

Hebrews 11:4
“The testimony of Abel”

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I. Introduction

The theme of the 11th chapter of Hebrews is obviously “FAITH”. In the first three verses the writer defined it for his readers. In verses 4-7 he illustrates the definition by going back into the Hebrew’s history to look at three demonstrations of faith. There are far more than three illustrations of faith through Jewish history, but these first three illustrate *what faith is*, the rest reveal *how faith works*. *These three men (Able, Enoch and Noah) lived by faith and chose to believe God when the world around believed something else.*

The result was that each one found ultimate reality and solved the greatest problem of their life, by realizing that their deepest desire was found in a relationship with God. The writer went as far back as he could to bring up the first illustration of faith, Able. He is the first in a long line of faith-filled people who could teach the Hebrews about a life of faith, even though his was cut short. His faith is extremely important as it related to the Hebrew’s because his life reveals that from the beginning God revealed that the only thing He would expect to redeem fallen humanity was, “FAITH” and not works! Some may wonder why start with Able and not his parents Adam and Eve? The reason is simple Adam and Eve could not be persons of faith in the same way as their descendants as they had walked with God “face to face” walking and talking with Him in the Garden. Until they sinned they had no need of faith, because they lived with God in His light. And even after they sinned, they still had the memory and knowledge of that relationship with

God. Cain and Able were were the first to have need of faith and Able was the first “*man of faith*” as it related to having a relationship with God.

II. Vs. 4a True sacrifice

Vs. 4a Based upon this verse we see that Abel’s faith led him to three progressive actions:

1. ***Offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain***: First, Able offered a **TRUE SACRIFICE**. Able offered a better sacrifice not because he was better but because he simple believed what God has made known to them about the sacrifice and offered it.
2. ***Through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts***: Second, because of this offering Able obtained **TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS**. Abel’s sacrifice based upon faith is that which led to God declaring him right with Him.
3. ***And through it he being dead still speaks***: Third, because of the above two Able secured a **PERMANENT AND TRUE WITNESS**. And that declared righteousness is what continually speaks to all humanity throughout every generation.

To examine Abel’s faith it is clear the writer intended it to be compared to that of his brother’s Cain’s, as we are told that “*By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.*” To do this we will need to discover what made Abel choose this sacrifice compared to Cain? These were the world’s first brothers, Cain and Able, sons of Adam and Eve. They lived when the world was young, in the days before income tax and world governments. We first need to examine what they both had known about the right sacrifice based upon Gen. 3:15 where we are told that God said, “*I will put enmity Between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.*”:

- They both would have known God had put their parents out of the garden because of sin.
- They both would have known that even though judgment sent them out of God’s presence, grace promised a way back. *Within the curse it’s self was a promise of a Redeemer being offered. Judgment was being executed at the same time mercy was being offered and both of these two sons would have known that.* In Genesis 3:15 we are told by God that “*And I will put enmity Between you and the woman,*

and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” Notice that the word “seed” is singular and not plural.

- This is further brought to light in their two names:
 1. **Cain**: Means “*to get* or *I have gotten*” and comes from the statement of Eve in Genesis 4:1 where she exclaims, “*I have acquired a man from the LORD.*” In Hebrew some believe that her statement is “I have gotten, even the Lord” which indicates that Adam and Eve clearly understood the shadow of the sacrifice and the substance being the incarnation. But the son they had thought was the redeemer was the world’s first murder, not it’s savior. What Adam and Eve didn’t understand was that “flesh can only produce flesh” and in Adam all die as the son’s of Adam can not give life which they do not have. Cain was a “*tiller of the soil*” or **farmer**.
 2. **Able**: Means “*breath*” and carries the idea of weakness or brevity. It seems that early on after Cain’s birth Adam and Eve knew that Cain wasn’t the answer and named their second son “weakness”. Able was a “*keeper of flocks*” or **shepherd**.
- Both were conceived after the fall and born outside of Eden, the second and third people to live on earth. As such both were sinners by nature and choice.
- Both had the same natures, inclinations and temptations as every other human born from them on. In other words, neither of them had an unfair advantage over the other to make the right choice.

In Genesis 4:3-5 we are told that, “*In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.*” Here we learn that each of these two equally possessed the same three things with regards to worshipping God:

1. **The time for worship**: “*In the process of time*”! In the Hebrew this phrase means “*at the end of days*” and speaks of a specific period of time. Based upon this it seems that as far as these two sons, their parents had passed down from God a “**designated**” special time for worshipping God. The fact that both boys did so at the same time indicates this.
2. **The place for worship**: “*Cain brought...Able also brought*”! Because both sons **brought** an offering there was clearly **a specific place for worship**. There is no mention of them erecting an altar and it could be that one already existed on the east side of Eden, built by their parents. It seems consistent with God’s nature of Grace that He would have provide instruction for one that would have included a mercy seat where they could come and place the shed blood of the lamb for atonement, even though it would have been only a shadow.
3. **The way to worship**: I also believe that God had clearly established the “**way**

to worship". In Genesis 3:21 we are told that "for Adam and his wife Eve the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." So that the sacrifice for their sin was symbolically covered by the shedding of blood of an innocent animal and was something that they knew from the beginning of the fall. These two sons would have known this handed down from their parents. In Genesis 5:4-5 the fact that God accepted only Abel's animal offering while rejecting Cain's indicates that the sacrificial pattern had been established and practiced as a pattern of worship towards God as God would not have rejected Cain's offering if Cain had no way of knowing what to offer. Further more Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of God" Abel must have obeyed the revelation of the Word of God where as Cain rejected it.

Both of these two sons knew the time and place for worship and I believe that they both knew the way to worship was offering a symbolic sacrifice for sin. But only Abel offered what God had revealed to the booth of them. There was nothing wrong with offering grain, fruit or vegetables as an offering to God; the Mosaic covenant included in the future such offerings. The problem was that the "blood offering" was always first as Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul." And Hebrews 9:22 "And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Abel presented his sacrifice based upon trusting God at His word (faith) and it was because of this (faith) that the sacrifice was accepted by God. Abel did what God had said and in so doing revealed his obedience while also acknowledging his sin. Cain was disobedient not because of ignorance but willfulness. Able offered a better sacrifice because God had prescribe a "blood sacrifice".

- **Abel gave God, what God wanted:** Abel acknowledged his own sin! Abel approached God saying, "Lord, this is what You said You wanted and You promised that if I brought it, You would forgive my sin! I believe You, God."
- **Cain gave God, what Cain wanted:** Cain acknowledged his own works! Cain had the same knowledge as his brother Abel but chose instead to say, "Lord, I know that you say that You wanted a blood sacrifice, but I don't believe you

and I believe if I offer the best of my works it will be good enough because I'm a good person!"

- **Cain believed IN God, otherwise he wouldn't have come to God at the right TIME and the right PLACE. He even understood that he OWED God some sort of worship. But though he recognized God, he didn't OBEY God. Cain believed IN God, but didn't BELIEVE GOD! Cain thought that he could approach God in the way he wanted and he expected God to be impressed by his WORKS and in so doing Cain became the father of all religion! Religion is by definition is: Trying to come to God by ANY OTHER WAY other than the WAY God has prescribed!**

In Acts 4:12 we are told that, *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* Religion says that there is another name another way to God than the way God Himself has ordained. But Proverbs 14:12 reminds us that, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."* Cain didn't mind worshiping God as long as he could do so "religiously on his own terms, in his own way"! And it is this God rejected. This is why Jude warns his readers in 1:11 *"Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain,..."* Setting up ones own religious standards and way of approaching God, being acceptable to God apart from the only way God has established. Paul said the same thing in Romans 10:2-3, *"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God."* Cain didn't want to worship God he only wanted to give the appearance of doing so, he wanted to please himself not God. His sacrifice was "religious activity" designed to show off his own self righteousness and worthiness! This is what Samuel told Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22 *"So Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams."*

III. Vs. 4b True righteousness

Vs. 4b Second we are told that “*through which he (Abel) obtained witness that he was righteous..*” The only thing that Abel did that obtained righteousness was that, in faith, he did what God had told him to do. It was not how good Abel was but that He trusted in God and showed it by obeying Him. Abel was as sinful as Cain, the difference was in the WAY in they sacrificed: Abel was obedient because he trusted God’s word, Cain was disobedient because he trusted in his works. You can not claim to believe in God and then continually disregard His word. Abel was counted righteous, not because he was righteous, but because he trusted in God’s righteousness!

IV. Vs. 4c True witness

Vs. 4c Finally we read that, “*God testifying of his (Abel’s) gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.*” Abel’s faith continues to speak for thousands of years, three truths to believers and potential believers:

1. ***Humanity can only come to God by trusting in His word (faith). And never by works!***
2. ***Humanity must accept and obey God’s Word above their own reason, self-effort and works!***
3. ***Humanity’s sin will be judged and no amount of good works, religious effort for a life time will ever be able to atone for it. Apart from receiving Jesus sacrifice on our behalf all of our good works and religious effort have gained us eternity in hell!***

It is as Habakkuk said in 2:4 “*Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.*” ***We cannot receive God’s enablement for our problems until we first lay aside all dependence upon ourselves.***