

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Hebrews 11: 32-40

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Hebrews chapter 11. We will read verses 32-40 today.

The author of Hebrews enumerates the great men of faith from the Old Testament as witnesses of faith, from Abel, Enoch, and Noah in ancient times, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph in the patriarchal age, then to Moses in the era of the Law, along with the Israelites who followed Moses out of Egypt, and finally including Rahab, the Gentile harlot. The author's intention is not to glorify the great deeds they accomplished through faith but to highlight their journey toward hope through faith. Although the path of faith is often hidden and unseen and frequently involves suffering, this all the more emphasizes that faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"

The figures previously listed were all individuals revered and well-known among the Israelites, and they bore a beautiful testimony of faith. Next, the author adopts a different approach, presenting the people and events of faith in a more concise and direct manner—first mentioning some names, then recounting certain deeds—allowing readers to see that examples of faith are everywhere and can be found at any time. Perhaps they are even around you in your daily life, and if you observe with the eyes of faith, you will see these examples. Today, you too are walking on the path of faith, and perhaps you may also become an example for others. Understanding the author's burden, we now follow his line of thought and quickly read through his account.

Verse 32: "And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:"

"And what more shall I say?" The accounts of the great men of faith previously mentioned are already sufficient, and if they were to be recounted one by one, there would not be enough time. Therefore, from the time the Israelites entered the Promised Land, marking the beginning of the period of the judges, and continuing through the era of the kings, the author merely lists names. The individuals he mentions are not necessarily universally recognized as heroes of faith; some even lived lives marked by failure, yet they each accomplished at least one deed in faith that was worth remembering. This serves as an encouragement to us today—though we may still be weak, failing, and incomplete, as long as we look to God in faith, we too can accomplish works of faith. Now, we will briefly go over the names mentioned by the author.

Gideon, whose deeds are recorded in Judges 6 to 8, was originally a minor figure from the tribe of Manasseh, yet through faith, he was able to lead 300 warriors to defeat the entire Midianite army, bringing forty years of peace to Israel.

Barak, whose deeds are recorded in Judges 4 and 5, lived during the time when the prophetess Deborah was judging Israel. Deborah summoned Barak to lead the congregation of Israel into battle against the enemy army, but Barak insisted that Deborah go with him; otherwise, he would not go to war. From a human perspective, this might seem like an act of weakness and cowardice, but in God's eyes, it was a demonstration of respect for the prophet and valuing God's word above his own ability and reputation. This is why the author specifically mentions his name.

Samson, whose deeds are recorded in Judges 13 to 16, was a judge whose personal life was extremely corrupt. He was a Nazirite, born with divine strength, and the source of this strength was his hair. Yet he foolishly lusted after women and revealed his secret, leading to his capture by the Philistines, who gouged out his eyes. He seemed to be a tragic figure. In the end, when the Philistines were offering sacrifices to their god and brought Samson out to mock him before the crowd, his hair had already grown back. At that moment, he prayed to God for strength one last time, then grasped the two central pillars of the building and brought it down, killing the Philistine rulers along with himself. In his death, he killed more enemies

than he had in his life. Though Samson's life was marked by weakness and failure, his final act of faith was remembered by God.

Jephthah, whose deeds are recorded in Judges 11 to 12, had perhaps the most unfavorable background among all the judges. He was the son of a harlot and was rejected by his own brothers, forcing him to leave home and become a bandit, eventually rising to the position of a leader. Later, when the Ammonites invaded, he rose up to fight for Israel and became a judge over the nation. This further proves that as long as there is faith, God's grace can transform an unworthy sinner into a vessel in His hand, accomplishing works of faith.

David, the greatest king of Israel, demonstrated faith from his youth when he faced the giant Goliath, defeating him with a sling and a stone. Though he was anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel, he patiently waited in faith for God's timing. Twice he had the opportunity to kill King Saul, yet he refused to do so, showing reverence for God's anointed one. After Saul's death, David succeeded him, waging battles in every direction, and through faith, he secured the inheritance that God had promised to Israel, establishing the kingdom of Israel.

Samuel was a man who changed an era; he was the last judge and also a prophet. Under God's guidance, he first anointed Saul as king and later anointed David, ushering in the era of kings. During the time of the monarchy, the king governed Israel, the priests assisted the people in offering sacrifices to God, and the prophets conveyed God's will to the nation. The king, the priest, and the prophet became the three pillars of Israelite society. Since both kingship and priesthood were hereditary, when kings became incompetent and priests became corrupt, the prophets became the most crucial pillar in keeping Israel faithful to God.

During the time of the kings, God raised up many prophets to speak on His behalf, so the author mentions the work of the prophets as a whole. Later, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ came to the earth as King, Priest, and Prophet. The Old Testament finds its fulfillment in Christ, and Christ inaugurated the New Testament, establishing the church through the apostles. Christ is the head of the church, and within the church, He reigns through the Holy Spirit, fulfilling His kingly office.

After Christ's resurrection and ascension, He intercedes for us in the heavenly tabernacle, fulfilling His role as the great High Priest. Christ Himself is the Word of God, and the revelation concerning Him has been completed and is contained in the Bible we hold in our hands. The office of prophets in the New Testament differs from that in the Old Testament; they no longer prophesy about future events but rightly divide the Word of God, helping people understand and obey it.

Next, in verses 33-38, the author presents many acts of faith without mentioning names, as these events may repeatedly occur, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Some of these are victorious and glorious, but most involve suffering, even martyrdom. God leads people differently in various circumstances, and each person must follow God within their own situation.

Verse 33-34: “who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

These two verses mention a total of nine events, which can be divided into three groups, each containing three events. The first group describes victories through faith: they subdued kingdoms, they worked righteousness for God, and they obtained promises from Him. There are many examples of this during the period of the judges and the kings, so we will not go into detail on each one.

The second group describes those who were preserved by God in times of great distress. God shut the mouths of lions, as seen when Daniel was thrown into the lions' den yet remained unharmed. God quenched the fury of the flames, as seen when Daniel's three friends were cast into the fiery furnace but emerged without even the smell of fire on them. God delivered them from the edge of the sword, as seen in how David was repeatedly saved by God when pursued by Saul.

The third group consists of those whom God transformed through faith. The weak became strong, they displayed courage in battle, and they routed foreign armies.

There are many examples of this in the Old Testament, but more importantly, this can also happen in our lives today. We are all weak, unable to overcome sin, our flesh, and our desires. But in faith, whenever we are weak, then we are strong. We can show courage in the battle against the flesh, resisting and overcoming Satan's temptations and trials.

Verse 35: "Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection."

Women received their dead raised to life again, as seen when Elijah and Elisha both brought a widow's son back to life. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release. There were many such examples in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament as well. The author here also seems to be speaking prophetically. Nearly all of the apostles in the early church were eventually martyred. When Christians faced widespread persecution, they could have been released if they denied their faith, but every apostle who was martyred chose to lay down their life for the Lord. They sought to obtain a better resurrection.

This is exactly what Philippians 3:10-11 speaks of: "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." According to the original text, the resurrection Paul speaks of here should be translated as a "better resurrection," or a more outstanding and surpassing resurrection. Because they looked forward in hope to that which was better, they were willing to endure all kinds of unjust suffering, even martyrdom, in faith. Faith was the path by which they reached their hope.

Verse 36-38: "Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins,

being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.”

This passage describes how those who follow God in faith will encounter various trials—this was true in the Old Testament, and it remains the same in the New Testament. Some endured mockings, scourgings, chains, imprisonments, and all kinds of hardships. When a person walks the path of faith, Satan is unwilling to let them continue and will stir up afflictions to make them abandon their faith. Mockery, insults, beatings, and imprisonment are common, and many times, God permits them so that our faith may be tested and become even more precious.

"Stoned to death, sawn in two, tempted, slain with the sword"—when people fall into tribulation, sometimes God does not deliver them. Stephen, for example, was stoned to death, but before his death, he saw a glorious vision. Acts 7:55-56 says, "But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'" Though others could not see it, Stephen himself saw that the Jesus who was seated at the right hand of the Father stood up to welcome him. As for being sawn in two, tradition holds that the prophet Isaiah was placed between two wooden planks and sawn apart. And as for being tempted and slain by the sword, the number is beyond count—such as John the Baptist and the apostle James, among many others.

All kinds of trials and threats of death could not stop those who walked the path of faith. They followed God's leading and lived lives full of suffering, wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins. Paul may be the best example—traveling across Gentile lands for the sake of preaching the gospel and establishing churches. Dressed in simple clothing, working with his own hands when there was no provision, enduring poverty, hardship, and persecution—wherever he was needed, he went. In deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the earth, he lived as a pilgrim, without a fixed dwelling place. Truly, the world was not worthy of such people.

These laborers for God, who wandered and endured suffering, were people whom the world was not worthy to have. On one hand, they rejected the temptations and

bribes of the world, willingly forsaking comfort and enjoyment for God's sake. On the other hand, the world despised them, for they had no fame, no wealth, no status, and no power—truly, they were counted as nothing in the eyes of the world. Yet from God's perspective, they were His precious treasures, the apple of His eye. The world was utterly unworthy of them.

The author, after describing numerous acts of faith in verses 33-38, ultimately presents the most fitting conclusion: these people are those whom the world is not worthy to have. Paul gives a similar description in 1 Corinthians 4:11-13, saying, “To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.” Paul’s conclusion is the same—the world sees them as filth, as the refuse of all things, yet in reality, they are those whom the world is unworthy to have.

Dear brothers and sisters, this chapter is the greatest passage in the Bible concerning faith, and its conclusion is that those who have faith are people of whom the world is not worthy. Paul even said that they are regarded as filth and the scum of all things. These heroes of faith were completely set apart from the world. Think about it—if the author of Hebrews and Paul were to come to today’s church and see how closely the church has aligned itself with worldly authorities, in complete contradiction to their teachings on faith, would they still acknowledge this as the church of God? This is a question worth pondering. True faith must lead us to live a life set apart from the world, wholly submitted to God, and untainted by the world. May we follow the example of these heroes of faith, hold fast to the pure faith, and walk on the path that pleases God until the day we see the Lord.

Verse 39: "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,"

These heroes of faith all walked the path of faith. Their lives bore a beautiful testimony to their faith, and they themselves received the testimony of being

pleasing to God. Yet, when they died, they had not yet received what was promised by God. Just as verse 13 of this chapter says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." They all lived as sojourners and pilgrims on this earth, looking from afar toward that better homeland, seeing the city that God was preparing, yet they did not receive it in their lifetime.

Verse 40: "God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us."

"For God had provided something better for us." The Greek word for "better" appears a total of fifteen times in the New Testament, and thirteen of those are in the book of Hebrews. One could say that "better" is a signature word of Hebrews. The author uses "better" to describe many things: a better hope, a better covenant, better promises, a better sacrifice, a better inheritance, a better homeland, a better resurrection, and better things—everything connected to Christ is better. For the Old Testament was but a shadow, while the New Testament is the reality. How then could the saints of the New Testament return to the Old? The heroes of faith in the past walked their entire lives in faith, yet they did not receive what was promised, for the better things were what God had prepared for us. Without us, they could not be made perfect.

The journey of faith is passed down from generation to generation. The saints of the past have already borne a beautiful testimony and have entered into their rest, yet they have not received what was promised, for it is not yet complete. Why is it not complete? Because we are not yet ready. What God desires is a corporate expression, and without us, it is incomplete. Therefore, they must patiently wait.

In that better heavenly homeland, God is building a city—a city that includes the saints of the Old Testament as well as the saints of the New Testament. All the overcomers who have gone before us are already there, watching. They are like spectators at a great game, cheering us on, encouraging us to press forward and be

overcomers. When the full number of overcomers is complete, this game will come to an end. Now, we have come to the end of the age, and they are eagerly awaiting the city that God is building. But without us, they cannot be made perfect. Perhaps we are the final group of overcomers. Dear brothers and sisters, let us press on together.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for showing us that the journey of faith is the path that everyone who follows God must go through. On one hand, we are each individually accountable to God, but on the other hand, what You desire is a corporate expression. The heroes of faith in the Old Testament and the apostles of the early church have all finished their race, yet they have not received what was promised. They are waiting for us, the final group of overcomers, to be wrought by the Holy Spirit into living stones, to become the materials for the building of the spiritual house. Lord, help us to press forward courageously in faith. I also ask that You prepare for me spiritual companions in the church, that we may pursue together, grow together, and walk the path of faith together. Bless the church where I am, and I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.