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Faith Through Trials

11: 32-40

Faith through trials DIG: Why have so many people in our world been persecuted for their faith? Should believers be surprised when trials come? Why or why not? In verses 39-40, when we glorify God with our faith in Him, what is the result of our faith? How was Gideon's faith demonstrated? What was the source of Samson's courage? How was David faithful? Why do you think the Ruach ha-Kodesh selected Samuel as an example of faith? What gave courage to the righteous of the TaNaKh who suffered for their faith? Even though none of them received what had been promised, what was the something better that God had planned for them and for us?

REFLECT: Think about the others in verse 36 who didn't receive miracles or liberation for their faith. Instead they suffered and even died. Why does it make sense to hold onto your faith even if it doesn't bring you deliverance from your suffering? How does your faith help you to stand firm in a very evil world?



For a Jew to become a believer in the first century it was always costly. It often cost him his friends, family, synagogue privileges, job, social status, and community respect. Some of the Jews on the edge of **salvation** receiving this letter to the **Hebrews** were tempted to return to Jerusalem and the old Levitical sacrificial system. Such hesitant Jews were being shown in this chapter that **ADONAI's faithful** followers were not like them. When **the righteous of the TaNaKh** chose **God**, **they** were fully committed because **they** had a right view of who **YHVH** is. Right **faith** is based on right theology. **Faith believes** and obeys **God**

because **faith** knows that **He** cannot lie, cannot make a mistake, cannot do wrong, cannot be defeated and cannot be surpassed. A **God** like this can be **trusted**. In fact, with a **God** like this, it doesn't make any sense to do anything else *but* **trust Him**. Unbelief, of course, is blind to this sort of **God** and therefore sees **trust** and obedience as **foolish**. **For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (First Corinthians 1:18)**. There is never enough proof for unbelief. It walks by sight.³⁴⁷ **But those who are righteous will live their lives by faith (Hebrews 10:38 CJB quoting Habakkuk 2:4 CJB)**.

Countless others: There were far too many heroes of **faith** for the writer to deal with in detail. **And what more shall I say? It would take too long to recount all the stories of faith (11:32a)**. So the author singles out the three best-known **judges**; a general, **David**, who is also the best-known king; **Samuel** the judge-prophet; and other unnamed **prophets**.

Gideon (Judges 6:11 to 8:35), a judge and military leader, had assembled 32,000 men to fight the Midianites and the Amalekites. To keep **Isra'el** from thinking the coming victory was won by her own power, **Ha'Shem** cut her forces down to 10,000 and then to a mere 300. Those 300 were chosen solely on the basis of how they drank water from a spring. The enemy, by contrast, were **as thick as locusts; their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore (Judges 7:12)**. However, **Gideon's** men were outfitted only with trumpets and with pitchers with torches inside. With even fewer men and less effort than used to defeat Jericho, the entire heathen enemy army was routed (**Judges 7:16-22**). Only a fool would have attempted such a courageous approach to battle apart from **God's** direction and power. From the perspective of **faith**, however, only a fool would *not* attempt such a thing when he has **the LORD's** direction and power (**11:32b**).³⁴⁸

Barak (Judges 4-5): is unknown in Scripture outside the brief account in **Judges 4-5** and the mention of **his** name in **Hebrews 12:32**. We are told nothing of **his** background or training. Through **Deborah, the judge, Ha'Shem** promised that **Isra'el** would be delivered from Jabin, the Canaanite king, whose great commander, Sisera, had a large, powerful army that boasted 900 chariots. According to **the LORD's** instruction, **Deborah** asked **Barak** to assemble an **Israelite** army of only 10,000 men, taken from two tribes, Naphtali and Zebulun. The rest of the tribes were not asked to participate, apparently to show **Isra'el**, and the Canaanites, that **YHVH** could be victorious with only a token army from a small part of **Isra'el**. **Barak** assembled **his** men on Mount Tabor and charged Sisera as **God** had commanded **him**. **At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword (Judges 4:15)**. **Barak** and **his** men no doubt fought bravely, but the success of the campaign was **ADONAI's**. Otherwise, **Isra'el** would have been

slaughtered. **Barak** was told in advance that the glory of the victory would not be **his**. Not only did **God** fight the battle for **His people**, but **He** allowed **a woman, Deborah**, to kill Sisera (**Judges 4:9**), so that **Barak** would have even less cause for claiming the credit for **himself**.

Barak believed **God's** promise of victory and was not the least concerned that **a woman** would get the credit for slaying Sisera. In fact, **he** insisted that **Deborah** go to battle with **him** (**Judges 4:8**). **He** wanted **her** spiritual, not **her** military, help. **She** was **the LORD's** anointed in those days and **Barak** wanted **the LORD's** anointed with **him**. The fact that **he** wanted **her** along was another indication of **his trust** in **ADONAI**. As **God's prophetess**, **she** was of greater value to **him** than **his** 10,000 men. **Barak** was not concerned about Sisera's power because **he** had **God's** power. By such courageous **faith** **he conquered kingdoms** (**11:32b**).³⁴⁹

Jephthah preceded Sampson as judge of **Isra'el**, and **his** responsibility was to subdue the Ammonites, one of **Isra'el's** many enemies. Despite **his** foolish vow (**Judges 11:30-31**), **Jephthah's trust** was in **ADONAI** (**Judges 29** and **32**). Even people of **faith** make mistakes, and **God** honored **Jephthah** for **his faith** (**11:32b**).

Samson (**Judges 13-16**): is not most remembered for **his faith**, but for **his** physical strength and personal gullibility. In many ways **he** was immature and self-centered, unable to cope with the miraculous power of **Ha'Shem** had given **him**. However, **he** was a man of **faith**. **He** never doubted that **God** was the source of **his** power, of which **his** hair was only a symbol.

Samson was a judge of **Isra'el** and was given the special task of opposing the Philistines, who then ruled over **Isra'el**. **Samson's** own motives for fighting the Philistines were often mixed, but **he** knew **he** was doing **ADONAI's** will in **ADONAI's** power. From **his** early adulthood **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** had been with **him**, and we are told specifically that it **the Ruach** that strengthened **him** in **his** amazing one-man battles (**Judges 13:25, 14:19, 15:14, 16:28**).

Samson knew that **Ha'Shem** had called **him** and that **Ha'Shem** had empowered **him** to **take the lead in delivering Isra'el from the hands of the Philistines** (**Judges 13:5**). **God** had promised **him** that power and **Samson trusted God** for that power. **He** faced the Philistines not in the courage of **his** physical prowess but in the courage of **faith**. We are inclined to judge **Samson** (no pun intended) by **his** weakness. But **YHVH** commends **him** for **his faith** (**11:32b**).³⁵⁰

David stands out as one of the obviously great men of the TaNaKh. **His trust** in **ADONAI** began when **he** was a boy, tending sheep, killing lions and bears, and talking on Goliath with a slingshot. When **David** faced Goliath **he** was supremely confident that **Ha'Shem** would give **him** the power to defeat the Philistine giant. While the rest of **Isra'el**, including King Sha'ul and David's own brothers, were trembling in fear, **David** boldly walked out to Goliath and announced: **This day ADONAI will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head . . . and the whole world will know that there is a God in Isra'el (First Samuel 17:46)**. It seems that it never occurred to **David** not to **trust** in the **LORD**. Like the other heroes of **faith**, **David** wasn't perfect, nevertheless **YHVH** called **him a man after My own heart, he will do everything I want him to do (Acts 13:22)**. **He** pleased **God** because of the courage of **his faith** to **trust Him** and do **His will (11:32b)**.

Samuel is added to this list of warriors, though **he** was not a warrior. But he fought a battle equal to any that soldiers face. **His** greatest foes were idolatry and immorality. **He** had to stand up in the middle of a polluted society (sounds familiar doesn't it) and fearlessly proclaim **God's** truth. **His** severest opponents frequently were not the Philistines, the Amorites, or the Ammonites - but **his** own people. It often takes more courage to stand up against our friends than against our enemies. Social pressure can be more frightening than military power. This **prophet** of **God**, who was also **Isra'el's** last **judge**, began **ministering before the LORD - a boy wearing a linen ephod (First Samuel 2:18)**, and continued to be **faithful** to **ADONAI** throughout **his** lifetime. **He** ruled in **faith** and prophesied **(11:32b)**.

The **prophets** are unnamed except for **Samuel**. As the writer had mentioned earlier that **it would take too long to recount all the stories of faith (11:32)**, **he** does not have time to go into detail about the many other **faithful** people of the TaNaKh, or to even mention them all by name. These prophets, just like **Gideon**, **Barak**, and the others risked everything for **the LORD**. They cheerfully, courageously, and confidently accepted **Ha'Shem's** commands and faced whatever opposition came along. **They** did not fight on the battlefields, but **they** had many victories in **ADONAI** because **they believed** in **Him**; **they** conquered through the courage of **faith (11:32b)**.³⁵¹

The exploits of **11:33-34** are general and refer collectively to the persons above. **Through faith they conquered** (Greek: *katagonizomai* meaning literally *to fight down*, thus, *to struggle against* or *overcome* and signifies a desperate contest) **kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions** (quoting **Dani'el 6:22**), **quenched the fury of the flames (Dani'el 1:6, 3:1-30)**, Elijah and Elisha

were among those who **escaped the edge of the sword (First Kings 17:8-24; Second Kings 6:31ff); whose weakness was turned into strength, and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. God specializes in turning weakness into strengths. He** wants to take your greatest **weakness** and transform it.

Continuing in Suffering: Not all those of **faith** experienced miraculous deliverance. Although widow of Tzarfath and the **women** of Shunem **received back their dead, raised to life again** through Elijah and Elisha's ministries many did not. But **from the Apocrypha we learn how in the days of the Maccabees, the ninety-year-old Torah-teacher El'azar willingly chose to die 'al Kiddush Ha'Shem ("to sanctify God's name as in Acts 7:59-60), rather than eat pork and appear publically to have forsaken Judaism - he was among those who were tortured, refusing deliverance, choosing death** instead, **so that they might gain an even better resurrection, an immortal one.**³⁵² The word **tortured** (Greek: *tumpanizo* meaning *torture with the tumpanum*, a wheel-shaped instrument, over which criminals were stretched and then horribly beaten with clubs). **Some faced jeers, flogging, and even chains and imprisonment** as seen in **Jeremiah 20:2, 37:15 and 38:6 (11:35-36).**

They were put to death by stoning (11:37a). This was a well-established method of execution as seen in the **stoning** of **Achan** after the fall of Jericho (**Joshua 7:24-26**). **Zechariah**, one of the **righteous of the TaNaKh**, a **faithful man**, was also **stoned to death (Second Chronicles 24:20-22)**. It was, in fact, the means of carrying out the **death** penalty in Isra'el. However about the time **Jesus** was born, the Romans took away the right of the Jews to use their method of execution and instead implemented the cross, the Roman method of execution, in its place. That's why **Jesus** was executed on the cross and not **stoned** to death.

They were sawed in two (11:37b). This was a commonly known form of **torturing people to death**, and **according to the first century book, The Ascension of Isaiah, the prophet Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) was killed in this way. The Talmud gives this description, Rabbi Shim'on ben-'Azzai said, "I found a genealogy scroll in Yerushalayim and it is written there that King M'nasheh (Manasseh) killed Yesha'yahu."** Raba said, **"Before killing him, M'nasheh staged a trial and said, 'For men shall not see me and live' (Exodus 33:20); but you say, 'I saw Adonai sitting on a throne, high and lifted up' (Isaiah 6:1)." Yesha'yahu replied, "It is well known that you do not receive what people tell you; so if I answer your accusations, I will only turn you into a willful murderer." So Yesha'yahu said a Name [of God, thought of as having supernatural power] and was swallowed up by a cedar. However, the**

cedar was brought and sawed in two; and when the saw reached Yesha'yahu's mouth he died; [this was his punishment] for having said: I live among a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5) (Yevamot 49b).³⁵³ Like Abel, however, he continues to speak to us even after **death**.

And the sword killed them because **they** would not deny **their faith (11:37c)**. Great **faith** conquers great fear. But we need to remember that more believers have been **killed** and are being **killed** than in any time in the history of **the world**.

The faithful went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground (11:37d-38). The description fits Elijah (**First Kings 19:9**), as well as the pious Jews who fled from the persecution of Antiochus IV in the time of the Maccabees (First Maccabees 2:38). **Yochanan the Immerser wore camel skins (Matthew 3:4)** and led a similar life, while **Yeshua Himself had no home to call His own (Luke 9:58)**. In other words, **the righteous of the TaNaKh** were utterly unrewarded and unappreciated during their lifetime; the other side of that coin is seen when our author writes that **the world was not worthy of them.**³⁵⁴

The world is not worthy of having such **people** in its midst, just as **these people** did not deserve **the sufferings they** received. For its inflicting **the suffering, the world** will be judged and punished; for **their** enduring **the suffering** the **faithful** will be resurrected and rewarded. **They** knew with Rabbi Sha'ul that **the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed to us (Romans 8:18)**, and they looked forward with **Peter** to **an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven (First Peter 1:4)**. God does not promise us deliverance from all suffering. **Yeshua** said: **If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you (John 15:20).**³⁵⁵

Counting on Salvation: True **faith** has the courage to count on **salvation**. **They** knew very little about the nature of the time or the means of **God's salvation**. But **they** knew it was coming, and this was the basis of **their trust**. **They** had an abiding confidence that one day **ADONAI** would do the necessary thing to redeem **them** and reward **them**. **These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised (11:39)**, that is, **they** only foresaw that **it** would be fulfilled and died in **faith** since **God had planned something better for us**. **ADONAI** provided this **something better for us** that is for those under the B'rit Chadashah, which is why **only together with us would they be made perfect (11:40)**. That is, not until after the cross could **their salvation** be

completed, or **made perfect**. Until the shedding of **Messiah's** more superior **blood** (**to see link click Bz - The Better Tabernacle Purified with Better Blood**), no salvation was complete, no matter how great the **faith the righteous of the TaNaKh** may have had. **Their salvation** was based on what **Christ** would do, ours is based on what **Christ** has done. **Their faith** looked forward to a future promise; ours looks back to a historical fact.³⁵⁶

As we learn from this chapter, the life of **faith** isn't always easy. Many of the heroes of **faith** suffered persecution, deprivation, or martyrdom. Knowing this, do not be surprised when trials come your way, but expect them as a normal part of the life of **faith**. Mediate on the following verses to prepare yourself to face your next trial: **Acts 14:22; Romans 8:18; First Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 1:29-30; James 1:2-4; First Peter 2:20-21 and 5:10.**³⁵⁷