

**Hebrews 11 – No 4 Verses 32 to 40 Tried and tested**

We have arrived at this last section of the chapter, and it seems like the author has run out of space. He could still tell us more about so many people, ‘What more shall I say’ (v32) he cries out almost in frustration, there are so many people he hasn’t named all of whom would be worthy of a mention.

We always have to remember that these Old Testament heroes of faith did not have the benefit of Jesus – they only had a God who they believed spoke to his people personally and gave them direction. They truly lived by faith by being ‘certain of what they did not see’ (v1). On a purely human level some of them had very little to go on but still obeyed God.

1. Look back at Hebrews 11 and reflect on some of the characters that you may have found surprising.

* Are you surprised Isaac gets a mention when the story is about a dysfunctional family?
* Is the mention of a Jericho prostitute (Rahab) quite a shock? (don’t forget to look at Matthew 1:5)
* Talk about any others in the ‘hall of faith’ that you find encouraging.

This passage is really a summary of over 2000 years of Israel’s history as the people of God. He begins with a list of six people covering the period of the Judges through to the period of the united monarchy (David). They are not in date order but they all showed bravery in the face of great challenges. Most of them are in Judges and you may like to read each of their stories – the author is trying to prompt his audience to think of memorable events.

* Gideon and his 300 men routed the massive Midianite army (Judges 7:7 to 25)
* Barak, a military leader who served under Deborah (Judges 4:8 to 16)
* Samson, despite his vices, was champion at a time of Philistine oppression (Judges 13:1f)

1. David is the only king named. His heroism against Goliath is legendary and worthy of praise. But some of his later life is marred by some wretched behaviour (e.g. Once he had Bathsheba, he put her husband Uriah into the front line of battle to get him killed and out of the way)

* Should he be mentioned in a ‘hall of faith’? What are the qualities of a person of faith?

From verse 33 the author begins to describe the actions of the faith heroes – again he seems to be focussing on the period through from the Judges to the monarchy. They ‘conquered kingdoms’, ‘administered justice’ and ‘gained what was promised’. They also ‘shut the mouth of lions’ – clearly a connection to Daniel in Babylon.

1. These actions were done for the good of God’s people as they tried to live as a nation after their desert wanderings. The ‘gain’ of v33 is the settling in the Promised Land.

* Sometimes we feel God’s promises take longer than we would like – do we doubt God’s promises when they are a long time coming (the Promised Land took 40 years)?
* Does the fact that God kept his covenant promises to the ‘hall of faith’ strengthen our faith? Try to think of OT stories where God kept his promises to his people.

In verse 34 we have another Daniel connection (‘fiery furnace’) and there were several who escaped the ‘edge of the sword’ (e.g. Elijah, Elisha and Jeremiah). There were those who ‘routed foreign armies’ (David and Gideon) and whose ‘weakness was turned to strength’.

1. There are numerous examples of where God’s people experienced the strength of God when feeling weak or oppressed. Many of us have probably experienced something similar.

* This would be a good time to share testimonies of where you have experienced God’s strength when you felt vulnerable.

Verse 35 shifts the emphasis to times where God’s people have suffered real hardship and persecution. Some experienced ‘resurrection’ (died for their faith) others accepted that torture was part of the deal. That is not our every day experience in the UK but it is in other parts of the world. Many OT characters suffered in this way and plenty of 21st century believers suffer.

1. What can we do to stand with our persecuted sisters and brothers?

* Can we pray for the persecuted church? (There is such a prayer group at Christ Church.)
* Could we consider praying for a particular nation where God’s people are suffering?
* Do we have a responsibility to support the persecuted church?

You can make many more connections with OT people who ‘were stoned’ and so on through verse 37 and 38. But the author finishes this colossal chapter with his own epilogue in verses 39 and 40.

Verse 40 reminds us that they did not experience the coming of Messiah, but one day they would see perfection when they ended up in God’s perfect heaven.

1. This reminds us that our faith will be severely limited if we only live in the present.

* Do we have a future perspective?
* Does the prospect of heavenly glory really shape our lives?