

HEBREWS

Chapters 11-12

Let us open our Bibles to the Book of Faith: Hebrews, chapter 11. There, we have a list of a *cloud of witnesses*; these were men and women, very much like us, who were brought from the ordinary to the extraordinary because of their strong belief in God. For them, God was real and ever present. They took His Words at face value. His promises were authentic. Like the way we consider our money, when you go to a store and present the merchant with a \$5 bill, you know he cannot refuse it; it is the law. More sure than any money, are these pledges of God. They knew that and they lived by them. Their faith stood as a light house in the dark of the night and this account invites us to see how these people lived so heroically in the face of impossible situations. It is easy; it is clear. Yes, there are many difficult passages in the Bible, but not in this one.

We have already considered Enoch and Noah; these lived in an evil environment and in the midst of hatred and immorality. It was so vile that God had to destroy the world they lived in, by the flood, but they kept their holiness and stood out strong. Their environment did not phase their faith. Their blessings came from above, not from down here. Along with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, these had such a powerful and close relationship with God. They knew they were only sojourners, just passing by in this planet for a little time, because they took hold of the offer of faith which told them about heaven and eternity. This is how they knew where they were heading, and today, they are there. This is why we have this chapter in our Bible; it will bring us to ponder questions about our eternal future and the grip this current world has on our lives. It asks questions like: Have the things of this world overtaken our lives; how much space are we giving God in a given day?

For all these believers listed here, who are really so much like us, or began like us, it was the reality of eternity that took over their lives. This, in turn, helped them succeed so well in dealing with earthly things.

We remember that faith is the means through which we have all come to first see the wonders of God. It was the means through which we came to believe. It is written that *by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8-9)* It is this same faith which sustains us through our journeys. At first, faith showed us salvation, but its work had then just begun; it is still the means through which God wants to show us other wonders of life.

The same feeling of surprise and admiration that you experienced the day of your salvation, God is willing to renew this marvel, day after day. This is the message of **Hebrews 11**. Faith is not only a pointer; it is a blessing that we live by. It is a gift of the Spirit, mentioned among the other gifts in **Galatians 5** and it is free.

Let us go to the text and see how the author now mentions these other plain and everyday people, whom God has lifted so high. We begin with two individuals who are found on their death beds: Jacob and Joseph. The writer could have easily chosen among so many other situations in the lives of both these men, to bring out their faith, especially with Joseph who lived such a faithful life. Yet, He chose the last moments of their lives, but there is a reason.

Hebrews 11: 21, 22

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

In both cases, we are brought to the time when they were at the door of death and what did they do?

We read that they worshipped! They were not scared in the face of the unknown for the simple reason that it was not unknown to them at all. They knew where they were going; Jacob knew that, one more time, he was going to be face to face with God, so He worshipped him. What powerful verses, these are!

But these are not the only ones who worshipped at death; this seems to be the mark of great men of faith. Job, after he heard of the death of his children, also worshipped God. But how can you worship in time of such distress?

They all knew that evil does not proceed from God. They all knew that God suffered with them. Job knew, so well, that God stood on the other side of death; his faith told him so.

Job 1:20

Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

He did not despair, he did not surrender, he worshiped. He knew how to separate the evil of this world from the surety and unmovable love of God.

David as well, when he lost his son, he worshipped God. After mourning for a long time, “*So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped...* (2Samuel 12:20)

Faith will bring us right through the tunnel of the darkest hour, to the presence of God.

Why, in the world, did Joseph want to have his bones buried in Israel?

Surely, not because of the same reason people today want to be buried in Israel; these believe that they will be among the first to resurrect at the coming of the Messiah. Joseph’s reasons are nobler; at the time he was at the height of his career, he was second to Pharaoh, like some kind of prime minister. He had all the riches he desired. His two children, Ephraim and Manasseh must have been among the most spoiled of the Egyptian youths, but we read that he *made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones*. He reminded all Israel that Egypt was not the place; it was not the real one. He reminded them of the promises of God to their father Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about the land of Israel, where they were destined to go. God’s promises overtook all the riches of Egypt. He left the children of Israel a legacy of faith. What stands out in these two verses is that through faith in God we can already conquer the last enemy, death.

Next in the list, we read of two individuals, to whom we rarely pay attention: Moses’ parents. These were godly parents who paved the way for the creation of the nation of Israel.

Hebrews 11:23

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command.

This happened in Egypt before the Exodus, where we witness the first attempt, by a country, to annihilate the people of God even before it became a nation. Pharaoh, seeing the growth of this group of Semites, decided to kill all the Jewish newborns by drowning. As they were born, they were to be killed, so that, after a while,

there would be no more males in Israel to continue the existence of the nation. But one baby escaped, namely Moses.

The way **verse 23** is translated, sounds like the parents saw that their baby was so good looking that they were not afraid of the king's command, but there is more to this. What gave them courage was their faith in God; He must have come to them and told them about what their new born was destined to be. So, in their eyes, *he was a beautiful child*. The Greek word for *beautiful* speaks of fame, of grandeur; it only occurs twice in the New Testament, and only for Moses. The Greeks of the time spoke of the city of Athens and of Alexandria as *beautiful* because of their great architecture and influence. The Greek word, which you may recognize, is *asteios*, where we get our word *astute*, as one showing cleverness and intelligence.

We are told the names of Moses' parents. Here again, I believe there a message showing us the sovereignty of God. His father's name is *Amram*, and his mother's is *Jochebed*; she was the daughter of Levi, Jacob's son. She must have been very old at the time of Moses and this is why the Talmud believed that Moses' birth was as miraculous as that of Isaac. In the Talmud, they asked: how come they call her *daughter of Levi* even in her old age?

Their answer is:

As it is written [Num. 26:59]: "Jochebed the daughter of Levi, whom (her mother) bore to Levi in Egypt." And why is she named daughter? Said R. Jehudah b. Zebidah: Infer from this that signs that her youth returned to her. The wrinkles disappeared, the complexion became improved, and her beauty returned to her". (Talmud Bab Bathra 2)

It is possible that Jochebed, like Sarah, Annah and Elizabeth, were advanced in age when they had their promised child. But what is the meaning of Moses' parents names?

Amram, in Hebrew, means *raise the people* and *Jochebed* means *the Glory of Jehovah*. This is so significant when you think that Pharaoh wanted to do away with Israel; God then *raised His people for His Glory*. Moses is not a Hebrew name, but an Egyptian name, meaning *to draw out of water*; his name completes the whole story. In the language of Pharaoh, who wanted to drown the children of Israel in the waters, God spoke of a child that will be *drawn out of the water*, and it happened in the very house of Pharaoh and through the arms of his daughter. Moses was destined to lead Israel to become a nation; there is irony here, but above all things, this is also where we see His sovereignty.

Later, who drowned in the waters of the sea of reed?

The Egyptian army was drowned, when again they attempted to annihilated the nation. It is unfortunate that they did not understand the previous message.

As for the life of Moses, there is one thing I want to bring to your attention; try to spot the unusual within these verses.

Hebrews 11: 24-26

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

I am sure you spotted many unusual things; the whole chapter is oddly heavenly, but there is one thing that is out of time, out of chronology here. It says that Moses esteemed the *reproach of Christ greater riches*. But how did Moses know Christ?

The word is *Christos*, the name of Yeshua in Hebrew. Did Moses really know Jesus?

Yes he did and this is how: Moses could not know the Messiah as He came in a bodily form in the first century, but he knew Him in His eternity for *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*. He always was and He is especially found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Christ was not created in the first century, nor ever created, because He is the Creator Himself, and He is from eternity past. His name in the Hebrew Scriptures is Jehovah; He is the God of the Bible. In this sense, Moses knew Him. Have you ever thought of the eternity of the Messiah?

We are not worshipping a new god, but the very God of the Hebrew Scriptures and this is, I believe, one message the writer of Hebrews wants to convey to his congregation. Let us not forget that Hebrews was written for those believers who contemplated leaving the faith to go back to the Mosaic Law. So, the Spirit is telling them that, even there, they will meet the same God, but there, as a judge.

Later, in Hebrews 12, he asks them how they wish to meet their God, in a mountain of fire as in Sinai, or in the Shabbat of the New Jerusalem. There, we find the facets of Jesus.

Hebrews 12:18

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest;

Then, in **verse 22**, he says

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

Chose the way you want to meet Jesus; because at the end, every man will meet Him.

This is how the writer brings the believer side by side with Moses; we both believe in the same God. We both have the same faith. We both began in the same way. For the author, we are all the same family, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and you who believe; we belong to the same mishpacha (family). We are going through very similar experiences and, above all, we can experience the same blessings and victory as any man or woman mentioned in this list. He stresses this point so much at the end of this account. Let me bring you to the last verse of Hebrews 11. After listing all these heroes, he says something that is really out of this world.

Hebrews 11:40

God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

What he is saying is that all these heroes of the faith, in Hebrews 11, are waiting for you in heaven. Only when we are all present, then together we will all be made perfect. This is not easy to understand, because it is too much. It is as if a great supper is being prepared; the table is set, and all are waiting to sit, but they can only do that when the whole family is present. Then all can partake of it. This is how great a family we are and see how close we are to them. Know that whoever you are, as a believer in Yeshua, you are part of this list of Hebrews 11. Moses, Abraham, and Enoch cannot sit down at the table, unless you come to the table.

Jesus said it **Matthew 8:11**

And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

We also learn from Hebrews, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are waiting for us. See how important we are to God?

This is a main message of Hebrews 11; it is not only there to show us how great others are, but how much you are part of this group of people.

How much did Moses understand of the Messiah to come?

Perhaps much more than many believers may understand today.

Hebrews 11:28

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

There is where Christ is! Moses understood the real meaning of Passover; it was through blood that the lamb saves. He knew, like Able, that the blood was the way to salvation. He was told to put the blood on the door posts and lintel of the door; but there is nothing in history or in his society that could explain this manner of applying the blood, except to understand the complete protection of God on him and his people. Moses acted purely out of faith. Today we can look back and see this sign much more; it looks so much like the manner with which the Messiah died. This truth, the sprinkling of the blood, must have played so much in his understanding of the Law of sacrifice in Leviticus. He must have been in awe, in front of this truth; this we can see right in the book of Leviticus, which speaks of these sacrifices.

Moses' personality was so vibrant in other books of the Torah, yet in Leviticus, he seemed so overwhelmed by the presence of God and by what he heard from God. In the other books, like in Exodus and Deuteronomy, we met a Moses whose strong personality and leadership skills are seen. But here, throughout the book of Leviticus, he takes the back seat. His words and actions are all in response to what the Lord told him to do. Because, of all the books of the Bible, Leviticus contains more of the direct Words of God; this is where it speaks of the death of His Son and of our Salvation. Moses must have felt this awesomeness; it must have begun when *by faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood*.

The faith of Moses could also be seen in the leading of Jewish people to the land of Egypt. First they were about three million of them; imagine the logistics. How do you feed so many people; how do you get them all to agree to walk, orderly and for so long?

Many times, they complained to Moses; at some point they wanted to kill him. So many times Moses went to God and told him that he did not want to do the job. God never accepted his resignation. Moses had the most complicated job in the Bible. This is perhaps why he is the only one who saw God face to face; he needed this boost.

Next in the list, after Moses, an unlikely group is mentioned for her faith; it is Israel.

Hebrews 11:29

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

These are the nation of Israel. Within Israel, you had the Israel of God, and all the nation rebelled. Through history, this remnant showed great faith.

We also see this in **Hebrews 11:30**

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.

This also speaks of the nation of Israel. Here again, it required a great amount of faith. For seven days, they circled Jericho, and on the seventh day, they circled Jericho seven times. It was a long walk, but by faith they

did it because it was God who told them. This last day was dramatic; it says that, at the last day, when all Israel shouts, *then the wall of the city will fall down flat*. That is power! Its account is seen in **Joshua 6:5** *"It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat..."*

But all the walls of Jericho, except one, collapsed. This was the one where the house of Rahab was attached, because, according to **Hebrews 11:31**, she also had faith. They recognized the house of Rahab because there was a scarlet cord in the window. The red cord surely reminded Moses and the Israelites of the blood of the lamb which saved them from Egypt. It was called *line of scarlet cord in the window*. (**Joshua 2:18**) We remember that the word *line* is Tikvah, or hope. So it was a *hope of red cord in the window*, which, in a way, we all have on our windows, for we are all protected by the Lamb of God.

Before we leave Rahab, there is a verse which brings us to the moment where she confesses her salvation. See what she says to the Jewish spies who came to her. Speaking of the news of the coming of Israel she said:

Joshua 2:11

"And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."

Notice she calls the LORD by the name of the God of the Bible, "Yud, He, Vav, He". She heard of Him, she recognized Him and she believed, and was saved. As the history of Israel began, the workings of God did not lose any time to amaze people all around; how much more should we be amazed today, after so many of God's interventions in history, even in recent history.

As numerous as were mentioned in Hebrews 11, there were many more; but the author could not go further because he would never have the time to mention all the exploits done through faith.

All these people were not mentioned amiss; they were well chosen, from the very beginning with Abel, to Enoch before the flood, to Noah leading to the Messianic line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Israel, and the Gentile Rahab who is mentioned in Matthew's Genealogy account.

In **Hebrews 11:32**, six more names are given, and these are very well chosen.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

Notice the first four: Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah. These four men were particularly known to the people of the first century as examples of heroism. We have seen that the Bibles used at the synagogues, at the time, were the Targums. These were Bible translation into Aramaic, the language mostly spoken at the time of Jesus. These Targums were not only translations, they were also commentaries. In the Targum of Deuteronomy, these four, Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah are mentioned together along with Joshua, whom we associate with the walls of Jericho. It is regarding the passage of **Deuteronomy 34:1** where Moses was given a tour of Israel by God, before his death, and there we read: "Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo," ---and, along with seeing the whole land, these rabbis added that he also saw--- "the mighty things that Jephthah of Gilead would accomplish, and the victories of Samson, son of Manoah, from the tribe of Dan, and the thousand commanders from among those of the house of Naphtali who would associate with Barak and the kings whom Joshua son of Nun, from the tribe of Ephraim, would kill, and the mighty acts of Gideon, son of Joash, from the tribe of Manasseh..."

So they knew about these four men together, and the author spoke of things that were familiar to them. This passage of **Deuteronomy 34** was one of the Parashot of the weekly reading in the synagogue. The rabbis then devised a chart where all the five books of Moses are read throughout one year, a list they still use today. This passage of **Deuteronomy 34** is the 54th passage and the last read passage of the year. Perhaps this was the very passage they would have read at the time when the author wrote this chapter. This time was during Simchat Torah, at around Succoth in September or October.

Considering these men mentioned, is not Samson an odd choice; did he not marry a Philistine and make havoc of his calling?

Jephthah is another peculiar choice; was he not the one who said that he will offer the first one to come to him as a burnt offering and then his daughter, was the first one who showed up?

We may remember the worst of these people, but the people of the first century learned to remember the best of what these produced, and so did the Spirit when He mentions their names in this list of men of faith.

As for the others, who are mentioned, we know that David is the first king of Judah from where the Messiah was to come. Samuel, an important figure, is considered the first prophet and the one who anointed David. Gideon is a very special individual. At first he was ready to fight a formidable army of 185,000 of Midianites and Amalekites, with a small army of 32,000 soldiers, but God told him that his army was too much, and to go only with 300 soldiers. Gideon believed and he went with 300 soldiers and won. That was faith over faith.

After these men of God, the author speaks of others, but mentions no names, only their exploits and their suffering. See with which ferventness he speaks about them, beginning in **Hebrews 11:33**:
who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Who subdued kingdoms?

David did, Solomon did, and even Jeremiah did in his own way. We remember what God told the young Jeremiah when He chose Him:

Jeremiah 1:10

See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant."

Jeremiah did this and is still doing it through his prophecy from God.

Who stopped the mouths of lions?

David did by his might and Daniel by his prayers.

Then we read in **Hebrews 11:34**

quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Who were made strong out of weakness?

All of them were, one by one, just like us. It also says that *they became valiant in battle*; this is the life of a believer, he always *becomes*, always progressing to become valiant, stronger, and better. He speaks not only the men, but the women as well.

Hebrews 11:35

Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Women are often linked with resurrection. We can think of the widow at Zarephath, who received her son back from Elijah; she opened her home to God and God gave her back her son. There is also the Shunammite woman who received her son back from Elisha; she also had her home opened to God and He blessed her with the same miracle. We remember Mary Magdalene. She longed so much for her Lord, and she was the first on the scene when He resurrected; she was first to see Him, and she did not want to let Him go.

The author keeps up his description in **Hebrews 11: 36, 37**

Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

Who was stoned?

Tradition tells us that Jeremiah was stoned to death in Egypt.

Who was sawn in two?

Tradition tells us that king Manasseh, not happy to hear the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple, sawed Isaiah the prophet, in half.

This list is not only of these Jews in the Hebrew Scriptures, but of those of the Gospels, as well as those who never denied their Lord because they knew He was real. Of these are the apostles. According to tradition, Matthew suffered martyrdom and was finally killed by the sword. Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael, was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed in present-day Turkey and was martyred for his preaching in Armenia, when he was flayed to death with a whip. Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Greece, after being whipped severely by seven soldiers. Tradition further says that Thomas was stabbed with a spear, in India, during one of his missionary trips to establish the church there. Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded. Peter, we are told, was crucified upside down. The apostle Paul was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A.D. 67. James, the brother of Jesus, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over, a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple, when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a club. This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the temptation.

In **Hebrews 11:38**, the author adds that of all these...*the world was not worthy*. He reminds us in **Verse 39** that all of these men and women of faith, *having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise*.

Of whom had they *obtained a good testimony*?

Surely it was not of the world, but of the Holy Spirit of God who counted them worthy to have their names, their work, and their memories inscribed in the Book of Faith forever.

It is at the first verses of **Hebrews 12** where we have the conclusion of this great list. **Hebrews** follows the same pattern as **Romans**; in the first eleven chapters, it tells you all your blessings and the benefit of being a believer, and, beginning with Chapter 12, the Spirit asks us: what are you going to do with all of this; how is this impacting your life?

He does not only ask, but he tells us how to apply all of this. Let us read just the first verse of **Hebrews 12**: *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*

Here comes the practical application of this great information we had from the very beginning. *Therefore...* Now that we have seen that *we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*, what is the first step toward experiencing these blessings?

First: *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us*. Don't let sin rule your life. Don't let even the smallest sin be a weight to carry. This word *weight* is not a simple weight but a mass, a bulk, something very heavy, and it is only found here in the New Testament. From this point on, the writer sees the believer as an athlete in a race, and in order to race, you don't want to wear heavy clothes. With this illustration, he says, remove the known sins in your lives, and you will rocket through the race track.

Then he says *let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*. What race is the author speaking about; who are we racing against?

It cannot be the people of the congregation, since we are one body. The foot cannot race against the hand, or the eyes against the ears; they will get nowhere and the body will suffer. We are here to help and support each other. So, who are we racing against?

It is not the world; we are not in competition with the world, we are here to help them find God and if you compete with them, they will not listen to you. This, I believe, is the point of the author when he says in **Hebrews 12:14**: *Pursue peace with all people*. If you are not at peace with people, forget about doing the work you are assigned to do, in telling them about God.

Who is left then, in this world, to race against?

It is you! This is who we are racing against. The real battle is really within us. We remember the 12 spies, 10 saw giants, 2 saw the Lord, yet their eyes saw the same thing. When Daniel's three friends saw the burning oven, they did not see the fire that could burn them, but they saw God who was waiting inside the oven to save them. All this can happen when we are putting away *the sin which so easily ensnares us*. David knew this so well. **Psalm 51** always resurfaces when we think that in the first 12 verses, David confesses his sins and only in **verse 13** he concludes and says: *Now I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.*