

It is human nature to look back with nostalgia on a lost golden age, a time when people were stronger and purer. We often feel we have been unfairly placed in a fallen and diminished generation.

The Jews who read Hebrews may have felt like that. Many of them no doubt turned to the remnants of their past glory – the temple and the sacrifices – as a tie to the vanished days when the patriarchs and kings were the focus of God's favor on the earth.

But the writer of Hebrews tells them differently. He begins the book by saying none of the past writings, holy and precious as they were, had been delivered by a messenger equal to the One they themselves had heard and seen: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." And this chapter ends with another declaration of the superiority of their day (and your day), the day of grace: "And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." The faith of the heroes of old would not find its completion until Christ came.

And not just in the book of Hebrews:

"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matt. 11:11)

"Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you." (1 Peter 1:10-12)

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Phil. 3:7-8)

Are you also conscious of the surpassing worth of living in a day when we can know Christ?

Questions:

1. A third of this chapter is devoted to Abraham. Why?
2. Faith can be seen as hope expressed in action. For each of these people, what did they hope for, and what specifically did that hope lead them to do?

Abraham

Joseph

Moses's parents

Moses

The people of Israel

Rahab

3. What is the “reproach of Christ” in verse 26? What could that have meant for Moses?
4. This portion tells of many who suffered horrible treatment, even death, for their faith. Find some examples here of others who may have endured ridicule or other lesser evils such as those we might experience.
5. Read verse 39. What was promised that these people did not receive? When did/will they receive it?
6. What does it mean in verse 40 that these people were made perfect?