

- b. *Enoch* is the writer's second example of faith (11:5), which isn't surprising given his proximity to Abel in the Genesis narrative (5:20-24). Notably, this man was one of two individuals with the same name, one a son of *Cain* (4:17-18), and the other a descendent of *Seth* (5:6-18). The Scripture treats Seth as a replacement for Abel (Genesis 4:25), so that he and Cain were the patriarchal heads of Adam's two primary lines of descent. Seth represented the faithful line that gave birth to Noah and Abraham, whereas Cain represented the other human family – the part of humanity given over to the unbelief, autonomy and hubris resulting from the fall. All of Adam's descendants lived in exile under the curse of alienation and death, but Cain found refuge in this circumstance, building a city for himself and naming it after his son Enoch. Whereas Seth's faithful descendants sought God as their dwelling place and refuge (cf. 4:26, 5:24), Cain and his offspring constructed a human habitation – the City of Man – as their chosen dwelling (4:16-24).

Thus the two Enochs symbolized the two possible orientations for human beings living under the curse (cf. Abel and Cain): The first Enoch accorded well with the fallen world, symbolized by the city bearing his name and marked with the glory of autonomous human ingenuity, achievement, and aesthetic, while the second Enoch sought and found his lasting habitation in God's heavenly city (4:17-5:24). As figureheads for the antithetical human orientations (sometimes designated by the terms, *seed of the woman* and *seed of the serpent*), these two men have huge symbolic importance in the scriptural story. For that reason, it might seem odd that the Scripture says virtually nothing about their personal lives. But that silence is intentional and reflects their symbolic significance: The Genesis narrative treats them this way because their contribution to its story resides in what they represent, not their individual persons or life circumstance.

Both Enochs play an important role in the scriptural storyline, but the Hebrews writer was obviously referring to the one descended from Seth (11:5). Again, almost nothing is known about this man; all the writer had to make his case for Enoch's faithfulness is the scriptural claim that he "walked with God" (5:22, 24) and then was "taken up" by God. But he saw in that claim the evidence of Enoch's faith and its divine affirmation. Whereas Abel demonstrated his faith in a particular act of worship, and God attested it by receiving his offering, Enoch's faith was evident in a worshipful (faithful) life, which God attested by supernaturally receiving him into His presence. Both men substantiated their faith by their faithfulness, and God affirmed each one in appropriate fashion.

This is the sum and substance of the Hebrews writer's claim, and he made no effort to address or explain the mysterious phenomenon of Enoch's exit from this world. He clearly didn't see this as necessary or even important to his argument; what matters is that Enoch's undying departure was *God's* work – a supernatural act that attested the veracity of Enoch's faith and faithful communion with Him. When God "took up" Enoch in this way, He was simply consummating the reality of this man's life lived in His presence. For the writer (as the Genesis account), the particulars of the phenomenon itself were of no concern.

But readers and scholars through the centuries haven't necessarily shared that perspective, and many pages of commentary have been devoted to examining Enoch's departure and how it ought to be understood. Some have claimed a natural explanation by assigning a euphemistic sense to the Genesis language. They argue that the text is simply highlighting Enoch's premature death (Genesis records that his lifespan was notably shorter than his forefathers and immediate offspring), not indicating some sort of supernatural translation out of this life.

The Hebrew text of Genesis 5:24 conceivably allows for this interpretation, as it simply states that Enoch was "no more" because God "took him." But the writer of Hebrews certainly didn't interpret it that way. For he was explicit that Enoch *did not see death*; the reason he could no longer be found is that God removed him from the world, leaving no body or grave behind. The key textual issue here is the verb that expresses this removal, and the Hebrews writer followed the Septuagint rendering of Genesis 5:24 rather than the Hebrew text. That Greek verb has the basic meaning of setting something in another place, and so can carry the connotation of *transference, transposition, transport, translation*, etc. These connotations are present in the various occurrences of the word in the Septuagint and New Testament, but the Genesis context clearly suggests the idea of supernatural *translation*, especially when read alongside Hebrews 11:5.

- Again, the Hebrews writer stated that Enoch did not experience death.
- So the account of Enoch and his forefathers and immediate descendants (Genesis 5:1-31) explicitly notes the death of every one of those relatives ("and he died"), while conspicuously omitting that epitaph with Enoch.

Hence the prevalent historical view that God supernaturally removed Enoch from this life apart from death is well justified, even if it requires the reader to leave the phenomenon itself in the realm of mystery. What can be said, however, is that this translation must not be confused with the transformation of living believers at the Parousia (ref. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). For this latter transformation pertains to the full *christiformity* – body and spirit – that living Christians experience when Jesus returns. Enoch couldn't experience this sort of transformation, for it involves sharing in Jesus' resurrection glory as consummate Man, which wasn't possible until Jesus was raised from the dead (ref. 11:39-40; cf. also Romans 6:1-11, 8:9-10; 1 Corinthians 15:12-49; Philippians 3:20-21).

In the end, the significance of Enoch's translation has nothing to do with how God brought it about or how it affected Enoch himself, but *why* He did it. And the Hebrews writer answered that it was His way of attesting and rewarding Enoch's faith – specifically, his faithfulness in walking with Him throughout his life: "*he obtained God's witness that, before being taken up, he was pleasing to Him.*" Verse 5 clearly suggests that Enoch's faith was the reason God was pleased with Him, but verse 6 makes the point explicitly, albeit from the negative vantage point: "*without faith it is impossible to please God...*"

The writer's statement in verse 6 flows out of his claim regarding Enoch, and it serves as a sort of parenthetical underscoring the essential relation between faith and God's pleasure with men. In this way, it's directly tied to verse 5, but it also stands alongside verses 1-2 as the general lens for reading the entire chapter: All of the named faithful individuals – and the multitude who aren't named – are united in sharing the blessing of God's approval. Though their personal lives and circumstances differed greatly, God was equally pleased with them because they related to Him in faith. Indeed, there is no other way for human beings to obtain God's approval; without faith, it is *impossible* to please Him. The writer was adamant in this, and so it's important to understand why and how this is the case.

The doctrine of “salvation by grace alone through faith alone” that emerged from the Reformation controversies has so dominated post-Reformation Protestantism that the concept of faith is now largely understood from that perspective. That is, faith is seen as one means of personal salvation in contrast to the alternative of “works”: a person can strive to meet God's righteous standard, or he can believe that Jesus met that standard for him. From this vantage point, the Hebrews writer's assertion about faith pleasing God is readily understood as God being pleased with us when we trust Jesus for our salvation rather than ourselves. It follows, then, that the reason it's impossible to please God without faith is that it's impossible for us to merit God's acceptance and earn our salvation by our works.

The doctrine of salvation by faith is important (though often oversimplified or misunderstood), but this isn't what the writer was talking about. The very way he described faith (11:1) shows that he wasn't speaking of it as the soteriological alternative to personal “works,” but as it is the essence of authentic human existence. Faith is the conformity of God's image-bearers – mind, heart, and will – to the truth as it exists in Him and is revealed by Him; it is image-children living in devoted, trusting intimacy with their Creator-Father, and through that intimacy, fulfilling their created identity and vocation to His glory. This is what it means that “the righteous will live by faith” (ref. again 10:35-39).

The epistle's wider context supports this meaning, but the writer left no doubt of it by his own commentary. Faith alone pleases God, not because it obtains the imputation of the righteousness of Christ's obedience to His law, but because it takes hold of God in truth; it seeks and embraces Him as He actually is and for who He is, not out of speculation and self-seeking. Faith owns the God of all excellence, wisdom, goodness and grace who is fully revealed and fully known in Jesus the Messiah. It owns Him as the One in whom is the truth of genuine human existence; it owns the living God as *He* is man's great reward (cf. Psalms 16, 73).

Enoch wasn't granted to see the divine glory in the face of Christ, but he did know the Creator-God who'd promised to restore all things, and he entrusted his present and future to Him. Enoch lived his life gazing heavenward, and God rewarded his longing. And having escaped the curse by deliverance from death, Enoch affirms the resolve of all who live in hope of the resurrection of the dead.