

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 316 – November 12th – Hebrews 11:1-16

Works frequently referenced in these notes on Hebrews

Bruce, FF	<i>The Epistle to the Hebrews</i> , Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964
Guthrie, Donald	<i>Hebrews</i> (Tyndale Commentary), IVP, Leicester, 1983
Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe	<i>A Commentary on The Epistle to the Hebrews</i> , Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977
Westcott, BF	<i>The Epistle to the Hebrews</i> , Macmillan, London, 1889

Hebrews 11

"The writer is well aware that the life of faith is not easy, but he calls to mind the exploits of many men and women of faith from the past. He produces a miniature picture-gallery of godly people who nevertheless, in spite of their achievement, did not fully inherit the promises since they had lived before the time of Christ." Guthrie

Westcott divides the chapter up as follows:

- i) vv. 1-2 Preliminary view of the characteristics and work of faith.
- ii) vv. 3-7 Faith as seen in the prophetic records of the old world.
- iii) vv. 8-22 The faith of the Patriarchs, marked by obedience, patience and sacrifice.
- iv) vv. 23-31 The faith of conflict and conquest.
- v) vv. 32-38 Faith active in national life.
- vi) vv. 39,40 Conclusion

Westcott prefers the latter since he argues that *ἐλεγχος* (which occurs nowhere else in the NT) carries the sense of 'proof' rather than 'conviction'.
Hughes lists four possible meanings of *ὑποστασις* and concludes, "Despite the different interpretations proposed, there is in all cases, as Moulton and Milligan point out, 'the same central idea of something that *underlies* visible conditions and guarantees a future possession.'"

πραγμα, τος n matter, thing, event, deed
ἐλεγχος, ου m verification, certainty
βλεπω see, be able to see

The *object* of faith is 'things hoped for' and 'things not seen'. The *quality* of faith is to create 'assurance' and 'certainty' concerning such things. The life of faith is built upon the certain reality of what is not seen but hoped for. The certainty itself arises from the fact that faith simply trusts what God has said.

Verse 1

Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἐλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων.

"The order (ἔστιν δε πιστις) shews that the object of the writer is not to give a formal definition of faith but to bring out characteristics of faith which bear on his argument." Westcott

ἐπιζω hope, hope for, hope in, expect
ὑποστασις, εως f confidence, assurance, conviction; nature, essence, substance

Westcott considers the meanings of *ὑποστασις* and *ἐλεγχος*. He says that the structure of the sentence demands that their meanings must be co-ordinate. He says that they refer *either* to:

- i) a particular frame of mind – so *ὑποστασις* is translated 'assurance', as in 3:14.
- ii) a description of what faith does – *ὑποστασις* is 'substance' – that which gives real existence to a thing.

Verse 2

ἐν ταύτῃ γὰρ ἐμαρτυρήθησαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι.

ἐν ταύτῃ 'in respect of this' i.e. of faith

ἐμαρτυρήθησαν Verb, aor pass indic, 3 pl
μαρτυρεω bear witness, testify, affirm, approve; pass be well spoken of, receive approval

Westcott takes the verb to mean 'the elders had witness borne to them' i.e. the testimony of Scripture concerning them (cf. v.4). The NIV takes it in the sense that they received commendation (from God).

πρεσβυτερος, α, ον elder

Verse 3

πίσται νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγονέναι.

νοεω understand, perceive, discern

Faith provides a foundation for the reasoning activity of the believer – provides a 'world view'. Faith is not opposed to reason.

κατηρτίσθαι Verb, perf pass infin καταρτιζω
make complete

Bears the sense 'put together.' "expresses the manifoldness and the unity of all creation; and by the tense marks that the original lesson of creation remains for abiding use and application." Westcott

αἰῶνας Noun, acc pl αἰών, αἰῶνος m age,
world order, eternity

The sense is not just the original cosmos but "creation as unfolded in time, the many 'ages' going to form one 'world'." Westcott

ῥήμα, ατος n word

An expression of the divine will.

φαινω shine; midd. and pass. appear, be
seen

βλεπω see v.1

γεγονέναι Verb, perf act infin γινομαι

"The purpose and end of the knowledge gained by faith as to the creation of the world is the conviction that the visible order as we observe it, as a whole has not come into being by simple material causation. We learn to recognise that there is a divine power behind it. Such a conclusion is the fundamental triumph of faith." Westcott

Verse 4

Πίστει πλείονα θυσίαν Ἄβελ παρά Κάιν προσήνεγκεν τῷ θεῷ, δι' ἧς ἐμαρτυρήθη εἶναι δίκαιος, μαρτυροῦντος ἐπὶ τοῖς δώροις αὐτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ δι' αὐτῆς ἀποθανὼν ἔτι λαλεῖ.

πλειων, πλειον ορ πλεον more

I.e. 'more excellent', 'more abundant'

θυσια, ας f sacrifice

προσήνεγκεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s
προσφερω offer, present

Gregory the Great, quoted by Hughes, states, "It is obvious that it was not the offeror who received approval because of the offerings but the offerings because of the offeror." Similarly Calvin comments, "the sacrifice of Abel was more acceptable than that of his brother only because it was sanctified by faith."

Hughes considers the view of Owen and others that Abel's offering involved the shedding of blood and so signified an acknowledgment of sin that was absent from that of Cain. Hughes comments, "Whether or not this is a correct understanding of the situation it is impossible to say. The developed system of blood-sacrifice for sin receives explicit formulation only later in the Old Testament, though it may be assumed that its roots go back to a very early period."

ἐμαρτυρήθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s
μαρτυρεω

δι' ἧς ἐμαρτυρήθη i.e. 'through which sacrifice'. "The sacrifice was the sign of the righteousness – the true relation to God by faith – which he had inwardly. Through this the witness came, as *God bore witness on the occasion of his gifts*... There is nothing in Scripture to shew in what way the divine witness was given to Abel." Westcott. Hughes says that δι' ἧς refers to *faith*, not to the sacrifice, saying, "*Faith* is the ruling concept of this verse, and indeed of the whole chapter, as the emphatic position of πιστεῖ at the beginning of the sentence attests, and accordingly πιστεῖ not θυσίαν is the proper antecedent of the relative ἧς, as it is also, by general agreement, the antecedent of the pronoun αὐτῆς in the last clause of the verse. The connection of thought is the fact seen in the sequence πιστεῖ ... δι' ἧς ... καὶ δι' αὐτῆς..."

εἶναι Verb, pres infin εἰμι

δίκαιος, α, ον righteous, just

δωρον, ου n gift, offering

δι' αὐτῆς 'through it', i.e. faith

ἀποθανων Verb, aor act ptc, m nom s

ἀποθησκω die

ἔτι still, yet

λαλεω speak, talk

"Abel by his example of faith and righteousness still speaks to us today, even though he has so long been dead. The spectacle of his trustful integrity, even in the face of violence, should inspire us to persevere and to overcome by the same means." Hughes.

Verse 5

Πίστει Ἐνώχ μετετέθη τοῦ μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον, καὶ οὐχ ἠύρισκετο διότι μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός· πρὸ γὰρ τῆς μεταθέσεως μεμαρτύρηται εὐαρεστηκέναι τῷ θεῷ,

Cf. Gen 5:18-24.

μετετέθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s μετατιθημι
remove, take back

ἰδεῖν Verb, aor act infin ὁραω see

θανατος, ου m death

εὕρισκω find, discover

διότι because, for
μετέθηκεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s μετατιθημι

"Enoch, indeed, may be seen as a sort of prototype (together with Elijah at a later period) of the men and women of faith who will be living at the moment of Christ's return – an occasion of surpassing glory – and who, too, will be caught up to be with Christ without passing through the experience of death (see 1 Thess 4:15-17)." Hughes.

μεταθεσις, εως f removal; taking up
μεμαρτύρηται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s
μαρτυρω

The perfect carries the sense 'the witness stands recorded'

εὐαρεστικῆναι Verb, perf act infin
εὐαρεστεω please, be pleasing to

"The circumstances under which Enoch lived gave prominence to his faith. In a corrupt age he is said to have maintained that fellowship with God which is identical with pleasing him." Westcott

Verse 6

χωρίς δὲ πίστεως ἀδύνατον εὐαρεστήσαι,
πιστεῦσαι γὰρ δεῖ τὸν προσερχόμενον τῷ θεῷ
ὅτι ἔστιν καὶ τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν αὐτὸν
μισθαποδότης γίνεται.

χωρίς prep with gen without, apart from
ἀδυνατος, ον impossible
πιστεω believe (in), have faith (in)
δει impersonal verb it is necessary, must
προσερχομαι come or go to, approach
ἐκζητοῦσιν Verb, pres act ptc, m & n dat pl
ἐκζητεω seek or search diligently
μισθαποδοτης, ου m rewarder

"The faith which is thus declared to be necessary for anyone who approaches God as a worshipper ... includes two elements, the belief: a) that God is, and b) that He is morally active; in other words it is a faith in the existence and in the moral government of God." Westcott.
Hughes, citing Gen 15:1, says that the reward is God himself. Those who seek him find *him*.

Verse 7

πίστει χρηματισθεῖς Νῶε περὶ τῶν μηδέπω
βλεπομένων εὐλαβηθεῖς κατασκεύασεν
κιβωτὸν εἰς σωτηρίαν τοῦ οἴκου αὐτοῦ, δι' ἧς
κατέκρινεν τὸν κόσμον, καὶ τῆς κατὰ πίστιν
δικαιοσύνης ἐγένετο κληρονόμος.

χρηματισθεῖς Verb, aor pass ptc, m nom s
χρηματιζω warn, instruct, reveal
μηδεπω not yet
εὐλαβηθεῖς Verb, aor pass dep ptc, m nom s
εὐλαβεομαι act in reverence, be moved
with fear; take heed

κατασκευαζω prepare, build, construct,
furnish

Includes both the construction and the fitting up.

κιβωτος, ου f ark, ship
σωτηρια, ας f salvation
οικος, ου m house, household, family

δι' ἧς 'through which ark'. "His faith was visibly presented to the eyes of his contemporaries by the construction of the ark. Through this then he condemned the unbelieving world, as witnessing to the divine destruction which was to come upon them in just recompense for their deeds." Westcott.
Again, Hughes sees this as a reference to *faith* not to the ark.

κατέκρινεν Verb, aor & imperf act indic, 3 s
κατακρινω condemn, pass judgement
on

"Though the form is ambiguous, [it] is probably an imperfect and describes the constant significance of his action." Westcott

δικαιοσυνη, ης f righteousness

"The righteousness which 'answers to,' 'corresponds with' faith, is that righteousness which God alone can give, which answers to, corresponds with, that spiritual order which faith also enters." Westcott

ἐγένετο Verb, aor midd dep indic, 3 s γινομαι
κληρονομος, ου m heir, one who receives
what is promised (by God)

"The righteousness was not a hope for the future but a real possession by the gift of God." Westcott.

Verses 8-12

Westcott entitles these verses, "The Faith of persistent Obedience seen in the Faith of Abraham." The main emphasis is upon faith trusting wholly in God for what he has promised and, through patient endurance, inheriting the promise.

Verse 8

Πίστει καλούμενος Ἀβραὰμ ὑπήκουσεν
ἐξελθεῖν εἰς τόπον ὃν ἤμελλεν λαμβάνειν εἰς
κληρονομίαν, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν μὴ ἐπιστάμενος ποῦ
ἔρχεται.

The present participle καλουμενος emphasises the immediacy of his obedience. "He obeyed the call while (so to say) it was still sounding in his ears." Westcott.

ὕπακουω obey, be subject to
τοπος, ου m place, opportunity
ἤμελλεν Verb, imperf act indic, 3 s μελλω
(before an infin) be going, be destined

κληρονομα, ας f inheritance, what is promised

ἐπισταμαι know, understand

ποῦ adv where, to what place

"It is no ordinary trial of faith to give up what we have in hand in order to seek what is afar off and unknown to us." Calvin.

Verse 9

πίστει παρόκησεν εἰς γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ὡς ἄλλοτριαν, ἐν σκηναῖς κατοικήσας μετὰ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ τῶν συγκληρονόμων τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῆς αὐτῆς·

παροικεω live in, make a temporary home, live as a stranger

γῆ, γῆς f earth, land

ἐπαγγελια, ας f promise

This phrase occurs here alone in the NT.

ἄλλοτριος, α, ον belonging to another

Cf. Acts 7:6

σκηνη, ης f tent, temporary shelter

κατοικήσας Verb, aor act ptc, m nom s

κατοικεω live, inhabit

Westcott says that "Abraham dwelt throughout the time of his sojourn in tents, so declaring that which was permanent was not yet attained... The premature settlement of Lot and its disastrous issue point the lesson of Abraham's discipline."

συγκληρονομος, ον sharing together, sharing together God's blessings

Verse 10

ἐξεδέχετο γὰρ τὴν τοὺς θεμελίους ἔχουσαν πόλιν, ἧς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός.

"It was by faith that Abraham learned to look beyond this present fleeting scene to the unseen and eternal blessings which God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9) and to account the sufferings of this present time as unworthy of comparison with the glory that was to be revealed to him (Rom 8:18). Accordingly, he realised that the attainment of this earthly territory was not the completion of his pilgrimage and perceived that this land of promise, so unpromising in itself, was in fact a pointer to a further and more solid reality. The testing circumstances of his sojourn within its boundaries were a daily witness to him that fulfilment was not here and not yet. And so the land became to him a sacrament, or rather an element which, linked as it was with the word of promise, was invested with sacramental significance, and which, as such, pointed beyond itself to a more excellent consummation." Hughes.

ἐκδεχομαι wait for, expect, look forward to

θεμελιος, ου m (also θεμελιον, ου n) foundation

πολις, εως f city, town

τεχνιτης, ου m craftsman; designer

δημιουργος, ου m builder, creator

"The word τεχνιτης in this connexion refers to the plan and δημιουργος to the execution of it. Τεχνιτης occurs in the more general sense of 'craftsman' Acts 19:24, 38; Rev 18:22: δημιουργος is not found again in the NT." Westcott

Verse 11

πίστει καὶ αὐτῇ Σάρρα δύναμιν εἰς καταβολὴν σπέρματος ἔλαβεν καὶ παρὰ καιρὸν ἡλικίας, ἐπεὶ πιστὸν ἠγήσατο τὸν ἐπαγγειλάμενον·

στεира, ας f barren, a woman incapable of having children

καταβολη, ης f beginning, creation

σπερμα, τος n seed, offspring

ἔλαβεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s λαμβανω

There is much debate over whether Sarah or Abraham is the subject of this verse. There are a number of textual variants which seek to ease the ambiguity. The UBS Committee, influenced by the fact that the expression δύναμιν εἰς καταβολὴν σπέρματος ἔλαβεν is regularly used of the male in begetting rather than the female in conceiving, punctuate the text to indicate that καὶ αὐτῇ Σάρρα στείρα is considered a circumstantial clause, 'by faith, even though Sarah was barren, he [Abraham] received power ...' Hughes, having considered the various options and influenced by the fact that the Greek fathers uniformly understood the verse of Sarah, concludes, "Taking everything into consideration, it remains the most natural construction to accept Sarah as the subject of the sentence." He understands 'seed' here "not of the receiving of seed by the woman from the man nor of transmission of seed by the man to the woman, but of the founding or establishing of a seed or posterity."

παρα preposition with acc beside, contrary to

καιρος, ου m time, season

ἡλικια, ας f age, span of life, years

καὶ παρὰ καιρὸν ἡλικίας "Even against natural expectation of the age which she had reached."

ἐπει since, because, for

πιστος, η, ον faithful, trustworthy, reliable

ἠγήσατο Verb, aor midd dep indic, 3 s

ἠγεομαι think, regard, consider

ἐπαγγειλάμενον Verb, aor midd dep ptc, m

acc & n nom/acc s ἐπαγγελλομαι promise

Verse 12

διὸ καὶ ἀφ' ἑνὸς ἐγεννήθησαν, καὶ ταῦτα νενεκρωμένον, καθὼς τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῷ πλήθει καὶ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος ἢ παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης ἢ ἀναρίθμητος.

διο therefore, for this reason

εἰς, μια, ἐν gen ἑνός, μιας, ἑνός one, single

"Though Sarah is lost, so to speak, in Abraham with whom she was united (ἀφ' ἑνός), yet her act of Faith completing his Faith is made the reason of the fulfilment of the promise (διο)." Westcott.

ἐγεννήθησαν Verb, aor pass indic, 3 pl
γενναω be father of, bear; pass be born

Westcott says of καὶ ταῦτα that it is a classical phrase found here only in the NT.

νενεκρωμένον Verb, perf pass ptc, m & n gen
s νεκρωω put to death (pf pass ptc as good as dead)

Cf. Rom 4:19

ἄστρον, οὐ n star, constellation
οὐρανός, οὐ m heaven
πληθος, οὐς n crowd, multitude

Cf. Gen 22:17; 32:12.

ἄμμος, οὐ f sand
χεῖλος, οὐς n lip, shore
θαλάσσα, ἡς f sea
ἀναρίθμητος, οὐν innumerable

Verse 13

Κατὰ πίστιν ἀπέθανον οὗτοι πάντες, μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, ἀλλὰ πόρρωθεν αὐτὰς ἰδόντες καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι, καὶ ὁμολογήσαντες ὅτι ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοί εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

κατα πιστιν "indicates that it was in accordance with the principle of faith that they faced the moment of death." Hughes.

ἀπέθανον Verb, aor act indic, 1s & 3pl
ἀποθνησκω die, face death
πάντες Adjective, m nom pl πας

Meaning, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

ἐπαγγελια, ας f see v.9

Qualifies the assertion that these all died 'in faith'. They died in faith in the sense that they had not received the promises of the land, growth of a nation etc. but they died trusting God to fulfil his promise.

πορρωθεν at or from a distance
ἰδόντες Verb, aor act ptc, m nom pl ὁραω
see, observe, perceive

The paradox of faith is that it sees the unseen, cf. v.1.

ἀσπάζομαι greet, welcome

"Thus the existential power of faith made the distant hope a present reality, and these believers of the ancient world 'saw' and 'greeted' the promised consummation, even, and indeed especially, in the hour of death, as though already face to face with it." Hughes.

ὁμολογήσαντες Verb, aor act ptc, m nom pl
ὁμολογεω confess, declare
ξένος, η, ον strange, foreign; ὁ ξ. stranger, foreigner

παρεπίδημος, οὐ m temporary resident

Reflects Abraham's words in Gen 23:4 when seeking to buy a burial plot for Sarah.

Verse 14

οἱ γὰρ τοιαῦτα λέγοντες ἐμφανίζουσιν ὅτι πατρίδα ἐπιζητοῦσιν.

τοιούτος, αὐτη, οὗτον correlative pronoun and adjective such, of such kind

ἐμφανίζω inform, make known, reveal
πατρις, ἰδος f native country, own city, own town, settled home

Only occurrence of this word in the epistle. Cf Jn 4:43. The word bears the sense 'fatherland', the place to which one truly belongs.

ἐπιζητεω seek, desire, search for

Verse 15

καὶ εἰ μὲν ἐκείνης μνημονεύουσιν ἀφ' ἧς ἐξέβησαν, εἶχον ἂν καιρὸν ἀνακάμψαι.

ἐκεῖνος, η, ο demonstrative adj. that
μνημονεω remember, keep in mind; make mention of

Westcott thinks that the second, and less common sense, 'make mention of' is the appropriate one here. He thinks that the reference is to their words rather than their feelings. The suggestion seems unnatural in context. The sense appears rather to be that of remembering with longing, rather as Israel in the wilderness looked back with longing to Egypt.

ἐξέβησαν Verb, aor act indic, 3 pl ἐκβαίνω
leave, go out

καιρός, οὐ m time, here 'opportunity'
ἀνακάμψαι Verb, aor act infin ἀνακαμπτω
return, turn back

The writer of this epistle is warning his readers against the temptations of turning back. There are always plenty of opportunities to turn back, but faith is forward looking. Faith looks back only in thankfulness and forward always in hope.

Verse 16

νῦν δὲ κρείττονος ὀρέγονται, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐπουρανίου. διὸ οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς θεὸς ἐπικαλεῖσθαι αὐτῶν, ἠτοίμασεν γὰρ αὐτοῖς πόλιν.

"To avow openly in the world, by our ways, walking and living, with a constant public profession, that our portion and inheritance is not in it, but in things invisible, in heaven above, is an illustrious act and the fruit of faith. But then it is incumbent on us, that we do not in anything contradict this testimony. If we love the world like others, use it and abuse it like others, we destroy our profession, and declare our faith to be in vain." John Owen. Owen says that their desire had three elements:

- i) A sense of dissatisfaction with the present;
- ii) A sense of the worth and excellence of what is desired;
- iii) A sight of the means of attaining it, without which the desire would soon fade.

κρείττων and κρείσσων, ὄν γεν ονοσ
better

ὀρεγομαι be eager for, long for, desire

ἐπουρανιος, ὄν heavenly, celestial

διο therefore, for this reason

ἐπαισχνομαι be ashamed

ἐπικαλεω call, name

I.e. he calls himself 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' (Gen 28:13; 31:5; 39:9; Ex 3:6; 4:5). Cf. Jn 20:17 – he now calls himself our God.

ἐτοιμαζω prepare, make ready

Cf. Jn 14:2-3.

πολις, εως f city

"The fulfilment of the promise in its highest form is set before us as social and not simply as personal. God prepared for His chosen not a home but a 'city,' a Divine Commonwealth." Westcott.

"It is the same goal toward which the apostle Paul, unhindered by present afflictions, pressed on, 'forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,' in the conviction that 'our citizenship is in heaven' where at last we shall be fully transformed into the likeness of our glorified Redeemer (Phil 3:12f., 20f.); and toward which we who are Christian believers hasten as we 'run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Heb 12:1f.). In such single-minded commitment there can be no thought of turning back." Hughes.