

God's (Political) Heroes

in the Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith, whom God calls us to follow

Christian political witness is the application of God's Examples of Faith for us in Hebrews 11.

No one who is politically insignificant is our example..

Abel, Enoch, Noah (Heb 11:4, 5, 7) **Patriarchs** The form of government in that time was called "Patriarchal", or "Tribal". These men, called "Patriarchs" (Ac 2:29, 7:8-9, Heb 7:4), were the leaders of such governments. Thus Josephus wrote that the Flood "happened in the six hundredth year of Noah's government..." and it was only "illustrious men" whose "births and deaths" were "noted down with great accuracy". (1.1.3) Moreover, "Seth...delivered the government to Cainan his son..." "Mathusala...had Lamech for his son...to whom he delivered the government...Lamech, when he had governed seven hundred and seventy seven years, appointed Noah, his son, to be ruler of the people...and retained the government for nine hundred and fifty years." (1.3.4) One's "government" was "retained" from one's birth to death; therefore by this practice, even Abel, though childless, was "delivered the government", and indeed was very influential over the whole world population. Adam had 33 sons and 23 daughters, according to an "old tradition" cited in a footnote to Josephus 1.2.3.

Abraham (Heb 11:8) **Mighty Prince** Qualifications as holding worldwide political power: he defeated the 4 kings who had defeated the 5 kings, Genesis 14; King Abimelech and his court were "sore afraid" of him, Genesis 20:8; Pharaoh repented of taking from him, Genesis 12:14-20; neighboring nations regarded him as "a mighty prince among us", Genesis 23:6.

Sarah (Heb 11:11) **Wife of a "mighty prince"** Vs. 12, birthed nations

Isaac (Heb 11:20) **Mightier than a King** "...thou art much mightier than..." King Abimelech. Genesis 26:16

Jacob (Heb 11:21) **terror to "all the cities round about"** "...all the cities round about" Jacob were afraid to pursue him. Genesis 35:5.

Joseph (Heb 11:22) **Defacto world ruler** Genesis 41:1-50:26

Moses' parents (Heb 11:23) **defied government** "Not afraid of the king's commandment"; their civil disobedience to their government is an example of faith for us. They risked the wrath of the law to do right, and invaded the King's very family.

Moses (Heb 11:24) **ruler, conqueror** Ruler of Israel, spoiler of Egypt which had been the dominant world power, grandson of Pharaoh (Exodus 2:10), conqueror of the following nations: Amalek (Exodus 17:8-13), Sihon, King of the Amorites (Numbers 21:21-24), King Arad (Numbers 21:1-3), Edom (Numbers 20:17-21), and "Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Shebam, and Nebo, and Beon" (Numbers 32:3)

Rahab (Heb 11:31) **counterspy** Betrayed her own government, married a prince. Eastman's Bible Dictionary says "She afterwards became the wife of Salmon, a prince of the tribe of Judah (Ruth 4:21; 1 Chr. 2:11; Matt. 1:5)."

"...Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:" (Heb 11:32) **Political Leaders of Israel, military conquerors, prophets to kings**

Confronting (lobbying) Governments is our example of faith

After listing several Examples of Faith by name, Hebrews' Hall of Faith lists the fates of many unnamed heroes of faith, and almost all of those fates are the consequence of correcting ("lobbying") a government which decides it would rather not hear correction. "Tortured", v. 35; "scourged", "imprisoned", v. 36; "sawn assunder, slain with the sword, afflicted, tormented", v. 37; all these are punishments given out, not by mobs or lone assassins, but by governments to "prophets" (as the Bible calls them; "lobbyists" is our word for people who regularly appeal to lawmakers). Even stoning, although it sometimes seems as if it can be mob rule, is supposed to follow a judicial proceeding by the Sanhedrin according to Josephus, Antiquities 14.9.3.

Our examples of faith "wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth," v. 38, fleeing from what? From governments. Not from mobs. Not from isolated individuals.

The accomplishments of faith, v. 33-34, were mostly political accomplishments: They "subdued kingdoms ... waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies..." They "wrought righteousness", meaning, according to the reforms urged by the prophets, national revival which included legal reforms and ending corruption in court. They "stopped the mouths of lions, 34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword," referring to Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and David when he confronted Goliath. All these were protected by God from the governments which they confronted.

v. 35 "Women received their dead back to life again". But never through politically insignificant men. The first time, 1 Kings 17, was through Elijah, who played King Ahab's conscience like a yo yo. The second time was through Elisha, the guy whose prayers blinded the Syrian army, whom Elisha then led to the King of Israel. Third, Elisha again, 2 Kings 13:21. Fourth, Jesus (who bore the government on his shoulders, Isaiah 9:6) raised the daughter of the Ruler of the Synagogue, Mark 5:41. Fifth, Jesus delivered a young man alive to his mother, Luke 7:14-15. This was at "the gate of the city", which in those days was the center of political activity. That is where trials were held, with the crowds functioning as jurors. Sixth, Jesus raised Lazarus, John 11:44, who then became the subject of a murder contract by the Sanhedrin, John 12:10-11. Seventh, (if we don't count the hundreds raised from their graves at Jesus' death, since their mothers weren't there to receive them), Paul, former officer of the Sanhedrin, lobbyist before Nero (Phil 1:13), raised up a young man, Acts 20:9-10.

Political Leaders/Activists Not mentioned in Hebrews: **Job**, world ruler, Job 29; all the **Judges, Kings, prophets** (prophets all spoke to political rulers); **Ezra**, governor of Jerusalem, who had almost a blank check from the world ruler (Ezra 7:21-22); **Nehemiah**, world emperor's cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:11) and governor of Israel; **Esther**, world emperess. **Jesus** routinely challenged the Sanhedrin's officials. **Paul** was excited about witnessing to the Palace, Phil 1:13. The **apostles** witnessed around the world until they were slain by governments. John is the only one who died a natural death, *not* slain by his government; he was merely *exiled* by his government.

Jonah 3:4 says his message was that Ninevah would be overthrown in 40 days. Definitely a message that would concern the King. v. 6 says "word came unto the king of Ninevah". The reason the people repented, v. 5, was because the King proclaimed repentance, v. 7. It is not known whether Jonah directly spoke to the king, but with a message like that, everyone knew it would reach the king, and that most kings, upon hearing messages about their own overthrow, would quickly and cruelly kill the messenger.

Mary and Joseph hosted "wise men", who had considerable political influence judging from their treatment by Herod. Mary and Joseph obstructed Herod's murderous intentions by fleeing the king's soldiers.

Of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, the only two which were praised and not criticized had suffered martyrdom at the hands of their governments. (1) Smyrna had already suffered "tribulation", 2:9, and would in the future suffer more "tribulation", with some "cast into prison" and "tried" (in court), 2:10. (2) Philadelphia "hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name", which I take as evidence of persecution, since without persecution, acknowledging Jesus would not be worthy of God's praise.

A third church, Pergamos, had not “denied my faith” even as their “martyr” was “slain”, 2:13, yet received criticism, though not so scathing as other churches received.

The church so “lukewarm” that Jesus wanted to spit her out of His mouth, Laodicia, was advised to “buy gold tried in the fire”, 3:18. A “fiery trial” is a metaphor of persecution by governments in 1 Peter 4:12. Rev 3:19 continues, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous...” This is like Hebrews 12 comparing God’s discipline with parental discipline and concluding “our God is a consuming fire.”

Most of the martyrs in the Bible, and down through the ages, were tortured and murdered by governments; and the few who were murdered by mobs were encouraged by their governments.

CONCLUSION: Let us walk in the footsteps of God’s Heroes, witnessing not only to sinners among our family, friends, and coworkers, who have little power to physically hurt us, but also to wicked wielders of political power, who have considerable power to hurt us, and who are most insistent that we not witness to them about God’s standards, which they dismiss as “irrelevant”.

Let us not compromise by going into politics as Christians, but still not witnessing about God’s standards, but letting those who hate God think the standards we proclaim are our own. We only look odd when we take a daring position, without explaining to people the real reasons that persuaded us, but letting them think our only reasons are the weak logical arguments we give them, which were never powerful enough to persuade even ourselves. God is more persuasive than we are; He can better explain His positions than we can. We gain nothing by plagiarizing, and then diluting, His standards.

Let us not be content to say not a word for Jesus, imagining it is enough for people to see our righteous lives and come ask us why we are so happy. Let us offer the world God’s righteousness, not our own, which frankly isn’t that much of an offer.

God’s Heroes confronted governments with words. Powerful words. Let us also.