On the Chronological Relationship
Between Daniel and Esther

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> And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, [33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. (Heb 11:32-34)[1]

Introduction

In Heb 11 past heroes of faith are introduced in roughly chronological order. There are exceptions to this rule, but this is the rule to which they are exceptions. Below I distinguish three series of names or events in Heb 11 (vss. 3-31, 32-35, and 36-38). Within the first series items are presented one by one. In the second they are presented at first two by two, and then three by three. In the third series there is no clear pattern.

In the first series, specific names or events are mentioned and discussed. In the second, names are mentioned at first (part [a]), then not (part [b]). In series two there is no discussion. In series three the author's references are more general and his primary goal is to develop an effective peroration.

Text Groupings

First series

After two verses of introduction, the author begins with the creation of the world (vs. 3). "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." The word "universe" is from Greek *tous aiōnas* "the ages," which in turn transparently reflects late Hebrew *hā'ôlām*. The meaning of the Hebrew word changed over time. Originally it had to do with eternity as the furthest extent of time (see Gen 3:22; Isa 63:9; Ps 90:2) and then, in later periods of the language, also came to mean the universe – the fullest extent of space.[2] Note that the author does not say, By faith the universe

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[2] "Post biblical Jewish writings refer to the present world of toil as *hā'ôlām hazzeh* and to the world to come as *hā'ôlām habbā'*" (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* [Chicago: Moody, 1980], s.v. *'ôlām*).

was formed at God's command, but, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command." The element of faith resides in our acknowledgement, not in God's act.

He then proceeds to Abel (vs. 4), Enoch (vs. 5), Noah (vs. 7), Abraham (vss. 8-10, 12, 17-19), Sara (vs. 11), Isaac (vs. 20), Jacob (vs. 21), Joseph (vs. 22), Moses' parents (vs. 23), and Moses himself (vss. 24-29). Here I include the parting of the Red Sea under Moses. We also have the toppling of the walls of Jericho (vs. 30) and the faith of the prostitute Rahab (vs. 31). All of this forms one series of people or events and all are presented in chronological order.

Second series

The second series divides naturally into two parts. In the first, specific individuals are mentioned by name. In the second, there are specific individuals in view, but they are not named.

Part (a). There are six names at the beginning of the second series and these come in pairs. First Gideon and Barak, then Samson and Jephthah, then David and Samuel. How can we know that the author intends us to see these as pairs? In each case the chronological order expected from the Old Testament text is reversed. The sequence chosen appears to depend on which of the two people is more prominent. Thus, Gideon is more prominent in the Old Testament than Barak, Samson is more prominent than Jephthah, David is more prominent than Samuel. And yet in the text of Judges and 1 and 2 Samuel, Barak (Judg 4-5) is mentioned before Gideon (Judg 6-8), Jephthah (Judg 11-12) is mentioned before Samson (Judg 13-16), and Samuel (1 Sam 1-28) is mentioned before David (1 Sam 16-30; 2 Sam). These facts are now summarized in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Second Series, Part (a): Presentation

First	Second
Gideon	Barak
Samson	Jephthah
David	Samuel

Table 2
Second Series, Part (a): Chronology

First	Second
Barak (Judg 4-5)	Gideon (Judg 6-8)
Jephthah (Judg 11-12)	Samson (Judg 13-16)
Samuel (1 Sam 1-28)	David (1 Sam 16-30; 2 Sam)

Part (b). In Heb 11:33-34, the author mentions eight further examples of faithfulness, but without specifying names. These eight all appear to be grouped together as "prophets" (vs. 32) – a term used broadly here to describe individuals whose lives speak on God's behalf or bear witness to God.

. . . who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. (Heb 11:33-34)

Conquering kingdoms (vs. 33a) might possibly be a reference to David and administering justice (vs. 33b) might be a reference to Samuel, mentioned earlier. Gaining what was promised requires discussion, since this could be interpreted generally. I submit, however, that the author has in mind a specific set of historical events. Consider three passages from 1 Kgs (quoted below), their parallels in 2 Chr 6:16 and 7:18 (not quoted), and the reference back to these in Jer 33:17.

and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' (1 Kgs 2:4)

ᴺᴵⱽ "Now LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, 'You shall never fail to have a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons are careful in all they do to walk before me as you have done.' (1 Kgs 8:25)

ᴺᴵⱽ I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' (1 Kgs 9:5)

It is a recurring theme in the Old Testament, and in the New. God promised David that, if faithful, his kingly line would never end – culminating ultimately in the lordship of Christ, the antitypical David. I submit that, in the context of present references to David and Samuel (historically Samuel then David), it would be reasonable to apply the third clause of vs. 33 to Solomon and his successors as David's heirs on the throne of David. Thus, what we have is a set of three clauses, the first two reversed chronologically, as we saw earlier in vs. 32, and the third a later, though comparable, state of affairs. This pattern can also be mapped onto the second set of three clauses of part (b).

Shutting the mouths of lions (vs. 33c) is a clear reference to Daniel and quenching the fury of the flames (vs. 34a) is an equally clear reference to his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah). Again, since Daniel is more prominent than Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego he is mentioned first, although the story in which they figure is told in chap. 3 of the book of Daniel and the one in which Daniel himself figures is told in chap. 6. Those who escape the edge of the sword (vs. 34) are, in my view, the people of Esther's day. The book of Esther tells how she and her people escaped the evil plans of Haman, who attempted to destroy the entire Jewish race on one day (Esth 3-9).

The last set of three clauses in this section has to do with warfare. This could be seen as parallel to what follows. Becoming powerful in battle and routing foreign armies might well be a reference to the Maccabean revolt against Syria during the second century BC, as recorded in the books of 1 and 2 Macc. The reference to torture undoubtedly has in view the events of 4 Macc, where the idea of Jews being tortured by their Syrian overlords prior to the Maccabean

revolt is a predominant theme. Of its eighteen chapters, all but two (chaps. 2 and 3) use the word "torture."[3]

This brings us to vs. 35. Our discussion of the series two, part (b), is now summarized in two tables. In table 3 we review the items mentioned in Heb 11:33-34 and in table 4 their respective applications.

Table 3
Second Series, Part (b): Text

First	Second	Third
conquered kingdoms	administered justice	gained what was promised
shut the mouths of lions	quenched the fury of the flames	escaped the edge of the sword
weakness was turned to strength	became powerful in battle	routed foreign armies

Table 4
Second Series, Part (b): Application

First	Second	Third
Samuel (1 Sam 1-28)	David (1 Sam 16-30; 2 Sam)	David's dynasty (1 Kgs 8:24-26)
Daniel (Dan 6)	Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego (Dan 3)	Esther
Maccabees	Maccabees	Maccabees

Summary. Material from series two, part (a), is presented two items at a time. Material in series two, part (b), is presented three items at a time. Thus, there is a clear pattern: the clauses of the first series are presented one by one, those of the next, two by two and then three by three. The writer has a highly developed sense of literary balance and structure.

If "conquered kingdoms" (vs. 33) refers to David and if "administered justice" (vs. 33) refers to Samuel, then in series two, part (b) the idea of pairing is still visible, although followed in each case by a third clause. Clear illustrations of this patter are "shut the mouths of lions" (vs. 33) and "quenched the fury of the flames" (vs. 34), where the first two elements in each row are paired and chronologically reversed, again based on relative prominence, as in part one.

In the third row of tables 3 and 4 there is no chronological reversal, since "weakness was turned to strength" (vs. 34), "became powerful in battle" (vs. 34), and "routed foreign armies" (vs. 34) all appear to be in a reasonable chronological sequence. All three clauses refer to the Maccabees. The Maccabean and subsequent Hasmonean periods are the only ones between Trajan (who demolished the temple of Herod in AD 70) and Nebuchadnezzar (who demolished the temple of Solomon in 586 BC), when Israel could be said to have an army.

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[3] See 1:11; 4:26; 5:6, 32; 6:1, 5, 9, 10, 11, 30, 30; 7:2, 4, 10, 16; 8:1, 2, 5, 9, 12, 19, 25, 27; 9:5, 6, 6, 16, 18, 26, 30, 32; 10:16: 16; 11:1, 2, 6, 16, 20, 23; 12:4, 11, 12, 13; 13:27; 14:1, 5, 8, 11; 15:11, 14, 19, 21, 22, 32; 16:;1, 2, 3, 15, 17; 17:3, 7, 10, 23; 18:20, 21 (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/macc4.html).

The point of special interest in this section concerns the chronological relationship between Daniel and his three friends on the one hand, and Esther on the other. It also concerns the chronological relationship between Daniel and the Maccabees.

Third series

In vss. 36-38 the author might have had specific individuals or events in mind, but it is hard to tell who or what they were. One clear reference to a more or less datable historical event is the execution of Isaiah when Manasseh placed him in a hollow log and had it sawn to two.[4] Isaiah comes much earlier than the Maccabees, Esther, and Daniel. Material in the last section of the chapter does not lend itself to specific identification. I consider it general and unordered. Vss. 39-40 provide two verses of conclusion, just as vss. 1-2 provided two verses of introduction.

Discussion

Notice that the author places Daniel and his three friends before Esther. It is not that Daniel and Esther form a pair and since Daniel is the more prominent of the two he is mentioned first. Actually, one could argue that the Bible does not make Daniel more prominent than Esther. The events surrounding Esther's life resulted in the creation of a Jewish national holiday – Purim – which is still celebrated to this day. Daniel is paired instead with his three companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He is placed before them because of his greater prominence in the text, but Esther here is the third item in the sequence. The chronological relationship between Daniel and Esther in Heb 11 cannot be accounted for on the basis of relative prominence. The story of Daniel precedes that of Esther in history, as that history is understood by the author of Hebrews.

Daniel goes to Babylon as a captive in the first captivity of 605 BC and serves a succession of Babylonian kings. When Babylon is finally conquered by the Persians his service continues under Darius the Mede. Esther, on the other hand, becomes the wife and queen of Xerxes (r. 486-465). Thus, Daniel is active during the sixth century and Esther during the fifth century.

It is also significant that the author places Daniel prior to the Maccabees and suggests no link between the two, which is significant in view of the fact that modern critical scholarship make the story of Daniel part and parcel of the Maccabean experience. Putting this another way, the author of Hebrews places the events where earlier biblical writers place them – not where critical scholars place them.

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[4] "M. A. Knibb writes (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, p. 143): 'The Ascension of Isaiah is a composite work which falls very obviously into two parts, chapters 1-5 and chapters 6-11; the first part is now known as the Martyrdom of Isaiah, the second bears the title the Vision of Isaiah'" (http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/ascension.html). The particular way in which Isaiah was martyred is described in this pseudepigraphical work.

Conclusion

I submit that the author of the book of Hebrews sees Daniel as coming historically prior to Esther, just as the Bible tells us when allowed to say what it says without scholarly adornment. Furthermore, the author sees no connection between Daniel and the Maccabees. These are important facts, because modern critical scholarship places Daniel, not before. This is perhaps the more important fact, because of the insistence among scholars that the stories of Daniel, and especially the prophecies of Daniel, grow out of and pertain to the eschatological needs of the Maccabees.

For those who wish to take the Bible as it reads, He 11:32-34 sets forth a small supporting argument that Daniel belongs where the book of Daniel itself has already placed him, i.e., in the sixth century B.C. rather than the second.