

Faith like Sarah's

By [Elizabeth Myer Boulton](#)

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Scholars say the title "To the Hebrews" is not a part of the original manuscript: the author of this early Christian letter—a written sermon, really—doesn't waste time on salutations. He gets right to it, straight to the point. His aim is to inspire, motivate, encourage and theologically counsel a community experiencing persecution and quite possibly the abandonment of faith, and so he has no time for chit-chat.

The community being addressed has already faced persecution, and it is entirely possible that more is on the way. And so the author of Hebrews wants to provide a word of clarity, a word of strength, a word of consolation and a word of hope—and along the way, he pens one of the most treasured passages in all the canon:

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

In other words, though the news around us may be full of shadows, though the evidence does not look good, we can and must believe—for our faith is not “evidential” in the conventional way. It's based on more than one kind of news: the signs of the times around us, yes, but also and preeminently the good news of the Christian gospel.

We might not believe at first—like Sarah, a paragon of faith in this passage, we might even *laugh* at first, incredulous—but God believes in us. No matter how barren we feel, new birth is possible. No matter how bleak the world may look, new life is possible. And for us, new life is possible through faith, through trust, through leaning on the promises of God despite what we see.

For in fact, the author maintains, even the most common things around us—the trees, the silverware, the slanting sunlight in the afternoon—are made of things we cannot see. The whole world emerges from an unseen realm, an idea we evoke in

the Lord's Prayer: "on earth as it is in heaven."

So too with God's promised future: we might not see it yet, but it is no less real for that. In the fullness of time, it will emerge and we will see it one day, as surely as we now see the most common things. Becoming convinced of this—laughing first, perhaps, with Sarah, but then coming to trust and believe—is what it means to "have faith."

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