

What is Faith? Part 4

February 12, 2017

Hebrews 11:23-40

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

29 By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. 31 By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

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-- 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-- 38 of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

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

11:23. With this transition to the life of **Moses**, the writer began to focus on the way faith confronts opposition and hostility, a subject familiar to his readers. It was **by faith** that Moses was hidden by his **parents** and his life was thus preserved. The phrase **because they saw he was no ordinary child** might be better read, “because they saw he was a beautiful child.” (“Beautiful” is the Gr. *asteion*, which occurs in the NT only here and in Acts 7:20, which also refers to Moses.) Delighted by the precious gift of a son which God had given them, they evidently believed God had something better for this lovely baby than death. Not fearing Pharaoh’s **edict**, they kept him alive, and God rewarded their faith by their son’s illustrious career.

11:24–26. In a classic presentation of the way faith chooses between the attractive but temporary **pleasures of sin** and the prospect of **disgrace for the sake of Christ**, the writer showed **Moses** to be a real hero of faith who had an intelligent regard for the eschatological hopes of the nation of Israel. The readers also were to accept “disgrace” and reject “the pleasures of sin,” and they would do so if they, like Moses, anticipated their **reward**.

11:27–28. Moreover, at the time of the Exodus, Moses was undeterred by fear of **the king’s anger**. By keeping **the Passover**, which included **the sprinkling of blood**, the nation avoided God’s judgment. In the same way, the readers should not be afraid of human wrath and should maintain their separateness from the surrounding world. They should persist in the worship experience made possible by the blood of the New Covenant. If they would do so, they would not fall under divine retribution (cf. 10:19–31).

11:29–31. The readers could also look forward to victory over their enemies (cf. 1:13–14). They could learn from the destruction of **the Egyptians** and the collapse of **the walls of Jericho** what triumphs faith can win over its adversaries. If, as seems probable, there were a few Gentiles in the church that received this letter, they could take comfort from the experience of **the prostitute Rahab**, a Gentile who was spared when Jericho was conquered.

11:32–35a. There were far too many heroes of faith for the writer to deal with them all in detail. Swiftly he mentioned the variegated accomplishments of some of them. At the climax of this list stand **women who received back their dead, raised to life again**—a truly superlative victory of faith which does not allow death to defeat it (cf. 1 Kings 17:17–24; 2 Kings 4:17–37).

11:35b–38. In a swift transition of thought, the writer moved from faith’s obvious triumphs to what seemed to be its defeats. But these defeats were only apparent, not real. Those who **were tortured and refused to be released** did so because they knew their sufferings would lead to a richer and **better resurrection** experience. So the readers might also endure suffering staunchly and expect reward in the future world. Indeed, all manner of physical suffering (vv. 36–37, 38b cite about a dozen kinds of persecution) has been endured by people of faith, as well as ostracism from their homes and countries, treatment that the readers might also have to endure. But in a lovely touch, the writer commented that **the world was not worthy** of those whom it banished.

11:39–40. In a concluding summary the writer pointed out that the great heroes of faith he had spoken of had not yet realized their eschatological hopes. This fact shows that **God had planned something better for them and us**. It is indeed “better for us” that the future hopes they strove toward be delayed, since only thus could believers enjoy the present experience of becoming companions of the Messiah who leads them to glory. As a result, the perfecting (cf. 10:14; 12:23) of the Old Testament worthies—that is, the realization of their hopes—awaits that of all believers.¹

23–28 In this section faith is portrayed as a force sustaining God’s people in times of opposition and affliction, enabling them to overcome fear and temptation and to fulfil his purposes for them. The attitude of Moses’ parents is highlighted first. They displayed no fear of Pharaoh’s *edict* about the killing of Hebrew baby boys and hid Moses *for three months after he was born* (23; cf. Ex. 1:22–2:2). Faith in God is incompatible with fear of hostile forces.

When Moses grew up, he demonstrated his own faith by refusing *to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter* (24; cf. Ex. 2:5–12). Like Abraham, he rejected earthly comforts and security in order to serve the living and true God. He could have enjoyed *the pleasures of sin for a short time* (25), and all *the treasures of Egypt* (26), but his goals were different. In fact, when he refused to accept his status in the Egyptian court, *he chose to be illtreated along with the people of God*. For Moses there was a greater wealth to be experienced in suffering *disgrace for the sake of Christ* (lit. ‘the reproach of the anointed’). Identifying with God’s anointed people, Moses experienced the stigma and reproach supremely suffered by the Messiah (12:2–3; 13:13; cf. Ps. 89:50–51; 1 Pet. 4:12–16). Moses exemplifies faith as it is defined in v 1, because his secret was *looking ahead to his reward* (cf. v 6) and persevering *because he saw him who is invisible* (26–27). Moses feared God rather than the king of Egypt! Believing that a terrible judgment on *the firstborn* of Egypt would most certainly take place, Moses obeyed God’s command and *kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood* (28; cf. Ex. 11–12). The blood on the houses of the Israelites meant that *the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel*. Moses’ faith was an essential element in God’s saving plan for his people.

29–31 The faith of the Israelites, as they *passed through the Red Sea as on dry land*, was inspired by the promises of God that Moses brought to them (e.g. Ex. 14:13–14). When the Egyptian forces followed, they were not motivated by faith and were overwhelmed by God’s judgment. Two final instances of faith are then given from the period when the Israelites invaded the promised land. *The walls of Jericho fell* because the Israelites acted in response to God’s strange command and *marched around them for seven days* (Jos. 6). The faith of *the prostitute Rahab* was expressed in her willingness to show hospitality to the Israelite spies (Jos. 2:8–11). She feared the God of Israel, rather than the king of Jericho, and was *not killed* when God’s judgment fell on *those who were disobedient* in that city (Jos. 6:22–25). As a woman, a Gentile,

¹ Hodges, Z. C. (1985). Hebrews. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 808–809). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

and an open sinner she joined the company of those who were saved by faith.

32–38 In this summary passage the writer specifically mentions four judges (*Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah*), one king (*David*), with *Samuel and the prophets*, as examples of faith. He then describes what was accomplished by such faith in the political and military sphere (33–34), with a particular allusion to Daniel (*who shut the mouths of lions*; Dn. 6:22–23) and the three who were thrown into the Babylonian furnace (*quenched the fury of the flames*; Dn. 3:25–28). The supreme achievement of faith is victory over death in resurrection (35). Certain women *received back their dead* in this life (e.g. 1 Ki. 17:17–24; 2 Ki. 4:17–37). Others had to endure torture and *refused to be released* from imprisonment, so that they might obtain the *better resurrection* to eternal life. Some vivid examples of this occur in the Apocrypha, written after the period of history recorded in the OT (e.g. 2 Macc. 6:19, 28; 7:9, 11, 14). Images of persecution and imprisonment pile up to convince the first readers of Hebrews that their experience has been one with that of believers in former generations (36–38; cf. 10:32–34), to encourage them to persevere in faith.

39–40 A fitting conclusion to ch. 11 and a transition to the call of ch. 12 is provided by these verses. *These were all commended for their faith* in the sense that God testified to their faith and made them witnesses of true faith for others (cf. v 2; 12:1). *Yet none of them received what had been promised* (v 13). Although they saw the fulfilment of specific promises in this life (e.g. 6:15; 11:11, 33), none of them experienced the blessings of the Messianic era and of the new covenant. In his gracious providence, *God had planned something better for us* in the sense that their enjoyment of perfection through Jesus Christ would only be *together with us*. The writer's point is to stress the enormous privilege of living 'in these last days' (1:2). On the perfecting of believers, see notes on 10:14. The ultimate benefit of Christ's work for us is a share in the promised eternal inheritance.²

23. In searching the sacred records for eminent examples of the power and efficacy of faith, the apostle arrived at that of Moses. And because this is the greatest example, next to that of Abraham, he emphasizes many of the results and acts of Moses' faith. And if we consider correctly his person and his circumstances, the work he was called to do, the trials, difficulties, and temptations he had to contend with, his concern for God's glory and for the whole church, we will see how this wonderfully represents the redemption and deliverance of the church by Christ. With Moses' victory over all opposition we must acknowledge that there is not a better example of the power of faith. For this reason the apostle takes one step back and declares the faith of Moses' parents in preserving Moses' life as a baby. When God planned that a person should carry out some great work he often indicated this in some way at their birth. This was the case with Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist and others. And so it was with the birth and

² Peterson, D. G. (1994). Hebrews. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 1348–1349). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

preservation of Moses, as is declared in this verse.

By faith Moses' parents. The faith of the parents of Moses is celebrated here. Their faith was so strong that they were not afraid of the king's edict.

Verses 24–26

24. By faith Moses. Nobody in the world was more marked out by Providence in his birth, education, and actions than Moses. Yet Moses lived and worked by faith.

Self-denial is not just saying no to outward actions but is a mortification of the desires and affections of the mind that wants to place a value on things in life, especially the things of this world that oppose spiritual things. Moses crucified his heart to his outward enjoyments, thinking of them as rubbish in comparison with Christ. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time (verse 25). Moses had to choose between the people of God in their afflicted state and enjoying the pleasures of sin. Moses' determination is seen in the words he chose. He chose to be mistreated....

Mistreated. This word occurs only here in the whole of the New Testament. Literally, it means, "to be mistreated with," and signifies "to be pressed, distressed with evil things that destroy nature."

26. Disgrace for the sake of Christ. This must be the same as being "mistreated along with the people of God." **Christ**, as used here, is never used for any type of Christ, but only for Christ himself. If Moses went through disgrace as the type of Christ, knowing that he was doing this, then he believed in Christ. From the first promise about the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, Christ was the life, soul, and everything for everyone in the church, in all ages. From him everything came and centered in, for "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). He is "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

The treasures of Egypt. Treasures are the riches in gold, silver, precious stones, and other very valuable things that are stored and hidden. But when treasures of a nation are mentioned they include all the advantages that may be derived from these treasures. In both respects Egypt, while it flourished, was second to none. Moses was well aware of the treasures of Egypt, but he preferred disgrace for the sake of Christ.

His reward. God gave this **reward** to Moses, just as he had given him faith and obedience. Moses did not deserve it or earn it, but it was given to him as sovereign bounty.

Verses 27–38

27. Three things are ascribed to Moses' faith here.

1. What he did: **he left Egypt.**
2. How he did this: **not fearing the king's anger.**
3. The basis on which he did it: **he persevered.**

He left Egypt. Moses left Egypt by faith. Moses left Egypt twice; first after he killed an Egyptian (Exodus 2:14–15); and second, when he delivered the people out of Egypt (Exodus 10:29). The apostle is referring to Moses' second departure from Egypt here. While this leaving of Egypt may be a general expression of Moses taking the people into the desert, the apostle has a special reason for recording it: "Pharaoh said to Moses, 'Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die.' 'Just as you say,' Moses replied, 'I will never appear before you again'" (Exodus 10:28–29). Never has there been a greater expression of faith and spiritual courage than this. It is stated that Moses threatened Pharaoh, that all his servants would come and bow down before him; and so "Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh" (Exodus 11:8). Moses was indignant about Pharaoh's obstinate rebellion against God. He had in front of him a bloody tyrant, armed with all the power of Egypt, threatening him with death if he persisted in the work God had given him. But, far from being terrified, or failing in his duty in any way, he professed his resolve to carry on and called down destruction on the tyrant himself. This is how Moses left Egypt. He did not fear **the king's anger.**

28. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. This story is recorded in Exodus 12. There are two things to note in this verse. First, the commendation of Moses' faith, which is seen in the observation of the double divine ordinance of worship. One became of perpetual use in the church, namely, the Passover. The other was temporary, suited only to that time, namely, the sprinkling of blood; or it may be thought of as a temporary addition to the other. Second, the result of his faith in observing these ordinances, of which they were a sign: that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

He kept the Passover. The Passover. The Greeks call it "*pascha*," which they derive from the word meaning "to suffer," because the lamb suffered when it was slain. But the Greeks are very foolish in this, for the word is a Hebrew one meaning "to pass over." The word was chosen to intimate the manner of the distinction that God made by the destroying angel between the Egyptian houses and the Israelite houses, when he passed over one untouched and entered into another, which might have been next-door, with death.

Moses demonstrated his faith in various ways as he kept or observed the Passover. First, he

showed respect to its original institution, which came through divine revelation. God revealed the ordinance to him, with all its rites and ceremonies (Exodus 12:1–4, etc.).

Second, Moses showed respect through faith about its sacramental nature, in which the promise was included. For this is the nature of sacraments, that in and by a visible pledge they contain a promise and show the thing promised to those who believe. This is expressed in Exodus 12:11, where, speaking of the lamb to be killed and eaten, with all its rites and ceremonies, God adds, “it is the LORD’s Passover.” Here the application of the name of the thing signified for the sacramental sign is consecrated to be used in the church. So it was taken for granted by our Savior in the institution of the sacrament of his Supper, when he says of the bread and wine that they are his holy body and blood, applying the names of the things signified to those that were appointed signs of them by divine institution. This contained the promise of the people’s deliverance that was exemplified through their faith in all the rites.

The sprinkling of blood. This temporary ordinance had the same purpose as the first celebration of the Passover. Its institution is recorded in Exodus 12:7. The blood of the lamb after it had been killed was kept in a bowl, into which a bunch of hyssop was dipped, which was then used to strike the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses. This would be a token so that God would pass over the houses that were so sprinkled and marked with blood, and so none of them would be destroyed (Exodus 12:12–13).

The destroyer. The agent used in this word was **the destroyer**. “Some of them ... were killed by the destroying angel” (1 Corinthians 10:10). **The destroyer** was an angel whom God used to execute his judgments, as he did once later, in the destruction of Sennacherib’s army; and as he did once before, in the city of Sodom. There is therefore no reason to think, as some of the Jews do, that it was an evil angel whom they call Ashmodaeus in the Book of Tobit, and by the name of “the angel of death,” or, “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Psalm 78:49 has a reference to “destroying angels.”

29. Having laid the foundation of the deliverance of the church on the exercise of faith through observing the holy institution of divine worship, prescribed to be the signs and token of this, the apostle moves on to give an example of one of the most remarkable moments of divine providence that happened to them during their deliverance. A greater instance about the work of divine providence, of the power of faith on the one hand and of unbelief with obdurate presumption on the other, is not recorded in the whole Book of God.

The Egyptians tried. The Egyptian army of men, horses, and chariots tried to do what they saw the children of Israel do in front of them, namely, pass through the Red Sea while the waters were parted. This was the worst height these obdurate pagans could rise to. They had seen all of God’s mighty works that God had performed on behalf of his people among them, and yet, now, as they saw the wonderful work of God in opening the sea, they attempted to follow them.

When the oppressors of the church are closest to their own ruin they often rage most and are

most obstinate in their bloody persecutions. It is the same to this day among the anti-Christian enemies of the church. Notwithstanding all their pride and fury, they seem to be entering into the Red Sea.

They were drowned. They were drowned and swallowed up (see Exodus 15). This destruction of the Egyptians, with Israel's deliverance being secured, was a type and pledge of the victory that the church will have over its anti-Christian adversaries (Revelation 15:2–4).

30. In this verse the apostle adds another instance of the faith of the whole congregation. For although Joshua's faith is doubtless in mind, yet the faith of the whole people is expressed. The apostle gives a summary of the taking and destruction of Jericho that is recorded in Joshua 6 along along with what is mentioned previously about the spies in Joshua 2.

The walls of Jericho. The city was not a large one, as the whole Israelite army was able to march around it seven times in one day. But most probably it was fortified and had high and strong walls which had terrified the spies Moses had sent (Numbers 13:28). The Israelites showed their faith because they had entered Canaan at God's command and now showed how willingly they were following God's instructions, marching around the town, blowing trumpets, without attempting to capture it. So the apostle rightly commends them for their faith, which they held to despite so many difficulties.

31. Up to now all the examples of faith have been of men, with just one woman mentioned—Sarah—because of her husband. In this verse the apostle gives the example of faith from a woman. The story of Rahab, her faith and deeds, are recorded in Joshua 6.

Rahab. This Rahab was by birth a Gentile, an alien from the stock and covenant of Abraham. So, as her conversion to God was an act of free grace and mercy in a special manner, so it was a type and pledge of calling a church from among the Gentiles. She was not just a Gentile—Rahab was an Amorite, that race that was given over in general to being utterly destroyed. Rahab was, therefore, an example of God's sovereignty in dispensing with his laws as it seems good to him, for out of his own mere pleasure he exempted her from the denounced doom of her race.

The prostitute. Rahab was known as **the prostitute Rahab**. This is a blessed example both of the sovereignty of God's grace and of its power; of its freedom and sovereignty, in the calling and conversion of a person given up through her own choice to the vilest of sins. Nobody, no sin, should lead to despair when the cure of God's sovereign, almighty grace is engaged (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

She welcomed the spies. Rahab showed her faith by her deeds. **She welcomed the spies.** In these few words the apostle compresses the whole story of her receiving the spies, concealing them, giving them intelligence, and arranging for their safe escape, which is all recorded in Joshua 2. Rahab's work is remembered in James 2:25: "was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a

different direction?”

The apostle ends his particular examples of people’s faith here and moves on to a more general summary, confirming the truth about the power and efficacy of faith, which he had undertaken to demonstrate.

32. In this verse and up to the end of verse 38, the apostle sums up the remaining testimonies that he might have singled out and used, intimating that there were even more like them that he does not mention. He changes the method he had used up to now. No longer does he single out his witnesses and show how each one is an example of faith. Now he proposes two things to confirm in general: first, faith effects all kinds of things when we are called to them; second, faith can enable us to suffer the most terrible things that we can be exposed to. With examples of the latter the apostle closes his discourse, because they were especially relevant to support his purpose, namely, to encourage the Hebrews in their suffering for the Gospel. The apostle gives them through these examples the assurance that faith would carry them victoriously through them all.

The apostle mentions the people first and then goes on to say what things they did. He does not say what happened to each of them, but leaves that to be read in the sacred story. From verse 35 he moves on to his second topic about the great things that faith will enable believers to undergo and suffer. There he mentions first the things that were suffered but not the people who suffered them. I suppose this is because their names were not recorded in the Scripture, although the things themselves were well known in the church.

We observe two things about his first section (verses 32–34). First, in naming them, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel, he does not do so in the same order in which they lived; for Barak was before Gideon, and Jephthah before Samson, and Samuel before David. Second, the apostle does not mention the things they did in the same order as their list of names. The first thing mentioned does not match up with the first person mentioned.

33. After his list of the people who believed, the apostle now states the things they did through faith. The apostle does this to encourage us to make use of the same grace on every occasion. In this verse he mentions four things.

Conquered kingdoms. The first thing some of these people did was to conquer kingdoms. This is generally and rightly assigned to Joshua and David. Joshua subdued all the kingdoms of Canaan; and David all those around it, such as Moab, Ammon, Edom, Syria, and the Philistines.

But it might be asked how this conquering of kingdoms can be thought of as a fruit or effect of faith. Most people who have **conquered kingdoms** have not only been unbelievers, but for the most part wicked and bloody tyrants. People who did this **through faith** were those who did so at God’s command.

Administered justice. Literally, “wrought righteousness.” To work righteousness in a

political sense is to be righteous in rule and government, to administer justice and judgment to everyone under their rule. The particular people mentioned are all rulers or judges and did what is here ascribed to them. David, who is intended here, gives such an account in Psalm 101:1–8. Samuel is also intended here, and his actions of righteousness of this kind are recorded in 1 Samuel 7:15–17: “Samuel continued to judge over Israel all the days of his life. From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also judged Israel.”

Gained what was promised. The promises intended here, which were obtained by faith, were made in specific ways: to Joshua, that he should conquer Canaan; to Gideon, that he should defeat the Midianites; and to David, that he should be king of all Israel.

Who shut the mouths of lions. This could refer to Samson, who, when a young lion was about to attack him, tore the lion apart with his bare hands (Judges 14:5–6). In a similar way, David shut the mouth of a lion when he killed one (1 Samuel 17:34–35). But if the word is taken in its correct meaning, to put a bridge or stop to the mouth of a lion so that it cannot hurt anyone though it remains alive and free, this can only be applied to Daniel. “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions” (Daniel 6:22). And Daniel did this through faith, for although this was performed through the ministry of angels, it was still done “because he had trusted in God” (Daniel 6:23).

34–35a. Quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Six more instances of the power of faith are added.

Quenched the fury of the flames. This describes Daniel’s three companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were thrown “into the blazing furnace” (Daniel 3:23). They so **quenched the fury of the flames** that “the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched and there was no smell of fire on them” (Daniel 3:27). The faith of these men was considerable in that they were not assured that they would be miraculously delivered, and all they could do was to commit themselves to God’s sovereignty (Daniel 3:16–18).

Escaped the edge of the sword. Literally, “mouths,” and hence “edges,” but note the plural, which refers to the two-edged swords. Their way of escape was to flee from the danger. David often did this when Saul sought him, as did Elijah when Jezebel threatened his life (1 Kings 19:3).

Whose weakness was turned to strength. **Weakness** here means any kind of moral or bodily infirmity. In each of these senses it is used in the Scripture, to be without or to lack strength of any kind. Frequently it is applied to bodily ailments (Luke 13:11–12; John 5:5; 11:4; Acts 28:9).

Who became powerful in battle. This may be applied to many people, such as Joshua, Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah. David says of himself, “He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.... You armed me with strength for battle” (Psalm 18:34, 39).

Routed foreign armies. This signifies Barak, Jonathan against the Philistines, the victories of Asa and Jehoshaphat. In all of these faith was strongly exercised, as is seen from each story.

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. These women are the widow of Zarephath, whose son Elijah raised from death (1 Kings 17:22–24), and the Shunammite, whose son was raised by Elisha (2 Kings 4:36). And it is said of them that they received their children from the dead; for in both places the prophets, having raised them from the dead, gave them into their mothers’ arms, who received them with joy and thankfulness. Their faith is not expressed, but the faith of the prophets who obtained this miraculous work through faith is. However, at least one of them, namely, the Shunammite, seems to have exercised much faith in the whole matter.

Through these ten examples the apostle demonstrates what great things had been done through faith, to assure the Hebrews, and us with them, that there is nothing too hard or difficult for faith to effect when it is applied according to the mind of God.

35b–37. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated. The apostle now gives a different set of examples, which are more readily suited to the condition of the Hebrews. For hearing about the previous ten glorious examples they might think that they had nothing to do with them. For their condition was poor, persecuted, exposed to all evils and to death itself for the profession of the Gospel. They wanted to know: what will faith do when people are exposed to persecution and martyrdom? The apostle now applies himself to this condition. He did not want to hide from these believers what they might have to go through. He also wanted the Hebrews to know that all the evils listed befell people because of their faith.

35b. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. The reason for their steadfastness under torture lay in their hope of gaining a better resurrection. One of the brothers in 2 Maccabees 7:9 affirmed specifically that he endured those torments and death itself, since he believed that God would raise him up at the last day.

This the apostle calls the **better resurrection**, not just compared with the deliverance that they refused, a resurrection that was better than that deliverance, but because he intends that better resurrection that leads to eternal life.

36. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. In the next example the apostle draws on those who also suffered but were not killed, but were

nevertheless greatly tested about their faith. There are four things mentioned here: first, **jeers**; second, **flogging**; third, **chained**; and, fourth, **put in prison**. They contain all the outward ways of the sufferings of the church, when God restrains the rage of the world, so that it does not go so far as killing people.

Jeers. This word was constantly used for the mockings that were thrown onto our Lord Jesus Christ himself (Matthew 20:19; 27:29, 31, 41; Mark 10:34; 15; 31; Luke 14:29; 18:32; 22:63; 23:11, 36).

Flogging was a servile punishment used on vagabonds and the vilest of men.

37. Two kinds of people and two kinds of persecution are here. First, such as came about as a result of the worst anger of the world, which ended in death. Second, such as escaped death, but were exposed to all sorts of miseries. The same faith works in both examples.

Those of the first sort were killed in three ways. First, **they were stoned**. This happened to Stephen.

Some were **sawed in two**, but their names and other details are not recorded.

They were put to death by the sword. The sword intended is either that of injustice in the form of the law or of violence and mere force. Many have been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 20:4), just as John the Baptist was (Luke 9:9). Countless thousands have been killed both under pagan and anti-Christian tyranny with the sword.

They went about in sheepskins and goatskins. This means that their condition was poor, mean, and contemptible.

Destitute. This means to be poor and in need. I think what is especially meant is to be in need of friends.

Persecuted. Here the word seems to have the special respect to the great pressure that people in the condition are brought into by the great dangers that are continually brought on them.

Mistreated. We translate this word “tormented.”

38. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. There are two things in this verse. First, the character of the people who suffered: the world was not worthy of them. Second, the rest of their sufferings which he goes on to describe: they wandered in deserts ...

The world was not worthy of them. The world thinks that they are not worthy of it, or to live in it, or to enjoy any name or place among them. Here the testimony is to the contrary: the world was not worthy of them.

They **wandered** around with nowhere to go and nowhere to rest. **Deserts and mountains** were uninhabited wastes. **Holes in the ground** may refer to hollow places where wild beasts sheltered.

This was the state of these servants of the living God. They were driven out of all inhabited places. They found no rest in **deserts and mountains**, but **wandered** up and down, taking **caves and holes in the ground** for their shelter.

Verses 39–40

These are all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. As the apostle ends his observations about all these instances of faith of believers under the old testament, he states four things.

1. About whom he is speaking, and that is, “All of these.”
2. What he ascribes to them: they were commended for their faith.
3. What he still denies them, which is receiving the promise: none of them received what was promised.
4. The reason for this, which is God’s sovereign disposal of the states, times, and privileges of the church: God had planned....

These are all commended. These people are all those who have been cited since the beginning of the world or since the first promise about the Savior and Redeemer of the church.

Commended for their faith. Literally, “having obtained witness through their faith.” They were God’s martyrs, and he gave witness to their faith.

Yet none of them received what had been promised. This promise refers to Christ’s coming in the flesh and his accomplishing his work of our redemption. This promise was made to the elders from the beginning of the world. It was not actually fulfilled until “the fullness of time.” This was the state of believers under the old testament. They had the promise of the manifestation of Christ, the Son of God in the flesh, for the redemption of the church. This promise they received, saw afar off as to its actual accomplishment, were convinced about its truth, and embraced it (verse 13). The actual fulfillment of it they desired, longed for, and expected (Luke 10:24), inquiring diligently into the grace of God contained in it (1 Peter 1:10–11). Hereby they enjoyed its benefits, just as we do (Acts 15:11). However, they did not receive its actual accomplishment in the coming of Christ. The reason for this the apostle states in the next verse.

40. The apostle compares the state of those under the old testament with that of the believers

under the Gospel, giving the preeminence to the latter and stating his reason for doing this. He states this in the following ways.

1. The reason for the difference between the two states of the church, and this was God's disposal of things in this order: God had planned.

2. The difference itself, namely, **something better** that was provided for us.

3. A declaration of that better thing: that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Only together with us would they be made perfect. With us amounts to “with the things that are actually exhibited to us, the things provided for us, and our sharing them.” All the advantages of grace and mercy that they received and enjoyed, were by virtue of those better things that were actually exhibited to us, applied through faith, and not in virtue of anything committed to them and enjoyed by them. All the outward glorious worship of the old testament had no perfection in it. And so it had no glory when compared with that glory that the Gospel ushered in (2 Corinthians 3:10).³

³ Owen, J. (1998). *Hebrews* (pp. 229–240). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.