Notes for Preparing to Teach Hebrews Part IX (May 31, 2023)

Last session, we stopped at verse 22 of Hebrews 11 so that we could pick up with and focus on Moses right off the bat this week. Since we plan to go through Hebrews 12 this session, we are at a very important part of the book where we are moving from doctrine or belief to lifestyle. It is clear that the author of Hebrews believes that we build our Christian lifestyle on specific matters of belief which encourage us in general but remind us to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ in specific.

Last session, we emphasized that the promises of a salvation (10:36) reaches its complete fruition (10:37) only when Jesus comes again. So, unlike those who expect all of God’s goodness in this life or, like some ancient gnostic heretics or modern “new age” heretics expect the fulfillment only upon release of our physical bodies, comes at a specific time (when Jesus comes) and is available to us in sampling form at the present. “This provides the clue for understanding the rest that remains for the people of God (4:9), the promised eternal inheritance (9:15), the promised homeland (11:14) or better country (11:16) promised the Old Testament saints. The use of the word ‘heavenly’ to describe this Kingdom (11:16) does not look away from an eschatological future to a present world of invisible reality.” [Ladd, George Eldon*, New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 573.] “The longed-for homeland of 11:16 and the heavenly Jerusalem of 12:22 are also eschatological: the final aim of God’s community. The unshaken Kingdom (12:28) and the city to come (13:14) belong to this same futuristic perspective. It is the new order that will emerge after God shakes the present order (12:26; cf. 1:11). Hebrews conceives of an invisible Kingdom already existing in heaven. When the present is shaken by a cosmic catastrophe, God’s Kingdom will be left unimpaired and will stand…” [Ladd, George Eldon*, New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 574.]

That’s a lot of big words to suggest the “already” where we as believers experience God’s promises in little tastes (spiritual dim sum?) but the “not yet” in that God isn’t ready to unveil the full glory of what’s going to happen. So, what do we do in the meantime? I like the division of specific exhortations in Hebrews into three basic ideas, found in the works of Cynthia Westfall and Karen H. Jobes, respectively. They divide the exhortations into: 1) what we are to hang onto, 2) what we need to do regularly in our relationship with God, and 3) where do we go from here. Let me try to illustrate that from Jobes’ adaptation of Westfall below.

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| **Let's Hold On** | **Let's Draw Near** | **Let's Go Forward** |
| **Pay closer attention to what we've heard (2:1)** | **Approach the throne of grace for mercy and help (4:16)** | **Be anxious so no one fails to reach the Sabbath rest (4:1)** |
| **Hold tight to our confession [of Jesus as Lord] (4:14)** | **Approach "Holy of Holies" cleansed and ready (10:22)** | **Be active toward reaching that rest and don't disobey (4:11)** |
| **Hold tight to our faith because of His reliability (10:23)** | **Worship/serve God with awe and gratitude (12:28)** | **Move from rudimentary doctrines to maturity (6:1)** |
|  | **Be willing to suffer [outside the camp] with Jesus (13:12)** | **Consider how to stimulate each other's good works (10:24)** |
|  | **Constantly praise, do good, and share (13:15-16)** | **Finish the race we started (12:1)** |

Before we get too deep, though, let’s look at how scholars have tried to streamline the material we’ll cover in the next two weeks.

In the 1960s, the respected F. F. Bruce summarized the section as so:

**f. The faith of Moses (11:23-28)  
 g. Faith at the Exodus and Settlement (11:29-31)  
 h. Further examples of faith (11:32-38)  
 i. Epilogue: Faith’s vindication comes with Christ (11:39-40)  
 5. Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfector of Faith (12:1-3)  
 6. Discipline is for Sons (12:4-11)  
 7. Let us then be up and doing (12:12-17)  
 8. The Earthly Sinai and the Heavenly Zion (12:18-24)  
 9. Pay Heed to the Voice of God (12:25-29)**

[**Bruce, F. F. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews*   
(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. lxiv.]**

**More recently, Karen H. Jobes of Wheaton College used this format:**

**B. The Examples of Those Who Persevered Before Us (11:1-40)  
 1. A Definition of Faith (11:1)  
 2. The Examples of Old Testament Believers (11:2-38)  
 3. Their faith commended, but promise deferred (11:39-40)  
 C. Another Exhortation to Persevere (12:1-28)  
 1. The Example of Jesus (12:1-3)  
 2. The Discipline of the Father (12:4-13)  
 3. Warning not to refuse the Father’s discipline (12:14-17)  
 4. Warning not to refuse the new covenant (12:18-28)**

[**Jobes, Karen H. *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI:  
 Zondervan Academic Publishing, 2011), p. 53.] I hope that you particularly noticed her emphasis on 11:39-40 as “faith commended, but promise deferred.” This is that “already” but “not yet” aspect of God’s purpose that I was trying to share about in the George Eldon Ladd quotations above. The reason believers have to be encouraged to hold onto what we already have and constantly seek God’s Presence is because we’re not there yet.**

**The details in Charles Trentham’s commentary from the 1970s may also be useful to some of you.**

**IX. Meaning of Faith (11:1-40)  
 1. Substance and Evidence (11:1-2)  
 2. Belief in the Creator (11:3)  
 3. The Faithful of the OT (11:4-34)  
 4. Summary of Horrors (11:35-38)  
 5. Delay of the Promise (11:39-40)**

**X. Words of Encouragement and Discipline (12:1-24)  
 1. Call to complete the course (12:1-2)  
 2. Need for discipline (12:3-17)  
 3. The final arrival (12:18-24)  
 4. The final warning (12:25-27)  
 5. Call to gratitude and worship (12:28-29)**

**[Trentham, Charles A., “Hebrews” in Clifton J. Allen (ed.), *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 12: Hebrews-Revelation, General Articles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), p. 13.] I like the fact that Trentham divides between the particularly positive examples and those that might be less than encouraging.**

**But none of this preparation does any good unless we are willing to delve into the text. So, let’s go. As I noted earlier, we will pick up with Moses. The author of Hebrews points to five (5) particular points in the life of Moses that should help us in our life of faith.**

**The first point is in favor of Moses’ parents (11:22). Although Genesis 2 literally says that he was a “goodly” child, it demonstrates that they perceived him as “exceptional” and having a future beyond the dead end of Pharaoh’s proclamation. Interestingly, they hide him for three (3) months, a divine number (for God Who causes to be, God Who is, and God Who Will Continue to Be). In addition, the word for the vessel in which they put the baby is “ark,” the same Hebrew word as that for Noah’s Ark in Genesis 6. It had the same steering and visual provisions.**

**Moses’ birth tale is very similar to that of Sargon the Great:**

***Sargon, the mighty king, king of Agade, am I.  
My mother was a princess [changeling?], my father I knew not.  
…  
My princess [changeling?] mother conceived me, in secret she bore me,  
She set me in a basket of rushes…***

**Note the differences, though. Sargon is illegitimate, Moses is not (Genesis 2:1).  
Sargon is placed in the basket by a princess; Moses is drawn out of the water by one.  
Sargon may have been hidden in shame; Moses is hidden because of persecution.  
Both are sensed to be children of purpose and accomplishment, guided by more than themselves.**

**The second point in Moses’ favor was his refusal to accept the position of privilege and leisure to be given to him as an Egyptian. He refuses to be called the son of the princess and chooses to share ill-treatment with God’s people than enjoy the fruits of sin. Look particularly at verse 26. “He estimated loss and gain not by outward and transient appearances, but according to inward truth and reality, which though for the present hidden, would one day be manifested.” [Delitizsch, Franz, *Delitzsch’s Commentary on the Hebrews: Volume II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870), p. 261.]**

**If I were teaching this in Sunday School, I would ask students to identify how Moses’ situation in these verses compared with the situation of the readers/hearers of Hebrews? Is it better to suffer with the “people of God” than identify with the worldly folks who could offer temporary pleasures from sin? Is it better to remain with the “people of God” than to commit apostasy? I would also ask students to compare this section of Hebrews 11 with Acts 7:20-36. Below are the answers, but I have provided a blank spreadsheet for you to change to Chinese and use in class if you’d like.**

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| **Acts** | **Stephen's Sermon** | **Hebrews** | **Hebrews Emphasis** |
| **7:20** | **"Exceptional" child nurtured 3 months** | **11:23** | **Parents hid "exceptional child" 3 months** |
| **7:21-23** | **Raised Egyptian till 40 years old** | **11:24-26** | **Refused privilege of Egypt** |
| **7:24-25** | **Assumed he could be deliverer** | **11:27** | **Fled Egypt, but still trusted "invisible"** |
| **7:29** | **Fled Egypt in Fear** | **11:28** | **By means of faith, kept the Passover** |
| **7:30** | **After 40 years, saw burning bush** | **11:29** | **By means of faith, crossed the Reed Sea** |
| **7:36** | **Led them out with wonders for 40 years** |  |  |

The third point in Moses’ favor looks quite dubious at first. He is commended for leaving when circumstances demanded it (as in Exodus 2:14-15), but he never (as Hebrews puts it) was so afraid that he lost faith in His purpose to be instrumental in God’s deliverance of Israel (even though he seems to have forgotten about it until confronted at the bush that was burning but not consumed. Let it be a reminder to all of us that there are times, even in faith, when it is wise to retreat for a time, but come forward to advance in the future.

The fourth point in Moses’ favor was much more clear, leading Israel in the initial Passover observance. We know the shedding of blood and covering of the doorposts provided for the salvation of Israel. We know that Moses was following God’s instructions. Although many people in the early church such as Melito, a leader in the church at Sardis, believed that the Passover was only formerly of value, the author of Hebrews and writers like Paul saw them as more. I like two summary comments from Old Testament scholar, Brevard S. Childs: “The effect of understanding the Old Testament Passover traditions in the light of the New Testament is to affirm the hope of Israel in so far as it foreshadowed God’s true redemption. But, without the fullness of God’s plan, the Passover rite can lead to distortion. God’s redemption is not simply a political liberation from an Egyptian tyrant, but involves the struggle with sin and evil, and the transformation of life.” [Childs, Brevard S., *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 213.] Summing up, he wrote: “The formal parallelism between the Jewish and Christian hope – both look to the past, both hope for the future – affirms the profound degree of solidarity which unites the two faiths together in a common testimony to God’s final victory.” (p. 214) You may or may not be able to use that. What you can use is the fact that this is an example of faith being able to accomplish its goal through obedience—even when the obedience seems unpleasant.

The fifth point is tied to the crossing of the Reed Sea. I know the New Testament calls it the Red Sea, but I use that term because the Hebrew Bible calls it the “Sea of Reeds.” It may be a portion of the Red Sea or the whole thing, but the important thing to know is that it was significant enough to be an obstacle and God took care of it. We don’t know how God did it, but we know that obedient Israelites were saved and unbelieving Egyptians were drowned (11:29). We do know that the Exodus account starts things off with a fierce wind, and we do know that, in the Bible, wind, breath, and Spirit are the same word (roo-AHK in Hebrew and NEW-mah (*pneuma*) in Greek). So, notice that Moses learned by faith when to leave, when to confront, when to obey, and when to wait.

Strangely, Joshua isn’t given credit in verse 30. Maybe this was so that all of Israel could be given credit for circling the town seven (7) days, followed by seven (7) circuits on the final day, the blowing of the trumpets, and the shouting. The emphasis is that it occurred by faith, as the non-biblical book of 2 Maccabees 12:15 reminds us, the walls fell “unsmitten by battering rams or engines of war.” But if v. 30 emphasizes the faith of God’s people as a whole, acting in obedience, v. 31 reminds us of the faith of the individual, Rahab. She is a harlot. She is, apparently, the Rahab in the line of David and Jesus. She is saved not only by what she did before the “battle,” in hiding the spies and claiming that she knew that God was going to bring victory for them, but she is saved by using a scarlet banner as an identifier that she belonged to God. Remind anyone of Passover?

For the next verse, I would list the names on the white board (or on a handout) and ask students to identify them. They probably won’t have any problem with Gideon, Samson, David, or Samuel, but do they know of Jephthah who ended up sacrificing his daughter for no solid purpose or Barak who could have had the glory of a great military victory, but insisted on depending upon Deborah, the female judge. Ask where Elijah, Elisha (not named in v. 35 for 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4), and all of the prophets except Daniel might be (although not named, clearly in verse 33). We can learn lessons about faith resources from Gideon, not depending on our own strength from Samson, being careful about bargaining with God from Jephthah, and being too timid to accept the leadership role from Barak. These aren’t bad folks as witnessed by their inclusion in this Honor Roll, but they remind us that even when following in faith, there is personal responsibility and a need to keep following God.

Naturally, verse 33 echoes the experience of Daniel in the lion’s den, while verse 34’s reference to “quenching the fire” is often replied to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (known by their Babylonian names as Shadrach, Meschach, and Abed-nego).

Why do you suppose the “List of Horrors” in vv. 35-38 exists?

I would suggest that it exists to remind the readers/hearers of Hebrews that God’s people have always been persecuted, but that they needed to persevere, to hang on, to stretch out in effort, to remain faithful to God’s plan. We don’t really know how to identify all of those who suffered in the “List of Horrors.” It may well be that not all of them took place within the confines of the Old Testament since some may be from the intertestamental tradition (as in Maccabees). However, here are my best ideas. Those who lost sons and received them back in resurrection seems to correspond to Elijah’s Canaanite hostess in 1 Kings 17 who is brought back to life after Elijah stretches upon him and breathes life into him following God’s instructions. It also corresponds to Elisha’s experience with the only son of the Shunammite woman who died, but was raised when Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, placed the prophet’s staff on the dead boy’s face (2 Kings 4).

The verb for tortured in verse 35 seems to reflect better the idea of torture similar to the medieval rack. However, many ancient scholars associated this verse with the martyrdom of Eleazar in 2 Maccabees 6:18-31 where the authority on the Jewish law was force-fed pork and spat it out rather than be defiled. The authorities whipped him and suggested an easy out where he would prefer kosher food and eat it while pretending to eat the pork. He refused, being willing to die rather than to be defiled. Similarly, in 2 Maccabees 7:1-41, seven brothers and their mother are tortured by both whips and thongs, as well as being force-fed pork. In addition, when they wouldn’t swallow the pork, they were burned to death, flayed till skinless, and tortured to death. Then, the mother was killed after seeing all seven of her sons die. They all maintained faith in God, and ceremonial purity, even after being granted a chance to go free.

A lot of commentators also place verse 36 in the era of the Maccabees. Yet, when we get back to verse 37, we seem to be in the realm of Old Testament once again. 2 Chronicles 24:20-22 reminds us of another Zechariah (not the writing prophet) who is stoned to death after delivering his message. Tradition (but not biblical accounts) suggests that Jeremiah may have been stoned when in Egypt after preaching against idolatry. Of course, Jesus referred to the stoning of the prophets in Matthew 21:35 and 23:37, as well as Luke 13:34.

As for being cut into two pieces, there is an old rabbinic tradition that Manasseh executed the prophet Isaiah in this way. Such cruelty seems characteristic of Manasseh, but this is not firm biblical tradition. [Thank you, Mr. Zane, for pointing me in the right direction on this, I found it in a 19th century commentary.] That tradition is also found in the apocryphal book, *The Ascension of Isaiah*.

Naturally, the reference to animal skins may be interesting to some. “The description of the garments worn by some in the group speaks to the placement of these individuals at the margins of society: linen garments come from the realm of the craftspersons and merchants, but animal skins place the wearers outside the margins of ordered society. … The prophets and other people of faith are not persecuted, executed, or expelled because they are ‘undesirables’ who are undeserving of a place in the world. Rather, the way the world has mistreated and marginalized those who embody God’s values and remain steadfast in their orientation toward God shows that the ‘world is not worthy of them.’” [DaSilva, David A. *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle ‘to the Hebrews’* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 422.]

The shocking (though very realistic) statement in this chapter is found in the summary. Not everyone received all that was to be expected. So, please consider these two fine quotations on that subject. First, F. F. Bruce, and then, Franz Delitzsch.

**“Some of them, as we were told in v. 33, ‘obtained promises,’ but none of them received *the* promise in the sense of witnessing its fulfillment.” F. F. Bruce, p. 343**

**“For *them* final salvation was simply a future good; for us it is at once present and future: *present*, in that the whole blessing has been procured for us by the self-sacrifice of Christ once for all; *future*, in that the full development and apprehension of this blessing is not yet realized…”  
Franz Delitzsch, p. 291.**

Once again, we see that idea with which I started us in these notes—the already corresponding to the not yet.