

Further Heroes of Faith Presented as Models

Hebrews 11:29-40

Hebrews 11:29-32 - *By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.*³⁰ *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.*³¹ *By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.*³² *And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets.*

Background Notes

Hebrews 11:1 says, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” Faith does not say “seeing is believing” but rather faith says “believing is seeing.” Faith does not create reality, and it does not believe in what is unreal. No, faith believes only in what is real. The natural eye does not necessarily see everything that is real - including the promises of God - but the eye of faith sees these unseen realities. ***The eye of faith sees what the heart of faith believes.*** Believing is seeing.

But how do we know that what we believe is really real - including the promises of God? How do we know if there really is substance to the “*things hoped for*”? How can we say that faith is the evidence of realities we can't see? We know it, because God told us, and we believe it. That's what biblical faith is all about.

Saving faith and living by faith consist of ***believing*** what God has said and revealed, and ***acting*** on it - basing our lives on it. The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 believed in the existence of the one true God. They believed that what He had revealed to them through His Word was true. And then they acted on it on what they believed. They based their lives and destinies on it. That is the kind of faith that pleases God!

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should follow the faith of the children of Israel.

The people of Israel were not giants of faith - that's for sure! In fact it was unbelief that kept them out of the Promised Land for many long years. But in Hebrews 11 God chose two events in the life of the nation of Israel when they did exhibit faith: the crossing of the Red Sea (v29) and the encircling of Jericho (v30).

In the account of the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14), it's not obvious that the children of Israel showed a lot of faith. That should be an encouragement for us, because sometimes our faith is weak, too – right? But when the Red Sea parted, they trusted the Lord and crossed over – by faith.

Notice - the Egyptians also entered the Red Sea - but not by faith (v29). Their eyes were not on the Lord, and they drowned. It's interesting that both groups did the same action. Both groups entered the Sea. But in one case it was evidence of faith, and in the other case it was by the works of the flesh.

The children of Israel exhibited great faith when they followed the Lord's directions and marched around Jericho once a day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day. Right up to the last minute there was absolutely **no evidence** that the wall would fall - not even a tiny crack! But they believed what God had promised and they acted upon His promise. They didn't give up or quit. In faith they shouted - and the wall fell down!

God said it, and they believed it, and they acted on His Word. That's living by faith! Believers should follow the faith of the children of Israel.

2. Believers should follow the faith of Rahab.

Rahab did not have the Jewish Law of God because she was a Gentile, and a prostitute - but she believed whatever facts she knew about the one true God of Israel. And God honored that faith.

Notice that the Scripture does **not** say, "By faith, Rahab lied." Nowhere in the Scriptures was Rahab's lie condoned. No. Rahab was commended for her "faith in action." She received the Jewish spies in peace and hid them. She believed and she acted - this was evidence of her faith. It was a true and genuine faith and God honored it. Believers should follow the faith of Rahab.

3. Believers should follow the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah.

These men of faith were all Judges of Israel. But when you look at the records, you wonder why God chose these Judges for Hebrews 11! Why didn't He select judges like Othniel and Ehud and Deborah, who all seem to have exhibited more faith?

Gideon had faith, but it was a weak faith. He tested God with a fleece rather than take God at His word (Judges 6) – but he finally acted. Barak needed the stronger faith of Deborah to motivate him (Judges 4) – but he finally acted! Samson was no a model of godliness – that's for sure (Judges 14-16)! And it seems like Jephthah tried to bribe God with his promise to offer a sacrifice in return for God giving him the victory over the Ammonites (Judges 11) – but he acted, and fought the enemies of God's people.

I don't know about you, but I'm encouraged by God's choice of judges for Hebrews 11. These judges may not have had strong faith –but they had a genuine faith, and even though they wavered they did finally act on their faith. And God honored their faith!

Did you ever feel discouraged because your faith is weak? Well - be encouraged! Remember the judges mentioned in Hebrews 11:32. Believers should follow the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah.

4. Believers should follow the faith of David and Samuel and the prophets.

Think of David's faith. He was called "a man after God's own heart." But as we know, David did not walk by faith in all of his actions. He committed adultery, and he murdered one of his most faithful soldiers.

But God saw evidence of David's faith throughout his life. Think of the faith David exhibited when he fought the giant Goliath. Against all human odds, he defeated the champion of the Philistines with only a slingshot - and his faith in the God of Israel.

Think of the faith of Samuel, the last Judge and the first prophet in Israel. Even as a young boy, Samuel believed the word of the Lord, and he lived by it. Samuel's faith was a major factor in bringing the whole nation of Israel back to the Lord following the dark and immoral days of the Judges.

And then think of the faith of the prophets. Think of Jeremiah, for example, who is often called "the weeping prophet" and "the lonely prophet." Jeremiah preached for more than forty years – forty years of opposition, persecution, beatings, and imprisonment. No one thanked Jeremiah for his nice, pleasant sermons! But Jeremiah endured. He remained faithful. He believed what God had revealed, and he steadfastly acted on that belief. Believers should follow the faith of David, Samuel and the prophets.

5. Believers should follow the faith of the unnamed heroes of Hebrews chapter 11.

Hebrews 11:33-40: *"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again.*

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

In verses 33-40 the author of Hebrews listed a number of unnamed heroes of faith. The unnamed heroes in these verses cover the rest of Old Testament history, including the Inter-Testamental Period.

Many of these heroes of faith are easily recognized, like Daniel - who through faith "stopped the mouths of lions" (v33). But wait a minute, you say; I thought it was God who shut the lions' mouths? Yes it was - but God acted in response to Daniel's faith.

Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego (v34) were Daniel's three friends who, because of their faith in the one true God, refused to bow down to an image and were thrown into a fiery furnace. By faith they "*quenched the violence of fire,*" and only the ropes that bound them were burned. Once again, God's power was at work in response to their faith.

Notice that by faith some escaped the edge of the sword (v34), while some of the faithful were martyred - slain by the sword (v37). Their faith was not the determining factor in whether they lived or died – God had predetermined the date and method of their call to Heaven. Their faith was determined by whether they believed what God had said and revealed. They had believed, and clearly they had acted on what God had revealed.

Verse 35 mentioned women who "*received their dead raised to life again.*" In 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4, dead sons were miraculously resuscitated through the ministry of Elijah and Elisha. But notice – God raised the dead sons to life in response to the faith of their mothers.

Verse 37 mentions faith heroes who were "*sawn in two.*" Jewish tradition says that Isaiah was placed in a hollow log by wicked King Manasseh of Judah and cut in half.

These heroes of faith did not receive the promise of the kingdom that is yet to come here on this earth. But they will receive the promise in the future - and so will we, who are part of the Church, the body of Christ. Ours is an even better position (v40)! Both Old Testament believers and New Testament believers will be "*made perfect*" – they will have resurrected sinless bodies in the future kingdom of Christ. And in that future kingdom of Christ on earth, there will be rewards for having lived by faith in this lifetime. Believers should follow the faith of the unnamed heroes of Hebrews 11.

Practical Application

Would you have been selected for Hebrews 11?

Suppose you had lived as a believer in Old Testament times, and you lived the same kind of life you're living as a believer right now. Would God have selected you for Hebrews 11 because of your life of faith? What would God see as evidence - in *your life* - that you believe what He has said? What is the evidence that you have acted on it?

Are you living by faith? Would you have been selected for Hebrews 11?