

“Real Faith Reveals God’s Way”

Hebrews 11:32-38

March 10, 2019

INTRO: Let me ask you a question...

- Have you ever *“missed the forest thru the trees?”*
- ...ever lost the macro in the micro?
- ...ever *missed the point amidst of the particulars?*

T/S: Today we’ll see **one of the Bible’s “Big Ideas!”**
Like a *fireworks finale!*

CONTEXT:

- Hebrews... **exhortation** sermon/letter...
- 5 warnings of Hebrews - #4... Don’t **DISOBEY!**
- Hebrews ch.11... We’re building to a **crescendo!**
 - Zooming out to get the big picture...

BIG IDEA: **Real faith reveals God’s Way...**

PREVIEW:

- Real faith reveals God’s **PURPOSE**
- Real faith reveals God’s **PEOPLE**
- Real faith reveals God’s **PATH**
- Real faith reveals God’s **PROMISE**
- Real faith reveals God’s **POWER**

I. Faith Reveals *PURPOSE*

³² *And what more shall I say?*

"faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"

VIDEO: *"Definitions: Biblical Belief 1"*

Here is the pinnacle of faith, a willingness to accept the worst the world has to offer—death—because of trust in the best God has to offer—resurrection.

VIDEO: *"The True Meaning of Faith"* (by Martin Luther)

- Luther begets our exhortation & encouragement
- Remember our **5 warnings:** *(faith fixes them all)*
 - *Drifting & Discontentedness...*
 - *Distractions... (see video to follow)*
 - *Dilly-Dallying...*
 - *Disobeying... (heart of ch.10 & 11)*
 - *Deny & Defy... (coming in ch.12)*

VIDEO: *"Matthew Dudek on Distractions"*

II. Faith Reveals *PEOPLE*

- Notice whose listed... AND whose ***NOT listed...***
- What's the point?
 - Faith is **NEVER** about the people
 - Faith is **ALWAYS** about God's **glory**
 - **EVERY** faithful follower is saved by **grace**

³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection.

- Conquered kingdoms
- Enforced justice
- Obtained promises
- Stopped the mouths of lions (Daniel)
- Quenched the power of fire (Shadrach, Meshach, & Ben)
- Escaped the edge of the sword (David vs. Goliath)
- Became strong out of their weakness
- Became mighty in war
- Put foreign armies to flight
- Women received back resurrected dead (Eli & Elisha)

VIDEO: *"The Victory of Faith"* (by Eric Ludy)

III. Faith Reveals *PATHES*

³⁵ *Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.*

God does not promise His saints deliverance from all suffering. To the contrary, Jesus told us to take up our crosses and to follow Him (Mark 8:34), and that "if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). Both Paul (Phil. 3:10) and Peter (1 Pet. 4:13) advise us to rejoice in our sufferings for Christ's sake. Paul told the Corinthian believers, "I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction" (2 Cor. 7:4).

VIDEO: "Balance Beam +" (by Francis Chan)

IV. Faith Reveals *PROMISES*

- *You WILL BE persecuted... (Matt. 10:22 & 2 Tim. 3:12)*
- *BLESSED are those who are persecuted (3X)...*

³⁶ *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, & in dens and caves of the earth.*

- Some were tortured
- Some refused to be released (choosing better resurrection)
- Others suffered mocking
- Others suffered flogging
- Others suffered chains & imprisonment
- Others were stoned
- Others were sawn in two
- Others were killed by the sword
- Others were destitute, afflicted, mistreated
- Others were wanderers without basic supplies

BUT... *ALL of them were worshipping-witnesses whose loving & lived-out faith revealed them to be brothers & sisters of whom this wicked world was not worthy!*

1st Timothy 1:18-19

¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies/promises previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,

- **Philippians 4:13**
- **2 Peter 1:3**
- **No excuses! How about you???**

VIDEO: *“Asking the Tough Questions”* (by Eric Ludy)

*“Remember brothers and sisters,
they can kill us, but they can’t hurt us.”*

- Justin Martyr

*They would not sacrifice the future on the altar
of the immediate.*

v. Faith Reveals *POWER*

*Just as it is sometimes God's will for His people to
conquer in a struggle, it is also sometimes His will
for His people to continue in their suffering...*

*He will give them victory, too, but it may only
be spiritual—the only kind of victory He
guarantees. It often takes more courage to hold
on than to fight on, and where there is need for
more courage there is need for more faith.*

*“Real & powerful faith is NOT wishing bigger...
it is **WORSHIPPING** better!” - JDP*

Let me be clear...

Hebrews 11 does not call us all to die like these witnesses... but to LIVE a life of worship like they did during their displays of great faith. – JDP

Moreover...

People are not going to hell because they don't live this way.... They don't live this way because they are going to hell. (They will pay their own price for their sins; whereas Christians have their sins paid for by the blood of Christ who came to take away the sin of the world).

In the same way, the cowards & counterfeits are not going to hell because of their cowardice... No. They are cowards because they are going to hell. (They do not have Christ's cleansing or courage, so they shrink back and will be destroyed). – JDP

To say it another way:

- God's people have always been saved by His gift of **miraculous** faith
- Biblical faith has always been in the One gracious, gospel-giving **Messiah – King Jesus!**
- Biblical faith has always been about BE-ing on our Messiah's **mission**
- *All for His glory & All by His grace!*

CLOSE:

We cannot overcome Satan nor refuse his temptation in our own strength. We cannot increase faith, or even maintain it in exercise, by any resolution of mind or act of our own will. We cannot achieve victories to the praise of our God by our own faithfulness. It is only as we are strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in the inner man, that we are furnished for the battle against the forces of evil; and that strength is to be definitely, diligently, and trustfully sought.

REMEMBER: Real faith reveals God's Way...
(PURPOSE - PEOPLE - PATH - PROMISE - POWER)

“The holy & humbling irony of saving faith is that our faith is in the Lord's faithfulness.” - JDP

*Don't ever forget... **Ephesians 2:8-10 & Titus 2:15***

“Relentless faith & fruit-filled repentance are the fingerprints of the gospel's miraculous & saving faith!” - JDP

Let's Pray!

Final Examples of Faith

[Hebrews 11:32-40](#)

As we come to the chapter's end, it is as if we have experienced a great symphony. There has been expansive movement across many portions of the Old Testament. And now the list of characters culminates in a crescendo of final examples.

Even though we may be less familiar with them, the central message intended is the same: **the individuals were marked by an astonishing faith in God. The same should mark us.**

Flawed Lives Marked by Remarkable Faith:

The lives of those mentioned in this passage serve as examples for us. Were they perfect examples? No.

Luther's dying words, which underscore our need, apply to them: "We are beggars. This is true." Gideon demanded signs from God and led Israel to sin when he made an ephod ([Judg 6:36-40; 8:24-27](#)); Samson was sexually promiscuous and broke his covenant with God ([Judg 13-16](#)); Jephthah vowed to sacrifice his own daughter ([Judg 11:30-31,34-40](#)); David committed adultery with a woman and tried to cover it up by arranging the death of her husband ([2 Sam 11](#)). Even so, the author does not remember them for their flaws. He commends them for their faith. Though they sinned, their lives were ultimately marked by their faith in God, which the author highlights in verses 33 and 34. **They failed yet accomplished each of these feats by faith, so they serve as examples of remarkable trust in God.**

Verses 35-38 shift our attention to those who suffered for the sake of Christ by faith.

The women receiving back their dead is probably a reference to the work of Elijah in [1 Kings 17:17-23](#) and the work of Elisha in

2 Kings 4:18-36. These women trusted God and so received back their dead.

Those who experienced the terrible suffering the author details did not fail in their faith, even in the midst of their persecution. They believed God would not fail to give them the promised land and trusted he would raise them to life on the last day. **Though they were counted righteous by their faith, they were despised by the world for their devotion to God, so “the world was not worthy of them.”**

The author is not calling us to die like they did, but he is calling us to trust in the covenant Lord like they did—even if that means suffering a death like theirs.

Justin Martyr, an early church father, echoed this same kind of faith. When beholding the very place where he and his congregation would be martyred, Justin **said:**

“Remember brothers and sisters, they can kill us, but they can’t hurt us.”

This is the kind of devotion that marked these Old Testament saints, and it’s the kind of devotion we should display in our own lives.

Old Promises Fulfilled in a New Covenant

The author ends *the symphony of chapter 11* by taking his readers back to its beginning, namely the theme of 11:2. These saints only had preliminary glimpses of God’s

wondrous fulfillment of his promises. They did not live to see the coronation of King Jesus on the cross of Calvary. Still, they are commended for their extraordinary faith in God's promise. They did not receive the ultimate fulfillment of that promise, but they recognized that they would experience it eschatologically. Their faith, like that of those the author discussed earlier, was a future-looking faith.

This again highlights the supreme significance of the new covenant. It was only in the establishment of the new covenant by the blood of Jesus that the old covenant promises could be fulfilled. This is what the author means in verse 40.

Apart from the new covenant, there is no hope of perfect, unmitigated fellowship with God on the last day.

- Christ-Centered Exposition

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, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ([11:32-34](#))

The six men named, who are not listed in chronological order, were all rulers of one kind or another. Several are outstanding Bible characters, while the others are less known. Samuel was both a judge and a prophet, and David was a king and a prophet. But **none of the men is praised for his office. All are praised for what they accomplished by faith.**

Gideon, a judge and military leader, had assembled 32,000 men to fight the Midianites and the Amalekites. **To keep Israel from thinking the coming victory was by her own power, God cut her forces down to 10,000 and then to a mere 300. These 300 were separated out solely on the basis of how they drank water from a spring.**

The enemy, by contrast, were "as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore" (Judg. 7:12).

Yet ***Gideon's men were outfitted only with trumpets and with pitchers with torches inside. With even fewer men and less effort than used to defeat Jericho, the entire heathen enemy army was routed (7:16-22).***

Only a fool would have attempted such a courageous approach to battle apart from God's direction and power. From the perspective of faith, only a fool would not attempt such a thing when he has God's direction and power.

Barak is unknown in Scripture outside the brief account in **Judges 4-5** and the mention of his name in **Hebrews 11:32**. We are told nothing of his background or training. **Through Deborah, the judge, God promised** that Israel would be delivered from Jabin, the Canaanite king, whose great commander, Sisera, had a large, powerful army that boasted 900 iron chariots. **According to the Lord's instruction, Deborah asked Barak to assemble an Israelite force of only 10,000 men, taken from two tribes, Naphtali**

and Zebulun. The rest of the tribes were not asked to participate, apparently to show Israel, and the Canaanites, that God could be victorious with only a token army from a small part of Israel.

Barak assembled his men on Mt. Tabor and charged Sisera as he had been commanded by God. *"And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army, with the edge of the sword before Barak"*

([Judg. 4:15](#)). Barak and his men were involved, and probably fought valiantly, but the success of the campaign was the Lord's. Without His help, Israel would easily have been slaughtered.

Barak was told in advance that the glory of victory would not be his. Not only did the Lord fight the battle for His people, but he allowed a woman to kill Sisera, so that Barak would have even less cause for claiming credit for himself ([4:9](#)).

Barak believed God's promise of victory and was not the least concerned that a woman would get credit for slaying Sisera. In fact he insisted that Deborah, a woman judge, go to battle with him ([v. 8](#)). He wanted her spiritual, not her military, help. She was the Lord's special representative in those days, and Barak wanted the Lord's person with him. The fact that he wanted her along was another indication of his trust in the Lord. As God's prophetess, she was of greater value to him than his 10,000 men.

Barak was not concerned about Sisera's power, because he had God's power.

By such courageous faith he **conquered kingdoms**.

Samson is not most remembered for his faith, but for his physical strength and personal gullibility. In many ways he was immature and self-centered, unable to cope with the miraculous power God had given him. Yet he was a man of faith. He never doubted that God was the source of his power, of which his hair was only a symbol.

Samson was a judge of Israel and was given the special task of opposing the Philistines, who then ruled over Israel. Samson's own motives for fighting the Philistines were often mixed, but he knew he was doing the Lord's will in the Lord's power.

From his early manhood the Spirit of the Lord had been with him, and **we are told specifically that it was the Spirit that strengthened him in his amazing one-man battles** (Judg. 13:25; 14:19; 15:14; 16:28).

Samson knew that God had called him and that God had empowered him to ***"begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines,"*** just as He had told Samson's mother before her son was even conceived (**13:5**).

God had promised him power and Samson trusted God for that power. He faced the Philistines not in the courage of physical prowess but in the courage of faith.

We are inclined to judge Samson by his weaknesses. But God commends him for his faith.

Jephthah preceded Samson as judge of Israel, and his responsibility was to subdue the Ammonites, one of Israel's many enemies. **Despite his foolish vow (Judg. 11:30-31), Jephthah's trust was in the Lord, and his power was from the Lord (vv. 29, 32).**

Even people of faith make mistakes, and God honored Jephthah for his faith.

David stands out as one of the obviously great men of the Old Testament. His trust in the Lord began when he was a boy, tending sheep, killing lions and bears, and taking on Goliath with a slingshot. **David faced Goliath in utter confidence that the Lord would give him power to defeat this giant. While the rest of Israel, including the king and David's own brothers, were cowering in fear,** David calmly walked up to Goliath and announced, *"This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you"* ([1 Sam. 17:46](#)). It seems never to have occurred to David not to trust the Lord.

Like the other heroes of faith...

David was not perfect, but God called him "a man after My heart, who will do all My will" ([Acts 13:22](#)).

He pleased God because of the courage of his faith to trust Him and do His will.

Samuel: *is added to this list of warriors, though he was not a warrior. But he fought a battle equal to any that soldiers face. His great foes*

were idolatry and immorality. He had to stand up in the middle of a polluted society and fearlessly speak God's truth. His severest opponents frequently were not the Philistines, the Amorites, or Ammonites—but his own people. It often takes more courage to stand up against our friends than against our enemies. Social pressure can be more frightening than military power.

This prophet of God, who was also Israel's last judge, began "ministering before the LORD, as a boy wearing a linen ephod" ([1 Sam. 2:18](#)) and continued **faithful to God throughout his life. In the courage of faith, he ruled and prophesied.**

The prophets are unnamed except for Samuel. **As the writer mentions in the opening of [verse 32](#), he does not have time to go into detail about the many other faithful people of the Old Covenant, or even to mention them all by name. These prophets, just as Gideon, Barak, and the others, risked everything for the Lord. They cheerfully, courageously, and confidently accepted God's commands and faced whatever opposition came along.**

They did not fight on battlefields, but they had many victories in the Lord because they believed Him. They, too, conquered through the courage of faith.

The exploits of [11:33-34](#) are general and refer collectively to the persons in [verse 32](#). The mouths of lions may refer to Daniel, and quenched the power of fire to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. The point of mentioning these works is to show that, whether the need was for political victory, helping those in need, receiving promises, overcoming natural enemies, protection from war or weakness, or winning in war—the power to accomplish these things was from God and the power was received by faith in Him.

Continuing in Suffering

Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. ([11:35-38](#))

Elijah brought back to life the child of the widow of Zarephath ([1 Kings 17:8-23](#)), and his successor, Elisha, did the same for a Shunammite woman's son ([2 Kings 4:18-37](#)). These mothers and these prophets believed God for resurrection, and He performed it.

The **women** suffered for a while, but the pain was alleviated when their children were restored to life. God does not always work in this way, however. Many of the afflictions mentioned in [Hebrews 11:35-38](#) were long-term, even lifetime. God gave power through faith to see some of His people through these problems, not to escape them. **Just as it is sometimes God's will for His people to conquer in a struggle, it is also sometimes His will for His people to continue in their suffering.**

He will give them victory, too, but it may only be spiritual—the only kind of victory He guarantees. It often takes more courage to hold on than to fight on, and where there is need for more courage there is need for more faith.

Sometimes affliction is inescapable; sometimes it is not. To the person of faith, no affliction is escapable that requires denial or compromise of God's Word. What is easily escaped for the worldly person is not for the faithful. When it is suffered because of God's Word and standing for Him... God's people will take torture, **not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection.**

Here is the pinnacle of faith, willingness to accept the worst the world has to offer—death—because of trust in the best God has to offer—resurrection.

Tortured is from the Greek *tumpanizō*, from the same root as the English tympani, a kettledrum. The particular torture referred to involved stretching the victim over a large drum-like instrument and beating him with clubs, often until dead.

God's faithful are willing to be beaten to death rather than compromise their faith in Him. They would not sacrifice the future on the altar of the immediate. They preferred being put to death, because by faith they knew that one day they would be resurrected.

They endured both mental and physical anguish, **mockings** as well as **scourgings**. **Jeremiah was as emotionally abused as he was physically abused, and it is not strange that he was called the weeping prophet.** He did not weep so much for himself as for the people, who rejected God by rejecting him. He endured, and continued to endure, all sorts of pain for the sake of God's Word.

Tradition holds that Isaiah was sawn in two.

The people became so irritated at his powerful preaching that they cut him in half. Like Abel, however (11:4), he continues to speak even after death.

The many kinds of suffering mentioned in these verses, just as the conquests mentioned in the preceding verses, apply generally to the faithful saints. They are a summary of the many and varied kinds of affliction God's people face and are often called to endure for Him. **Whether they were killed or made outcasts, the point is the same—they courageously and uncompromisingly suffered for the Lord because of their faith. Whether for conquering in a struggle or continuing in suffering, they trusted the Lord.**

The world is **not worthy** of having such people in its midst, just as these people did not deserve the sufferings they received.

*For its inflicting the suffering,
the world will be judged and punished;
for their enduring the suffering,
the faithful saints will be resurrected & rewarded.*

They knew with Paul that *"the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us"* ([Rom. 8:18](#)), and they looked forward with Peter to *"an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven"* ([1 Pet. 1:4](#)).

God does not promise His saints deliverance from all suffering. To the contrary, Jesus told us to take up our crosses and to follow Him ([Mark 8:34](#)), and that "if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" ([John 15:20](#)). Both Paul ([Phil. 3:10](#)) and Peter ([1 Pet. 4:13](#)) advise us to rejoice in our sufferings for Christ's sake. Paul told the Corinthian believers, "I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction" ([2 Cor. 7:4](#)).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were perfectly confident that God would save them from the blazing furnace. *"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king" (Dan. 3:17).*

But their greatest faith was not shown in their certainty of deliverance. They went on to say, *"But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (v. 18).* Their primary concern was not for the safety of their lives but for the safety of their faith. Physical deliverance or not, they would not forsake their trust in God.

Counting on Salvation

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 should not be made perfect. (11:39-40)

True faith has the courage to count on salvation. These faithful saints had to live in hope. They knew very little about the nature or the time or the means of God's salvation. But they knew it was coming, and this was the basis of their trust. **They had abiding confidence that one day God would do the necessary thing to redeem them and reward them.** What happened to them before that time was not consequential.

They did not receive what was promised but they had gained approval through their faith. Their faith was not in some immediate fulfillment, but in the ultimate fulfillment of the promises.

Here is where faith is most tested and where it most matters.

The ultimate promise was of a redeemer, the Messiah, and of His covenant that would bring righteousness before God. "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pet. 1:10-11).

All these, from Enoch through the prophets, had that courageous faith which counts, without reservation, on final salvation.

Many of them never received the land. Sometimes they had earthly victory; sometimes they did not. **Sometimes their faith saved them from death; sometimes it brought them death. No matter. They knew that God had provided something better.**

God has provided this "something better" for us, that is for those under the New Covenant, which is why apart from us they should not be made

perfect. That is, not until our time, the time of Christianity, could their salvation be completed, made perfect. Until Jesus' atoning work on the cross was accomplished, no salvation was complete, no matter how great the faith a believer may have had. Their salvation was based on what Christ would do; ours is based on what Christ has done. Their faith looked forward to promise; ours looks back to historical fact.

Yet, though their salvation was not completed in their lifetimes, these were not second-rate believers. *They were believers of the highest order. They courageously struggled, suffered, and counted on salvation. They believed all of God's Word that they had, which is what counts with Him.* How much less faith do we often have, in spite of our much greater light.

"Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" ([John 20:29](#)).

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Hebrews.

The Faith of the Judges
([Hebrews 11:32](#))

In some respects the verse we have now arrived at is the most difficult one in our chapter. It commences the last division of the same. Therein the apostle changes his method of treatment, and instead of particularizing individual examples of faith, he groups together a number of men and summarizes the actings of their faith.

The selection made, out of many others who could have been given, is most startling: those whose names we might have expected had been registered on this honor roll are omitted, while others we have never thought of are given a place.

The order in which they are recorded seems strange, for it is not that of the chronological. This has puzzled some: one eminent commentator stating "The apostle does not observe strict order, reciting them in haste": which is not to be allowed for a moment, for it ignores the superintending guidance of the Holy Spirit. Again; "the prodigies performed by these men cannot be presented for our emulation": why, then, are they referred to?

The principle of guidance in the selection of some of the men here mentioned is obviously that of *sovereign grace*: no otherwise can we account for the passing over of such illustrious characters as Caleb and Deborah, Hannah and Asaph, and the inclusion of Jephthah and Samson—in the latter the free favor of God was more conspicuously displayed.

The order in which they are mentioned is not that of time, but of *dignity*, for Barak lived before Gideon, Jephthah before Samson, and Samuel before David: God reckons those most excellent who bring forth the best fruits of faith—the more we excel in faith, the more God will honor us. Where faith shines the brightest the least are accounted the greatest, and the last become first; then how *we* should labor daily for an increase of faith.

Five of the six men named in our text were judges who ruled over Israel, though they came from very humble callings. **From this we may learn that faith is a spiritual grace suited not only unto the temple, but also to the judicial bench and throne**; that it is needed not only by those who occupy positions in the private walks of life, but also by those who fill public office. Governors equally with the governed require to have a true faith in the living God: instead of disqualifying them for the discharge of their important duties, it would be of inestimable value to them—enabling them to face difficulties and dangers with calmness, inspiring with courage, endowing with wisdom, and preserving from many temptations which confront those in high places. He who is blest with a spiritual faith will have lowly thoughts of himself, as had Barak, Gideon, and David.

Remarkable achievements are credited to the men whose names are now before us. As we read the historical account of them in the book of Judges we may well marvel at them, but it is only as we view them in the light of what is said here in [Hebrews 11](#) that we shall understand them aright. Other men besides these have vanquished lions, put armies to flight, and subdued kingdoms; yet *their* deeds proceeded from a very different principle. The mighty works of men chronicled in the Old Testament are given for a higher purpose than the indulging of our love of the sensational. The exploits of Gideon and Barak, Samson and David, are only recorded in Holy writ as they were wrought *by faith*: thus **the Holy Spirit honors His own work.**

One prominent feature which distinguishes many of the extraordinary performances of men of God set down in Scripture from the prodigies done by men of the world is, that **the Holy Spirit moved the sacred historians to faithfully register the infirmities under which faith so often wrought and the weakness which preceded it. The faith of these men was very far from being perfect, either in degree, stability, or unmixed purity. Like ours so often is, their faith was mingled with fear, oppressed by unbelief, hard beset by carnal reasonings.**

We have only to read through the 6th of Judges to see that the faith of the first one named in our text was painfully slow in exercise, though by grace, it was afterward mighty in execution. They were men of like passions with us, and from that fact we may take comfort—not in sheltering behind the same, but by refusing to despair when our faith is at a low ebb.

One thing which is common to all the individuals mentioned in our text is that the history of each of them was cast in a day of great spiritual declension. **The time in which they lived is described at length in the book of Judges. Following the deaths of Moses and Joshua, Israel grievously departed from the Lord: cast off His law, worshipped the idols of the**

heathen, and "every man did that which was right in his

own eyes" ([Judg. 21:25](#)); darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. Yet even in those days God left not Himself without witness: inexpressibly blessed is it to behold the faith of individuals shining in the midst of a failed testimony; that *here and there was a lamp maintained, illuminating the surrounding darkness*. Nor is the number here specified without significance for to the six individuals mentioned are linked the "prophets" (who also ministered in seasons of apostasy), making *seven* in all—telling of the completeness of the provision made by the grace of God.

Thus we may see how that [Hebrews 11](#), which describes at length the Life of Faith, would have been incomplete had no notice been taken of those times when Israel so grievously departed from God.

It was during seasons of great spiritual darkness and gloom that faith wrought many of its mightiest works and achieved some of its most notable victories. For faith is not dependent on favorable outward conditions; it is sustained and energized by One who is infinitely superior to all circumstances. What is mentioned in our text and the verses which immediately follow, is recorded for our encouragement. We too are living in a day when Christendom is in a sad state, when there is widespread departure from God and His Word, when vital and practical holiness is at a low...

But the arm of the Lord is not waxed short, and they who lean hard upon it shall be sustained and enabled to do exploits in His name.

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthath, of David also, and Samuel and of the prophets" (verse 32). The apostle had already given abundant proof that *"faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (verse 1), and had shown that *"by it the elders obtained a good report"* (verse 2); yet he had by no means said all which might be given on the subject. Numerous and notable examples of the power and fruits of faith had been advanced, and many others might still be cited; but it would not be convenient to enumerate each instance of faith recorded in the O.T. To have done so, would extend the epistle beyond due limits: so we now have a bare mention of the names of others, followed by a description in general terms of the effects of their faith.

The characters which we are now to contemplate, like the apostles of Christ, and in smaller measure the reformers at the close of the "Dark Ages," were extraordinary men, specially raised up by God in times of crisis, for the good of His Church and the benefit of the commonwealth. This needs to be carefully borne in mind, or otherwise we shall view them in a false perspective. Their calling was extraordinary, and so were their performances. They were endowed with uncommon powers, and supernaturally energized for their particular tasks. That which distinguished them from men like Caesar, Charlemagne and Napoleon, was that they were men of faith.

It is not that the apostle by any means commends *all* that they did, or that he excuses their manifold imperfections, which cannot be vindicated; he makes mention here only of their faith.

Gideon was raised up by God at a time when Israel's fortunes were sunk to a low ebb. Three judges had preceded him, delivering the people of God from the hand of their enemies; but a fourth time they had apostatized, and now they were groaning under the servitude of the Midianites. So great was the number of those who had invaded their territory, that they "left no sustenance for Israel" and "Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites" ([Judg. 6:4, 6](#)). But that was not the worst: the worship of Baal prevailed to such an extent among the favored covenant people of God, that to oppose it was considered a criminal act, deserving of death ([Judg. 6:28-30](#)). Nevertheless God had promised "the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone" ([Deut. 32:36](#)), and now, once again, He was about to make good this word.

To be delivered from the dire situation which now faced Israel, called for a "mighty man of valor," and such was Gideon, as we learn from the language in which the angel of the Lord first addressed him ([Judg. 6:12](#)). But something more than natural courage and daring was required in the one whom the Lord would employ—he must be an *humble* man of God, that the glory might rebound unto Him alone. In order to that, the instrument had first to be prepared for the tasks to be performed—the servant fitted for the service he must do. "God must first do His work with Gideon, before Gideon could do his work for God. To accomplish this, God makes the wine-press of Joash to be to Gideon what He made the backside of the desert to be to Moses" (E.W.B.).

The servant of God must first be made to feel his weakness, before he is taught that all-sufficient strength is available for him in the Lord. Thus it was with Gideon; thus it is still.

It is blessed to observe the Lord's dealings with Gideon: He now said "Jehovah is with thee" ([Judg. 6:12](#)). This was to exercise his heart, which is ever the prime requisite. Aroused, Gideon enquired, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of?" etc. (verse 13). Second "the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee!" (verse 14). It is at this point so many interpreters go astray in their understanding of this incident. The *saint's* "might" is in realized helplessness:

"For when I am weak, then am I strong"
[\(2 Cor. 12:10\)](#).

That word of Jehovah's was designed to bring Gideon to the consciousness of *his own* utter inability to deliver Israel from the yoke of the Midianites.

The instrument must be experimentally fitted ere the Lord will employ it in His service; and the first part of this fitting process is to empty it of self-sufficiency that it may then be thoroughly dependent upon Himself. Gideon's "might" consisted in conscious weakness, and as soon as that was realized he would be forced to believe the Lord's declaration "Thou shalt save Israel." That was the word addressed to his heart, and was the foundation on which his faith was to rest. Gideon now asked, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is *poor* in Manasseh, and *I am the least* in my father's house" (verse 15): the Divine arrow had hit its mark, as Gideon's humble confession attests.

The Lord has only one response unto acknowledged helplessness: "*Surely I will be with thee*, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man" (verse 16). How blessed! When faith truly realizes this, it exclaims, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" ([Phil. 4:13](#)). From that assuring word of the Almighty Gideon knew that he had "found grace" in His sight, and asked for a sign: "Not because he doubted, but because he believed; not to prove the truth of Jehovah's word, but because he would prove the truth of Jehovah's grace, in the acceptance of his offerings which he proposed to go and fetch:" [verses 17, 18](#) (E.W.B.).

Next, Gideon prepared and presented his offering (verse 19), and was bidden to place the same upon a rock (verse 20). This was followed by a miracle, fire issuing from the rock and consuming the offering, by which he "obtained witness" that he had found grace in Jehovah's sight—the supernatural fire denoting his acceptance with God, filling him with awe and terror. Immediately the Lord quieted his heart with, "*Peace* be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die" (verse 23): thus did he receive Jehovah's blessing: that Gideon's faith laid hold of that benediction is very evident from the next verse, "Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom"—"The Lord send *peace*."

The heart of Gideon being now fitted and established, God gave him his first commission: "Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place; and take the second bullock and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down" ([verses 25, 26](#)). Such definiteness of language at once evidenced to Gideon that he had to do with One who knew everything—the bullocks his father had, and their very ages. Like his father Abraham, Gideon believed God and obeyed His command, for we read that, "It came to pass *the same night*... Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord commanded." At this distant date, his action may seem to us trivial, but the sequel shows that Gideon acted at the imminent peril of his life: "Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cut down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it" (verse 30).

The immediate sequel supplied a much more severe testing of Gideon: "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the East were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel" (verse 33). Enraged at the overthrow of the altar of Baal, the Midianites gathered their forces together and with their allies came up against Israel for battle.

It is to be expected that Satan will wax furious when his territory is invaded and the Lord is magnified in the place where he has reigned supreme: that is why it so often follows that when a Christian has done his duty, it *seems* as though he has only made bad matters worse, by increasing his troubles.

Then it is that he is sorely tempted to regret he has been so 'radical' in his conduct and to effect a compromise. Such a temptation is to be steadfastly resisted. More; the increasing troubles which faithfulness brings upon him, are to be regarded as a golden opportunity for further exercises and acts of *faith*. Thus Gideon acted, and so should we.

We cannot now enter into a detailed comment upon the response made by Gideon to the open menace of the Midianities, and all that is recorded of him in [Judges 6-8](#), but we commend those chapters unto the careful pondering of the reader. Let him carefully note, first, that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" ([Judg. 6:34](#)), which supplies the key to all that follows: safeguarding the glory of God (preventing us from ascribing the honor to Gideon), and furnishing the vital word of instruction for our own hearts.

We cannot overcome Satan nor refuse his temptation in our own strength. We cannot increase faith, or even maintain it in exercise, by any resolution of mind or act of our own will. We cannot achieve victories to the praise of our God by our own faithfulness. It is only as we are strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in the inner man, that we are furnished for the battle against the forces of evil; and that strength is to be definitely, diligently, and trustfully sought.

The infirmities of Gideon appear in that he imagined he must head a large army if the Midianites were to be vanquished: it was only little by little that his heart was instructed, and the

lesson was learned that God is not dependent upon numbers.

His repeated request for confirmatory signs ([Judg. 6:36-40](#)) also shows us that it is not all at once the saint learns to walk by faith and not by sight. But the Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, and bears with our infirmities when the heart is truly upright before Him. He granted Gideon the signs requested, though that is no guarantee He will do so for us; and He corrected his notion that a large force was needed: only a small fragment was employed—"by the three hundred men that lapped will I save you" ([Judg. 7:7](#)). Then, when Gideon *believed* the Lord and *obeyed* His orders, this word was given, "Arise get thee down unto the host, for I have delivered it into thine hand" ([Judg. 7:9](#)), which was completely verified in the sequel. Thus did the Lord use and work mightily by one who was poor and little in his own eyes ([Judg. 6:15](#)), and who "did as the Lord had said unto him" ([Judg. 6:27](#)).

Barak. Time (or space) fails us to enter into a full consideration of his history and exploits, so we must condense. Barak was raised up by God near the close of the twenty years when Jabin the king of Canaan "mightily oppressed the children of Israel" ([Judg. 4:3](#)). Deborah was acting as judge at that time—proof of the terribly low state into which the covenant people had fallen (cf. [Isaiah 3:12](#)); though she was not a "judge" in the proper sense of the term (see [Judges 4:3](#) and carefully compare [Judges 2:18](#)), but a "prophetess," and therefore a mouthpiece of God. It was through her that the Lord spake to Barak, saying "Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand" ([Judg. 4:6, 7](#)): *that* was to be the ground of Barak's faith, *that* was the sure promise which described the thing to be "hoped for." The infirmity of Barak is seen in [Judges 4:8](#), but the obedience of his faith appears in [Judges 4:10](#). A further word was given to him, "Up, for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee!" ([Judg. 4:14](#)): he "heard," "believed," and obeyed, and a great victory was secured. It was by *faith* in God's promise that Barak went forth against the enormous army of Sisera and vanquished the same.

Samson. Many mighty deeds are recorded of him in the book of Judges, such as his rending to pieces a lion, as though it had been a kid; his slaying of a thousand Philistines, single-handed, with the jawbone of an ass; his carrying of the gates of Gaza and their posts on his shoulders up a steep hill; his bursting asunder the strongest cords when bound by his enemies; his overturning the pillars on which stood the great temple of Dagon. How, then, did Samson perform these prodigies? By *faith*. In the O.T. it is said, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him," but that does not mean he was involuntarily impelled by a Divine power, like a hurricane carries things through the air blindly and unwittingly. No, the Spirit deals with men not as stocks and stones, but as moral agents; enlightening their minds, controlling their hearts, inclining their wills, and supplying physical strength for whatever tasks God allots.

"Faith cometh by hearing," and in Samson's case he "heard" through his parents the promise which God had made concerning him: "he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" ([Judg. 13:5](#)). The strength of his mother's faith comes out beautifully in [13:23](#), where, quieting the fear of her husband, she said, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these." Brought up in the strong faith of his parents, Samson *believed* what he "heard" from God through them, grew up in the confidence of the same and conducted himself accordingly. His last act was his greatest and best, furnishing the strongest evidence of his faith in God and being of most profit to His church. After being so sorely chastened for his sins, and considering the situation he was then in, it called for no ordinary confidence in the Lord to do what is recorded in [Judges 16:28-30](#).

Jephthah. By calling, Gideon was a farmer, Barak a soldier, Samson a religious Nazarite, while David was the youngest of his family and despised by his brethren; Samuel was first used by God while still a child; thus we may see how God delights to use lowly and weak instruments. But more striking still is the case now before us: Jephthah was one of dishonorable birth, a bastard ([Heb. 11:1, 2](#)) which the law excluded from the congregation of the Lord ([Deut. 23:2](#)). Yet God, in an especial and extraordinary manner conferred His Spirit upon Jephthah and advanced him to the highest dignity and function amongst His people and prospered him exceedingly. From this we may learn that no outward condition, be it ever so base, can serve as a hindrance to God's grace. That he was a man who feared the Lord is clear from [Judges 11:9, 10](#). His message to the king of Ammon ([Judg. 11:14-27](#)) shows that he *believed* what was recorded in the Scripture of Truth: he ascribed Israel's victories to the Lord ([verses 21, 23](#)) and called on Him to judge between Israel and Ammon (verse 27); and Jehovah rewarded his faith by delivering the Ammonites into his hand. His fidelity and perseverance in the faith is seen in the keeping of his vow of banning his daughter to continual virginity.

David. There is little need for us to attempt here an enumeration of the many works and fruits of his faith, nor to point out how often unbelief wrought within and through him. We agree with John Brown that it is likely the Holy Spirit has particular reference in our text unto David's victorious combat with Goliath, when, quite a youth, and totally inexperienced in the arts and guiles of warfare, armed only with a sling and a few pebbles, he engaged in open fight the mighty giant of the Philistines, who was a veteran in the field and heavily armed for the duel. How are we to explain David's temerity and success? In this way: he had received a revelation from God (as [1 Samuel 17:46, 47](#) plainly intimates), he rested on the same with implicit confidence, and acted accordingly. By faith he ventured; by faith he overcame.

Samuel. "The event to which we are disposed to think it most probable, from its miraculous character, that the apostle refers, is that recorded in [1 Samuel 12:16-18](#): 'Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat-harvest today, I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.' A revelation was made to Samuel that the Divine power was to be put forth in connection with certain words which he spoke. He believed that revelation; he spoke the words, and the event followed" (John Brown).

The Prophets. They too exemplified the power of faith, both in what they did and in what they suffered. By faith they were enabled to achieve and to endure what otherwise they could not have achieved or endured.

They delivered nothing but what they received: hence the frequency of their announcement, "Thus saith the Lord." They concealed nothing they had received: though it was a "burden" to them (Mal. 1:1, etc.), and though they knew full well their message would be most unpalatable, they faithfully delivered the Word of God. They were undaunted by the people's opposition, setting their face as a flint (Ezek. 3:8, 9). They humbly submitted to God's requirements: Isaiah 20:3, Jeremiah 27:2, Ezekiel 4:11, 12.

They wrought mighty works, especially Elijah and Elisha. All these things manifested the efficacy and might of a real faith in the living God.

"Lord, increase our faith."

- An Exposition of Hebrews.

Hebrews 11 does not call us all to die like these witnesses... but to LIVE a life of worship like they did... when they were displaying great faith. – JDP