

STUDENT NOTES

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

RESUME HERE ON AUGUST 8, 2021.

Hebrews 11:13-16. Having seen the promises

13. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and embraced them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15. If indeed they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had enough time to return. 16. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

13. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and embraced them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth

As noted above, Abraham died without possessing anything of the Promised Land other than the cave of Machpelah and its surrounding field. He died, having known only a few of his progeny. He had not "received the promises," and his descendants wouldn't receive them for many years to come.

Nevertheless, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob embraced God's promises from afar. They lived as "strangers and pilgrims" rather than as proud residents of the Promised Land, but died in faith that God would be faithful to his promises.

14. "For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own

They were strangers and pilgrims (v. 13), but they had a vision of living in their own land. Their vision would come true only after the Egyptian captivity, the Exodus, and their wilderness wanderings

"15. If indeed they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had enough time to return

If Abraham and Sarah had felt a tug on their hearts to return to Haran, they could have done so. Their families would have welcomed them back, and they could have settled in houses instead of tents. They could have networked with the people with whom they had grown up.

DO YOU THINK SARAH MIGHT HAVE BEEN WANTING TO PICK OUR BEDSPREADS AND CURTAINS FOR A HOME IN HARAN?

16a. "But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one

I am reminded of the old Gospel song:

"This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through.
If heaven's not my home, then Lord what will I do?
The angels beckon me through heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOING THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS MINDS AT THIS TIME?
WHY IS IT IMPORT TO THE CHRISTIAN CONVERTS?

16b. "Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God for he has prepared a city for them

God is not ashamed of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. He is pleased to be known as their God. They were far from perfect, but God chooses to remember their faith rather than their sins.

WHAT CITY IS THE ONE PREPARED FOR THEM?

Hebrews 11:29-31. By faith

29. By faith, they passed through the Red Sea as on dry land. When the Egyptians tried to do so, they were swallowed up. 30. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days. 31. By faith, Rahab the prostitute, didn't perish with those who were disobedient, having received the spies in peace.

29. "By faith, (the people of Israel) passed through the Red Sea as on dry land. When the Egyptians tried to do so, they were swallowed up

This is the story of the Exodus, shortly after the Israelites had left Egypt. They were making good progress, but Pharaoh, who had let them go to escape further plagues, changed his mind and had his armies and chariots pursue them.

Then the Israelites came to the Red Sea.

Then God told Moses to lift up his rod, stretch it out, and divide the sea.
He did so, and the Israelites escaped on dry land in the midst of the waters.

"Thus Yahweh saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians.
(Exodus 14:30-31).

Read Exodus 14 for the complete account of these events. It's actually a pretty exciting story and may keep you awake at night.

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

See Joshua 6 for an account of this battle.

31. "By faith, Rahab the prostitute, didn't perish with those who were disobedient, having received the spies in peace

See Joshua 2:1-24; 6:17-25 for the account of Rahab's story.

Rahab is mentioned three times in the New Testament.

- In Matthew 1:5, she is listed in Jesus' genealogy—although we can't be certain that the Rahab listed in that genealogy is the same Rahab as the one listed in Joshua 2.
- In Hebrews 11 (our text), Rahab is listed as one of the heroes of the faith.
- James 2:25 says, "Rahab the prostitute (was) also justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way."

Hebrews 11:32-38. A litany of faith and suffering

32 What more shall I say? For the time would fail me if I told of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets; 33 who, through faith subdued kingdoms, worked out righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, grew mighty in war, and caused foreign armies to flee. 35 Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Others were tried by mocking and scourging, yes, moreover by bonds and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned. They were sawn apart. They were tempted. They were slain with the sword. They went around in sheep skins and in goat skins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts, mountains, caves, and the holes of the earth.

WHENEVER WE GET TO THESE VERSES, I WOULD LIKE FOR EACH OF YOU TO TAKE ONE OF THE STORIES, READ IT, AND SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THESE MEN... Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. WORD OF WARNING...SOME OF THESE STORIES ARE RATHER GROSS...

32. "What more shall I say? For the time would fail me if I told of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets

- The story of GIDEON is found in Judges 6-8.
- The story of BARAK is found in Judges 4-5.
- The story of SAMSON is found in Judges 13-16.
- The story of JEPHTHAH is found in Judges 10-12.
- DAVID, of course, was Israel's second and greatest king. We find his story in 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 2. **LOTS OF READING...WE MAY WANT TO TEAM UP ON THIS ONE....**
- SAMUEL was a great prophet whose story is told in the book of 1 Samuel. **SAME TEAM IDEA AS THE DAVID VERSES.**
- God chose THE PROPHETS to serve as his messengers and to lead the people faithfully.

While most Biblical prophecy took place in the Old Testament, the New Testament also includes accounts of prophecy (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 15:32). **FOR MORE CLASS REPORTING...**

33. "who, through faith subdued kingdoms, worked out righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions

The prophets led Israel to victories over kingdoms. They called Israel to righteousness. They obtained promises for God's blessings for Israel.

"Stopped the mouths of lions" alludes to Daniel, who was thrown into a den of lions, but the king found him unharmed the next morning. Daniel explained that God had delivered him, because God found him blameless. You will find that story in Daniel 6. **ANYBODY WANT TO REPORT ON THE DANIEL STORY?**

34a "quenched the power of fire

Daniel 3 tells the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who "quenched the power of fire. **AND WE CONTINUE READING AND TELLING THE STORY.**

34b. "escaped the edge of the sword

God saved Elijah from Jezebel and Jeremiah from Jehoiakim, but some prophets paid with their lives for challenging powerful people.

34c. "from weakness were made strong

God often seems to prefer weakness to strength, because when a boy like David slays a giant like Goliath, no one can attribute his victory to anything but God's deliverance.

34d. "grew mighty in war, and caused foreign armies to flee

Gideon, David, and others serve as examples of great military prowess. The point of their stories, however, is not their prowess, but the fact that God made their victories possible.

335a. "Women received their dead by resurrection

Elijah restored the life of the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17). Elisha restored the life of the son of a woman of Shunem (2 Kings 4:8 ff.). Jesus restored the life of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21 ff.).

35b. "Others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection

- His enemies forced open the mouth of the scribe Eleazar and forced the flesh of swine between his teeth, but Eleazar willingly went to the rack to be tortured and killed rather than to cooperate (2 Maccabees 6:18). **A STORY FROM THE APOCRYPHA.**
- Stephen, a man full of faith, suffered death by stoning for his proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 6:8 ff.).
- The apostle Paul suffered a host of injuries for his proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 9:16, 28; 13:50; 14:4, 19; 16:22; 21:30; 22:22; 23:1-10; 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 11:16-28; 2 Timothy 2:9; 3:10).

36. "Others were tried by mocking and scourging, yes, moreover by bonds and imprisonment

This was common in the early centuries of the church, and is still common in many parts of the world.

Note the similarity between what is described here and what Jesus experienced just prior to his crucifixion.

"They were stoned. They were sawn apart. They were tempted. They were slain with the sword. They went around in sheep skins and in goat skins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated" (v. 37).

- Stoning was a form of capital punishment using large stones to crush the victim. The prophet Zechariah was stoned (2 Chronicles 24:21).
- The apocryphal work, *Ascension of Isaiah*, says that the prophet Isaiah was sawn in two.
- 1 Kings 19:10 tells of prophets being killed by the sword. The prophet Uriah was killed by the sword (Jeremiah 26:23).
- Prophets were often "destitute, afflicted, (and) ill-treated," because they spoke against power (Nehemiah 9:26).
- Jesus accused the scribes of building the tombs of prophets and approving of their executions (Luke 11:45-52).

Jesus lamented Jerusalem's role in persecuting prophets, saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, like a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, and you refused! Behold, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Luke 13:34-35).

"(of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts, mountains, caves, and the holes of the earth" (v. 38). The world was not worthy of these prophets, who suffered terribly for their faith. The same could be said today of the millions of Christians being persecuted and killed for their faith in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, China, Russia, and a host of other nations.

We should not imagine that the Lord will always prosper people of faith. Historically that has often not been the case, and it is often not the case today. The problem is that people of faith often find themselves challenging entrenched power, and power seldom takes such challenges lying down.

Hebrews 11:39-40. They didn't receive the promise

39 These all, having had testimony given to them through their faith, didn't receive the promise, 40 God having provided some better thing concerning us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

"These all, having had testimony (Greek: *martureo*) given to them through their faith, didn't receive the promise" (v. 39). *Martureo* is one of several similar Greek words from which we get our word martyr. *Martureo* actually means witness or to bear witness, but those who bear witness to Christ often pay a high price for their faithfulness—sometimes even martyrdom.

In this context, commendation might be a better translation for *martureo*. God has borne witness to the commendable faith of these ancient men of faith, and has given them the stamp of his approval.

But while God approved of these faithful people and commended them for their faith, he didn't always permit them to receive the promise during their lives on earth. God has reserved the fulfillment of the promise for the world to come.

40a. "God having provided some better thing concerning us

Now that Christ has come, we can see more clearly what God wants of us—and we enjoy a kind of grace beyond anything found previously.

40b. "so that apart from us they should not be made perfect

This emphasizes the unity of the people of God (Israel) and the people of God (the church). "They" (the people of God in the Old Testament) and "us" (the people of God in the church) will not find ultimate fulfillment—apart from each other.

Hebrews 12:1-2. Surrounded by witnesses

12:1 Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

1. "Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"

Having recounted the names and deeds of the heroes of the faith, the author pictures them as surrounding his readers—serving as models to emulate—sitting in the heavenly bleachers and cheering for the current faith generation. Their faith stories are inspirational, and help people struggling with problems to remain faithful.

But in what sense are they witnesses? A witness is someone who has seen or experienced something and is therefore qualified to testify to it. These witnesses—these heroes of the faith—have experienced God's faithfulness, and are qualified to bear witness to it. Many of them lived on earth without receiving the promise, but they have now realized that fulfillment in the heavenly realm.

1b. "lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us

Runners know that they must shed every ounce of weight possible if they are to remain competitive. The author uses that as a metaphor for the spiritual race in which believers are engaged.

We must "lay aside every weight." **What does that mean for a spiritual race?**

- We need to lay aside worry and fear, God calls us to faith, not fear.

- We must lay aside anger and hatred, which have the potential to harm others and ruin our witness to Christ.
- We need to lay aside the win/lose kind of competitiveness that grasps as much as possible for self with no thought for the person on the other side of the transaction.
- Consider other possibilities. There are many.

2a. “looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith

The word for “perfecter” means one who completes something or finishes it—someone who reaches the goal.

There have been many heroes of the faith. The list in Hebrews hardly scratches the surface. But Jesus is the only one whose faith was perfect—complete. He is the ultimate model of faith.

2b. “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame

In perfect faith, Jesus willingly endured the cross, despising its shame. Dying on a cross was as shameful a punishment as ever devised. It was reserved for serious criminals and inflicted terrible pain. The person being crucified was stripped naked or almost so. The cross was intended to deter crime, so the Romans made it a public display.

2c. “and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God

Sitting at the right hand of God was Jesus’ reward for the completion of his mission, which was bringing salvation to the world.

The right hand was the place of honor. For most men, the right hand is the dominant hand—the strong hand—the hand that wields a sword—the fighting hand. As a result, the right hand was a symbol of power and authority (Exodus 15:6, 12; Nehemiah 4:23; Psalm 18:35; 20:6; 21:8). Kings wore the ring signifying their authority on their right hand. Fathers conferred their blessing on their firstborn son by their right hand.

Sitting at the right hand as a mark of honor is still practiced today. In military staff meetings, the commander sits at the head of the table with his second in command at his right hand and his Sergeant Major (the ranking enlisted person and one of the commander’s most entrusted advisors) at his left hand.

Bibliography:

Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible: Hebrews* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1976)

Cockerill, Gareth Lee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012)

Guthrie, Donald, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews*, Vol. 15 (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1983)

MacArthur, John, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1983)

O'Brien, Peter T., *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009)

The Lord bless us and keep us;
The Lord make his face to shine on us
The Lord be gracious to us
and give us peace.

Numbers 6:24-26