

THE TRIUMPHS AND TRIALS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVERS

TEXT: HEBREWS 11:32-40

Introduction:

1. Last week we looked at the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, David, and Samuel (11:32).
2. Verse 33 is a continuation, and this verse is obviously referring to their great exploits.
3. Second Samuel 8:1 says, "And after this it came to pass that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them" (cf. Heb. 11:33).
4. John Wesley said, "Faith overcomes all impediments, effects the greatest things; attains to the very best; and inverts, by its miraculous power the very course of nature."

I. OUT OF WEAKNESS THEY WERE MADE STRONG

1. Joshua, David, and other military leaders "subdued kingdoms" - "through faith" (11:33).
2. They "wrought righteousness" (11:33). This would refer to the great prophets like Elijah and Elisha, as well as great kings like Hezekiah and Josiah.
3. They "obtained promises" (11:33). There are thousands of them in the Bible. Right before he died, Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh. 23:14).
4. Even after the death of Joshua, when Israel went into terrible backsliding and apostasy, God continued to keep His promises, and to graciously give them more promises. Consider the promise he gave to Gideon (Judges 7:9-15).
5. By faith, they "stopped the mouths of lions" (11:33). This would refer to the incredible story of Daniel in the lion's den (Dan. 6:22).
6. It would also include young David, who told King Saul, "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (I Sam. 17:34-37).

7. Judges 14:6 says that the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon Samson, and he rent a lion "as he would have rent a kid."
8. By faith these men of faith "quenched the violence of fire" (11:34). This refers to the miraculous deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 3:27).
9. They "escaped the edge of the sword" (11:34). David escaped frequent attacks from King Saul. Elijah escaped the murderous Queen Jezebel. Elisha escaped from the king of Syria, and many other of God's servants were providentially protected by the hand of God.
10. "Out of weakness were made strong" (11:34). We think of Moses, who said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10).
11. We think of Gideon, who said, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15).
12. Of course, this applies to all believers -- "Out of weakness were made strong" (11:34). First Corinthians 1:27 says, "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."
13. "Waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (11:34). Moses said, "How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?" (Deut. 32:30).
14. And Joshua told the children of Israel, "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you" (Joshua 23:10).
15. "Women received their dead raised to life again" (Heb. 11:35a). We think of the widow woman from Zarephath, in the days of Elijah, recorded in I Kings 17:17-24; and the Shunammite woman in the time of Elisha (II Kings 4:17-37).

II. THEY ENDURED TERRIBLE PERSECUTION

1. "And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection" (11:35b). There are some interesting contrasts here. The widow woman's son, and the Shunammite woman's son were raised from the dead. However, those that were martyred for their faith obtained "a better resurrection" (11:35b).
2. If deliverance meant renouncing their faith, they wouldn't do it, even if it meant being tortured to death (11:35b, 36).

3. Another contrast: some believers "escaped the edge of the sword" (11:34), but others "were slain with the sword" (11:37).
4. In Acts 12, God allowed wicked King Herod to kill James with the sword. But the Lord sent an angel to rescue Peter. A friend of mine heard a wicked liberal minister accuse God of being unfair. But it is wrong to question God.
5. Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).
6. "Bonds and imprisonment" (11:36b). Many believers, like the prophet Jeremiah, were unjustly imprisoned.
7. "They were stoned" (11:37). Second Chronicles 24:21 says Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest was stoned to death at the commandment of King Joash.
8. Our Lord referred to this crime in Matthew 23:35, when He said to the scribes and Pharisees, "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar."
9. "They were sawn asunder" (Heb. 11:37). A horrible way to die! Tradition has it that Isaiah the prophet was killed this way by wicked King Manasseh.
10. It is interesting to note that they "were tempted" (11:37) is right between "they were sawn asunder" and they "were slain with the sword." They were tempted by the devil and this was often as painful as being tortured by men.
11. "They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (11:37, 38). They did not enjoy the comforts others enjoyed. They were pursued by wicked oppressors. They had to hide in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves, but they would deny their Lord.
12. "Of whom the world was not worthy" (11:38).
13. "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise" (11:39). They died before they received the fulfillment of the promise.
14. They did not live long enough to see the advent of the promised Messiah. That is what our Lord meant when He said in Luke 10:24, "For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

III. GOD HAS PROVIDED SOMETHING BETTER FOR US (11:40).

1. "Better" is the key word in this epistle, found thirteen times (cf. 11:16, 35; 12:24).

2. God in His providence has arranged that they should not be made perfect apart from us (11:40).
3. The Old Testament believers did not enjoy the privileges we enjoy. They lived on the other side of the cross.
4. They did not have a complete Bible, or a local church.
5. They did enjoy the permanent filling of the Holy Spirit, for Jesus said in John 14:17, "For he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."
6. We are not only on the other side of the cross, we are on the other side of Pentecost.
7. The Old Testament believers anticipated the first coming of Christ, whereas we look for the second coming of Christ.
8. Their spirits have already been made perfect, according to Hebrews 12:23. But their bodies will not be resurrected until the second coming of Christ.

CONCLUSION:

1. Though we today have many advantages over these Old Testament believers, we often fall short when it comes to living by faith.
2. Let us be encouraged by their example.
3. Let us be like the apostles, who said to our Lord, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5).
4. And the Lord responded to their prayer by saying, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (Luke 17:6).