

QUESTIONS ABOUT CHURCH

How Can I Strengthen My Church?

The Great Faith of God's People

Hebrews 11:33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

The writer now turns from naming people of faith to citing their exploits.

They subdued kingdoms. Here our minds turn to Joshua, to the judges (who were really military leaders), to David, and to others.

They worked righteousness. Kings like Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah are remembered for reigns which, though not perfect, were characterized by righteousness.

They obtained promises. This may mean that God made covenants with them, as in the case of Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon; or it may mean that they received the fulfillment of promises, thus demonstrating the truth of God's word.

They stopped the mouths of lions. Daniel is an outstanding example here (Dan. 6:22), but we should also remember Samson (Judg. 14:5, 6) and David (1 Sam. 17:34, 35).

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.

They quenched the violence of fire. The fiery furnace succeeded only in burning the fetters of the three young Hebrews and setting them free (Dan. 3:25). Thus it proved to be a blessing in disguise.

They escaped the edge of the sword. David escaped Saul's malicious attacks (1 Sam. 19:9, 10), Elijah escaped the murderous hatred of Jezebel (1 Kgs. 19:1–3), and Elisha escaped from the king of Syria (2 Kgs. 6:15–19).

They won strength out of weakness. Many symbols of weakness are found in the annals of faith. Ehud, for instance, was left-handed; yet he slew the king of Moab (Judg. 3:12–22).

Jael, a member of "the weaker sex," killed Sisera with a tent peg (Judg. 4:21).

Gideon used fragile earthen pitchers in the defeat of the Midianites (Judg. 7:20).

Samson used the jawbone of a donkey to slay one thousand Philistines (Judg. 15:15).

They all illustrate the truth that God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:27).

They became valiant in battle. Faith endowed men with strength beyond what was natural and enabled them to overcome in the face of insurmountable odds.

They put to flight the armies of the aliens. Though often under-equipped and greatly outnumbered, the armies of Israel walked off with the victory to the confusion of the foe and the amazement of everyone else.

Hebrews 11:35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Women received their dead by resurrection. The widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17:22) and the woman of Shunem (2 Kgs. 4:34) are cases in point.

But faith has another face. In addition to those who performed dazzling feats, there were those who endured intense suffering. God values the latter as much as the former.

Because of their faith in the Lord, some were subjected to cruel torture. If they would have renounced Jehovah, they would have been released; but to them it was better to die and be raised again to heavenly glory than to continue this life as traitors to God.

In the time of the Maccabees, a mother and her seven sons were put to death, one after the other, and in sight of each other, by Antiochus Epiphanes. They refused to accept release that they might obtain a better resurrection, that is, better than a mere continuation of life on earth.

Morrison comments: So this is also a result of faith, not that it brings deliverance to a man, but that sometimes, when deliverance is offered, it gives him a fine courage to refuse it. There are seasons when faith shows itself in taking. There are seasons when it is witnessed in refusing. There is a deliverance that faith embraces. There is a deliverance that faith rejects. They were tortured, not accepting deliverance—that was the sign and seal that they were faithful. There are hours when the strongest proof of faith is the swift rejection of the larger room.

Hebrews 11:36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

Others were mocked and flogged, and were bound in prison. For faithfulness to God, Jeremiah endured all these forms of punishment (Jer. 20:1–6; 37:15). Joseph too was imprisoned because he would rather suffer than sin (Gen. 39:20).

Hebrews 11:37 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—

They were stoned. Jesus reminded the scribes and Pharisees that their ancestors had murdered Zechariah in this way between the sanctuary and the altar (Matt. 23:35).

They were sawn in two. Tradition says that Manasseh used this method of executing Isaiah.

They were tempted. This clause probably describes the tremendous pressures that were brought to bear on believers to compromise, to recant, to commit acts of sin, or in any way to deny their Lord.

They were slain with the sword. Uriah the prophet paid this price for his faithful proclamation of God's message to King Jehoiakim (Jer. 26:23); but the expression here refers to mass slaughter such as occurred in the times of the Maccabees.

They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

Moorehead comments: They might have rustled in silks and velvets and luxuriated in the palaces of princes had they denied God and believed the world's lie. Instead, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, themselves accounted no better than goats or sheep, nay, they like these reckoned fit only for the slaughter.

They suffered poverty, privation, and persecution.

Hebrews 11:38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

The world treated them as if they were not worthy to live.

But the Spirit of God burst forth here with the interjection that actually it was the other way around—the world was not worthy of them.

They wandered in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth.

Dispossessed of homes, separated from families, pursued like animals, expelled from society, they endured heat and cold, distress and hardship, but they would not deny their Lord.

Hebrews 11:39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,