

## WHAT MORE CAN GOD SAY?

(Studies in the Letter to the Hebrews)

### Study 14

## Faith: Risking It! Really?

(Hebrews 11:23-31)

### Translations

Please read the passage carefully in more than one version *before* you look at the notes. Jot down any points that strike you as you read. My recommendation is that you use the NIV or the TNIV (which uses inclusive language judiciously). **ALL** translations involve a measure of interpretation since idiomatic differences would render a word-for-word translation virtually meaningless to English readers. More literal translations can be a bit wooden and are not necessarily more accurate than freer (dynamic equivalent) translations. The NIV preserves a good balance. If you prefer a more literal translation, the NASB (New American Standard Bible) is a good choice. Those who are wedded to the terminology of the KJV (I was) may find the NKJV helpful. The New Living Translation is free and reads well. The Message is more of a paraphrase but it is important to realize that there is no fixed barrier between translations and paraphrases, especially where the translator respects the meaning of the passage in the original languages and translates from them rather than paraphrasing a translation. We really need to be careful not to dismiss translations on the basis the translators' preference for certain words or our subjective sense of whether this sounds like Scripture or not. Often that has more to do with how similar the translation is to the version with which we grew up and little or nothing to do with accuracy or faithfulness to the original text.

### Purposes of this Study

1. To identify a key aspect of faith that comes to the fore in this passage.
2. To show that risk-free "neutrality" is not an option that is open to us.
3. To encourage us to obey God, even in the face of danger.
4. To spell out, as a group, what risks we might be expected to take as we obey God in our situation.

## **A Passage to Ponder**

"By faith (Moses) left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible" (11:27).

## **A Question to Get us Going**

As you read the passage, are you able to identify an aspect that is common to each vignette (the actions of Moses' Parents, Moses, the people at the Red Sea and at Jericho, and Rahab)?

## **Some Observations**

### The Key Aspect

Each person or group of people was exposed to danger. They were faced with a crucial decision. From a natural point of view, each of them was required to take a risk.

### The Vignettes

- Jochebed hid Moses for three months
- Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.
- He left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger.
- He kept the Passover
- The people passed through the Red Sea.
- The walls of Jericho fell.
- The prostitute Rahab welcomed the spies.

### The Risk Element

In the case of Moses' mother, there was danger and she had to take a decision. There was risk. She could not hide the child indefinitely. If he was detected, the entire family could face reprisals. She could have reasoned: "Better to lose a baby boy with whom I have not even bonded than to endanger myself and his siblings."

Moses himself made a choice that subjected him to danger. Humanly-speaking he was taking a risk. When he left Egypt (the Exodus), he and the people were at risk. The Passover (and all that went with it) could be construed as an act of political subversion. From a natural point of view, the crossing of the Red Sea was daring and dangerous.

At Jericho, Joshua followed one of the most bizarre battle strategies of all time. The Israelites were exposing themselves not only to ridicule but to rout. And Rahab took a huge risk by aligning herself with the people of God.

So, in each case there was an element of danger. Humanly-speaking trusting God was a risky business. But real faith in God removes fear. It was important that the original readers (*and we*) understand that there is a risk either way!!! In fact, when we look at the big picture, in each of these cases **it was actually more dangerous to disobey than to obey**. Think, this would have been true for Moses' parents and for Moses, at the Passover and at the Red Sea, at Jericho and in the case of Rahab. Think also of Mordecai's words to Esther (Esther 4:12-16).

What's more, when we trust God and act in faith, his faithfulness exceeds our expectations. Could Jochebed have imagined what would happen to her son? When Moses took his initial decision to be mistreated along with the people of God, he could not have imagined what role he would eventually play. Could anyone have envisaged what would happen at the Red Sea? And what about impregnable Jericho! Rahab could never have dreamed that she would be an ancestor of Messiah.

Decisions are inevitable. In a sense, every major decision we take is influenced by our faith (or the lack thereof). The life of faith is exciting. When we walk with God, he expands our horizons and stretches us. He helps us to see the big picture. He often calls us to take the difficult way, not the secure way.

I like the way President Teddy Roosevelt put it:

Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.

Or, in the words of a Chinese proverb: "Man who say, 'It cannot be done must not interrupt man who is doing it.'"

I am not talking about foolhardy, impetuous, or reckless action. That's not faith. You can take risks without faith, but I sometimes wonder whether you can have faith without taking (what would appear to be) risks.

### Truths to Apply

1. Clearly it was faith that inspired the seemingly courageous acts of the people mentioned in this passage. How might our faith influence the stand we take and the decisions we make?
2. We cannot know when unusual challenges (opportunities and obstacles) might come our way. How can we develop a "faith mentality" that will stand us in good stead when an extreme challenge comes our way? Consider the example of David when he overheard Goliath's threats and in what he said to Saul (1 Sam 17:26, 34-37).
3. What kind of "risks" might we be exposed to (family, workplace, society, church)?
4. As the people mentioned in this passage would have exposed themselves to danger by disobeying (taking what seemed to be the easy way out), we might actually expose ourselves to greater long-term danger by disobedience than by obedience. Consider Moses' decision: "He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin *for a short time.*" Think of Rahab's fate had she not taken the risk of sheltering the Israelite spies.