

Hebrews 11:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Analysis

Of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. This stunning statement reverses worldly values. These persecuted, impoverished, hunted believers whom the world rejected, tortured, and killed are declared superior to the world itself. 'The world was not worthy' (οὐκ ἦν ἄξιος ὁ κόσμος) means the world didn't deserve such noble inhabitants. Those the world deemed worthless are actually too valuable for the world.

Their wandering 'in deserts, mountains, dens and caves' describes fugitive existence, hiding from persecution like David fleeing Saul in Adullam cave (1 Samuel 22:1), Elijah at Horeb (1 Kings 19:9), Maccabean rebels in wilderness caves (1 Maccabees 2:29-31). Yet God values these refugees above the world's powerful who oppress them. This reflects Jesus' beatitude: 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you...for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you' (Matthew 5:11-12).

This verse encourages suffering believers that God's value system inverts the world's. Those whom the world rejects, God receives. Those whom society marginalizes, God honors. Those who lose everything for faith are richest in God's economy. Paul echoes this: 'as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things' (2 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Historical Context

Throughout redemptive history, God's faithful remnant often found themselves marginalized, persecuted, and forced into hiding. During various periods of apostasy in Israel's history, faithful believers became minorities fleeing corrupt authorities. The image of caves as refuge appears repeatedly—Lot's daughters in cave after Sodom's destruction (Genesis 19:30), Israelites hiding from Midianites (Judges 6:2), David's mighty men gathering in caves (1 Samuel 22:1), prophets hidden in caves during Jezebel's persecution (1 Kings 18:4). This pattern continued into intertestamental and New Testament eras. The statement that 'the world was not worthy' of such faithful sufferers would powerfully encourage early Christians facing Roman persecution.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's declaration that the world 'was not worthy' of persecuted believers reshape how you view suffering for righteousness?
2. What worldly values, status, or security must you be willing to lose to be counted worthy of Christ?
3. In what ways does this verse encourage you to value God's approval above human recognition or comfort?

Interlinear Text

ὧν (Of whom G3739	οὐκ not G3756	ἦν was G2258	ἄξιος worthy G514	ὁ G3588	κόσμος the world G2889	ἐν in G1722	ἐρημίαις deserts G2047
πλανώμενοι they wandered G4105	καὶ and G2532	ὄρεσιν in mountains G3735	καὶ and G2532	σπηλαίοις in dens G4693	καὶ and G2532	ταῖς G3588	ὀπαῖς caves G3692
τῆς G3588	γῆς of the earth G1093						

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 18:4 (Parallel theme): For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)

1 Kings 19:9 (Parallel theme): And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

1 Samuel 22:1 (Parallel theme): David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him.

Isaiah 57:1 (Parallel theme): The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.