

Faith From Moses to Messiah

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was a beautiful child*; and they were not afraid of the king's command. 24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth*.

39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (Heb. 11:23-40)

We could reply to that objection in many ways, but one of the most powerful ways is the Hebrews 11 way. For here we learn that the true faith of ancient Israel, which both Judaism and Christianity lay claim to as our heritage was always a religion of faith. It was always one that was based in true belief in the true God. At the same time, what Hebrews 11 shows us is that when you have the right creed, it always comes out in right deeds. Deeds without a creed is just works, which Isaiah says is like filthy rags to God. But a creed without accompanying deed is a dead faith that cannot save.

Hebrews 11 doesn't tell us what true faith is, it shows us what true faith is by simply pointing to biblical characters. Since Hebrews is there to exhort us to be faithful to the finisher of our faith to the finish, he is giving us illustration after illustration of what faith that draws near to God as a diligent seeker looks like. We have seen the faith of people before the flood: Abel, Enoch, Noah, where it looks like sacrificial worship, and walking with God, and obeying when it looks crazy. We have seen the faith of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. Their faith looks like obeying when you don't know where God is taking you, or when the promise will be fulfilled, or how, or why He is doing it a certain way.

Today we reach that period of time that spans 1500 years: from Moses to Messiah Jesus. It's really the time when Israel became a nation. It's the time when all of Old Testament Scripture was given. It is the time of the Law, the Mosaic Covenant.

But what our writer wants us to understand is that it was still a time of salvation by grace through faith. There were many things unfulfilled and incomplete, as the last verses of this chapter will show. But there were many things that were the same: and faith is one of them. So once again, we can see three pictures of what faith is in this concentrated passage.

1. Faith Looks Like Risking Danger for God's Sake

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was a beautiful child*; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

We don't know much about Moses' parents. His father was Amram, and his mother was called Jochebed. They were Levites, living as slaves of the Egyptians. They also had two other children, Aaron and Miriam.

Aaron was three years older than Moses, and apparently, when he was born, there was no threat to Aaron's life. But in the year Moses was born, a decree went out from Pharaoh that all Hebrew boys should be killed at birth. One of many attempts to exterminate and assimilate the Jewish people as a whole, it failed because of the righteous Hebrew midwives, who refused to do so. Now how long this went on, and why Pharaoh didn't insist on slaughtering the infants like Herod did, we don't know. But obviously enough killing went on that Moses' parents decided to risk the wrath of Egypt and they hid their son. They saw his beauty, and here we speculate, perhaps they saw in him the potential of a future deliverer for Israel. When they could no longer hide him, they put him in an ark of bulrushes, placed it in the river and trusted to God's providence to protect him. As it turned out, he floated to where Pharaoh's daughter found him, who subsequently hired Moses' mother to nurse the boy. Amram and Jochebed must have laughed at the mercy of God, that now she was being paid by the state to be a mother to her own child.

But there was risk in hiding Moses, and they embraced the risk, trusting that God's commands to not murder, and that God's promise to restore Israel were more important, and obedience was more pressing than self-protection.

It is when your convictions and beliefs place you in real danger that we find out if your faith is living or dead. Living faith sees more than just the threat or the danger. It sees the greater danger of disobeying God. It sees the greater reward of pleasing God.

When obeying God seems to threaten your career, or threatens to ruin your reputation, or land you in a lawsuit, or land you accused of a hate crime, or persecuted and prosecuted by an ungodly government, faith looks like taking the risk.

Following God is always risky from a human, limited perspective. It's filled with what-ifs. What if by obeying God I lose my savings and my pension? What if I end up in dangerous lands? What if this interrupts my close family life?

But if you never face any of those what-ifs, you never find out if your faith is more than theoretical. Men in easy-chairs in plush offices can talk and write about *risk assessment*, but lifeguards, firemen, soldiers, astronauts and policemen face it. And we can all talk about faith that expects great things for God, but it is those believers who take the risk that show their faith by their works. They start ministries. They bring up evangelism and the Gospel with colleagues and family. They equip themselves for ministry or the mission field. They do street evangelism. They go to other countries. They pour themselves into discipleship. And their attitude is that of Joab when attacking the Amalekites: Let us be valiant for the Lord our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to Him. They take the attitude of Esther: I must do this thing, and if I perish, I perish. They take the attitude of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: our God is able to deliver us, but even if not, we will not serve your gods, O king.

What does faith look like? Faith looks like risking danger for God's sake.

2. Faith looks like identifying with God's people instead of the world

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Moses was born a Hebrew, weaned by his mother, but then adopted as Pharaoh's daughter's son at a young age. There's some evidence that one of Pharaoh's daughters at this time was Hatshepsut, who ended up queen for a few years many years later. Her palace has been discovered. Through his formative years, through his teens, and through his adult years until he was forty, Moses lived as an Egyptian prince. He learnt Egyptian culture, Egyptian religion, Egyptian politics. He lived with the luxuries and privileges of royalty. From an earthly perspective, he was set for life. He could drink the milk and honey from Pharaoh's coffers for his whole life.

There was one problem. He knew he was not Egyptian. He knew he was a Hebrew, and had probably known it from his years as a small child. He knew who his biological parents and siblings were, and he knew that his nation was enslaved. Somewhere in his adult life, the tension between his adopted identity and his born identity became a full-blown crisis.

We remember how he took matters into his own hands. Seeing an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he looked this way and that, and then killed the Egyptian. Moses threw his lot in with the Israelites. Our text tells us what this meant. He was refusing to be called Pharaoh's daughter's son. He was disowning his adopted royal Egyptian status. He was giving up the treasures of Egypt. He could have gone on, living off the oppression of the Israelites, and living in the idolatry and wanton godless high-life of the royal house of Egypt. Consequently he was knowingly and willingly embracing affliction with God's people.

How did he do this? Verse 26 tells us the inward calculation he made:
26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The reproach, the shame or scorn of the coming Messiah, of being one of God's people was far greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, and he looked to the reward. He saw more value, more preciousness in full identification with God and God's Messiah and God's people, than in all the earthly wealth of Egypt.

He wanted better and more. He realised that the pleasures of Egypt were passing pleasure. So He chose as one who could see Him who is invisible.

Faith identifies with God's people, embracing their affliction, embracing their reproach, regarding it as more valuable to be on God's side, to be part of the rejected people of God, than to be powerful, famous and wealthy in the world's eyes.

What does faith look like? Faith looks like identifying with God's people over the world. There are plenty of false Christians and false churches claiming things in the name of Jesus that we would disown. There are plenty of things that Christians do that embarrass the church, which make us cringe, and distance ourselves from. But when all of that is accounted for, are you ashamed of being a Christian? More to the point, are you ashamed of being counted among Christians? Remove all the foolishness and silliness and falseness that goes around in the name of Christianity. Take what remains, and ask, are God's people your people? Will you happily claim membership with them, own them as family, call them brother and sister?

A fairly common refrain in the New Testament calling on God's people not to be ashamed or embarrassed to own Christ and His people as your own.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Rom. 1:16)

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, (2 Tim. 1:8)

26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father's, and of the holy angels. (Lk. 9:26)

You meet people who think that it's possible to have a secret, inward faith, but no public affiliation with God's people. They're part of the Christian Secret Service, or the CIA (Christian Intelligence Agency). They're permanently undercover – indistinguishable from the world, blending in perfectly and permanently with them, but secretly Christians. Of course, the New Testament knows nothing of covert Christians.

Faith says, it's better to be disliked by the world and be called the people of God than to be on the A-list of the world. It is better to be on the wrong side of popularity in this age, and to be on the right side in the next age. It is better to count as family those outcasts going to Heaven, than to be one of the boys who are going to hell.

3. Faith looks like attempting courageous things for God

28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, *whereas* the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

Here are four events which were momentous things. For Israel to have kept the Passover meant a meal with precise instructions as to how it was to be done, when, what to do with the blood, the meat, even what to wear to the meal. For two million people to keep this meal at the same moment, to avoid the Destroying Angel, was a large event, orchestrated and performed in faith.

Not very long after, that two million would find themselves cornered, with the sea in front of them, Egyptian chariots bearing down upon them. Their two options were to fall on their knees and beg the drivers of the 600 chariots pursuing them to spare them and allow them to re-enter slavery in Egypt, or to literally walk into the Sea. By faith they stepped in, and God sent an east wind that made the waters like a hollow tunnel on either side. To have even thought that the way to save two million people from the army of the world's most powerful empire would be to lead them into the sea was inconceivable, but it was attempting great things for God.

Fast forward forty years, and Joshua begins the conquering of the land. Some of the cities of Canaan were actually military fortresses, and Jericho was one of them. Jericho actually had a series of walls. First was a stone wall about five meters high. On top of that was a mud-brick wall around 8 meters high. If you got over those 13 meters, there was an embankment that went up until another 8 meter mud-brick wall. From ground level, the walls of Jericho loomed up to the height of a ten-storey building. Everything would have said to leave this city alone, especially if you had no siege engines, ladders, catapults, or anything to bring it down. And when God told them to spend the first six days marching around the whole city in total silence once a day, until on the seventh day they were to walk around seven times and then blow trumpets and shout, this isn't exactly an orthodox military strategy. But they did it, and archaeology has confirmed a massive burn layer in the ruins of Jericho that corresponds to the time of Joshua. The walls came down.

Just before that siege, someone else attempted a great thing. Her name was Rahab, whose house was likely built into the walls or within the embankment between walls. She, like the others in Jericho, had heard of the great things done by Yahweh the God of Israel. Like Moses, she decided

to identify with the people of God, at great risk to herself. She chose to hide the spies, taking a huge risk on these Israelites. But because of that, she did not perish in the attack on Jerusalem, and in fact married Salmon in Israel, and became the mother of Boaz, the redeemer in the book of Ruth. These were great things attempted and risked for God.

At this point, the writer knows he is at risk of running out of writing space.

32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

The 1500 years from Moses to Messiah are so full of acts of faith, that he must now just bullet-point them. He could mention judges like Gideon whose 300 men conquered an army, or Barak who took on Sisera and the Canaanites, or Samson whose faith brought down a house upon the Philistines, Jephthah who defeated the Ammonites, David defeating Goliath and army after army, alongside Samuel.

So he now just launches into descriptions of these exploits of faith.

Verse 33: ***They subdued entire kingdoms:*** vast, technologically superior, numerically overwhelming kingdoms were defeated by Israel, David, Solomon, Hezekiah.

They worked righteousness and obtained promises. In a primitive savage time, they brought in the gloriously wise and fair Law of Moses and lived it out as a shining light before a pagan world.

They stopped the mouths of lions: whether it was David protecting sheep, Samson protecting himself, or Daniel in a lion's den, their faith overcame the threat of the king of the beast.

Verse 34: ***They quenched the violence of fire,*** as when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were cast into a fiery furnace for their allegiance and faith in the living God, but came out unscathed.

They escaped the edge of the sword, as when Mordecai through Esther delivered Israel from genocide, or when Elijah and Elisha escaped execution, by faith.

Out of weakness were made strong, like Gideon facing hordes with 300, like David facing a giant with a sling, both by faith.

They became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. This could refer to many of Israel's battles recorded in Joshua and Judges and Samuel and Kings. It could also refer to the time of Maccabees, when brave Jewish believers were willing to stand against those attacking Israel. Facing the enemy in the promises of God by faith.

Verse 35: ***Women received their dead raised to life again.*** Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath; Elisha raised the son of the Shunnamite, but these women needed to place their faith in the God of the prophets.

And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

During the time of the evil ruler Antiochus, the Jews were forced to adopt Greek customs, eat pork. Many steadfastly refused to disobey the law in the face of “the wheels and racks and hooks and catapults and cauldrons and frying pans and finger racks and iron bands and wedges and hot cinders”

Verse 36: ***Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.*** Jeremiah was scourged for his faith. Joseph and the prophets Hanani, Micaiah, and Jeremiah were all imprisoned for theirs.

Verse 37: ***They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword.***

Zechariah son of Jehoida was stoned. Isaiah was sawn in two. Prophets were slain by Ahab and Jezebel.

They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

This was the attire of Elijah. It was not a uniform, it simply meant they were destitute and outcasts. Obadiah hid 100 prophets in caves. Elijah fled to a cave. Mattathias and his sons hid in deserts and

mountains during the Maccabean revolt. Israel is pockmarked with holes and caves, perfect for shelter, hiding and refuge.

The great range of experiences and people shows that faith takes the particular circumstances of your life and turns actions into exploits for God. Acts of courage, bravery, fortitude, trust, perseverance. Whether they were politicians or prophets, mothers or soldiers, priests or farmers, shepherds or wives, they performed their part in trust and drawing near. And often their ordinary lives became extraordinary, because their faith would not let them draw back, or cast away their confidence.

Not all of them were delivered gloriously, or had victories. The break in verse 35 with the words “and others” shows that sometimes people of faith appear to be defeated, executed, tortured, or imprisoned. But whether their faith is in season or out of season, whether they are victorious or defeated on Earth, famous or obscure, having escaped death or embraced it, they are all part of the people who by faith attempted great things for God.

Sometimes doing great things for God is sought out, as when you seek out usefulness on the mission field or in ministry. Sometimes it comes to you as when you must defend the faith against a government or an aggressive group. Attempting great things for God can often be the ordinary done through great trial: educating your children when it becomes illegal to teach them Christianity, opposing laws that destroy religious freedom. It can be the ordinary of praying fervently for a missionary, for ministry. It can be a faithful giving of the Gospel to a hard-hearted person.

What becomes extraordinary is not always the circumstance, but the endurance of faith in the face of what looks impossible, or too difficult, or too unlikely. The people are ordinary. The situations are ordinary human situations. The faith and its results are extraordinary.

What does faith look like?

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39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

God's plan was always that the Old Testament would not be complete without the New. Though these great saints obtained these great testimonies, God did not allow them to see the fulfillment of all promised to them. That has now come to us, the believers upon whom the end of the ages has come. But faith is the golden chain that links us all.

Why has he walked us through this faith hall of fame? Because it is as if we are walking to the starting blocks of a race, as we'll see next week, and as we walk up we see the encouraging, nodding faces of Abraham, and Noah, and Moses, and David, and Daniel. Their looks say: you can finish, like we did. You can keep drawing near to God, and hold fast, and finish. We did it in all kinds of ways, in all kinds of circumstances, but we were men of like passions and desires as you. We had the same weaknesses, pains, and problems. We also found it hard. We also suffered discouragement. But we fixed our eyes on the shadowy form of Messiah, and we drew near and endured. So can you.