

# The Book of Hebrews

מְאֹנְשׁ מִנְמָה דָא מִנְהָת אַקְלָא  
צְמַאַלְלָא נְתַחְצְרָה דְרַחְסָנָה סָקָה  
אַחֲרַ פְּקָלָא תְּסִנְ סְרְבָּאַלְלָה  
רַרְתָּא סָקָה תְּאַקְסָנָה דְמַמְצָה  
תְּאַתְּפָלָשָׁה נְתַרְדְּנָה הַרְפָּרָה נְרַלְדָה  
תְּאַגְּשָׁה רַלְדָה מְלַלְצָה סָסָה תְּלָשָׁה



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# Outline of Hebrews

## “Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus’ Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)
- V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)
- VI. Epilogue: Final Exhortations (13:1-25)

# Outline of Hebrews

## V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)

- A. Exhortation to Draw Near, Hold Fast, and Encourage One Another (10:19-25)
- B. Warning: No Hope of Forgiveness for Those Who Turn from Christ (10:26-31)
- C. Call to Persevere in Faith (10:32-12:3)
  - 1. Don't Abandon Confidence but Persevere in Faith (10:32–39)
  - 2. The “Hall of Faith” – Description and Examples of Persevering Faith (11:1-12:3)
- D. Exhortations to Readers to Endure (12:4-29)

# Outline of Hebrews

2. The “Hall of Faith” – Description and Examples of Persevering Faith (11:1-12:3)
  - a. Prologue: The Nature of Faith (11:1-3)
  - b. The Faith of Those Prior to the Flood (11:4-7)
  - c. The Faith of Abraham and His Heirs (11:8-22)
  - d. The Faith of Moses and Those Entering the Land (11:23-31)
  - e. A Closing Catalog of Faith (11:32-40)
  - f. Run the Race Looking to Jesus as the Supreme Example of Faith (12:1-3)

# A Closing Catalog of Faith (11:32-40)

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

# A Brief Summary of What I've Said About This Section So Far (11:32-38)

- In this last section of chapter 11, the author realizes the list could keep going on forever, so he briefly discusses the faith of a number of believers in the rest of the Old Testament along with a number of believers mentioned in later Jewish tradition.
- In verses 32-35a he focuses on the *great victories* experienced by those who exercised faith.
- Then in verses 35b-38 the author *shifts gears* from looking at more *positive* outcomes encountered by those who had faith, to faith that was expressed in the face of *great hardship*.

<sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

- In these last two verses, the author concludes “the Hall of Faith” with a fitting *epilogue*.
- The phrase “*all these*” refers to all the Old Testament believers listed or alluded to in the previous 38 verses (Heb 11:1-38).
- In Heb 11:1-2 the author *introduced* this list of OT believers by stating that it was by “*faith*” that “*the people of old [= OT believers] received their commendation*” – meaning that God has “borne witness” (Greek: *martureo*) to their faithfulness.
- And so when the author *repeats* that same idea here in verse 39, saying that, “[*these OT believers were*] **commended through their faith**,” the author is tying back into that introductory statement and, in effect, putting literary brackets around this entire section (Heb 11:1-39).

<sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

- The author goes on to tell us that “*all these [OT believers], though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised*”
- What were “*all these*” OT believers “*promised*” that they “*did not receive*”?
- After all, the author has mentioned ***earlier*** in this letter that ***some*** of these OT believers ***did*** receive ***certain*** promises:
  - *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.* (Heb 11:11)
  - *..who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises...* (Heb 11:33)

<sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

- But the author's point **here** is that these OT believers did **not** receive the definitive fulfillment of God's **ultimate** promise to them.
- And what promise **was that?**
- I believe the author has already described this ultimate promise in the immediately preceding context where, using **similar wording**, he says concerning Abraham and his heirs:
  - *"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... But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God... has prepared for them a city.* (Heb 11:13-16)

<sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

- From this we see that “*what was promised*” to “*all these*” OT believers that they “*did not receive*” was that final state of glory where they will dwell in a “*better [heavenly] country*”, and a new and better “*heavenly... city*” that God has prepared for them.
- Upon the death of each of these OT believers, their souls were taken into the presence of God where even now they continue to dwell in a state free from sin, and fear, and suffering – but they *still* have not *fully* received “*what was promised*” to them!
- The promise of a glorious resurrection, the promise of the new heavenly Jerusalem – “*the city that is to come*” (Heb 13:14), has *yet* to be fulfilled for “*all these*” OT believers.

<sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for **us**, that apart from **us** they should not be made perfect.

- Likewise, the **readers of this letter** were **also** looking forward to, and had not yet received “**what was promised**” to **them**.
- Which is why the author, in the warning passage that comes at the end of chapter 10, just **before** the “Hall of Faith,” tells his readers:
  - *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.* (Heb 10:36)
- So, this brings us to the **next** verse (verse 40) where the author goes from talking about “**all these**” (**OT believers**), to talking about “**us**” – himself and his readers, who were **NT** believers.

<sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,<sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

- Just as God had “*promised*” “*all these*” OT believers something *far “better”* than any of the things of this world (which is why they lived as “*strangers and exiles on the earth*”), so “*God had provided something better for us [= NT believers]*” as well.
- In my opinion, the way the ESV has translated verse 40, while a fairly accurate literal translation, is nevertheless awkward.
- I believe the NET has done a much better job of translating verse 40, so for the remainder of this discussion, I would like to use the NET translation.

<sup>39</sup> *And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised.* <sup>40</sup> *For God had provided something better for us, so that they would be made perfect together with us.* [NET translation]

- So, what *is* the “*something better*” that God provided *“for us”* [NT believers]?
- I believe, in this context, the “*something better*” is **not** “*something better*” than **OT believers had**, but “*something better*” than what **we have** in our present earthly state (i.e., **the same** “*better country*” that the OT believers were “*promised*”).
- In other words, the “*something better*” that “*God had provided... for us*” is the future glorious fulfillment of what God has promised to **all** believers of **all** ages: believers in their glorified bodies dwelling in the new heavens and new earth and the New heavenly Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup> *And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised.* <sup>40</sup> *For God had provided something better for us, so that they would be made perfect together with us.* [NET translation]

- The author then goes on to say that “*God had provided*” this future glorious state of heavenly perfection for “*us*” [NT believers] “*so that they [the OT believers] would be made perfect together with [NT believers].*”
- What does the author mean when he talks about OT believers (“*they*”) being “***made perfect***” together with NT believers (“*us*”)?
- The Greek word translated “*made perfect*” (*teleioo*) is a word that means “*bringing something to its goal complete, fulfill, accomplish*” (Friberg Analytical Greek Lexicon)

<sup>39</sup> *And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised.* <sup>40</sup> *For God had provided something better for us, so that they would be made perfect together with us.* [NET translation]

- So, here is the point I think the author is making in these two verses:
- “*All these*” faithful OT believers (including those listed by our author in the “hall of faith”) ***did not***, and ***still*** have not, entered into that “*better country*”(Heb 11:16) and that heavenly “*city that is to come*”(Heb 11:16 cf. 13:14) that they were “*promised*”.
- Why? Because God has provided “*something better*” (i.e., ***the same*** “*better country*” that the OT believers were “*promised*”) for “*us*” faithful NT believers as well.

<sup>39</sup> *And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised.* <sup>40</sup> **For God had provided something better for us, so that they would be made perfect together with us.** [NET translation]

- And therefore “*they*” [the OT believers] must wait until God has finished gathering all of “*us*” [NT believers] for whom God has *also* “*provided something better*.”
- And they must do this “***so that they***” may enter “*together with us*” into that “*perfect*” eternal state that is the fulfillment of all that God has promised his people throughout all of human history.
- There is a passage in the book of Revelation that describes a similar idea to what I believe the author is describing here.

<sup>39</sup> *And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised.* <sup>40</sup> **For God had provided something better for us, so that they would be made perfect together with us.** [NET translation]

- At one point in the book of Revelation, the Apostle John describes the following scene:
  - *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”* (Rev 6:9-10)
- And here is how God responds:
  - *Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.* (Rev 6:11)

<sup>39</sup> *And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised.* <sup>40</sup> *For God had provided something better for us, so that they would be made perfect together with us.* [NET translation]

- The author is pointing out to his readers that the OT believers in the “Hall of Faith” faithfully served God in their lifetime, and are now still **eagerly waiting** to receive what they **confidently** believe God will yet provide.
- And so the author is encouraging his readers to follow the example set by these OT believers and continue faithfully serving God, because, like these faithful OT saints, **we too** should be **eagerly** looking forward to “*something better*”.
- And the “*something better*” they have to look forward to is nothing less than that glorious moment in the future when the present heavens and earth will be burned up and they, along with the saints of old, will be given their glorified bodies and will enter “**together**” into the presence of God in the new heavens and new earth and the new city Jerusalem that is to come.

# Class Discussion Time



## \*Class Discussion Time

- We have looked today at what I believe to be a rather difficult passage to interpret, and I have, in my interpretation have come up with a different understanding than the majority of my favorite commentaries on Hebrews.
- Was my explanation clear? Or do you perhaps still have questions about something I have covered? If so, please ask now. Someone else may be asking the same questions!
- Was my explanation persuasive? Do you think the way I have explained the text makes sense of the wording that we see there? And, in your opinion, does my explanation fit well with surrounding context?

## \*Class Discussion Time

- Assuming that I am correct in my understanding of this passage, the big idea in these two verses is that we, like those faithful OT saints who have gone before us, should be confidently and eagerly awaiting that final day when God makes all things right and this eager expectation should be the main driving force in what motivates us in how we live our lives.
- Would you say this is the case for you? Do you have an eager expectation and desire for the Lord to come and make all things right? And is that expectation and hope a major driving force in your life?