

This week's passage is a continuation of the timeline of faith from last week's passage.

➤ Review Hebrews 11:1–16.


1. As the author of Hebrews began the recap of the history of the faithful, how did he explain what faith is? (v. 1)

What did the author say that those who come to God must do to please him? (v. 6)

➤ Read Hebrews 11:17–31.

2. Today's passage continues the story of Abraham. Killing Isaac, the child by whom the promises were to be fulfilled, would seem counterintuitive at best. Though God's commands seemed to contradict his promises, how did Abraham reason that the promises could still be true even if he obeyed and sacrificed his son? (v. 19) (If you would like to read more about this episode in Abraham's life, see Genesis 22:1–18.)

3. Isaac and his son Jacob were faithful to pass on to the next generations God's blessing "in regard to their future" (v. 20) and the future of all of Abraham's descendants. In verse 22 Jacob's son Joseph showed that he believed not only in a general blessing on Abraham's descendants (Deut. 1:8), but in the details of God's promises.

a. What did Joseph do? (v. 22; * Gen. 50:24–25)

b. What specific part of the promise do his instructions show he believed? (Gen. 15:13–14)

"Where, then, did Abraham get the idea that if he killed his son God would raise him from the grave? First, he must have realized that God's promise required that Isaac be alive. If Isaac had to be alive and yet had to be killed, then God had to raise him from the dead. The logic makes sense, but surely there is something more. Remember the circumstances of Isaac's conception and birth, when Sarah was far beyond child-bearing age, all in a manner promised and predicted and produced by the power of God. All of this surely made clear to Abraham that God has power over life, and if he has power over life then he has power over death as well."¹

4. Moses' parents, who were slaves in Egypt, did not foresee all that God was going to do through their son. How did the faith of Moses' parents affect how they were able to react to the king of Egypt? (v. 23) (If you would like to read more about "the king's edict" [v. 23] and Moses' birth, see Exodus 1:8-9, 22; 2:1-10.)

5. After Moses was "grown up" (v. 24) it became evident to him that he could not identify with both the enslaved Hebrew people and the court of Pharaoh. Why did Moses decide to identify with his Hebrew family instead of the Egyptian royalty? (vv. 25-27)

6. Obeying God, the Hebrews fled from their Egyptian oppressors to what appeared to be to a dead end, with their backs to the Red Sea. What happened to the Egyptians when they tried to imitate the Hebrews and pass through the sea without faith in the God who provided the way? (v. 29) (If you would like to read more about this event, see Exodus 14:5-31.)

Sake of Christ

In verse 26, the author makes the surprising statement that Moses "regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ." This does not mean that Moses confessed Jesus Christ over 1,300 years before the Christ's coming. It likely means that Christ "identified in some way with the people of God in O[ld] T[estament] times"² and that "Moses suffered reproach just as Christ and his followers did centuries later."³

7. The last two of the "by faith" references recall the episode of the fall of Jericho (Josh. 6:1-21). God's people no doubt made a ridiculous sight as they obeyed God's instructions to march around the walls of the city and blow ram's horns for seven days. The Hebrews' actions didn't make any sense militarily, but their faithful obedience ensured that God alone received the glory for the victory. When has your obedience to God looked foolish to others?
8. The author of Hebrews reserves the honor of the last individual story of faith for Rahab, a prostitute and resident of Jericho. Risking her life, Rahab showed hospitality to the Hebrew spies, even though she lived amongst "those who were disobedient" (v. 31). What did Rahab have to say about her faith in the God of the Hebrews? (Josh. 2:8-11) (To read the full story of Rahab, see Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25; Mt. 1:5-6a.)

➤ Read Hebrews 11:32–40.

9. To save time, the author quickly lists six Old Testament people whose names and stories would be familiar to his readers.

Below are the passages where these stories can be found. Choose one person to read about, and note where you see faith working itself out in his life.

- Gideon (also called Jerub-Baal) (For a reminder you might want to skim: Judges 6–7; 8:22–28)
- Barak (Judges 4:1–16)
- Samson (Judges 13–16)
- Jephthah (Judges 11)
- David (1 Sam. 16–19; 26; 2 Sam. 2; 5; 7; 11–12; Ps. 32; Acts 13:22)
- Samuel (1 Samuel 1; 3; 7:2–17)

10. Verses 33 to 35a don't give names, but continue to tell of the faith that "the ancients were commended for" (11:2).

- a. Do you recognize any of the stories from the Old Testament? If so, which one inspires you the most?
- b. Why?

11. Up to verse 35, the author's list of the faithful shows us a victorious, against-all-odds kind of faith. If the chapter left off there, it might leave us with a misleading impression that the life of faith equals worldly success and shields one from suffering.

- a. What suffering had the readers of this letter already experienced? (Heb. 10:32–34)

b. What kind of suffering did the ancients endure? (vv. 35b–38)

c. Does this suffering demonstrate God’s disapproval? (v. 39; Rom. 8:35–37)

12. In verses 39–40, the writer says that the ancients would have to wait for the fulfillment of all of God’s promises and “that only together with us would they be made perfect” (“perfect” meaning “complete”).

a. Why? (v. 40)

b. How does this encourage you regarding God’s purposes for his people?

13. The author of Hebrews knew that the believers he was writing to needed to be reminded of testimonies of the faithful that had gone before them and to remember that even the ancients could not foresee God’s plans before they obeyed in faith. What testimonies of faith—whether one from Hebrews 11 or another believer’s testimony—encourage you to persevere in obedience when you can’t see all that God has planned? Take the time now to write, draw, or sing about this encouraging testimony.

*📖 For further study

¹ Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2006), 47.

² Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol.12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 126.

³ J. Ramsey Michaels, *Hebrews*, in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009), 429.