

Faith that overcomes the world

Hebrews 11:23-40

The previous verses of this chapter spoke about the people from the creation of the world unto the time that Jacob/Israel with his family went into Egypt and stayed there.

The verses for today deal with the heroes of faith from the time of Moses up to the time of entering the promised land. The focus in these verses is mostly on faith in very difficult circumstances.

Let's first look at Moses.

Hebrews 11:23

- 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.

When Moses was born, he was supposed to be killed according to the commandment of Pharaoh, who ordered that all male babies born to Jewish women should be killed.

But the parents of Moses didn't do that. They first did hide him for three months and when that was no longer possible, they put him in a basket in the river Nile. As the daughter of Pharaoh was walking along the Nile, she noticed the basket and after opening it she realized it had to be a Jewish child. She also didn't obey the command of her father but brought the child into the palace and raised him there as her own child. She also was the person who named him Moses.

In the Hebrew text the basket, in which Moses was put into the river is mentioned with the same word as the Ark of Noah. None of us would expect that, but Moses was also in an ark.

Hebrews 11:24-26

- By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

Moses grew up in the palace of the Pharaoh, but this doesn't mean he forgot about his Jewish brothers and sisters. This might be due to the fact, that his mother was hired as a nurse to take care of him in his very early years.

You might say that, the first time he tried to help his Jewish brothers, he did it in his own strength and in his own way.

We see that recalled in the verses on the next sheet.

Hebrews 11:27-28

- By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.
- By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

After Moses had killed the Egyptian at the age of 40, he had to flee the country and ended up in Midian.

There he stayed, got married and was a shepherd for 40 years.

Then God appeared to him in the burning bush telling him to go back to Egypt. Moses resisted for quite a while, but ultimately, he obeyed God. The Bible doesn't tell us whether the Pharaoh of Egypt at that point in time was still the same one as when Moses left Egypt. Anyhow, the mission that God gave to Moses made it dangerous for him to go back to Egypt and to Pharaoh anyway. Moses went back to Egypt and did all that God had commanded him, including the keeping of the Passover according to the word of God.

Let's continue.

Hebrews 11:29

- By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land, whereas* the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

God did many great things to save the Jewish people and lead them out of Egypt.

While after the death of the firstborn in Egypt Pharaoh let the people go, after a short time he regretted that decision and went after them with his army in order to bring them back as slaves. Caught up in between the sea and the army of the Egyptians the Jewish people were in what we would call a hopeless position. But God provided an extraordinary way out for them and they safely passed through the Red Sea. When the Egyptian army still tried to pursue them, they all drowned as the waters came back to their normal position. God did many miracles to bring the Jewish people out of Egypt, but they still had to follow and obey His Word also.

Hebrews 11:30-31

- By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.
- By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

Can you imagine being told to circle a city for 7 days with the purpose of the city walls falling so you can conquer it?

But that's exactly what God told the Jewish people to do once they had entered the promised land and were camped near Jericho.

And before they could go to war the Israelites still had to circumcise all men. This only happened after they had entered the promised land already. You can read it in Joshua chapter 5.

In verse 31 on this sheet we see another person that had faith in God, Rahab. That she indeed had faith in God we learn from the following verses from the book Joshua.

Joshua 2:8-9

- Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you.

Even though the messengers of the king of Jericho came to her house Rahab did not betray the spies sent out by Joshua.

The reason why she did not do that we find in these verses and in the verses to follow in the next few sheets,

She makes it clear that she believed that God would keep His promises towards the Jewish people.

Let's go on to the next sheet.

Joshua 2:10-11

- “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.
- “And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

So, the stories about the miracles of God and how He already had delivered some kings with their armies into the hands of the Jewish people had traveled around already.

And Rahab explains here what the impact of those stories was.

Joshua 2:12-13

- “Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token, “and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.”

Throughout these verses Rahab is confessing her faith in God and acting upon it, knowing that only God can save her from destruction.

And God indeed did that, even though she was not Jewish.

Throughout the Old Testament we have examples of non-Jewish people being saved because of their faith in God.

Hebrews 11:32-34

- 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: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 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.

Thinking of king David, one specific thing comes to my mind and that is the fact, that as often as Israel had to go into a battle again, king David first inquired of the Lord whether or not he should go and fight that specific battle.

And then he acted according to the word he received from God, either directly or through a prophet.

But let's continue!

Hebrews 11:35-36

- Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.
- Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

Even in those days, following God was not always easy and without danger. Persecution of the people of God, whether you talk about the Jewish people or of the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, has been around for a very long time.

Satan has done whatever he could to prevent the birth of our savior. And until now he does whatever he can to get us to deviate from the path that God has defined for us.

Some examples of that persecution we see on the next page.

Hebrews 11:37-38

- 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 — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth.

Looking at these words we can only conclude that our Lord was very honest when He proclaimed that we would be hated by all for His name' sake.

He never promised us an easy life on this earth!

What He promised us was eternal life with Him.

And this is not different from what happened to the spokesmen of God in the Old Testament period. Very often we can read how the prophets of God were persecuted and even killed. Being a prophet for God wasn't such a safe position in those days neither.

Let's go to the next sheet.

Hebrews 11:39-40

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

Looking at these last words of this chapter we need to realize that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews was mainly referring to persecution during the Old Testament period.

With the coming of our Lord into this world a new promise and a new covenant was put in place.

The persecution of the children of God, however, is still going on.

I want to look at several verses from the letter of James, the brother of Christ, where he explains the true meaning of faith and how obedience to go is connected to that.

James 2:14-17

- What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?
- If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?
- Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James start by giving an example of the uselessness of empty promises.

And then he links that to the relationship between faith and the works that should follow from it.

James 2:18-23

- But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.
- You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!
- But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?
- Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?
- Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?
- And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

What we need to understand is the fact that the expression of having faith in God does not so much relate to believing in the existence of God, but to believing God and to trusting Him.

And the result of believing and trusting God should be obedience to God, living according to His Word.

When we look at Genesis 3, the story about the fall into sin, we see that the serpent accuses God of lying to the humans He created about the impact of eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, the issue for Adam and Eve was to decide who they would believe. Unfortunately, they believed the lies of the serpent. Satan still uses this tactic, telling people they will miss out on so many enjoyable things when they live according to the Word of God. He is still using the same lie.

Shall we pray?