

# Hebrews

I. **Hebrews 11:29-40 . . .** By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. [30] By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. [31] By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. [32] And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, [33] who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; [36] and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated [38] (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. [39] And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, [40] because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

## II. Prayer

## III. Examples of Faith

A. **Hebrews 11:29-30 . . .** By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. [30] By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

1. These two examples continue to display a hard to miss truth revealed in this chapter on faith. And that truth is that God – for His people, in His people, and through His people – does both the impossible and the improbable.

- a. And why does He do the impossible and the improbable? To bring glory to His name among the unbelievers, and to convince us to trust in Him instead of ourselves.
  - b. Therefore, may we, like the saints of old, live by faith in God and obedience to God's will so that God has many opportunities to do the impossible and improbable for us, in us, and through us – as individuals and as a church.
2. Which brings me to an interesting fact about these two verses. These two verses are the only community examples of living by faith. All the other examples in **Hebrews 11** are of individuals who lived by faith.
3. There are two great lessons here for us about community faith.
  - a. First, Moses was not the sum of Israel. Moses, together with the rest of the Israelites made up the sum of Israel. It is the same in the church. Neither the pastor nor the elders are the sum of any church. The sum of our church is every one of us. So what is my point? What is the lesson for us?
    - (1) We face many challenges in life as individuals, and we have learned to share our concerns and needs with one another so that the community of believers can support us in our struggle. This is good, and it is as God intends it to be – for we fulfill the Law of Christ when we bear one another's burdens.
    - (2) However, we face challenges and trials and hard times as a church. And as a church, we have faced situations and circumstances that required difficult or even seemingly impossible solutions. It is likely we will face more such things in the future. I suspect most of us long for spiritual growth and for more intimate fellowship with God. Many of us desire reaping from evangelism and numerical growth. And as a church, many of us want to be able to do more to financially support God's work here and around the world. Surely, these are commendable and God-honoring desires and wants.
    - (3) Which brings us back to the lesson God has for us in this. Community faith is just as important as individual faith when it comes to the church being Christ's light in a dark world and doing the will of God in a rebellious world. History – be it the book of Acts or church history as it has been passed down to us through the ages, shows us that

when the church acts as one body – trusting God as Israel did at the Red Sea and obeying God as Israel did at Jericho – God does the impossible and the improbable for His church, in His church, and through His church. And I am convinced He has done the same for us and will do so in the future as we come together in faith and obedience. Therefore –

- (a) I encourage us to think of ourselves as one body, or as one team when facing the challenges and pursuing the God-pleasing longings of our church.
  - (b) I encourage us to pray – in faith – together; to discern and do the will of God – by faith – together; to together be a light in the dark world – so that the world sees one light instead of many differing lights, and to stand together – in faith – as we look to God to take us through the difficult times or do the impossible or empower us to become what He wants us as a church to be.
  - (c) Why? Because God works in, for, and through the church just as he works in, for, and through individual Christians.
- b. The second lesson from **Hebrews 11:29-30** is this. God did what the community of faith could not do for itself. Yet in order for Israel to reap the benefits of God's part, **they had to do their part** – and their part was submitting to the will of God and obeying the word of God.
- (1) Crossing the Red Sea to safety and bringing the walls of Jericho down were neither all of God's doing nor all of the people's doing. Now I want to be clear here that God did the heavy lifting – that is, He made possible what was impossible. Yet both God and the community of faith worked together to achieve God's intended results.
  - (2) So what is the lesson here for us? As we survey the needs and face the challenges of our church, we must get on our knees before God and look to Him to do what we cannot do ourselves. Yet if we stop with praying, we will not be living by faith. To live by faith is to lay before God our needs and wants **while** devoting ourselves to thinking, speaking and living according to His will and word in relation to our needs and wants.

4. There is one more thing I want to say about these two verses. God so arranged the crossing of the Red Sea and the walking around Jericho as to make it clear that He is to be our first and foremost focus; that reverence and love for Him are to be our motivation for what we do; that He will provide our direction and His word will set the boundaries within which we as a church are to operate; that His empowerment and promises are to be our source of courage; and that His goodness is to be the basis of our faith.
  - a. May we never think that in doing our part we are doing something great or important for God – as if we should receive the honor instead of God. Such thinking is pride, and pride is the opposite of living by faith.
  - b. In spite of how much we do for God or what God does through us, our attitude is to be one of humility – a humility that wants the glory to go to God, and God alone. May we, like humble Christians everywhere, seek God's glory as if He is everything and we are nothing.

B. **Hebrews 11:31** . . . By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

1. You can read the story of Rahab in **Joshua 2:1-21**. In essence, this is a story of evangelism that bore fruit, and it goes like this – Joshua sent spies into Jericho. The spies sought lodging in Rahab's home – and she was a known harlot or prostitute. Once the authorities began looking for the spies, she chose to side with them and their God on the basis of stories she had heard about their God's great deeds at the Red Sea and in giving Israel victory over two kings of the Amorites. In response, the spies agreed to protect her and her family.
2. Rahab is an example of faith because upon hearing about God and having what she heard confirmed by the spies, she chose to put her faith in God and act accordingly.
3. Now in spite of Rahab's occupation at the time of her coming to faith in God, God honored her by speaking of her faith here in **Hebrews 11:31** and in **James 2:25**. But more than that, God gave this unbelieving Gentile prostitute before her conversion the privilege to be in the genealogy of Jesus (**Matthew 1:5**). In fact, she was the great, great, grandmother of King David.

C. **Hebrews 11:32** . . . And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,

1. **Gideon** – The story of Gideon is told in **Judges 6-7**. With only three hundred soldiers, Gideon won a victory over the well-equipped and far larger army of the Ammonites at a time when they were terrorizing Israel.
2. **Barak** – Barak's story is in **Judges 4-5**. In obedience to the prophetess Deborah's word from God, and with Deborah's help, Barak assembled ten thousand men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun and faced the Canaanites with their nine hundred chariots of iron. He won what any unbeliever would call an unbelievable victory. Yet because of God and his faith, we call it believable.
3. **Samson** – You may be wondering why Samson is included in this list of people who lived by faith. I used to wonder that myself. But a clearer understanding of my own sin and fleshly desires compels me to see his strengths as well as his weaknesses. Samson's story is told in **Judges 13-16**. On the faith side, Samson was willing to fight the enemy alone – even though he was up against tremendous odds. And as most of us know, he always won – which is a testimony to God's continued grace and strength in his life. In praise of Samson, we can say his faith in God was such that he entered each battle confident of victory – including his last one. On the negative side, we can say he was impulsive at times and spiritually immature – especially when it came to the ladies. May we learn from both sides!
4. **Jephthah** – You can read the story of Jephthah in **Judges 11-12**. His father was Gilead and his mother was a harlot – making him an illegitimate son even though he grew up in his father home. And though he was a valiant warrior, his brothers drove him away so that he would not be included in their father's inheritance. However, when the Ammonites were threatening to take part of Israel's land, the Gileadite elders went to Jephthah and begged him to fight the Ammonite kings for them. He agreed and under the anointing of God and after making a vow to God, he won a great victory. However, the carelessness of his vow is revealed when it cost him the life of his daughter. May we emulate his faith. May we be wiser in what we promise or offer God to gain His help.

5. **David** – While still a young shepherd, David, the youngest son, was anointed king in preference to all his brothers (**I Sam 16:1-13**). And though he is not without his faults, the overall pattern of David's life was that of faith and obedience such that God called David a "man after His own heart." Surely, such faith is worthy of our study and consideration.
6. **Samuel** – He was a gift from God to Hannah and from Hannah back to God. His faith and obedience were such that God fulfilled every word of prophecy or promise or blessing or curse that Samuel spoke.
7. **The prophets** – Those men who stood alone with God and in speaking for God to people who, generally speaking, did not want to hear what they had to say. In fact, many of the prophets were put to death by the very people and rulers God sent them to serve.

D. **Hebrews 11:33-38** . . . who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; [36] and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated [38] (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

E. **Hebrews 11:39-40** . . . And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, [40] because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

IV. Let me conclude Hebrews 11 by drawing your attention to three points.

- A. First, each of these folks listed here lived by faith – submitting to God's will and obeying God's word – without seeing the fulfillment of God's promise (***first the Promised Land and then the Promised Savior***) in their lifetime. Imagine, being asked to act on a promise that is never fulfilled in your lifetime. Would you have enough faith in the one who

promised to live accordingly even though you never see the promise fulfilled? These folks had that much faith. Interestingly, we have less excuse than they for not living by faith because the promise of a Savior has been fulfilled, and this Savior has spoken to us. Which brings me to my second point.

- B. Second, this list of people is not a list of extraordinary Christians. It is a list of people living an ordinary life of faith and obedience. If they seem extraordinary to us, its because of the weakness of our faith and the frequency of our disobedience. Now let me remind you that they had to live by faith without seeing the promise fulfilled while we live by faith knowing the promise has been fulfilled – which means we ought all the more to be able to live up to their example of faith. So I urge each one of us, let us read **Hebrews 11** as a testimony to what we ordinary Christians can be rather than excluding ourselves by thinking this chapter is about what a few extraordinary Christians might be.
- C. Third, this list of those who lived by faith is our heritage. How far we fall from their example of faith and obedience, or how high we rise to meet it depends on us – individually, and as a church.
- D. **Hebrews 12:1-2a** . . . Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith . . .