

**THE VINDICATION OF FAITH:
THE FULFILLMENT OF “THE” PROMISE
HEBREWS 11:39-40**

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As we have been noting throughout our study of Hebrews 11, Biblical faith consists of a persistent hope in the promises of God. It is an assurance and a conviction that something in the future will actually come to pass because God has said that He will bring it to pass.

We have also noted that our author’s goal throughout this chapter is to illustrate what this faith looks like by presenting numerous examples from the lives of Old Testament saints. Although many saw answers to particular promises during their earthly pilgrimage (v. 33), some only saw faint glimpses of the things promised (v. 13). All were anticipating a greater future hope (v. 16); none were privileged to witness the fulfillment of “the” promise (v. 39), which was the promise of the coming Messiah.

But now this promise has been fulfilled. With the coming of Christ and the once-for-all-nature of His atoning sacrifice, God has secured perfection for us – and for them: “With us in mind, God has made a perfect plan, that only in company with us should they reach perfection.” (v. 40; NEB translation)

Here then is an all important text that affirms the unity of the people of God in both the Old and New Testament eras: “Apart from us they should not be made perfect.” But it also points to a fundamental difference between them and us: “God has provided something *better* for us . . .” Both perspectives need to be held in balance.

1. The Unity of Old Testament and New Testament believers. Contrary to popular dispensational teaching, there is but one people of God. In the Old Testament era, they were the believing remnant of Israel; in the New Testament era, they are members of the Body of Christ, which is the church. Salvation concerns the *whole* people of God from both eras. Our author’s point, therefore, is that as long as the people of God in Old Testament times were without the people of God in New Testament times, it was impossible for them to experience the *fullness* of salvation. Only the once-for-all-nature of Christ’s sacrifice provides the basis for the eternal “perfection” of us – and of them. Therefore, the saints of the Old Testament, along with those of this era, are now portrayed as “the righteous made perfect” (Heb. 12:22-24), which was the goal of Christ’s work (Heb. 10:14).

2. The Difference Between Old Testament and New Testament Believers. One of the central teachings of the book of Hebrews is that the Law of Moses, with its priesthood, covenant, sacrifices, and tabernacle was but “a shadow of the good things to come . . .” The “true form of these realities” is found in Christ and His final, once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 10:1-2). This “better plan,” which God has provided for “us” (Christians in the NT era) embraces a better hope (7:19), better promises (7:22), a better covenant (8:6), better sacrifices (9:23), and a better and eternal possession (10:34). The centerpiece of this better plan, which God provided for “us” as opposed to “them,” is the new covenant (8:1-13).

As our eternal High Priest, the Lord Jesus is the mediator of this covenant (8:16; 9:15; 12:24), one which is founded on better promises (8:6), which are cited in 8:8-12. Our author then draws the following conclusion: “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he (the LORD) has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear” (v. 13). As a result, the people of God in this era, unlike the people of God in the Old Testament era, can no longer define their relationship with God in terms of the Mosaic Law. The rest of the New Testament amply supports this notion that new covenant Christians are no longer under the law of Moses (Rom. 6:14-15; 7:1-6; 2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15-4:7; Col. 2:16-17), but rather the law of Christ (Note in particular Paul’s own testimony to this effect in 1 Cor. 9:19-21; Cf. Gal. 6:2; Rom. 13:8-10).