

Faith: A to Z

³² 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--
³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice,
obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,
³⁴ 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.
³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some
were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might
rise again to a better life.
³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and
imprisonment.
³⁷ 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--
³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy-- wandering about in
deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.
³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not
receive what was promised,
⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart
from us they should not be made perfect."

Hebrews 11:32-40

Faith: A to Z

2013 CELEBRATED THE 450TH ANNIVERSARY of the famed *Foxes Book of Martyrs*. In the top 10 most printed books of all time, this work focuses most of its energy on the horrible massacres of English speaking Protestants at the hands of Roman Catholics, though it goes all the way back to the first NT martyr Stephen in the book of Acts, moving forward in history from there to the Twelve Apostles and so on. It became a driving influence for views of Rome that persist to this day, and it did much to further the cause of Reformation among English speaking people. For it shows just how far real people have been willing to take their faith in Jesus Christ.

But John Foxe was not the first to write such a book. Circulating in the First Century A.D., there was a book we today call *The Lives of the Prophets*. While not a book devoted to martyrdom *per se*, it nevertheless recounts the lives and deaths of 23 of Israel's prophets. These include all of the prophets who wrote books in the OT as well as the likes of Nathan, Ahijah, Joad, Azariah, Elijah, Elisha, and Zechariah son of Jehoiada (a perfect number "seven"). What we

discover is that as with Foxes' book, many of these prophets were put to death for their faith in Christ.

Without question, the information contained in this book was well known and even used by the authors of the NT, given that the things they say about the deaths of certain people are not contained in the Old Testament. For they were just like people are today when they write. If they knew a reliable source of historical or theological information, they were not afraid to use it to help further the cause of the point they were trying to make.

Today we come to our last sermon from Hebrews 11. We will be looking mostly at [the last nine verses of the chapter](#). In them, we get a list of six names of OT men of faith, a catch all phrase for all the prophets, ten things they and others did by faith, one more woman of faith, and then a list of several things that happened to them and others because of their faith. We can outline these verses as follows.

- A. The Triumphs of Faith in Victors ([11:33-35a](#))
- B. The Trials of Faith in Victims ([11:35b-38](#))
- C. The Anticipation of Faith ([11:39-40](#))

We will look at these verses using this outline, but the way I want you to remember them—and really the chapter as a whole—is that **every single one of God’s people is given, has, and exercises faith**. All of them. No one is left out. If that is true of them, then it is also true of you who are God’s people today. This is faith: A to Z or to use the Greek alphabet faith: **Alpha to Omega**. So let’s look at the text and see just how stunning of an idea this actually is.

The Triumphs of Faith in Victors

As we have already seen, Hebrews 11 has thus far laid out its case for faith in **chronological order**. It begins with Abel, moves to Enoch, then Noah. Abraham and Sarah are the parents of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Moses and his parents come next, along with the entire nation of Israel. Joshua and Rahab finish out what we have seen. So we might say that by faith they offered acceptable sacrifices, walked with God, built arks, went to the land, conceived, and offered up the only begotten. They saved their babies from doom, refused to sit with sinners, chose to suffer with Christ. They ate the Passover meal, crossed seas on dry land, welcomed spies of

the LORD, and watched impregnable walls fall before their eyes.¹

These are but highlights of the vast amounts of acts done in faith from Genesis to Joshua. But there is still more than **a thousand years' worth of Israel's history** to account for. How can he speak of all those who have faith in a 45-minute sermon like Hebrews? At this point, the Apostle breaks off named examples and their faith and moves to generalities. He has to travel now at breakneck speed. He puts his rhetoric into full throttle so that we become almost dizzy at the flurry of examples.

Now, you could just say it that way: "I'm going to change what I've been doing." Or, if you are clever, you can be more subtle about it. One of the ways you tell your Jewish audience that you are not finished but don't have time to tell them everything is by using **numbers**. Thus, he lists **six** named individuals and a **seventh** in the list is a host of prophets (this is the famous 6 + 1 use of numbers that starts off the book of Genesis). "**And what more shall I say?**"

¹ The last two are on intertwined story with Rahab coming first (**Joshua 2**) and Jericho second (**Joshua 6**). However, Rahab is not commended in the narrative until after Jericho falls (**6:25**), and this is probably why she is mentioned last. Though, the fact that she is a female, pagan prostitute also helps in the order, because as the last of seven, she is not what we would expect.

For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets--” (Heb 11:32). He has already given two lists of seven this twice in this chapter, though it isn’t as immediately noticeable. There are **seven examples after Abraham** is introduced, and **seven examples that follow Moses**.² Believe me when I tell you, our pastor took his time writing this chapter.

Another thing you can do is switch up how you have been giving your examples to throw a monkey wrench and make people think. He does this by unexpectedly changing from a chronological ordering of examples to an unexpected **three-fold reversal of chronology**. Of our first six, they can be looked at as fours that belong together. Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah are all Judges. These can be further reduced to two sets of two: Gideon and Barak, Samson and Jephthah. Now, why can we have two sets of two? Because of the order that they actually appear in Judges. Barak (**Jdg**

² As we can see below, these seven fall into the same structure of four examples from the life of Abraham and Moses followed each by three examples of others directly influenced by their faith.

1.	Abraham went to the land (11:8)	Moses’ parents hid him (23)	Gideon (Judge)
2.	Abraham lived in tents (9)	Moses chose suffering (25)	Barak (Judge)
3.	Abraham’s wife Sarah received power to conceive (11)	Moses left Egypt (27)	Samson (Judge)
4.	Abraham was tested (17)	Moses kept the Passover (28)	Jephthah (Judge)
5.	Isaac invoked blessings (20)	The people crossed the Red Sea (29)	David
6.	Jacob blessed his sons (21)	The walls of Jericho fell (30)	Samuel
7.	Joseph prophesied of the exodus (22)	Rahab took in spies (31)	The Prophets

4) actually came before Gideon (Jdg 6-8) and Jephthah (Jdg 11) came before Samson (Jdg 13-16). Similarly, Samuel (1Sa 1ff) is older than David (1Sam 16ff).

Why in the world would he do this? And why would he have these names? Answering the second question, the names take us through Judges, Ruth, the books of Samuel, and with the phrase “the prophets” completing the heptad (list of seven), we go right on through to the end of the NT. This seventh in the list would include the longest list of names you could think of over the most history. It is the “perfect” way to end it, for it tells you that everyone of God’s people has faith.

What about why he would reverse the orders of the three pairs of names? It seems to me that the first thing it does it puts the most established, better known of the pair first. It is easier to look at the first names of the pairs and say, “Yeah, of course he had faith.” But here is where he gets you. For not only does he disrupt the chronological order of the heroes of faith for the first time, which itself could cause an obsessive-compulsive person who can’t take things being out of order to wake up if he has been droning off to sleep (is there anyone really like that? Probably a couple). But now

he adds quite **unexpected characters** to his list.

There is tremendous importance with these secondary names. Everyone knows Gideon, but who is Barak? Everyone knows Samson, but why would you include Jephthah—the man who made such an insane vow that he ended up sacrificing his only daughter because of it. Finally, David and Samuel are both very well known, but clearly David is the more important of the two as he is arguably the most important figure of the last 1,000 years of the Old Testament era. So he is putting the important one first. Samuel then makes a nice segue into the other prophets.

As we look at them, it is important to remember that all the characters are flawed and sinful individuals. Let's just look at the big three. "**Gideon is a man of inconstant faith,**" says one Bible dictionary.³ He needs assurances from the LORD—even after the Angel appeared to him personally—that God will do what he said and give him victory. Later in his life, he creates a mysterious golden ephod out of gold he won in battle. Whatever this was, it probably wasn't good, and it became a snare for the increasingly superstitious

³ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 865.

Israelites who ended up “whoring after it there” (Jdg 8:27) later on.

Samson is, of course, the quintessential womanizer. His lust for flesh is but one example of his constant flirtations with the world, including specifically the Philistines, the enemies of God. His hedonistic attitude towards life makes Hollywood writers drool. His inability to maintain fidelity to his God cost him his herculean strength, and eventually, his life.

Finally, **David** the man after God’s own heart was an adulterer, polygamist, murderer, and man who gloried in the largeness of his army instead of in his God, both numbering them when forbidden and refusing to go out with them when obligated. David is an open book as far as his sins are concerned. The Psalms constantly recount his sin and his sorrow and his repentance. These men are flawed and sinful people. That is the kind of people God chooses to give faith.

Second, again, many in this list are rather surprising. Yes, **Gideon** is probably the most well known of the first six judges. He is known for his amazing visions and dreams, as being the original leader of 300 (warriors), and for his

unrelenting faith in God. **Samson** is known for his demigod-like strength, his clever riddles, his taunting of and great victories over the Philistines. Both trusted the LORD and both are naturally in the Hall (is Samson's presence here surprising to you?).

But did you know that Gideon isn't the first judge. He is actually the fifth judge. Why not start with the first judge? The judge before him is actually the person mentioned after him. Who is this **Barak**? The only reason that name even sounds slightly familiar to most of us is because there is a person sitting in the Oval Office of our nation's capital with a name that sounds kind of like it (it isn't). He has a great victory over Sisera, but that's all we really know about the man other than that he seems to have played second fiddle to Deborah. He wouldn't even go into battle unless she went with him. But there he is.

Jephthah is quite the character. Most of Israel's judges are hardly the people you would send home to meet momma. In fact, that's kind of the point of Judges. As you get farther along, the judges themselves become worse and worse in character and moral ineptitude. But God will save his people, using anyone he feels like using! These people

aren't choosing Yahweh, Yahweh is choosing them! Jephthah comes closer to the end than the beginning of the judges. Again, he leads some great military victories and fought for Yahweh, but his greatest victory came at the cost of his own daughter after he rashly made a vow to sacrifice the first thing that came out of his house if the LORD would win the battle for him. This is messed up, but it is still rooted in true faith. And here they both are in the Hall of Faith!

This begins to get at my purpose of this sermon today. Those who have faith are not perfect, and those who truly possess it are often deeply flawed and sinful people. Nevertheless, God's people have faith. We are sometimes stunned to read just who Hebrews puts forward as having faith, because if we were to judge, if we were to write this chapter and use people who came to our minds, **those probably wouldn't be the first people we would list**. I mean, who teaches VBS lessons to kiddos in the summer using Barak? Perhaps that betrays the shallowness of our own understanding and how often it is that we look to the outward appearances of a man rather than to the heart. **"Look at how well behaved his children are. He must have great faith."** **"Get a load of how super intelligent that**

professor of Reformed history is! What a man of faith!” “I’ll bet he never struggles with sin, because he’s a man of faith.” “Look at how well her children are behaved. She must be a godly woman of faith.”

Beloved, part of the reason this lists exists is to shatter Pharisaical images from your mind. Not that many godly saints in the list aren’t exemplary (one thinks of Joseph or Enoch for example). But when we put people up on pedestals, we not only create idols of them in our own hearts, we make it that much more difficult to get through to the real essence of what faith is all about and where it originates. Thus we read Barak was a man of faith. Jephthah was a man of faith. Samson was a man of faith. This is rather stunning if you ask me.

One more thing we could do here is to look at [Samuel and the prophets](#). Again, having Samuel last makes for a smooth transition into “the prophets.” Samuel was really the last judge of Israel but also her first great prophet since Moses. Samuel is a towering figure in the OT. While some of these men have brought to our mind more of their sin than their faith, someone like Samuel (though also sinful and not without his own problems) really starts to call faith to

our minds.

You need to see **both things**. In fact, that is the shock of it. That is therefore the beauty of it. And yet, not only does the list include men who have faith when their lives don't really look like it in some ways, but it also includes men who we think of as the most faith-filled people in the OT. God actually works in people's lives sanctifying them from the world, creating goodness and obedience in their hearts, so that they really can look different from the world.

That is who the prophets were. Though bands of ragtag refugees who mostly communed together in the deserts of Israel creating songs and receiving visions, when they heard from the LORD, they told the people. These men were often fearless in the face of adversity and totally faithful in the presence of the Word of the LORD. Not without sin. Not without perhaps long periods of depression, hopelessness, or fear. But through their trials, they persevered to the end. They were perhaps the greatest of the people of God of the OT.

To help us think about just what they were **persevering through**, we have **two more lists**. The first list is about triumphing as victors. This list contains ten statements.

Some of the statements show us how they were victorious by faith in the face of adversity. In many ways, these link together with the six names given, and certainly also with “the prophets.” They **stopped lion’s mouths** (we think of Daniel). But to stop lion’s mouths, he had to first be thrown into a lion’s pit! Daniel was not ashamed of his God and for it he received a night in a den with hungry man-eating, flesh tearing kings of the jungle. The victory he gained could only be achieved by going into the pit.

Likewise, they **quenched fire**. One thinks of Daniel’s three friends: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. For their faith, they were tossed into a furnace of flames to be burnt alive. But their faith brought them through the fiery furnace when one like a son of the gods (i.e. the Angel of the LORD, Jesus) saved them by coming into the flame with them and delivering them. This faith was not a faith that expected to make it out alive. But they did know that God *could* save them if he wanted. “**Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you ... that we will not serve your gods**” (**Dan 3:17-18**). The “but if not” is the uncertainty of the future. The confession

of God is their faith. God decided in that instance to deliver them.

Escaping the sword is something that calls to mind plenty of prophets, but I think of Elijah myself. After this incredible victory over the prophets of Baal—something that some might think would surely give you such faith that you would never doubt anything again—the wicked Jezebel seeks to kill Elijah the same way he had taken the lives of all of her prophets: with the sword. “**He was afraid**” (**1Kg 19:2**) and **ran** for his life and **wanted to die** (4). He runs forty days and forty nights to Mt. Sinai where he meets the Angel of the LORD just as Moses did. He had escaped, but not without an overwhelming trial on his life. So these kinds of victories remind us that faith is never easy. But they also remind us, of course, that faith overcomes, and often times God even brings escape in this life. In the end, these were all **made strong out of weakness** (**Heb 11:34**). It is only when we are weak that we can be strong. It is only when we are at the end of ourselves, no longer relying upon ourselves and our strength that God truly begins to teach us the wonders of faith. For that is when God overcoming (rather than you) can be evidenced.

This thought of God giving victory through faith is multiplied by other things in the list. Some of these rightly belong to men like Samson or Jephthah or Barak or Gideon. They “conquered kingdoms.” They “enforced justice” (33). They were “mighty in war.” They “put armies to flight” (34). These are great outcomes of their faith in God. With three hundred men, Gideon routed the armies of his enemies. Not because he did it. But because the Captain of the Hosts of Heaven fought for him. He had faith thus obtaining the promises: “If you do it my way, even if it seems absurd, I will give you the victory.” It is difficult to imagine greater victories of faith than this war or the slaughter of hundreds of Philistines by Samson with merely the jawbone of a dead animal.

You can see how in reading this list off that it reminds you even here of things that had to be endured by faith in order to become victorious by faith. None of these things give you reason to think that there is some “easy way” through this life. Does anyone go to war, win a battle, enforce justice, and think ahead of time that there is no adversity here, no enemies, no people trying to take your life or force you to step down? If you have a view of faith

that is so popular on so-called “Christian” television, then the remedy for you is Hebrews 11 and really sitting down and thinking about the examples given. When you do, you will see just how amazing it truly is when people overcome by faith. This is a glorious God we serve who chooses to deliver in these ways. The key, of course, is faith.

Curiously, this list ends (in my opinion) with a **tenth thing**: **Women received back their dead by resurrection (35a)**. This is the **second explicit statement** of resurrection made in Hebrews 11, with a third coming at the end of the verse. The first was when Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead. That story is one of the great foreshadowings of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the OT. Now, it is not the mighty Abraham who has a faith like I couldn't possibly have who is in mind.

It is **women**. There are at least two examples of women having faith like this in the OT. **The first** (actually the second) is when a **Shunammite woman (2Kg 4:18-37)**, that is a woman from the northern part of Israel in the land of Issachar, whose son had died from a terrible headache, had faith enough to call for Elisha who finally came and raised him from the dead. This is remarkable because she is a

woman and because she had the faith to go to Elisha and talk to him about it, even confronting his helper who scoffed that she had attempted to speak with the mighty prophet.

The second episode is all the more amazing. It is the story of a woman from Zerephath. Now, Zerephath is a city, not in Israel, but in today's Lebanon. It is between Tyre and Sidon. In other words, this is not one of God's "chosen people" (i.e. a Jew). Even more, the story does not immediately demonstrate her faith. "She said to Elijah, 'What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?'" (2Kg 17:18). But Elijah took her son and raised him from the dead. Only *then* is it recorded of this woman who sounds like the Samaritan woman at the well, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the Word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth" (24). Yet, here they are both proudly displayed for you in the Hall of Faith. They received their dead back by faith.

Think about three things here. **First**, this ends the victorious list of ten things. It is the last and greatest thing that faith received in the OT, physically speaking. **Second**, this foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ about whom untold

millions of people have believed upon because he has been raised from the dead (it does even more as it is actually the LORD himself who raises these boys from the dead). **Finally**, if you take the time to read the list and go back and read the stories, you will be astonished that such people as these are said to have faith in the true and living God. For their stories do not often match up with what we think they should in this regard. And the people, as with the previous list, do not often match up with what the world thinks of when they think of those with faith. These are the lowliest of society, sometimes not even God's people, who when they behold the power of God come to life and have faith. But somehow, faith seems to be there is seedling form even when they themselves do not realize it. Faith in what? In the LORD. Let these stories encourage you and teach you about true faith when yours gets weak or when you think you finally have it all figured out.

The Trials of Faith in Victims

These women serve as both the high point of victory and as a transition to the victims. For these women did suffer

greatly. Their sons both died. This helps us be introduced to **Heb 11:35b-38**, which times the final list in the chapter. The number of things in the list now moves into the background. It is difficult to figure out if he even cares about this anymore.⁴ Now he uses another technique to inspire and hold interest. He uses an arsenal of literary devices available to him in making his list, including rhyming, rhythm, and repetition.

Actually, he has been using great rhetoric for a while now. Our first verse uses interesting techniques that help keep interest, with numbers, the order of things, slowing down your ear, or speeding it up. He just finished with a kind of staccato way of writing, which causes you to naturally pause and reflect. But now, he blasts his list out with speed and skill. The endings of words and prepositions used have this effect upon you in **vs. 37**: *-asthesan, -isthesan, apethanon perielthon, en en en, -umenoι, -omenoi, -umenoι*.⁵ The pen really is mightier than the sword, especially in the hands

⁴ Though, there is still structure as things are now divided into threes: tortured, mocked/flogged, chained/imprisoned; stoned, sawn in two, killed with the sword; destitute, afflicted, mistreated; wandering with sheep skins, in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves.

⁵ *elithasthēsan epristhēsan | en phonō machairēs apethanon periēlthon | en mēlōtais | en aigeiois | dermasin | usteroumenoi | thlibomenoi | kakouchoumenoi*. See **Michael R. Cosby**, “The Rhetorical Composition of Hebrews 11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988): 257-73.

of the greatest Greek speaking Apostle of the NT.

Capturing your attention through the end of his list is one thing (the Confession tells us that part of how we know this is God's word is by the "majesty of the style" LBC 1.5), but the **content is all the more important**. So now he switches from victory to victims. Faith in Christ does not guarantee victory in this life. Yes, God does sometimes give it. That is how kind and gracious he is. But not always.

Thus we read immediately after hearing of women receiving their dead back to life about some being **tortured**. Some **refusing to accept release (35)**. Some are **mocked**. Some are **flogged**. Some are put in **chains and imprisoned (36)**. These are the martyrs, the confessors of the Faith of the OT, and it is probable that this would have hit very close to home for the original audience whom we know has been tempted with this very kind of suffering and because of it renouncing their Faith (see ch. 10). Their sufferings were brought about specifically because they refused to give in and deny their faith in Yahweh. They would not do it, and they paid a dear price for it.

While we could get specific with biblical examples like Jeremiah and all he endured, or Joseph and all he went

through, what is interesting to me is to think about some of the things that we do not know about from the OT itself. For example, “They were sawn in two.” Nothing in the Bible tells us this. But *The Lives of the Prophets* does. The books of the Kings of Israel begin by telling about how a certain king came to power, what he did with his life, if he was good or bad in God’s eyes, and how or when he died. Not so with the Lives of the Prophets. Its first words are, “Isaiah, from Jerusalem, died under Manasseh by being sawn in two, and was buried underneath the Oak of Rogel, near the place where the path crosses the aqueduct whose water Hezekiah shut off by blocking its source” (*LivProph 1:1*).

Why would Hebrews 11, which has stuck to the inspired text, suddenly start adding things like this? Because it suits his purposes and because it is true. Our view of the Bible is not that the Bible is the only book that contains truth, but that the Bible is the only book that tells us infallibly about ourselves, our God, our salvation, and our lives in Christ. But just taking this particularly gruesome image for a moment, you can surely see how this adds to the impact of what the OT saints endured for Christ. I remember reading this the first time wondering, “Where did he get that from,

because that's just horrific." Yes it is, and that's why he tells it to you. It is difficult to imagine anything worse than this. That is what faith sometimes has to endure.

But the point is not to terrify you, but to encourage you. Isaiah was able to endure this. Others endured other things. It is probable that Hebrews actually has this little book in mind, because the one just before this is that some were "stoned." This is not referring to marijuana. While not in the biblical text, we learn of Jeremiah (right after Isaiah) that he was stoned to death by his own people (LivProph 2:1). Since we are on the prophets, it is worth mentioning that we learn that Ezekiel was killed by the ruler of the people (3:2), Micah was thrown off a cliff (6:2; and curiously buried "near the burial ground of the Anakim" vs. 3), Amos was beat to death with a club after having been tortured by king Amaziah (7:1-3), Joad (1Kg 13:1-32) was attacked by lions (LivProph 19:1), and last but not least, Zechariah son of Jehoiada was stoned near the altar of the temple in Jerusalem (23:1). It could be a difficult life being a prophet of the LORD. Why should we think we should get anything better? These all died horrible deaths by faith.

This last one is worth talking about a little bit more. This

Zechariah is not the author of the prophetic book. He is a different prophet mentioned in **2Ch 24:20-21**. He was the son of Jehoiada the priest in the days of king Joash. What is interesting to me is not necessarily his death but how he is used in conjunction with another “prophet” of the OT. His name is Abel.

The Lord Jesus himself says, “I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar” (**Matt 23:34-35**). Not only does Jesus have the same idea of persecution for the Name of Christ in mind like Hebrews does, but do you notice anything about Abel and Zechariah? They are considered the first and last martyrs of the Old Testament, and their names start with A and Z. They bookend the history of the OT in this regard. To put it in Hebrews’ language in other words, they exemplify from A to Z just how far some are called by God to go for their faith. The message to the audience would be easy to

get. Don't be surprised if God calls you to these same kinds of things (and we know they already were from the previous chapter). Therefore, persevere by faith.

The Expectation of Faith: Alpha and Omega

It is almost too difficult for us to truly wrap our minds around these kinds of sufferings. But they are not really seen here as an end to themselves. In fact, if you were writing a litany of sufferings, trying to escalate it from least to worst, wouldn't you end it all with death? As if to say, “OK guys, get ready because I'm going to show you how bad it can get.” He doesn't do that. This betrays his real purpose.

Instead, after he closes out his three forms of martyrdom by saws, stones, and swords, he returns to a lesser form of suffering. It almost seems anticlimactic, until you realize what he is doing. It tells us about people who went around in sheep and goat skins, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. That is how he ends the list in the chapter. Why?

He gives it away by finishing with words that he has been dealing with throughout the chapter. “And all these,

though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised” (Heb 11:39). We saw the very first examples in the chapter were “commended” for their faith. Now we learn that they all are. We saw after this that Abraham was wandering around in tents in a land that was foreign because he was looking for a different city. So by returning to wandering and having no clothes, and eating bad food, and living in such places as caves, we are returned to the idea of a better hope, a hope for the future. And that is what Faith is. It is being sure of who you hope for, and certain of what you do not see. This is what allows people to undergo such gruesome, horrible, terrible sufferings in this life. This isn't the end. What is coming is infinitely better to those who have faith.

Faith where? Let me conclude by thinking about a couple of individuals I'm reminded of in the NT in these things. The first person comes to my mind because of the clothes that he wore, the food that he ate, the places he ministered. He wore camel's skins, ate locust for food, and ministered the desert. His name is John and he is likened to Elijah, who all the more embodied the things at the end of the last list. John was an outcast and excluded by unbelieving

society, because earthly society was not his goal.⁶

John was the the last prophet of the OT era. He was also martyred, having his head cut off and served on a dinner plate, making him the first Christian martyr of the NT. He is also the forerunner of someone else, a voice calling in the wilderness. This was necessary and the the last verse begins to tell us why. “Since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:40).

This rather strange verse is also critical to the entire chapter. It links the faith of those who came before to us, and the reason why we have been made perfect (see 10:14) to them. For we are all one people of God in Christ. There is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, OT vs. NT saint. To attain the celestial city, we need their persevering faith. To be cleansed, they need what is now available to us.

Do you remember what John called out? “Prepare the way of the LORD. The Kingdom of God is at hand.” The beginning of chapter 12 now teases out the ultimate reason

⁶ This language is inspired by Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 594.

for all of this. A “great cloud of witnesses” (12:1) is now in heaven and therefore by faith we are to lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and run the race set before us with endurance? But why?

Part of it is because the martyrs from A to Z made it there ahead of us. But all oh, so much more, because the Ultimate Martyr who is the founder and perfecter of our faith, “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God” (12:2). It is not Zechariah, not the prophets, not Abraham, not Moses, not anyone else in the OT who completes the list of those who died. It is our Lord Jesus. If you only read chapters, you could miss him. But there he is. And he has been here the whole time even in chapter 11, being foreshadowed both in the sufferings and death of the OT saints, but also in their victories, especially the victories of resurrection. “So that they might rise again to a better life” (35) it says. Through the resurrection of Christ who is at the right hand of God.

And thus, this chapter is ultimately not a list praising those who had faith. It is a list praising the One in whom their faith was placed. The Word by whom we believe by faith

created the world (11:4). Christ, of whom Moses desired to suffer the reproaches of rather than partake in the pleasures of sin in this world for only a while (26). He who is raised, better than Isaac, greater than the widows' sons, the hope of our reward, the root of our life to come. Therefore, not only are you to look at the faith of those who lived from A to Z, knowing that they all died in faith, knowing that all of God's people have faith. Not only are you to emulate their faith. Not only are you to know that God gives you faith when you trust in Christ. But you are to see the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End who went before you, cleansing you of your sin, restoring you to God, giving you a better covenant, a better hope, by his better sacrifice, thereby removing your sin forever. And by faith in him, whether God chooses you to be a victim or victor, you will make it through to the end, for he grants faith, he sustains it, and he will never leave or forsake you.