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EDITORIAL

Hebrews 11 is a hall of fame of God's people in the Old Testament. In this one chapter we are reminded of the great figures of the Old Testament and their faithful works in service to God.

The promise of salvation is made as early on as to our first parents. Evidence of faith in that promise is evident within the same family. It is traced through the Old Testament from Abel through to David and the prophets.

There are surprises along the way. Many stories of Joseph might be used as examples of his faith – his interpretation of the dreams, his fleeing Potiphar's wife, his rise to power in Egypt and reconciliation to his brothers. Yet another, lesser known story is highlighted. He 'at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.' This story doesn't excite as much as the others do. But it teaches us important truths of faith. It is lived to the end of life and rests in God's promise. It has concern for the fulfilment of God's word and directs others to that end.

The variety of characters in the chapter bring clarity to what faith is. It is a gift, by which God brings home his power of salvation. God's boundless grace is shown effectively in their lives. We can see that especially in Rahab's life. John Owen comments she was living in, 'that kind of sin, which of all others is the most effectual in detaining persons under its power. But nothing, no person, no sin, is to be despaired of, in whose cure sovereign, almighty grace is engaged.'¹

After Rahab hears of how Israel was delivered at the Red Sea, she turns to the Lord in faith. She is wholly isolated from the covenant people in her community, yet her tactic to deter the Jericho king from the spies echoes that of the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1:19. She, a Canaanite prostitute, a stranger to God's people; they were Hebrew midwives at the very heart of the covenant people, ensuring the next generation was safely delivered. Yet God did similar works through them. Though we know little of her circumstances afterwards, providentially she was brought directly into the very heart of God's covenant purposes, as we read in Christ's genealogy in Matthew 1.

Rahab's story is especially helpful for bringing the relative importance of faith in the Lord to light. So Owen comments again on this story, 'Although unbelief be not the only destroying sin (for the wages of every sin is death, and many are accompanied with peculiar provoca-

¹ John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. by William H. Goold, 7 vols (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter), VII (1862), 178.

tions), yet it is the only sin which makes eternal destruction inevitable and remediless.²

The stories and figures of Hebrews 11 remind us to observe faith in ordinary acts as well as mighty ones. God saves people from a variety of backgrounds and to perform a variety of works. God binds his people together. The chapter ends remarking on the unity of believers in Old and New Testament eras. There are shared beliefs and experiences. 11:3 perfectly describes the contrast of beliefs about the origins of the world today. Thus, while following the New Testament we live in the light of Christ's coming, faith continues to be 'the assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen.' As Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' (John 20:29)

² Ibid., p. 179.

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The Rev Topping's paper was written for new students to read in advance of theological study as a preparatory exercise.