

Hebrews 11:30-40
July 31, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We have been deep-diving quite a number of storylines regarding Old Testament heroes of the faith. The author starts to wind down his list of heroes simply because he “doesn’t have the time” to tell them all the details! His goal is to make an appeal to these young Hebrew Christians, which we will get to in Chp 12. So let’s read the remainder of chapter 11 and glean more observations that will help us live by faith, and then we’ll get the writer’s appeal.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 11:30-40]

V.30:

- By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

V.31:

- By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

V.32:

- And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets,

V.33:

- who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,

V.34:

- quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

V.35:

- Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.

V.36:

- Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.

V.37:

- They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—

V.38:

- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

V.39:

- These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

V.40:

- God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.30: What faith did the Israelite people have to show regarding the walls of Jericho falling down? [X-Ref Joshua 6:1-6 They had to believe that God had truly given them Jericho, and once they were to all shout together, the walls would come tumbling down!]

Think About It: Is it possible that a few Israelite people huddled together in their tents and said, “Joshua must be off his rocker. This is the silliest thing I’ve ever heard. All of us are going to shout at the same time and the walls of Jericho will be going down? Really?? This account is marvelous because it shows that 100% of the Israelites under Joshua’s command had faith in God. If God said it, they believed it!

Q v.31: [Give backstory from Josh 2, but focus on v.8-11] What caused Rahab to have so much faith in God when she wasn’t even an Israelite? [She had heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea. She remembered what they did to two Amorite kings who were completely destroyed. She acknowledged that their hearts melted in fear because they knew that the Lord their God was the God in heaven above and the earth below.]

Q v.32-34: Here is an inspirational listing of OT heroes who had great faith in God. We can see their accomplishments and go “Wow!” What did all of these men have in common? [They believed God. Their trust in God was unwavering. They had a close relationship with God. The more they spent time with Him, the more He revealed Himself to them. They knew He would take care of them.]

Set up v.35-38: All of us have bad days, right? Think of some of your worst days and then let’s compare them to the kinds of days experienced by faith followers of the OT –

- V.35 - Some were “tortured and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection.” I have had bad days, but I can’t say I’ve been tortured.
- V.36 - Some “faced jeers and flogging.” I’ve had bad days, but I haven’t endured jeers and flogging.
- V.36 - Some “were chained and put in prison.” I’ve had bad days, but I haven’t been imprisoned.
- V.37 -Some were “stoned, or sawed in two, or put to death by the sword.” I’ve had bad days, but I’m still living by God’s grace.
- V.37 - Some “went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated.” I’ve had bad days, but I can’t say that I’ve been destitute, persecuted or mistreated.
- V.38 - Some “wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.” I’ve had bad days, but have never been a wandered looking for caves and holes in the ground.

Observation v.39: Notice that many of our heroes of faith, men and women alike, didn’t receive what had been promised! Some obviously died.

Q: How do you think these men and women developed such an amazing faith such that they would endure torture, floggings, or even death? [Let people struggle with this.]

LOOK:

God has provided us with many examples of faithful followers. Not only are they our examples for us to grow in our faith, but many of us have family members who have been wonderful heroes of the faith. Will we be considered a hero of the faith when we're long gone? Let's be an example now, so that our future generations can look back on our own lives and be inspired.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 320–321). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Joshua and Rahab—faith winning (vv. 30–31). The account of the conquest of Jericho is found in Joshua 2–6. Joshua was Moses' successor as leader of Israel, and he succeeded because he trusted the same God that Moses had trusted. God changes His workmen but He does not change His principles of operation. He blesses faith and He judges unbelief.

From a human point of view, Jericho was an impossible city to conquer. However, Joshua's first act of faith was not the defeat of the city, but the crossing of the Jordan River. By faith, the nation crossed the river just as the previous generation had crossed the Red Sea. This was a witness and a warning to the Canaanite nations that Israel was marching forward by the power of God.

Rahab was a harlot, an unlikely person to put faith in the true God of Israel! *She was saved by grace*, because the other inhabitants of the city were marked out for death. God in His mercy and grace permitted Rahab to live. But *she was saved by faith*. What she knew about God is recorded in Joshua 2:8–14. She knew that Jehovah had delivered Israel from Egypt and that He had opened the Red Sea. But that was forty years before! She also knew God had defeated the other nations during Israel's wilderness wanderings. "For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. 2:11). That was her testimony of faith, and God honored it.

She was saved unto good works. True faith must always show itself in good works (James 2:20–26). She protected the spies, put the cord in the window as directed (Josh. 2:15–21), apparently won her family to the true faith (Josh. 2:13; 6:25), and in every way obeyed the Lord. Not only was Rahab delivered from judgment, but she became a part of the nation of Israel. She married Salmon and gave birth to Boaz who was an ancestor of King David (Matt. 1:4–6). Imagine a pagan harlot becoming a part of the ancestry of Jesus Christ! That is what faith can do!

Rahab is certainly a rebuke to unsaved people who give excuses for not trusting Christ. "I don't know very much about the Bible" is an excuse I often hear. Rahab knew very little spiritual truth, but she acted on what she did know. "I am too bad to be saved!" is another excuse. But Rahab was a condemned heathen harlot! Another excuse is, "What will my family think?" Rahab's first concern was *saving* her family, not opposing them. She stands as one of the great women of faith in the Bible.

Various heroes of faith (vv. 32–40). Faith can operate in the life of any person who will dare to listen to God's Word and surrender to God's will. What a variety of personalities we have here! Gideon was a frightened farmer whose faith did not grow strong right away (Jud. 6:11–7:25). Barak won a resounding victory over Sisera, but he needed Deborah the prophetess as his helper to assure him (see Jud. 4:1–5:31). Both Gideon and Barak are encouragements to us who falter in our faith.

The story of Samson is familiar (Jud. 13–16). We would not call Samson a godly man, for he yielded to his fleshly appetites. He was a Nazarite, which meant he was dedicated to God and was never to cut his hair or partake of the fruit of the vine. (A Nazarite should not be confused with a Nazarene, a resident of Nazareth.) Samson did trust God to help and deliver him and, in the end, Samson was willing to give his life to defeat the enemy. However, we must not conclude that believers today can expect to lead double lives and still enjoy God's blessing.

Jephthah's story is fascinating (Jud. 11:1–12:7). It is unlikely that he sacrificed his only daughter as a burnt offering, for this was forbidden in Israel. Probably he dedicated her to the Lord on the basis of the "law of vows" (Lev. 27), dedicating her to perpetual virginity (Jud. 11:34–40).

It is not possible for us to examine each example of faith, and even the writer of Hebrews stopped citing names after he mentioned David and Samuel, who were certainly great men of faith. There are examples in the Old Testament of men and women who won the victories referred to in Hebrews 11:33–35. David certainly subdued kingdoms and wrought righteousness. Daniel's faith "stopped the mouths of lions" (Dan. 6), and the three Hebrew children overcame

the power of the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:23–28). The women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11:35 have their stories given in 1 Kings 17:17–24 and 2 Kings 4:18–37.

The transition in Hebrews 11:35 is important: not all men and women of faith experienced miraculous deliverance. Some were tortured and died! The word translated “others” in Hebrews 11:36 means “others of a different kind.” These “others” had faith, but God did not see fit to deal with them in the same way he dealt with Moses, Gideon, and David.

While making a hospital visit, I found a patient lying in bed weeping. “What’s the matter?” I asked. Her reply was to hand me a book that she had that day received in the mail. It was on “divine healing” and “the power of faith.” Some anonymous person had written on the flyleaf, “Read this book—it will give you faith to be healed.” The patient happened to be a dedicated Christian who trusted God even in the midst of suffering. But her anonymous correspondent thought that *all* people with faith should be delivered miraculously.

I have personally experienced God’s miracle touch on my body when others were sure I would die. I know that God can heal. But I also know that God *does not have to heal* in order to prove that I have faith. The writer of Hebrews (11:36–38) records the fact that many unknown men and women of faith *were not delivered* from difficult circumstances; yet God honored their faith. In fact, it takes more faith to *endure* than it does to *escape*. Like the three Hebrew children, we should trust God and obey Him *even if He does not deliver us* (Dan. 3:16–18).

Man’s estimate of these heroes of faith was a low one; so men persecuted them, arrested them, tortured them, and in some cases, killed them. But God’s estimate is entirely different. He said that the world was not worthy of these people! The Apostle Paul is a good illustration of this truth. Festus said that Paul was out of his mind (Acts 26:24). The Jews said Paul was not fit to live (Acts 22:22). Paul himself said he was treated like “the filth of the world ... the offscouring of all things” (1 Cor. 4:13). Yet Paul was God’s chosen vessel, probably the greatest Christian who ever lived!

Faith enables us to turn from the approval of the world and seek only the approval of God. If God is glorified by delivering His people, He will do it. If He sees fit to be glorified by *not* delivering His people, then He will do that. But we must never conclude that the absence of deliverance means a lack of faith on the part of God’s children.

Faith looks to the future, for that is where the greatest rewards are found. The people named in this chapter (and those unnamed) did not receive “the promises” (what was promised, Heb. 11:13) but they had God’s witness to their faith that one day they would be rewarded. God’s purpose involves Old Testament saints as well as New Testament saints! One day all of us shall share that heavenly city that true saints look for by faith.

We today should give thanks for these saints of old, for they were faithful during difficult times, and yet *we* are the ones who have received the “better blessing.” They saw some of these blessings afar off (see John 8:56), but we enjoy them today through Jesus Christ. If the saints of old had not trusted God and obeyed His will, Israel would have perished and the Messiah would not have been born.

“Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). But this kind of faith grows as we listen to His Word (Rom. 10:17) and fellowship in worship and prayer. Faith is possible to all kinds of believers in all kinds of situations. It is not a luxury for a few “elite saints.” It is a necessity for all of God’s people. Lord, increase our faith!

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 809). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

11:29–31. The readers could also look forward to victory over their enemies (cf. 1:13–14). They could learn from the destruction of **the Egyptians** and the collapse of **the walls of Jericho** what triumphs faith can win over its adversaries. If, as seems probable, there were a few Gentiles in the church that received this letter, they could take comfort from the experience of **the prostitute Rahab**, a Gentile who was spared when Jericho was conquered.

11:32–35a. There were far too many heroes of faith for the writer to deal with them all in detail. Swiftly he mentioned the variegated accomplishments of some of them. At the climax of this list stand **women** who **received back their dead, raised to life again**—a truly superlative victory of faith which does not allow death to defeat it (cf. 1 Kings 17:17–24; 2 Kings 4:17–37).

11:35b–38. In a swift transition of thought, the writer moved from faith's obvious triumphs to what seemed to be its defeats. But these defeats were only apparent, not real. Those who **were tortured and refused to be released** did so because they knew their sufferings would lead to a richer and **better resurrection** experience. So the readers might also endure suffering staunchly and expect reward in the future world. Indeed, all manner of physical suffering (vv. 36–37, 38b cite about a dozen kinds of persecution) has been endured by people of faith, as well as ostracism from their homes and countries, treatment that the readers might also have to endure. But in a lovely touch, the writer commented that **the world was not worthy** of those whom it banished.

11:39–40. In a concluding summary the writer pointed out that the great heroes of faith he had spoken of had not yet realized their eschatological hopes. This fact shows that **God had planned something better for them and us**. It is indeed “better for us” that the future hopes they strove toward be delayed, since only thus could believers enjoy the present experience of becoming companions of the Messiah who leads them to glory. As a result, the perfecting (cf. 10:14; 12:23) of the Old Testament worthies—that is, the realization of their hopes—awaits that of all believers.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1836). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

11:31–32 Some see a contradiction in verse 31 because it says Rahab was saved by faith, whereas James 2:25 says that she was saved by works. However, the word for “save” also means to “vindicate” or “authenticate.” Thus, the contextual point in Jms is that Rahab's faith was authenticated by her works—i.e., it was shown to be genuine. These verses address different aspects of salvation and do not contradict each other.

One might wonder why Jephthah is remembered in verse 32 for his acts of faith, given that his vow was rash. One should remember, however, that although Jephthah's vow was foolish, it still showed his faith in, and devotion to, God.