

The point has been made. There is a great cloud of faithful men and women who are inspirational role models. Some like Abraham and Moses became great pillars of faith. There are many more common folk like us whose faith is valued by God, but not so often by men. Winding up the story for now, six more are named and a great class of unnamed are noted by their lives, their work, their sufferings, their persecution and their personal sacrifice for the Lord. Though they did not know Him as we know Him from the New Testament, actually Christ was the object of their faith, their hearts. The annals of the faithful has continued to grow down through the centuries since Hebrews was written. Many Christians reported in history have been no less faithful than the saints recorded in the Old Testament. And they have been under no less pressure.

As we read Hebrews and throughout scripture we note that God periodically blessed man with fuller and greater revelations of Himself, His Plan and His Ways. And He has gradually unfolded the future in detail to faith, then and now. So, by faith we now know much of what is going to happen in heaven and upon earth in the end of the age we are living in and afterward. What a blessing! What a responsibility. Daily we see news events so clearly foreshadowing prophesied events we can almost feel Him coming. Yet just when it seems inevitable God "pulls the string," as it were, and the built up scenario dissolves before our eyes. Why, we cry?! Because God is long suffering not willing any should perish, 2Peter 3:9. What grace. He waited for you and for me. We can certainly wait with Him for others and work to bring them the good news that saves. And don't rest our hopes on the apparent signs of His approaching return. If Israel should be driven from the land, or "nuked" next week that does not nullify Christ's promise to return. It merely shows it is a little further off then we hoped. Yes, future-watching by faith is fascinating and almost frustrating. Keep alert, but not fixated, for there is work to be done. And the Lord said, "in such an hour as ye think not" . . . Surprise!

Abraham was told he was going to die and not be raptured as Enoch was. Moses was told that he was going to die without entering the promised land. David knew he was going to die when he was told Solomon, his son, would build the temple. Others suffered horribly for their faith. Though not named here or told in scripture, ancient Jewish tradition holds that Isaiah was sawn in two by king Manasseh's men. Jeremiah's confinement, knee deep in a palace dungeon, and his release by a man of faith is recorded in Jeremiah 28. Daniel records the episodes of the fiery furnace and the lion's den. All of these, named and unnamed, though having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise. They died. But they died in faith. Most New Testament believers will too. They have already. You and I may die before the rapture. Like all of mankind before us, our hope is heavenly not earthly. Chapter 12:22-24 enumerates the multitudes of humans included in the heavenly company described.

In the last verse of chapter 11 the Spirit briefly clarifies God's general plan and timetable. "God having provided

some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." This one sentence reveals several things for faith.

The Old Testament saints will go to heaven at the same time we do.

They will not go before us and we will not go before them.

Their destiny is in heaven but their position and role in heaven will differ from ours. We, the Church, will be the Bride of Christ, "God having provided some better thing for us."

We have been reading about the "better thing" God has for us through the first ten chapters. Hebrews was written to present "that better thing."

The whole New Testament presents the glorious "better thing," kept secret until Jesus came. It is Christ Himself, seen and heard in the flesh. Seen and heard in the Gospels. Still by faith to all but his contemporaries. And Christ seated in glory. And we here on earth His Church, His House, His Body, His Bride. And He in the midst of each local assembly gathered unto His name, and in the midst of the circled candlesticks. We, by faith, justified by His blood, given by faith power over sin in our lives, Romans 6-8. The Holy Spirit on earth personally indwelling and collectively inhabiting the Church. The hope of Christ's soon return for His own and the assurance of His return with us to reign.

The Old Testament saints, before us are "the friend of the Bridegroom."

*John 3:29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.*

They will occupy that heavenly city they faithfully waited for so long. They will reign with Christ and minister to their fellow saints on earth who will have survived the Great Tribulation on the earth, Revelation 20: 4, 6. They are not the bride but they will attend the marriage supper of the Lamb rejoicing for His joy in His bride.

(The scriptures all tell of a faithful remnant of Israel and of Gentiles who will survive the Great Tribulation on earth and welcome the return of the King. Their sufferings before that will be similar to those listed here in chapter 11. But many of their comrades will be martyred, Revelation 6:9-11. Interestingly, the resurrection of these faithful martyrs to heaven comes after the marriage supper of the Lamb, Revelation 20:4.)

Questions to consider.

Why did the Spirit choose to name the persons He did on the list in Hebrews 11 and omit others? Was there something that distinguished their faith from others?

Why does God value *faith* so highly as a basic principle of life for mankind? Does that reveal God's character and power to us in some way?