

Faith: trusting God in the face of opposition, part 2 (Hebrews 11:28–31)

Seven cases of living “by faith” in Hebrews 11:23–31 teach us what it means to trust God in the face of challenges that seem to make living by faith difficult. Though they could not see God, these people lived without doubt that He is real. They responded in obedience to what they knew about God and His will, and thus are listed as those who lived “by faith.”

1. ***Contrary government edict (11:23)***

2. ***Prestige and security (11:24–26)***

3. ***Threat of death (11:27)***

4. ***Unprecedented judgment (11:28)***

See Exodus 11 – 13.

Moses acted in faith, first because this final judgment was a change in the pattern. The first nine judgments either explicitly or implicitly excluded Israel. Second, Moses believed both the judgment and God’s provision for deliverance.

True faith trusts God’s Word, even when it breaks a pattern we suppose should be there. True faith obeys. True faith also believes that judgment begins with the house of God (cf. 1 Peter 4:17). God will judge an unbelieving world, but He also disciplines His children (cf. Ch. 12).

5. ***Physical impossibility (11:29)***

See Exodus 14.

Moses clearly had faith: encouraging the people not to fear and parting the sea at God’s command. The people sort of had faith. They had enough faith to pass through the sea, but only afterwards did they fear the LORD and put their trust in Him (Exodus 14:31). In the face of a physical impossibility Moses and the people believed.

Nevertheless it is clear that some faith is not perfect, and some faith is not saving faith. (Cf. Mark 9:24; Luke 8:13). Faith also is not presumptuous boldness. Faith is a response to what God has said, not courage to do what you want to happen.

6. ***Overwhelming odds (11:30)***

See Joshua 5:13 – 6:21. Cf. Numbers 13:33.

Despite a fortified city, “powerful men of strength within it” (Joshua 6:2), and a humanly illogical battle plan, Joshua and the people obeyed God, showing that they believed God. By faith, the wall of Jericho fell.

Faith trusts God to do what He says, and obeys His commands, whatever human logic might say. Faith trusts God to do what He says He will do, and does not presume that He will do anything that we might ask, even if He is capable of it.

7. ***Contrary allegiance (11:31)***

See Joshua 2; 6:22–25.

All the inhabitants of Jericho heard and believed the reports of what God had done for Israel, but only Rahab obeyed. Rahab’s actions showed true faith, the conviction of her testimony (Joshua 2:9–11). Her faith required a change of allegiance. She chose being on the side of the LORD, rather than her own people.

True faith in Christ results in a new citizenship, a new allegiance to a heavenly commonwealth. It brings the believer into God’s family. But faith, to be true, saving faith, is more than hearing and believing facts; it must include a response to those facts.

Rahab is also the first mention in the list of a believing Gentile, one of the nations to be blessed. Though none in this chapter received what was promised (11:39), God’s faithfulness is reassured. These are all people who lived by faith, who pleased God, believing He exists and rewards those who seek Him. Despite challenges, trials, temptations, human impossibilities, they believed God and demonstrated it by their actions. This is the faith by which every follower of Jesus Christ lives.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- If you had been an Israelite observing the first nine plagues on Egypt, how would you have responded when Moses warned about the tenth plague and about the needed preparation which every Israelite family had to make?
- What are examples of presumptuous boldness, masquerading as faith? How do we guard against it?
- What “overwhelming odds” do believers today face? Are there clear biblical commands about living in such situations?
- In what ways does faith require a “contrary allegiance” in our increasingly anti-Christian western culture?