

Text: Hebrews 11:32-40

Title: More Examples of Faith in Action

Truth: If you want the approval of God, live with faith like these people did.

Date/Location: Sunday October 9, 2011 at FBC

I. Further Examples of Men of Faith, v. 32

- A. The author of Hebrews would run out of time to speak about every example of faith in the Old Testament, because there are so many. So would we. He has touched on many examples from Genesis; some from Exodus; one from Joshua, and he has 33 books of the OT to go!
- B. God now gives us four quick examples from the book of Judges, and then three from the books of Samuel.
 - 1. Gideon, see II. 1, 7, 8. He won a battle against the Midianites with a very small and unconventionally-armed force of 300 men. See Judges 6-8. He finally believed in God, but only after much doubting and demands for signs. Our faith should learn from Gideon to be obedient at the first.
 - 2. Barak see II. 1. He insisted on Deborah's presence with his forces; this is often interpreted as a sign of weakness or lack of faith. However, it may have been that he insisted on having God's representative (a woman prophet who was a judge) with him in order to honor God and show his faith rather than swagger off to military victory. See Judges 4.
 - 3. Samson, see II.1, 4, 7. His life was a mess. But there were a number of faith highlights. See Judges 13-16. In particular, the Lord used Samson as an instrument of judgment on the Philistines and corresponding salvation for Israel for a period of 20 years.
 - 4. Jephthah, see II. 1. See Judges 11-12. He made a stupid vow which has been much debated by students of the Bible; but he was at least zealous for God. He demonstrates a grasp of Israelite history as well, so he was no fool.
 - 5. David, see II.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8. He was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22, 1 Samuel 13:14). He was given a huge promise—the everlasting Davidic covenant—which has not yet been fulfilled.
 - 6. Samuel, see II.1, 2. From youth he was dedicated to the service of God.
 - 7. The prophets. These are grouped with Samuel, who was the first in a whole line of prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Elijah, etc.
- C. These men all had their faults: weak faith, immorality, and problems in judgment. They also had children who went astray (e.g. 1 Samuel 8:3). These folks were not perfect. No reading of this text should be too idealized, for the Bible is very clear about the faults of these men.

- D. But they are listed here as great examples of faith, particularly in their finest hours. Their faith was coupled with action in which they trusted God even in very difficult circumstances. They were genuine.
- E. We also have bunches more from the New Testament and from church history, even in the news these past few days.

II. The Trials Faced by People of Faith, v. 33-37, 38b

- A. Then there are the trying situations that these people faced by faith:
 - 1. Subdued kingdoms, referring to the conquering of entire domains under the rule of other kings.
 - 2. Worked righteousness. This is always by faith.
 - 3. Obtained promises, that is, particular promises that were made in various circumstances throughout the OT period.
 - 4. Stopped the mouths of lions. Daniel, in effect, did this. But David and Samson also killed lions without modern weapons.
 - 5. Quenched the violence of fire, Daniel 3:10-30.
 - 6. Escaped the edge of the sword, like Moses or Jeremiah or other prophets who were nearly killed.
 - 7. Were made strong out of weakness. Little David against Goliath; or Gideon, the least in his father's family.
 - 8. Became valiant in battle and turned to flight the armies of the aliens (other nations, not men from Mars!)
 - 9. Women received their dead raised to life again, referring to the widow of Zarephath and to the Shunammite whose sons were raised by Elijah and Elisha, respectively (1 Kings 17, 2 Kings 4).
 - 10. Tortured, not accepting deliverance so as to have a better resurrection (more reward).
 - 11. Trial of mockings and scourgings, chains and imprisonment.
 - 12. Stoned, like Zechariah the son of Jehoiada in 2 Chron. 24:20-22. This is mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 23:35 (Jehoiada also called Berechiah, which means *blessed of the Lord*).
 - 13. Sawn in two. Isaiah suffered this very fate according to tradition passed down in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and by Justin Martyr.
 - 14. Tempted. All of these were tempted *not* to rely on God.
 - 15. Slain with the sword. Such atrocities continued into the New Testament with Herod's murder of James (Acts 12:1-2). Whether by sword or some other means, thousands of our brothers and sisters have been killed simply because they are believers in Jesus.
 - 16. Wandered about in sheep-skins and goatskins, indicating they were poor and therefore ill-dressed. Recall Elijah's mantle and belt (1 Kings

19:13, 2 Kings 1:8). They were destitute, afflicted, tormented. They wandered about in deserts and mountains, dens, caves. They had nowhere else to live. The apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, for example, give account of the poverty of God's prophets when the nation was in spiritual declension.

- B. In summary, many OT believers were persecuted, killed, or impoverished because of their faith, and it was through faith that they endured these injustices. *How is your faith in light of your own trials?*
- C. The OT believers accomplished these great things through faith. However halting their belief might have been, they still had a measure of certainty about God's revelation and promises, even when things were unseen or improbable from the purely human perspective.
- D. Perhaps we can draw out this principle from the text: *Faith is often most notable when circumstances are most trying.* See 1 Peter 1:6-7.

III. God's Evaluation and Response to Their Faith, v. 38a, 39-40

- A. The world was not worthy of these people. They belong to heaven, not to this sin-cursed place. The world considered them to be unworthy of respect and shameful in their adherence to God; but in fact it was the world that was not worthy of them.
- B. They obtained a good testimony through faith.

This ties back to v. 2. *These all* refers to all that were listed, among a whole host of others that time and space did not permit the author of Hebrews to enumerate. The obtaining of a good testimony means they were well spoken of and approved by God. In a court, God would testify favorably for these people.

- C. They did not receive **the** promise.
 - 1. This is a different sense of "obtained promises" in verse 33. Those were particular promises in specific situations. "**The** promise" has to do with the entire promise-program to Abraham and David that was not fulfilled in its totality in their lifetimes, nor in any of these other believers. The Messiah has to come for the "big promise" to be fulfilled. And we now know that Christ has to come *again* for the promise to be obtained.
 - 2. 10:36 says that endurance must happen before the receipt of the promise. So it is with us—persevering faith in Christ is what always occurs before receipt of God's promises, whether of eternal life or the Messianic kingdom of God.

3. Having faith does not guarantee that you will receive the promise before your life ends. It may be a long time after that point. Many of our Christian brothers and sisters who have died expected to see the rapture before they died. But God is very patient and not willing that any should perish. So, He waits.

D. God provided something better for us

1. Verse 40 is a conundrum. It gives the reason that God did not provide them the promise. And that reason is that God provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. They had to wait, in other words, until God was finished with us.

2. I understand *better* to mean better for us in comparison to what they received. Here is proof that the spiritual blessings of the church can be distinguished from those of the nation of Israel.

3. The idea seems to be that they had to wait for the completion of God's program with the church era until they should be made perfect. Part of God's plan for the world was to "provide something better for us" and to hold off some things for the OT saints until the church saints were brought in.

4. Illustration: The OT saints have to wait for dessert until everyone finishes their dinner. And, God's dinner for the church is somewhat better than the one for Israel.

5. Christ had not come yet in the OT saints' lifetimes. Now we look back on His coming and have the assurance of a full, final sacrifice for sins.

6. Note the word *better*. It is a key word in Hebrews. What the apostle is saying is that the thing he has been discussing in the book is the very "better" thing that the OT saints had to wait for—a better hope, a better covenant, better sacrifices—all found in Jesus Christ. This better thing is what makes them and us perfect as far as sin is concerned. To review the "better stuff," check out Heb. 1:4, 7:19, 7:22, 8:6, 9:23, 10:34, 11:16, 11:35, and 12:24.

Conclusion

The God-inspired application of this text actually comes in the opening verses of chapter 12. One thing we should consider is the need to carefully develop our faith in times of peace, like we have right now, so that we are ready for the difficult times. Get grounded now. Don't wait until the difficult days come (Ecclesiastes 12:1). MAP