

Hebrews 11:32-40

In Hebrews 11, the author of Hebrews characterizes some key aspects of the faith of the OT witnesses (**Heb 11:1**) in connection with which God testified of the invisible objects of hope to the saints of old (**Heb 11:2**). Those saints in turn, responded with persevering faith and became “a cloud of witnesses” to us (**Heb 12:1**).

After the brief, one-verse summaries in **Heb 11:4–7**, the author continues with some longer summaries of the Patriarchs, and Moses and the Israelites. The author then turns to multiple examples of other OT witnesses but again without much detail. They all obtained a good testimony through faith and persevered in that faith but none of them received the promise because it was God’s purpose for them not to be made perfect ‘apart from us’ through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Summary

In Hebrews 11:32-40, the author of Hebrews concludes his presentation of the OT saints as witnesses who point to those unseen, hoped for realities which have been brought to definitive, inaugurated fulfillment by Christ.

1. Conquering Testimony vv. 32-36

The author mentions a host of examples of witness and their testimony by their deeds even as he protests he does not have time to deal with them in detail (**11:32**). First, he mentions four judges: one king then the prophets (**11:32**). Though the book of judges shows the flaws in some of those mentioned here, yet it also shows how they persevered through faith and gave testimony to the promise of God, who worked in and through their lives to advance His plan of redemption for His people. Secondly, the author describes what these people through faith accomplished in the political and military sphere (**11:33-34**). The author concludes by mentioning those who ‘out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle (Gideon), ‘turned to flight the armies of the aliens’ (Samson). Although the author has just mentioned some who escaped death, he presents the ultimate expression of faithful testimony and persevering faith in the lives of those who ‘... received their dead raised to life again’ (**11:35**) ‘Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection’ (**11:36**). The author of Hebrews makes it clear, however, that a share in the resurrection to eternal life is possible only because of the better sacrifice of Christ (**Heb 9:21-23**), which inaugurates the better covenant (**Heb 7:22**).

2. Suffering Testimony vv. 36-38

The author of Hebrews piles up images of alienation, persecution, imprisonment and death (**Heb 11:36-38**) to show his readers the extent to which their experience so far has been similar to that of believers in former generations (cf. **Heb 10:32-34, 13:3**), although none has yet been forced to shed his or her blood (**Heb 12:4**).

Despite the world's evaluation and dismissal of such people, ‘the world was not worthy of them’ (**Heb 11:38**). By this means the author encourages those he addresses to persevere, trusting in God and his promises (**Heb 10:35-39; 12:1-13**) and endure the different degrees of exclusion from the world in which they live and even punishment for their faith. Likewise, it is so for us as believers today.

3. Jointly Perfected vv. 39-40

It is part of the point the author of Hebrews is making that neither the Patriarchs, Moses, nor any other OT saint actually inherited the final form of the promised inheritance (“something better”; **11:39–40**) but only a shadowy foretaste. Nevertheless the OT saints were indeed heirs of the same promise as we are, so that we too should heed their testimony and “become imitators of those who through persevering faith were heirs of the promises” (**Heb 6:12; cf. Heb 6:13–18; 7:6; 11:17, 33**). The author shows us clearly that God’s OT revelation was oriented all along to the stage of worldwide fulfillment inaugurated by Christ (whose day Abraham saw **John 8:56**). The NT makes the same point (**Rom 4:23–25; Gal 3:8-9; 1 Pet 1:10–12**). Believers must persevere in faith; trusting in God and his promise in order to obtain the rich reward of eternal life.

4. Overall Conclusion

Hebrews 11 presents the OT saints as witnesses who point to those unseen, hoped for realities which have been brought to definitive, inaugurated fulfillment by Christ. The world to come is a central subject of the book of Hebrews but the author shows that this theme is also the main, if evolving, focal point of the OT Scriptures. The OT saints, reviewed in Heb 11, are presented as witnesses to various aspects of this future oriented reality to which believers have now come in Christ. The author’s presentation of the OT saints as witnesses to the ultimate historical realities makes his case in the epistle incredibly strong. Given that his audience are being tempted to turn back to old covenant sacrifices, the author points to the old covenant saints themselves as witnesses to an exclusive faith in the new covenant Mediator, Jesus—not faith in the ultimately “weak and useless” (**Heb 7:18**) shadowy types “of the good things to come” (**Heb 10:1; cf. 9:11**). The author of Hebrews is reiterating in Heb 11, what Jesus had said to the Jews (**John 5:46–47**). Moses himself had considered “the reproach of Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt” (**Heb 11:26**), but his spiritual descendants preferred the empty rites of Levitical ceremony in place of that sacrifice of Christ to which Levi and Aaron pointed and in which they themselves had put their faith. Levi, Moses, Aaron, and all the OT saints are witness to Christ by their confession of faith and the events of their lives under God’s sovereign direction in both revelatory word and action.