

# The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 40 February 20, 2022

## Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah

Hebrews 11:32

### Introduction

Now, as a sort of summary, the author of Hebrews, feeling that covering all these faithful OT characters who remain in the OT record ( some are named here, some are not ) would take far too long – note: *“For time would fail me...”*. He gives a list of 6 needing special mention, followed by a general laying out of the exploits of the OT faithful, the joyous occasions, and the pitfalls that often accompany real faith as the faithful interact with a hostile and unbelieving world.

This will be a lengthy lesson to some extent, because, though reduced in details as it is, we still must cover a lot of ground as we consider these last 9 verses of chapter 11. There is considerable evidence for the lives of faith for each of these 6, four of which we will cover in this lesson, and two which we will reserve for the next lesson. These, of necessity, will be merely thumbnail sketches in order to acquaint us with these characters, a couple of whom are somewhat known to the average OT reader, and others who are more obscure.

### Gideon

v. 32a; Judges 6:11-8:35

In Verse 32 the author of Hebrews mentions 4 characters from the book of Judges, and then David and Samuel. Then, in a general way, “the prophets”. We will cover these people one by one when they are named, especially with the first four, and attempt to explain why they are on the Hebrews 11 list, although they do not appear to have been particularly faithful in the OT accounts that describe their lives, at least to us when compared with other people more well-known.

In v. 32, the A.H. is winding up his detailed list and moving to more minor characters ( albeit, David and Samuel are anything but minor characters of the Bible, and perhaps even Samson is notable & notorious ). If he continued the path he is on regarding major characters, the reason he is running out of time in the list and he realizes he could get bogged down in minutia.

Gideon appears in the Bible record at Judges 6:11 as he is threshing wheat in a winepress – most likely so he was hidden from the enemy, the Midianites – whose tactics included swooping down on Israel at harvest time and taking their crops and food. The people had cried out to God for relief from this oppression, and God’s unlikely answer, as we will see, was Gideon, son of Joash the Abriezite. Read [Judges 6:11-27](#). God’s first test for Gideon was to have him tear down the altar of Baal, and set one up to God, but at night – note v. 27b.

The immediate result is found in vv. 28-32, where the men of the town seek to kill Gideon because he tore down their idolatrous altar. His father and others intervened by telling the would-be killers that if Baal is so powerful, he should be able to defend himself! In v. 34, “the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon...”, and he sent messengers to rally troops to defend against the Midianites, Amalakites and ‘the people of the east’, who had formed a coalition against Israel.

The 2 things Gideon is most well-known for are found, first in Judges 6:36-40, when he tests God with a fleece – twice! He wanted a sign that God would really save Israel by using someone as unlikely as Gideon. Secondly, in Judges 7:1-25, where Gideon (under God’s command), reduces his army from 32,000 men to 300. Similar to Joshua’s victory over Jericho, based on God’s unorthodox battle plan. So the victory by Gideon, with only 300 men, would be an unconventional battle without the use of weapons. Instead (7:16-22), using trumpet blasts and empty jars holding torches which were broken outside the enemy’s camp, timed by a heart shout – *“For the Lord and for Gideon!”* – the enemy flees and is so confused that (v. 22) they basically kill one another!

This, of course, was done by God to ensure that it was obviously His work and the humans performing His actions did so by faith – no question.

## Barak Hebrews 11:32b; Judges 4:1-5:31

Barak, the son of Abinoam, was not a judge of Israel, but he was a commander of the army of Israel while Deborah, a prophetess, was the judge. Barak comes to some prominence at a time in Israel when Jabin, king of Canaan was the chief oppressor of Israel (cf. vv. 1-2), yet under God’s sovereign control because of Israel’s sin. Jabin oppressed Israel for 20 years (v. 3).

Barak does nothing that a commander of any army would not do, as Deborah expresses to him that God has commanded him to gather his army of 10,000 at Mt. tabor, along with people of Naphtali & Zebulun. Deborah will go with him in order to draw out Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army at the River Kishon to defeat him. Note the odd interchange in vv. 8-9.

The Lord gave Barak and Deborah victory – He was the one who gave them their victory – note vv. 14-15. Given the texts of vv. 9 & 14, it appears that Deborah is in charge, since she was the Judge, and Barak almost appears hesitant to do what needs to be done. *“If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go (v. 8).”* Notice Deborah’s command, in v. 14 – *“Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?”*

Nevertheless, as Deborah predicts, *“the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.”* (v. 9). Verse 23 tells us that “God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan...”. In fact, Sisera was killed by a woman (Jael), as Barak pursued him (vv. 16-22). In vv.

23-24, we are told that Israel pressed on and defeated the king. Then the song of Deborah and Barak is written for us in Judges 5:1-31, ending with, *“And the land had rest for 40 years.”*

Nothing monumental or overtly miraculous takes place in these two chapters. Deborah seems to be the dominant or prominent character, but Barak is given the nod to appear in Hebrews 11:32 as a man of faith. It is perhaps a bit bewildering to us when we read Judges 4 & 5 to ‘see’ the faith of Barak, because it certainly does not stand out in this account. The same could be said for Gideon, with the exception of the odd attack he waged on the Midianites, and his testing of God surely makes us question his initial faith. In the case of Barak, it reads to us like he was dependent on Deborah for his courage, but she is not named in Hebrews 11.

A.W. Pink was of some help to me here, and he first points out Judges 2:18. -read vv. 16-18. Notice, of the one raised up as ‘judge’, that, in v. 18, he “saved them...”. Pink uses this to point out that Deborah was not a judge in this sense, she was a she. Israel, according to Pink, had sunk to a low state, since no man had stepped up.”<sup>1</sup>

Pink stresses that Deborah was a prophetess ( 4:4 ), therefore, she was a ‘mouthpiece of God, and through her, God spoke to Barak. He points out that based on Hebrews 11:1’s definition of faith, vv. 6-7 describe the promise – i.e., *“the thing hoped for”*. Barak’s stuttering faith is seen in v. 8, but his faithful obedience is seen in v. 10. He is again strengthened by God’s message through Deborah in 4:14 – he heard, believed and obeyed, and God delivered a great victory. Pinks says, “It was by faith in God’s promise that Barak went forth against the army of Sisera and vanquished the same.”<sup>1</sup>

Far from being a distraction from Hebrews 11’s theme, this supports it. It is applicable to us, if we consider it carefully. Our lives are generally stable, and only through mature discernment do we recognize the spiritual battles that face us all. We all have times when we ( if we are honest ) are not so faithful, and perhaps times of being very faithful seem to elude us – or, sometimes, we might almost automatically respond in faith. We must admit, that apart from the deadly wars, men like Gideon and Barak waged, we are more like them than we are like Abraham, Noah, Moses and Joshua. In that sense, the inclusion of these 2 men and the next ones, Samson & Jephthah, should be a way to observe that faith is not always jumping off the page in showiness’ but can be observed in everyday circumstances when the “just shall live by faith.”

## Samson

Heb. 11:32c; Judges 13:1-16:31

Samson’s life is an interesting study on its own, and identifying the faith component in his recorded life is challenging. In the book of Judges, it spans 4 chapters – 96 verses; although the majority of chapter 13 really covers his parents Manoah and his mother ( who is never named ). Chapter 13 leads off by telling us that Israel did evil in God’s sight, so God gave them into the hand of their perpetual early enemies, the

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Pink, The Heroes of faith, MT. Zion Publications, p. 214

Philistines for 40 years. Notice that this time, there is no recorded cry for deliverance from the people.

Samson's mother was barren, and chapter 13 features 2 visits by "*the angel of the Lord*" - who, in vv. 3-5 appears only to the woman, telling her she would have a son, and in v. 5, notice the important instruction from this angel as to what the son's role would be. Since the Philistines besiege Israel for 40 years, but Samson only judges for 20 years, and defeats them in the end, after 20 years, then by the time he is born and grows to be old enough to be a force against them, the Philistine's torment may have just begun as he was being born.

The "*angel of the Lord*" appears a second time ( vv. 9-20 ) to both Manoah and his wife this time. At the prayer of Manoah ( v. 8 ) and he repeats the message of a son. In v. 22, Manoah is convinced they have 'seen God'. This may mean this was a Christophany, but the evidence is not overly strong enough to support this without any doubts. The message was no less true however, and vv. 24-25 records the birth and growth of Samson. A key moment is found in v. 25 - "*The Spirit of the Lord began to stir him...*" This is a clue that he was Spirit led and empowered, and that would account for the faith he had been given by God, since he does appear in Hebrews 11:32 as a man of faith.

By chapter 14, he is grown up and seeking a wife among the Philistines. Read vv. 1-4 and note v. 4 - God's sovereign hand here and in all that comes forth from it. In vv. 5-6, Samson's first demonstration of his incredible strength is recorded, as he kills a lion with his bare hands, tearing it apart. Then, some days later, he comes upon the carcass of this lion, and it is filled with bees and honey - so he eats some.

He now has married this unnamed Philistine woman and uses the lion and the honey to pose a riddle to those at the wedding feast. His new wife wrangles the answer from him and he loses his bet. So, to pay up - v. 18 - this tells us he was angry, and that the Spirit rushed upon him again ( v. 19 ). And in that power of the Spirit he killed 30 Philistines and paid his debt to those who had won by "guessing" the answer to the riddle, because his wife had given them the answer. See Judges 14:29-15:2 - his wife is taken away from him by her father and his anger results in more devastation for the Philistines in vv. 3-8.

The Philistines respond with a raid in Judah and now 3,000 men of Judah come to capture him to appease the Philistines, but he tears off the bonds and kills 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. Again, v. 14 tells us he was empowered by the Spirit of God "*rushing upon him.*" In vv. 18-20, Samson is thirsty and God miraculously supplies water out a rock He had split open.

By chapter 16, Samson's career as a Spirit-empowered judge is well established. The last verse of chapter 15 ( v. 20 ) is simply a precursor to chapter 16:31b. He was a judge for 20 years. The bulk of chapter 16 is taken up with his marriage to Delilah, yet another Philistine woman. - cf. vv. 4-6. So the die was cast and Samson was under

constant haranguing so Delilah could earn her blood money from the Philistines who wanted Samson enslaved or dead.

In this account Samson lies 3 times to get her to stop pressing him for answers ( vv. 7,11,13 ). Finally, she pleads her love and the fact that he does not love her if he won't tell her the truth. Note vv. 15-20. Duped and captured finally, his strength gone, he becomes the Philistines' slave and prisoner.

Note v. 22 – Note v. 22 – His final moments are recorded for us, and here, though defeated, he cries out to God to strengthen him one last time – vv. 28,30. Here was one last effort of faith from one whom we would not usually attribute that quality to. He certainly had his moments of weakness, more so than many of the OT heroes we read about, but the repeated verses re: the Holy Spirit “*rushing upon him*” ( 13:25; 14:6, 14:19, 15:14; 16:30 ( implied ) plus references to his miraculous birth, God's miraculous supply of water from a rock, and God's answer to his final prayer at the end of chapter 16, all serve to give us pause before we say he was not a man of faith. God tells us he was, and that should settle it, even if we think the picture of faith working in his life is somewhat flawed. Aren't our own lives of faith flawed too? Maybe not in such a spectacular way, but flawed nonetheless. Note 2 Tim. 2:10-13.

Once again, we should be encouraged that a less than perfect man is seen as a man of faith, just like us.

## Jepthah

Heb. 11:32d Judges 11:1-12:7

Here again we have a lesser known OT hero of faith being named and honoured by being included in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews. He was a judge of Israel, and judged for 6 years only ( according to Judges 12:7 ). We need to read the lead-in to his story in chapter 10:6-18. Now, we see the state Israel one again finds herself as a result of rampant sinful idolatry.

Again, the people are in desperate need of a judge to lead them, a saviour, so-to-speak, and then, in Judges 11, God shows us how He provided one. The first 3 verses of chapter 11 show us Jephthah's rocky beginnings, as the son of a prostitute, and his disinheritance by his father Gilead and his half brothers. He was driven from home and took up (v. 3) with “worthless fellows.”

The change in Jephthah's fortunes comes about as the Ammonites ( who had, according to 10:8-9, oppressed Israel for 18 years ) make war against Israel. Now ( vv. 4-8 ), the elders of Gilead seek Jephthah out to be their leader. Notice the interplay between Jephthah's bewildered questions and their response – vv. 7-8. He agrees to do this for his people in vv. 9-11 – each side supplying conditions for this relationship.

Verses 12-28 in chapter 11 describes Jephthah's attempts to supply a diplomatic solution to the conflict – as he appeals to history between Israel, the Moabites and the Ammonites. He wraps up his diplomatic appeal in vv. 27-28.

Then, in vv. 29-32, God empowers Jephthah via the Holy Spirit, and then the one who appears to be a good diplomat and leader displays his first flaw. His foolish vow to God in v. 31 & the fulfillment of it in the remainder of chapter 11 is what he is most remembered for. Read vv. 32-40. A.W. Pink believes that what Jephthah did to his daughter was condemn her to a vow of perpetual virginity.” However, as much as I respect Pink, I have to disagree here. Many commentators believe that he did fulfill his vow to God by actually carrying out what the text says – see v. 39 & 40. This would be a strange lament indeed if she was not dead. Morbid, and horrible, to be sure, but he had made a vow to God, and even though it was foolishly and hastily made, a man of faith carries out his vow, unless God somehow prevents him from carrying it out, and in this case, God did not stop him. By contrast, compare Saul’s foolish vow and subsequent balking at carrying it out, once he discovered it would mean the death of his beloved son, Jonathan, in I Sam. 14:24-27 & 37-46.

Chapter 12:1-7, fills in the biblical history of Jephthah. So, as we put all this together, where do we see his faith? That’s why we have come back to Judges – because he is listed as a man of faith in Heb. 11:32d. Pink again points out – “that he feared God is clear from Judges 11:9,10; his message to the king of the Ammonites in vv. 14-27 shows that he believed that Scripture was true; he ascribed Israel’s victories to the Lord ( vv. 21-13 ), and called on God to judge between Israel and Ammon in v. 27. God rewarded his faith by delivering the Ammonites into his hand; and finally, keeping his vow is proof of his faith and perseverance. The fact that God empowered him by His Holy Spirit is further evidence of his faith, along with all his subsequent actions.”<sup>2</sup>

We will next move on to the last section of v. 32 and consider David, Samuel and the prophets.

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<sup>2</sup> Pink, Heroes..., pp 215-216