some circles. Philippians 3:9 says succinctly, “not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”

For readers who feel a pull to depart from Christ and return to their previous system of animal sacrifice and works-based righteousness, you can see how this is an important point. Abel, in the earliest days of creation, was declared righteous by God...by faith. This transcends the Mosaic Law and supports the principle that righteousness comes to you and me the same way - by faith. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us how this takes place, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." This is sometimes called the great exchange. We give Christ our sin, and He gives us God's righteousness - a beautiful picture. In the space below, briefly recount your own story or testimony of how you exchanged your sinfulness for the very righteousness of God in Christ. You can use the additional notes at the end of this week's devotions if you need more space.

Remember that we said to understand how a particular word is used in the Bible, look into how it is used elsewhere in the same chapter, book, and other writings of the same human author. Hebrews 11:7 says Noah “became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” Hebrews 11:33 refers to many other examples of saints that the chapter does not have space to name who worked righteousness through faith.

In Bible study, we have something called the principle of first mention. The first time that a person, concept, or place is mentioned usually introduces a significant insight into its meaning and purpose. The first mention of righteousness by name in the Bible is in Genesis 15:6, “And he [Abram] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (See also Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6.) The faith-righteousness connection is strongly attested in Hebrews 11 and all of Scripture (especially Galatians and Romans).

In our day, how do you find people pursuing righteousness? Is it through religious ritual? Is it through self-reformation and self-help programs? Do you know examples of how futile the pursuit of righteousness by good works can be?

I appreciate the observations of John H. Sailhamer in his Commentary on Genesis:

“The author’s purpose is to use the narrative of Cain and Abel to teach an important lesson on worship. What kind of worship is pleasing to God? Worship pleasing to God is worship that springs from a pure heart. How does this narrative teach a lesson about a pure heart? It does so by allowing the reader to see, behind the scenes, Cain’s response to God’s rejection. In his response we see the kind of heart that lies behind an unaccepted offering. Cain’s worship is unacceptable. Abel’s worship is acceptable. The difference between the two offerings is not drawn out by the author.”

As we’ve seen, we do not know every detail about the Genesis account where God gave preference to Abel’s sacrifice.

Interestingly, Hebrews 11 gives us information about the story that we do not have elsewhere. What we do see in Hebrews 11 is that Abel had faith. We know that Abel pleased God, and we will soon read that it is impossible to please God without faith. In addition to Sailhamer’s observations above about a pure heart, faith likely played a role in God’s acceptance.

How have you seen the faith and righteousness connection work in your own life and the lives of others? Can you give testimony to the truth that righteousness does not come from fulfilling the Old Testament Law but by simply trusting in Christ for salvation?

## **Takeaways:**

- The biblical concept of righteousness means a right standing before God; it means to be approved by God.
- Righteousness comes only through faith and never through works.

## **Prayer Points:**

- Thank you, God for showing me the truth concerning righteousness. Thank you for imputing your righteousness to me through Christ.
- Use me, Lord, to encourage others to pursue and find the righteousness which comes by faith.

## Day Five: Week 2 Review and Legacy

Key Verse:

Hebrews 11:4b, “God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

Long after we have gone to heaven, our testimonies and legacies on earth can continue to influence others. Abel may be the strongest example of this principle since he was in the very first immediate human family.

This influence can be direct or indirect. For example, Adrian Rogers, one of the best-known Southern Baptist preachers of the twentieth century, died in 2005. The ministry he founded called “Love Worth Finding” still has a broadcast on many Christian radio stations and online. His books, recorded sermons, articles, and more continue to speak, though he himself is in heaven.

This influence can be indirect. You make your mark on someone else, and after you have passed away, that person still carries the torch for the glory of God. I will refer several times in this study to a man named Bradley Price, whom God used significantly in my life. Dr. Price influenced me to be a visionary leader, to see what others do not see, to believe God for more than the mundane and the trivial. Even though he is in heaven, I still feel his influence and can hear that voice and see that face. When I repeat certain phrases or ideas that he instilled in me, people are hearing from him indirectly through me. He, being dead, still speaks.

Something interesting about Abel's example is that the Bible tells us that God testified of his gifts. Through God's own testimony concerning Abel, Abel, being dead, yet speaks. The word "testifying" here is the same word in verse 2, where the Bible says, "the elders obtained a good testimony." It is also used in the next verse speaking of Enoch's testimony. Abel and Enoch are examples of what the writer said in verse 2. In Abel's case, God's own testifying about Abel establishes his legacy. Earlier in verse 4, the Bible said, "Abel...obtained witness that he was righteous." This witness that he obtained came from God. God is the one who declared Abel righteous. This is justification - God declaring someone righteous. This theme of righteousness by faith is prevalent in Hebrews 11. God saw fit to put the story of Abel into His everlasting Scriptures, establishing forever Abel's witness and testimony that he was righteous. Even though Abel has been dead for ages (the first human being on record to die), being dead, still he speaks.

Will people be talking about us a decade after we are gone? A century? Longer? If so, what will they be saying? What legacy are you leaving? When you think about your career, your family, your choices, do you see a trajectory that serves as an example to the upcoming generation? If someone used your life as a pattern, where would your influence take that person?

## **Takeaways:**

- We can have influence even after we pass away.
- What God says about us is what truly matters.

Look back over the takeaways from Days 1-5 this week, and write here the single biggest takeaway you have gotten from the study this week.

## **Prayer Points:**

- God, help me leave a legacy that points people to you. Even if I haven't been leaving such a legacy, help me start today.
- Lord, thank you for those whose legacy I follow. Thank you for their influence which has inspired me to follow you.
- Prepare my heart for next week's discoveries in this study.