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# Words of Truth

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## Hebrews 11:2

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This chapter started by defining faith (Hebrews 11:1). Now we read this: “*For by it the elders obtained a good report*” (Hebrews 11:2). Soon we will begin reading about the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sara, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, etc. This verse is not about them. This verse is about the elders of Israel.

When you study through the Scriptures of old, you come to the conclusion that the elders of Israel were held in high regard when Israel was faithful. When Moses came to speak to the children of Israel in Egyptian bondage, he was to address the elders (Exodus 3:15-18 and Exodus 4:29). The elders served a large role in the establishment of the Passover (Exodus 12:1-28 [notice vs. 21]). In answering the murmuring of the people, the elders were witnesses of Moses bringing about water (Exodus 17:1-7). The elders were involved in offerings (Leviticus 4:1-35 [notice vs. 15]). When God chose helpers for Moses, he did so from among the elders in Israel (Numbers 11:1-30). The elders played significant roles in judgment among the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 19:1-13, Deuteronomy 21:1-9, Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Deuteronomy 22:13-30, and Deuteronomy 25:1-10). The elders gave commandments unto the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 27:1; 32:7). Their authority was made clear in events such as when Boaz wanted to take Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:1-12) and when Israel desired to have a king (I Samuel 8:1-5). God looked down on the children of Israel when they did not favor the elders (Lamentations 4:16).

The Jewish saints addressed in this Hebrew letter would have had some understanding of the role the elders played in Israel. The fact is, the elders still had considerable authority among the Israelites in the first century. They had such authority that they could bind laws, even in sinful ways (Matthew 15:1-2). They were still involved in judgment. Sadly, we can see their authority used against our Lord (Mark 14:53; cf. Luke 9:22). Clearly, those who had erred are not the ones being discussed here in Hebrews 11:2. So, let’s consider the points made in how the elders of the past obtained a good report by faith.

The Greek term [μαρτυρέω] that is translated “good report” is defined as: “To be a witness, i.e. testify (literally or figuratively): — charge, give (evidence), bear record, have (obtain, of) good (honest) report, be well reported of, testify, give (have) testimony, (be, bear, give, obtain) witness. To be a witness, to bear witness, i.e. to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, or that he knows it because taught by divine revelation or

inspiration. To give (not to keep back) testimony; to utter honorable testimony, give a good report; conjure, implore” (Strong’s # 3140). The majority of the times this Greek word appears in the New Testament, it is translated as bear witness or something very similar to that (i.e. Matthew 23:31, Luke 4:22, Luke 11:48, John 1:7-8, John 1:15, John 1:32, John 1:34, John 3:26, John 5:31-33, John 5:36-37, John 8:13-14, John 12:17, John 18:37, John 19:35, Acts 15:8, Acts 23:11, etc.).

As I looked at the Greek word “μαρτυρέω” and read through a great number of accounts to gain a better understanding, I found a few passages that were very clear in defining what the word means. If you read through the tenth chapter of the book of Acts you read about a man named Cornelius. He was the first recorded Gentile that obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Within the account of how he was taught and converted, there is a passage that has the Greek term “μαρτυρέω” in it. It is translated the same as we find in Hebrews 11:2. Notice: *“And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of **good report** among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee”* (Acts 10:22). Similarly, a widow indeed (I Timothy 5:3-16) is a woman that is “well reported of for good works” (I Timothy 5:10). If you were to look at the Greek text through chapter eleven of the book of Hebrews, you will find the Greek word “μαρτυρέω” used four more times in this chapter. It is translated as “obtained witness” and “testifying” in Hebrews 11:4. It is translated as “testimony” in Hebrews 11:5. It is translated as “good report” in Hebrews 11:39.

The elders of Israel had a good report among the people because of their faith. Their faith served as a character witness for them. As we read through this chapter we see that genuine faith is visible because faith produces good works. Faith and works are inseparable.

In conclusion, think about this familiar text: *“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:14-26).