



Powerful, enduring faith comes from believing in God's promises so deeply that it becomes the motivating force behind worship and devotion.

Belief in a Promise: The Power of Faith

JEFFREY W. CARTER

Jeffrey W. Carter (CarterJW@ldschurch.org) is a seminary teacher at Orem Senior Seminary.

Over the centuries, countless people have marveled at the faith in Jesus Christ demonstrated by men and women of the scriptures. Readers have been thrilled by scripture stories of people who were able to draw on faith to do heroic acts, make difficult decisions, and even be instruments of bringing about miracles. At the same time, many have wondered how these people were able to draw on such incredible faith as they faced the challenges of life.

Focusing on and believing in the promises of God can greatly strengthen our faith as we seek to come unto Christ and do his will. This paper will explore the relationship between faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and promises as taught in Hebrews 11. Paul is faced with the daunting task of helping the Jewish converts stay true to their newfound faith in the face of increasing challenges. He does so, in part, by reminding them of the stories of their ancestors. These converts also have to hold on to their faith in times of extreme difficulty.

Hebrews 11 becomes more than just stories about great faith. As we examine the experiences of the people referenced in Hebrews 11, a pattern established by God himself will emerge, a pattern of divine promises given

as these individuals are called on by the Lord to do his will. Some promises are fulfilled within the individual's lifetime, while the fulfillment of other promises has to wait until after. No matter the timing, however, people can strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ as they believe in the promises of God and seek to do the will of the Lord. This principle is among the many lessons that Paul desires the Jewish converts of his day to understand as they struggle with challenges to their newfound faith.

Hebrews: A Brief Overview

There is still much debate in the scholarly world as to the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. However, based on the statements of modern-day prophets and apostles, I accept that the book of Hebrews was written by Paul.¹ We also know from Hebrews that this epistle was intended primarily for Jews who had converted to the gospel. In this epistle, Paul refers to his audience as having been "illuminated" (Hebrews 10:32) and also as having been given the foundation of repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment (see Hebrews 6:1–2). Paul writes the Epistle to the Hebrews to address some grave concerns he has with the Jewish converts. To better appreciate the teachings found in Hebrews generally, and specifically in chapter 11, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the climate of ancient Jerusalem when this epistle was written.

As Paul returns from his several missions, he finds that "many thousands" of the Jewish converts are still holding on to practices and traditions of the Mosaic law (Acts 21:20). This is happening, in part, because the Jerusalem conference held years earlier had specified only that gentile Christians would not be required to live this law. No such clarification had been given concerning the Jewish converts.² Of great concern to Paul is that the Jewish converts are beginning to abandon their Christian faith and return to the Jewish forms of worship. Paul speaks of Jewish converts "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:25). Elsewhere Paul expresses his concern that the Saints are beginning to "draw back" from their faith and return to the Mosaic beliefs (see Hebrews 10:38–39). This is happening, at least in large part, because of the opposition and persecution they face as they accept the gospel covenant into their lives. Paul refers to the Jewish Saints as having "endured a great fight of afflictions" and as having been "made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions" (Hebrews 10:32–33).

In the end, because of persecution, trials, traditions, and even a lack of understanding of the basic doctrines, such as whether Christ truly fulfilled the ancient prophesies about the Messiah, Jewish converts are wavering in their faith in Jesus Christ and conviction to the new gospel covenant and returning back to their former ways of worship and beliefs. This would obviously be disturbing to Paul, since a return to these former beliefs would result in a rejection of the gospel covenant and of Jesus himself. The purpose of the Epistle to the Hebrews, therefore, is to encourage especially the Jewish converts to hold on to their newfound faith and the promises that God had made (see Hebrews 10:35–36).³ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland stated, “In his letter to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul was trying to encourage new members who had just joined the Church, who undoubtedly had had spiritual experiences and received the pure light of testimony, only to discover that their troubles had not ended but that some of them had just begun.”⁴

Because Paul sees the abandoning of the gospel covenant and even of Jesus as the promised Messiah, one of the major themes of Hebrews is to convince the Saints “of the absolute superiority of Jesus Christ as the great High Priest. Only through him do Christians have direct access to God.”⁵ Paul’s hope is that an understanding of this doctrine would again encourage the Saints to hold on to what they have. The Epistle to the Hebrews begins with a focus “on the superiority of Jesus as God’s Son (Hebrews 1:4–4:13), the superiority of his priesthood (Hebrews 4:14–7:28), and the superiority of his sacrifice and ministry (Hebrews 8:1–10:18). It then concludes by emphasizing that Christians [Jewish converts] avail themselves of Jesus’ priestly work through faith and endurance (Hebrews 10:19–12:29).”⁶

Paul ties together his teachings of the superiority of Christ and the necessity of the converts to endure with faith in God by stating, “Wherefore . . . let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, . . . looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:1–4). Paul wishes to point the Jewish Saints to Christ so they will follow him as the ultimate example of one who suffered much more than any could possibly imagine and ultimately received the promised rewards from God.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie further summarized the purpose of this epistle by stating, “Above all, this Epistle—as seems natural when addressed to a people who had looked forward to the delivering might of their Messiah; a people who had great difficulty in accepting Jesus as their promised Redeemer—above all, this Epistle is a witness of the divine Sonship of Him of whom the Jews had said: ‘Is not this the carpenter’s son?’ (Matt. 13:55.)”⁷

This brings us to the discourse on faith found in Hebrews 11. In this portion of his discourse, Paul desires to remind and encourage the Saints of the need to live by faith in their difficult circumstances. Paul teaches this by recalling many of the beloved stories of Hebrew history where men and women alike not only endured but succeeded in following God and accomplishing his will through their faith in Christ. These stories would naturally resonate in the hearts and minds of the Hebrew converts. However, another purpose of Hebrews 11, and more to the point of this paper, is Paul’s apparent desire for the Saints to understand the source of such great faith.

In Hebrews 11, Paul establishes the critical relationship that exists between promises and faith in Jesus Christ. Through the stories of Hebrews 11, Paul shows that these well-known characters of scripture were not people who simply decided to obey God, but in fact were people to whom God had made promises. It was their willingness to rely on and believe in these promises, the ultimate of which would be the salvation that comes only through Christ, that gave power to their faith as they sought to follow God and do his will. Paul seeks to establish this relationship in the minds of the early Saints to help them as they struggle with accepting Christ and enduring the difficulties that come with being a Jewish Christian.

Paul’s Examples of Faith and Promises

Through a careful reading of Hebrews 11, one discovers that there are at least eight references (even more depending on interpretation) that either directly or indirectly touch on the word *promise*.⁸ As previously stated, this is not just a side note of the chapter but appears to be an important principle of the discourse. The stories Paul tells show a relationship between faith in Christ and promise.

To establish the association between promise and faith, Paul begins Hebrews 11 with the basic definition that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). From the footnote it is understood that the Joseph Smith Translation of this passage changes

this phrase to “*assurance* of things hoped for” (Hebrews 11:1, footnote b). Among the many words that can be used as synonyms for assurance, two words that particularly apply to this discussion are *promise* and *guarantee*.⁹ Faith is much more than a belief in the existence of God. Paul is suggesting that there is a connection between enduring and unwavering faith and divine promises from God. God gives promises with the intention to help, encourage, and strengthen those who seek to do his will. This is not to say that we follow God only because we want the prize. At the same time we must admit that knowledge of promised blessings can be a strength and comfort to our faith as we seek to do his will. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said of this idea:

Although those who serve out of fear of punishment or out of a sense of duty undoubtedly qualify for the blessings of heaven, there are still higher reasons for service.

One such higher reason for service is the hope of an eternal reward. This hope—the expectation of enjoying the fruits of our labors—is one of the most powerful sources of motivation. As a reason for service, it necessarily involves faith in God and in the fulfillment of his prophecies. The scriptures are rich in promises of eternal rewards.¹⁰

As Elder Oaks stated, understanding and believing in the promises of God can be a “powerful” source of motivation and one of the “higher reasons” for following him. “The highest reason of all” is charity.¹¹ Paul further touches on the link between faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and promise in a subsequent verse. He begins by stating that “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6). Paul then teaches that faith is made up of two parts. He states that we are to “believe that he is” and that we are to believe that “he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Paul is suggesting that for us to come to God in faith, we must first believe in him; second, we must believe that he will keep his promises by rewarding those who “diligently seek him.”

Abel. Paul’s first historical example is that of Abel. Unfortunately, we have only a small scriptural account of the life and faith of Abel. What we do know is that he was a devoted follower of God and lost his life because of the jealousy and hatred of his brother (see Genesis 4; Moses 5). In speaking of Abel, Paul says, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Hebrews 11:4). Inherent in this statement is the promise that further strengthened Abel’s faith: the knowledge or promise from God that he was considered righteous in God’s eyes. However, this seems admittedly backward from what it should

be. It seems that the assurance was given after the act of faith. The Prophet Joseph Smith helped clarify this issue concerning the sacrifice of Abel:

But it is said that Abel himself obtained witness that he was righteous. Then certainly God spoke to him: . . . and if He did, would He not . . . deliver to him the whole plan of the Gospel. . . . How could Abel offer a sacrifice and look forward with faith on the Son of God for a remission of his sins, and not understand the Gospel? The mere shedding of the blood of beasts or offering anything else in sacrifice, could not procure a remission of sins, *except it were performed in faith of something to come; if it could, Cain's offering must have been as good as Abel's.*¹²

From this statement we understand that Abel already had an understanding of the gospel plan and was already looking forward to things that were yet to come—namely, the Savior and all that he promised. This assurance or promise was part of what motivated Abel to offer his sacrifice. It is also interesting to note that God then followed this act of faith with even more assurances (that of Abel being righteous).

Finally, it should be noted from the above statement that mere obedience—offering a sacrifice—was not enough. For Abel's act of faith to be rewarded, it had to be founded in a belief of a promise of "something to come." From the very first story of Hebrews 11, Paul establishes a connection between faith and promise. In fact, it was Abel's deep belief in a promise of the Messiah, his Atonement, and even the Resurrection that motivated his faith to offer "a more excellent sacrifice" (Hebrews 11:4).

Enoch. Paul's next historical example is Enoch. Like Abel, Enoch also had the "testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). This testimony, or assurance, would be the foundation of Enoch's faith, "for before his translation he had this testimony" (v. 5). Paul also taught that "by faith Enoch was translated" (v. 5). Much of what we know about Enoch and his mission comes from the Pearl of Great Price. In Moses chapters 6 and 7 we learn that not only did God call Enoch, but he also revealed to him the plan of salvation. He further revealed the history of the world, or, from Enoch's perspective, the future events of the world. Among other things, God showed to Enoch the establishment of Zion and what would become of this great city. The record states, "The Lord showed unto Enoch all the inhabitants of the earth; and he beheld, and lo, Zion, in the process of time, was taken up into heaven" (Moses 7:21).

It must have been a sweet comfort and source of strength for Enoch to know from the beginning what the eventual outcome would be to his mission

and life on this earth. Enoch's rare accomplishment, having an entire city translated, was not based on a random faith that was unexpectedly rewarded. Instead, Enoch moved forward with faith that was based on promises given him by God. These promises included an understanding of the plan of salvation, of the Savior and his mission, and of future events that God had revealed through the vision (see Moses 6–7). Enoch did indeed have a testimony of his place before God.

Noah. Similar to Enoch, Noah saw future events when given his call. Paul shows the connection between enduring faith and promise by stating, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear [footnote c indicates that “fear” means “being cautious, reverent”], prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Hebrews 11:7; also see Genesis 6–7; Moses 8). It was his belief that God would fulfill his promise of a flood that empowered Noah's faith and resulted in actions that saved humanity. This story would be especially relevant to the Jewish converts who were laboring under persecution and wondering how long they would have to wait until the promised judgments of God would be fulfilled. Paul's message seems to be encouraging the Saints to be like Noah—hold on to your belief in the promises of God, and your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will be sufficiently strengthened to withstand any difficulty, to truly accept Jesus as the Messiah, and to wait for the eventual reward that will indeed come.

Abraham and Sarah. One of Paul's more compelling arguments that support the teaching that a critical tie exists between promises and enduring faith in Jesus Christ comes from the story of Abraham and Sarah. Paul first refers to promises made to Abraham of promised lands (see Hebrews 11:8–10). Abraham's belief in these promises helped him to strengthen his faith and set out, “not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:8). More importantly, the belief that Abraham and his family held in the promises of the Abrahamic covenant helped them to move forward in faith as they sought the “city” or “better country” that they believed God had “prepared for them” (Hebrews 11:10, 16). Paul strengthens the connection between faith and promise by stating, “These [Abraham, his wife, and their righteous posterity] 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” (Hebrews 11:13).

Paul then turns his attention to Sarah, referring directly to the trial of not having children and the promise of a child when she was beyond the

childbearing years (see Hebrews 11:11). From the Old Testament account of this story, one must wonder about Sarah's initial reaction to this promise (see Genesis 18:10–15). In this account we read that Sarah "laughed" at the news of having a child in her old age (see Genesis 18:12). It becomes obvious that Sarah's first response is one of doubt as the visitors question her reaction by finally asking, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14).

The miracle of Sarah having a child was indeed wonderful. However, if Sarah truly lacked confidence in God's power, would God actually reward her? Paul lays this issue to rest. When talking of Sarah, Paul states that Sarah did indeed conceive "because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11). Elder McConkie gave further clarification on Sarah's faith: "Sarah's initial reaction . . . was one of incredulity and doubt. . . . But—and it is ever thus!—the promise came to pass by faith. Sarah, on more mature consideration, believed God and thereby reaped the blessing."¹³ Again we see the principle that Paul interweaves throughout Hebrews 11. It was only when Sarah showed true faith, faith motivated by belief in a promise, that the reward was given.

Paul next returns to Abraham, whose life was filled with promises ranging from lands to eternal posterity. It is no coincidence that his life was also filled with many great acts of faith. Abraham believed so strongly in the promises of God that he was willing to endure any trial that God gave him.

The particular story of Abraham that shows the relationship of faith in Jesus Christ and promise most powerfully is the attempted sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham was indeed one of the greatest faithful souls to ever live on this earth, but from where did this faith in Christ come? A more careful reading of Paul's account of this story yields the answer to this question: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:17–19).

Examining key phrases in Hebrews 11 reveals valuable insights into Abraham's faith. From verse 17 we read he "received the promises." From verse 18 we are given "in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Finally, in verse 19 we read "that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." It is well known from the Old Testament that God promised Abraham eternal posterity and more specifically told him this promise was to be fulfilled through Isaac (see Genesis 15:3–6; 21:12). Not coincidentally, the Bible makes

specific mention of Abraham's reaction to these promises: "And he believed in the Lord" (Genesis 15:6). This is a key to understanding Abraham's faith. Abraham believed so strongly in the promises of God concerning his son and his eternal posterity that he knew Isaac was going to survive this trial, even if it meant that God would raise him from the dead. This is what gave Abraham the courage and faith to obey God and actually be willing to lay Isaac upon the altar. Abraham had received specific promises concerning Isaac, and he knew that God never lied. Hence, he knew that somehow Isaac was going to survive this trial.

From the experience of Abraham and Isaac we once again see the link that exists between faith in Christ and promises. It seems that one lesson Paul wants the Hebrews to understand is that the ability to follow Christ is influenced by the willingness to believe in his promises. Our quest to come unto Christ therefore becomes a twofold statement on our part: not only do we show God that we truly love him and hence will obey, but we also show God that we truly believe him when he makes a promise. This becomes an important aspect of faith. Not only does this impact one's strength and willingness to obey, but it also impacts the rewarding of faith. Referring back to the previous statement by Joseph Smith: "The mere shedding of the blood of beasts or offering anything else in sacrifice, could not procure a remission of sins [the reward for the act of faith], except it were performed in faith of something to come."¹⁴

As stated earlier in this paper, merely going through the motions is not enough if one truly wishes to receive the full promised blessings from God. For faith to be real, powerful, and enduring, actions must be based on a strong belief in God's promises (faith of something to come) and the sure knowledge that God never lies.

Reflecting upon one's faith is obviously a very personal issue. However, as we come to understand the link between faith and promise, we realize that it is improper to compare our faith to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. This is not what having the faith of Abraham means. To be "tried, even as Abraham" (D&C 101:4) refers to the trial of faith, not to the event of the sacrifice. The faith of Abraham refers to Abraham's belief in the promises of God: a belief so strong that it became the driving force behind his actions. Abraham knew that God never lied, and he therefore lived a life of faithful service and obedience. With this perspective we realize that we too can show this type of faith. While we may never be asked to sacrifice our child on the altar, we all can

look at our lives and realize that we have been asked to do many things, and sacrifice many things, in our quest to come unto Christ. A close examination will also show that the call of God in our lives has indeed been accompanied by many promises. Understanding and believing these promises can give strength to our faith as we seek the Savior in our lives. Hence, we are all given the opportunity to show the faith of Abraham.

Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Paul continues his discourse as he speaks of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Again we can see the interdependence between faith in the Savior and promise in the lives of these faithful men. Paul mentions earlier that Isaac and Jacob were “heirs . . . of the same promise” (Hebrews 11:9). He now speaks of all three men giving blessings “by faith” to various people and even nations (see Hebrews 11:20–22). It is interesting to note that these blessings deal with “things to come” (Hebrews 11:20), or promises of future events. Jacob and Esau both received promises through Isaac (see Genesis 27). Ephraim and Manasseh received blessings under the hand of Jacob (see Genesis 48). Before Joseph died he gave significant prophecies concerning the future of Israel (see Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:24–38). All of these men moved forward in faith, understanding the promised blessings from God.

Moses. In referencing the prophet Moses, Paul calls to mind several aspects of his life from infancy to the parting the Red Sea (see Hebrews 11:23–29). Within these verses Paul establishes that Moses made his choices based on his belief in the promises of God. The record states, “By faith Moses . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God . . . ; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (vv. 24–26). Moses believed that following the Lord would bring greater reward and happiness than all the riches of Egypt. He believed in the “recompense of the reward” (v. 26). What a timely message for a struggling congregation to hear. In addition, we find further evidence from Hebrews 11:28 that the faith of Moses was strengthened and influenced by promises, as he saved a nation by keeping “the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”

A detailed study of each aspect of Moses’ life and faith would support the principle that unwavering faith in Christ is linked to promise. As one of many examples, Paul refers to the event of parting the Red Sea (see Hebrews 11:29). This miracle is still today considered one of the greatest ever performed by

any prophet in the world's history, especially in Hebrew history. When the Lord called Moses to the work, Moses was given the following promise: "I, the Almighty, have chosen thee, and thou shalt be made stronger than many waters; for they shall obey thy command as if thou wert God" (Moses 1:25).¹⁵ In relation to this promise, it is interesting to note the many miracles that Moses performed dealing with water. In the opening scenes of Moses' encounter with the Egyptians, he turns the river to blood (see Exodus 7:20–25). Moses then performs the miracle of parting the Red Sea (see Exodus 14). Later he heals the waters of Marah (see Exodus 15:23–25), strikes the rock in Horeb and produces water (see Exodus 17:1–7), and then strikes another rock in Meribah, producing water (see Numbers 20:2–11). Again we see the principle at work: the faith of Moses was empowered by very specific promises that God gave when he was called to the ministry.

Many Other Examples

Hebrews 11:30–40 provides many other examples of people who endured through faith. As with previous examples, Paul shows a relationship between their faith and the promises that come from God. Joshua was promised victory over Jericho (see Joshua 6). Rahab was promised safety and protection in return for her help with the spies (see Joshua 2). Both Gideon and Barak were promised victory as they were called to liberate Israel (see Judges 4; 7).

Even Samson provides an interesting example of the link between promise and faith. God kept his promise to Samson as far as he could. Phrases such as "subdued kingdoms," "escaped the edge of the sword," and "out of weakness were made strong" could apply at least in part to Samson (Hebrews 11:33–34). When Samson finally betrayed his entire covenant, the promised blessing of strength was withdrawn. While in prison, Samson acted in faith and requested that God grant him one last show of strength. Whether his motives were pure or not is a matter of judgment by God, but one thing we know for sure: God granted this final request (see Judges 13–16).

Paul then speaks of "others [who] were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35), people who, in other words, had faith that was strengthened by a belief in a promise. Ultimately, in speaking of these many examples, Paul makes this final statement: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better things for them through their sufferings, for without sufferings, they could not be made perfect"

(Hebrews 11:39; Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 11:40). Again it seems that one of Paul's desires in this chapter is to encourage the Saints to hold on to their faith despite the trials, persecution, and doubts. Within this plea is found a key that was intended to be a help to the Jewish Saints as they struggled with their Christianity. Understanding and believing in the promises of God can give support and strength to wavering faith in difficult times. Even if those promises are "afar off" (Hebrews 11:13), they are still promises from God. And God never lies.

Modern-Day Commentary

Modern-day commentary also supports the teachings of Paul pertaining to the link between enduring faith in the Savior and promise. In *Lectures on Faith*, much time is spent on the importance of having "a correct idea" of God's "character, perfections, and attributes" in order to truly have faith in him.¹⁶ Many subjects are touched upon throughout this work to help us better understand the true character of God. Like Paul, *Lectures on Faith* also stresses the importance of believing God as a requirement of true faith. In Lecture Third of this work, six items are listed under "respecting the character of God," the fourth of which states "that he is a God of truth and cannot lie."¹⁷

Lecture Third continues:

An acquaintance with these attributes in the divine character, is essentially necessary, in order that the faith of any rational being can center in him for life and salvation. For if he did not, in the first instance, believe him to be God, that is, the Creator and upholder of all things, he could not *center* his faith in him for life and salvation, *for fear there should be greater than he who would thwart all his plans, and he, like the gods of the heathen, would be unable to fulfill his promises; but . . . no such fear can exist in the minds of those who put their trust in him, so that in this respect their faith can be without wavering.*¹⁸

The last line of this quote brings to mind Joseph Smith, who in 1820 read a passage of scripture that spoke of "nothing wavering" (James 1:6). Joseph Smith not only believed in God, but believed God. Joseph believed that God *could* answer a prayer, but more importantly he believed that he *would* answer, and Joseph hence moved forward in faith, ushering in the final dispensation before the coming of Christ.

In addition, the following question is asked in *Lectures on Faith* with its accompanying response:

Is it not necessary also, for men to have an idea that God is a being of truth before they can have *perfect faith* in him? It is; for unless men have this idea they cannot place confidence in his word, and, not being able to place confidence in his word, *they could not have faith in him*; but believing that he is a God of truth, and that his word cannot fail, their faith can rest in him *without doubt*.¹⁹

This brings us back to the original definition of faith as given by Paul: “Faith is the substance [assurance or promise] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The tie between faith and promise is critical if one wishes to follow Christ. In order to have true and perfect faith in God, a faith that does not waver and is without doubt, one must understand the promises of God and then deeply believe that God will never break his word or promises to mankind.

Elder David A. Bednar gave additional insight to the link between faith in Christ and promise. He describes faith in Christ as being made up of three elements: assurance (promise), evidence (looking back and seeing the results), and action (what belief in the promise leads to).²⁰ Elder Bednar goes on to explain that these three elements “influence each other” and “are not separate and discrete; rather, they are interrelated and continuous and cycle upward.”²¹ As possibly the ultimate example of this relationship, Elder Bednar states: “Faith in Christ is inextricably tied to and results in hope in Christ for our redemption and exaltation. And assurance and hope make it possible for us to walk to the edge of the light and take a few steps into the darkness—expecting and trusting the light to move and illuminate the way (see Boyd K. Packer, “The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1983, 54). The combination of assurance and hope initiates action in the present.”²²

Elder Bednar helps us understand that our faith in Christ depends upon our belief (hope) in the promise of our redemption and exaltation through the Lord. The link between faith in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and promise is critical and inseparable. For us to truly show faith in God, the kind of faith that can endure the test of time, we must know and understand the promises of God and place our deepest confidence in those promises.

Conclusion

There are many people who profess to be believers and followers of Christ. Yet when the call from God comes, or the tests and trials of life descend, they seem to falter. What is it that causes some to stand strong and succeed when others falter and fall short of the mark? At least one key can be found in

Hebrews 11. Not only did Paul want the Hebrews to understand in whom they should place their faith, but he wanted them to understand where that strength of faith came from. Paul referenced many stories to accomplish both purposes. Faith in Jesus Christ is much more than believing in the existence of God. Powerful, enduring faith comes from believing in God's promises so deeply that it becomes the motivating force behind worship and devotion. Promises are an inseparable part of pure, powerful faith. It is important to understand this as we seek to come unto Christ and do his will.

Noah builds an ark when others would dismiss it as silly paranoia. Moses stands before an ocean and parts it when others would have panicked and surrendered to Pharaoh. Abraham endures a heart-wrenching trial when others would have faltered and decided that God was asking too much. Their faith was empowered by a belief in the promises of God. This was one of many lessons that Paul wanted the Jewish Saints to understand. As they faced their doubts and struggles, it would be their willingness to hold on to the promises of God that would strengthen their faith in Christ. It is the same for us today. As stated earlier in this paper, most of us will never be called on to part the Red Sea or lay our child upon the altar, yet we can still show the faith of these great men and women of the scriptures.

As God's covenant people, we too have been given many wonderful promises, including the greatest promise of all: exaltation and eternal life through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (see D&C 14:7). It will be our willingness to focus on and believe in these promises that will empower our faith as we seek to come unto Christ and serve him until the end. **RE**

Notes

1. For instance, Joseph Smith stated, "It is said by Paul in his letter to the Hebrew brethren . . ." *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 2:16–17; *History of the Church*, 3:388. In addition, Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, "In any event, Paul did write Hebrews, and to those who accept Joseph Smith as an inspired witness of truth, the matter is at rest." *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 3:133. See also Elder Holland's quote referenced in note 4 of this paper. Although some might claim that these leaders are repeating the traditional view of the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, I accept that they are speaking prophetically on this issue.

2. See Bible Dictionary, "Pauline Epistles, Epistle to the Hebrews," 746.

3. There are other references found in Hebrews that also refer to the idea that promises are an important part of faith. See, for example, Hebrews 6:10–18.

4. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence," *Ensign*, March 2000, 8.

5. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 254.
6. Holzapfel, Huntsman, and Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, 259.
7. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:134.
8. See Hebrews 11:1 (“substance” is changed to “assurance” in footnote b), 5–6 (“and that he is a rewarder of them”), 9 (“land of promise” and “heirs with him of the same promise”), 11 (“she judged him faithful who had promised”), 13 (“not having received the promises”), 17 (“he that had received the promises”), 33 (“obtained promises”), 39 (“received not the promise”).
9. *The New Roger’s Thesaurus in Dictionary Form*, rev. ed. (1978), “assurance.” The updated version of Roger’s Thesaurus Online yields the same synonyms.
10. Dallin H. Oaks, “Why Do We Serve?,” *Ensign*, November 1984, 14.
11. Oaks, “Why Do We Serve?,” 14.
12. *History of the Church*, 2:16; emphasis added.
13. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:205.
14. *History of the Church*, 2:16.
15. After reading Moses 1:25–29 and researching the footnotes in context, it is my opinion that the word *they* in Moses 1:25 refers to “waters” previously mentioned in the same verse.
16. Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 38.
17. *Lectures on Faith*, 41.
18. *Lectures on Faith*, 41–42; emphasis added.
19. *Lectures on Faith*, 47; emphasis added.
20. See David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith” (address to CES religious educators, February 3, 2006), 1.
21. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” 2.
22. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” 2.