

## Hebrews

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Hebrews 11:30-40



Vss. 30-31

- The preacher departs here in vs. 30 from citing the faith of individuals, to citing the faith of the whole Hebrew nation. After over 40 years of wandering in the desert the Hebrews had become a tribe of nomads. In short, they had neither the means nor the resources to either scale or bring down the fortified walls of Jericho. On the face of it, God's plan for the conquest of the city that Joshua shared with the people seemed ridiculous. Only by faith would anyone take up such a plan, but it was only by faith that anyone would see the plan succeed.
- One of the reasons why some scholars believe Hebrews may have been co-written by Aquila and Priscilla together is the way two women are included in this list of heroes of the faith: Sarah and Rahab. Here Rahab is cited because she alone in the city of Jericho believed in the God of Israel. They had all heard of the great things the God of Israel did to free the Hebrews, but she alone had faith, and it was a faith that could have cost her her life. Rahab and her family alone were spared when the city fell and she was taken in by the Jews. It is remarkable that she is included in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:25) and cited also by James as an example to follow (James 2:25).

Vss. 32-34

- Like any good preacher, the preacher to the Hebrews is conscious of time. Time will not permit him from going on with citation after citation. He could talk of Gideon (Judges 6-7). He could speak of Barak (Judges 4-5) who faced impossible odds against the Canaanites, but stood firm and saw a great victory. He could tell of Sampson, who was always fighting alone against overwhelming numbers. He could recount the story of Jephthah (Judges 11-12) who was an outlaw. When there was no one else to stand against the Ammonites the people recalled him from exile and he won a great victory. And of course the preacher could point to David at any number of points in the shepherd king's life.
- Finally he turns to Samuel and the prophets. The stories of the prophets all melt into a single narrative. They heard the call of God and went out alone to speak a painful truth. Jewish tradition by the time of Jesus said that death was the price for their faithfulness. Death at the hands of their own people.

- Vss. 33-34 sum up the previous verses. Those he had cited had won kingdoms, demonstrated righteousness which earned promises from God. He remembered Daniel and how the lion's mouths were shut (Daniel 6:18, 23). He remembered the three Hebrew boys who were cast into the furnace but were not consumed (Daniel 3:19-28).

#### Vss. 35-40

- Over these verses the preacher bounces around a bit, not only in Old Testament history but also in the time between the testaments, the time of the Maccabees. In 2 Kings 4 we have the story of women receiving back their dead. 2 Chronicles 24 tells of how the prophet Zechariah was stoned to death. Jewish tradition says that Jeremiah was killed the same way and by his own people. Likewise, tradition says that under King Manasseh, Isaiah was put to death by being sawn in two.
- During the time between the testaments, around 170 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes became king in Syria. His plans to invade Egypt were thwarted by Rome, so to soothe his wounded pride and vent his rage, he turned his armies on an unprepared Jerusalem. Ancient historians say some 80,000 Jews were killed and another 10,000 sold into slavery. But worst of all was his violation of the Temple. He stripped it of all its holy relics and turned it into a site of pagan worship with all the immorality that went with it. The Syrian king's treatment of anyone who dissented was quick and brutal. But yet the faith of the Hebrews stayed strong and in time a man named Judas Maccabaeus and his friends and family escaped to the hills and caves until they were strong enough to attack and overthrow the Syrians.
- And the one thing that all of these people had in common, from the Maccabees all the back to Joshua, is that though they "gained approval" by their faith, all of them died long before God's promise of the Messiah was given, long before "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us". All of these lived by faith in such a way that they were preparing the way of the Lord. The preacher to the Hebrews is saying to his congregation and to us, "See what great faith and sacrifice it took for you and I to be able to have faith! Would you not join with them so that by faith you ensure a future that you cannot see for the benefit of those still waiting on the Lord's return?"