

Hebrews 11:23-40

The Triumph of Faith

How do people of faith respond to persecution? How do you deal with the constant barrage of hostility to your faith?

In Hebrews eleven we see demonstrated "the just shall live by faith." It is "a divine, supernatural, justifying, saving faith, the faith of God's elect, the faith that is not of ourselves, but is of the operation of God, whereby all true believers are endowed from above," wrote John Owen.

In Hebrews 11:23-40 the author develops the relation of faith to suffering and martyrdom. He demonstrates how God honored the faith of Moses' parents under hostile circumstances. They chose to obey the LORD God above Pharaoh's command to have all Jewish male children killed. God honored the faith of Amram and Jochebed.

Not only do we see this strong faith in Moses' parents, but he was determined to associate himself with the people of Israel and the promises of their God. The decisions we make today determine our rewards tomorrow.

The Faith of Moses

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward" (Hebrews 11:23-26). All Scripture references are from New American Standard Bible 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

The best estimates are that the Exodus took place in 1446 or 1445 B.C. We are told in Exodus 7:7 that Moses was eighty years old at the time of the Exodus. Therefore, he was born around 1525 B.C. when Thutmose I was pharaoh.

The historical background for this reference to Moses in Hebrews is found in Exodus chapters one and two. The faith exhibited by his parents had the conviction that God would preserve the baby, and he would be used under God's direction to accomplish great things for his people. Exodus speaks of the mother's role, but no doubt both parents were involved in the plan. They hid him in an ark of bulrushes until he was rescued by a daughter of Pharaoh.

Moses chose to be identified with the people of Israel.

Moses displayed his faith "choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." "Enjoying the passing pleasure of sin" does not refer to sensual gratification of the lower nature, but "the high position in Egypt with the satisfactions that such prestige and power could bring," notes Homer Kent, Jr.

Archaeological evidence from the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt reveals the luxurious opulence and wealth of the Pharaohs. They had fabulous treasures of gold. As the son of Pharaoh's daughter Moses was identified with the ruling dynasty with its luxury and power.

Moses made a decision not to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and pursue the prestige, privilege and power that it could bring him. He looked forward to the ultimate reward which he would receive in the life to come. Moses "refused" to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. The word "refused" (*arneomai*) means "to

say no, to deny, refuse," and implies deliberate rejection of a career. He refused to be described or called the son of a royal princess, and with it he refused the prestige, power and position of such a station in life.

The faith of Moses was the same as that of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God had called him to be the one who would deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Jesus rebuked his enemies saying, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46).

Moses chose the "reproach of Christ."

What did Moses understand about the "reproach of Christ"? We know from his writings in the Pentateuch that he was fully aware of the coming of a divine prophet like unto himself (Deut. 18:15, 18; Acts 7:37). Jesus said Abraham was aware of these things. Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). If Moses rejected the privileges of being an Egyptian for the promises of the LORD God he could expect to be treated the same way as the coming Anointed One. Moses' focus was on the promise of his future with the Messiah.

The title "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term *Messiah*, the anointed one. In the Old Testament the prophets, kings and priests here anointed with oil symbolizing the anointing of God. These anointed ones were types of the threefold office of Jesus, God's anointed one *par excellence*. The New Testament presents Jesus as the one person who is the Anointed of the LORD God. In the Old Testament He is the coming one; in the New He has arrived. He is the divine person who in the absolute sense is the Anointed One, the *Messiah*.

The author of Hebrews tells us that Moses chose to be identified with the "reproach of Christ." The persecution was severe against Moses, but he persevered in spite of the wrath of Pharaoh. Remember that the king was determined to kill Moses. "When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well" (Exodus 2:15). Other scholars see this hostility against Moses immediately after Israel's exodus. "When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?' So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly" (Exodus 14:5-8).

"He was looking to the reward" (v. 26) has the idea of habitually keeping his eye on the reward. He kept his attention fixed on the goal. What does God have in store for the believer? Do we also have our eyes on the goal He has in store for us? Some of the suggestions are blessedness of heaven, the Messianic salvation, the coming day of recompense in the city of God. The full reward awaits all true believers in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul quoted Isaiah saying just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

By faith Moses left Egypt.

Actually, he left Egypt twice. After killing an Egyptian he feared the Pharaoh and fled for his life to Midian (Exo. 2:14-15). Then forty years later he left Egypt under the direction of the LORD God (Exodus 12).

"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. 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" (Hebrews 11:27-29).

Even though Moses was uniquely qualified to lead the nation of Israel by his training at Pharaoh's court, the people were not ready to accept him. God continued to hone and shape him in the wilderness. He needed 40 more years in God's seminary.

This is a perfect example of the faith God honors. Moses did not cower to the mighty Pharaoh's threats. Philip Hughes writes, "it was during the forty years of obscurity, which were years of testing and preparation for the final forty years as the deliverer of his people. This prolonged interval was indeed a period which called

for great faith and endurance if he was to overcome the temptation to frustration and discouragement" (*Hebrews*, p. 499). It was persevering faith that kept Moses focused on "Him who is invisible" (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; Col. 1:15; 1 John 4:20). "Moses paid more attention to the Invisible King of kings than to the king of Egypt," observes F. F. Bruce. As a result of this focused faith he "endured" (*kartereo*) meaning "to be strong, be steadfast, hold out, endure." He persevered as if he saw the invisible King. It is a picture of persevering faith that would not turn back to Egypt. He stood firm in his strength, steadfast and fearless faith.

When did Moses see "Him who is invisible"?

Exodus chapters three and four tells about living in the wilderness tending his father-in-law Jehthro's sheep. "The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed." God called to him out of the bush. He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:2-6, ESV). God spoke to Moses often in Egypt (Exo. 33:11, 23; Num. 12:7-8). The author of Hebrews is probably referring to the lifelong vision of God that was at work in Moses' life. "The Invisible One" takes us back to verse one of faith trusting "things not seen." We do not look at icons and idols as if to believe they help us see God. Like Moses our eyes are focused on the Invisible One. We see with spiritual eyes Him who is invisible.

Moses kept his focus on the unseen LORD God. Like Abraham, he continually sought the LORD. This was his "fixed habit of spiritual perception" since the day he encountered the LORD at the burning bush. John Owen said, "He had as certain persuasion as if he had seen God working with him and for him by his bodily eyes."

The same Angel of the LORD who appeared to Moses at the burning bush is also the one who strikes Egypt's first born dead, and delivers the children of Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 3:2-6; 11:4; 12:12-13, 23, 27, 29). Many Old Testament scholars identify this Angel of Yahweh as the preincarnate Christ. We never encounter Him after the incarnation of the Second Person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ.

Moses left Egypt behind never to return again.

By faith Moses kept the Passover.

"By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood." His faith is forward looking and is expressed in active obedience to God's command. The author uses the perfect tense (*pepoieken*) to suggest a continuing state. Moses instituted the Passover the night God delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt, and it was intended as a perpetual feast (Exo. 12:5, 14; Lev. 23:5; Deu. 16:6).

It took faith to believe the shedding of blood would cover sins on that first Passover night. If the people did not listen and obey, their firstborn would die. It was an obedient response to God's commandment that He would not kill the first-born, and that He would pass over those houses whose doorposts and lintels were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb. Moses also demonstrated his confidence in the blood of the lamb God would provide for the Passover at Calvary (John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The deliverance out of Egypt was a type of the greater deliverance God would provide. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." The writer of Hebrews has had much to say about the blood of the Lamb of God. "After the shedding of Christ's blood there is no place for any further blood-shedding," says Philip Hughes. Praise God, the price has been paid in full. There is no more need for an atoning sacrifice.

The Passover was a type of Christ. Christ is the Lamb of God without blemish who was slain for us. Christ the Passover lamb was sacrificed for us. He bore the fiery wrath of God on our behalf. By faith we come to Him today and feast upon the spiritual food He has provided. "Whatever is not sprinkled with the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, who was slain and sacrificed for us, is exposed unto destruction from the anger and displeasure of God," wrote John Owen.

Chrysostom wrote, "If the blood of a lamb then preserved the Jews unhurt in the midst of the Egyptians and in the presence of so great a destruction, much more will the blood of Christ save us, for whom it has been sprinkled not on our doorposts but in our souls."

By faith they crossed over the Red Sea.

The Lord delivered Israel by His powerful hand. They all passed safely over the Red Sea and the waters rushed back in over Pharaoh's army and drowned (Exo. 14:16-22). Israel was delivered because they took God at His word and obeyed. The Egyptians drowned because they presumed on God and were swallowed up by the rushing waters. They had not received any instructions from God. The books of Exodus, Numbers and Joshua demonstrate how Israel experienced victory over their enemies as they trusted in the LORD. Trust and obey is the theme of these books. Yet, even though Israel saw God deliver them, the whole next generation refused to trust and obey and died in the wilderness. They failed to exercise this faith and only two men entered the Promised Land. They were Caleb and Joshua.

So it is with us. We can presume on God or we can walk by faith trusting in His Word. The only way we can live the Christian life is by putting into daily practice the promises of the Word God through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It is a walk of faith. We began the Christian life by grace alone through faith alone in the provision of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and we live it by faith as we trust Him daily.

By Faith Rahab and the Walls of Jericho

The destruction of the walls of Jericho was a display of Israel's faith in Yahweh (Joshua 6). The people of Israel marched around the city for seven days blowing their trumpets and shouting. Who would have believed anything would happen? It was not human ingenuity or power that defeated Jericho. It was God who did it. Joshua took God at His word and obeyed. On the seventh day the walls came down!

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace" (Hebrews 11:30-31).

Rahab was a foreigner and a notorious sinner, but God in grace saved her by faith (Joshua 2:1-24; 6:22-25). In the examples that follow they are all sinners saved by grace through faith. Calvin said the fact that she was a "harlot" heightens the grace of God. Jesus did not come to save the self-righteous, but sinners. Jesus said tax collectors and prostitutes go into the kingdom of God, not the self-refined.

Again, the author does not whitewash the facts of the story. Rahab was a prostitute (*porne*). All of these Old Testament saints were sinners! All of them! God takes raw sinners and saves them by His grace and uses them for His glory. Rahab reappears in James 2:25 and Matthew 1:5. She is right in the heart of the lineage of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. She is praised for her faith in the LORD, in the people of Israel, and joining in with them. She saw the hand of God in the invasion of Canaan. Rahab is also a type of the ingathering of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God.

God will save all who are personally unworthy by His infinite grace and mercy if they place their trust in His great provision through the death and resurrection of His Son. He saves by means of faith in His Son.

The Faith of Countless Others

"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, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 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. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 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 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground" (Hebrews 11:32-38).

This is the only reference in the New Testament to Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah.

Faith of Gideon (Judges 6-9) and his little band of 300 who defeated 135,000 Midianites.

Faith of Barak and Deborah (Judges 4-5) who delivered Israel from the Canaanites.

Faith of Samson (Judges 13-16) who defeated the Philistines on many occasions. Even at his death he killed more than he did alive.

Faith of Jephthah (Judges 11-12) delivered Israel from the Ammonites.

Faith of David who is described as a "man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14; 16:1, 12; Acts 13:22). He is the king God chose as a type of the coming Messiah and the future kingdom of God (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

Faith of Samuel the king maker of Israel (1 Sam. 16:13).

It is a list of heroes of faith who were determined to do the will of God at all costs. God made promises to them and proved Himself to be true to His word. God promised the victories and fulfilled them. They obtained the "promises" (plural) by walking by faith. However, the one "promise" they did not see fulfilled was still in the future (v. 39). It was "the promise" (singular) made to Abraham and involved the coming of the Messiah in its full manifestation. During their life time they did not see the fulfillment of this promise, but they persisted in faith until death. Because God fulfilled His promises on numerous occasions they could trust Him to fulfill the greater promise in the future. That promise required the coming of the Anointed One of Yahweh. The promise was fulfilled when God sent His one and only Son to die on the cross bearing our sin and guilt and rising from the dead. He fulfilled in His person and work all of the promises that were given to them men and women of faith in the Old Testament.

Samson, David and Daniel fought with lions and won (Judges 14:6; 1 Sam. 17:34-37; Dan. 6:21-22). The apostle Paul centuries later spoke of being "delivered from the lion's mouth" (2 Tim. 4:17). Was Paul's experience literal or was he using it figuratively of exceedingly difficult encounters with evil?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were delivered from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:13-30). Who was the fourth fellow in the fire with them? They were delivered because they trusted in Him.

On many occasions the LORD God delivered His people from the "edge of the sword." Elijah escaped assassination in 1 Kings 19:1ff. Elisha and his servant were surrounded one night with "chariots of fire" when the enemy closed in on them (2 Kings 6:15-19). David was delivered on many occasions.

God strengthened the weak on many occasions. Samson received superhuman strength to defeat the Philistines in the temple of Dagon (Judges 16:29-30). Hezekiah prayed and God gave him 15 more years to live (Isa. 38:1-8; 2 Kings 20:1-6). David slew the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:50), Hezekiah was delivered when the angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 32:21).

Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by evil King Manasseh. The king was enraged because Isaiah prophesied the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Isaiah fled and hid himself in the trunk of a cedar tree which was discovered in the tree trunk and was sawn in two.

The blood of the martyrs runs deep in the lives of those who sealed their testimonies by their lives. They were brutally tortured by enemies of our Lord. One martyr said, "The King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws." They suffered and died because of the unquenchable flame of faith in Christ.

"Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 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 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." (Hebrews 11:35-38).

Some women in the Old Testament received back their dead by resurrection. Elijah raised the son of the woman of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24). Elisha raised the son of a Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:18-37). By the power of Jesus the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-15), Lazarus (John 11:1-44) and Dorcas (Acts 9:36-41) were raised from the dead. Yet, the author of Hebrews says they received back their dead by

resurrection "so that they might rise again to a better life" (Heb. 11:35). Literally, "obtain a better resurrection" is much better than the Old Testament resurrection that was just resuscitations back to mortal life. These were not a resurrection to a perfect resurrection body like we shall receive when Jesus returns. They were resuscitations, miracles indeed, that pointed to a great day when "the dead in Christ shall rise first" to an eternal resurrection of the body.

All of these Old Testament saints were anticipating a greater future hope based upon the conviction they held. This enumerated in the first ten chapters of Hebrews. There is "something better for us" based upon the new covenant of the Son of God which is far superior to the old covenant.

"Of whom the world is not worthy"

The world was not worthy of such men, and it still is not. The world system drove them out by persecuting them, thinking they were unworthy of living in it. The truth is it was unworthy of having them live in it.

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

What was it that these Old Testament saints did not receive?

They had claimed the promises of the coming Messiah. Check out nearly a hundred of these in Christ in the Old Testament. But all of these saints died before Jesus came the first time. They died in faith believing in these promises God gave to them, and they entered into heaven based on these promises. Their faith was in the "sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pet. 1:11). With His sufferings Christ brought many sons to glory and has made them perfect.

They saw fulfilled many promises in their daily lives, but they longed for the day when "the promise" would be fulfilled. Jesus is "the promise." "The promise" is properly the singular, and designates the fulfillment of the great Messianic promise.

Leon Morris notes, "God's plan provided for 'something better for us.' The indefinite pronoun leaves the precise nature of the blessing undefined. The important thing is not exactly what it is but that God has not imparted it prematurely. 'Us' means 'us Christians.'" ("Hebrews," *Hebrews-Revelation*, in *Expositor's Bible*, vol. 12, p. 132).

"God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect." We find this theme of the perfection of believers throughout the book of Hebrews. It is based upon sacrifice of Christ because "it was impossible for blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:14). We look forward to the day "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23). We have a better hope based on the better sacrifice which is the finished work of Christ (7:19; 9:9; 10:1, etc.).

The reason the Old Testament saints did not fully realize the fulfillment of the promises given to them in their lifetime was that God's plan included the New Testament believers. Jesus Christ provided the once-for-all all-sufficient sacrifice for sins had not yet come. The Old Testament saints presently enjoy the benefits of Christ's sacrifice for their sins as they await the resurrection of their bodies. The sacrifice of Christ is an accomplished fact that covers all our sins and guarantees our salvation. We, too, enjoy the blessings of the new covenant as we wait that day when we shall see Jesus even as He is and we receive our resurrection bodies. When Christ returns we will rejoice and celebrate with all those Old Testament saints the great salvation He has provided.

"Apart from us they would not be made perfect." The word "perfect" (*teleioo*) means "complete, bring to an end, finish, accomplish." When Jesus returns the goal or accomplishment will have arrived. On that day all the redeemed of all ages shall be gathered together in the kingdom of God and God shall be all in all.

"Together with us they shall be made perfect. John Brown notes, "They shall be made perfect, but not without us; we and they shall attain perfection together." All believers will be made perfect at the same time.

"Apart from us" does not mean to our exclusion. We along with the Old Testament saints wait for the final triumph of our Savior at His return. The Messianic age will be a perfect age. It causes us to cry out even so come Lord Jesus, come!"

Many authentic believers in Jesus Christ have chosen to be faithful unto death rather than renounce Him as their Lord and Master. These are the men and women "of whom the world was not worthy." Why then should we allow the modern mob to shame us into disobedience to our Master? God never forgets a single one of his children.

One of the Ecuadorian martyrs said it well, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

All of these saints who walked by faith are living testimonies to encourage us to remain faithful to our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. The God of history is the same one who encouraged us today. What He did in the past He can do again. We will celebrate with them that precious day in glory as we cast our crowns at the feet of Jesus.

"Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.' And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.' And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped" (Revelation 5:8-14).

No other song have I to sing but Jesus!

Abiding Principles and Practical Applications

1. When we have true appreciation for the promises of God we will be willing to face temporary reproach and loss of material to gain eternal rewards. How tragic that we focus on material gain rather than spiritual rewards. Warren Wiersbe observed, "The emphasis in the Epistle to the Hebrews is: 'Don't live for what the world will promise you today! Live for what God has promised you in the future!'"

2. When we have a determined focus on God we will face and overcome the hostility of the world. Only the clearest spiritual vision will overcome hostile encounters. Moses was continually seeking the unseen. He saw with spiritual eyes the unseen, and this was the secret of his greatness. The testimonies of the saints in Hebrews eleven reveals a hope that is ever moving forward with utter conviction. The Christian faith is filled with certainty. The apostle Paul's recorded words declares: "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know in whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him, until that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

3. When we trust and obey the promises of God's Word we experience victory in the Christian life. None can ever make himself perfect. The Holy Spirit is the one who is within the believer working out our salvation daily. He enables us to take off the old man or woman and put on the new in Christ. It is our responsibility to yield to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

4. When we are saved by faith we will walk by faith. We live in the now and the yet to be. We enjoy now the benefits of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is our Savior and Lord, our High Priest who intercedes on our behalf. His blood covers all our sins. At the cross he paid the price of our redemption once for all. We stand justified and clothed in the robes of His righteousness. Yet we still wait for that glorious day when we shall see Him face to face with the redemption of our bodies. We walk by faith. We conquer by faith. We overcome by faith.

The world passes away, but he who does the will of God abides forever.

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