

Faith: The Better Way ~ Part 2f

Messianic Jews 11:32-40

Letter to the Messianic Jews

In my last post, we examined the **Trust of the Israelites and Rahab** in **Messianic Jews 11:29-31**. In this post, we move on to explore the **Trust of the Judges and the Prophets in Messianic Jews 11:32-40**.

*³² What more should I say? There isn't time to tell about **Gid'on, Barak, Shimshon** [Samson], **Yiftach** [Jephthah], **David, Sh'mu'el** [Samuel] and the prophets; ³³ who, through trusting, conquered kingdoms, worked righteousness, received what was promised, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, had their weakness turned to strength, grew mighty in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead resurrected; other people were stretched on the rack and beaten to death, refusing to be ransomed so that they would gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Others underwent the trials of being mocked and whipped, then chained and imprisoned. ³⁷ They were stoned, sawed in two, murdered by the sword; they went about clothed in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, mistreated, ³⁸ wandering about in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground! The world was not worthy of them! ³⁹ All of these had their merit attested because of their trusting. Nevertheless, they did not receive what had been promised, ⁴⁰ because God had planned something better that would involve us, so that only with us would they be brought to the goal." ~ Messianic Jews 11:32-40 (CJB)*

In this passage, the author looks back over the history of his people with name after name of those men who were heroic souls. The whole list is of men who faced incredible odds for God. It is of men who never believed that God was on the side of the big battalions and were willing to take tremendous and even terrifying risks for Him. It is of men who cheerfully and courageously and confidently accepted God-given tasks which, on human terms, were impossible. They were all men who were never afraid to stand alone and to face immense odds for the sake of their loyalty to God. This honor roll of history is of men who chose to be in God's minority rather than with earth's majority.

The author singles out the three best-known judges, a general, **David** the most renowned king, **Shmu'el** the judge-prophet, and the other **prophets**.

Gid'on (Judges 6:11-8:35) is remembered for the faith demonstrated when he accepted God's decision that he should reduce the size of the Israelites' army from 32,000 to 300 before defeating the Midianites' force of 50,000 (Judges 7).

General **Barak** (Judges 4-5), though not independent of **Dvorah** [Deborah] the judge and **Ya'el**, had faith of his own, for even though he knew that these women would get the glory for the victory instead of himself (Judges 4:9), he led the Israelites in conquering Sisera, Yavin, and the Canaanites.

Shimshon (Judges 13-16) lived much of his life with his eyes, not on the Lord. But after he was blinded he saw clearly enough to pray for strength to destroy the Philistines' temple; this is what qualifies him for the faith hall of fame (Judges 16:25-30).

At first glance **Yiftach** (Judges 11:1-12:7) seems an even less likely candidate, but his rash vow to sacrifice the first thing that came out of his house, which turned out to be his daughter, does not detract from the undiluted faith in God which this simple man demonstrated as he defeated the Ammonites.

Through trusting, Moshe conquered the kingdoms of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan (Numbers 21:21-35). Daniel shut the mouths of lions (Daniel 6:1-29). Chananyah, Misha'el, and 'Azaryah (Shadrach, Meishakh and 'Aved-n'go) quenched the power of fire (Daniel 1:6, 3:1-30). Elijah and Elisha were among those who escaped the edge of the sword (1 Kings 19:2ff., 2 Kings 6:31ff.). The

widow of Tzarfat and the woman of Shunem **received back their dead resurrected** through **Elijah** and **Elisha's** ministries (1 Kings 17:8-24, 2 Kings 4:8-37). From the Apocrypha, we learn how in the days of the Maccabees, there were those **stretched on the rack and beaten to death, refusing to be ransomed, so that they would gain a better resurrection** (2 Maccabees 6:18-31). Yeshua himself was **mocked, whipped, chained and imprisoned** (Yochanan 19:1-3, Mark 15:1-9); also compare the prophets **Mikhayahu** (Micaiah, 1 Kings 22:24) and **Yirmiyahu** (Jeremiah 20:2, 7; 37:15).

Z'kharyah, the son of Y'hoyadah, the priest, was **stoned** to death (2 Chronicles 24:21).

Being **sawed in two** was indeed a known form of torturing people to death (2 Samuel 12:31), and according to the first-century partly Jewish, partly Christian book, The Ascension of Isaiah, the prophet **Yeshu' yahu** was killed in this way.

Jeremiah 26:20-23 mentions the prophet **Uriah** as having been **murdered by the sword**, and **Elijah** speaks of others who suffered the same fate (1 Kings 19:10, Ro 11:3).

Went about clothed in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, mistreated, wandering about in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground. The description fits **Elijah** and **Elisha** (1 Kings 19:13, 2 Kings 2:14), as well as the pious Jews who fled from the persecution of Antiochus IV in the time of the Maccabees (1 Maccabees 2:38). **Yochanan the Immerser** wore camel skins (Matthew 3:4) and led a similar life, while **Yeshua** himself had **"no home of his own"** (Luke 9:58).

In other words, the people who trusted God were utterly unrewarded and unappreciated in their time by the rest of humanity. The reverse side of this coin is seen when our author writes that **the world was not worthy of them!** Worldly people cannot fully appreciate those whose lives are based utterly on trust, because their values are so different. But as soon as worldly people, by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), take the tiniest step of faith themselves, then the great trust reported in this chapter takes on an altogether different significance for them and becomes a source of inspiration.

Chapter 11 is a homily on 10:35-39. In summarizing the two central themes of Chapter 11, verses 39-40 refer back to the earlier passage, which expresses the necessity of continuing to trust God despite all obstacles and setbacks, physical or spiritual, to **receive what had been promised.**

On the one hand, **all** the heroes of faith **had their merit attested because of their trusting.** For indeed the only meritorious acts there are, are those based on trusting in God, as expounded in Galatians and Romans. The original readers of this letter are to renew their trust in **Yeshua's** atoning death; there is no other way for them to attain the reward of eternal life.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, these heroes of faith, even though they kept on trusting, **did not receive what had been promised** in their lifetime, **because God had planned something better,** namely, something **that would involve us** who came later; **so that only with us would they be brought to the goal.** God's secret plan for history, including the perfecting of human beings from all times, places and cultures, Gentiles as well as Jews, is glorious beyond imagining.

Only by trusting God can anyone enjoy its benefits.

"Faith in God is more than just believing He exists; it is living with confidence that He will fulfill all His promises and bring salvation to us."

~ Dr. Charles F. Stanley

In my next post, we will move on to a new topic of the **Trust and the Believer** beginning in **Messianic Jews 12.**