

Lesson Twenty-one

(11:23-40)

FAITH AND LAW

²³By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. ²⁷By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. ²⁸By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the first-born might not touch them.

²⁹By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. ³⁰By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given friendly welcome to the spies.

³²And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of

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Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets —³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions,²⁴ quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.³⁵ Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life.³⁶ Others suffered mocking and scourging, 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, ill-treated —³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy — wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

39 And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Faith's obedience took a new and more sharply defined turn when God gave the law to Moses in 1445 B.C. One always had to believe and obey, beginning with Adam. When the law came, however, explicit directions were given for everyone subject to it. There were some specific things for men, some for women, some for children; while some were for all. Prior to the law, faith evidently took several different turns, but the law brought much more conformity than was true before.

God gave the law for several reasons, among them the more revealing types and shadows of that which was to come, and the more polished mirror in which men could perceive their sinfulness. As before remarked in the comments on chapter 7 and 8, God designed the law and all that was involved in it as a temporal measure, to be the final preparation for that which was the real and the true, the kingdom of God, the church. Jesus came as the fulfillment of all that went before, God summing up all things in his son.

Our lesson text continues the thread of thought relative to the faithful of God, tracing for us those who lived by faith while under the law. It is important to note once again that those who lived under the law (basically we are speaking about Jews) were required as part of the expression of their obedience to God to keep the law. However, keeping the law, as such, however well it was kept, did not procure them redemption. The reason is simple: the law only condemned, and could not take away sins (as noted on 10:1-18, for instance). Their salvation actually came through Jesus Christ, 9:15-17, not through law-keeping. It is the same for us today. We are required to obey God's commands, whatever they are, but the keeping of them does not bring salvation.

Jesus saves. Our acceptance of him and his sacrifice for us and our sin is the means of salvation. Let us keep these things forever straight in our minds, that if Jesus had not died for sin, we could not be saved even if we lived perfectly. God ordained that redemption be in Jesus only. That's the way it is.

11:23 — **by faith** — The faith of Moses' parents, Amram and Jochébed, whose names are not mentioned, but who believed in God and looked into the future. How they knew what to do with Moses is not told us. Evidently they did not consider that disobedience to a ruler was improper, even though the Bible, and especially the New Covenant, teaches believers to obey rulers. It is a bit difficult to imagine that God expressly told them to disobey, but disobey they did. They were like the midwives who also disobeyed.

Obedience to one's rulers because God has so ordered it is a general rule for all. Sometimes, as in the case in point, believers have come to the conclusion that God's will for them is such that they cannot do what the ruler requires (as was the case with Shadrack and co., John and Peter, etc.). In such instances, whether one has correctly perceived the issue or not, one must do as he believes God has ordered. No other position will do, for one must do as is believed to be right, regardless (Martin Luther is a classic example of this point.).

In all ages, including the last two centuries in these United States, believers have been on all sides of this issue, and still are. It is not an easy matter to settle, for the issue is complex and hard to see clearly. We have Christians on all sides of such issues as abortion, taxes, speed limits, divorce, armed services, etc., all of which relate in some way to laws of government. While each of us needs to study carefully and continually, doing the best we know how, we also need to practice restraint and forbearance towards other Christians especially, and people in general who do not see the issue as we do. (The relevant New Testament texts would include Matthew 22:15-22; John 19:8-11; Acts 4:18-30; 5:19-20; Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2; I Peter 2:13-17.)

V. 24 — **By faith Moses** — With his mother for his nurse, Moses was doubtless well taught concerning his heritage and the particular way he came to be a part of Pharaoh's household.

V. 25 — **choosing** — By faith, reasoned out and decided upon, Moses chose to live his life for God, regardless of the consequences, not regardless of the evidence. Any life of faith will be one of choice, though sometimes the enormity and eternal significance of some choices will not be comparable to others. Yet it remains true that every decision in life must be made in the light of faith's commitment to God.

ill-treatment — Such as this will bring out one's character and dedication. Often such circumstances are brought about by misunderstanding

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or ignorance, but sometimes ill-treatment is from prejudice and is deliberate.

people of God — In this case, the Israelites. It is worthy of note that most of the ill-treatment Moses received in his life was from his own people. His choice, however, was still right in view of reality.

fleeting pleasures — No pleasure this life offers can be but fleeting. Only that which comes from God endures. This is why Paul teaches that godliness is profitable both for this life and the life to come, I Timothy 4:7-10; 6-10.

V. 26 — **he looked** — The recurring refrain in all these examples is that the people selected were living expressions of 11:1, 6. Whatever the cost was, it was not too high to pay to live for God. In all cases, these ones brought to our attention had less evidence, both in quality and quantity, than those to whom the epistle was first addressed, and us today.

V. 27 — While Moses left Egypt at the age of forty years because of Pharaoh's anger over the Egyptian's murder at the hands of Moses, when Moses came back at the age of eighty, he faced the ruler with no fear, and in spite of his studied opposition. The reason was that he feared God rather than men (see Luke 12:4-7). For Moses, his faith made that which was not seen "seen" and that which could not be proved "real."

V. 28 — **the Passover** — This event, with few peers for greatness, had to be kept solely by faith. There had been no such occasion before; there was no way to prove that it would happen — it was observed because God was believed. In many ways it foreshadowed Jesus' death and its commemoration, the communion service.

V. 29 — **dry land** — Exodus 14:22 states that the land was dry for the Israelites, but later in v. 25 states that the chariot wheels were clogged. Anyone who has ever cleaned out a pond or walked in a lake or river having a mud bottom can appreciate what a tremendous miracle God worked in making that sea bottom dry for Israel. Paul teaches in I Corinthians 10:1ff. that this event was an immersion into Moses for the Israelites, and that in some unexplained way, Christ was their food and drink, their sustenance. How like it is for all Christians that our whole life is from Christ! Those who first received this epistle were like the Israelites in having passed out of sin's bondage into freedom by the grace of God. They needed to be cautious lest God not be pleased with them as was true with most of Israel, I Corinthians 10:5.

V. 30 — **the walls of Jericho** — As it was with the Passover and the Red Sea, no human could show that what God had promised would happen. Yet forty years after those great events, Joshua led Israel around that fortified city, and the walls came tumbling down. Obedient faith carried the day!

V. 31 — **Rahab** — This lady's faith was of such outstanding quality that she was also mentioned by James as one who believed. The fact of her previous (?) life only puts her faith in sharper prospective. The part that is sticky is that she lied while ostensibly believing, a somewhat incongruous state. However, God honored her faith, imperfect though it was, just as he did for Abraham who also lied while believing. Her faith was evident in that she so acted as seeing the unseen (i.e., the city falling to Israel), even some forty years after the exodus from Egypt.

friendly welcome — The Greek text reads that she received the spies in "peace" (note Matthew 10:13). The Greek word is *εἰρήνη*, (the Hebrew term was commented upon in 7:1-2), our English word "Irene."

V. 32 — **what more shall I say** — If the facts of the case from Abel to Rahab were not sufficient for faith, the author of Hebrews was in despair. Yet it is as true today as 2,000 years ago, that people become Christians and then fall by the wayside, and with even more reasons for faith. Each of the people that will be briefly mentioned were as those before: persons who lived by faith, not perfectly but loyally.

V. 33 — **who through faith** — Recall here the teaching in 6:7-8, 9-20. God did not overlook or forget the lives of these various ones, because he was faithful and they were rewarded because they were faithful.

V. 33-38 — The worth of studying the Old Covenant is impossible to measure, but this text gives plenty of evidence for doing so. While it is true that Christians are obligated only to keep that which is to be found within the New Testament (see 8:9), yet it is but folly to ignore God's revelation in the Old Testament. Within its confines we can see so many valuable things for us, such as is here given in Hebrews. We can know much about the character of God, much about the general things he approves and disapproves. It may not be a part of our life to be concerned with moving a pile of rocks that mark a boundary, yet we can see it is wrong to do so, Proverbs 22:28; 23:10. One can meditate at some length upon God's dealings with the Jews, and learn many things profitably (see Exodus 19:1ff.; 24:1ff.; Deuteronomy 27:1 — 30:20; Jeremiah 22:1ff.). The New Testament says little about the reasons God is opposed to drunkenness, but Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35 offer help. No book more clearly enunciates the vainness of living apart from God than does Ecclesiastes. May we all be Christians by obedience to the New Covenant scriptures, but may it also be true that we are students of God's Old Covenant as well.

V. 35 — **by resurrection** — The best known examples are of Elijah and the widow's son in I Kings 17, and Elisha and the Shunammite's son in II Kings 4. Mary and Martha both understood and believed in a final resurrection, John 11, though not much is explicitly taught in the Old Testament about it.

a **better life** — Clear evidence of faith seeing the invisible. Some were by faith delivered from trials (as the men in II Kings 4:38-41) while others were delivered through trials (as the three men in Daniel 3).

V. 37 — **they were killed** — No place has God promised to deliver the faithful from problems, adversity or even physical death. While it may be true that God watches over his own (Psalms 91:11-12; Matthew 6:25-33), yet it is also true that each day has its share of trouble, Matthew 6:34, and God did not spare his only son from physical death, Romans 8:31-34. Romans 8:35-36 are on this point — God may treat his own like a lamb for sacrifice; but if faith is continued, God will deliver, Romans 8:37-39; John 10:27-30; Hebrews 10:35-39.

V. 38 — The New English Bible's rendering of this verse in a positive way, that these mentioned were "too good for the world" is really good. That they were! They remained true to God despite the odds against them, through their faith in light of the rewards, even as did Jesus, 12:2.

V. 39 — **did not receive** — Some were greatly blessed, and some will be blessed, as Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:28-29 tell us, but the realization of the Messiah's coming and the resultant kingdom were not theirs to enjoy. Christians are those upon whom the "ends of the ages are come," I Corinthians 10:11.

V. 40 — **something better** — The "better" is in Christ, and the church, the kingdom of God on earth. It isn't that the faith of these mentioned was any less commendable than that of Christians, for it wasn't. It is simply that God chose to make Christianity the "better." Note the comment of Simeon in Luke 2:29-32; Jesus' prayer in John 17:23 and Paul's statement in Galatians 4:4.

perfect — The same word as in 5:9; 7:19; etc. As is often done in this epistle, the intimate connection between the events prior to Jesus' coming and those that surround and follow him are shown. Such is but another piece in the total picture that reveals how involved God has been in the affairs of men.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSONS 21:

194. With what particular time slot is our text concerned?
195. Have you listed all those faithful expressly mentioned in our text?
196. How do you reconcile the disobedience of Moses' parents to the general will of God toward rulers?
197. Do you disobey rulers? If so, what sort of example do you set?
198. Would it be possible to disobey a ruler and be wrong in the sight of God even though the disobedience was believed to be "in faith"?

199. Give examples of Jesus' breaking the laws of the land.
200. Do the points made in 11:1, 6 about faith and the faithful characterize those mentioned in our text?
201. Why do you think the point about "dry land" was made?
202. How do you reconcile faith in God and lying to men, as was true of Rahab?
203. Who, of all those mentioned in ch. 11, was without sin?
204. While we didn't comment in detail about verses 33-38, can you give some Old Testament examples of some of those things?
205. What is expressly said about the faithful in v. 39?
206. Who is the "us" in v. 40?
207. Who is said to be not perfect in v. 40? (Does our lesson introduction help us see why some were not perfect?)