

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 39 February 6, 2022 Entering the Promised Land Hebrews 11: 30-31

New Introduction

Well, it has been a long, long time since we examined the book of Hebrews in Sunday School class. The last time we met was February 23, 2020 – over 2 years ago. With a 2 year absence, it is obvious that much of what we covered during our (up to that point) 4 ½ years of study (9/13/15 – 2/23/20) from Hebrews 1:1 to 11:29, will be distant memories for almost everyone here, including me, and some of course, were not here during those first 4 ½ years.

There is much theological truth and great value in Hebrews, but I can't take the time to do a meaningful review of what was covered, but you do have notes – (lots of them) – and for those who don't I can provide copies of the handouts for you. I wasn't sure over the past 2 years if I would even have the opportunity or ability to finish our study of Hebrews. But quite recently, October / November of 2021 – I decided I had to attempt to get it done, and I am hoping to complete it within 6 months, when it will be time to turn the class back over to Ken Baird. But I also don't want to rush through it, as there is great value in studying this book, especially the last 3 chapters. We are currently ¾ of the way through chapter 11, and I believe we have realized (concluded) that there is really only 1 hero of the faith here – the Lord Jesus Christ!

But, rather than conduct a lengthy review, instead, I found a great paragraph in a book I read in the summer of 2021, and the following quote from that book will serve as a mini-review:

“For the present, we need to know that the unknown writer of Hebrews is writing to a group of Hebrew Christians. He is sure that the vast majority of them truly belong to Christ. But he is concerned that some in the community have been carried along by the enthusiasm of the group and may not have experienced the reality of God's grace in their lives. The community is under great pressure. Their Jewish friends and family are anything but enthusiastic that they have left Judaism to become followers of Christ, and are continually pointing out the things they have left behind; the sacrificial system, the temple, the priesthood of Israel. These Christians are experiencing the pressures and persecutions of Gentile society as well. In addition to these external pressures, there are the internal battles that all Christians fight against sin in their lives and in the lives of others. Christians may be forgiven, but they are far from perfect, and it is easy for them to become disillusioned with the weakness of their lives and their status on the margins of society. Some are tempted to turn back and to try to find an easier way.”¹

¹ Gary Inrig, True North, Discover House, 2002, Pg. 71

This is where we have been for the 4 ½ years in Hebrews over 2 years ago. So, we find ourselves, still battling the pandemic that interrupted our course of study and for a time, church itself, at about the 75% position in Hebrews 11, at vv. 30-31, so let's begin.

Original Introduction

In Hebrews 11:29-30, there is a span of 40 years of OT history. Much of what took place in that 40 years has already been mentioned by the author of Hebrews in Heb. 3:7-18, and he points out that it was generally a time of unbelief for many who called themselves God's people. Certainly Moses was faithful during that time, his one unfortunate act of recorded sinfulness found in Numbers 20:2-13, the punishment for which was his (& his brother, Aaron's) exclusion from entering the promised land (v. 12).²

We find in Deut. 34:9 the statement that Joshua would now lead the people into the Land to conquer its people and take possession of the Land that God had promised them. Deuteronomy ends with vv. 10-12, probably written by Joshua (likely all of chapter 34) as he took on the mantle of leadership during this critical stage of Israel's history. Deuteronomy 31:1-8 presents Joshua to the people as the one God had chosen to lead them into Canaan, and in 31:23, Moses officially commissioned Joshua to be the new leader. Of special note in this passage is 31:24-29 – Wow! What a final rebuke of these people, and these were the ones who had not died during the 40 years in the wilderness – the younger generation!³

In Numbers 27:12-23, Moses describes how Joshua was made to be the leader of succession after Moses dies – God selected him. And now, as we move into the book of Joshua, and Hebrews 11:30, Joshua, though unnamed in the Hebrews account at 11:30 (but notice Heb. 4:8-10), certainly the account of Jericho bears out the focus on the faith of Joshua in leading the people to obey God's commands.

Jericho – The Impregnable Fortress Heb. 11:30; Joshua 1,4,5

Back in Numbers 13:28, ten of the twelve spies reported *“The people who dwell in the cities are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large.”* This is a general report, but certainly it describes Jericho, the first city the people of Israel would encounter when they entered Canaan – the first physical obstacle to attempt to block their ownership of the Land which God had promised and led them to. We will reserve chapter 2 for our discussion of Rahab, the next subject of Hebrews, but for now, let's read chapter 1 of Joshua, as God commissions Joshua for the daunting task facing him and the people.

² Aaron's death – Numbers 20:22-29; Moses' death – Deut. 34:1-8

³ Cf. Numbers 14:31-35,38

In Joshua 3 & 4, we have an interesting preparatory account of crossing the Jordan River on dry land – both a parallel to the Red Sea crossing 40 years earlier, and a symbolic reminder to the people that God had not forsaken Him or become weak in power. As God had opened the Red Sea to give them safe passage out Egypt, He now opens the Jordan River for safe passage into the Land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their descendants. Note some particular verses here: 3:5-10,13; 4:1-7,14,19-24.

Then, in chapter 5, an oversight is corrected – see 5:2-9 (at Gilgal – per 4:20, where the memorial stones were set up). Three more things should be noticed in chapter 5, just prior to the attack on Jericho. The first is found in vv. 10-11 – they kept the Passover. Second, v. 12 – the manna ceased the day after they ate of the land’s produce. It had sustained them from Exodus 16 (just short of a week after the Red Sea crossing) for 40 years! Now they were in the Land, and could be sustained by the Land itself (no less at the hand of God of course, just not now a miraculous thing - Now it became providential). Third, Joshua 5:13-15 – this is the greatest of the 3 things to notice. This is a clear Christophany, an OT pre-incarnate appearance of the second Person of the Trinity – Christ. What an incredibly encouraging thing for God to give to Joshua as he prepares to conquer Jericho! This Christophanic appearance goes beyond these 3 verses and into 6:5, as this mysterious Person presents Joshua with the strangest battle plan ever conceived – read vv. 1-5. How do we know this was the pre-incarnate Christ? From 5:14 & 15 – Joshua worshipped Him, and was not rebuked for it as an angel would have done (cf. Rev. 19:9-10); and v. 15 provides an outright reference to Moses at the burning bush from Ex. 3:5-6. Joshua was on holy ground!

So the purpose of this Divine visitor coming to Joshua is to show him how they would take Jericho and who would really take Jericho on their behalf – God Himself! God had promised a number of times to be with Joshua (cf. Joshua 1:5,9; Deut. 31:6-8; 31:23); and Joshua, especially after this encounter with “The Commander of the Lord’s army”, is now faithfully (even more) convinced that God was indeed with him and with Israel.

So Joshua’s faith in God’s promises is highlighted in the account of chapter 6, which ends once again affirming (in v. 27) that God was with Joshua and had enriched His name throughout the Land.

The account of the actual battle is found in Joshua 6:1-27. Let’s read this with only brief comments.

Obviously, the faith of the people is also in sight here, as we consider, what army would do this without any record of grumbling as they did obediently that which must have seemed weird in the extreme? Yet, they followed Joshua’s leadership, trusting God for the victory. The only report of any unfaithful person in the army comes up in chapter 7, when a defeat at the next city – Ai – causes Joshua to question God, and he finds out that a soldier, Achan, had broken God’s command (cf. Josh. 6:18-19), and Achan’s confession in 7:19-21 is an example of exactly what God wants to rid Israel of

– sinful and corrupt behaviour which belies a lack of faith and trust in God, and he is made a very graphic example for the people – Joshua 7:24-26. Israel had to be made to understand that faith must be displayed by obedience. And so, as Hebrews 11:30 tells us, *“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for 7 days.”*

Rahab’s Faith

Hebrews 11:31; Joshua 2; James 2:25

We had skipped past Joshua 2 to look at the actual defeat of Jericho, but now, Hebrews 11:31 bids us to examine the account of Rahab’s faith. Again, this is a very important passage of Scripture, as it highlights how faith in God spares those who are ungodly, even Gentiles, (Romans 4:5) from God’s wrath and destruction.

Rahab was a prostitute, so our assumption must be, first of all, that her standing before her encounter with the two Israelite spies was as an unsaved sinner, as we all are before Christ saves us. Gregg Allison comments on James 2:25 and Rahab’s faith: “James’s second illustration of saving faith is Rahab: “And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?” (James 2:25). How can one know that the faith of this prostitute was not just some last-ditch effort to save her own life, an example of the false faith that James is combatting in this passage? Bogus faith would not have resulted in such a courageous deed, but because she rescued the Israelite spies, her good work enables one to see her saving faith. As the letter to the Hebrews, in its chapter on faith, highlights, “By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies” Heb. 11:31). The conclusion that James draws from this illustration is that “faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26). Rahab’s faith was not a bogus faith or dead faith; rather, it was a genuine faith – a saving faith – that showed itself to be such by her works.”⁴

So, her faith was put on display by what she did in our Joshua 2 account. She put her own life at risk once she realised that the king of Jericho knew that spies from Israel had entered the city (v. 2). Anticipating that they may have been spotted going into her house, she had already hidden them in stalks of flax (v. 4,6) on her roof. When the king’s representative came to her (v. 3), her famous reply – vv. 4,5 – sends them off in the wrong direction. Her “white” lie is counted as faith because by it, she spares the spies and sends her own people on a ‘wild goose chase’. Had they been discovered, she along with them would surely have been executed.

So, her act of faith is thus exhibited. Now, in vv. 8-11, the real evidence of the initial appearance of (or granting of her faith by God) is expressed. With it, a verification of God’s purpose as expressed in Exodus 14:30-31. Here is some primary evidence that shows why God did what He did in redeeming Israel, and how He did it – not just at the Red Sea, but the utter decimation of Pharaoh and Egypt’s ‘gods’ in the ten plagues. The story had (over 40 years plus in the past) come to those in Jericho, and

⁴ Gregg Allison, Roman Catholic Theology and Practice, Crossway, 2014, p. 439

note her point in v. 11! This was the moment of her initial faith described – accomplished and now applied!

She also mentions (v. 10b) the account of Numbers 21:21-26 & 31-35. These reported victories of Israel and the fact that God in fact, went before them to bring them victory had reached Jericho (and almost certainly, all other Canaanite cities), and so the people of the Land were being prepared to fear God's army. Note Deut. 31:3-6, as God tells Moses that, though he would not personally enter the Land, Joshua would lead a victorious army into it, just as God had given them victory over Sihon and Og. When the two spies return from Jericho, notice their report – Joshua 2:24!

Rahab's faith and subsequent actions in saving the spies, also results in her specific request – also an expression of faith, because she knew her city was doomed (2:14). Unless they responded to her with compassion and mercy, she too was doomed. But, the record shows their promise to spare her and the conditions are pronounced in vv. 15-24. Her physical salvation is recorded in Joshua 6:17,22-23. This was of course, physical salvation, but her spiritual salvation cannot be doubted, based on Heb. 11:31 and James 2:25. But, also, please take note of Matthew 1:5.

Here, in the first NT genealogical list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, we find a surprising name, a Gentile woman who figures prominently in the list. See vv. 5-6. Here, Rahab's husband is named (also spared at Jericho), Salmon, and he is the father of Boaz, Rahab's son, who married Ruth (Ruth 4:19- 22), who gave birth to Obed, who fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David! Astounding! What providence!

Rahab's faith saves her and her family, but her salvation is also instrumental, as she, by her act of God-given faith becomes a link in the chain of faithful people leading up to David the king, and through him, to the Christ! God is amazing and so is His grace and superintendence of all things.