

## DAY 7: THOSE WHO EXERCISE FAITH, PART 2

Hebrews 11:23-40

**MOSES, GOD'S CHOSEN LEADER** At the time of Moses' birth, the reigning Pharaoh had issued a decree intending to limit the increasing number of Israelites in Egypt: Attending midwives were to kill every Jewish male at birth. Nevertheless, with the birth of their son, Moses' parents responded to this decree with an act of faith. Recognizing that "*he was no ordinary child*" (11:23, NIV), they risked their lives to save him. Somehow, Moses' parents understood that God had a special work for their child to do. How they were able to hide him for three months we do not know. What we do know is that their faith, not fear of consequences, controlled their conduct.

As an adult, Moses "*refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*" (11:24), and established the faith of his parents in his own life. Moved by compassion for the Hebrew plight, he rejected "*the fleeting pleasures of sin*" (11:25). By faith, Moses instituted the Passover according to God's command. Being warned of coming judgment, each household was to kill an unblemished lamb and brush some of its blood on the front doorframe. The angel of death visited Egypt, striking down the firstborn of every unmarked home. The Israelites whose houses had been sprinkled with blood were unharmed. Thus God's people were finally freed and the Passover was established.

**MOSES ENCOURAGES THE ISRAELITES** When Moses and his people arrived at the Red Sea, Pharaoh and his army were close behind. The people were terrified, angry, and faithless. But Moses' faith inspired them. He said, "*Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. ... The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent*" (Exodus 14:13-14). The Israelites believed God's promise of deliverance and started walking across the seabed while a strong wind whipped open a path. God had made their way safe. At the Lord's command, Moses again stretched out his hand and the sea returned to its place, covering the pursuing Egyptian army.

**THINK ABOUT** how Moses began with doubt in his own ability—doubt that nearly overcame his desire and calling to serve God. Moses' dependence on God gave him the endurance to stay faithful to his God-given task. He faced anticipated opposition from the Egyptians and unexpected defiance from his own people. He was disappointed, frustrated, and sometimes furious, but his faith, rather than failing, grew stronger. Like Moses, every believer must trust God's ability rather than our own inherent ability—or lack of it.

**THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN** Hebrews 11:30 refers to the generation who followed Joshua into Canaan. Their faith brought them victory at Jericho. Joshua believed God's instructions and inspired the people to march around Jericho. The Israelites risked everything, even their national reputation, as they placed their trust in God.

Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute of Jericho, is esteemed for her faith, although she comes from a pagan, idolatrous culture. The people of Jericho feared the Israelites because of their victories in battle. But, Rahab believed in the God of Israel. She hid two Israelite spies and helped them escape, asking only that her family be saved when Jericho fell to the Israelites. She staked her life on the fact that the Israelites' God had said He would save and protect His people. She was spared and married into the Hebrew nation. She became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David. So Rahab was an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

**THINK ABOUT** what it means to live by faith. In both the victory at Jericho and the deliverance of Rahab, we see God act in a way that is contrary to human reasoning. In God's economy, neither might nor strategy accomplishes His purposes, but the faithful obedience of His people does.

**GOD'S FAITHFUL SERVANTS** The list goes on to include several people who represent faith during a later period of Jewish history. For the most part, they are the names of judges, prophets, and kings. The first four are judges who served during the gradual expansion of Israelite power in Canaan.

- **Gideon** was Israel's champion against the Midianites and Amalekites. With just 300 men equipped with torches, earthenware jars, and trumpets, he threw the enemy host



into panic and won a great victory. Gideon was enlisted into God's service despite his original hesitancy to fully trust God. Nonetheless, emboldened by increased faith, he and an army too small to succeed by natural strength overcame their enemies and returned peace to Israel—all by God's power.

- **Barak** commanded the armies of the tribes of Israel and defeated Sisera, commander of the Canaanite chariot force. When the prophetess Deborah, God's chosen leader of Israel, called on Barak to fight Sisera, Barak reacted with uncertainty and then agreed to lead Israel's army into battle—but only if she would go with them.
- **Samson**, a judge of Israel, is known for his strength—and his undisciplined life. He fought single-handedly against the Philistines many times, but he was self-centered and unable to discipline his God-given strength. However, in his moment of death, he placed his faith solidly in God, praying, "*O Lord God, ... please strengthen me only this once*" (Judges 16:28). His faith was rewarded, and he is remembered because of how he died rather than how he lived.
- **Jephthah**, another judge of Israel, conquered the Ammonites. Despite a rash vow that he later regretted, Jephthah believed that God, who had given Israel victory in the past, would continue to defend His people. God honored Jephthah for his faith in spite of his mistakes.
- **David**, king of Israel, is one of the most prominent men of the Old Testament. He had many gifts and strengths, but also some great flaws. He committed adultery and plotted the murder of an innocent man, yet he acknowledged his sin and sought God's forgiveness. In addition, he faced his adversaries in battle with utter confidence that God would prevail against Israel's enemies. Like other heroes of the faith, David was not perfect, but he pleased God by his trust and readiness to comply with His will.
- The prophet **Samuel** fought against Israel's immorality and idolatry by speaking God's truth. He became a friend and adviser to Saul, the first king of Israel, and later to David.

Several other faithful servants are named, including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Jeremiah. Many people of faith were miraculously delivered, but others suffered and died for their faith. We learn that faith in God does not guarantee safety or comfort in this world.

**A GOOD REPORT** Yet despite suffering or victories, these faithful people all lived in hope. None of them received fulfillment of the greatest promise—the coming Messiah. But they had an abiding confidence that God would one day redeem them. Now the promise has been fulfilled. "*Something better for us*" (11:40) has come through the new covenant established in Christ. Forgiveness of sins is no longer symbolized by animal sacrifice, but is finalized in Jesus' death. Jesus gives us access to God and fellowship with Him.

**PERSONALIZE** this lesson. This passage reminds us that faith enables God's people to act courageously and accomplish great deeds. It shows that following Christ doesn't necessarily result in an easy life. Even giants of faith knew difficulties and trials as well as triumphs. Regardless of our circumstances, God will enable us to live victoriously. God's heroes lived and died by faith. If we would be heroes in His eyes, we, too, must live by faith, so that we "*might rise again to a better life*" (11:35) and receive the promised perfection. Which of the people described in this lesson as heroes of the faith encourage you? What do you learn about them and about God that helps you live with more courage and trust?

### REVIEW: THOSE WHO EXERCISE FAITH, PART 2

13. How has your understanding of faith been changed or strengthened? Include examples from last week's study that have added to your understanding of faith.