

All These Died in Faith

by Leiann Walther

Foreword

There are many prayers that we see God answer and we rejoice when His response is visible. But what do you do when you earnestly intercede and don't see any changes? When things seem to fall apart? When the wrong people are promoted? When evil seems to prevail? When the hearts of those you love appear unchanged? How do you persevere? What do you pray?

Hebrews is the book about persevering—about hanging on and keeping going when you don't see change—about not becoming calloused or hardened ...about not quitting.

The list of characters in Hebrews 11 experienced the same situations we do. I started asking four questions:

1. How old were they when God first called them?
2. What was their role and heart passion?
3. How long did they live with that desire?
4. What did they see fulfilled at the time of their death?

*“Therefore , since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us,
and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
fixing our eyes on Jesus.”*

Hebrews 12:1-2

Leiann Walther
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*All these died in faith,
without receiving the promises,
but having seen them
and having welcomed them from a distance,
and having confessed that they were strangers
and exiles on the earth.*

*And all these, having gained approval
through their faith,
did not receive what was promised,
because God had provided something better for us,
so that apart from us they would not be made
perfect.*

Hebrews 11:13, 39-40



Abraham

Age when called: 75 years old

Purpose: Go to the land that God would show him

How long he lived in a tent: 100 years until the time of his death at 175 years old.

Genesis 12:1-2

Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house to the land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation.

Genesis 12:6-7

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So he built an altar there.

What did Abram *do* to advance God's plan on earth?

Simply be willing to live in a tent.

The first two things Abram would have seen after he stepped out in faith and left his settled life for a nomadic life:

12:6 "Now the Canaanite was then in the land."

12:10 "Now there was a famine in the land."

There was absolutely NOTHING Abram could do to get rid of the Canaanites or make the land produce.

Abram was not asked by God to make anything happen. He didn't raise an army.

He didn't make peace treaties with the Amorites.

He didn't spend money to buy up property.

All he was called to "do" was to live year-by-year in a tent. To believe that what God said, He would accomplish.

What did he think when his young nephew, Lot, chose the well-watered fertile land and chose to settle down in a city and become a judge in the city gate?

Genesis 13:11 "So Lot chose for himself..."

How discouraging to have both a relative and fellow journey-traveler sell out and leave him holding nothing but a promise. But immediately...

"The Lord said to Abram after Lot separated from him, 'Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.'" (Genesis 13:14-18)

The second promise of God involved descendants for Abram.

"A great nation." "To your descendants I will give the land." "One who will come forth from your body will be your heir." "Count the stars..."

But there was absolutely NOTHING Abram could do to have an heir because Sarai was barren. All Abram could do was wait for God's timing...25 years of waiting. Well...actually he only waited 10 years and decided with Sarai that "one from his own body" could include a son by Hagar. Ishmael was born. He was named by God, cared for by God, and made great by God. But he wasn't the one God had promised "descendants" from.

Wait.

Live in a tent.

Daily life.

Take care of herds and herdsmen.

15 years after Ishmael.

This didn't look like he was advancing God's plan at all!

Advancing God's kingdom was not Abram's responsibility. Remaining steadfast in believing God would fulfill His promise was all he had to do...despite Sarah's barrenness and age.

...and then he came! Isaac became a reality!

It wasn't what Abraham did for God that was great.

It was what God did for Abraham that accomplished His purposes on earth.

When Sarah died, Isaac was 37 years old and was unmarried. She didn't get to see any descendants except ONE.

When Abraham died, the Canaanite was still in the land...still held all the title deeds, except for his burial plot. There was no VISIBLE evidence that ANYTHING in the world had changed because of the 100 years he had spent in a tent waiting for God to keep His promises.

And as for descendants—

Ishmael had several children and Abraham had more children by another wife after Sarah died (Gen. 25:1-6), but it took his one true heir, Isaac, 20 years before they were able to have children.

...more waiting! More helplessness!

God alone brings life.

There was nothing Abraham could do.

And (finally) the Lord heard Isaac's prayer for his wife and Rebekah had twins—Jacob and Esau.

Abraham got to see them before he died. They would have been 15 years old at the time of his death.

What did Abraham "do" that changed the world?

"In hope against hope he believed. Without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body now as good as dead, since he was 100 years old...yet with respect to the promise of God

He did not waver in unbelief,
But grew strong in faith,
Giving glory to God."

Romans 4:18-22

Joseph

Age when called: 17 years old

Purpose: Preserve his family; keep them alive. (Gen. 50:20)

How long he helped his family: 93 years until the time of his death at 110 years old.

God's call on Joseph's life came at a young age through two dreams—seeing his brothers and father and step-mother bowing down to him. His leadership was evident from the beginning, for he was put in charge of “keeping an eye on his brothers” whose actions were already causing grief to Jacob.

So...what would the fulfillment of those two dreams look like?

What would it look like to be the hero and save the family and become the ruler?

What did Joseph have to “do” to make it happen?

When his brothers grabbed him and stripped off his coat and threw him in a pit to die—Joseph was totally helpless. He cried and pleaded for his life but they wouldn't listen. Who was in charge at that moment? Who had prevailed?

When his brothers sold him and Joseph was in chains and in the slave market in Egypt and was purchased by Potiphar—was he accomplishing anything of eternal significance? Yes! Not because of what he was doing for God, but because he did not stop believing the dreams God had revealed to him—he would rule one day...he would provide grain.

As far as we know, God did not come down and speak to Joseph the way He had spoken to Abraham. All we are told is that “the Lord was with Joseph” in Potiphar's house.

And what was Joseph doing?

Taking commands.

Daily work and responsibilities.

Being faithful.

For 10 years.

His family was far away in Canaan. How would he ever rule them?

He was helpless to make it happen.

...but things were looking up. He was promoted to top slave, overseeing the household of one of the most prominent families in Egypt.

False accusations. Imprisonment.

From all outward appearances, Potiphar's wife was in charge of the outcome and his brothers had won in their plot to get rid of him.

"But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer." Genesis 39:21

No recorded conversations between God and Joseph are given at this point either—just the ability to persevere

Without bitterness and

Without a doubt that God was right there in his dark cell with him...and that God would fulfill the dreams He had given.

Two full years pass after the cupbearer promised to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf.

Waiting.

In prison.

Attending to the needs of the other prisoners.

No indication of when it would change.

At this point does Joseph's life have an eternal impact on God's kingdom? Yes!

He was faithful in persevering...

and then the day came when he was called, he was given the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, he was made the exalted ruler!

But what about the fulfillment of the dreams from 13 years earlier?

He has to wait another 9 years!

After his family moves to Egypt, Joseph lives another 70 years. During the 93 years after the dreams of his youth, he had only been back to the land of his fathers one time—to bury his father, Jacob.

Yet that was the desire of his heart. On his deathbed he "made the sons of Israel swear saying, 'God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.'"

He died before his family got back to Canaan.

Moses

Age when called: 80 years old (Possibly at birth? Possibly at 40?)

Purpose: To bring 2-1/2 million Israelites out of Egypt.

His passion: to bring the Israelites into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

How long it took: 40 years

It's hard to know when Moses was "called" because from the time he was born it was evident to his parents that he was a special child. (Heb. 11:23)

He grew up with privilege—

Receiving the best education of Egypt, having access to the wealth of Pharaoh's court and being offered the parties that went with position. (Hebrews 11:24-26)

And when he was 40, he turned his back on that life in order to embrace the call of God as "the deliverer."

But at the age of 40, when he stood up for one oppressed Jewish man—what was Moses' plan? "He supposed that his brethren would understand that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand." Acts 7:25

What was in Moses' heart? To take vengeance for the oppressed.
God's plan was to get them OUT of Egypt.

Moses kills the Egyptian.

Has to run away to Midian.

Marries.

Becomes a shepherd.

It wasn't that Moses was waiting for God to accomplish His plan—he had quit.
...but God had not quit with Moses!

Forty years He waited.

Could God not have appeared in the burning bush earlier than that?

Was this wasted time in Moses' life?

No!

He had been brought low—humility.

He had become a shepherd—compassion.

He would not be the hero in God's big picture—he would be the salvaged failure in the hands of a Mighty God.

What was the job God gave him at the burning bush?

“Come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh so that you may bring My people, The sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” Exodus 3:10

And within a year...the people were out!

Moses had a tangible “to do” job that, through the power of God, got done!

And his passion was the next step in the plan—to lead the people into the land of Canaan!

Another year and they are at Kadesh-Barnea, sending spies to see what they will encounter. And when the spies (ten of them) saw the obstacles facing them,

Their FEAR and DOUBT

Turned to UNBELIEF and REFUSAL.

God had forgiven them for their idolatrous disobedience with the golden calf. But their unbelief in His promises—after SEEING His power and what He had done—would not be dismissed.

They would not receive what they didn’t believe God was capable of doing.

How did that change Moses’ passion?

Now he had to “put up with them” until they died.

Walk. Walk.

Eat. Eat.

Sand. Sand.

Heat. Heat.

...for another 38 years.

Was Moses “advancing” God’s kingdom at this point? Just listening to their problems every day? Yes!

Moses was used to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, but if you look at his ministry, it looks like a failure—only 2 people over the age of 20 make it INTO the promised land. And Moses dies before seeing the people enter.

Was this a success? Yes.

Joshua

Age when called: about 30.

Purpose: To dispossess the Canaanites and give the land to the Israelites as their possession.

How long he did his job: 80 years until he died at the age of 110 years old.

We aren't sure of Joshua's age at the time of the Exodus, but he is described as a "young man," he was a tribal leader and one of the spies that was sent into Canaan. From the earliest time, it appears he was Moses' attendant—yet always in his shadow.

He was distressed over Israel's golden calf affair, stood up for Moses' reputation, and gained experience in war before entering Canaan. Yet, it was his rock solid trust in God's ability to dislodge the Canaanites and give them the land as promised—despite the 'giants' and chariots and walls—that gained him the responsibility of leading the Israelites into Canaan after the death of Moses.

Except for a couple of blunders at Ai and with the Gibeonites, Joshua's advancement of God's kingdom on earth seems very straightforward:

- Fight and win battles.
- Subdue the land.

The first few years went well—

City after city fell to Joshua's army.

But each tribe was supposed to take up the vision and FINISH the work!

This is when things began to fall apart.

The tribe of Judah couldn't drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem. (Josh. 18:63)

The tribe of Ephraim couldn't drive out the Canaanites in Gezer. (Josh. 16:10)

The tribe of Manasseh couldn't take full possession. (Josh. 17:12)

Joshua said to the sons of Israel,

"How long will you put off entering to take possession of the land, which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you?"

After the initial push of victory, the Israelites were content to “make due” with what they had. When they encountered pockets of Canaanite resistance that were stronger, they stopped advancing. Even when the Israelites gained strength, they merely put the Gentiles to forced labor. To obediently drive them out required persistent work... Work they were no longer motivated to do.

Did Joshua see a completely successful job completed at the end of his life? There had been many victories to be sure! Many stories to recount to the children and the grandchildren of what God had done.

Yet in his farewell address, Joshua says:
“Put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” Joshua 24:23

He saw their continued struggle with idolatry;
their negligence to take possession;
their contentment to co-exist with their Canaanite neighbors.
He foresaw the direction they were headed.

Was all his work in vain?
No. It was not in vain.

David

Age when anointed: about 15 years old

Purpose: To rule over God's people as a man after God's own heart. (1 Sam. 13:14)

His passion: To build a Temple in Jerusalem for the nations to come and worship God.

How long he did his job: 55 years until his death at age 70.

When David was called in from watching sheep out in the field in order to stand before Samuel and be anointed as the next king of Israel, I wonder what went through his mind? His part in God's plan, God's kingdom on earth, was clearly laid out.

The early events all move toward the goal—

- He plays his music for Saul
- He defeats Goliath and becomes a public hero
- He becomes best friends with Jonathan
- He marries Saul's daughter

But the greatest opposition to David fulfilling God's plan for him to rule is not going to come from the Philistines—but from Saul and others holding the political power. David refuses to take matters in to his own hands.

He runs.

He hides.

He cries.

He waits.

...for 15 years.

In addition to the historical narrative, we have 73 Psalms of David that give the emotional impact of what it was like to persevere in the face of opposition.

Thirteen Psalms have the words "wait" or "how long?" in them:

Psalms 4, 6, 13, 25, 27, 35, 37, 39, 40, 52, 56, 62, and 69.

*But know that the Lord has set apart the godly man for Himself.
The Lord hears when I call to Him. Psalm 4:3*

*I am weary with my sighing;
Every night I make my bed swim,
I dissolve my couch with my tears. Psalm 6:6*

*Indeed, none of those who wait for Thee will be ashamed...
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation,
For You I wait all the day. Psalm 25:3,5*

*Wait for the Lord.
Be strong and let your heart take courage.
Yes, wait for the Lord. Psalm 27:14*

Lord, how long will you look on? Psalm 25:17

*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way...
For evildoers will be cut off...
Wait for the Lord and keep His way,
And He will exalt you to inherit the land. Psalm 37:7,9,34*

And then the news came: Saul was dead.
But this was no victory celebration for David. It was a time to lament. (II Sam. 1)
David was made king...by the tribe of Judah, in Hebron.
Seven more years of waiting.
Until the rest of the tribes finally bow to the authority God has given him.

In II Samuel 5 David makes Jerusalem his capital, and in the next chapter he is trying to move the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. In chapter 7 he is making plans for the Temple—it was his passion...
And God said, “No” ...that his son would build it.

Through an adulterous affair
Through a rebellious son
Through a family in turmoil
Through more battles—
David cried, planned, and stored up the supplies for God’s glorious Temple.
And he died. Never seeing it happen.

Elijah

Age when called: unknown

Purpose: Turn the hearts of the people in the nation of Israel back to God.

How long he did his job: 15-22 years.

When Elijah came on the scene, Israel was like a runaway train—derailed from Truth, ignorant of God’s law, and plunging into a destructive path of immorality and spiritism.

Through prevailing prayer, God’s power was like a concrete wall to stop the direction they were headed. Three years without rain had all eyes focused on Elijah.

It wasn’t as if he was unaffected by the cost of being God’s spokesman of the truth.

He goes into hiding.

Drinks from a brook.

Evidently is without a home.

Is fed by ravens...an unclean bird.

Is fed by a Phoenician woman...an “unclean” Gentile!

...for THREE years!

Then the BIG CONTEST on Mt. Carmel comes:

“YAWEH is God!

YAWEH is God!”

The people SEE it and PROCLAIM it!

450 prophets of Baal are killed.

But Jezebel is not gone. And from all outward appearances, she is not going anywhere soon. She will not relinquish her power.

Elijah has given everything.

Elijah has interceded.

He has prevailed in prayer.

His strength is gone.

Jezebel threatens.

Elijah runs...first to Judah and then to the mountain of God, Mt. Horeb.

God had sent the angel to give him food and drink in order to make the journey...to retreat...to talk with God.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” (I Kings 19:9)

“I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty.
The Israelites have rejected your covenant,
Broken down Your altars,
And put Your prophets to death with the sword.
I AM THE ONLY ONE LEFT.
And now they are trying to kill me, too.”

Had Elijah done the job God had given him to do? Yes.
Had it been successful?

There was no visible indication that ANYTHING had changed as a result of all Elijah had done. Yet his work was not in vain.

In fact, his most important work would be in anointing the three men who would bring God’s vengeance on Jezebel and avenge the blood of His servants.

Elijah finds Elisha—who will be his successor.
And then after a couple more confrontations with Ahab and his successor, Ahaziah,
Elijah is called into heaven in a whirlwind.
Elisha will be the one to anoint Hazael and Jehu; to care for the “seven thousand
whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed
him.” (I Kings 19:18)

Elijah:
The man of prevailing prayer
The greatest of the prophets
The one fearless in proclaiming TRUTH
And standing alone—

Never saw Jezebel die.
Never saw Israel repent.
Never saw the 7,000 worshipping.

Jeremiah

Age when called: about 20 years old.

Purpose: To go to everyone God sent him to and speak whatever God commanded him to say. To uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and plant. (Jeremiah 1:7-9)

How long he did his job: 40 years.

Jeremiah was born into a priestly family and as such, his family would have grown up around the polluted worship that King Manasseh led Judah into. Yet God's plan for him was from before he was born. He would not be part of the religious system—he would be a messenger of God's Words during the darkest hours of Judah's history, when those in the "established religious rituals" would fiercely oppose him with apostate words and actions.

Just as King Josiah had been brought into existence to fulfill a 300-year-old prophecy, so Jeremiah was called into existence at the *same* time period to speak the TRUTH WITHOUT WAVERING—regardless of who he was speaking to and regardless of the response.

Approximately half of Jeremiah's ministry was under the reign of King Josiah, who had already started to seek God and purge Judah and Jerusalem of idols. (II Chron. 34:1-3)

For FIVE YEARS Jeremiah preached God's messages, while King Josiah slowly and methodically tore down Baal altars, incense altars and Asherim. These were exciting days of success, but the real breakthrough came when King Josiah was 26 years old—he began to repair God's house.

The book of the Law was found.

Josiah trembled and repented.

He led the people in repentance and celebrated the Passover, which had been neglected for almost 60 years!

"Josiah contributed to the lay people, flocks of lambs and young goats, all for the Passover offerings, numbering 30,000 plus 3,000 bulls. These were from the king's possessions." II Chron. 35:7

After 18 years of working alongside a godly king, Jeremiah would have seen Josiah go into battle against Pharaoh Neco. He would have waited and felt the blow when the news came that King Josiah had been shot with an arrow and had died.

Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. (II Chron. 35:25)

The people had gone along with Josiah, but their hearts had never truly returned to God. Jeremiah saw Pharaoh Neco invade Judah and take Josiah's son as a prisoner to Egypt, where he would die.

Still he spoke God's truth.

Jeremiah saw Josiah's other son, Jehoiakim, put onto the throne—and then turn in rebellion against God. He saw Pharaoh Neco destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar.

Still he spoke God's truth.

He saw King Jehoiakim burn the Word of God that he had written on a scroll over a period of months.

He re-wrote the scroll and still he spoke God's truth.

He was thrown into an abandoned well and left to die,
he was imprisoned,
he had only a few friends,
he was scorned by his family and rejected by those he spoke to.
His advice was asked for and repeatedly not taken.

He saw the deportation of the nobility—including Daniel and his friends—Judah's future.

He saw the holy articles taken out of the Temple.

He saw people murdered by Babylonian soldiers and his beloved Temple and Jerusalem destroyed and burned with fire.

Just before the final destruction, he bought a piece of property and spoke of the return of Israel and Judah from captivity. He told of God's new covenant that would be written on the hearts of His people. (Jeremiah 30-32)
Jeremiah would never redeem that property deed. He was taken as a captive and later released—give his freedom.

He was asked for advice by the remaining Jews who wanted to go to Egypt—and although they did not listen...

Still he spoke God's truth.

The disobedient Jews who were left in Judah forced him to go to Egypt with them...and there he died.

He didn't see his homeland again.

He never married or had children.

He didn't see the return of the exiles.

From outward appearances his message seemed
Ignored
Forgotten
Resisted
And useless.

But there was at least ONE who had heard and was listening...

Daniel

Age when called: about 16 years old.

Purpose: To bring understanding to God's people about what would happen in the end times regarding the Gentile nations, the Jews and God's eternal kingdom.

Passion: for the exiles to return to the land.

How long he did his job: 75 years—he was probably around 90 when he died.

Daniel was a youth who heard the message of Jeremiah and took it to heart. He was taken as a captive to Babylon because he was of nobility and showed a natural ability for understanding.

Yet it was his commitment not to defile himself with the idols or food sacrificed to them that God honored with a special wisdom and understanding. (Daniel 1:20)

Seventeen times the word “understanding” is used in the book of Daniel.

“He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding.” Dan. 2:21

“When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it.” Dan. 8:15

“I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days.” Dan. 10:14

*“Many will be purged, purified and refined,
But the wicked will act wickedly,
And none of the wicked will understand,
But those who have insight will understand.” Dan. 12:10*

There was plenty that was hard to make sense of; that was difficult to understand!

Why had God allowed him and his friends to be carried to Babylon as captives?

Why wasn't God protecting Jerusalem and defending His Name and reputation in front of this wicked foreign king?

For sixteen years Daniel lived in Babylon as a top administrator in the government. Then he heard the news that the foreign king he was serving had destroyed his beloved city and burned God's Temple.

There would be no rescue coming from home. His country was gone—destroyed.

Daniel saw the thousands of Jewish captives brought to Babylon and relocated—the wealthy citizens and the common people alike were reduce to the basest conditions of existence.

To all external observers it looked as though God's promises to David to give him an enduring house had FAILED.
It looked as if God's promises to Solomon to place His Name and presence in the Temple and protect it had fallen flat in front of a heathen despot.

Daniel sought for understanding.
...and God pulled back the curtain on the future.

Dreams.

Visions.

Fasting.

Prayer.

Intercession for Jerusalem.

Confession of sin after 70 years "according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet." (Dan. 9:2)

God showed Daniel the Gentile kingdoms that would come and rule over his people. He showed him what would happen to his people...things that Daniel would never personally see.

Eight times the phrase "*end time*" is used in Daniel.

Four times the phrase "*future*" is used.

Daniel did see the issuing of the decree for the exiles to return, but never got to go back to his beloved homeland.

"You will rest and then at the end of days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." Daniel 12:13

Esther

Age when called: a young woman

Purpose: To stop the extermination of the Jewish people throughout the Persian Empire—including the exiles that had returned to the land.

How long she did her job: a week/her life.

Where is God?

Nowhere is His Name mentioned in the book—and neither is there ever a reference made to prayer or sacrifice. Yet over and over His Sovereign Hand is seen guiding the DETAILS and the TIMING of seemingly “natural” events.

- Esther’s family background (Jewish!)
- The loss of her parents at a young age.
- The location of her growing up—in the capital city of Susa.
- Her natural beauty and manner...

These things could have been true of a number of young girls—they didn’t look like they were part of God’s divine plan for His people.

Esther’s obedient spirit won her favor with those in positions of authority—

She was a woman who stood apart.

And the king noticed as well.

“Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins.” Esther 2:17

What was it like for this beautiful, obedient, gracious Jewish young woman to be married to an unbelieving, Gentile, high-demanding king?

And yet God’s hand was still working through the course of natural attraction and the timing of events in the king’s life to bring about His **bigger** plan.

The enemy, Haman, is elevated.

The plot is made because of his hatred of Mordecai and is extended to include all the Jews in the Empire.

The king carelessly gives permission to carry out Haman’s plan.

And there sits Queen Esther—

A woman who has been given her position through no seeking or advancement of her own doing.

Mordecai understands:

“If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to *royal position* FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?” Esther 4:14

Esther asks for all the Jews in the capital to fast for her for 3 days.

She and her maids do the same.

She is granted an interview.

She prepares a meal. The timing isn’t quite right.

She waits one more day...another meal—

And she speaks.

...openly and truthfully making her request.

Her people are spared!

The Enemy, Haman, is hanged!

Mordecai is promoted!!

All the “natural” events of her life came together for that ONE week!

We don’t know when Esther died, but she—along with Mordecai—“worked for the good of (her) people *and spoke up* for the welfare of all the Jews.” Esther 10:3

John the Baptist

Age when called: from conception

Purpose: To prepare the way for the Messiah by turning the hearts of the people back to God and to identify the Messiah.

How long he did his job: about 2 years before his death.

"Your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son,
And you are to give him the name John.
And he will be a joy and delight to you and many will rejoice at his birth,
For he will be GREAT in the sight of the Lord...and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.
Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God..." Luke 1:13-16

It had been over 400 years since there had been a prophet sent with God's message,
yet when John appeared saying,
"Repent! For the kingdom of Heaven is near"
—everyone **knew** he was a man sent from God.

Whether it was his strange clothes or strange food (Mt. 3:4,5) that helped convey his uniqueness—
"people went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized..." Matt. 3:5-6

This was a successful ministry!
Then Jesus comes to be baptized
The heavens are opened
The Spirit descends
...many start following Jesus.

...and now what was supposed to happen?
The King-Messiah would receive the kingdom...
The Holy Spirit would come...
The evil doers would be cleared away...
The righteous would be gathered. (Matt. 3:11-12)

But the evildoers didn't get cleared away.

Those that were in charge of the Temple continued their hypocrisy, deceit, and cheating—all in the context of "worship."

Herod put John in prison—

And the Messiah, Savior, did not speak the word or rescue him or set up His kingdom.

Had John heard wrong?

When the voice said, "This is My Beloved Son" it had seemed so clear. But from the dungeon, it didn't add up.

Had John seen wrong?

When the Spirit had descended like a dove there had been no doubt...but from the dungeon the meaning was no longer clear.

"Calling two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" Luke 7:19

The answer sent back to John was not an explanation of the plan, or that the kingdom would be delayed. He didn't even tell John that He was going to be betrayed, beaten, crucified, and the third day rise again.

All Jesus said in response was to give a list of the miracles recently performed—miracles foretold of the Messiah—and then say:

"Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of me." Luke 7:23

It looks like evil is prevailing, John.

It looks like the Father is not in control.

It looks like there is no power that can rescue you in your situation.

Hang on to the truth, John.

You know who you are and why you came.

You preached repentance. You pointed Me out.

The cell door opened. The executioner had come. And John was beheaded.

Jesus

Age when called: from conception

Purpose: The Messiah who would “save His people from their sins.” Matt. 1:21 and who would fulfill the Messianic prophecies.

How long he did his job: 3½ years before His death and resurrection.

One of the most distinctive marks about the ministry of Jesus is that He was not self-proclaiming. Even at the age of 12 when He knew who He was, He did not draw attention to Himself, but rather returned to Nazareth for 18 more years, in subjection to Mary and Joseph.

Waiting for John’s announcement that the kingdom was at hand.

Waiting for the Father’s identification and the Spirit’s descent that marked the beginning of His public ministry.

And then He was listening.

Withdrawing from the crowds to hear His Father’s voice in prayer.

Always doing what His Father was showing...that was His motivation—his food.

The miracles came. The popularity, the praise, the publicity.

He spoke the TRUTH the Father told Him to speak.

He was the impartial judge—

Not adjusting His message according to those who stood before Him.

Not granting favors to those who deemed themselves worthy.

In power, He cleared the Temple of the evil doers who had entrenched themselves in religious observance and the traditions of men, but whose hearts were far from God.

And systematically He was REJECTED:

First by the Pharisees and Herodians

And by the crowds who realized He was not going to bow to their desires or time table for His kingdom to be established.

Then by the Sadducees, the high priest, and the Romans.

Things He said directly at the beginning became shrouded in parable. The kingdom had come but was like a hidden piece of leaven, whose presence in the dough would appear slowly over time.

The seed of Abraham had come, but it had to die in order to produce much fruit.
(John 12:24)

And out of the seed would grow a church of believers from every tribe, and tongue,
and people, and nation.

But at the time of his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt—

There were no kingdoms being given to him.

There were no peoples from the nations speaking His praise in their native tongues.

Only children running around the Temple court were singing out
to the King of the World.

He would be misrepresented, misquoted, and lied about.

He would be stripped, beaten, and crucified.

And as He was about to die, how many followers did He see?

One disciple and a few women.

From all outward appearances, His life had been spent in vain and had
ended in tragedy at the hands of the Romans.

Yet what was He quoting from Scripture while enduring the agony of the Cross?

Psalm 22:1

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?

Why are You so far from saving Me?”

...and certainly the rest of the Psalm was going through His mind, even if unable to
be uttered for others to hear:

“For He has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one.

He has not hidden His face from him, but has listened to his cry for help...

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord

And all the families of the nations will bow down before him.” Psalm 22:24-28

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit.

Matt.27:50

Paul

Age when called: probably around 30 years old.

Purpose: To carry the name of Jesus before the Gentiles, and the Gentile kings, and before the people of Israel. (Acts 9:15)

How long he did his job: 32 years.

Paul had a Damascus road experience—a life-changing encounter with Jesus. From the very beginning his purpose was prophetically spoken over him. And with all his zeal of both personality, spiritual gifting, and Spirit empowerment—Paul set out on his mission!

His heart passion was that his fellow Jewish countrymen would understand that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah. (Romans 9:1-5)

And who better to tell them?

Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee who had studied under the Rabbi Gamaliel and not only had he memorized the Scripture but understood as an insider all the arguments they could raise against the truth.

City after city saw Paul in the synagogues, reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jews.

And city after city saw the Jewish leaders reject Paul's personal testimony and the clearly presented evidence of Scripture. Information would not transform their hearts.

From all outward appearances, Paul's ministry to the Jews who were spread out in the Roman Empire looked like a failure.

But what the Jews were throwing away, the Gentile God-fearers were snatching up with eager determination. They were in need of God's mercy and knew it.

Paul's heart passion for the new believers to grow in their knowledge of the truth and in their trust in Jesus consumed his time and oriented his priorities.

His testimony:

"I have been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again...three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger

From rivers

From Gentiles

At sea

From bandits

In the city

from false believers

From my fellow Jews

In the country

I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food. I have been cold and naked.”

II Cor. 11:23-27

Why was he willing to go through all that?

“Besides everything else, there is the DAILY PRESSURE ON ME of CONCERN for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” II Cor. 11:28-29

And he had reasons to be concerned:

After Jews and Gentiles had believed in Galatia, false teachers were giving them wrong teaching about how to live pleasing to God.

After three years of daily instruction in Ephesus, he despaired of his life because of the intense opposition of the Jews there—and he foresaw that “savage wolves” would come into the church there and introduce heretical teachings and false worship.

After 1½ years with the new believers in Corinth, they rejected his authority, thought Apollos was a better speaker, were filled with divisions, and had open immorality embraced in their congregation!

In the congregation he had started in Philippi, Paul received accounts of women who were not getting along.

Masters and slaves,
Husbands and wives,
Parents and children—were having problems in their relationships.

And after 32 years of enduring everything imaginable in order to remain faithful to his calling, Paul writes to Timothy from prison that, “at my first defense, no one came to support me, but all deserted me.” II Timothy 4:16

At that moment, Paul could have felt that everything he had worked for had been in vain. But it was at that very point of dark discouragement that
“The Lord stood by my side and gave me strength,
So that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear.” II Timothy 4:17

The message Paul spoke at the beginning of his ministry,
he could say again at the end:

Therefore my dear brothers and sisters,
STAND FIRM.
Let nothing move you.
Always give yourselves FULLY to the WORK OF THE LORD,
Because you know that your labor in the Lord
Is NOT IN VAIN.
I Corinthians 15:58



*And what more shall I say?
For time will fail me if I tell of
Gideon,
Barak,
Samson,
Jephthah,
of David
and Samuel
and the prophets...*

*Therefore, strengthen the hands that
are weak and the knees that are feeble,
and make straight paths for your feet.*

Hebrews 11:32 and 12:12-13

