

Hebrews Chapter Eleven (vv.30-40)

True Faith Sanctifies (vv.29-30)

30 *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

Now the writer leads us on from the Red Sea to Jericho, omitting the whole wilderness experience. This is not surprising given the unbelief which characterised the nation in the wilderness years (Hebrews 3.12, 19, 4.6). If God was recording our acts of faith, how many days and years would be missing from the book?

It was by **faith** that the walls of Jericho fell down; the faith of Joshua (Joshua 5.14), the priests, the warriors and the people (Joshua 6.1-21). And what faith! God's commands in relation to the taking of Jericho appeared strange at the very least. A city had never been conquered by walking and shouting before. Until now. The commands of God appear very strange to the natural and carnal eye (e.g. Naaman). However, God's ways are very different to our ways and this can very often test our faith. Many Bible methods are being forsaken today in the preaching of the gospel because they are perceived as outdated and lacking in power. But God's ways are not our ways. 1 Corinthians 1.21: It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 1 Corinthians 9.16: For I take no special pride in the fact that I preach the gospel. I feel compelled to do so; I should be utterly miserable if I failed to preach it. (JB Phillips)

Jericho was 'compassed about seven days', once for six days and seven times on the seventh day. Not only did this demonstrate **consistency** and **constancy** of faith, it showed the **effort** that is required to live by faith. Sweat and faith go together as much as obedience and faith! Joshua and the people rose early, even at the dawning of the day, such was their fervency. That's 04.43AM in June, but 08.06AM in December!!

True Faith Saves (v.31)

31 *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

By faith Moses *joined* his people (v.25) and by faith Rahab *left* hers. **Faith is perceptive.** Rahab transferred her loyalties from her native people to those she believed to be God's people. Her faith was demonstrated not only by her actions in receiving the spies, but by her understanding of God's character and His dealings with Israel in the past, present and future (Joshua 2.9-11). *Joshua 2.11: The LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.* It would seem that Rahab's faith worked alone. All those of Jericho were privy to the same information, but only Rahab believed and 'perished not'. Faith is not popular but results in a great prize. Not only was she saved through faith, but she was adopted into the family of God and has the dignity of being recorded in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 1.5).

The writer notes Rahab's ugly past ('harlot'), but **faith is purifying.** Although sin leaves scars which remain, the sins themselves are removed by faith. It would seem that during the time she received the spies her employment had changed. She hid them beneath stalks of flax (Joshua 2.6) which were gathered, dried and spun into thread to make cloth. This sort of hard labour was associated with women of honourable character, not harlots (Proverbs 31.13)! The receiving of the spies with 'peace' shows that she was reconciled to her enemies and justified by works (James 2.25); the evidence or conclusive proof that she was justified by faith. *James 2.26: For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

True Faith Succeeds (vv.32-35a)

32 ¶ *And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:*

The writer has given a great quantity and quality of evidence. Now is the time to summarise, firstly with the successes of faith (vv.32-35a) followed by the suffering of faith (vv.35b-38). The order of those in v.32 is not chronological, but rather spiritual, emphasising firstly the judges, then the prophets. Every one of these men or groups came on the scene in a time of spiritual declension and none were in a position of distinction or dignity before God called them. **Gideon**, for example, delivered Israel from the seven year oppression of the Midianites, yet he was the least in his father's household (Judges 6.15). **David** reigned for 40 glorious years after Saul (2 Samuel 5.4), yet he was the eighth and youngest son of Jesse (1 Samuel 16.11, 17.14) and despised by his brethren (1 Samuel 17.28). Faith is not dependent on social standing or status. In fact, God often chooses the foolish and weak things of this world to confound the wise and strong (1 Corinthians 1.27). One should not miss the faith of 'the prophets'. Samuel is linked with them as he was the last of the judges (1 Samuel 7.15-17) and the first of the regular prophets (1 Samuel 3.19-20, 10.5, 10, 19.20). The prophets sustained the most persecution in the OT (see Acts 7.52) yet they boldly conveyed the mind of God to the people whether it brought condemnation, suffering, rebuke or comfort. Are we willing to declare the word of God in all its fullness even if it causes offence?

In vv.33-35a the writer turns from names to deeds to elucidate the *nine fold fruit of faith*. This is faith that risks, or dares to do something for God. Every believer has faith that **receives** (salvation in Christ). Some believers have faith that **reckons**, i.e. counts upon God to fulfil His promises. Few believers have faith that **risks!** *Lord, increase our faith.*

Would you and I have the faith to achieve some of these mighty acts in a spiritual sense today?

- Some 'subdued kingdoms', literally 'struggled against' and 'overcame' enemy kings and kingdoms by 'hard conflict', e.g. 2 Samuel 8.1. These enemies were those that sought to prevent Israel entering into and enjoying their rightful inheritance. Likewise, powerful enemies are seeking to harass and hinder our testimony for God in this world. They must be subdued! The deeds of the flesh are to be put to death (Colossians 3.5), the Devil is to be resisted (James 4.7) and the world is to be overcome (John 16.33).
- They also 'wrought **righteousness**' which includes not only living a life of personal holiness, but establishing and administering justice and righteousness. *2 Samuel 8.15: And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people.* See also Psalm 101, an ancient coronation oath. Believers today are likewise to work or labour in righteousness by faith (see Psalm 15.1-2, Acts 10.35). This means to 'walk according to the rule of God's word' and seek to be obedient to Him.
- Some 'quenched (extinguished) the violence' or 'power' of the **fire**. It is the fiery trial of persecution and suffering which puts faith to the test (1 Peter 1.7). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego literally proved this as they cooled the fire of judgment by faith (Daniel 3). They knew God was *able* to deliver them, but knew not whether He *would* (Daniel 3.17-18)! Believers today face the fiery darts of the wicked one. Let us quench these darts by taking the shield of faith and looking to God in confidence (Ephesians 6.16).

True Faith Suffers (vv.35b-38)

Faith does not always result in immediate deliverance from present trying circumstances. Faith is not always seen to be triumphant in this life. There are no great miracles, victories or preservations in these verses. Here are victims, not victors; but faith will trust God in **all** circumstances. Some of these individuals were 'tortured', the Greek word *tumpanizo* referring to a wheel-shaped instrument over which criminals were stretched before being beaten with clubs. This was preferable to them than compromising their faith, 'not accepting the deliverance' which was probably release from the torture in exchange for denying their faith (apostasy). This was refused in the light of a 'better resurrection'. They had their gaze set on a future resurrection to endless life (in contrast to those raised to die again, v.35a). These good saints esteemed the eternal interests of their souls much more highly than the present comfort of their bodies. They lived to fulfil the lusts of the spirit rather than the lusts of the flesh.

Still others experienced 'cruel mockings' (see Jeremiah 20.7) or words of reproach and ridicule. *JG Butler: Do not look for accolades from the mouths of men for living by faith, rather expect sneering, mocking and ridicule. For one who lives by faith, praise will come from God in heaven, but seldom men on earth.* If we are not sneered and scoffed at, it is because we are too worldly. The worldly estimate of all these men and women of faith was that of **worthlessness**. They were hounded and harassed, mistreated and molested, being driven from the world's society and caused to wander as outcasts in mountains and caves. The world has no place for faith in God. Whatever the world's estimation, God's assessment is different. Such is their value to Him that He declares: the world is not worthy of them! They belong to God. They are His people and destined for His eternal glory.

True Faith Summarised (vv.1-3, 39-40)

39 *And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

Here is the summary of the whole matter. God has borne witness to the faith of all these OT saints, and yet they had not even received **THE** promise; that of a coming Messiah who would bring the blessing of entry into the better heavenly country or eternal city (11.10, 13-16). This was the master plan of God. He had others (us!) to bring into blessing and something 'better' planned for our day, namely, cleansing from sin and access into the very presence of God (see 7.19, 22, 8.6, 9.23, 10.14). This was not possible until Christ came. OT saints did not enjoy these privileges during their lifetimes, but now, we are all 'made perfect' (cf. 12.23) and, following resurrection, await the final entrance into that city in a coming day. The faithful of old persevered during their lifetimes without the privileges we have in Christ. We, therefore, are without excuse.

From 'Millenium 4': That there is a distinction between the OT saints and the believers of the Church age is seen in *Hebrews 11.39-40: And these all, having obtained a good report through faith (OT saints), received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us (NT saints), that they without us should not be made perfect.* OT saints received many particular promises in their lifetime (e.g. Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Hebrews 11), but they did not receive 'the' promise, that of a coming Messiah who would bring the blessing of eternal life in a 'better heavenly country' or the 'city' (Hebrews 11.10). This was not their own fault, but rather it was in the master plan of God. He had something better planned for our day (Hebrews 7.19, 22, 8.6, 9.23), and it was His plan that they should not reach perfection (completion in the sense of their resurrected bodies and the promised city, cf. Luke 13.32) without us. God must gather together all things in Christ. The first resurrection must be completed. God must gather His family together into the heavenly fold before the Kingdom festivities commence.