

- ***READ Hebrews 11:1,2*** The great hall of faith that is found within **Hebrews 11** serves as a strong reminder that there have always been strong and faithful people who were willing to live their lives by faith before God. All of the men and women mentioned either by name or not by name could find their lives as having been led by the beginning two verses of this chapter. Each individual had confidence in the things they hoped for even though those things had not yet been seen. For their efforts, the Scriptures tells us, they gained approval from God.
- One of the individuals that is not mentioned by name, but who might be alluded to in **Hebrews 11** is the great prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was the first of a line of strong prophets who went before the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah to prophesy concerning their need to return back to faithful service to God. For many decades, Isaiah could be found at the feet of Judah's kings begging them to return to God so that they might find restoration through the power of Yahweh. Unfortunately, Israel often found herself in times of abundance through having trade agreements with surrounding nations. We are all well aware of the difficult nature of trying to convince successful people of their need for God. Isaiah and the prophets knew that first hand through their efforts as God's prophets. Yet, that doesn't mean that everything was perfect. It was during Isaiah's years as God's prophet that the Assyrians were causing havoc just next door in the northern kingdom of Israel. Judah might have been peaceful and prosperous at the moment, but that could have all changed in a very short amount of time. They needed to return to faithful service to God or they too would fall before His judgements.
- Tradition tells us that Isaiah died a martyr's death by being sawn in two by the evil king Manasseh of whom it is said in **II Kings 21:16**, *"Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin with which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord."* You might notice the there is mention in **Hebrews 11:37** of nameless great characters of faith that were sawn in two. Regardless of whether the tradition is true or not, Isaiah did much great and yet difficult work for the Lord in prophesying to the wicked nation of Judah. But he was willing to do so because he possessed a great hope in God and His promises. Let's consider the hope of Isaiah this evening by making some observations about his life and then considering some points of application for our benefit.

I. Isaiah lived a difficult life.

A. Nearly all, if not all, of the prophets of God lived difficult lives.

1. To live the life of a prophet basically came with the job description that life would be difficult. If a man was wanting to lead a quiet and peaceful life then being a prophet of God during the years of the divided kingdom certainly was not a job that would be wise to pursue. The prophets role was to be a mouthpiece or spokesperson for God. If God's people were doing what they needed to be doing in being faithful to God then that is great and the messages would be encouraging the continued faithfulness of the people.
2. However...what is often seen within the history of Israel is a people who were not faithful to God. Instead they continually sought after other gods through building up of high places for the worship of these others gods. If they were still focused on serving Yahweh, they would then have a nasty habit of simply going through the motions when it came to the worship of the one true and living God. Therefore the message from God through the prophets was often one of *"repent...or bad things are going to happen."* With this being the case, we can probably imagine how the prophets were often treated when they stood before the kings and the people to whom God sent to them.
3. We see Isaiah speaking to this type of worship and how God despised it in **Isaiah 1:10-20**. God sent Isaiah to warn the people of their need to return their hearts back to God in worship, but we know that this wasn't as well received as might have hoped, and this was simply a pattern that

we see time and time again throughout the prophets. Amos was a former shepherd and fig picker down in Judah, but after his call to be a prophet for the Lord, he went to the northern kingdom of Israel and spoke out against their heartless worship and mistreatment of the helpless. He sums up quite well the attitude that he often ran into during his years of working for the Lord when he wrote in **Amos 5:10**, *"They hate him who reproveth in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks with integrity."* The prophets of God endure much harsh treatment at the hands of those who they were sent to try to encourage to repent, and it was such a pattern within the people of Israel and Judah that Jesus even spoke out about it in **Matthew 23**.

B. Jesus was well aware of Israel & Judah's terrible track record of mistreating God's prophets.

1. In **Matthew 23:29-38**, we find Jesus concluding His scathing remarks towards the Jewish leadership for their ungodly hypocrisy in how they were leading the Jews. Jesus finishes up by speaking concerning the prophets who had been given lip service by the Jews, but they were the ones who had been most hateful towards these messengers of God.
2. Jesus says in **Matthew 23:34,35,39**, *"Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar...Behold your house is being left to you desolate."* Of course the Jews hearing this must have been enraged, and we will quickly see them devising the plan by which they would have Jesus murdered on the cross. In doing so they would only be confirming the words spoken by Jesus concerning their horrible treatment of those who were sent in the name of God. Isaiah's life was just one example of many prophets who were mistreated for their service to God in warning His people of the need for repentance from their unfaithfulness.

II. Yet regardless of his difficulties, Isaiah kept his hope in God.

A. There were many factors and circumstances in Isaiah's life that could've distracted him from being faithful to God as a prophet.

1. A God's spokesman, Isaiah knew that he would not be a very popular man as he went about standing before kings and telling them and the people of their need of repentance and turning back to God. If Isaiah would've been someone who cared much about what other people thought about him then he wouldn't have lasted very long as God's chosen spokesman.
2. In fact, the only prophet who was often popular among the people were those false prophets who only spoke those things they thought would be well received by the people. Jeremiah was another prophet who did a lot of important work within the kingdom of Judah specifically with Josiah. King Josiah was a strong king and did much with Jeremiah in the way of helping to restore Judah to a place where God was properly respected, worshipped, and obeyed. However, upon Josiah's death, Jeremiah was arrested, imprisoned, beaten, and publicly humiliated. All the while, the false prophets stood around without much care because they spoke what the people wanted to hear and not what they needed to hear. Jeremiah says this in **Jeremiah 23:21,22**, *"I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and who'd have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds."*
3. If Isaiah had been concerned with being popular among the people, all he had to do was forget what God wanted him to say and instead preach an encouraging message that people wanted to hear. Yet, we know that his focus and hope was founded in God and not the flattery, love, and praise of men. His words might have been difficult, but Isaiah believed they were needed.

B. He believed they were needed and he believed that God's words would not fail.

1. The whole reason for God sending prophets out into the people was for them to give every effort to redirect their attention and focus back to God. When the people went off into idolatry, a prophet was sent to bring them back to God. When the people begin to offer up half-hearted and lazy worship, a prophet was sent to redirect their hearts back to God. The prophet was well aware of the need for his words to be heard by the people, but it was also important for him to believe that God's words were true and that any prophecies would come to fruition.
2. In **Isaiah 40:6-8**, Isaiah speaks to the enduring nature of God's words. "*The grass withers, the flower, fades, but the word of our God stands forever.*" God's words are so different from our words because our words are only going to be around for a time before everyone has forgotten them, but this is not so for the words of God. His words, promises, and prophecies were going to last forever and come to be fulfilled.
3. While prophets of God were often sent to speak against the evils of the day, there were also times where they actually spoke concerning the future. Numerous times through Isaiah's book we find the prophet speaking of future days of restoration for the nation of Israel. Many of these predictions are messianic in nature, but there are some in which we can see them as being written concerning a literal return of strength to the Jews. Some of those predictions can be found in **Isaiah 44:28-45:7**. As Isaiah speaks these words of future restoration for the people, did you happen to notice the specificity of this prediction? Not only are there words of them being loosed from the bonds of the Babylonians, but Isaiah even goes so far as to state which king would be responsible for such a thing! King Cyrus is mentioned by name in this text nearly 100 years before his birth. It's one thing to make a vague prediction and it come true...it is an entirely different thing for this level of specificity to be fulfilled, and fulfilled it was by God.

III. God kept His promise to Isaiah and restored Jerusalem and Israel.

A. Isaiah's hopeful prophecies must have been music to the ears of all.

1. While there was much that Isaiah said that would've cut like a knife, there were also portions of his work that included happy proclamations of God's power to restore His people to a place of strength and prominence. Isaiah promised that one day, after God's people had served their punishment for rebelling against God, the Israelites would be returned to Jerusalem where they would be able to rebuild and restore the mighty walls of the city of David.
2. Think about it from their perspective. Israel was once a strong and thriving nation who was able to stand up against any nation that might come up against it. But then the difficult days came when the people turned from God and ended up dividing the once great nation into two. The northern kingdom of Israel was the first to be invaded and to fall, and then the southern kingdom of Judah was next to be taken off into exile. As a people, what real hope did they have in their current situations as being prisoners in a land that was not their own. What hope was their for them that they would somehow be able to rise up and fight their way back to their homeland? We know that there was not hope of that happening at all, and I'm sure there were just as many of them that realized this reality.
3. The only thing they had to lean upon was the words of the prophets who had spoken in earlier times. These prophets had come to their forefathers and warned them that rebelling against God would lead to their ruin, but the people refused to hear and only sought after their own desires. The prophets would then speak of the coming destruction of the nation which surely only angered the people more, but then what followed after this was the prophecies of restoration that would be experienced by God's people. It was on these words that the people could have any hope of a future as a nation, and it was these words that they would eventually see as becoming their nation's reality.

B. God's words came true just as He said they would and the people were returned to their land.

1. The accounts of these prophecies being fulfilled can be found beginning in **II Chronicles 36:22** and going all the way through the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah. At the tail end of **II Chronicles 36** in **vv.22,23**, we find Cyrus being raised to power as the king of Persia *"in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah."* Well hold on a second...I thought we just read that Isaiah said it was going to be Cyrus? We definitely did read Isaiah saying specifically that it would be Cyrus, but we must remember that Isaiah was only the first in a line of prophets who were sent to the people to warn them of their impending judgement for unfaithfulness. The writer of **II Chronicles** must have had in his mind the statements made by Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 25:12 & 29:10** where Jeremiah speaks of the Lord punishing the king of Babylon for their sins and inquiries, and the Lord's returning of the people back to their own land. Jeremiah focuses on the timing of the return while Isaiah speaks of the persons involved.
2. Both of these men's prophecies surely did come to fruition for Ezra begins his book with the restoration of the temple which was a symbol of the nation's returning back to the Lord with renewed worship and dedication. Zerubbabel is able to return to Jerusalem with some workers, tools, and supplies and he begins the restoration of the temple which is completed in about 20 years after a temporary work stoppage. After another seventy years we then see Nehemiah being allowed to return to Jerusalem where he was able to rebuild the city's walls in a mere 52 days through the Lord's strengthening and good bit of hard work and determination. Just as was the case with Noah and Abraham, God proved Himself to be worthy of trust that He would fulfill all of the promises and prophecies that were spoken on His behalf.

IV. Take Hope Points:

A. God's people are not promised easy lives .

1. If ever there was a group of people that deserved much from God for what they were willing to do for His sake....it was the prophets. And yet they lived tough lives. But even with the difficulties they were lives that had fulfillment in knowing that they were doing good work for the Lord. There might have been many things to distract them from God's will in their mission, but they persevered through all of the difficulties that they might have faced along the way while proclaiming the words of the Lord.
2. While we might not be divinely appointed as prophets...we too have been given the responsibility to be spokespeople for the Lord. As disciples, it is our responsibility to continue to fulfill the commands of Jesus that He delivers to the Apostles in **Matthew 28:18-20** where He tells the Apostles to, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* As those who have been made disciples, we are then to go on following these commands of Jesus to teach trying to make other disciples. This means that we will sometimes have to say difficult things that people need to hear if they, too, want to become disciples.
3. Unfortunately, this will sometimes lead to us being hated and mistreated for doing basically the same thing that the prophets had to do in calling people back to God in faithful service and obedience. They were hated, and sometimes we will be hated, but this isn't something that should surprise us for Jesus told these same Apostles in **Matthew 10:22**, *"You will be hated by all because of My name."* We carry the same name that was carried by those men and the men that came before them as prophets, so we shouldn't be surprised when we suffer mistreatment in much the same way as they did. Sometimes we will suffer in various ways, but we can withstand such mistreatment if we have our hope focused in the right place.

B. When life get's difficult, our hope must remained stayed upon God.

1. Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and many of the other prophets that worked for the Lord suffered in various ways, and yet they continued to do this work for the Lord. I don't know about you, but if I am in some sort of job where I am constantly being hated and hurt for the work I am trying to do, then I might well consider switching jobs to escape the difficulties. Yet, that is not what these men did. They didn't give up simply because the going go tough. They simply became more resolved in their dedication to the Lord, and hoped for a great reward for their hard work.
2. We must have this same type of mentality as disciples and recognize that this is the type of mentality that many disciples even before us had as they were working for the Lord even in the earliest days of the church. In the **Book of Acts**, we read of the earliest disciples often facing harsh treatment for the work they were doing in spreading the Gospel. I think firstly of Peter, John, and the rest of the Apostles that found themselves in and out of prison in **Acts 4 & 5**. They were seeking to fulfill the commandments of Jesus that we spoke of earlier from **Matthew 28:18-20**, and yet they were facing much difficult for following His instructions.
3. They were continually opposed by the Jewish leadership for their preaching in the name of Jesus. They were even punished for doing such a thing with imprisonments, harsh treatments, and even floggings. Yet, their resolve was not weakened for after they were released in **Acts 6:41,42** we read, *"So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."* They had suffered and yet they rejoiced in that suffering because they were convinced of and trusted in God's willingness and ability to fulfill His promises to them.

C. God will fulfill the hope of those who remain faithful to Him.

1. Though they might have suffered horrible fates in this life for their willingness to be God's mouthpieces, the faithful prophets of God are certainly counted among those in **Hebrews 11** who had their hope focused on something so much better than what this life has to offer. Their ability to have this type of mindset was a result of their being fully convinced of God's faithfulness, and we too must being willing to fully accept that God is willing and able to fulfill the hope that we have in His reward if we will faithfully serve Him in this life.
2. Peter and John actually speak to the hope that they had in God as they stood before councils and were forced to answer for the work they had been doing for the kingdom. In **Acts 4:8-12**, we see Peter standing before the rulers and elders of the people and proclaiming that they had done all things by the name of Jesus whom had been raised from the dead. They were willing to face difficulties because they truly believed that salvation was only found in Jesus. He was the only means by which man could be saved. They were convinced that their hope in God would be realized because He was faithful to fulfill His promises to them. Therefore, they were willing to state with confidence that they, *"must obey God rather than men."* (**Acts 5:29**) They knew that they would receive God's promises through their faithful obedience.

Isaiah himself was a man that was willing to do some pretty difficult things because he was confident in God's ability to be with him and strengthen him to do what He desired. Isaiah told God's people exactly what they needed to hear whether they liked it or not, and we must have the same confidence to be busy about the Lord's work in this life so that we might be with Him for eternity in the next. May Isaiah's example of strong hope encourage each of us as we give every effort to serve the Lord.