

THE GREAT BELIEVERS' FAITH (PART II): AN ENDURING FAITH HEBREWS 11:35–40

Introduction

This is the powerful picture of what enduring faith is. It is a faith that endures even martyrdom if necessary. This passage is a panoramic scene that glances back over the history of the Old Testament and highlights the enduring faith of God's people.

- I. There was the enduring faith of believers (v. 35-38).
- II. There was the reward of enduring faith (v. 39-40).

I. *Hebrews 11:35–38 The Enduring Faith of Believers*

There was the enduring faith of believers. Note: no names are mentioned in these verses. As verse 35 indicates, they were the women and men of every day life who were not necessarily leaders, but who had one distinctive trait: they believed God and their faith in God was strong. They endured in faith no matter what attacked them. They never accepted defeat; therefore, they were never defeated. They never denied God; therefore, they were never denied by God. They never lost hope; therefore, they were never left hopeless. They endured in faith. No matter the circumstance, difficulty, threat, injury, pain, torture or form of execution and death, they endured and held fast to their faith and profession in God.

1. Some believers — women — received back their dead, raised to life again. This is an astounding fact, that some believers could have faith strong enough to have their children raised from the dead. Yet it is true. The Old Testament gives two examples; perhaps there were others, but they are not recorded in the Scripture (1 Kng 17:17-24; 1 Kng 4:18-37). In the New Testament Christ raised several people from the dead (cp. Mat 9:18-34; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:41-46). The point is this: enduring faith — faith that will not let God go — will conquer anything including death. It is not the normal experience for God to raise people from the dead, but He has done it, and He did it because the mothers (and fathers) believed God. If they had not believed God, nothing would have ever happened. They would have just resigned themselves to the death. But they believed God and God raised them. Why? Why these few isolated instances? Why would God raise these and not raise others? Does this mean that some had weak faith and some had strong faith? No, not necessarily. The faith of some persons, of course, is stronger than the faith of others. But some have sought God with just as strong a faith as others, yet they received a different answer. Their dead children were not raised. Why?
=> Because circumstances were different. God could teach them more about Himself by strengthening them to go through the death and circumstances. In addition,
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their testimony to a lost and unbelieving world would sometimes be stronger by experiencing the sorrow and grief of death.

We must always remember that God knows best, even in the death of children. He knows how to make us stronger and how to bear a strong testimony to the world through all the circumstances of life, even through death. But note: God cannot strengthen us, raise the dead nor do anything else apart from faith — faith that endures. We must believe in God and His power and love, and we must endure in that belief. It was enduring faith that caused these women to receive back their dead, raised to life. And it will be enduring faith that will cause us to receive the provision of our needs from God.

2. Some believers were tortured, refusing to deny God. The word “tortured” (*etumpanisthesan*) means to beat or club to death or else to be put on the rack in order to make a person deny Christ. These dear believers suffered martyrdom for the name of Christ. They *refused to accept deliverance*. All they had to do was renounce Christ, but they refused. And note why: “that they might gain a better resurrection.” They had their eyes on the *promised land* of heaven and glory, of living forever and ever with God and Christ. They knew something that was critical, something that is critical for every person to know:

⇒ If they had denied their faith, they would have saved their lives upon earth for a few days, perhaps even for several more years. But eventually they would have died anyway — accident, disease, old age or something would have consumed their body and snatched or drained the life out of it.

But not faith in God. God gives life — life eternal — to the soul of man. And these dear believers were not about to turn back and reject eternal life just to walk in this evil and dying world for a few more days or at most a few years. They had their eyes on a better resurrection and world — on the resurrection and world that is eternal, never ending, and that is with God and Christ forever and ever.

3. Some believers endured trials of jeers, flogging and being chained and imprisoned.

⇒ They were jeered: ridiculed, insulted, treated with contempt and cursed.

⇒ They were flogged: beaten with rods, whips and cords of leather straps with bone and metal chips tied to the end — beaten until they died or were near death.

⇒ They were chained hand and foot, sometimes for years (even Paul the apostle suffered this as well as so many of the other trials mentioned throughout this section).

⇒ They were imprisoned in the most horrendous dungeons or prisons in the history of men.

They suffered for their faith, refusing to deny God and Christ and the glorious hope of the *promised land* — of living forever and ever with God.

4. Some believers were martyred for their faith.

- => Some were stoned to death. They were thrown to the ground and surrounded by a mob of executioners. The executioners took hand size stones and hurled them at the victim causing whatever excruciating pain they could to the vital parts of the person's body and then eventually crushing the head. (Cp. Zechariah, 2 Chr 24:20f.)
- => Some were sawed in two. Oliver Greene says the method used was to put a person in a hollow log and then to saw through the log and the person (*The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 514).

These are horrible pictures of death, but they are just some of the ways the world in its madness against believers have slaughtered them for their faith. Note: the believers were "lured with tempting offers [to renounce their faith]" but they refused. They chose to receive the eternal life of God rather than a few days upon this evil and dying world.

5. Some believers were treated in the most inhuman ways imaginable.

- => They were stripped of all clothing and forced to wander about in sheepskins and goatskins.
- => They were stripped of all possessions — had everything taken away and confiscated — their homes, property, money, everything. They were left utterly destitute and they were afflicted and tormented as much as possible as object lessons in order to stop anyone else from believing in God and Christ.
- => They were forced to wander about and find shelter wherever they could: in deserts, in mountains and in the dens and caves of the earth.

But note the glorious declaration of Scripture: the world was not worthy of these precious people — the dear, dear believers who honoured and worshipped God. The idea is this: the unbelievers of the world stripped them and confiscated everything that was *worth anything* on this earth. But the world — the whole world with all its people and all their wealth — was *not worthy* of a single one of these dear believers.

Mat 5:11 *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."*

Mat 10:22 *"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*

Mat 19:29 *"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."*

2 Cor 4:11 *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

Phil 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*

James 5:10 *Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*

John 15:19 *“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”*

John 15:18 *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first....If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.”*

2 Tim 3:12 *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

John 15:21 *“They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.”*

John 16:2-3 *“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.”*

John 15:20 *“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”*

John 16:1-4 *“All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.”*

1 Th 3:3 *So that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.*

1 John 3:13 *Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.*

1 Pet 4:12-14 *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

II. Hebrews 11:39–40 Reward of Enduring Faith

There was the reward of enduring faith. The reward was twofold.

1. All the believers of the Old Testament obtained a good report and testimony. Their faith touched both God and man. Their faith was the light of the world; their lives pointed men to God, and their testimonies still do. Note: their faith touched God so much that He has recorded it forever in this chapter of Hebrews. And although their

names are not mentioned for the world to honour, what is important *is stressed*, that is, their faith. It is not their names that would stir people; it is their faith. It is the faith of their lives that touches the hearts and lives of people. Their faith touches people of every generation and stirs them to be men and women of stronger faith. What a legacy to leave behind, a legacy of faith that stirs and encourages people to arise and trust God and to live righteously and godly and to make this a much better world for God.

Rom 1:8 *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.*

Rom 16:19 *Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.*

Heb 11:2 *This is what the ancients were commended for.*

2. They had the glorious hope of the *promised land and the promised seed*. They died without receiving the promised seed. They never saw Christ born, crucified, resurrected and exalted to the right hand of God the Father. They never saw their salvation secured by Christ, who was the very Son of God. They never saw the promise of the Messiah fulfilled. They died believing the promise, but they never knew exactly how their salvation was to be arranged.

But this is not true with us: we know, Christ has come; He has died and been resurrected and exalted to make all believers perfect and presentable to God the Father. The Old Testament believers looked forward to the Messiah; we look back upon Him. We are far more privileged. It has already happened; it is a historic fact: Christ Jesus our Lord has now died and been resurrected to make us all acceptable to God. All believers — both Old and New Testament believers — are covered by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith in Him causes God to count us righteous and free from the guilt and judgment of sin. And being free of sin makes us perfect in God's eyes. But we must always remember: our righteousness and our perfection is in *Christ and in Christ alone*.

John 3:16-17 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Gal 3:29 *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Rom 4:13-14 *It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless*

Heb 11:8-10 *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Heb 11:13-14, 16 *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own....Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

Heb 12:22 *But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.*

Heb 13:14 *For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.*

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*

Rev 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ■*