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Sermon Brief
Text: Heb. 11:23-31
Title: Living in Faith 4
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

In this fourth look at Hebrews chapter eleven, we focus on the exodus and the conquest of Canaan by the Israelite people under Moses and Joshua. The theme of Living in Faith continues as the foundational emphasis of verses 23-31. Hear the words of the writer of Hebrews as he summarizes the period of ancient Israelite history.

23 **By faith** Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 **By faith** Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. 27 **By faith** he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. 28 **By faith** he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. 29 **By faith** the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. 30 **By faith** the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. 31 **By faith** Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.¹

Moses and Joshua stand next to Abraham in importance to the Jewish people as models and examples of ancient leaders. Particularly is this so with Moses.² The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews saw them

¹GNT: 11.23 **Πίστει** Μωϋσῆς γεννηθεὶς ἐκρύβη τρίμηνον ὑπὸ τῶν πατέρων αὐτοῦ, διότι εἶδον ἀστείον τὸ παιδίον καὶ οὐκ ἐφοβήθησαν τὸ διάταγμα τοῦ βασιλέως. 11.24 **Πίστει** Μωϋσῆς μέγας γενόμενος ἠρῆσατο λέγεσθαι υἱὸς θυγατρὸς Φαραῶ, 11.25 μᾶλλον ἐλόμενος συγκακουχεῖσθαι τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ πρόσκαιρον ἔχειν ἀμαρτίας ἀπόλαυσιν, 11.26 μείζονα πλοῦτον ἠγασάμενος τῶν Αἰγύπτου θησαυρῶν τὸν ὀνειδισμόν τοῦ Χριστοῦ· ἀπέβλεπεν γὰρ εἰς τὴν μισθαποδοσίαν. 11.27 **Πίστει** κατέλιπεν Αἴγυπτον μὴ φοβηθεὶς τὸν θυμὸν τοῦ βασιλέως· τὸν γὰρ ἀόρατον ὡς ὄρων ἐκαρτέρησεν. 11.28 **Πίστει** πεποιήκεν τὸ πάσχα καὶ τὴν πρόσχυσιν τοῦ αἵματος, ἵνα μὴ ὁ ὀλοθρεύων τὰ πρωτότοκα θίγη αὐτῶν. 11.29 **Πίστει** διέβησαν τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν Θάλασσαν ὡς διὰ ξηρᾶς γῆς, ἧς πείραν λαβόντες οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι κατεπόθησαν. 11.30 **Πίστει** τὰ τεῖχη Ἰεριχῶ ἔπεσαν κυκλωθέντα ἐπὶ ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας. 11.31 **Πίστει** Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐ συναπώλετο τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν δεξαμένη τοὺς κατασκόπους μετ' εἰρήνης.

²Interesting is Stephen's different account of the life of Moses in Acts 7:20-44, NRSV:

20 At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father's house; 21 and when he was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. 22 So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds. 23 "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his relatives, the Israelites. 24 When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. 25 He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand. 26 The next day he came to some of them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, "Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong each other?" 27 But the man who was wronging his neighbor pushed Moses aside, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" 29 When he heard this, Moses fled and became a resident alien in the land of Midian. There he became the father of two sons. 30 "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush. 31 When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight; and as he approached to look, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look. 33 Then the Lord said to him, "Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the mistreatment of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Come now, I will send you to Egypt." 35 "It was this Moses whom they rejected when they said, "Who made you a ruler and a judge?" and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, "God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he

as important to Christians as well. I believe we can still learn valuable lessons from these individuals about living our lives in the midst of faith commitment to our God.

BODY

I. In faith Moses led the people out of slavery, vv. 23-29

23 **By faith** Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 **By faith** Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. 27 **By faith** he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. 28 **By faith** he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. 29 **By faith** the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned.

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Moses is the central example in verses 23-29.

In the space of a short paragraph the writer summarizes the life of Moses as the deliverer of the Israelite people from Egyptian slavery. This covers four of the first five books of the Old Testament! The writer begins with the faith of Moses' parents which led them to hide the infant Moses from the Egyptian pharaoh for three months to protect their son from death. Moses as a young man by faith chose to identify with his suffering Israelite people rather than enjoy the privileges of the Egyptian royal palace. In his trust in God he forty years of his life away from Egypt in the wilderness tending to sheep and goats. In his faith Moses observed the first Passover in order to protect the first born among the Israelites. Through he faith he led the Israelites through the Red Sea safely to the other side. These are the points of Moses' life the writer chose to highlight. From his summary of Moses' life we can learn some valuable insights into the nature of Living in Faith.

Faith takes risks, v. 23: By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict (Πίστει Μωϋσῆς γεννηθεὶς ἐκρύβη τρίμηνον ὑπὸ τῶν πατέρων αὐτοῦ, διότι εἶδον ἀστεῖον τὸ παιδίον καὶ οὐκ ἐφοβήθησαν τὸ διάταγμα τοῦ βασιλέως.). In Exodus 1:15-22³ and 2:1-2⁴ we find the biblical narrative that the writer here sum-

raised me up.' 38 He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us. 39 Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, "Make gods for us who will lead the way for us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him." 41 At that time they made a calf, offered a sacrifice to the idol, and reveled in the works of their hands. 42 But God turned away from them and handed them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: "Did you offer to me slain victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 43 No; you took along the tent of Moloch, and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; so I will remove you beyond Babylon." 44 "Our ancestors had the tent of testimony in the wilderness, as God directed when he spoke to Moses, ordering him to make it according to the pattern he had seen."

³Exod. 1:15-22, NRSV: 15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." 20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

⁴Exod. 2:1-2, NRSV: 1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.

marizes. The Egyptian pharaoh ordered all Israelite boy babies to be killed at birth. But Moses's parents defied this governmental decree when Moses was born. To be sure, the writer to Hebrews follows here the LXX text of Exod. 2:1-2 rather than the original Hebrew text. The LXX (Exod. 2:2) attributes one of the reasons for hiding Moses at birth as being "his striking appearance" (εἶδον ἀστέilon τὸ παιδίον). The second reason is that they weren't afraid of the king's decree. In Exodus 1:17 and 21, the midwives who feared God were highlighted.⁵ Moses' parents shared that faith commitment to God with these midwives. Through their faith, they were committed to obeying God rather than the pharaoh. And this meant taking a huge risk in order to protect their new born son.

People of faith are risk takers. Not careless or mindless risk takers. But people who will be true to God's will and ways when it puts them in conflict with the ways of men. When a choice is forced upon them, they will choose God's ways over men's. This, even if it puts them in danger.

Faith stands with God's people, vv. 24-26:⁶ 24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. (11.24 Πίστει Μωϋσῆς μέγας γενόμενος ἠρνήσατο λέγεσθαι υἱὸς θυγατρὸς Φαραῶ, 11.25 μᾶλλον ἐλόμενος συγκακουχεῖσθαι τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ πρόσκαιρον ἔχειν ἀμαρτίας ἀπόλαυσιν, 11.26 μείζονα πλοῦτον ἠγησάμενος τῶν Αἰγύπτου θησαυρῶν τὸν ὀνειδισμόν τοῦ Χριστοῦ· ἀπέβλεπεν γὰρ εἰς τὴν μισθαποδοσίαν.).

The next incident in Moses' life highlighted by the writer is Moses' choice to identify with his Israelite heritage rather than continue to enjoy the privileges of the royal palace of the Egyptian pharaoh.⁷ As the commentator Raymond Brown notes on these verses, "faith determines our options." Moses came to realize that as an Israelite he had to identify with his own people. This even though it would mean suffering and loss of privilege. His faith led him to be willing to suffer with the people of God even as Christ centuries later would suffer. The writer looking at Moses from a Christian view sees God's identification with the Israelites as also being Christ's identification with the people of God. One would be in serious error here to assume that Moses had understanding of Christ as the Messiah. Nothing in the Old Testament even hints at such. More likely the point of Moses' faith was to realize that suffering as God's Anointed, the meaning of τοῦ Χριστοῦ here, had the blessing of God attached to it. And this blessing was far more valuable than all the wealth of the Egyptian pharaoh.

When we live in faith as did Moses, we will take our stand with God's people. This may well bring suffering and loss, but true faith will identify itself with the people of God no matter what the cost may be. To fear such identity is to reflect lack of faith in God.

This kind of open identity with God's people is at the heart of Christian baptism. Through baptism we take our stand with the people of God in the New Covenant established by Jesus. Thus Jesus declared the absolute necessity of open confession of Him in Matt. 10:32-33:

"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven."

No such thing as secret discipleship exists in the Kingdom of God. To claim to be a child of God but then to refuse to openly acknowledge Him in identifying with His people is a lie and such claims have not validity whatsoever.

Faith perseveres under suffering, v. 27: By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. (Πίστει κατέλιπεν Αἴγυπτον μὴ φοβηθεῖς τὸν θυμὸν τοῦ βασιλέως· τὸν γὰρ ἀόρατον ὡς ὄρων ἐκαρτέρησεν.).

Here the writer alludes to Exod. 2:15b-25 where Moses fled into the wilderness⁸ in the land of Midian.⁸

⁵Exod. 1:17, NRSV: "But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live." Exod. 1:21, NRSV: "And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families."

⁶Compare Acts 7:23-29.

⁷See Exod. 2:10-15, NRSV for the account: 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." 11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" 14 He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." 15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.

⁸Exod. 2:15-25, NRSV: 15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He

By siding with the Hebrew against the Egyptian, Moses incurred the wrath of the pharaoh and was forced to flee for his life. He ended up in the land of Midian⁹ where he would spend the second forty years of his life tending to sheep and goats. During those lean years of isolation not only from the privileges of the Egyptian royal palace, but also from his own Israelite people, Moses “persevered” (ἐκαρτέρησεν) according to the writer of Hebrews. The core idea of the Greek verb used here ἐκαρτέρησεν is that Moses held out strong and unwavering in his faith.

True faith makes a person strong in their commitment to God. Adversity is a real test of whether one’s faith is real or not. Going through times of trouble presents us with the chance to experience a strengthening of our faith so that it can enable us to stand faithful to God under the harshest of conditions.

Moses’ experienced the continual presence of God in his life. The Greek phrase used by the writer ὡς ὁρῶν ἐκαρτέρησεν reflects a common idiomatic expression in ancient Hellenistic Greek that is usually missed by Bible translators. The idea of the expression is simply “He kept seeing continually.”¹⁰ Moses kept God constantly in front of him through these years of living in the wilderness. That continual awareness of God’s presence with him became the source of his strength and endurance. Faith opens our eyes to experience God in our life. In that ongoing experiencing of God we become strong and able to endure.

Faith obediently worships God, v. 28: By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. (Πίστει πεποίηκεν τὸ πάσχα καὶ τὴν πρόσχυσιν τοῦ αἵματος, ἵνα μὴ ὁ ὀλοθρεύων τὰ πρωτότοκα θίγη αὐτῶν.).

The writer now jumps to the climatic event of the last of the ten plagues inflicted by God on the Egyptians to convince the pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt (cf. Exod. 3:1-4:18). God instructed the Israelites to smear the blood of a sacrificed lamb over the door posts of their homes. When the ‘angel of death’ come to all the homes in Egypt he passed over all these homes with no harm coming to the first born children

settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well. 16 The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. 17 But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. 18 When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come back so soon today?” 19 They said, “An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.” 20 He said to his daughters, “Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.” 21 Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. 22 She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, “I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.” 23 After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. 24 God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

⁹“The ‘land of Midian,’ the place to which Moses fled after having killed the Egyptian, (Exodus 2:15 Exodus 2:21) or the portion of it specially referred to, was probably the peninsula of Sinai.“ [“Midian,” Smith’s Bible Dictionary online]

¹⁰“The manner in which Moses overcame his fear is delineated in the explanation clause of v 27b: τὸν γὰρ ἄορατον ὡς ὁρῶν ἐκαρτέρησεν, “for he kept the one who is invisible continually before his eyes, as it were.” Although the assumption that God cannot be seen, and that it is unsafe to attempt to see him, is pervasive in Scripture (e.g., Exod 33:18–23; Deut 4:12; Ps 97:2; cf. Jos., *Ant.* 4.346), God is never described in the LXX as ὁ ἄορατος, “the invisible One.” In educated circles in Judaism and early Christianity, however, the adjective ἄορατος, “invisible,” was broadly applied to God as one of his attributes (e.g., Philo, *On Abraham* 183; cf. Rom 1:20; Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17); Philo, for example, uses it more than a hundred times (Spicq, 1:85, n. 2). It was the fact that Moses kept the invisible God continually before him that explains how he succeeded in overcoming his fear through faith (for the unwarranted suggestion that the reference is to Jesus, “the seeable of the Unseen” God, see D’Angelo, *Moses*, 187–88).

The key to the proper interpretation of v 27b is the fixed Hellenistic idiom ὡς ὁρῶν ἐκαρτέρησεν, “he kept seeing continually.” The idiom has frequently been missed (see above, *Note* ο*), with the result that v 27b is translated “for as seeing the invisible one, he endured” (e.g. D’Angelo, *Moses*, 30, 33, 35). The verb ἐκαρτέρησεν (now rendered “he endured”) then becomes the basis for finding in v 27 the example of faith as endurance (e.g., Grundmann, *TDNT* 3:617; Williamson, *Philo*, 363, 473–75; Dautzenberg, *BZ* 17 [1973] 171; and especially D’Angelo, 11–12, 17–18, 27–33, 62–63, who finds in vv 24–27 the portrait of Moses the martyr, who exemplifies the martyr’s endurance). The fact that Philo (*Moses* 1.154; *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.11-14) and Josephus (*Ant.* 2.256-57) interpret Moses’ departure from Egypt as an example of the Hellenistic moral virtue of καρτερία, “endurance,” may have misled interpreters of v 27b.

The emphasis, however, falls not on endurance but on continually seeing, as it were, the unseen God ([BAGD](#) 405). The reference is not to the awesome event at the burning bush (as urged by Spicq, 2:359; Héring, 105; F. F. Bruce, 320; among others), as if to say that Moses saw one who is invisible, but to a fixed habit of spiritual perception. Once that is recognized, it is clear that the explanatory clause in v 27b is a parallel comment to v 26b and must be interpreted in the light of that earlier statement. Moses’ departure was an act of faith motivated by the vision of God, which faith invested with a substantial reality. In conjunction with v 26b, the explanation of Moses’ lack of fear in v 27b testifies to an eschatological faith oriented to the future because it seized upon the reality of God and of the reward he bestows in response to active faith (v 6 cf. Barrett, “Eschatology,” 380–81; Williamson, *Philo*, 475–77).“ [William L. Lane, vol. 47B, *Word Biblical Commentary : Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 374.]

and animals. But where there was no sacrificial blood death came to every first born child and animal in that home.

The instructions to set up the sacrificial blood took deep faith in God. Moses trusted God's instructions and led the Israelites to follow these instructions. The writer of Hebrews describes Moses' action as a faith led worship of God. Worship and obedient faith are inner connected. When we come to worship God we must come with willingness to obey God. This is the inevitable outcome of true faith. And Moses sets the example for us.

Faith is willing to follow God, v. 29.: *By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned.* (Πίστει διέβησαν τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν Θάλασσαν ὡς διὰ ξηρᾶς γῆς, ἧς πείραν λαβόντες οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι κατεπόθησαν.).

Here the writer shifts the emphasis to the Israelite people under the leadership of Moses and he describes the crossing of the Sea of Reeds in miraculous fashion (cf. Exodus 14). Although fearful at first, the people followed Moses' instruction to go into the sea and God parted the waters to allow them to pass through as though on dry land. The Egyptians blindly tried to follow them and at that point God allowed the waters to close in on top of them thus destroying the entire Egyptian army.

The lesson here is that faith will step out bravely to follow the leadership of God. To be sure, we must be following God and not our own notions about things. The distance between true faith and being naive can be a very short. This then becomes the difference between a wise and a foolish decision. To step forward in faith under God's leadership is wise. To make naive decisions without God's leadership is indeed foolish. This is the difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians here. So under God's leadership then faith will enable us to make strong decisions about the direction of our lives. And God will bless those decisions.

Moses! A man of deep faith in God! His faith enabled him to be used mightily of God at a pivotal time in the life of the Israelite people. His faith challenges us to reach out to God in similar fashion.

II. In faith the people entered the Promised Land, vv. 30-31

30 **By faith** the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. 31 **By faith** Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace

11.30 Πίστει τὰ τεῖχη Ἱεριχῶ ἔπεσαν κυκλωθέντα ἐπὶ ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας. 11.31 Πίστει Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐ συναπόλετο τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν δεξαμένη τοὺς κατασκόπους μετ' εἰρήνης.

In these final two verses, the writer focuses on the conquest of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' successor. The book of Joshua in the Old Testament describes this lengthy process. The writer zeros in on one event, the fall of Jericho that is described in chapter two of the book of Joshua.

Faith overcomes obstacles, v. 30: *By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days.* (Πίστει τὰ τεῖχη Ἱεριχῶ ἔπεσαν κυκλωθέντα ἐπὶ ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας.).

The story of the fall of Jericho is told in Joshua chapter six. The inhabitants of the city became desperately afraid of the Israelites and shut off their city from the outside. God instructed Joshua to march the Israelite soldiers around the walled city for six days straight behind the priests who carried the ark of the covenant. On the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times again. At the end the priests blew their trumpets the final time and the soldiers shouted loudly. At that moment the outer walls of the city crumbled and the city was captured by the smaller Israelite army. The only persons to survive was Rahab and her family who had gathered in her apartment on the city wall. It took faith in God to follow these unusual instructions. But Joshua and the Israelite people trusted God and so they followed His instructions. Because of this they were able to overcome the barrier of the fortified walls of the city to capture a much stronger enemy.

True faith in God overcomes obstacles and barriers. This is the lesson of Jericho for us.

Faith steps out into the unknown, v. 31: *By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.* (Πίστει Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐ συναπόλετο τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν δεξαμένη τοὺς κατασκόπους μετ' εἰρήνης.).

Rahab was the Gentile prostitute who lived on the city wall of Jericho. The story of her courageous protection of the two Israelite spies is described in chapter two and then the story of her rescue by the Israelites is in chapter six. In Jewish interpretative history she became a heroic figure and is presented as such in two of the three times she is mentioned in the New Testament.¹¹ In the third instance, in Matt. 1:5, she is listed

¹¹Cf. Heb. 11:31 and James 2:25.

in the genealogy of Jesus as the mother of Salmon, whose son was Boaz, the husband of Ruth. Her faith is described in Joshua 2:9-11:

9 and [she] said to the men: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. 10 For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. ***The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.***

The faith of this immoral Gentile pagan woman thus stands as a challenge to all. No matter who you are or how you have lived your life, you can come to God in genuine faith. And in so turning away from your old life to the life of obedient faith in God you will discover God's acceptance and blessing. Rahab experienced a life she could have never imagined while living in Jericho. She is remembered today several thousand years later as a heroine and as an example of genuine faith in God. Her faith prompted action of protecting the spies brought her vindication before God as James 2:25 declares.

CONCLUSION

Living in faith! This is our challenge -- and our blessing! Just like Moses, the children of Israel and Rahab, a life of obedient faith brings surprises and experiences that we could never envision otherwise. It brings the rich blessings of God into our life that changes, shapes, and molds how we live.

Are you living in faith?

James 2:25, NRSV: "Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road?"