



³⁷ For, ^b“Yet a little while, and ^cthe coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ ^dbut my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of ^ethings not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by ^fthe word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of ^gthings that are visible.

⁴ By faith ^hAbel offered to God ⁱa more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And ^jthrough his faith, though he died, he ^kstill speaks. ⁵ By faith ^lEnoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God ^mmust believe that he exists and ^mthat he rewards those who seek him. ⁷ By faith ⁿNoah, being warned by God concerning ^oevents as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of ^pthe righteousness that comes by faith.

I am going to read a short list of names and I want you to keep a tally in your head or on paper as to how many of these people were martyrs. I will read them slowly so you have a moment to think. Stephen, Rahab, Gideon, Paul, Moses, John the Baptist, Abraham, John—the author of the

But then we don't need a colorful Wordle to know that faith is the theme of the chapter. But what is faith? We have a clear statement in verse one. *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* This is a clear and simple statement, but most people fail to understand it rightly. You have to admit that at first glance, it sounds a bit like double speak. How can you have assurance of something that you hope for? How can you be certain of that which is unseen?



Far too many Christians have defined faith as if it were a leap of faith, like the man in this picture. After all, our beliefs can only take us so far, right? We can't empirically prove God's existence. We can't put God in a test tube and run experiments. There were no videotapes of Jesus' miracles. The feeding of the five thousand is not on Youtube. Therefore, if my knowledge can only take me so far, the rest of the way to God must entail some kind of leap of faith. It's not quite a leap into the darkness like existentialism or even Christian

existentialism but more like a leap into the shadows. I can't prove what is there but I know enough to make the leap. I've got some knowledge but I certainly cannot explain everything so I have to accept the rest on faith. The distance between my reason and my beliefs must entail a leap of faith. A person who holds to this kind of faith says to himself, "I don't know how this is going to turn out, but if I close my eyes, grit my teeth and just hope for the best, I think it will turn out OK."

There is a kernel of truth to this because faith must include action on our part. There are steps that must be taken or else the belief you hold in your head ceases to be a real faith. If you cannot see why this is not a Biblical picture of faith, that will become evident as we go. Unfortunately, I think this is the kind of faith that more than half of all Christians hold to.

Others take a very different view of faith and link faith to reason. They say that faith is not a leap in the dark but a reasoned faith with real answers. If you just study long enough and hard enough you will be able to explain what you believe, why you believe it, why everyone should believe it and why it cannot be disproven under any circumstances. These kinds of people would never make a leap of faith in the dark because such a leap scares them to death. They want every last theological duck lined up in a neat row. Any hint of mystery in their faith is rooted out and destroyed—or else it is ignored altogether.



Such people cannot tolerate uncertainty of any kind and perceive such as a sinful form of doubt.

They have proofs, evidence that demands a verdict, more evidence and more proofs covered with layers of reason and topped off with a cherry of absolute certainty. You do not want to rock their boat and they usually won't let you rock their boat.

There is also a kernel of truth with this kind of faith because there *is* evidence for our faith. As this passage in Hebrews states, there is deep assurance and genuine conviction in our faith but it's not the kind of faith that leaves no room for healthy doubt and mystery.

So far I have defined two extremes held by the majority of believers that tells us what faith is not. But what then is faith? In order to get the full context, we need to go back to verse 37 of the last chapter. ³⁷ For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."

The author is using a quote from Habakkuk 2—my righteous one shall live by faith. Most of you should recognize that Paul used this quote on two occasions to describe saving faith. These are worth looking at.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)

¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:11)



The faith that is described here is saving faith. It is faith that is the opposite of works. It is faith that comes from the righteousness of God and is the means of his saving grace. Therefore, the first thing we learn about faith is that it must start with saving faith. The faith of the men and women listed in this famous chapter of faith were not commended for their saving faith. The author is not saying, "Hey, way to go Noah. You are to be commended for your conversion. Good job, Moses. So

glad you are saved." All of these people are in this chapter and each of them is being commended because of the results of their saving faith, not the faith that converted them. Do you see that distinction? What I am saying is that whatever faith is—it must begin with saving faith. If you are not saved, you can't have this kind of faith. You can only look at it as a little child might look through a department store window longing to have that Red Rider bb gun for Christmas. You can look at it from afar, but it can never be yours without saving faith. Saving faith is the rock solid foundation to living faith.

Now we can examine verse one in more detail. This verse has two parts which are parallel in thought.

Now faith is
the assurance of things hoped for
the conviction of things not seen

Faith is both of these things and both of these things is faith. The word assurance is parallel to the word conviction and the “things hoped for” is parallel in thought to “things not seen.” The first question we should ask is does the word assurance actually mean assurance? I know that may sound rather redundant, but if we are talking about a subject like faith, which as we have already seen can be something nebulous and ill-defined for so many, we should not leave any stone unturned.

The simple answer is that assurance does in fact mean assurance.¹ Surprise! Moreover, just as the boldness with which we are to approach the throne of grace is an intensified boldness, so this is an intensified assurance. I love how one commentator phrased it. The word assurance “designates an objective reality that is unquestionable and securely established.”² (Furthermore, the word for hope is most often translated as “trust.”³ This is not a weak hope that says, “I hope it doesn’t rain today.)

Moving to the next parallel phrase we see the same kind of definitions for the word conviction. The word translated as conviction can mean evidence, proof and certainty. The same commentator offered a powerful explanation. The word conviction “must be understood in the objective sense of proof or demonstration, the evidential character that deprives uncertainty of any basis.”⁴ I have to tell you. I love that phrase!—“the evidential character that deprives uncertainty of any basis.”

But we are still back to the question of how things which are hoped for and things not seen can have an “evidential character that deprives uncertainty of any basis”? If we are not careful here we will be back to a leap of faith into the dark. You and I are used to dealing with evidence and proof in our everyday lives. For example, how did you get to church this morning? As far as I know, all of you arrived here is some form of car, truck or van, and in order for that to have happened, you or someone you came with, sat in the driver’s seat, put the key into the ignition and turned the switch. You probably never even get a second thought as to whether the car would start or not when you turned the key—you just instinctively did it. You had faith that the car would start. Unless the car has been giving you trouble starting lately, based on your past experience, you assumed the car would start.

We do this all throughout the day, every day. Did you think about whether the chair would hold you up before you sat down? Did you stop for a moment and think, to yourself, “Man, I definitely should not have had that second piece of pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving. I think that chair might collapse if I sit in it.” We assume that it will hold us up because we have faith in the chair. It’s not the size of my faith that matters but rather the inherent reliability of the chair that is the key.

But some of you might say, “I know, I’ve heard that illustration before but faith in a chair is different than faith in God. Let me give you three reasons why this is kind of illustration is exactly right.

First, a chair has inherent characteristics which make it reliable to sit on but God has an infinitely reliable character that we can depend on. Will God’s character and reliability ever increase or decrease? Could he possibly be more reliable or less reliable at some point in the future? If God inherent quality cannot increase—he is already infinitely reliable, and if our faith is in this infinitely faithful God, then the only way to increase our faith is to increase our understanding of God’s infinite faithfulness. Therefore, it’s not the size of your faith that matters but rather the size of your God.

Second point. Some will say that even if my understanding of God’s faithfulness increases, I will never know all that there is to know . In other words, how can I have perfect certainty in this God? The answer is that you will never know all that there is to know because that would mean that you would be God. We will never know all there is to know but we can know enough. Furthermore, that which we do know is so certain that we do know what is in the unseen realm. If I carried this chair with me on the plane to Haiti, would it be safe for me to sit on? From my perspective standing here in Wisconsin, that precise situation abides in the realm of “the conviction of things not seen.” Just as I can have certainty in the reliability of the chair in Haiti in a month from now, how much more so can I have certainty in God’s reliability tomorrow—or a million years from now? We will never know all that there is to know, but God’s Word has given us enough knowledge to say that God possesses “the evidential character that deprives uncertainty of any basis.”

Third, you may struggle in your faith because you haven’t put it into action. All of the people in this chapter were commended for their faith because they put their faith to the test. They acted on their faith. Faith that sits on a shelf is just an intellectual position.

Some of you know Dan and Amanda Juetten. Dan is one of Aaron Juetten’s older brothers. Several years ago, Dan and Amanda felt a crystal clear call to go to Haiti as missionaries with MAF, just like the Lees served with MAF in Indonesia. As a matter of fact, Dan met Roland and Karen at the Bosien’s house and this meeting was very instrumental in affirming God’s call on their lives. Several years ago Dan and Amanda were at our church and shared their vision. A few of you even agreed to financially support their ministry. Theirs’ was a clear call from the Lord and they expressed faith in the Lord every step of the way.

Everything was going according to plan when the housing market in the U.S. collapsed and since the Juetten’s live in California, the value of their house dropped by about 60%. And since MAF requires missionaries to sell their homes before they leave for the mission field—a policy that seems very wise to me—this meant that unless they received a gift in the six figures, the Juetten’s would not be going to Haiti.

Understandably, they were devastated by this. Many times they asked the question, “Lord, I thought you called us to Haiti. We had faith that this was the calling on our lives. What happened, Lord?”

What would you do if you were in their shoes? What do you do if you had total faith in something God asked you to do but then it did not come to pass? The first thing you should do is to ask whether or not you heard the voice of the Lord. God does speak with clarity to his children but sometimes we get it wrong. When it comes to having faith in Christ that is certain and removes all uncertainty, the only thing we can trust to that level is the infallible words of God contained in the Scriptures. Many people become disappointed with God because they feel that God promised them something and then did not fulfill his promise.

But from what I know of the Juetten’s, it seems that God did speak to them. And though they reeled from the initial disappointment because their hearts were so strongly drawn toward Haiti, they decided that God did lead them on the journey but for different reasons. Because of this calling, they got more involved in their missions committee. Dan is finishing his bachelor’s degree. They learned to trust the wisdom of the leadership in MAF. Amanda has developed an degenerative eye disease that has taken away all of her peripheral vision. Their hearts are still in Haiti, but the Lord wants them in California right now. Their view of God grows larger all the time and therefore their faith in him grows larger as well. What about you?

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^b Isa. 26:20; Hag. 2:6; Luke 18:8

^c Cited from Hab. 2:3, 4

^d Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11

^e Rom. 8:24; 2 Cor. 4:18; 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:8

^f See Gen. 1:1

^g [Rom. 4:17]

^h Gen. 4:4–8; 1 John 3:12

ⁱ Prov. 15:8

^j Gen. 4:10

^k ch. 12:24

^l Gen. 5:22–24; [2 Kgs. 2:11]

^m 1 Chr. 28:9; Jer. 29:12–14; [John 4:24]

ⁿ Gen. 6:13–22; Luke 17:26; 1 Pet. 3:20

^o ver. 1

^p Rom. 4:13; [Gen. 6:9; Ezek. 14:14, 20]

¹ ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*), **substance**, nature, essence (Heb 1:3); **2**. LN 31.84 **trust**, confidence, being sure (2Co 9:4; 11:17; Heb 3:14; 11:1+) Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. DBLG 5712, #2

² William Lane, Hebrews, Word Biblical Commentary, Word Books, Dallas, volume 47, © 1991, p. 328.

³ **1679** ἐλπίζω [*elpizo* /el·pid·zo/] translates as “trust” 18 times, “hope” 10 times, “hope for” twice, “things hoped for” once, and “vr hope” once. **1** to hope. 1A in a religious sense, to wait for salvation with joy and full confidence. **2** hopefully to trust in. Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. H0

⁴ Lane, p. 329.