

Proven Results

Hebrews 11:4

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A. It's Better (v. 4):

1. Abel - The name means "breath" or "temporary" or "meaningless" (the translation of the same basic Hebrew word that is in Ecc. 1:2; 12:8) and hints at the shortness of Abel's life. (NIV Bible Notes)

a) "Fat" is often used in figurative senses, e.g., abundant, fertile, robust, outwardly successful, insensitive, dull (see Deut 32:15; Ps 92:14), (MT Ps. 92:15), AV; 119:70; Prov 11:25, AV; 13:4, AV; Isa 6:10; Jer 5:28; etc.). See also FATNESS. (from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, revised edition, Copyright © 1979 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. All rights reserved.)

b) Abel represents the righteous man referred to in Hebrews 10:38, whose acceptance before God was based on a superior sacrifice. Like Abel, the readers found acceptance before God on the basis of the better sacrifice of the New Covenant. Their unbelieving brethren, like Cain, found no such divine approbation. Even death does not extinguish the testimony of a man like Abel.^[1]

c) Motivation and heart attitude are all-important (2 Cor. 9:6-10), and God looked with favor on Abel and his offering because of Abel's faith (Hebr. 11:4).

2. Faith – Faith mentioned here is an intense commitment to God's Word, leading to a total surrender in the ability of God to carry out His promises. This mindset causes the person to remain steadfast in their obedience to God's Word.

a) Firstborn: Indicative of the recognition that all the productivity of the flock is from the Lord and all comes from Him and belongs to Him (Deut. 8:11-20; Proverbs 8:17-21).

b) Faith in the book starts here (1:1-4): The issue of faith is established in chapter 1:1-3: *“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* (NASB)

3. Faith – Whatever was taught to Abel by his parents was executed effectively and faithfully. This was displayed by the fact that the animal was the best, choicest and the fat of the animal was offered. Offering the fat had to take much time and energy exposing his dedication and commitment to please God.

a) Faith’s bedrock foundation is belief that when God speaks, it will happen. The consummate example of the power of God’s word was when God’s word created the universe out of nothing. Faith believes that God’s word can make the invisible visible. This world was created out of nothing, without the use of preexisting materials. Each example that follows illustrates that belief in the unseen is based upon a promise of God. Hebrews 11:6 presents two unseen truths for faith: God’s existence (that He is there) and nature (that He is consistent and good). Faith is the key to knowing God. As people respond by faith to the general revelation of God in nature (Rom. 1:19–21), God directs them to the special revelation of himself found in His Son through His word. ^[2]

b) The chief reason for the acceptance of Abel’s sacrifice was that he offered it “by faith.” It is implied that Cain’s sacrifice was rejected because he offered it without faith, as a mere formality (NIV Bible notes).

4. Offering; present – This is a direct, purposeful, personal presentation of a gift that is presented once and for all with no expectation of any return.

a) Abel showed faith. The fact that God accepted Abel’s sacrifice showed that he had an obedient attitude of mind. In some way Cain held back from God, perhaps in his heart. Abel’s offering was an unrestrained response to God, complete with lavish worship which pleased God, like David and Solomon (1 Chron. 19; 2 Chron. 7) . John

tells us that Cain's works were evil, while those of Abel were righteous (1 John 3:12).^[3]

5. Offering to God – Abel presented his best, manifesting his respect for God as someone who is superior and necessary for his existence.
6. Better sacrifice - Abel's sacrifice, which was in the form of a burnt offering ["The basic meaning, "to sacrifice," is used only of burnt offerings in the earliest literature." It is viewed as a complete perfect offering, representing God's ownership - This offering which was wholly consumed and speaks of the complete surrender to the will of God (Romans 12:1)], was an abundance in the eyes of God. His sacrifice served as more than enough for God.

a) It may be better to translate a better sacrifice as "a more appropriate sacrifice," or "a more fitting sacrifice," or "he sacrificed to God in a more fitting way." The entire comparative expression may then be rendered as "Abel sacrificed to God in a more fitting way than Cain sacrificed to God." (from the UBS Handbook Series. Copyright (c) 1961-1997, by United Bible Societies).

b) Key verses:

- Proverbs 3:9-10: *"Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; So your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine."* (NASU)
- 1 Kings 17:10-16 – Zarephath – gathering sticks at the gates when Elijah sent by God to the woman of Zarephath, he asked her to give him her last piece of bread and some water.

7. More excellent sacrifice - A better sacrifice means a more excellent sacrifice. It was more than enough because it was beyond what was expected. Abel went out of his way to impress God.

a) The contrast is not between an offering of plant life and an offering of animal life, but between a careless, thoughtless offering and a choice, generous offering (Lev. 3:16). (NIV Bible Notes)

b) **FATLING**: A domestic animal, generally young, well cared for, and fattened for sacrificial slaughter, although not restricted to such use (cf. 1 Sam 28:24; Matt 22:4; see also Prov 15:17; Jer 46:21).

8. Better sacrifice – Because it was the first fruit and fat of the animal, it took time, and it was a deliberate gift.

B. Prime Rewards (v. 4b):

1. Obtain the testimony – Abel’s witness demonstrates that there is no possibility of a mistake being made and that what he did represents a good report. What he did was of such high regard it is now recorded permanently in heaven. *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* (Matthew 6:19-21; NASU)

2. Obtain the testimony – Abel’s offering became an icon, the first recorded person to sacrificially worship God (Hebrews 13:15-16). The first person to be mentioned in the ‘Hall of Faith.’

3. That he was – Abel’s righteousness demonstrated by His gift is a timeless example of giving that pleases God (2 Corinthians 9:10-11). God made sure Moses recorded this act of worship.

4. That he was righteous – Abel exposed his level of faith by how he brought his gift to God. His gift was done in true alignment with God’s expectations. Because it conformed with God’s standards, he was justified by his faith. He showed his faith through his works. This act will never be forgotten.

a) “Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.” (2 Cor. 9:10-11; NASU)

b) *“BUT 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 to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”* (Heb 10:38-39; NASU)

5. That he was righteous – His desire to please God even though he could not see God is descriptive of his commitment to live a life in the right standing with God. This is why his gift received ‘approval’ (Hebrews 11:2).

a) The association of Abel with righteousness is found elsewhere in sources contemporary with Hebrews (Matt 23:35; 1 John 3:12; Jos., *Ant.* 1.61).^[4]

b) Abel represents the righteous man referred to in 10:38, whose acceptance before God was based on a superior sacrifice. Like Abel, the readers found acceptance before God on the basis of the better sacrifice of the New Covenant. Their unbelieving brethren, like Cain, found no such divine approbation. Even death does not extinguish the testimony of a man like Abel.^[5]

6. That he was righteous – Giving is an act of righteousness because the person faithfully obeys the Lord, no matter the sacrifice it may create. Pleasing the Lord is everything to this person. Their giving manifests this.

7. God testifying – God was so pleased He made sure Abel’s act of worship was highly regarded. No one can get more recognition than this.

8. God testifying about his gift – God’s witness is in reference to the fact that Abel’s offering was directly set aside to be presented to God, and it was the choicest and the fat of the animal. This is an intentional, purposeful expression of Abel’s desire to provide God his best (the fat of the animal is an expression of providing the best of the animal – the animal was considered healthy because of the goodness of God).

a) His gifts—the common term for sacrifices, implying that they must be freely given.

b) Gifts – Abel presented a generous offering that was set aside particularly for God (2 Corinthians 8:1-15).

c) Gifts – Abel’s generous offering became God’s Hallmark.

d) Gifts – Because Abel’s gift was meticulous, God gave him special recognition (2 Corinthians 8:1-15).

C. Overflows (v. 4c):

1. Through faith – The fact that Abel set aside his gift demonstrates that he was intensely committed to totally surrendering himself to please God. This mindset demonstrates Abel’s steadfast commitment to obey God’s Word.

- a) Faith – God recognizes that Abel’s total surrender is an example we must use.
- b) Faith – Abel’s dedication to bringing God the best sacrifice became a model for all givers.
- c) Faith – Abel’s act of faith became an example God used to explain chapter 11, verse 1.

2. Though he is dead – Even though Abel is no longer physically on earth, God did not forget Abel’s sacrificial worship because Abel’s offering was such a blessing, and God was so pleased; God continues his righteous worship as an icon forever; *“The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.”* (Psalm 37:29; NASU)

“He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous, But with kings on the throne He has seated them forever, and they are exalted.” (Job 36:7; NASU)

3. He still speaks – Abel’s sacrificial act of faith is God’s message to everyone. Adam and Eve were not recorded, after the Fall, as righteous, but their son Abel’s commitment to live a life totally surrendered to pleasing God was fully highlighted by how he sacrificially gave to God.

- a) Abel’s act of faith, which demonstrated that he was a righteous man, continuously speaks through all generations of the gift that truly pleases God.
 - b) Faith comes from God, so Abel’s example will never die.
 - c) Nevertheless, the underlying meaning is probably that Abel still speaks because of the faith which enabled him to become the first true worshiper recorded in scripture (see Heb 12:24). Gen 4:10 uses a present tense rendered “Your brother’s blood is crying out...”, to which the writer of Hebrews gives a deeper meaning. (from the UBS Handbook Series. Copyright (c) 1961-1997, by United Bible Societies).
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[1] Hodges, Z. C. (1985). Hebrews. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 807). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

[2] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 672). Tyndale House Publishers.

[3] Lea, T. D. (1999). *Hebrews, James* (Vol. 10, pp. 200–201). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

[4] Lane, W. L. (1998). *Hebrews 9–13* (Vol. 47B, p. 335). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

[5] Hodges, Z. C. (1985). Hebrews. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 807). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.