



Hebrews 11:4

"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."

SUMMARY

In Hebrews 11:4, the author begins his journey through the Old Testament's many examples of faith in action. And in verses 4-7 he shows that walking by faith is something God's people have done even before Abraham's time.

The first example of faith comes from Abel, whose story is told in Genesis 4. Abel and his brother Cain each brought an offering to God from their respective occupations. Abel, a shepherd, offered to God an animal sacrifice from his flock. Cain, a farmer, offered a sacrifice from his field. God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's.

It's never explicitly said why God accepted one offering and not the other. But the close association between the men and their offering ("Cain and his offering"; "Abel and his offering") suggests that God wasn't so much concerned about *what* each man sacrificed but rather the attitude with which they brought it.

This is supported by Jesus' reference to Abel being "righteous" (Matthew 23:35) as well as Cain's response to God's loving correction (Genesis 4:7-8; see also 1 John 3:12). In other words, while Abel's offering was an act of joyful and sacrificial

worship, Cain's offering was an empty religious ritual void of gratitude or dependence on God.¹

How does the author conclude that it was "by faith" that Abel made his offering? Right before Hebrews 11, he quoted Habakkuk 2:4 which says that the "righteous one shall live by faith" (10:38). Faith and righteousness are thus inseparable, which means that "righteous Abel" (Matthew 23:35) was a man of faith (without which no one can please the Lord - Hebrews 11:6). Even though Abel never speaks in Genesis 4, his faith "still speaks" to us today by his example of heartfelt worship.

DISCUSS

Read Psalm 50:7-15. What kind of worship does God critique (vv 8-11)? What kind of attitude should true worshippers have (vv 14-15)?

The key difference between Cain and Abel's offerings seems to be the motive with which they brought them. What are some examples of good things we can do out of wrong motives?

According to Romans 12:1-2, what kinds of sacrifices should Christians make to God today?

How can you "present your bod[y] as a living sacrifice" this week?

¹ The fact that Abel offered the "firstborn" (i.e., the best) of his flock in Genesis 4:4 seems to demonstrate a heart of worship. No mention is made of Cain offering his best to God.