
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Hebrews

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Hebrews 11:31-40: *Examples of Faith!*

General idea: By faith in Christ, ordinary people became extraordinary and left an everlasting legacy, reputation, and example that we can follow too! Just a few names are given, but they represent all kinds of people of faith who demonstrated that they and we can persevere and overcome harsh trials and afflictions through faith.

Rahab, a prostitute, by hiding the spies, also showed remarkable faith as did Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. The great David, Samuel, and the Prophets exercised faith too. These people overthrew kingdoms and did great things, for they trusted and received God's promises. Some who had trusted in God were tortured and they still held hope and faith in God, for they knew this life was temporary and they held fast for the life to come. They were too good for this world; they stayed in the race to win the prize and receive God's approval and reward, as we will because of our faith in Christ.

Contexts and Background:

This eloquent discourse of rhetoric uses short summations for more evidence of active faith. The author could give so much more evidence and examples, but does not want to distract his hearers. He is alerting regular folks who are under stress and persecution that the people they regard as great were also regular folks, who under great strain and situations, just exercised trust and faith in God. And that is why they are great and why they persevered. They are the examples that we can follow, understanding that we can indeed do it too. The audiences of this letter were originally being persecuted by Jewish leaders, and their families were being hostile to them too. They are being encouraged and even threatened to come back and quit what their society condoned as a cult, an offshoot sect of Judaism.

Commentary; Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *By faith.* An illustration that to be in Christ also means we identify with His work and receive His grace; and to mature, we bear His disgrace. Many of these great people of faith did just that, knowing their reward was not in this world, but would come in heaven. Our faith is steady when we are in Christ; we receive it from Him, through His Spirit as revealed and described in His Word. It is a promise and a fact that is received. As it is revealed to us, we are to respond back to it by building more. Faith is no luxury; it is our necessity for right Christian being and living. Faith is essential for us to know Christ, to worship Him, to be led by Him, and to lead others to Him. Without it, we are just a nuisance at best in the Kingdom, and perhaps even a distraction and ill. Real faith is planted in our hearts and minds and it is merely confirmed by our actions and attitude, as Christ is our Object and the destination for

our faith. If we ignore our faith build-up, we will fall and sin (Acts 7:20-44; Rom. 10:17; 14:23; 15:4).

- *Rahab*. In Jewish mysticism, she is perceived as beautiful, wise, and the model of a convert to Judaism. This is a demonstration of God's boundless grace, ability to redeem, and to give provision; we can trust in God. Rahab hid the spies and showed great allegiance to God—and, she became an ancestor to Jesus. The point to the hearers was this: if Rahab, who was not an Israelite, demonstrated extreme faith, why can't you (Joshua. 2:8-11; 6:22-25; Matt. 1:5; James 2:25)?
- *What more shall I say / tell*. A rhetorical question to challenge the original hearers and us today to answer this question: what are you doing for the faith? Here are leaders of faith who persevered—and you can too! The “I” here is a masculine Greek verb, signifying that the author of Hebrews was probably male.
- *David*. The ideal king and a person who deeply followed God.
- *Samuel*. The ideal prophet and a person who deeply followed God and set up schools to educate that continued to the time of Christ. He was the transition from the Judges to the monarchy (Psalm 99:6; Jer. 15:1; Acts 3:24; 13:20).
- *Who through faith*. Here referring to the continuance of the Jewish legacy of faith and culture by the Judges, *Gideon*, *Barak*, *Samson*, and *Jephthah*. These various people, well known but not as important or famous as Abraham or Moses, showed them that the normal, everyday person can have victory in Christ by putting into effect real faith even in what seems to be defeat (Judg. 4:6-5:15; 6:11-8:35; 11:1-12:7; 13:24-16:31; 1Sam. 12:11; 1 Chron. 17:6).
- *Gained what was promised*. In Christ, we have what is most important: deliverance; what we face in trials, frustrations, and life are merely temporary so we have to keep our eye on what is important. Faith is in the promise of Christ; our hope is in Him, not in what we have or want. What God fulfills is up to Him and His timing. Even when we do not have confidence in Him, we eventually will, even if it is not until eternity (Heb. 4:10).
- *Mouths of lions*. Meaning Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6). And *quenched the fury of the flames* refers to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 3).
- *Weakness was turned to strength*. Meaning that through God's intervention and promise, we have His help and our fears and flaws can be overcome and used through His strength (Rom. 8:26-28; 2 Cor. 12:9).
- *Women received back their dead*. Has two main meanings: the miracle such as Elijah and the widow from Zaraphath whose son was brought back to life, and the fact that God cares for the widow and challenges the Church to do so too. As young women married older men, when widowed, they were often left without land and

means. Thus when they are cared for, it is like receiving their husband back (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:8-37).

- *Tortured.* Here refers to the time of the Maccabees and the Jewish revolt (167-157 BC) where we get the celebration of *Hanukkah*, referring to focusing on God and not on circumstances.
- *Still others.* There were a myriad of other great heroes of faith who lived before and pointed to Christ; we have so much more because we are in Christ now. The author is limited by the length of his paper as much more could be written. What we need to ask ourselves is what can I do too more with faith? Then our story can be written and counted too. This is a reminder we can live by faith as countless others who have gone on before us; we can indeed do it. We can even endure and prosper, but if we give up, we miss out what we could have had in blessings and maturity.
- *Sawed in two.* Perhaps referred to Isaiah and the tradition on how he was martyred.
- *Commended for their faith.* Being blessed by God has nothing to do with “health and wealth,” as some like to say. Rather, we honor Him by our trust and obedience, after which we receive His blessings in His perfect timing. Divine commendation is having the approval of God because one chooses to take what He gives and live by it. Even when great faith is exercised, it does not mean that we get benefits in the here and now. Sometimes, we are martyred or have real setbacks and are not able to get out of our bad circumstances. Additionally, getting what we want is not a sign of God’s blessing, especially when there is no Fruit behind it on our part. We have to trust that God’s plan is working and our reward is certain, even when we do not receive it when we would like to (Rom. 1:17).
- *None of them received.* Many promises as well as prophecies have been fulfilled while others wait for their fulfillment, just as when we receive what we need but not always what we want. It may not be good for us or not in His faultless holiness. God can be trusted! He does provide, in His timing, that which is perfect. The point is to show a hope that is contagious and practical.
- *Something better.* What Christ gives—His redemption for our sins—is far greater than anything we can suffer through! This is tested and approved by history and testimony, showing that faith is valid for our lives too. This is a call to live by faith, to persevere no matter what; for he is able to carry us through because we are now complete in Him. We participate in God’s promises that are real, substantial, and will be given (John 11:25-26; Rom. 8:18; Eph. 1:9-10; Heb. 10:38; 12: 26)
- *Made perfect.* Meaning the consummation of our salvation; it is received by faith and then applied to build more faith, producing righteousness. Also, it means our guarantee to be raised after death to heaven (Dan. 12:2-13; Heb. 1:14).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

There is a certainty we have in Christ; we have His promise as real, tangible hope for our daily Christian living. But, we have to receive it, know it, and exercise it so faith is our practice and righteousness is our goal. In so doing, God is glorified in both the ordinary *and* the extraordinary. Even when we do not see it or it has not been given, our needs are promised and this is a guarantee we can bank on. This is about our dependence on Christ; as our High Priest, He gives us so much, and we should never take it for granted or ignore what He has done. Jesus invites us to go to Him at any time, a privilege that previously only the high priest had, and then only once a year—to be in the presence of God. Do you know what He has done for you? You have access to God; a personal relationship is now extended to us that was only rarely dispensed in O.T. times! If not, we would be living the opposite of His call—that is, not having hope, faith, and confidence in Him so we can live for Him.

If Christ is giving us deliverance, how are we being that example to others? In the recovery movement, there is a theme that makes it so successful for those who strive to get their lives together and off their addictions and problems, and this is *acceptance*. It is why people go there and are willing to ignore shame and apprehensions. You can go to virtually any AA or twelve-step group worldwide and you will be accepted. When you arrive you are greeted, welcomed to come in, and you feel no judgment or condemnation; rather, you receive acceptance and caring ears from others who have “been there.” You can safely bare your troubles without retaliation or gossip, then seek honest help and even publicly confess and repent. But, if you tried to do this in virtually any church—dared to admit your problems to its pastors and peoples and/or confess your sins publicly—you would not be very well received. In fact, at most churches, you would at least be shunned or gossiped about and perhaps even asked to leave for being a disruption or a distraction. If there is an attitude of help there, the pastor or leader with a caring heart perhaps may take you to the AA group that meets there.

Why the problem? A church is a hospital for us all, sinners in the hands of a loving and caring God, Who is angry at sin and died and rose to bear it on our behalf. We have all been there; I am a sinner and I bet you are too. Yet, we have a God who condescended to reach down and lift us up out of our mire of transgression and helplessness, a God who will forgive, cleanse, and restore us when we receive Him and then repent. This is what Redemption is all about. The strange thing is that secular folks seem to get this better than we do in our local churches. Why is that? Why can't we be more accepting of one another's plight? Not accepting of sin, but willing to help the sinner, for we all are sinners, whether a homosexual, one with a drinking problem, one with anger issues, one who gambles or is addicted to pornography, one who is just lonely and depressed—or even the one thing God hates most, which is being prideful! (Why don't our Christian leaders, who are in the spotlight with other sins, get on that bandwagon too, and speak against being prideful? Our Lord did in Matt. 23!) Why can't we admit our need for God's impact and redemption, seek His face completely, listen to one another's woes, and be there as listeners and helpers? This is what Jesus does for us and asks us to do for one another. This is one of the imperative roles of a good church. How would our churches grow better if we had the attitude that we are all sinners, and then

let our pride go and be more accepting to others with sincerity and the love and Fruit of our Lord? How would we grow in our relationships and spiritual maturity? Just by realizing our dependence on Christ and exercising this by being more accepting and helpful would make a huge difference!

So, do outsiders have access to God in your church and heart?

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Faith in Christ means what to you? What is your faith dedicated to?
2. If your story can be written and counted too in this passage, what do you need to do too more with faith?
3. How do ordinary people become extraordinary with faith? How can you? How would these people's example help comfort and influence you? How does being in Christ help you?
4. How have you shown faith that influenced others? How have other's faith influenced you?
5. What do you need to do to line up your faith so it becomes more like righteousness?
6. Do you realize that this life and your struggles are temporary? What can you do to have more hope? Would this help you to hold fast for the life to come?
7. How is it that when you are in Christ, you have His promise as real and tangible hope for your daily Christian living? How can it be more so?
8. What does it mean to you that when you exercise faith, you receive God's approval and reward? How can you do this more?

9. What do you do to express gratitude to our Lord? What must take place for you to do this well?
10. When God seems far away and no one seems to care about injustice or your concerns, God is still there caring. How does this help you in your faith formation? How can you do a better job of showing God's care and concern to others?
11. How can you persevere and overcome harsh trials and afflictions through faith? What is in your way? What will you do about it?
12. How can your church do a better job at welcoming and helping all those in sin, even those we do not feel comfortable with? What would your community look like if you did? What is stopping you? What is the plan to make this so?

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