

**THE HEROES OF FAITH**  
**HEBREWS 11:32-38**  
**(Parts One and Two)**

**JULY 22, 2012**

One of the basic realities of the Christian life is that faith in God offers no guarantee of comfort in this world. The Lord Jesus Himself confirmed this when He said to His disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation.” (John 16:33) The Apostle Paul told his new converts the very same thing; “. . . through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)

Clearly this is one of the lessons that our author wishes his readers to learn as well. In this concluding section of Hebrews 11, he reminds them that there were faithful followers of the Lord who “escaped the edge of the sword” (v. 34); but there were also some who “were slain by the sword” (v. 37). There were some “who conquered kingdoms” (v. 33); but there were also those “who wandered about . . . in caves and holes in the ground.” (v. 38) Yet they were all characterized by faith, and for that reason, they are all a source of great encouragement for us today.

This is a passage in which our author is invoking many of the great names and faithful deeds of Old Testament saints. The list of their accomplishments moves from the victories that they achieved (vv. 32-35a) to the sufferings they endured (vv. 35b-38). Because of the significance of this two-fold emphasis, we will only be focusing today upon part one (vv. 32-35a). In our next study, we shall continue with part two (vv. 35b-38).

**A. Through Faith, Some Accomplished Great Victories (vv. 32-35a)**

1. They conquered kingdoms (v. 33). This would include those who are specifically named in verse 32. **Gideon** was Israel’s champion against the Midianites (Judges 6); **Barak** was Deborah’s right-hand man who defeated the chariot forces of the Canaanites (Judges 4-5). **Samson** championed Israel’s cause against the Philistines in his own single-handed way (Judges 14-16). **Jephthah** led the tribes east of the Jordan to victory over the Ammonites (Judges 11); **David** is the only king mentioned by name, whose record would have been known to all (1 Samuel 16 – 2 Samuel 24); **Samuel** was also responsible in leading the people of God to a decisive victory over the Philistines, one which proved to be a turning point in the nation’s history (1 Sam. 7:3-14).

2. They enforced justice (v. 33). As Israel’s last Judge, **Samuel** fulfilled this important role (1 Sam. 7:15-17). So did **David**, as Israel’s greatest king (2 Sam. 8:15; cf. Jer. 23:5-6)

3. They obtained promises (v. 33). Many of these Old Testament saints saw answers to specific promises that God had given along the way. The promises made to **Abraham**, for example, were partly fulfilled, as his descendants multiplied (v. 12) and lived in the land of promise (v. 9, 34b). But they still waited in faith for “the promise” of Christ’s coming (v. 39; vv. 13-16).

4. They stopped the mouths of lions (v. 33). This is most likely a reference to **Daniel**, thrown into the lions’ den for his refusal to bow before the Persian king. For his faithfulness to Yahweh, God not only delivered him from the lions, but promoted him to serve the Persian empire faithfully for almost 70 years. (Daniel 6:16-18)

5. They quenched the power of fire (v. 34). This would be a reference to Daniel’s three friends, **Shadrach**, **Meshach** and **Abednego**, who refused to fall down and worship Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image. For their faithfulness, they were thrown into the fiery furnace and preserved throughout the night by the angel of the Lord (Dan. 3:8-30).

6. They escaped the edge of the sword (v. 34). Three notable prophets were so spared: **Elijah** was delivered from the hand of Jezebel (1 Kings 19:2); **Elisha** from her son, Jehoram (2 Kings 6:31); **Jeremiah** from Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:16-19).

7. They received back their dead by resurrection (v. 35a). Because of **Elijah’s** faith, the widow of Zarephath’s son was raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24); because of **Elisha’s** faith, the Shunammite’s son was also raised from the dead (2 Kings 4:18-37).

## **B. Through Faith, Some Endured Great Sufferings (vv. 35b-38)**

1. They were tortured, chained, and imprisoned (vv. 35b-36). This is especially reminiscent of the treatment of the prophet **Jeremiah**, during the course of his difficult ministry; he was (a) beaten and placed in wooden stocks (Jer. 20:1-6); (b) beaten again, imprisoned, and then thrown into a vaulted cell within a dungeon (Jer. 37:11-21); (c) cast into a deep well, where he sank down into the mud and would have starved to death had he not been rescued by his friends (Jer. 38:1-6); (d) forced into Egyptian exile, where he would eventually die (Jer. 46-51). All this – for faithfully preaching a message of God’s impending judgment upon a sinful nation.

2. They were stoned to death (v. 37). The Lord Jesus Himself confirmed the sad fact that Jerusalem had a reputation for stoning the Lord’s messengers: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it . . .” (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34) One specific incident that our Lord cites as an example is the stoning of **Zechariah**, at the command of Joash, King of Judah (2 Chron. 24:20-22; Matt. 23:33-35).

3. The were sawn in two (v. 37). According to early Jewish and Christian tradition, this was the fate of **Isaiah** during the persecution of Manasseh, King of Judah (The Lives of the Prophets 1.1; Martyrdom of Isaiah 5:1-14).

4. They were killed by the sword (v. 37). Unlike Jeremiah, who was spared the sword (Jer. 26:16-19), the prophet **Uriah** was executed by the sword (Jer. 26:20-23). Likewise, **Elijah** was spared (1 Kings 19:2), but other prophets during his day were not (1 Kings 19:10; 18:4).

5. They were destitute and wandered about in mountains and holes in the ground (v. 38). This plight was the plight of many of the prophets who were forced into hiding. The most notable example would be **Elijah** and 100 of his fellow prophets during the wicked reign of Ahaz and Jezebel. (1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:9)

