



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

HEROES FROM HEBREWS

Breaking the Curse – Hebrews 11:30–31
Tim Badal | August 5, 2018



We have been going through a series entitled, “Heroes from Hebrews.” This summer we picked Hebrews 11 and have been focusing on what many Bible scholars and teachers call the “Hall of Faith,” chronicling the Old Testament men and women who did great things for God. They were not perfect people—did not follow God every step of the way—but they are commended for living out steps of faith. They are examples to us of obedience, that when we follow God in faith and not fear, God will use that to transform our lives and the lives of many other people. This week we are going to look at the children of Israel who entered the Promised Land, and the woman from Jericho, the prostitute named Rahab.

I want you to know that our faith in God creates opportunities for transformation. The children of Israel will see victory when all they have experienced up to this point is defeat. Rahab, a pagan woman of ill repute, has seemingly no chance at salvation, but because of her faith and trust in God, she is given a new life and opportunity to do things that she would have never imagined.

Let’s read Hebrews 10:30–31. We will then bounce around to get through seven or eight chapters of Scripture that chronicle many things. Let’s hear what the writer of Hebrews has to tell us before we ask for God’s blessing.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

When I was an eight-year-old child, I concluded that I was cursed and had no chance of ever being happy again. It had to do with what I was watching on television that Sunday afternoon in 1984. Earlier that year, I had fallen in love with a team called the Chicago Cubs. It was the first year I can ever remember following and loving a team, the stats and the personalities on the team. I fell in love with names like Ryne Sandberg, Bob Dernier, Keith Moreland, Larry Bowa and Ron Cey—my favorites.

It all came to a crashing halt when Goose Gossage (who is of the devil, I believe) closed out the game that would end their year. I was in tears—absolutely and totally broken-hearted. I felt like there was a cloud hanging over me. I had invested time and energy, thinking they were a team of destiny, only to have my dreams come crashing down. You would think I would have given up then, but I kept loving that team and they kept breaking my heart. In 1989, they did it again when Will Clark and the San Francisco Giants decimated any chance of the Cubs winning. I was ready to give up again, but I was too dumb and unwise to stop, so I kept being a glutton for punishment. Although I didn’t believe it, I kept hearing that there was a curse. It did seem like there was a curse in 2003 when the Cubs were only five outs from the World Series! I watched the team implode as I was sitting in my living room with my bride who was very quiet because she knew what was good for her. The circumstances were heart-breaking. I remember saying, “No more. I’m done. This team is cursed and it’s a waste of time to follow them.”

The Cubs had a curse—the Billy Goat Curse—like the Curse of the Bambino on the Boston Red Sox. Curses are not good or fun and don’t make any sense. A tavern owner wanted to bring a goat to Wrigley Field but was turned away. As he left, he pronounced a curse on the Cubs and Wrigley Field saying that there would never be a championship. Supposedly that curse had remained in place for over 70 years, and I was beginning to believe it. Every time the Cubs began to look good, I knew it would only be a matter of time before it came to a screeching halt. Then the Boston Red Sox broke their curse and we were left all alone to deal with the goat.

On October 31, 2009, something transpired that would change the Cubs' direction. They got a new owner and would no longer be owned by an organization or a corporation. They would be owned by one of the biggest fans of Chicago baseball, Tom Ricketts, part of a multi-billionaire family. He took some petty cash (about 890 million dollars!) and bought the team he loved. I have a picture with Tom. We are close friends. He's there with my boys while we talk about trades and things like that and I help him [okay, not really].

During a press conference as he was being introduced as the team president, he was asked why he spent 890 million dollars on a team that was cursed. He said, "I don't believe in curses. The Cubs are not under a curse. They have just done all the wrong things in the past. We have to start going a different direction, living differently in the big and small things we do. You are going to see a transformation over the next couple of years that you've never seen before."

He was absolutely right. We saw a transformation of an organization, from the lovable losers to a team that has made the NLCS in the last three years, something that is rarely done. Tom would say it had nothing to do with a curse, but with living life differently. We have seen and know that the Cubs have gone from the lovable losers to World Series Champions. I'm very excited and happy that I didn't give up too quickly.

Some of you Sox and Cardinal fans are wondering what any of this has to do with Hebrews 11. The writer of Hebrews takes us back to the beginning of Joshua 1 and an opportunity for a new group of Israelites to make a decision. The generation who was entering the Promised Land had to feel a bit of a curse upon them. For the last 40 years, they watched their parents and elders of the nation wander around the wilderness and experience great judgment from God. God had good reason to judge them. They were disobedient, obstinate, and rebellious. Through His prescribed leader, Moses, it seemed that every time God would have them do something, they would go a different direction. As a result, they experienced calamity upon calamity every step of the way.

They had to feel a bit cursed and fear that they, too, would wander. But as Joshua 1 opens, these children are going to be commended for their faith because they are going to do something different from the previous generation. In some ways, they were going to break the curse, not with incantations or waving of a magic wand, but through obedience.

How does that apply to our lives? Some of us want victory, opportunity, and brighter days for our lives as Christians, but we live under this "storm cloud" of what we believe to be a curse. Maybe it is because of disobedience in your parents' lives or some dysfunction in your family that always had you losing. Maybe it's because of your own past failures that you find yourself living in defeat instead of victory.

The reason I believe the writer of Hebrews puts this passage in here is to tell you that the past doesn't need to define you, and you don't need to relegate yourself to the failures of your past. But if you want victory in your life, you are called to move from the troubled past into a present reality where obedience and faithfulness rule the day.

We've all struggled with breaking the curse of faithlessness from the past and have dealt with the consequences and sorrows of sin. How do we get beyond it and allow something new to define us? The new generation that entered the Promised Land did so by beginning with faithfulness.

If you want a way out, a way to victory, God says, "Be faithful to Me today. Don't worry about what is in the past. It's in the rearview mirror and you can't do anything to change it. But today is a new day and a new opportunity. You have a choice today: are you going to continue down the road of faithlessness, or are you going to choose to follow Me and My commands?"

Joshua famously said to the people of Israel, "*Choose this day whom you will serve*" (Joshua 24:15). He gives the two different masters you can serve—the holy God or the gods of all of the pagan nations. We have a choice each day to either choose to live in our sin and the failures of the past or to make today a moment of demarcation where we set a line and say, "I'm going to follow and pursue You, God. I'm not going to live in the past, but in the light of the reality of Your Word and Your truth today."

In order to live in faithfulness in the present, we need to do a few things.

Committing to Obedience

As Joshua tells the children of Israel to "choose today whom they are going to serve," we also must choose today whom we will serve. Each day, we get up and face a litany of decisions and directions we can go. We have to make a decision to say, "God, whatever comes my way, I'm going to choose to obey You instead of choosing my flesh, my desires, the ways of this world, or the

ways my friends go. I'm going to choose You, God." When those difficult decisions come, we have already set the trajectory of our lives to go the way of God and not the way of the world.

God sets up Joshua incredibly well for this. Turn to Joshua 1. We will be in Joshua for the rest of our time today.

Joshua is a book of change. At the beginning of Joshua, a new day has dawned; a new opportunity. The children of Israel are now no longer the wilderness generation—that generation are all gone. The Bible makes it clear that the rebellious generation would not see the Promised Land and they did not. Some of the people who walked around the city of Jericho may have been children who escaped slavery in Egypt, but they had seen their parents' generation wander from God, rebel, argue and grumble against God. God tells the new generation that they cannot do the same thing. He gives these words to Joshua, the new leader, in Joshua 1:5:

⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

If the previous generation had obeyed God, they would have been able to enter the Promised Land, but they chose not to do that.

Some of you are not in a place of success, victory, or vitality, not because of a curse by God, but because instead of following God, meditating on His Law day and night and carefully obeying God's Word, you have wandered away. You have said, "You're the reason this has all happened! You're the problem, not me!"

God makes it very clear to this new generation, "If you want success, vitality, and My presence, you must very carefully obey the things that I say." We have to make a decision to commit to obedience. Why would we do so?

We must learn from the mistakes of others.

We will learn from our past failures and the mistakes of others. That generation was ready to obey and do whatever God said because they watched their parents do the exact opposite and have all kinds of calamity and judgment befall them. They realized that disobedience, rebellion, obstinance and grumbling wouldn't get them anywhere with God or in this life. They decided to do the opposite by choosing to obey and be faithful. By doing so, they trusted that God said they would be successful, find vitality and the life God desired for them.

We can learn and grow in wisdom in two ways. The harder and more painful way is to learn these lessons through our own experiences. Early on in my life, I chose to do things my way, and against my parents' wishes, the law's wishes, and God's wishes. I learned very quickly that life wasn't very fun or what I had hoped it would be. I found myself in a whole lot of trouble. I learned the hard way what wise, godly, and obedient living really looked like because I learned the way not to live.

The easier, cheaper, and less painful way to learn this truth is not through our own experiences, but to do so from afar, watching the experiences of others. Some of us don't do a good job of this and have to learn the hard way. There are many good and bad examples that show us consequences of others' good and bad decisions, then we can see from afar without pain and suffering where a life of sin leads and where a life of obedience leads. We need to observe people and think, for example, "As I look at Hollywood, I see pain and sorrow. But they live it up, they are their own gods, they do whatever they want when they want, but they don't seem happy. Their lives seem to be filled with many issues, so maybe I shouldn't long for that, but I should long to follow God."

We are told a couple of times in the New Testament that the generation that wandered in the wilderness was given as an example for us of how not to live. As God's people, we should not grumble, complain, be rebellious or run to idols of other nations. They serve as examples, so we don't have to do what they did in order to learn the same lessons.

That generation said, "It's a new day. Let's not do what the previous generation did. Let's obey! God is with us and wants our good. We will obey. We will meditate on His Law and do what He says." They learned from other people's past failures.

They live out commands.

They said, "We are no longer going to live in the past." That decision is symbolized in Joshua 4 where they crossed the Jordan River. Joshua said to the people, "We are never going back there again. We are in a new day—a new opportunity." They set up 12 stones

of remembrance to remind them that they did not want to go back. They were given two leaders: Joshua and Caleb—two of the only men from the previous generation who were faithful and true during that time. Why would God give two leaders from a previous generation? Because those two leaders would be a constant reminder. “Let’s not go back there. We remember what happened and how God used the ground to swallow up a whole group of people in Korah’s Rebellion. We know that God brought all kinds of havoc when we obeyed other gods instead of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Joshua declares that they would not return: “Now that it is a new day, we must obey in a way we never saw coming.” Joshua 5 says, “The new generation must be circumcised.” I am not sure why, but the practice of circumcision had not taken place during the wilderness experience, as we learn in this passage. Circumcision was the act of a boy baby having part of his flesh removed as a sign of purity and allegiance to God. There were over three million people in the nation of Israel at that time. Joshua came before them to give an important announcement. After some general announcements, he said, “By the way, I have a quick public service announcement: all the men of our nation are now going to be circumcised.”

This was a huge deal. Every man. It was going to be costly. Their obedience was going to hurt. “But I don’t feel like it! I don’t want to! I shouldn’t have to!” could have been their responses. But the text never says that any of the 1.5 million men complained about it. That’s a miracle! It is a testimony that these people had learned that disobedience is disaster for humanity. As your pastor, I want to teach you that disobedience will always lead to disaster. The children of Israel had learned that from their parents’ generation and said, “Obedience equals opportunity. We’re not going to pursue disaster, but opportunity. It’s going to cost us. Obedience hurts and makes us uncomfortable and vulnerable.”

They were in the midst of pagan countries and cities and by this decision to circumcise 1.5 million men, they lost their standing army, because they were rendered useless for at least a couple of weeks, unable to defend themselves in a case of attack. This circumcision shows that at times God will do what’s costly and painful. “God, we will render us vulnerable because by faith, we believe that obedience creates a better day than disobedience.”

Many times, I have sat with people whose lives are crumbling apart because of disobedience and they wish they would have learned the truth that obedience is the way to go. The children of Israel learned and said, “We’re going to live out God’s commands.” They had the Passover which was a remembrance of how God was with them at the very end of chapter five.

We come to the city of Jericho. They’ve healed up from the circumcision. God says, “All right. I told your forefathers I was going to give you this land. You’ve done the hard thing and have obeyed Me when it didn’t make sense, was going to cost you and even made you vulnerable. Here’s what I want you to do. Do you see the city of Jericho, a fortified city with walls all around it?”

We are told in another passage of Scripture that Jericho was a mighty city with mighty fortifications that made it impregnable from an invading army. The children of Israel saw it and knew their first battle was going to be difficult.

Listening carefully to what God says.

This is what obedience is. You can read the passage in Joshua 6 later. God says, “I want you to walk around the city for seven days. For the first six days, I want you to walk around the city once, then on the seventh day, I want you to walk around the city seven times. At the end, I want you to yell and scream, trumpeters blow their horns, then the walls are going to come tumbling down.”

“Yeah right, God. No! That’s not going to work. Where have we ever seen a city’s walls come tumbling down just because people walked around it?” But notice that they do exactly what God says. In all the preceding chapters, we’ve seen grumbling, complaining, and outright rejection. But now they are saying, “This makes no sense to us, but we are going to do it. We may be made fun of.” You can imagine the people of Jericho mocking them, especially on day two and three when nothing is happening. They were probably saying, “These guys are a lot of bark and no bite,” and hurling other insults. At least that is what the Veggie Tale video reminds us of as the little Jericho peas mock the people of Israel and throw goo down. Of course, that is legitimate because everything from Veggie Tales is from the Bible, right?

No doubt, there is a level of mocking and scorning taking place. We learn of the obedience of the children of Israel. The important thing was that Moses, their incredible leader, could not get the previous generation to line up single file for a drinking fountain break. They rebelled against him. But this generation stands up, ready to be circumcised, to reinstate the Passover and to walk around a city, with no questions asked. They are willing to follow God because they choose God and obedience over themselves and disobedience.

That is a decision you and I need to make, and until we do, we will live under a curse called sin. We have to stop living in the failures of the past and choose today whom we are going to serve.

Now this gets played out a little more and involves not only committing to obedience, but also to carrying out God's commands. It's one thing to hear what God is saying, and another to do it. The easiest part of obedience is listening. But as I prayed, the hardest part of the sermon is the application.

These things are easy to preach and hard to live. They are hard to live for your pastor, and I know they're hard to live for you. This group of people were commanded to walk around the city for seven days and on the seventh day to do it seven times. While they do it, the watching world mocks and scorns them. How did they do it? What made them different?

Carrying out God's commands

Pliability

Carrying out God's commands involves pliability. That is a big word that just means to be flexible, moldable, and shapeable. The children of Israel came to the realization that being rigid toward God gets you nowhere. Having an agenda of your own when talking with God isn't helpful. They said, "God, as a new generation, we are going to place ourselves in Your hands. Even if You ask us to do difficult and painful things like circumcision, we'll do it. Even if it means we have to walk around a city and look dumb for a while, we'll do it, fully trusting that You will take our flexibility—our pliability—and use it for Your good."

One person has said, "Faith is trusting God in the hard things, knowing good will result from it." That's exactly what the people are doing before the City of Jericho. They're trusting God in the hard things, knowing God has promised a good result to come afterwards. "God says this is how we're going to destroy this city. I don't know how it's going to happen; I've never seen it happen this way, but I'm going to trust that it is." They are pliable, moldable. God says numerous times in the Scripture that the best way to understand our relationship with Him is that He is the Potter and we are the clay.

Here we are on of God's pottery wheel, if you will, and He's shaping and molding us. But the problem is that when the clay becomes hard and brittle, it's unusable, un-moldable. It's literally thrown off to the side. Some of us have been pushed off to the side because we're not moldable and God can't use us or shape us as He wants to, so He's rendered us useless or unfit in some ways. We need to come back and ask God for forgiveness and say, "I've been rigid and inflexible with You, God, but here I am. I want to serve You and be the clay that is molded by the Great Master of the universe. I want to be molded by You."

When you do that, God, the great Artisan that He is, will fashion something beautiful with your life. That's what He's doing with these people. It involves pliability.

Perseverance.

It involves perseverance. When you carry out the commands of God, it will involve perseverance, seven days a week. That's a lot of time! Every day, they're going to get up, go to Jericho from their camp, walk around Jericho (which would have been a large task with such a large number of people), then go back home to eat and sleep. Then they will get up and do it again and again for seven days. I imagine humanly speaking, somewhere amidst those seven days, some people probably said, "This isn't worth it. What are we doing? We're getting mocked, laughed at, and our name is being dragged through the mud. This isn't worth it!" But we don't see that happening, showing their awesome faith.

We have been called by God to walk around this world, obeying the commands of God, while a watching world mocks, scorns, and thinks we're imbeciles in the process. And the whole reason for this book and chapter is to encourage Christians to live lives of perseverance. Why? Because God is working and it's taking some time to bring it to fruition. We are wondering when the walls of this world will come down. They will in God's good time, but until then, we need to remain steadfast and true. Just as the walls of Jericho came tumbling down, one day God will bring this world under judgment. On that great and glorious day, we will be vindicated for all the time, energy, mocking, and slander we have received from people; we will be vindicated as individuals who were found faithful and were wise to listen to God and not ourselves. But we must persevere.

It's a process.

We need perseverance and persistence, and thirdly, this is a process. God could have dropped the walls of Jericho in an instant, but He didn't! Why not? Because God recognizes that for us to learn, we have to learn through a process. Faith does not happen overnight. Faith-living is not done after one sermon, but takes perseverance, persistence and working through a process. We grow, take a couple of steps back, grow some more, go back a step, then grow more. The life of sanctification—becoming more like Christ—doesn't happen in one day; it happens over a course of time. We will see that this life of faith they lived isn't going to end

at the victory of Jericho. Once they get done with the battle of Jericho, someone will disobey—Achan. He's going to disobey God's commands regarding what can be plundered from Jericho. They go to the next battle, the Battle of Ai. When they get there, they lose the battle because there is sin in the camp.

That is the life we live. We have one victory and then the next time we expect victory, but we have defeat. Then victory happens again and again. Sometimes it's a process. We need to recognize that this life of faithfulness isn't going to happen overnight but will take time. What will it produce?

Changing lives.

When we obey God and choose faithfulness in the present instead of the faithlessness of the past, lives are changed. The first lives that we see changed are those of the people who lived it—the Israelites. They saw the walls come tumbling down and found out that obeying God brings His plan to fruition. They are thankful for it and rejoice in great celebration! "We've obeyed God and God has come through! That is a marvelous thing for us to see in this life. When we obey God, He allows us to be victorious. We need to rejoice and praise God.

In Hebrews 11:31, we see another life changed. By faith, Rahab, this prostitute from Jericho, is delivered from destruction and is brought into the nation of Israel. We learn a couple of things about this in Joshua 6. The walls are about to come down. The children of Israel are marching around the city. But what happens to Rahab?

²² But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her." ²³ So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel. ²⁴ And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. ²⁵ But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Rahab and her family are saved here. What allowed them to be saved? It was the faithfulness of the children of Israel by God's grace and mercy. How does this begin?

Our faithfulness sparks the interest of non-believers.

We learn in Joshua 2 that Rahab has heard of the renown of God and people of Israel. She says in Joshua 2:8-13, "I've heard how you crossed the Red Sea on dry land. Our gods can't do that. Our king can't do that. Our people can't do that. I'm going to trust your God and not my gods. I'm going to trust your ways, not my ways. I'll help you out and hide you from the authorities, so they don't know you're here spying. But what I ask for in return is that the same God Who has served you throughout this time would become my God so that I might be able to serve Him and be protected by Him."

Your neighbors, family, friends, and even acquaintances are watching you today. If they have known you for any length of time, they know you carry the banner of Christianity over you, hold the claims of Christ tightly, and that you live according to His Word. They are watching.

I have family members, friends, and coworkers who are watching. They are saying, "I just don't get it! It doesn't make sense! Why does he do this? Why is he involved in the things he is involved in? Why does he invest so much time and energy in this Christianity thing?" They are watching and wondering. Every once-in-a-while they will ask, "Why do you do all this?" I was asked by a woman yesterday while I was catering an event, "I found out that you're a pastor. Aren't you busy enough catering? Why would you do that?" I replied, "Aha. I was going to talk about you in the service tomorrow, because you've looked at my life and it doesn't make sense. And when things don't make sense, we ask questions." I then had an opportunity to share a reason for the hope that I have and why I get up and preach every Sunday and do all that I do. It's because I love Jesus. She got way more of an answer than she was looking for. We need to be showing people a life of obedience that sparks the interest of others.

Our faithfulness shows lost people the way.

Rahab says, "Listen, I've heard about your God. I've seen your faithfulness and I want to know more." The spies don't stop there. The spies say, "Okay. You can have life, protection, and a new lease on life if you will do the following." Joshua 2 and 5 tell us that on two different occasions they tell her, "Throw a scarlet thread out your window to let us know where you live. Show that to God. If you will do that, we will protect you and our God will protect you when the walls of this city come tumbling down." That's exactly what happens. Everyone who is in Rahab's home at the time of God's judgment is saved.

Like the spies, we should exhibit a godly life, a life of holiness and faith. The problem is we never tell people what that means for them. The spies say, "Listen, we're glad you've seen the claim of God and our obedience, but here's a way you can experience it for yourself." They share that without God, we're lost. That a crimson thread, a foreshadow of what Christ does on the cross, is the way of salvation. And in this new Passover, God's judgment passes over the house of Rahab, because by faith she believed. She was brought into the family of God, and the text says that for the rest of her life she was part of the people of God.

That's what happens when we introduce people to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We bring them into a new family where they are never the same again.

Our faithfulness allows us to see the plans of God unfold.

In our obedience and faithfulness, we are always worried about what it does for us in the here and now. But when we obey, it allows us to see the plans of God unfold. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 1. I want to show you one word in the entire text of Matthew 1 where we see the genealogy of Jesus Christ. There is a litany of names recorded that shows Jesus and His lineage all the way from Abraham to Joseph and Mary. Matthew 1:5 says, "*And Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab...*" Rahab? Wait a minute! She's an outsider—a prostitute—and shouldn't have been part of this equation!

When we obey God, He takes our obedience and does things in our time and in generations to come. He does masterful work. Notice that Rahab's son is a known man: Boaz who is a central figure in Ruth, the next book of the Bible. God is going to use Boaz as a picture of our Kinsman Redeemer—the One Who takes us in, the One Who loves us even though we're unlovable. Because of her faith, God is going to use the posterity of Rahab not only as a channel of God's grace to her generation, but also for many generations to come.

Today, you and I must choose either the curse and continue to live in the failures of the past which will become failures in our present and our future, or choose to draw a line saying, "God, it's a new day, a new opportunity and I choose obedience because You have promised You will never leave or forsake me. You promise success and not failure in this world if I will only trust You and follow Your commands to obey You every step of the way. Brothers and sisters, the choice is before you: how will you choose?"

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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