

Introduction: In this lesson we continue our study on faith from Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:13-16: *“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”*

Summary Comments About Old Testament Believers: Verses 13-16 present an overall outlook on the author’s Old Testament examples. All those in the Faith Hall of Fame died without fully receiving the things promised. Throughout mortal life, they looked to God to fulfill His word to them. Not that they expected immediate fulfillment. They saw and welcomed the things promised from afar. They understood God’s promises in both a spiritual and physical sense. They expected fulfillment to be primarily in the future. Though they knew they would certainly die, that certainty did not diminish their confidence God would fulfill His promises in His own timing. Because of their anticipated joy of promises fulfilled, they were willing to live as aliens and strangers in the world.

As described in Genesis 23:4, near the end of Abraham’s life, he described himself as a sojourner and foreigner in the land of promise. He was as a stranger in the land God was giving him. Had they chosen to do so, Abraham and his family could have returned to Mesopotamia. In fact, for a time, Isaac’s son Jacob did just that. Abraham’s family had faith in God’s promises which they recognized as being associated with the promised land. At the same time, they understood, the promised land was yet for them. They were destined to have difficulties and would be forced to live for a time in a foreign land. Ultimately, they would reach their heavenly destination, the city of God, which God was preparing for them.

The faith of Abraham and his family was a longsighted faith. They looked to fulfillment of God’s promises when God deemed the time to be right. With increasing faith, they looked both to earthly prospects and future eternal realities. Because of

their faith, God was not ashamed to be called their God. These faithful people believed in a definite link between the visible promised land of Canaan and the, as yet invisible heavenly promised land that would ultimately be theirs by faith.

God does not usually instantly fix earthly difficulties. Believers are told they will have difficulties during mortal life. But God has promised believers they will have a future eternal life with Him which will be without difficulties.

To enable eternal life with God, the sin problem must be solved. Only the holy creatures can live in God's presence. Christ's self-sacrifice provided the solution. For each believer, eternal life is to be welcomed though it be from afar. Once again there is seen a deliberate link between the visible and the invisible. God ultimately will fulfill every promise.

Hebrews 11:17-19: *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,¹⁸ of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”*

The Most Severe Test of Abraham's Faith: God's command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac was a most severe test of faith. It ended in glorious triumph for both Abraham and Isaac (v 17-19).

Isaac was the son of promise born at a time when Abraham and Sarah were so old it seemed impossible they could have a child. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. Abraham was promised by God a posterity and told it would come through Isaac. Abraham also had another son, Ishmael, but he was not from Sarah and not a son of promise. Only Isaac was the son of promise. The reference to *“his only son”* in verse 17b means Isaac was the only son of promise.

God's promise of posterity through Isaac had to mean that Isaac would live to have children. Because of that, Abraham reasoned that if he sacrificed Isaac to God, God would bring Isaac to life again. God could and would restore life as well as take it. In the Genesis account (22:1-10), Abraham, with confidence, assured his servants that both he and the lad would return from the mountain. That meant Abraham believed sacrificing Isaac to God would not be the end of Isaac.

The providential substitution of a ram to be sacrificed in place of Abraham's only son prefigures the later scene at Golgotha when God's Son, the Lamb of God, willingly lays down his life as a substitute for many. As God commanded, Abraham was ready and willing to sacrifice his son of promise.

In his heart, Abraham sacrificed Isaac fully expecting that the sacrificed Isaac would be restored to normal human life and would beget descendants. In the end, it was not necessary for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham's settled willingness in his heart meant that in his heart, Abraham did sacrifice Isaac. In God's grace a substitute was supplied, and Abraham received Isaac back from the dead.

When the time came, God *“did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all.”* (Romans 8:32a). Jesus sacrificed Himself to death on the cross to once for all settle the sin problem. But death could not hold Christ. On the third day He received a new and glorious resurrection life and arose from the dead. The intended sacrifice of Isaac and his restoration to Abraham was a “type” of the death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection.

Hebrews 11:20-22: *By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.*

Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph: These three men looked by faith beyond the end of their mortal lives to God's continuing actions in the lives of His people. Isaac apparently had insight into the way God would differently use the lives of his twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Each of them would be in a different relationship to God's plan (Genesis 27:27-20, 30-40). Isaac's faith looked beyond the obvious carnality of Esau and Jacob's crookedness and, consistent with God's intent, Isaac blessed not one but both of them.

Early in his life, Jacob seemed to find it difficult to explicitly trust God. Much later in Egypt, Jacob was a changed man. Under the protection of his son, Joseph, Jacob realized God had a plan for Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim which would place Ephraim in the first position though he was the younger. By faith Jacob dared to transfer the birthright due the first born from Manasseh to Ephraim. It is interesting that Jacob, by trickery, had himself received Isaac's birthright blessing rightfully due

his brother Esau. Jacob was given insight that his descendants would remain in Egypt a long time, some 400 years in all. They would suffer affliction. Jacob's faith led him to focus on the future promised deliverance when the people would return to the land of promise.

Joseph's life included many dramatic examples of the power of faith. Near the end of his life, Joseph was counting on the promised future return to the land of promise. Joseph believed Israel would eventually leave Egypt. That happened more than 200 years later. In anticipation of that return, Joseph instructed that, when they left, they were to carry his bones with them and bury them in the land of promise. When the time came to leave Egypt, Moses made sure Joseph's bones went with them (Exodus 13:19). Joseph's bones were buried at Shechem (Joshua 24:32). Each of these three men visualized future realities. They adapted their lives and those of their descendants to fit with the anticipated, but as yet, invisible realities.

Hebrews 11:23-28: *“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.”*

Moses and the Israelites: Moses is a towering figure, second only to Abraham among Old Testament figures. Verses 23-28 provide a few highlights from his life. These begin with the faith of Moses' parents as they thwarted Egyptian intent to kill all Hebrew male newborns. The highlights end with Moses following God's instructions enabling the Israelites to make a miraculous safe passage across the Red Sea.

Moses' parents' faith is vividly demonstrated as they hid their infant son among the reeds of the Nile. Two facts are given to show the faith of Moses' parents. They saw Moses was no ordinary child. They were not afraid of the king's edict. They hid Moses for three months.

Josephus, in his **Antiquities**, suggests Moses' parents received a revelation from God concerning their son's destiny. That would help explain their actions in faith to save their infant. It also explains why their faith enabled them to be strong enough to be unafraid of the king's cruel command to kill all male Israelite newborns. In another miracle Moses' real mother, Jochebed, was accepted by Pharaoh's daughter as Moses' nurse. Moses own mother helped raise him to adulthood. Moses faith and trust in God was largely molded by his physical mother and father.

Moses' parents' influence on his faith was powerful and lasting. Though trained in the culture of Egypt and called the son of the Pharaoh's daughter, Moses at 40 years of age (Acts 7:23) renounced his earthly privileges, choosing to be mistreated with the people of God rather than be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He was looking to God's future reward which was not going to be found in Egypt. He went on to fully identify himself with the people of Israel. In Acts 7:20-38, Stephen says Moses believed the Israelites would realize God was using him to rescue them, but, incredibly, they did not. The unreliable reactions of the Israelites were a continuing trial to Moses.

After killing an Egyptian and burying him in the sand, by faith, Moses left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king. He endured because he saw God who is invisible (v. 27). He did flee to save his life, but not because he feared the anger of the king. He fled by faith knowing God would fulfill his promise to deliver Israel. Moses awaited 40 additional years for God's timing of deliverance, persevering in Midian. During that time Moses was sustained by his faith by which he saw the unseen and reckoned on those invisible realities.

The author doesn't mention the unconsumed burning bush which preceded God's call to Moses, nor does he mention Moses' return from Midian to Egypt to free the Hebrews, nor the confrontations with the new Pharaoh, nor the series of 10 plagues brought on Egypt because of Pharaoh's hard heartedness. In verse 28, he does speak of the first observance of Passover on the night of the 10th and final plague.

The first Passover was a crucial experience for Israel and, through comparison with the institution of the Lord's supper by Jesus, is important to the church. Both provide pictures of God saving His people. The angel of death, on the night of the

first passover, was assigned the task of taking the life of the first born males of both people and animals. An exception was to be made for residents of homes with the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the doorpost. In that initial Passover, Moses and the people, by faith, believed the instruction that sprinkling their doorpost with blood of a lamb would save their first-born from the work of the angel of death. It did!

The angel of death passed over each house where the doorposts were sprinkled with the blood of a lamb. Thousands of first-born sons of the Egyptians perished that night including the first-born son of the Pharaoh, but not one of Israel. This plague, with the fact that the plague killed only Egyptians and not Hebrews, was so horrible that it broke Pharaoh's resistance. The Israelites were begged to leave and given many gifts to speed them on their way.

Hebrews 11:29: *“By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.”*

Moses and Israel's Faith in the Red Sea Incident: After the Hebrews hurriedly left Egypt, the Pharaoh changed his mind and sent an army of chariots and soldiers to head the Hebrews off and bring them back. The escaping Israelites were nearing the Red Sea (or Sea of Reeds). Pharaoh's army was fast approaching from the rear. What could Israel do? In Exodus 14:15b-16 God said to Moses, *“Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground.”* By faith Moses obeyed. A powerful east wind drove the waters back all night. By faith Israel passed between the walls of water, arriving safely on the other side. When the Egyptians tried to follow, Moses stretched out his staff, the waters returned. The Egyptian soldiers were drowned. Faith dares to obey despite apparent difficulties.

Hebrews 11:30-31: *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”*

Faith at Jericho: The next example of Israel's faith is forty years later after wandering in the desert. Israel is set to begin the conquest of Canaan. Joshua is preparing to lead them against the first major obstacle, the city of Jericho.

During the wilderness years, the Israelites had repeatedly demonstrated unbelief. For that reason, Israelite males twenty years old or older when they left Egypt were not permitted to enter Canaan and died in the desert, with two exceptions – Joshua and Caleb.

Joshua began the battle of Jericho by stirring the Israelites to act in faith. The ancient city was a large fortress, 600 meters in circumference (Kistemaker 1984:347). It contained an armed garrison of experienced warriors, a dangerous place.

Jericho blocked access to the valleys of Canaan and of necessity must be defeated. As he readies the battle, Joshua received seemingly strange orders from the angelic Commander of the Army of the Lord. Following those orders, Joshua set the people marching around the fortress, once a day for six days, and seven times the seventh day. On the seventh day, when they gave a great shout, the walls fell down. God's ways of deliverance are varied and often strange to people. He has an infinitely diverse set of solutions available.

Embedded in the story of the destruction of the walls of Jericho is the remarkable account of Rahab the harlot (v 31). Rahab had heard when Israel left Egypt and of their subsequent conquests. She had expected them to assault Jericho years earlier. Rahab believed the Israelite victories were due to their faith in God. She believed *“the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth below.”* (Joshua 2:11b).

When Jericho was taken, Rahab's faith was honored. All inhabitants of the city were killed except Rahab and her family. Her genuineness of faith was confirmed by Matthew who lists her as one of Jesus' ancestors. After the fall of Jericho, she went on to marry Salmon and became the mother of Boaz, and thus the great-grandmother of David. Her faith overcame a previous sinful life and brought her out of her pagan religion. She has a place of honor in the Faith Hall of Fame. Rahab was a woman in a man's world, but faith knows no such distinctions.

Hebrews 11:32-38: *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

Many Other Faithful People Rightfully Belong in the Hall of Fame: The author seems to hesitate as he reflects on the numberless other examples of men and women who have lived by faith. He knows many of them deserve to be mentioned in the Faith Hall of Fame. Some known to him and some unknown. What he chooses to do is give a set of six example names representative of the variety of experiences of men and women who lived lives of faith. He mentions them in general terms (v 32). Some came to great success through faith. Others died suffering in terrible ways, but they remained triumphant in their faith. All who live in faith are commended.

The six names are out of the history of Israel from the time of the judges to the early monarchy. They include Gideon, who is noted for victory over Midian using only 300 men. Barak, who encouraged by the prophetess Deborah defeated the Canaanite army of Sisera. Samson, the strong man of Israel, who though fatally susceptible to young women, was used by God to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression. Jephthah, was the conqueror of the Ammonites and punisher of the tribe of Ephraim. David, Israel's greatest king and author of many psalms, was "a man after God's own heart." David, though well aware he had been anointed as king of Israel, patiently waited for God's timing to remove Saul from the throne. Samuel, the first of the prophets and the last of the judges, lived by faith from his boyhood to his final

days. *The prophets*, must certainly include names like Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

Faith in Action: The faith of these men led them to three kinds of action (v 33-34). Some *“conquered kingdoms”* (like David over the Philistines). Others *“administered justice”* (like Solomon). Some *“obtained promises”* (like Joshua winning the promised land). Steadfast faith helped others to triumph over fearful odds (like Daniel when God *“stopped the mouths of lions”*), *“quenched the power of fire”* (like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when God protected them in the fiery furnace), and *“escaped the edge of the sword”* (like Elisha when God protected him from the Syrians). Still others were enabled by faith to be mighty in battle – *“were made strong out of weakness.”* Others *became “mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight”* (like Jonathan when God enabled him to defeat the Philistines). These were all actual historic incidents, familiar to the readers of this letter from the Old Testament accounts.

“Women received back their dead by resurrection” (like the widow of Zarephath, whose dead son was restored by Elijah, even though she was not of Israel); (like the woman of Shunem whose dead son was raised by Elisha). Such things demonstrate the power released by faith when God chooses to act.

Steadfast faith does not always result in triumph and victory but sometimes in torture and death. Verses 35-38 tells of ones who lost their earthly battle. The incidents cited seem to be mostly from the time of the Maccabean revolt and the cruel Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes (early second century B.C.)

Those who suffered martyrdom expected to *“rise again to a better life.”* What they anticipated was not a return to mortal life but resurrection to eternal life as promised to all who persevere in faith. Mocking, flogging, chains and prisons were experienced in many times and places.

Hebrew tradition says Jeremiah was stoned by his fellow Jews in Egypt. Tradition says Isaiah was sawn in half during the reign of Manasseh, the wicked son of King Hezekiah. Many were reduced to poverty, dressed in animal skins (like Elijah and Elisha), wandering about in deserts and mountains. But the author notes the world

was not worthy of them. Like Jesus, they were "despised and rejected of men" but approved and loved by God.

Hebrews 11:39-40: *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

Though all the people mentioned and inferred were commended for their faith during mortal life, they did not receive all that was promised (v 39-40). They, like us, await the promised "city with foundations" sought by Abraham. The something better provided for Christians speaks of the reality of the blessings of the New Covenant in Christ's blood.

The New Jerusalem will come down from heaven to earth, God will dwell among us and all the promises of God and the supernatural visions of the prophets will be fulfilled, blending the two covenant peoples of God together. In the "first resurrection" (Revelation 20:6-7) believers of both old and new covenants will be joined. All believers will together be made perfect. All will be united under Christ (Ephesians 1:10).

Transition to Chapter 12: The stories of the great heroes and heroines of faith in Chapter 11 are intended to inspire and motivate. In Chapter 12 the author culminates his argument to persevere in the faith with a challenge.

What is Next? A life of faith is like a long-distance race.