

OpenTheo

September 22nd: 1 Kings 12 & Hebrews 11

September 21, 2020



Alastair Roberts

The division of the kingdom. The heroes of faith.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

1 Kings 12. Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. And as soon as Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it, for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon, then Jeroboam returned from Egypt.

And they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.

He said to them, Go away for three days, then come again to me. So the people went away. Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father, while he was yet alive, saying, How do you advise me to answer this people? And they said to him, If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.

But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. And he said to them, What do you advise that we should answer this people who have said to me, Lighten the yoke that your father put on us? And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us. Thus shall you say to them, My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs.

And now whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, Come to me again the third day.

And the king answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel that the old men had given him, he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions. So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord, that he might fulfil his word, which the Lord spoke by Ahijah the Shalomite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David. So Israel went to their tents, but Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah.

Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labour, and all Israel stoned him to death with stones, and King Rehoboam hurried to mount his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day. And when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly, and made him king over all Israel.

There was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, 180,000 chosen warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came to Shimea, the man of God.

Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, Thus says the Lord, You shall not go up or fight against your relatives the people of Israel. Every man returned to his home, for this thing is from me. So they listened to the word of the Lord, and went home again, according to the word of the Lord.

Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived there. And he

went out from there and built Peniel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David.

If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their Lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah. So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough.

Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one.

He also made temples on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people who were not of the Levites. And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah. And he offered sacrifices on the altar, so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made.

And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast from the people of Israel, and went up to the altar to make offerings.

In 1 Kings chapter 12 we see the ramifications of the unfaithfulness of Solomon. God had declared that judgment would come upon his son in 1 Kings chapter 11 verses 11 to 13. Rehoboam was to be made king at Shechem.

This was the place where Joseph was sent before he was sold into slavery. In Genesis chapter 37, Judah had led the brothers in that plot to sell Joseph into slavery. And here we see Judah, as it were, reducing Joseph, the northern tribes, to slavery once more.

Shechem is also the site where Levi and Simeon performed their massacre in chapter 34 of Genesis. Abimelech had crowned himself king at Shechem in Judges chapter 9. Comparisons with Abimelech, the violent son of Gideon who came to no good, might be rather ominous for the reign of Rehoboam. Shechem was also one of the first places that Abraham visited in the land before he went to set an altar near Bethel.

Jeroboam takes a similar route in this chapter as Peter Lighthouse points out. Jeroboam comes out of Egypt. He leads the assembly of Israel in asking Rehoboam to let his people go, to diminish the burdens placed upon them.

In verse 4, Jeroboam sounds very similar to Moses and Aaron in the story of Exodus, which puts Rehoboam in the position of pharaoh. Solomon had associated with Egypt. He had a marriage treaty with Egypt.

He bought and sold horses from Egypt and he became like pharaoh in a great many respects. And now his people are wanting someone to let them go. He has become a new pharaoh.

Even though he was supposed to complete the story of the Exodus, bring people into rest in the land, he has turned back to Egypt and brought them into a new sort of slavery. Rehoboam's response to the delegation from Israel is to ask for time to consult. He first consults with the old men who had formerly counselled Solomon.

They advised him to serve the people so that they would serve him. He must put their interests ahead of his own. And if he did this, he would find that they would naturally follow him.

The danger was always that the heart of the king would be lifted up over the people as his brothers and that he would lord it over them. This was one of the warnings given in Deuteronomy chapter 17. It was important that the king not build up wealth and power and all these other marks of status that would cause him to lift up his heart over his people.

Similar warnings were given by Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 8 concerning the behaviour of the king that they would set over them. If they were not careful, they would be fighting his battles rather than him fighting theirs. The faithful king was to be characterised by humility.

He would act in the name of the lord with the lord's authority but in a way that served and built up the people. Rehoboam heard the advice of the old men who had counselled Solomon but ultimately took the advice of the men who had grown up with him. He was 41 when he began to reign as we discover in chapter 14 verse 21.

So these were not young men. They were in middle age. He behaves like Pharaoh, increasing their load on account of their complaint.

Rehoboam sees kingship as a sort of phallic contest. He suggests that his harshness is proof that his is bigger than his father's waist. Rehoboam talks tough but when he sends the chief of the forced labour, Adoram, to the northern tribes, he is stoned and Rehoboam has to flee south to Jerusalem.

Rehoboam's bravado proves counterproductive. He ends up losing most of the power that he sought to gain. Rather than successfully intimidating Israel, he ends up losing his rule.

All of this, we discover, was determined by the lord to fulfil the word that was given to Ahijah in the preceding chapter. However, Rehoboam and the men of Judah were forbidden to fight against the Israelites. They were supposed to recognise that they were brothers.

Solomon's sin had been similar to the sin of Adam in Genesis, the sin in the garden. And following that sin, there was the story of Cain and Abel. Israel comes to the brink of a very ugly repetition of this sin as Rehoboam responded to the lord's rejection of his rule by seeking to initiate a sanguinary war between brothers, gathering men to fight against the northern tribes.

Although the people were saved from such a disaster by the word of Shemaiah, the prophet of the lord, the brother nations were divided and Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, became the ruler of the northern kingdom. While Rehoboam is like Pharaoh, Jeroboam might initially seem like an amalgam of characters such as Joseph, Moses, Israel and David. In chapter 11, he is the one who is a descendant of Joseph, who rises to prominence and service.

He is appointed as the successor to an unfaithful king by a prophet of the lord. He flees to Egypt. He returns to Israel after Solomon is dead.

All of this most reminds us of the story of David, but also has echoes of the story of Moses and of Joseph. If Jeroboam repeats themes of the story of Moses in the Exodus, calling for his people to be let go, in Power in the North, Jeroboam proceeds to repeat the great sin of the Exodus. In order to establish a distinct cult in the North, he wants to prevent his people from defecting to Rehoboam.

And so he establishes two golden calves, declaring that they were the gods who brought Israel out of Egypt. This is repeating the sin of Aaron and the people in chapter 32 of Exodus. He copies and he doubles the sin of Aaron and the people.

And like Aaron, he builds an altar next to the calf at Bethel and declares a feast. He also installs a non-Levitical priesthood. Reminders of Aaron and his sin can also be seen in the fact that Jeroboam has two sons, sons named Nadab and Abijah.

We see this in chapter 14 verses 1 and 20. The two sons of Aaron killed by the lord for their profane fire in Leviticus chapter 10 were called Nadab and Abihu. Once again, the distorted Exodus themes serve to reveal just how bad Israel's situation has become.

A question to consider, how might Jeroboam, Rehoboam, Israel and Judah have responded more faithfully to the breach that the lord established in the kingdom? Hebrews chapter 11 Now faith is the assurance of things hopeful, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old receive their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up, so that he should not

see death, and he was not found because God had taken him.

Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

By this he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven, and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them, and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, Through Isaac shall your offspring be named. He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites, and gave directions concerning his bones.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting

pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who was invisible. By faith he kept the Passover, and sprinkled the blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Hebrews 11 is one of the most famous chapters of the New Testament. It's a great roll call of the faith. It takes the heroes from the beginning of creation to the coming of Christ.

As Gareth Cockerell observes, it serves a number of purposes within the argument of the book. It clarifies the nature of faith that the heroes of the book are being charged to emulate. It provides us with models to follow, and motivation for faithfulness in the present.

The models provided by the faithful of the past are also partial prefigurations of the faithfulness of Christ, the ultimate example of faithfulness, by which the full reality is finally realized. Finally, the company of the faithful from all generations is an alternative community to which to belong, and with which to identify, especially in contexts of great pressure to apostatize, such a community is of immense value. The examples of the saints of all ages have long served as examples for Christians to follow, helping them to persevere and be faithful in difficult times.

The list of this chapter gives the Christians being addressed a sense of their heritage, but it is not just a straightforward telling of the story of Israel. The unfaithfulness of Israel, especially in the wilderness generation, had served as a cautionary example earlier in the book. Now we are presented with another way of reading the Old Testament history, one that traces the theme of faith throughout, one that reaches its climax in Christ, and one in which we can find ourselves.

The examples that are given inspire and encourage, and they also give more clarity, giving us a sense of what faith will look like in various situations. We should recognize also the way that this chapter unpacks the meaning of Habakkuk 2, verse 4, The righteous shall live by his faith. The chapter begins with a definition of faith.

Faith is oriented to the future, and also to that which is present but unseen concerning God's existence and work. In 2 Corinthians 5, verse 7, the apostle Paul contrasts walking by faith to walking by sight. Faith enables us to perceive things that others do not, things that are invisible.

The person of faith can live in terms of God's existence, his promise, his providence, his power and his faithfulness. This is the horizon in terms of which they live their lives. And this way of living by faith enabled the great heroes of old to do their great deeds.

Without such faith, the sort of faith that the recipients of the book need at that moment in time, they would not have done what they once did. The opening statement, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, might be better translated in stronger terms. Faith is the reality of things hoped for.

It isn't just a subjective sense. Faith, for the author of Hebrews, is not just a state of mind. It's a concrete way of life.

Faith operates in terms of the reality of the things that are anticipated. While others can drift aimless as if through empty space, faith moves in the powerful gravitational field of the realities hoped for and promised by God. Again, faith is the evidence of things not seen, not merely the conviction of them, as the ESV translates.

Faith itself is objective evidence of unseen things, much as the movement of a body in space in its orbit can serve as evidence of a much larger yet unseen body that's acting upon it. When we look at the lives of people of faith, we can see something of the power and the reality of something much greater than anything that can be seen acting upon them. And the author of Hebrews starts with creation in order to move sequentially through the entire Old Testament.

But a deeper claim is made in verse 3. What he is saying is that the ultimate reality, the thing that underlies everything else, that is deeper, more real, and more true than everything else, is the word and the power of God. The most fundamental reality is not

what is visible and immediately tangible. God founded the creation by his word and power, and it is by these things that true reality here and now is also determined.

Those who act in terms of the unseen facts of God's power and word are living in terms of foundational reality itself. And he retells the primeval history. Abel, of course, is the first martyr, but yet he is praised not for his martyrdom so much as something that happened before it, his offering of a more acceptable sacrifice.

Cain responded to his rejection of his sacrifice with anger, revealing something about the character of his offering as an attempt to control God. He was angry when he did not get what he wanted from God, whereas Abel, by contrast, offered in a way that was accepted. It's not just the objective reality that he offered.

It was the way that he offered to. He's an example of true sacrifice, which anticipates his martyrdom, when he will offer himself up in some sense. Sacrifice was also here, as Hebrews is suggesting, always about faith, not mere visible ritual.

What really mattered was not just the offering itself, it was the faith by which it was given. Earlier he has quoted, earlier he has quoted Psalm 40 verse 6 to make the point that what God wants is not primarily sacrifice and offering, but the heart that is oriented to do his will, with the law of God written upon it. And Abel is, of course, an example of this.

His offering of a right sacrifice arises from a heart of faith that is set towards God. From the example of Abel, he moves to Enoch. Enoch was taken by God so that he did not experience death.

He was saved from death. This was evidence that he pleased or walked with God. Abel and Enoch, in their particular ways, both pleased God.

And the author of Hebrews reasons, in both cases, from their pleasing of God, Abel by his sacrifice, and Enoch by the fact that the Lord took him, back to their faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Faith pleases God because it is faith that corresponds to God's power and his promise.

It is faith that lives in terms of God's existence, the things not seen. And it is faith that lives in terms of the future that he proclaims, things hoped for. Both Abel and Enoch exemplify this.

Noah is a further example from the primeval history. He's an example of the future orientation of faith. With reverent fear, he acted.

He recognizes the reality of God's power and holiness and lives and acts accordingly. The story of the flood is a paradigmatic example of the last judgment in the New Testament. And the author of Hebrews has been encouraging people to live in terms of the

seriousness and severity of God's judgment.

As in the case of Noah, the prospect of God's judgment in the future should shape their action in the present. Verses 3-7 concern the primeval history. And verses 8-22 move into the patriarchal history.

Abraham, of course, is the father of the Jews and also of the faithful. Abraham and Moses receive the most attention within this chapter because they are such central figures. Abraham had to surrender his past for the sake of a promise.

He had to leave behind his country, his kindred and his father's house and move forward to receive a promise that God held out for him. He had to hold all of these things that he once possessed with an open hand and allow God to remove them from it. He had to surrender all of the things that seemed so solid and sure and immediate for the sake of a word from God concerning the long distant future.

He lived as a stranger and a sojourner in the land that was promised to him. He looked forward to something even greater, of which the promised land was just a symbol. He looked for a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

This city is a thing not seen. It's a thing hoped for. And yet, despite that fact, the author of Hebrews wants us to have a sense of its great solidity.

God is the builder of this city. The God who created the world has created this city too. Our cities here may seem secure, but the implication of this statement is that they lack foundations.

This is the city that has true reality. The deepest reality is not what is immediate to us, but what lies in the realm of God's promise and word. Sarah receives the power to conceive.

The child of promise is not just the child of the flesh. It isn't just that she has a child, but rather that the child, and all the future that the child holds in store, is received from the promise and the power and the purpose of God. The child is not received through human power, and the child's purpose will not be achieved through human power.

Faith weans people off the immediacy of the world. Those things that once seemed so powerful and secure begin to be recognised as insubstantial creatures of time, things that will soon pass. Only the word of God will endure.

We ground ourselves in something beyond the present age and the immediacy of what is before us. We recognise that we have a much greater homeland. This isn't just some idyllic past that we have left behind and desire to return to.

It's the promise of God's future, the promise of a heavenly city and homeland. God is not

ashamed to be called the God of such persons. Faith corresponds to his power and his promise, and thereby pleases him.

The point of faith is not some power inherent in faith itself, but rather its responsiveness to a power and reality outside of itself. Abraham offers up Isaac. This is the final test.

At the beginning, with his call, he had to surrender everything from his past. And in the offering up of Isaac, he has to surrender everything that he thought was certain about his future. God's promise had to be recognised as surer than life itself.

His trust was not in the son that he could see and touch, but in the promise of God that gave that son to him, and if that son were to die, could give him back again. We have an example of this, of course, in the story of the Shunammite woman. She receives a child from the Lord, and when that child is taken by death, goes to the prophet Elisha, and in faith receives that child back.

Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are all mentioned as those who blessed their sons concerning things to come. Jacob's blessing of the two sons of Joseph is particularly singled out. It is a more theological blessing than some of the others.

We see this in Genesis chapter 48 verses 15 to 16. And he blessed Joseph and said, And Joseph does the same. He calls for his bones to be taken up out of Egypt in the future.

In anticipation of the exodus, he makes those instructions of all the events of Joseph's life. This is the thing that stands out to the author of Hebrews. He sees this future event of the exodus, and he makes instructions concerning his bones, his deliverance from death, as it were, his deliverance from the land of Egypt into the land of Canaan.

And when they go out of Egypt, they take Joseph's bones. And the very end of the story of Joshua is the burial of Joseph's bones. Joseph anticipates a deliverance from the grave, a deliverance of his bones into the land of promise, a deliverance that anticipates a greater deliverance from the grave, the deliverance of resurrection.

Joseph anticipated the exodus in the instructions that he gave concerning his bones. And the story of Moses and the exodus follows in verses 23 to 31. There are parallels with the Abraham section, parallels that play out in reverse order.

There's deliverance of Moses from death, like Isaac was delivered from death. There's opposition from the world, like the alienation faced by the patriarchs. The departure from Egypt corresponds with Abraham's departure for the place of God's promise.

Moses' parents are introduced as people of faith. There is a heritage of faith that Moses continues in. They perceived that he was a beautiful child.

Acts 7.20 maybe conveys something of what is meant by this. At this time, Moses was

born, and he was beautiful in God's sight, like Isaac was only begotten. They recognised that there was something special about Moses through faith.

Abraham had other children beyond Isaac, but Isaac was uniquely singled out as the child of promise, and it seems that Moses' parents recognised something similar about him. He wasn't just a child that they loved dearly. He had some part to play in God's purposes.

And they weren't afraid of the king's edict concerning the killing of the baby boys, because they recognised something greater, a power that exceeded the power of Pharaoh. Moses accepted persecution with the people of God. He forwent his privileges as a son of the daughter of Pharaoh.

Such an identification was costly. He had to give up the fleeting pleasures of sin for persecution for the promises of God, things that are far more enduring and valuable. He took on the reproach of Christ.

Considering that Moses lived long before the incarnation of Christ, it may seem strange to talk about him taking on the reproach of Christ. However, faith is fundamentally that which acts in terms of God's appointed future and those things that are unseen. Moses had some sense of the glories that awaited and lived in terms of them.

He acted as one seeing God and seeing the future that he held out. This was seen in the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea, events that exhibited God's power over those things that are trusted by those who live by sight. And here the Israelites also showed faith.

They walked through the Red Sea on dry ground, trusting God while the prospect of death lay around them on all those other sides. The power of God was seen as the people responded to him in faith. And the falling of the walls of Jericho were also an example of the people's faith.

God gave them an instruction, an instruction that seemed entirely nonsensical, but unless they did this they would not have known the victory. This was something done in a situation of great peril. They had crossed the Jordan into the promised land.

This was the first city that they were facing. And if they lost at this city or faced some setback, there would be no easy route of retreat. Indeed, if they saw signs of weakness, the people of the land might well get together and crush them.

It took a lot of bravery to take such an action. But that bravery made sense in the light of faith. They saw the power and the promise of God and they acted accordingly.

Rahab is the last of the main examples of the list of persons of faith. She was someone who responded to God's word, his power and his promise. She had heard reports of the

Lord and his promise, and she believed what she heard and acted accordingly.

She was a prostitute, blessed not on account of what she deserved, but on the basis of God's grace and good pleasure. She was delivered from death as she identified with the people of God, even at that moment where they might have seemed most vulnerable and where their identification could prove most costly. The author of Hebrews could continue the tour through the Old Testament, but he hastens us through the long corridor past many doors he could have shown us into, a number of them quite surprising.

We might not expect to see characters such as Samson and Jephthah in the list, for instance. He traces the story through these characters, through the judges, into the story of the kingdom and through that into the story of the prophets. Faith is seen in a host of different situations, in battle, in perseverance through suffering, in accepting opposition and alienation.

We can notice a movement from battles and military struggles to a focus upon persecution, suffering, rejection, from the faith of judges and kings to the faith of the prophets, whose struggle was often a much lonelier one. We should also recognize a number of the events that are alluded to, from tradition and from scripture. The Shunammite woman in 2 Kings chapter 4 is an example of a woman receiving her dead son back.

According to tradition, Jeremiah was stoned, Isaiah was sawn in two. Wandering about in the wilderness might remind us of Elijah. The world considered such people unworthy and despised and rejected them.

However, in the process, they presented themselves as unworthy of the people of faith. There is throughout scripture a test of hospitality that's given. If the people of God are welcomed in a place, that place can often be blessed on their account.

But if they are rejected, that place will suffer judgment. The faithful heroes of the book of Hebrews are to look to these figures as their forerunners in the faith, heirs with them of a promise of God. But the forerunners did not receive that promise.

It's only through Christ's high priestly work that the promise of God has been brought into more concrete reality. The people of God now more directly receive benefits that these forerunners could only anticipate and await. We have been perfected, made fit to enter God's presence through Christ's work, and now they can share in what we have received.

A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which we can grow through the examples of the lives of the forerunners in the faith? What are some ways in which such lives testify to the truth of God?