

Today we conclude this chapter on the heroes of faith. Of course those mentioned in this chapter were only some of the early recipients of that honor. There were many more of whom we have never heard their names or their acts of faith. And since the time this letter was written to the Hebrew believers, there have been countless more who have joined the heroes who through faith inherited the promises (Hebrews 6:12). We read about them in Voice of the Martyrs, in Foxes Book of Martyrs, and biographies of men and women of God. I encourage you to read the biographies of such people as Augustine, Martin Luther, Charles Cowman, Hudson Taylor, Adonirum Judson, Amy Carmichael, Fanny Crosby, and I could go on and on. There are modern day heroes like that of Brother Yun whose stories are just as amazing as these we have looked at. God is still at work in the hearts of men and women and working through their lives of faith to offer hope to a sinful world. As believers we are one with these people of faith.

A life of faith is never a perfect life, for all have sinned (Romans 3:23), but as we will see again in today's examples, it is a life that perseveres in faith. Not all do extraordinary accomplishments, but all live for the eternal unseen realm and bear fruit unto God. They believe God is who the Bible declares Him to be and know He rewards those who wholeheartedly seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

The author of Hebrews will first list those who had great physical victories. ³² *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—* ³³ *who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* Hebrews 11:32-34 Gideon was out of weakness made strong, became mighty in war, and put armies to flight. When the angel of the LORD came to Gideon and told him the LORD was with him, he answered like we might answer. "Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us," Judges 6:13a The LORD told him to go and perform those wonderful deeds. Gideon responded that his clan was the least in his tribe and he was the least in his family (Judges 6:15). The LORD said, "But I will be with you!" God and one are a majority in any battle (Romans 8:34). We tend to think like Gideon. How could God use me? That's humility. But **will we have faith in the God that is with us and in His mighty power?**

You know the rest of the story. God had Gideon reduce the number of soldiers down to 300. God convinced Gideon through several signs that He would be faithful to do what He had promised and defeat the huge army of Midian. With the unlikely tactic of torches in pots and yelling, they routed the Midianites and soundly defeated them.

We should take note of the pattern. While God rarely does the same thing twice, the patterns of God at work are often similar. The situation was desperate. God called one man. The man was humble and didn't think he was able. God promised to be with him. The man obeyed some strange instructions. Victory was accomplished, and God got the

Commented [PW1]: Hebrews 6:12 (KJV)

¹² That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Commented [PW2]: Romans 3:23 (KJV)

²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Commented [PW3]: Hebrews 11:6 (KJV)

⁶ But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Commented [PW4]: Judges 6:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Commented [PW5]: Romans 8:31 (ESV)

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

glory. We saw that clear pattern with Moses. We saw something similar with Noah, Abraham, and Joseph: **desperation, humility, the call, faith, obedience, God glorified.**

There is another thing we saw in several of the examples that happened with Gideon. After the battle, the people wanted him to rule over them. He refused and said the LORD would rule over them. Then he did a strange and evil thing. He asked for all the gold earrings taken as spoils of war and made a golden ephod that became an idol for Gideon's family and the nation (Judges 8:27). Yet, like the sins of the other people of faith, we don't read about it here in Hebrews. We only read of what they accomplished in faith, for that is all that remains in the eternal record. Thank God our sins are covered by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for us and are remembered no more (Isaiah 43:25)!

Barak was a captain of two of the tribes of Israel when Deborah was Judge. Once again we have the imperfect person acting in faith and being remembered for his act of faith. The tribes were under threat of the Canaanites. Deborah heard from the LORD that Barak was to gather the men for battle and God would defeat the Canaanites. Barak told Deborah he would do it if she would go with him. It sounds to me like he wanted to be sure Deborah was convinced the LORD had spoken. It is similar to Gideon's fleeces. It is normal to want to be sure God has spoken and is directing you, and God *can* give you confirmation of His will. But because Barak doubted, Deborah said the honor for the victory would go to a woman (Judges 4:8-9).

The LORD went before Barak, and his men defeated the superior army of the Canaanites with their iron chariots, but the Canaanite captain escaped on foot. Exhausted from running he took refuge in the tent of woman whose clan had a treaty with the Canaanites. Once he was sound asleep, she nailed his head to the floor with a tent peg. She got the honor of killing the captain of the Canaanites.

The next example was Samson. Again, we have an imperfect man who had a little too much testosterone. His problem was his passion for women. God gave him supernatural strength and used it to wreak havoc on the Philistines. You know the story of how he fell for Delilah and was captured and enslaved. After being blinded and suffering years of slave labor, he was brought to a Philistine feast so the people could mock him. He had the boy who was leading him put him beside the pillars that supported the building. All the lords of the Philistines had gathered for this party. He prayed the LORD would give him strength one last time, and he pulled down the two pillars upon which the house rested, ending his life and that of thousands of Philistines (Judges 16:28-30).

The story of Jephthah is found in Judges 11. He was the son of a prostitute, exiled from his community. When Israel was threatened by the Ammonites, the people of Israel asked him to lead them. He led them to a great victory, but he was another flawed man. He rashly promised the LORD that if he was victorious he would sacrifice whatever first came out of his house to meet him. Perhaps he had a lamb that was attached to him. We don't know for sure. But his young daughter was the first to meet

Commented [PW6]: Judges 8:27 (ESV)

²⁷ And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.

Commented [PW7]: Isaiah 43:25 (ESV)

²⁵ "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

Commented [PW8]: Judges 4:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."
⁹ And she said, "I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

Commented [PW9]: Judges 16:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes."
²⁹ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other.
³⁰ And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

him. Not fully understanding the laws of God, he felt he had to follow through on his vow. Yet here he is in the hall of fame because of what he accomplished by faith.

The next person is David. Are you starting to get the picture? Another man of God, flaws and all. His sins would include murder and adultery, but he was the greatest king and psalmist the nation would know. He delivered them from the Philistines and made plans for the temple. He created instruments of worship with which to accompany the psalms he had written. He was even called a man after God's heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

The list of men here reminds me of the expression, "You can't be too bad for God, only too good." You see, flawed people are humbled by their sins. They give God all the glory. They are just like us. And that should give you hope that by faith, God can do great things through you. It is faith in God that accomplishes the impossible. It is faith in God that saves us. It is by faith that we know our sins are forgiven and that God will finish the work He has begun in us. Perfect people don't think they need God and depend on the righteousness they suppose they have (Isaiah 64:6). Thank God the Bible doesn't whitewash its heroes, but instead tells the whole truth.

Yes, there are a couple of men in the list who seem to have no sins in the record, such as Enoch and Joseph, but they are the exception. They were certainly sinners as well, it's just that their sins were so common as to not be worth mentioning.

Samuel was the final judge of Israel who anointed the first and second kings of the nation. The prophets were those who fit the other descriptions. It was Daniel who stopped the mouths of lions when his enemies tricked the king of Persia into having him thrown into the lions' den (Daniel 6:22). It was his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who were thrown into an overheated furnace fire. By faith they declared that God could save them, but if He didn't they said that they still wouldn't worship the king's idol (Daniel 3:17-18). They were thrown in, only to be with the Son of God, and walked out without even the smell of smoke on them (Daniel 3:27).

^{35a} Women received back their dead by resurrection. Hebrews 11:35a Both Elijah and Elisha raised a child from the dead (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:35). Elijah raise the son of a poor widow, and Elisha raised the son of a wealthy woman sponsor. At this point the tone shifts in the middle of verse 35 to those who from the world's perspective seem to have been defeated. In the eyes of God, however, they were just as victorious as the conquerors we have been studying. They were victorious in the eternal sense.

You have seen over and over how without planning we seem to come to a certain passage that speaks to that very Sunday. We call it "Godincidences." This Sunday is the one in which we remember the martyrs who died in faith and those who are being persecuted for their faith in our day.

^{35b} Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Hebrews 11:35b Now the author is addressing the real fears of the Hebrew believers to whom he is writing. God might miraculously deliver them and show His mighty power to save their physical lives, but what if He doesn't? What if they are

Commented [PW10]: 1 Samuel 13:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

Commented [PW11]: Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)

⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Commented [PW12]: Daniel 6:22 (ESV)

²² My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm."

Commented [PW13]: Daniel 3:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.
¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Commented [PW14]: Daniel 3:27 (ESV)

²⁷ And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

Commented [PW15]: 1 Kings 17:22 (ESV)

²² And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.

Commented [PW16]: 2 Kings 4:35 (ESV)

³⁵ Then he got up again and walked once back and forth in the house, and went up and stretched himself upon him. The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

tortured in an effort to try to get them to renounce their faith in Jesus as Lord, and told they can only live if they will say that Caesar is lord? Will they give in, or will they look to a better resurrection by faith? It's a better resurrection because of the reward they will receive for giving their lives for their faith in Jesus (Revelation 14:13).

There is an unprecedented number of people being forced to make this decision today. With a sword at their neck or fuel and a match ready in the hands of their persecutors, they are asked to renounce their faith in Jesus and declare that Allah is the only god and Mohammed is his prophet. PEW research projects that one in three people of the world will be Muslim by 2050. The growth is fueled by large families and the average age being younger than most other religious groups. In North Korea simply possessing Scriptures can mean immediate execution or being worked to death. In parts of India, Hindus burn churches and force converts of Christianity to flee into the jungle or be killed. In India Christians are not only threatened by Hindus, but also by Muslims and Communists. More people live under the threat of being robbed, beaten or killed for being a Christian than at any time in history. And time and time again we hear of their willingness to die rather than renounce Jesus. Even children are surrendering their lives rather than to renounce their faith. Like these in Faith's Hall of Fame, they are looking for a better resurrection.

³⁶ *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.* Hebrews 11:36 We get some of that mocking even here, but few of us in the USA have yet to experience flogging, chains, and imprisonment. I believe the time is coming faster than we would imagine. Businesses owners are already fined and being forced to shut down.

³⁷ *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—* Hebrews 11:37 The author was probably thinking of Jeremiah who was stoned. But there were those in his own day, such as Stephen, the first New Testament martyr, stoned to death, as he forgave those who were hurling rocks at him. Before he died he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. There were probably many others like him in those days for stoning was the Jewish punishment for what they considered blasphemy.

Tradition tells us that it was Isaiah who was sawn in two. Others were killed with the sword, including John's brother James (Acts 12:2). Elijah wore a camel skin and wandered in the wilderness and so did John the Baptist (Mark 1:6). Many believers have found themselves destitute. So much for the prosperity gospel. Voice of the Martyrs and Samaritan's Purse are constantly finding persecuted believers who have been driven from their community and had their resources taken from them. They support those they can find, but there are so many who are not found. Some barely survive in nations like Pakistan under constant affliction and mistreatment.

One woman in Pakistan, Asia Bibi, has been in prison for seven years for witnessing to a coworker. Cheng Jie was just released from a prison in China after serving a two year sentence for teaching children using Christian curriculum. While in a cell with 15 other women, some sentenced to die for their crimes, she realized she had a witnessing

Commented [PW17]: Revelation 14:13 (ESV)

¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

Commented [PW18]: Acts 12:2 (ESV)

² He killed James the brother of John with the sword,

Commented [PW19]: Mark 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

opportunity. She taught the inmates hymns and the Bible stories. Because her cell had such good behavior, like Joseph of old (Genesis 39:22), the guards put her in charge of that section of the prison. When she was released, it took her small children time to get to know their mother as they were only 1 and 3 years old when she was imprisoned. Imagine serving time for being a Sunday School teacher (2 Timothy 3:12).

In Sudan right now two pastors and an aid worker are facing the death penalty for helping a wounded man from Darfur. Last month a pastor in the Philippines was resting on his porch when two Muslims road up on a motorbike and shot him to death. He left behind two young children now without a mother or father. In Laos believers are forced to pay a fine if they will not renounce their faith. Some are forced from their homes. In Russia, a new law signed by Putin effectively lumps Christians with terrorists. Many are concerned that Russia is returning to its previous stance of active persecution of believers. And I won't go into all the even more barbaric atrocities of the Middle East. Christian communities existing from 400 A.D. have recently been wiped out.

³⁸ *of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.* Hebrews 11:38 What is our crime? It's being a good citizen (Romans 13:1), loving our neighbor (Matthew 22:39), and sharing the wonderful news that our sins can be forgiven (Mark 16:15). But the world is under the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). We should expect to be mistreated. Because of our blessed heritage, we have lived in an unusual time and place where to be a follower of Christ goes mostly without persecution. Don't be surprised that that time is ending. I think God had us born in this time and place because He knows our weaknesses (Acts 17:26). He has given us opportunity so we can bless those around the world with the Gospel and help those who are suffering for their faith with prayer and finances. That is why we support mission groups like Spirit of Martyrdom.

³⁹ *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* ⁴⁰ *since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.* Hebrews 11:39-40 These heroes from the Old Testament had never seen the Messiah who would die for their sins, or the promise of the Father, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They died trusting that God would provide a way, the perfect sacrifice for sins. Now we who have received that promise should certainly be able to take the stand they did. We have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We have read what Jesus did for us. Together with them we make up the temple of the living God (Ephesians 2:19-22). New Jerusalem is not just made up of New Testament saints. It consists of the living stones who put their trust in God throughout time (1 Peter 2:5). New Jerusalem won't be missing a single stone. Together we are made perfect, the habitation of God for all eternity. The psalmists spoke of the joy of being in the house of the LORD and never wanting to leave (Psalm 84:10; 23:6). How blessed we all are to make up the eternal temple of God! The focus of our passage today is not so much on suffering as it is on the power of faith and promises of what is ours on the other side for those who act on their faith God.

Commented [PW20]: Genesis 39:22 (ESV)

²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.

Commented [PW21]: 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Commented [PW22]: Romans 13:1 (ESV)

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Commented [PW23]: Matthew 22:39 (ESV)

³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Commented [PW24]: Mark 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Commented [PW25]: 1 John 5:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Commented [PW26]: Acts 17:26 (ESV)

²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

Commented [PW27]: Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV)

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,
²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Commented [PW28]: 1 Peter 2:5 (ESV)

⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW29]: Psalm 84:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Commented [PW30]: Psalm 23:6 (ESV)

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

This chapter has given us real people, flaws and all, who listened to God and did as God directed. God commended them for obeying in faith. By faith we are saved, and by faith you too can hear and obey God and receive His commendation. That expression of faith is unique for God's calling on your life. I can't tell you what that is. It comes out of your personal relationship with Christ. I can tell you that it will not be about you. It will be about how you serve the body of Christ and bring glory to God.

Let us close in prayer asking for hearts that are willing to hear the voice of the Spirit and willing to act in faith. And let us also remember today those who are standing for their faith and suffering for Christ's sake.

Questions

- 1 Why should we read about the faithful?
- 2 What is the Gideon pattern?
- 3 Can we ask God to confirm His will?
- 4 What is Jephthah's story?
- 5 What was the declaration of faith by Daniel's friends?
- 6 Why is the sermon timing a Godincident?
- 7 Are you prepared to face verse 36 by faith?
- 8 What are our crimes?
- 9 What can do for the persecuted church?
- 10 What does verse 40 mean?