

24.20

Hebrews 11 and a Demonstration of Aphrahat

Hebrews 11 is sometimes called “the roll call of faith” because it describes the nature and accomplishments of faith with reference to numerous heroes of the Old Testament.

A third-century Syrian Christian named Aphrahat offers a similar description of faith in an exposition that was probably inspired by Hebrews 11, the text of which is printed below.

Aphrahat (280–345)

Aphrahat was a third-century Syrian Christian who lived and worked within the sphere of the Persian empire. He wrote twenty-three expositions on Christian doctrine and practice, called *Demonstrations*. In one, he waxes eloquent about the power and nature of faith:

So let us draw near then, my beloved, to faith, since its powers
are so many.

For faith raised up [Enoch] to the heavens [Gen. 5:24]
and conquered the deluge [Gen. 7:21–22].

Faith causes the barren to sprout forth [Gen. 21:1–3].

It delivers from the sword. [Gen. 22:1–19] . . .

It raises the dead, and brings them up from Sheol.

It stills the billows [Matt. 8:26].

It heals the sick [Matt. 9:2, 22].

. . .

It stops the mouths of lions, and quenches the flame of fire.

It humiliates the proud, and brings the humble to honor.

All these mighty works are wrought by faith.

Now this is faith; when one believes in God the Lord of all,

. . .

He sent his Spirit upon the prophets.

Moreover he sent his Christ into the world, that we should

believe in the resurrection of the dead; and should also trust in
the efficacy of our baptism.

This is the faith of the church of God.

Demonstration 4.17–19

Text of Hebrews 11

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. **3** By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. **4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. **5** By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God." **6** And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who

seek him. **7** By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith. **8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. **11** By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” **13** All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, **14** for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. **15** If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. **17** By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, **18** of whom he had been told,

“It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.”

19 He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. **20** By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau. **21** By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, “bowing in worship over the top of his staff.” **22** By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial. **23** By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. **24** By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, **25** choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. **26** He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. **27** By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king’s anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. **29** By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. **30** By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. **31** By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. **32** And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of

David and Samuel and the prophets— **33** who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, **34** quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. **35** Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. **36** Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— **38** of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. **39** Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, **40** since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.