

XXX. Heroes of Faith

March 12/13/14, 2019

Hebrews 11:30-40

Aim: To realize that regardless of whether you triumph in this life or endure trials and suffering, the life of faith is always worth it because it results in eternal salvation.

Phillips: The verses that finish Hebrews 11 look back on the last verse of Hebrews 10, where the writer says of these persecuted Christians, ‘But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls’ (10:39). Salvation is by believing; failure to believe or shrinking back from faith because of hardship or opposition leads to judgment and destruction. This is what motivated the writer of Hebrews in all these studies of faith: not just interesting and encouraging tales, but a matter of life and death. Now he briefly offers two last examples—Joshua and Rahab—followed by a list of others who faith conquered and endured to the end.

A. The Faith of Conquest (Hebrews 11:30-31)

Phillips: Joshua and Rahab make quite a pair! In so many significant ways they were completely different. Joshua was a man, an Israelite, Moses’ successor as Israel’s leader, and the conqueror of Jericho. Rahab was a woman, a member of the cursed Amorite race, a prostitute, and a citizen of the condemned city. They had only one thing in common: they believed on the Lord and trusted His power to save. We look back centuries later and none of their differences seem to matter at all; what counts is their faith and the salvation they received by it.

1. Joshua (11:30)

³⁰*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.*

Phillips: Verse 30 point to a famous example of faith conquering through God’s power, namely, the fall of Jericho under the godly leadership of Joshua. The writer of Hebrews moves forward forty years from his last example, pointedly skipping the rebellion of those who perished in the desert, whom he earlier employed as an example of unbelief. Forty years passed after the crossing of the Red Sea before finally God brought Israel to the Promised Land. Moses died at the age of 120, and Joshua son of Nun took over as Israel’s leader. The Book of Joshua, which gives this account, begins with the transfer of authority. In a famous passage, God gave Joshua his charge to leadership and also to faith (Jos. 1:6, 9). Joshua’s first challenge was to capture the fortress city of Jericho, which dominated the entrance into the land of Canaan, and it is for this that Hebrews 11:30 remembers his faith. Joshua’s first action toward this objective was to send spies to reconnoiter the enemy position, and these spies would be the vehicles by which Rahab’s name is joined to Joshua’s.

a) *The Commander of the Lord*

Phillips: Before the battle, Joshua encountered a mysterious figure who named Himself as ‘the commander of the army of the LORD.’ Many identify Him as the pre-incarnate Christ. First, he stated that the Lord had delivered Jericho into Joshua’s hands. But then came instructions that must have seemed bizarre, to have the people simply march around the city for seven days, on the seventh day blowing trumpets, after which the walls would fall (Jos. 6:3-5). Joshua and the people under him did just as they were told and, just as God had said, when the trumpets

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sounded, the walls fell down and the Israelites put the city to the sword (Jos. 6:20-21). Verse 30 memorializes this as a great moment in the record of faith. This is faith trusting the promise of God and obeying carefully the commands He has given. Here we have perhaps the classic portrait of faith drawing forth the very power of God, and from it Christians have long drawn the conclusion that faith can do all things.

Hughes: Joshua stole out of the camp in the darkness to view Jericho for himself and to seek God's guidance. The Hebrew word that tells us Joshua was 'by Jericho' (Jos. 5:13) expresses the idea of immediate proximity. What he saw set his heart racing and adrenaline pumping, for there stood a warrior in full battle-dress, his sword bare and gleaming blue in the moon's light. I believe (along with Calvin) that this 'commander of the army of the Lord' was a theophany, an appearance of Jehovah in the form of an angelic messenger. I am convinced of this for several reasons. First, Joshua was told to take off his sandals. This very same command had been given to Moses *by God* from the burning bush (Ex. 3:5-6). Joshua realized, through the command to take off his sandals, that this 'commander' was the same God who spoke to Moses. Second, the 'commander' who spoke to Joshua is identified as 'the LORD' in Joshua 6:2-5. Third, as Origen said in his Sixth Homily on Joshua, 'Joshua knew not only that He was of God, but that He was God. For he would not have worshiped Him, had he not recognized Him to be God.' These three reasons convince me that 'the commander of the army of the Lord' was God in angelic form—the angel of the Lord.

Hughes: This encounter with God served to steel Joshua and arm him for the conquering of Jericho, for very special reasons. He saw not only that God was with him, but God's mystic appearance—with His sword pulled from His scabbard and held ready for battle—was indelibly printed on Joshua's consciousness. God would fight for him! He knew that whatever the enemy mobilized, it would be matched and exceeded by heavenly mobilization. Also, Joshua's encounter with God left him steeled by fully informing him regarding what God wanted him to do in taking Jericho (Jos. 6:2-5).

Hughes: What was the effect of all this upon Joshua? In a word, it produced the bedrock faith that introduces Hebrews 11—'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'—faith's *dynamic dual certitude*. He had incredible *visual certitude*, for he had seen the unseen. His conviction regarding the invisible would gird him in every battle. He had awesome *future certitude* regarding what he hoped for—namely, the fall of Jericho and the taking of the Promised Land. He was sure those walls would fall! Joshua's dynamic sureness enabled him to lead Israel to victory. And here we must emphasize again that, as with Moses' believing parents and Moses himself, one person's faith can make all the difference for God's people. As we shall see, Joshua's faith was communicated to and elevated the whole nation's faith—and so can yours and mine.

b) *The Walls of Jericho*

Hughes: Joshua knew what he had to do—and in the storied days that followed, he did it. The writer of Hebrews tells us, in a simple sentence, 'By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.' This is the key to the spiritual understanding of the fall of Jericho: *the walls of Jericho fell because of the faith of Joshua and his people*. It was the greatest corporate act of faith in Israel's history, one never to be exceeded. And as such, it forms an extended object lesson for us.

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Hughes: The Lord Himself had given *explicit* instructions to Joshua that demanded *implicit* obedience (cp. Jos. 6:2-5; 6-10). They detailed the order and conduct of the famous procession around Jericho. By any outside estimation these instructions were ridiculous! But though the instructions looked foolishly contrary to human logic, Israel, as a corporate body, believed. Why their uncharacteristic faith? Obviously because of their recent experience in watching the Jordan dry up when the ark penetrated its boundary. The freshness of that recent miracle made them receptive to faith. The other reason, already touched upon, was the faith and character of Joshua. Thus, Israel really did believe God was going to give them Jericho. When the writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says, ‘By faith the walls of Jericho fell down,’ he means that the Israelites actually did have faith. They were not pretending to believe. Theirs was not a bogus faith.

Schreiner: From Israel’s escape and redemption from Egypt, the author moves to the first battle in the conquest: the battle of Jericho (Joshua 6). The battle plan was singularly strange. Israel was to march around the city for six days (Jos. 6:3, 6-14). On the seventh day Israel was instructed to march around the city seven times, and while doing so, the priests were to blow on trumpets (Jos. 6:4, 15-16). At the end of the march, they were called on to give a loud shout at the ‘prolonged blast of the horn’ (Jos. 6:5, 20). The wall collapsed and then Israel took the city. Joshua says nothing about the people’s faith in taking the city, but following such an unorthodox battle plan evidence the faith of Israel, for no one conquers enemies with such a ‘military strategy.’

Bruce: The record of faith is suspended for forth years and resumed with the entry into Canaan. By whose faith did the walls of Jericho fall down? Primarily by Joshua’s; he believed and obeyed the divine instructions given him when he saw the angel ‘commander of Yahweh’s arm’ (Jos. 5:14). But the people’s faith was involved as well, for they carried out faithfully the instructions which Joshua communicated to them, until the city fell. But they could not see how it would fall; on the face of it, nothing could seem more foolish than for grown men to march around a strong fortress for seven days on end, led by seven priests blowing rams’ horns. Who ever heard of a fortress being captured that way? We may now never discover in material terms what made the walls of Jericho fall, whether earthquake or subsidence or something else, but our author ascribes their fall to the power of that faith which found expression in Joshua’s submissive reply to the divine messenger: ‘What does my lord bid his servant?’ (Jos. 5:14). It is by this same faith that other Jerichos, both large and small, can still be overthrown.

MacArthur: One of the most amazing things about Joshua 6 is that not a single word of doubt or complaint is recorded. The Israelites believed Joshua’s report from the Lord, and they immediately began to prepare for the marching (Jos. 6:8). For a full week they carefully and faithfully marched. It was a milestone of faith in the life of Israel. God delights in slaying men’s pride. He slew the pride of the city of Jericho by making its city walls collapse in the most foolish possible way. In the defeat of Jericho, He also demolished any pride the Israelites might have had. It was obvious that their part was purely symbolic. They could take absolutely no credit for themselves. All God wanted from them was faith, and this they gave, for ‘by faith the walls of Jericho fell down.’

Hughes: The evidence that they believed God’s word is that they *obeyed* it. The enduring object lesson here is that a life of faith is evidenced by a life of obedience to God’s word, even when it seems absurd. To the unbelieving mind, the Christian’s weapons appear not only impotent but ridiculous. God gives us directions in His Word on how to meet our Jerichos, instructions that

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are folly to human logic. The Scripture reveals a spiritual law: disobedience reveals our unbelief, but obedience to God evidences our faith. When difficult circumstances assail us, unbelief draws from the arsenals of the world, whereas faith causes us to take up the armor of God and join the absurd march around Jericho. Any Jerichos facing you? Are you wavering between God's way and the world's way of meeting it? Do you believe in God's Word? The authenticity of your belief will be determined by the weapon you choose.

2. Rahab (11:31)

³¹*By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.*

Hughes: It is most significant that the final person to receive individual commentary in the list of champions of faith is a woman and a Gentile and a prostitute. Rahab's faith, a *prostitute's faith* is given as an example for all who desire to have true faith—especially those who know they are sinners and who deep down want to be pleasing to God.

MacArthur: Rahab was an unlikely candidate for the faithful's hall of fame. For one thing, she was a prostitute. For another, she was a Gentile, and a Canaanite at that. She was, in fact, an Amorite, a race that God had long before marked for destruction (Gen. 15:16). Yet that is how God's grace works. His mercy is open to all who will receive it, and His grace has always been wider than Israel, even in Old Testament times.

a) *Believing the Truth*

Hughes: Verses 4 and 5 of Joshua 2 present a very awkward truth—Rahab's first work of faith was a lie! She lied to protect the two Israelite spies. Does this mean it is okay to lie in certain situations? I personally do not think so, though some highly respected theologians do. I agree with Calvin. Our Lord never lied or deceived anyone. And as members of His Body, we are obligated to do our best to live according to His example. Nevertheless, Rahab's calculated lie was a stupendous act of true faith, for her subsequent actions—when she assisted the spies in their escape through the window and cleverly advised them to hide three days in the hill country—put her life in deadly peril (cp. Jos. 2:15-16). In fact, if the king had gotten wind of her doings, her death would have been immediate and terrible. Rahab's faith was great and deserves the status it has been given.

Phillips: Coupled with Joshua's exploit is the faith of Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute. Before the battle, Joshua's spies had been detected by Jericho's leaders, and Rahab hid them at the risk of her life. One commentator says of her: 'At the moment ... there seemed not one change in a million that the children of Israel could capture Jericho. These nomads from the desert had no artillery and no siege-engines. Yet Rahab believed—and staked her whole future on the belief that God would make the impossible possible.' Rahab explained why: 'I know that the LORD has given you the land ... we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt ... for the LORD your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath' (Jos. 2:9-11).

Bruce: The next example of faith is the most surprising that we have met thus far—Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. Yet this is not the only place in the New Testament where she receives honorable mention for her faith: in James 2:25 her kindly treatment of Joshua's spies is one of two arguments for the thesis that faith without works is dead, the other argument being Abraham's offering up of Isaac. In fact, Rahab, despite her antecedents, enjoys a place of esteem

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in Jewish and Christian records. The two scouts whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho found a night's lodging in Rahab's house, and when the authorities discovered where they were, she concealed them and then helped them to escape, stipulating only that her life should be saved when Jericho fell into their hands. For, as she told them, the news of the Exodus and of Israel's victories in Transjordan had already reached Jericho and caused great alarm and despondency there (Jos. 2:11). They promised to protect her, and so, when Jericho was taken, she and the members of her household were saved from the massacre when the city was 'devoted' to Israel's God, and incorporated in the commonwealth of Israel (Jos. 6:25). It was self-evidently her faith in the God of Israel that moved her to behave as she did and led to her preservation.

Schreiner: The destruction of Jericho is intertwined with the story of Rahab's preservation. When the Israelite spies came to Jericho, Rahab hid them from the men of Jericho and informed them how they could escape safely (Joshua 2), and thus Rahab and all who were in her house were spared when the city was destroyed (Jos. 6:22-25). It was never forgotten that Rahab was a prostitute, but she was a prostitute who was delivered from her evil, for she trusted in the Lord and gave herself to Him. We have her a hint that a sordid past does not preclude one from enjoying forgiveness and a future reward. Her faith manifested itself in believing in the Lord's word (Jos. 2:9-11) and in sending away the spies in peace. Rahab is another person who trusted in the Lord at a time of danger. How improbable it seemed that a ragtag army could defeat the walled city of Jericho, and yet Rahab exposed herself to danger in concealing the spies. She represents someone who was willing to leave her own society and culture and to align herself with the people of God. In other words she functions as a model for the readers since she was willing to go 'outside the camp' (13:13) and to suffer the reproach of being identified with the people of God.

Hughes: We wonder at such great faith, and we wonder where Rahab got it. Rahab had heard that there was only one God, Jehovah. She heard bits and snatches about Israel's destiny. She heard, perhaps derisively, of the nation's high ethical and moral code. Perhaps she had become disillusioned with the culture around her. She was treated as chattel. She had seen life at its worst. All of this together made her open to truth and faith. No doubt, fear contributed to the formation of her faith. Fear is an inevitable and natural consequence of sensing that God's justice leaves us in the wrong. Rahab knew she was a sinner. She was ready for faith. The testimony of the spies opened her to faith. Rahab would immediately have sensed the difference between the Israelite visitors and the clients who normally frequented her house. The spies were not sensualists but holy men of impeccable morals. She had never seen this before. They were sure of their God. These inner workings coalesced with her disillusionment and fear to produce faith. Truly, we can never tell where faith will be found. And Rahab's example tells us there is hope for people where we would never dream of it. There is no one who is too bad or too ignorant to be saved!

b) *Acting in Faith*

Phillips: On the basis of that faith, Rahab asked the spies to guarantee her family's survival when the city was taken. She arranged to tie a scarlet cord in her window to mark her house. Although there is no evidence regarding what Rahab intended by her choice of color, Christian commentators have long understood the scarlet cord as a type of the atoning blood of Jesus.

Hughes: The classic symbol that revealed Rahab's great faith was the scarlet cord she hung from her window over the wall of Jericho. Joshua 2:17-20 records how the two spies promised her safety if she would display that cord in her window. They vowed that everyone in the house

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would survive if the red cord were in place. Rahab's faith invited their saving work. The scarlet cord tells us that Rahab's faith, though incipient and unformed, was *completely trusting*. If the Israelites failed to return and conquer the city, she would soon be found out. The gathering of her family into her home would be interpreted for what it was, someone would talk, and she and her kind would go down to their graves in terrible agony. But Rahab completely believed that judgment was coming and that salvation awaited her. So she let down the scarlet cord in profound trust.

c) *Receiving the Reward*

Hughes: Rahab's faith garnered three rewards. First, Israel was encouraged (Jos. 2:23-24). The children of Israel were encouraged through Rahab's great confession of faith (Jos. 2:9-11). They were uplifted by the positive report that the spies brought back, and they were strengthened by the miraculous deliverance given to the two spies through the prostitute. The second reward of Rahab's faith was her own salvation. This came initially as physical salvation (Jos. 6:22-25). Rahab did not initially have saving faith in the spiritual sense, but as she joined Israel she completely believed and became a full member of God's covenant people. Ultimately Rahab's faith saved her in every way.

Hughes: The third reward of Rahab's faith may be spoken of as her glorification. Here her story becomes lyrical—an 'impossible dream.' Not only did Rahab live in Israel the rest of her life, but she married an Israelite and became an ancestor of Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:4-6). Nashon, Rahab's father-in-law, was one of the twelve princes who made a special offering at the raising of the tabernacle (Num. 7:12). Nashon was a great prince of Judah, and so was his son Salmon, who married Rahab. How unutterably beautiful! The Amorite prostitute became a believer and then the wife of a prince of Judah. Rahab was a princess and ancestor of Christ!

MacArthur: Rahab had no more light than any other inhabitant of Jericho; yet she believed, while the others disbelieved. They were more than simply unbelieving, they 'were disobedient.' The implication is that they not only knew that the true God was with Israel but that He had also called them (that is, the Jerichoites) in some way. Yet they rejected God's word. They had wanted to kill the Israelite spies, but Rahab had 'welcomed the spies in peace.' They were prepared to fight Israel when she attacked the city, but Rahab again welcomed God's people. For her faith, she and her family were spared. For their disbelief, all the others in the city were destroyed. For her faithful courage Rahab not only was spared but was honored. She became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, the great-great-grandmother of David, and she thereby came to be an ancestor of Jesus (Mt. 1:5).

Bruce: Indeed, she is mentioned in yet another place in the New Testament, as she is the Rahab who appears in Matthew 1:5 as the wife of Salmon, prince of Judah, the mother of Boaz, the ancestress of King David and therefore also of our Lord.

Hughes: Anyone who looks down on Rahab had better beware, for it is obvious that such a person has a defective doctrine of sin and does not understand the depth of human iniquity or the heights of the grace of God. All of us stand in Rahab's place in front of a holy God. And many of us are worse, because she had such little knowledge. We must at least be as wise as Rahab, who though she understood little did understand that she was under God's judgment and sought redemption. Hebrews 11:31 cites Rahab as an example of one who was saved by faith. James 2:25 says she was saved by works. There is no contradiction, for Rahab was saved by a faith that produced works.

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B. The Faith of Heroes (Hebrews 11:32-38)

Hughes: The preacher concludes chapter 11 with a dazzling rush of encouragement as he quickly describes the empowerment that comes through faith to believers who are either winners or even apparent losers in this life.

Phillips: This final section may be divided into two categories: in verses 32-35a, we see faith conquering in success over obstacles, and in verses 35b-38 faith is shown conquering through perseverance in great suffering.

1. Faith in Triumph (11:32-35a)

a) *Who They Were (11:32)*

³²*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—*

Phillips: At this point, it seems the writer of Hebrews looks where he is in his narrative, scans back over the vast biblical territory he has covered in this chapter, looks forward to all that he hopes to relate, and decides it is time for a change of strategy. It is comforting to know that I am not the only preacher whose ambitions are curbed by time constraints, and perhaps by the attention span of the audience! Lacking time for these great tales of faith, the author merely mentions the names of their heroes and, in the remaining verses of this chapter, recounts some of the varied exploits of faith. His point is that the Old Testament is filled with accounts of faith, each of which is enough to inspire imitation.

Schreiner: The words ‘And what more can I say?’ signal that the writer could keep going, but he has abbreviated what he could say. He recognizes that time and space preclude a detailed exposition. The author lists some of those who could serve as examples of faith, but he doesn’t list in chronological order, for Barak (Judges 4-5) precedes Gideon (Judges 6-8), and Jephthah (Judges 11-12) precedes Samson (Judges 13-16), and Samuel (1 Samuel 1-28) precedes David (1 Samuel 16 – 2 Samuel 24). Perhaps the writer lists first in every instance the character whom he considers to be more significant. The category ‘prophets’ includes many persons, showing that the discussion could go on for a long time indeed.

Bruce: With a rhetorical transition our author goes on, first of all, to mention six men by name spanning the interval between the settlement in Canaan and the early monarchy. The six names are not given in strict chronological order (or the order in which they appear in the Biblical narrative); in fact, if we arrange them in three pairs, the two men in each pair are named here in reverse order to that of their Old Testament appearance, for in the Old Testament Barak appears before Gideon, Jephthah before Samson, and Samuel before David. The reversal of the order of Samuel and David may be intended to bring Samuel into closer contact with ‘the prophets’ who are mentioned immediately after, Samuel being the first in the continuous ‘prophetic succession’ of the age of the Hebrew monarchy.

(1) Gideon

Bruce: Gideon was Israel’s champion against the Bedouin Midianites; his small force of three hundred men, equipped with torches in earthenware jars, and trumpets, threw the host of Midian into panic and won a signal victory (Jdg. 7:19-25).

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MacArthur: Gideon, a judge and military leader, had assembled 32,000 men to fight the Midianites and Amalekites. To keep Israel from thinking the coming victory was by her own power, God cut her forces down to 10,000 and then to a mere 300. These 300 were separated out solely on the basis of how they drank water from a spring. Gideon's men were outfitted with only trumpets and with pitchers with torches inside. With even fewer men and less effort than used to defeat Jericho, the entire heathen army was routed (Jdg. 7:16-22). Only a fool would have attempted such a courageous approach to battle apart from God's direction and power. From the perspective of faith, only a fool would not attempt such a thing when he *has* God's direction and power.

Hughes: At God's direction *Gideon* underwent a remarkable divestment of power in preparation for his phenomenal victory over the Midianites. Obediently he reduced his troops from 32,000 to 10,000 to 300. Then the 300, armed with trumpets and pitchers that concealed torches, routed the Midianites whose 'camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance' (Jdg. 7:12). Gideon's feat was a stupendous act of faith.

Phillips: Gideon gave Israel victory over the Midianites with his force of just 300 men. Obeying God's command, he armed them with torches in earthen jars; when the trumpets were blown they smashed the jars and God threw the enemy into a panic (see Jdg. 7).

(2) Barak

Hughes: Likewise, *Barak*, obeying God's word as given through Deborah, sallied forth to meet the great army of Sisera with its 900 chariots of iron and myriads of troops, Barak himself having only 10,000 men drawn from just two of Israel's tribes, Naphtali and Zebulun (Jdg. 4:6). But his token army was victorious. Once again faith carried the day.

Phillips: Joined to Gideon is the name of Barak, another leader from early in Judges. Spurred on by the prophetess Deborah, Barak led the united tribes in their victory against Sisera and the mighty Canaanite chariot army.

Bruce: Barak was commander of the army of the tribes of Israel who united against Sisera, commander of the confederate Canaanite chariot-force, and defeated him and his followers 'at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo' (Jdg. 5:19). It is surprising to find Barak mentioned here as an example of faith rather than the prophetess Deborah, not to mention Jael, 'the wife of Heber the Kenite, blessed ... above women in the tent' (Jdg. 5:24). For Barak refused to take the field against Sisera when Deborah command him, in Yahweh's name, to do so, unless she went with him. Yet his very refusal may have been, in its way, a token of faith; his insistence on having Deborah with him was perhaps an expression of his faith in the God whose servant and spokeswoman Deborah was. And when he was told by her that the expedition which he was undertaking would not be for his own honor, he led it nonetheless; it was not his honor, but the triumph of Yahweh and His people, that he sought.

MacArthur: Barak is unknown in Scripture outside the brief account in Judges 4:15 and the mention of his name in Hebrews 11:32. We are told nothing of his background or training. Through Deborah, the judge, God promised that Israel would be delivered from Jabin, the Canaanite king, whose great commander, Sisera, had a large powerful army that boasted nine hundred iron chariots. Barak was told in advance that the glory of victory would not be his. Not only did the Lord fight the battle for His people, but He allowed a woman to kill Sisera, so that Barak would have even less cause for claiming credit for himself (Jdg. 4:9). Barak believed

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God's promise of victory and was not the least concerned that a woman would get credit for slaying Sisera. In fact, he insisted that Deborah, a woman judge, go to battle with him (Jdg. 4:8). He wanted her spiritual, not her military help. She was the Lord's special representative in those days, and Barak wanted the Lord's person with him. The fact that he wanted her along was another indication of his trust in the Lord. As God's propheticess, she was of greater value to him than his ten thousand men. Barak was not concerned about Sisera's power, because he had God's power. By such courageous faith he 'conquered kingdoms.'

(3) Samson

Bruce: Samson, who championed Israel's cause against the Philistines in his own single-handed way, may strike one as an odd choice among illustrations of faith; yet the narrative of Judges portrays him as one who was deeply conscious of the invisible God, and of his own call to be an instrument in God's hand against the enemy (cp. esp. Jdg. 14:4).

MacArthur: Samson is not most remembered for his faith, but for his physical strength and personal gullibility. In many ways he was immature and self-centered, unable to cope with the miraculous power God had given him. Yet he was a man of faith. He never doubted that God was the source of his power, of which his hair was only a symbol. God had promised him power and Samson trusted God for that power. He faced the Philistines not in the courage of physical prowess but in the courage of faith. We are inclined to judge Samson by his weaknesses. But God commends him for his faith.

Hughes: Normally we do not think of *Samson* as a man of faith, but rather a great dunce whose moral brain waves had gone flat! But there was a subterranean substance of faith in Samson. He knew God had given him power to deliver his people from the Philistines—though he frittered it away. But once blinded, he regained his spiritual perspective, and in a great act of faith he prayed and received strength to avenge himself (Jdg. 16:25-30).

Phillips: Samson was hardly a paragon of virtue; he is particularly known for his fatal weakness for foreign women. Nonetheless, he belongs in this list of heroes of faith because of his one-man war against the Philistines, and especially for the way he ended his life, achieving by faith in his death what he had failed to during his life because of unbelief.

(4) Jephthah

Bruce: And what of Jephthah, commander of the Trans-Jordanian tribes against the Ammonites? Posterity remembers him chiefly for his rash vow; yet, rash as it was, it was a token of his sincere though uninstructed devotion to the God of Israel. The message that he sent to the king of Ammon (Jdg. 11:14-27), with its historical retrospect reaching back to the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, expresses his appreciation of Yahweh's guidance of his people in those early days and his confidence that Yahweh will judge their cause today.

MacArthur: Jephthah preceded Samson as judge of Israel, and his responsibility was to subdue the Ammonites, one of Israel's many enemies. Despite his foolish vow (Jdg. 11:30-31), Jephthah's trust was in the Lord, and his power was from the Lord (Jdg. 11:29, 32). Even people of faith make mistakes, and God honored Jephthah for his faith.

Hughes: Neither would we imagine *Jephthah* as a man of faith because of his infamous and foolish vow to sacrifice his own daughter (Jdg. 11:30-39). Nevertheless, this illegitimate son, this outcast Hebrew Robin Hood, was called back to save Israel—which he did through his faith

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in God. He conquered because of his faith—notwithstanding that his raw uninformed faith tragically was perverted so that it became the source of his rash and wrongful vow to sacrifice ‘whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me’ (Jdg. 11:31).

Phillips: Jephthah’s foolish vow cost his daughter’s life, but he too was a man of faith. Despite his beginning as an unwanted child and his later career as a bandit, through faith he led the tribes in battle against the Ammonites.

(5) David

Bruce: David is the only king to be mentioned by name; his record displays faults enough, but it also displays a humble readiness to repent and seek pardon from God, and a conviction of God’s providence and faithfulness (cp. 2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10-14). Like Abraham and others before him, he too received promises from God, promises regarding his house ‘for a great while to come’ (2 Sam. 7:19).

MacArthur: David stands out as one of the obviously great men of the Old Testament. His trust in the Lord began when he was a boy, tending sheep, killing lions and bears, and taking on Goliath with a slingshot. Like the other heroes of faith, David was not perfect, but God called him ‘a man after My heart, who will do all My will’ (Acts 13:22). He pleased God because of the courage of his faith to trust Him and do His will.

Hughes: King *David*, on the other hand, is well-known for his acts of faith, not the least of which was his challenge and defeat of Goliath, to whom he cried, ‘...the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hand’ (1 Sam. 17:47). Towering faith!

Phillips: The most recognizable name on this list is that of David, Israel’s greatest king, ‘a man after [God’s] own heart’ (1 Sam. 13:14), who slew the giant Goliath by faith and whose career is one of the main Old Testament types for Jesus Christ. Although David was a very great sinner, he was also the quintessential Old Testament man of faith.

(6) Samuel

Bruce: None can question Samuel’s fitness for inclusion here. Samuel’s name is well worthy to stand alongside those of Moses, Joshua, and David in the annals of Israel. He manifested the prophetic gift in his youth, and when the central sanctuary at Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines, and the ark of the covenant, the palladium of Israel’s nationhood, taken into captivity, it was he who proved equal to the task of rallying the shattered morale of his people. He showed them that God was still in their midst, even if the ark was in the hands of the Philistines; and indeed, when the ark was restored, he left it in an obscure place, lest the people’s faith should once more be reposed in it instead of God. He went annually in circuit as judge in Israel, and undertook priestly duties as the nation’s representative with widespread acceptance. The central sanctuary was no more, but one man, under God, served as the focus of national life. He recalled Israel to its covenant loyalty, and thanks to his inspiring leadership they defeated the Philistines on the very field of their earlier disaster (1 Sam. 7:3-16). Not without cause has Samuel been described as ‘God’s emergency man.’

MacArthur: Samuel is added to this list of warriors, though he was not a warrior. But he fought a battle equal to any that soldiers face. His great foes were idolatry and immorality. He had to stand up in the middle of a polluted society and fearlessly speak God’s truth. His severest

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opponents frequently were not the Philistines, the Amorites, or Ammonites—but his own people. This prophet of God, who was also Israel’s last judge, began ‘ministering before the LORD, as a boy wearing a linen ephod’ (1 Sam. 2:18) and continued faithful to God throughout his life. In the courage of faith, he ruled and prophesied.

Hughes: The prophet *Samuel* had live a life of faith since he was a little ‘boy clothed with a linen ephod’ (1 Sam. 2:18), serving Eli in the house of the Lord. Through faith he fearlessly delivered God’s word to anyone anywhere at anytime—even the sinning King Saul (1 Sam. 15:22-23). This faithful proclamation was the hallmark of all true prophets.

Phillips: Samuel’s long career as judge and prophet was a crucial one, bridging the years of turmoil under the judges to the early monarchy he did so much to create. Even his birth tells a story of great faith, with his barren mother Hannah crying out to God for help and offering her child for the Lord’s service. Without Samuel’s faithful ministry, Israel would surely have fallen into disarray, the Philistines would have subjugated them, and David would have died an unknown shepherd.

(7) The Prophets

Bruce: It is in the time of Samuel that we first meet prophetic guilds (cp. 1 Sam. 10:5, 10ff.; 19:20), and from then on to post-exilic days the Old Testament narrative presents us with a sequence of prophets who not only spoke but acted for God—Elijah and Elisha, Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and others who, not expressly named by our author, were certainly in his mind as he penned these words.

MacArthur: The prophets are unnamed except for Samuel. As the writer mentions in the opening of verse 32, he does not have time to go into detail about the many other faithful people of the Old Covenant, or even to mention them all by name. These prophets, just as Gideon, Barak, and the others, risked everything for the Lord.

(8) Summary

Hughes: Viewed together, this dynamic half-dozen bore remarkable similarities to one another. Each lived in a time when faith was scarce—definitely the minority position. During the days of the judges, ‘everyone did what was right in his own eyes’ (Jdg. 21:25), and this ethic was very much alive during the transfer to the monarchy. From Gideon to David, each battled overwhelming odds—Gideon with his three hundred against an innumerable host—young David against the giant. Each stood alone *contra mundum*. And most significantly, perhaps, each of these heroes had a flawed faith.

Schreiner: One of the striking features of the list is the weakness and sins of those identified as people of faith. Barak wasn’t courageous enough to go to battle without Deborah (Jdg. 4:8). Asking for signs demonstrated Gideon’s lack of faith (Jdg. 6:36-40), and he also made an ephod that catapulted Israel to sin (Jdg. 8:24-27). Samson’s sexual infidelities and impulsive acts are infamous (Jdg. 13-16). Jephthah foolishly vowed to sacrifice his own daughter (11:30-31, 34-40). It is harder to find blemishes in Samuel, but his sons didn’t turn out well, and he appointed them as judges anyway (1 Sam. 8:1-3). David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah (2 Sam. 11). Still, it is not the sins and faults of these men that are remembered, but their faith and trust in God, showing that perseverance in faith for the author is not the same thing as perfection. Indeed, one may sin dramatically and still persevere in the faith.

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Hughes: Calvin concludes: ‘in every saint there is always to be found something reprehensible. Nevertheless, although faith may be imperfect and incomplete it does not cease to be approved by God. There is no reason, therefore, why the fault from which we labor should break us or discourage us provided we go on by faith in the race of our calling.’ How encouraging! There is hope for every man, woman, and child of us. Faith’s empowerment is not beyond any of us. As believers we have untapped faith capacities that will surprise not only others but, most of all, ourselves. We each possess interior spiritual nitroglycerin that faith can detonate.

b) *What They Did (11:33-35a)*

Hughes: To further strengthen his argument regarding the power that faith brings to life, the preacher lifts his focus from the empowered to the empowerments that they and others experienced. He lists nine empowerments grouped in three successive groups of three.

Phillips: Having run through this list of names, the writer of Hebrews next turns to the mighty deeds that faith enabled these and others to do. The list is organized into three groups of three, starting in verse 33.

(1) Victory (11:33a)

Hughes: The first three give the broad *empowerments* of authentic faith: ‘who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises.’ This was not only the corporate experience of the half-dozen, but the general experience of the preceding sixteen members of the Hall of Faith.

(a) Conquered Kingdoms (11:33a)

³³*who through faith conquered kingdoms...*

Schreiner: Faith trusts in what cannot be seen, but it produces effects in the real world. Faith shows up and manifests itself in concrete ways. Hence, faith conquers ‘kingdoms.’ He has in mind the victory of Barak over Sisera (Jdg. 4-5) and Gideon’s faith to triumph over Midian when his army was incredibly small and the odds of victory were against him (Jdg. 6-8). In addition, Jephthah triumphed over the Ammonites (Jdg. 11-12). Samson performed many exploits against the Philistines (Jdg. 13-16), and Samuel won a significant victory over the Philistines (1 Sam. 7). David, of course, won many battles both as a warrior and as the king of Israel.

Bruce: The exploits of these warriors and messengers of God are listed in general terms. The subduing of kingdoms, beginning with the overthrow of Sihon and Og in Trans-Jordan, goes on through the period of Joshua and the judges, and reaches its climax in the reign of David, whose empire stretched from the Egyptian frontier to the Euphrates.

Phillips: The number of warriors on the list of names we just considered perhaps leads the writer to state first that by faith they ‘conquered kingdoms.’ Certainly this could be said of Joshua, David, and Solomon; indeed, victory in battle was probably the most common achievement produced by faith during this early period of Israel’s history.

(b) Enforced Justice (11:33a)

...enforced justice...

Schreiner: Administering ‘justice’ (*δικαιοσύνην, dikaiosunēn*) was the responsibility of the judges and of kings. The judges weren’t kings, but judges like Samuel were responsible to see

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what was right and true was practiced in Israel. David, as king, particularly had that responsibility.

Phillips: It is quite possible, however, to succeed in battle without faith in the Lord. Therefore, we read that these heroes ‘enforced justice’ as well. The Greek literally says that they ‘established righteousness.’ This was certainly a hallmark of Israel’s faithful judges and kings. They did not merely win battles, but they also served God by establishing His righteousness within their domains. This is always a mark of godly leadership (cp. 2 Sam. 8:15).

Bruce: Those rulers of Israel also established righteousness within the areas they controlled. This they did through faith in God, whose own throne is founded on ‘righteousness and justice’ (Ps. 97:2).

(c) Obtained Promises (11:33a)

...obtained promises...

Schreiner: The promises given to these men focused especially on victory over their enemies. Barak was promised victory over Sisera’s forces (Jdg. 4:6-7). The angel of the Lord promised Gideon that he would triumph over Midian (Jdg. 6:12-16). Promises were made that Samson would begin to save Israel from the Philistines (Jdg. 13:5). David received many promises, including being anointed as king (1 Sam. 16:13) and receiving the promise of a dynasty (2 Sam. 7).

Bruce: They ‘obtained promises’ that God would be with them as they served His cause in faith, and obtained the fulfillment of His promises in the event; the promises made to David had regard not only to his personal fortune but to the destiny awaiting his house.

Phillips: Because of faith, these believers ‘obtained promises.’ One of the stresses in this chapter is the point made in verse 39: ‘these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised.’ This is also stated in verse 13, that Christian faith looks for promises that will not ultimately be fulfilled until heaven. But it is also the case that these heroes of faith did see many promises come true. Joshua saw the walls fall down; Rahab was saved from death; David was made king as promised; and so forth. Their experience encourages us that our faith in the great promises of the gospel will be fulfilled in God’s timing just as their promises were.

(2) Deliverance (11:33b-34a)

Hughes: The second trio lists some of the forms of personal *deliverances* that they experienced: ‘who ... stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword.’

(a) Stopped Lions (11:33b)

...stopped the mouths of lions...

Schreiner: Another exploit was shutting ‘the mouth of lions.’ Samson tore apart a lion with his bare hands (Jdg. 14:6-7). David slew lions threatening his flock (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Most strikingly lions did not tear Daniel apart when he was cast into the den with them (Daniel 6, esp. 6:19). Faith trusts in God’s promises in risky and dangerous situations.

Bruce: As for stopping the mouths of lions, we recognize immediately the reference to Daniel, thrown into the lion’s den for his fidelity to God, but protected from their attacks ‘because’ (in his own words) ‘I was found blameless before Him’ (Dan. 6:22).

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Hughes: Samson, David, and Beniah all shut the mouths of lions through physical force. Samson, bare-handed, took a charging lion by the jaws and ripped it apart. David grabbed a sheep-stealing lion by the beard and thrust it through. Beniah descended into a pit on a snowy day and dispatched another king of the beasts. But Daniel is the preeminent example, through his faith and prayer (Dan. 6:17-22).

Phillips: David and Samson both slew lions, but this seems to be about Daniel, who refused the king's edict to stop worshiping the Lord. When Daniel was thrown into the lion's den for punishment, God stopped the mouths of the lions and he emerged safe.

(b) Quenched Fire (11:34a)

...³⁴ *quenched the power of fire...*

Schreiner: Others 'quenched' flames of fire. The reference is to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who defied Nebuchadnezzar and refused to bow down to his statue (Dan. 3). When they were thrown into the fire, the fire did not burn even a hair of their heads, and they were confident that God would deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar.

Hughes: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted God and thus coolly conversed in a blazing furnace while the awe-struck king loomed on (Dan. 3:24-27).

Phillips: Daniel's three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego similarly refused to obey a king's command to deny God. When they were thrown in the raging fire. God went with them. Surely the writer of Hebrews would encourage us to remember their great testimony of faith (Dan. 3:17-18).

Bruce: Those who 'quenched the force of fire' were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to fall down and worship Nebuchadnezzar's great golden image. They knew that their God was able to deliver them from the furnace, but they had no means of knowing whether He would in fact deliver them or not (Dan. 3:18). Had they received a special revelation that their lives would be preserved, it would have called for considerable faith to act upon it in face of the burning fiery furnace; but to behave as they did without an revelation of the kind called for much greater faith. The people to whom this epistle was sent might well have a fiery ordeal to face in the near future, but whether life or death was their portion they could be sure of divine companionship in the midst of it such as the three Hebrews enjoyed.

(c) Escaped the Sword

...*escaped the edge of the sword...*

Bruce: We can think of several prophets and others who 'escaped the edge of the sword'; Elijah was delivered from Jezebel (1 Kgs. 19:2-18), Elisha from her son Jehoram (2 Kgs. 6:31-7:2), Jeremiah from Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:19, 26). But not all were delivered, as v. 37 reminds us.

Hughes: King David, as well as the prophets Elijah and Elisha, escaped the sword, as did many others (1 Sam. 18:10-1; 1 Kgs. 19:8-10; 2 Kgs. 6:31-32; Ps. 144:10).

(3) Power (11:34b-35a)

Hughes: The third triad tells about the astounding *power* that came by faith: '[who] were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection.'

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(a) Strength in Weakness (11:34b)

...were made strong out of weakness...

Schreiner: Threats to the lives of Elijah and Elisha were not realized (1 Kgs. 19:2; 2 Kgs. 6:31-32; cp. Jer. 36:26). Often the point of the accounts is that God's people conquered in spite of their weaknesses (e.g., Gideon). The Lord often put His people in desperate situations so they would trust in Him rather than themselves. There are many incidents in the OT where those in Israel became mighty in war and conquered foreign armies.

Bruce: It could be said of many of the judges and prophets that they 'won strength out of weakness.' Gideon was the least in his father's house, by his own account, and his family was the poorest in Manasseh (Jdg. 6:15); yet Gideon and his three hundred were used by God to accomplish a great deliverance.

Phillips: Verse 34 adds that others 'were made strong out of weakness' through faith. Here Samson comes to mind, having forfeited his strength through folly but regaining it at the end through faith.

(b) Mighty in War (11:34b)

...became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Schreiner: Escaping the sword, being mighty in war, and putting foreign armies to flight fit many narratives in the OT where Israel or individuals triumphed over their enemies.

Bruce: From the days of Joshua and the judges down to the war of independence led by Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers, they and their followers had their 'weakness ... turned into strength, they grew powerful in war, they put foreign enemies to rout.' They knew, in the words of Jonathan, that 'nothing can hinder Yahweh from saving by many or by few' (1 Sam. 14:6); they believed the battle was not theirs but God's (cp. 2 Chr. 20:15), and therefore one of them chased a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight (cp. Jos. 23:10; Dt. 32:30).

Phillips: This is a common biblical theme, but a notable example is Jehoshaphat, who 'became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.' When confronted by a vast enemy invader, Jehoshaphat stood before God in the assembly of the nation. Praising God for His might, he pointed out the threat of the invading armies and concluded, 'O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You' (2 Chr. 20:12). Jehoshaphat looked to God in his weakness and found strength. The Lord sent a prophet to reply to this great and godly king: 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's' (2 Chr. 20:14-15). If this is how God worked in times of old, it is also how we will find Him working today if only we will look to Him in the same kind of faith.

(c) Life through Resurrection (11:35a)

³⁵*Women received back their dead by resurrection.*

Schreiner: In two instances women received their sons back from the dead. Elijah raised from the dead the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kgs. 17:17-23), and Elisha raised the Shunammite's son after he died (2 Kgs. 4:18-36).

Hughes: Elijah stretched himself out three times on the dead form of the son of the widow of Zarephath and cried to God for his life—and then carried the child alive down to his distraught

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mother (1 Kgs. 17:17-24). Elisha, his understudy, accomplished a similar feat for the Shunammite woman's son—'putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands ... the flesh of the child became warm' (2 Kgs. 4:34).

Bruce: The women who 'received their dead children back by resurrection' were the poor widow of Zarephath and the wealthy woman of Shunem; the son of the former was restored to her by Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:17-24), the son of the latter by Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:17-37). In the former instance the faith was Elijah's rather than the woman's; when her son died, she could only think that the prophet was a visitant of judgment to her house, bringing nemesis in this form for her sin. But Elijah's prayer of faith, 'O Yahweh my God, let this child's soul come into him again' (1 Kgs. 17:21), was heard and the boy was restored to his mother. The woman of Shunem was an Israelite (not a foreigner, like the widow of Zarephath), and when her little son died, she showed what spirit she was by hastening to Mount Carmel to lay her plaint before the man of God. Elisha matched her faith with his own, and by prayer and appropriate action he brought the child back to life.

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews completes his litany of achievement by saying, 'Women received back their dead by resurrection.' This statement speaks of two events, one from the ministry of Elijah and the other from Elisha. Elijah had sought shelter with the widow of Zarephath, a woman from pagan Sidon. She had trusted God by obeying the prophet's various commands, and through faith she received this miraculous display of God's blessing (1 Kgs. 17). In contrast to the widow of Zarephath, Elisha received help from a wealthy woman who had been unable to bear a child. God blessed her with a son, but when he subsequently died, she sought out the prophet to ask for God's intervention. Through her faith in Elisha's ministry, a ministry symbolic of Christ's, her son was restored to life (2 Kgs. 4).

(4) Summary

Phillips: The point of all this is that by faith God's people achieve what they never could have done otherwise. In openly miraculous ways, as well as in the more subtle and secret ways, the Lord put His great power to work for those who trust in Him. We might put this in the form of a question: How are we to overcome great obstacles? How do we who are so weak find the strength our circumstances require? What are we to do to overcome tragedies? The answer to all of these is the same. God's people are to have faith in Him, finding deliverance and power and resurrection in the God we believe and trust.

Hughes: Three triads—nine empowerments—what power comes through faith! This was important to know and believe under the darkening skies of Nero's impending pogrom. The examples of the empowered six and the litany of the triads of empowerments that have come to the church ought to make one thing very clear: God delights to effect mighty triumphs through people of faith. Faith pleases God—and faith empowers. God can deliver the faithful anytime He wants from anything!

2. Faith in Trials (11:35b-38)

Hughes: But the parallel truth is, God has not promised wholesale deliverance *in this life* for His people at all times and in every situation. Not all of us will be 'winners' in this life. From the world's point of view some people of faith are huge 'losers.' To balance the record, the writer now changes the emphasis by showing that faith also provides a different empowerment—the power to persevere to the end.

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Phillips: If the account of faith were to stop right here, it might leave us with the dangerously false impression that faith keeps us from suffering in this world. This is the kind of thing we often hear today, that if we only have enough faith, we need never be sick or poor or troubled in any way. However, verses 35-38 refute such thinking, telling us about ‘others,’ that is, people who trusted God and yet were subjected to the greatest of trials. Theirs, however, was no less a triumphant faith, for it enabled them to honor God by faithfully enduring to the end.

Schreiner: After recounting the great exploits and victories won through faith, the author turns toward those who kept trusting God in the midst of suffering.

a) *Persecution (11:35b-36)*

(1) Torture (11:35b)

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

Schreiner: Some were tortured because of their allegiance to God. They did not ‘turn from God in order to be set free’ (*απολυτρωσιν, apolutrōsin*). The author probably has in mind here the torture of Eleazar that led to his death (2 Macc. 6:18-31). Also, seven brothers and a mother were tortured ‘with whips and thongs’ (2 Macc. 7:1ff.). Those who suffer for God’s sake receive ‘a better resurrection’ (*κρειττονος αναστασεως, kreittonos anastaseōs*). The word ‘better’ reveals the author’s typological argument. The resurrection is ‘better’ than that received by the sons raised from the dead by Elijah and Elisha. These boys, after all, died again, but their resurrection points to a better and permanent resurrection, a resurrection to a life that never ends.

MacArthur: ‘Tortured’ is from the Greek *tumpanizō*, from the same root as the English *tympani*, a kettledrum. The particular torture referred to involved stretching the victim over a large drum-like instrument and beating him with clubs, often until dead. God’s faithful are willing to be beaten to death rather than compromise their faith in Him.

Bruce: ‘Others were tortured to death,’ he says, ‘refusing to accept deliverance in order to attain a better resurrection.’ The particular form of torture indicated by the Greek verb is being stretched on a frame and beaten to death (*τυμπανιζω, tympanizō*). This was precisely the punishment meted out to Eleazar, one of the noble confessors of Maccabean days, who willingly accepted death rather than forswear his loyalty to God (2 Macc. 6:19, 28). In 2 Maccabees the story of his martyrdom is followed by the record of the mother and her seven sons who endured this and other forms of torture sooner than transgress the law of God (2 Macc. 7:1ff.). The resurrection to which they looked forward was ‘better’ than that to which the boys of Zarephath and Shunem had been raised by Elijah and Elisha. Those boys were restored to mortal life, and in due course died; the resurrection for which the Maccabean martyrs hoped was a resurrection to endless life. They could have avoided torture and death and accepted ‘deliverance’ had they been prepared to compromise with the idolatrous requirements of Antiochus Epiphanes and his officers, but they knew that, if they did so, resurrection to life could never be theirs. They remained faithful unto death, and have been honored ever since by all who set loyalty to God above all else.

Hughes: The apparent reference here is to the Maccabean persecution because the word for ‘tortured’ has etymological reference to the *tympanum*, a large drum or wheel on which Maccabean victims were stretched and beaten or even dismembered. Second Maccabees details the gruesome torture of a ninety-year-old priest, Eleazar, who refused to eat swine’s flesh (2 Macc. 6:18-31), and then goes on to recount the even more revolting accounts of the systematic

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torture of seven brothers for the same reason (2 Macc. 7:1-42). Each of them could have been released if they had compromised, but each categorically refused—the reason being, as our text explains, ‘so that they might rise again to a better life.’ Better? How can one resurrection be ‘better’ than another? It is a better resurrection because it is a resurrection not just to this life on this earth, as happened to women’s sons mentioned in verse 35a, but to a resurrection to everlasting life in the world to come.

Phillips: The first statement is a dramatic one, namely, that some of the faithful were tortured to death and refused to gain their deliverance by denying the faith. It is probably that the writer has the Maccabean martyrs in mind. These were the second century BC Jews who stood up to the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes, who persecuted them by requiring them to eat swine flesh and sacrifice to Greek gods. A description in the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees matches the particular Greek word for torture in our passage (*tympanizō*), one that means being stretched over a frame and beaten. The scene it depicts was well known in the author’s time: the torture and murder of seven brothers in succession, each of whom refused to deny the Lord. The brutal tortures are graphically described and include scalping, mutilation, tearing out the tongue, and frying over the flames, most of which took place while they were stretched over the wheel of a catapult. As our passage describes, these seven brothers accepted their deaths rather than renounce their faith, specifically because of their hope in a resurrection—a better one than experienced at the hands of Elijah and Elisha, which restored the dead only to this world, but a resurrection to eternal life in the world to come. This kind of sacrifice and fidelity is incomprehensible to the man who does not know God. But to the eyes of faith it is reckoned a fair bargain, however, unpleasant, even a privilege and honor to suffer for God’s sake.

(2) Imprisonment (11:36)

³⁶*Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.*

Schreiner: Still others were mocked and scourged. The words of the prophets were mocked and scorned and ignored repeatedly (2 Chr. 36:15-16; cp. 2 Chr. 30:10). Jeremiah was ‘beaten’ and put in ‘stocks’ (Jer. 20:2; cp. 37:15). Still others were imprisoned (cp. Jer. 37:14-21). King Asa imprisoned the prophet Hanani when he rebuked him for not trusting in the Lord (2 Chr. 16:7-10), and King Ahab imprisoned Micaiah for prophesying his death (1 Kgs. 22:26-27). All these suffered in faith, trusting the Lord’s promise despite their afflictions.

Bruce: When the recipients of the letter read of some who had experienced ‘mocking and scourging, chains and imprisonment,’ they might well think of members of their own community who had suffered some of these things in earlier days, as our author has already reminded them. And if similar experiences awaited them again, it might help them to realize that they were not the first to tread this path. One Old Testament figure of whom he may very well have thought was Jeremiah, the prophet of the new covenant. On one occasion Jeremiah was beaten and put into the stocks (Jer. 20:2). At a later date he was beaten again and put in prison (Jer. 37:15), from which he was taken out and thrown into the muddy cistern from which he was rescued by Ebed-melech the Ethiopian (Jer. 38:6-13).

MacArthur: They endured both mental and physical anguish, mockings, as well as scourging. Jeremiah was as emotionally abused as he was physically abused, and it is not strange that he was called the weeping prophet. He did not weep so much for himself as for the people, who rejected God by rejecting him. He endured, and continued to endure, all sorts of pain for the sake of God’s Word.

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Phillips: Hebrews 11:36 tells of those who were jeered and flogged, chained and put in prison. We might think of any number of prophets of whom this was true, as it was for our Lord Jesus.

b) *Martyrdom (11:37a)*

(1) Stoned

³⁷*They were stoned...*

Schreiner: The list of suffering continues. Some were stoned to death because of their devotion to the Lord. Zechariah was put to death by stoning for rebuking the people (2 Chr. 24:20-21; cp. 1 Kgs. 21:13; Mt. 23:37; Lk. 13:34). According to tradition, Jeremiah was stoned to death in Egypt.

Bruce: Jeremiah may also have been in our author's mind when he speaks of those who were stoned; this was his fate, according to tradition, at the hands of the Jews in Egypt who could not abide his protest against their continuing idolatry. Our author may also have in mind (among others) the example actually mentioned by Jesus: the priest-prophet Zechariah, who was stoned to death at the instance of King Joash 'in the court of Yahweh's house' (2 Chr. 24:21).

Hughes: The preacher moves on to explicitly reminds his little church that some of the faithful persevered even to death. Since stones are plentiful in Palestine, they were often the murderous weapons of choice against the prophets. Jesus mourned this fact, crying out: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together' (Mt. 23:37).

(2) Sawn

...they were sawn in two...

MacArthur: Tradition holds that Isaiah was 'sawn in two.' The people had become so irritated at his powerful preaching that they cut him in half.

Schreiner: Others were sawn in two, and according to Jewish tradition this was the fate of Isaiah (*Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 5:11-14).

Bruce: As for being 'sawn in two,' this was the traditional fate of the prophet Isaiah during Manasseh's reign. The apocryphon called the *Ascension of Isaiah*, records the prophet's death. It tells how Isaiah, to avoid the wickedness rampant in Jerusalem under Manasseh, left the capital for Bethlehem and then withdrew to the hill country. There he was seized and sawn in two with a wooden saw; before his death he commanded his disciples to escape the persecution by going to Phoenicia, 'because,' he said, 'for me only has God mingled the cup' (*Asc. Isa.* 5:13).

(3) Sword

...they were killed with the sword.

Schreiner: Others were put to death with the sword (cp. 1 Kgs. 19:10; Jer. 26:23).

Bruce: Some through faith, we have been told, 'escaped the edge of the sword,' but some through faith 'were killed by the sword.' Elijah escaped Jezebel's vengeance, but other prophets of the Lord were 'slain ... with the sword' at that time (1 Kgs. 19:10). If Jeremiah was delivered from Jehoiakim when that king sought his life, his fellow-prophet Uriah was not so fortunate; he

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foretold the doom of Judah and Jerusalem in similar terms to those of Jeremiah, and when he fled to Egypt he was extradited from there and brought before Jehoiakim, ‘who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the burial place of the common people’ (Jer. 26:23). By faith one lived, and by faith the other died. So too in the apostolic age Herod Agrippa I ‘killed James the brother of John with the sword’ (Acts 12:2); but when he tried to do the same to Peter, Peter escaped his hands.

c) *Deprivation (11:37b-38)*

They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Schreiner: The clothing of the people of God (cp. 2 Kgs. 1:8) signifies their poverty and being forsaken in society. They were poor, persecuted, tormented (cp. 1 Kgs. 18:4, 13; Neh. 9:26, 30; Amos 2:12; 7:10-17). The righteous, the readers are reminded, are often despised by the world, and the world ‘was not worthy’ of such people, showing their unworthiness by their mistreatment and rejection of those who put their trust in the Lord. Some wandered in deserts, such as Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs. 19:4; 2 Kgs. 2:8). The godly sometimes had to flee evil by hiding in caves, just as many prophets were hidden by Obadiah (1 Kgs. 18:4, 13), and David hid in a cave from his enemies (1 Sam. 22:1). Similarly, Israel hid from the Philistines after Saul became king (1 Sam. 13:6; cp. 1 Sam. 14:11). If the readers expected to be accepted and praised, they need to rethink matters in light of the OT. The people of God have always been a minority people, a pilgrim people, and often despised and forsaken.

Bruce: Elijah, we know, wore ‘a garment of haircloth’ (2 Kgs. 1:8); and in the *Ascension of Isaiah* (2:10) those who accompanied Isaiah to his wilderness retreat ‘were all clothed in garments of hair.’ But the whole description of those who, roughly clad like this, endured destitution, affliction, and ill-treatment as they wandered in desolate places and sought the shelter of caves, reminds us especially of those godly Jews who fled from the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes—the ‘wise among the people’ who, in Daniel’s vision, fell ‘by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, for some days’ (Dan. 11:33). These were indeed men and women ‘of whom the world was not worthy.’ They were outlawed as people who were unfit for civilized society; the truth was that civilized society was unfit for them. They might well take on their lips the psalmist’s cry to God: ‘For thy sake we are slain all the day long; and accounted as sheep for the slaughter’ (Ps. 42:22). Faith in God carries with it no guarantee of comfort in this world: this was no doubt one of the lessons which our author wished his readers to learn. But it does carry with it great reward in the only word that ultimately matters.

MacArthur: The world is ‘not worthy’ of having such people in its midst, just as these people did not deserve the sufferings they received. For its inflicting the suffering, the world will be judged and punished; for their enduring the suffering the faithful saints will be resurrected and rewarded. God does not promise His saints deliverance from all suffering. To the contrary, Jesus told us to take up our crosses and to follow Him.

Phillips: This description may have the Maccabees in mind, for this is specifically said about them (1 Macc. 2:28; 2 Macc. 5:27; 10:6), although these things were also true of Elijah and Elisha. Finally, we have this understatement: ‘of whom the world was not worthy.’ These men and women were thought unfit by the world because of their faith in God, when in reality this world—because of its unbelief—was not a fit place for them.

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Hughes: Lastly, there were those of the faithful that knew deprivation. The calculated irony here is that the world has rejected such people, and yet the world does not deserve to have them even if it were to accept them. So much for the prosperity gospel! Here are saints who are so holy and so full of faith that the world is not worthy to contain them, and yet they are called to persevere in persecution, deprivation, and death. Not only that, but the reason they are able to persevere *is* their great faith! Christians under the oppressive old paganism of Roman culture were to take note, and so must we in the darkening neo-paganism of our day.

C. Their Faith and Ours (Hebrews 11:39-40)

1. Their Faith (11:39)

³⁹*And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised...*

Hughes: Now, what was the result for those who were faithful in persecution, deprivation, and death? Beautifully, it was and is the same as for those who experienced great public triumphs in their lives (like Noah, Moses, and Gideon). First, they were ‘commended through their faith.’ This is the way the chapter began—‘Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation’ (vv. 1-2)—and this is how it ends. All the faithful (the known and the unknown, the famously triumphant and those who anonymously preserved in suffering) were ‘commended through their faith.’ God forgets no one who loves and serves Him! It is His great pleasure to commend faith!

Hughes: The second result is that none—that is, none of the great triumphant members of the Hall of Faith or those who persevered without earthly triumphs—‘receive[d] what was promised.’ Although many promises had been given and fulfilled in their lifetimes, they did not receive the great promise—namely, the coming of the Messiah and salvation in Him. Everyone of the faithful in Old Testament times died before Jesus appeared. They entered Heaven with the promise unfulfilled.

Schreiner: The author returns to the theme of 11:2. God approved the OT saints commended here on account of their faith. Their faith sustained them in good times and bad, in prosperity and suffering. Old Testament saints put their faith in ‘what was promised’ (*επαγγελιαν, epangelian*), and yet they did not receive the promise. Remarkably, they didn’t cease believing, even though the promise was not fulfilled. They experienced the fulfillment of some specific promises (11:11, 33), but they didn’t obtain the ultimate fulfillment of the promise. They recognized that they must wait for the fullness of the promise, that the promise would be realized eschatologically. The promise here is another way of speaking of the final inheritance. Similarly, the promise is understood as the eschatological rest (4:1), as the realization of final salvation (10:36), and as the coming of the kingdom (12:26, 28).

Bruce: From righteous Abel to those whose faith was so nobly manifested on the very eve of the coming of Christ, they all ‘won their record for faith.’ Some of them, as we were told in v. 33, ‘obtained promises,’ but none of them received *the* promise in the sense of witnessing its fulfillment. They lived and died in prospect of a fulfillment which none of them experienced on earth; yet so real was that fulfillment to them that it gave them power to press upstream, against the current of the environment, and to live on earth as citizens of that commonwealth whose foundations are firmly laid in the unseen and eternal order. Their record is on high, and on earth as well, for the instruction and encouragement of men and women of later days.

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MacArthur: True faith has the courage to count on salvation. These faithful saints had to live in hope. They knew very little about the nature or the time or the means of God's salvation. But they knew it was coming, and this was the basis of their trust. They had abiding confidence that one day God would do the necessary thing to redeem them and reward them. What happened to them before that time was not consequential. They 'did not receive what was promised' but they had 'gained approval through their faith.' Their faith was not in some immediate fulfillment, but in the ultimate fulfillment of the promises. Here is where faith is most tested and where it most matters. 'All these,' from Abel through the prophets, had that courageous faith which counts, without reservation, on final salvation.

2. Our Faith (11:40)

...⁴⁰since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Schreiner: God ordained that OT believers would not be perfected apart from NT believers. Despite the remarkable faith of the OT saints, something 'better' would only come with the new covenant. The something 'better' arrived with Jesus' death and resurrection, with the final cleansing of sins through Him. Hence, now that Christ has come, those who trust in Jesus have experienced something better even now. Perfection refers to the totality of Christ's work, including both present forgiveness and final salvation.

Bruce: But now the promise has been fulfilled; the age of the new covenant has dawned; the Christ to whose day they looked forward has come and by His self-offering and His high-priestly ministry in the presence of God He has procured perfection for them—and for us. They and we together now enjoy unrestricted access to God through Christ, as fellow-citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. The 'better plan' which God had made embraces the better hope, the better promises, the better covenant, the better sacrifices, the better and abiding possession, and the better resurrection which is their heritage, and ours.

MacArthur: God has provided this 'something better' for us, that is for those under the New Covenant, which is why 'apart from us they should not be made perfect.' That is, not until our time, the time of Christianity, could their salvation be completed, made perfect. Until Jesus' atoning work on the cross was accomplished, no salvation was complete, no matter how great the faith a believer may have had. Their salvation was based on what Christ would do; ours is based on what Christ has done. Their faith looked forward to promise; ours look back to historical fact. Yet through their salvation was not completed in their lifetimes, these were not second-rate believers. They were believers of the highest order. They courageously struggled, suffered, and counted on salvation. They believed all of God's Word that they had, which is what counts with Him. How much less faith do we often have, in spite of our much greater light. 'Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed' (Jn. 20:29).

Hughes: Why is this? The answer is given in our final verse. No one was 'made perfect' under the old covenant, because Christ had not yet died. They were saved, but not until Jesus' work on the cross was complete could salvation be perfect. Their salvation looked ahead to what Christ would do. Ours looks back to what he has done—and ours is perfect. The surpassing excellence of this is that the faithful of all the ages would not be made perfect apart from Christians. All the faithful of all the ages are made perfect in Christ. We are all in it together—from Abel to Rahab—from Paul to Billy Graham.

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Phillips: Verse 40 concludes: ‘God has provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.’ The key word is ‘better.’ It is a key to the whole Book of Hebrews, which speaks of better things in Christ—a better plan, a better priest, a better covenant, a better sacrifice, better blood, a better home forever. These heroes of faith were waiting to see all these things that are better—things that can be seen only through faith in Christ Jesus. If these Old Testament saints could believe not seeing Christ—knowing only shadows and not the reality—not seeing with anything like our clarity the purchase price of our redemption by the cross—then how much more faith ought we to have than they, we who are called by His very name?

Hughes: And the message to the embattled little church, and to us, is: *how great our advantage!* Right here, while we walk on earth, we have the perfection of Christ. And it is so much better under the new covenant. We now have a high priest who has offered a perfect sacrifice for our sins once and for all. Our Savior/priest sits at the right hand of the Father and prays for us. We have, then, a better hope!

3. Lessons in Faith

Phillips: We may draw four final conclusions about faith from this panorama. The first is that what matters is not the circumstances in which we find ourselves but our faith in God. It ought to be obvious that Christian faith does not guarantee us comfort in this world. Yes, God delivers some from trouble, but others He delivers in trouble. Faithful Elijah was spared Ahab’s wrath, but numerous other faithful prophets died by his sword (1 Kgs. 19:10). Jeremiah escaped King Jehoiakim’s hatred, but his fellow-prophet Uriah did not escape. If God sent an angel to break Peter’s chains, he also allowed James, another of Christ’s three closet disciples, to die at Herod’s command. Understand, then, that God may place us on either of the two sides of this record: on the side of those who conquered in success or of those who conquered in defeat. What matters is not the circumstances—neither the blessing in this life, nor the trials. What matters is the faith by which we may conquer in all circumstances through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Phillips: Second, faith suffices while we wait for God’s promises to be fulfilled. Many blessings come to the Christian in this life, yet the great point of this entire chapter is the one found in verse 39: ‘And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised.’ This is partly because the promises of God are beyond what can be received in this mortal existence. It is not in the flesh but in glory that we will be fit to receive what God has for us (1 Cor. 2:9). Thus we are encouraged in our faith, knowing that just ahead lies an eternal weight of glory; beyond the cross there awaits a crown. What do we have while we wait, often in great difficulty? Faith suffices for the man or woman of God, for faith perceive and makes real the things that are yet unseen.

Phillips: Third, and this is probably the main point the write of Hebrews had for his original readers, times of trial especially demand faith. This letter was written to those tempted to fall back because of persecution. Earlier, the author reminded them of a time when their own heroes suffered some of the things recorded in this passage. It is only those who stand firm in faith, even in hardship, who are joined to this honor roll of salvation. Indeed, this is what trials do: they test and try our faith; they burn away the dross so that what is left is pure and glorious to God.

Phillips: Fourth, and finally, let us remember that in the end, when all else is gone, what will matter is our faith. It is only through faith that we are saved. Look back over this list of names, and those associated with these descriptions, and think of the great variety there is among them.

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Some were Jews, others were not. Some were rich and others were poor. Some were men, some were women; some were loved, some were hated; some were successful, some were not. What is it, then, that puts their names on this blessed list of God's beloved? It is only one thing: faith. Someday we will look back and see how insignificant are so many things that we think so important now—our clothes, our cars, our houses, our reputations—just as we look back on the heroes of Hebrews 11 and realize that their faith is all that really mattered. With faith we gain Christ and His cross, the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting; without faith we are left to perish with the useless things of this world. The twentieth-century martyr Jim Elliot was right when he said: 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.'

For next time: Read Hebrews 12:1-3.