

THE GREAT BELIEVERS' FAITH (PART I): A HEROIC FAITH HEBREWS 11:32–34

Introduction

Heroic faith — this is a powerful picture of just what heroic faith is. It is a panoramic scene that glances back over the history of Israel highlighting the lives of some great men of faith — men who dared to believe God against unbelievable odds. And in every case their faith triumphed and won the victory.

- I. The heroic faith of outstanding leaders: a faith that accepted incredible responsibility and that called upon God for great courage (v. 32).
- II. The reward of heroic faith (vv. 33-34).

I. *Hebrews 11:32 The Heroic Faith of Outstanding Leaders*

The heroic faith of outstanding leaders. Note that these three verses discuss the faith of some outstanding leaders. The faith of believers in general is discussed in the next few verses (vv. 35-40). These particular leaders were true heroes of the faith. They had a faith...

- that led them to feel undeserving and that demonstrated humility.
 - that accepted incredible responsibility.
 - that showed undying courage.
 - that trusted and depended entirely upon God.
 - that conquered against all odds — unbelievable odds.
1. There was the faith of Gideon (Judg 6:11f). Gideon was already a grown man when God called him (Judg 8:20), and he had apparently gained a reputation as a soldier by fighting against the terrorists acts of the Midianites (Judg 6:12). The terrorists' attacks against Israel had gotten so fierce and frequent that the people had to be on constant guard. They even had to work inside protective walls in order to get their work done (Judg 6:11). Note these facts:
 - => The angel of the Lord called Gideon to take the lead and to save Israel.
 - => Gideon felt unqualified. He was gripped with a sense of humility and unworthiness. However, God gave Gideon assurance after assurance.
 - => Gideon finally believed God and God gave Gideon the Spirit of the Lord.
 - => Gideon tested God's call and promise by putting out the well known test of the fleece (Judg 6:36-40). God again assured Gideon that he was His chosen vessel to save Israel.
 - => Gideon believed God, and with three hundred hand-picked men he defied incredible odds and routed and defeated the Midianite army (Judg 7:1f).
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The point is this: Gideon was an outstanding leader because of his great faith. Even before he launched the great campaign against the Midianites, he cried out to his three hundred hand-picked men: "Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands" (Judg 7:15).

2. There was the heroic faith of Barak (Judg 4-5). Barak was called by God to save Israel, when the Canaanites had been attacking and oppressing them for twenty years. The commander-in-chief of the Canaanite army was Sisero. Note these facts:

=> The call of God to Barak came through the prophetess Deborah.

=> Barak was already a soldier, but he hesitated, feeling incapable. He insisted that the prophetess of God go to battle by his side. When she agreed, he surrendered to God's call.

=> Barak faced incredible odds. Sisero, the commander-in-chief of the Canaanites, had over 900 chariots of iron and a massive army.

=> Barak believed God. He attacked with only 10,000 men and won an incredible victory. How did Barak do it? By faith. He had a heroic faith in God. He did not act without God. He believed God, and because he believed, God gave him the victory.

3. There was the heroic faith of Samson (Judg 13-16). The angel of the Lord appeared to the mother of Samson and told her that she was to bear a son who was to save Israel from the Philistines. Samson was to be reared under the Nazarite vows of extreme discipline, self-denial, and control of the sinful nature. The purpose of the Nazarite vows was symbolic, to teach the people that they were to live lives of self-denial and dedication before God. Note these facts about Samson.

=> Samson was appointed by God and he was a devout servant of God: "the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him" (Judg 13:25; cp. Judg 14:19).

=> Samson was a man who had a serious flaw and weakness throughout all of his life, a weakness of fleshly passion. He never repented of his fleshly passion nor did he live by his Nazarite vows, not consistently.

=> Samson was a man of unusual faith and courage. He single-handedly fought the Philistines with unbelievable exploits of strength time and again. And he always won the victory.

The point to note about Samson's life is this: despite Samson's life-long weakness of passion, when the time came, he alone believed God; he alone was available for God to use. Samson was sometimes weak and passionate, but all others were even weaker and had less if any faith. Samson alone was available to believe and trust God. He was a man of heroic faith.

Thought 1. Mathew Henry makes a statement that we must always realize: "True faith is acknowledged and accepted, even when mingled with many failings" (*Mathew Henry's Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 951).

4. There was the heroic faith of Jephthah (Judg 11:1-12:7). Jephthah was called by God to save Israel from the Ammonites. Note these significant facts.

Jephthah was a man who had known rejection all of his life. He was the son of a harlot, but he was taken and reared by his father. However, he was apparently rejected, taunted and abused by his family and neighbours during his childhood. He was finally driven away from his home into the desert in exile (Judg 11:1-3). There in the desert he became the leader of a group of fighting adventurers who protected surrounding villages from Ammonite terrorists.

- ⇒ Jephthah believed and accepted the call to fight and save Israel when it came (Judg 11:4-11). He made a covenant with the elders of his people “before the Lord” (Judg 11:11).
- ⇒ Jephthah sought God’s presence and strength for victory by making a vow to God (Josh. 11:30-31).
- ⇒ Jephthah did what God wanted him to do and saved Israel (Josh. 11:33).
- ⇒ Jephthah kept his vow to God and had his daughter live as a virgin and dedicate her life to serve God.

The point to see is that Jephthah was a man of unusual faith and trust in God despite being rejected by his family and townsfolk. He was also a man of great humility who humbled himself to help save and rule the people in their great crisis. Jephthah was a man of heroic faith.

5. There was the heroic faith of David (1 Sam 16:1f). As the writer to Hebrews says, “I do not have time to tell...about David” (v. 32). David was unquestionably one of the greatest men of heroic faith who has ever lived. Note these facts:

- ⇒ David was chosen to be the King of Israel by God Himself when he was only a young shepherd boy (1 Sam. 16:1f).

1 Sam 16:13 *And from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David.*

- ⇒ David was *a boy of heroic faith*. He believed God in facing impossible situations. For example, a lion and a bear attacked his sheep and a giant of a man named Goliath led the Philistine army against Israel, but God honoured the young boy’s faith and gave David the victory in both situations.
- ⇒ David was *a young man of heroic faith*. He was feared and hated by Saul the king because he had been appointed to be the future king of Israel while only a young boy. Saul pursued David for years trying to kill him. David proved to be a young man of extraordinary trust in God as he lived in the wilderness and faced trial after trial and enemy after enemy.
- ⇒ David was *a man of heroic faith* in defeating enemy after enemy. He stretched the borders of Israel out farther than anyone else had ever done and brought Israel to the height of its glory as a nation.

=> David ruled Israel for forty years and proved *faithful throughout his whole life* with exception of the one or two year lapse with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1f).

The whole life of David is a challenging example of heroic faith to believers of every generation. Just think of the Psalms, how meaningful they are to us all. David wrote approximately 73 of the Psalms. He was also one of the ancestors of Christ (Mat 1:1).

6. There was the heroic faith of Samuel (1-2 Samuel). Samuel was both a judge and prophet of Israel. God called Samuel when he was only a young child, and Samuel followed the Lord all through his life. During his lifetime he was the lone figure of great faith among a people who rebelled against God and refused to follow Him in righteousness and holiness. He was a man of heroic faith in the midst of a faithless and unbelieving generation.
7. There was the heroic faith of the prophets. They were all men who sensed their unworthiness before God but who answered God's call. They faced every imaginable trial that can be thrown against a man by a wicked and sinful people. But despite all, they stood for righteousness and proclaimed the message of God, a message of hope for those who would repent and a message of judgment for those who continued to live wicked and evil lives. They were men who stood almost alone in facing generation after generation of unbelief and rebellion against God. They were men of heroic faith.

II. *Hebrews 11:33-34 The Reward of Heroic Faith*

There was the reward of heroic faith.

1. Heroic faith conquered kingdoms. This is clearly seen in the heroic faith of the leaders above. The point is this: true faith in God will stir God to give victory over all enemies, no matter how formidable. God will even work miraculously to deliver the person or people who truly believe Him.

Psa 44:5 Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes.

Prov 14:34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Rom 8:35, 37 Who shall separate us from the love [compassion] of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

2 Cor 2:14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Rev 2:7 *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*

Rev 2:17 *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.*

Rev 2:26 *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.*

Rev 3:5 *He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.*

Rev 3:12 *Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.*

Rev 3:21 *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

Rev 21:7 *Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.*

2. Heroic faith ruled with justice. This means two things.

⇒ When the leaders above believed God, righteousness was produced in their lives. Faith always produces righteousness in the life of the believer.

⇒ When the leaders above believed God, they set a dynamic example of righteousness and they taught and preached righteousness. As a result, some people turned to God and began to live righteously themselves. Faith — even if it is the faith of only one person — always stirs others to believe God and to live righteously themselves.

Prov 11:11 *Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed.*

Prov 14:34 *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.*

Prov 16:12 *Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.*

Prov 25:5 *Remove wicked officials from the king's presence, and his throne will be established through righteousness.*

Isa 54:14 *In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be removed; it will not come near you.*

Mat 5:6 *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”*

Mat 5:20 *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

1 Cor 15:34 *Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.*

Eph 6:14 *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place.*

Phil 1:11 *Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.*

3. Heroic faith obtained promises. God did just what He had promised to each of the leaders above. He always fulfils His promises to everyone who believes Him. And note: just as with each of the leaders above, He gives the assurance that He will fulfil His promises.

Rom 4:20-22 *Yet he [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.*

2 Cor 1:20 *For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.*

2 Cor 7:1 *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

2 Pet 1:4 *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

1 John 2:25 *And this is what he promised us — even eternal life.*

1 John 5:14-15 *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask we know that we have what we asked of him.*

4. Heroic faith shut the mouths of lions. This was true of Samson (Judg 14:5-6), David (1 Sam 17:34-35), and Daniel (Dan 6:22). The meaning for believers is this: God has the power to control the animals and nature of this world if believers will trust God. And even more importantly, God will deliver believers from the mouth of the lion which is Satan.

1 Pet 5:7-9 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

2 Tim 4:18 *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Heb 2:15 *And free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

Heb 4:15-16 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Heb 10:22-23 *Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

5. Heroic faith quenched the fury of the flames. This probably refers to the three Hebrew young men — Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego — who refused to worship the state religion of Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, they were to be executed by being burned alive. However God saved them by performing a most fantastic miracle: He preserved them and kept the flames of fire from burning them (Dan 3:17-27).

God is God. He can preserve a person through both the furious flame of temptation and trial and the furious flame of persecution. In fact, God can preserve a person through anything. But note the prerequisite: faith in Him. We must believe God, really believe Him.

2 Tim 4:18 *The LORD will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Deut 6:24 *The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.*

Psa 31:23 *Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full.*

Psa 37:28 *For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off.*

Prov 2:8 *For he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.*

Isa 41:10 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isa 46:4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Isa 49:8 This is what the Lord says: "In the time of my favour I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances.

6. Heroic faith escaped the edge of the sword. David escaped the sword of Goliath (1 Sam 17:49-51); Elisha escaped the sword of the king of Israel (1 Kng 6:30-31). Prophet after prophet was delivered from martyrdom time after time by the power of God.

God will deliver the believer from violence and death unless God wills to use the martyrdom of the dear child as a testimony and wills to take His dear child on home to be with Him. God is able to deliver the person who truly believes Him. But remember: without faith in God, no person is delivered by God. Faith is the power that takes hold of the hand of God and brings about deliverance.

Luke 21:18 "But not a hair of your head will perish."

2 Tim 1:12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

1 Pet 1:5 Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jude 1:24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

Rev 3:10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

2 Chr 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."

Psa 34:7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Psa 91:4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

Psa 125:2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and forever more.

7. Heroic faith brings strength out of weakness. Every one of the leaders above sensed unworthiness and weakness in serving God, but God strengthened them to conquer all the enemies and forces that stood against them.

Isa 6:5 “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

Jer 1:6 “Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

1 Cor 1:27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

2 Cor 12:9-10 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

8. Heroic faith grows powerful in battle. True faith develops and stirs courage and strength. The person who truly believes in God knows that God is with him. He is actually stirred to fight and fight, even against unbelievable odds.

2 Sam 22:33, 35 It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

Deu 31:6 “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Josh 1:6 Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

Josh 10:25 Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight.”

Josh 23:6-10 “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now. The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised.

1 Chr 19:13 “Be strong, and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight.”

1 Chr 22:13 Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the LORD gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged.

1 Chr 28:20 David also said to Solomon his son, “Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished.

Psa 3:6 *I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.*

Psa 27:3 *Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.*

Psa 91:5 *You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day.*

Psa 118:6 *The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?*

Prov 3:24 *When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.*

Isa 12:2 *Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. ■*