

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 11:32-40**

To better understand how faithful people depend on God.

Read the Text:

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. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 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, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. (Heb. 11:32-40, ESV)

Study the Text:**The Little Faith**

Chapter 11 has all of the big celebrities of the faith. These are the ones the author of Hebrews will call “a great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1). They include Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, etc., and even apart from the last few weeks, you had probably heard their names a few times. Certain people in the Bible go as far as to say that, “Abraham is our father” (John 8:39) or, “we are disciples of Moses” (John 9:28). Here, however, we are given a mixed bag of names we probably know and ones that we may not. It is unfortunate that the author did not feel he had time to discuss the list of the “faithful” in the first part of verse 32 because Judges, the seventh book in the Old Testament, is rarely read for comparison of ideal positive traits. But the author lists Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, followed by David and Samuel. Then he provides the biggest category, all of whom are simply unknown to us. Below is a breakdown of key details about each group.

THE JUDGES

The book of Judges has only one story that makes it into the Children's Bible (and only *parts* of it). The stage is set with the repeated phrase, "the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (Jg. 2:11, 3:7, 4:1, 13:1, etc.). It is not a good time to be an Israelite. But the Lord chose the mightiest men of Israel to lead during this time. But one problem remained: most of them did not know it, nor did they believe it. Gideon, when called by the Lord, states plainly, "Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest... and I am the least in my father's house" (Jg. 6:15). When Barak, who is not a Judge of Israel (for it states Deborah "was judging Israel at that time"), was called he tells Deborah (not God), "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go" (Jg. 4:8). Samson seems like an outlier because he always seemed to be with strength, until the part that usually is not in the Children's Bible when he has had both of his eyes gouged out and is summoned from his prison to entertain the Philistines at a party. His last prayer was, "O Lord GOD, please remember me, and please strengthen me only this once, O GOD" (Jg. 16:28). While Jephthah "was a mighty warrior," he was the "son of a prostitute" and therefore "he fled from his brothers" (Jg. 11:3). But in the words of Forrest Frank, "Ain't how you start, it's how you finish!"¹ Gideon, with just 300 men, conquers the Midianites. Barak conquers the army of Sisera. Samson kills 3,000 Philistines. Jephthah subdued the Ammonites.

DAVID, SAMUEL, AND THE PROPHETS

David and Samuel were both nobodies from nowhere. David was a shepherd boy, the eighth son of Jesse, and his father did not even invite him in from the field to sacrifice with his family when the prophet Samuel was choosing who to anoint as king. And Samuel, who was known as "the man of God," was not born into the priestly line, but to an Ephrathite woman whom Eli (the priest at the time) thought was drunk. However, Samuel is raised to judge Israel and is tasked with anointing Israel's kings. And David becomes arguably the best-known character in the Old Testament. During the time of Saul (who notably is not mentioned in this list of the faithful), the crowds would shout: "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam 18:7). David defeats Goliath. David conquers all his enemies. Time would fail me to tell of David alone. The author continues by listing the victorious deeds of the prophets. They "conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 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. Women received back their dead by resurrection." This is a list of mighty deeds. Worth remembering, chanting, believing! But there are three words that come before this list that shed light on the author's intent: "who through faith."

WHO THROUGH FAITH

In order to understand the remaining verses in chapter 11, this line "who through faith" must be unpacked. The chapter begins by defining faith: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). It is easy to see each of these people listed above as victorious. But when reading each account, it becomes plain that they were uncertain of the victory, often got in their own way, and ultimately the LORD gained the victory for them. In Barak's story, the author of Judges plainly notes: "on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan" (Judges 4:23). In Gideon's story, the author states: "the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled" (Judges 7: 22). In Samson's story, Samson prays for strength from the Lord (Judges 16:28) and often is filled with the Spirit of the Lord. As for Jephthah, "The Spirit of the lord was upon Jephthah" and "the Lord gave the Ammonites into his hand" (Judges 11: 29, 32). It is not hard to see the Lord's hand on David's life. For even the victory of being anointed King came at the command of God. Samuel also has many stories of God's hand on him and his victories.

¹ Forrest Frank, "Drop!," track 15 on *Child of God II* (River House Records, 10K Projects, Warner Music Group, 2025).

One of the clearest examples comes from 1 Samuel 7, where the Bible says that “Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him. As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel.” In all of these stories, the hero has faith (sooner or later), but the victory comes by the hand of the Lord. And if the victory is from the Lord, then one should not boast in “their” victory, but humbly walk with God.

WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY

The author of Hebrews continues his list of the “who through faith” with the not-so-victorious: “Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 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— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb. 11:35–38). How are people able to live (or *die*) like this? The answer is that each of these “knew that [they] had a better possession and an abiding one” (Heb. 10:34). In faith, these prophets set out remembering that God had been faithful before — in the lives of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel; in the stories of Daniel in the lion’s den; of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire; of Elijah and Elisha raising women’s dead sons. Each of these, who are listed in what is affectionately called the “hall of faith,” walked forward before seeing the victory God would provide. They could each have said with the same confidence as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: “Our God whom we serve **is able** to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and **he will deliver us** out of your hand, O king. **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Dan. 3:18).

ALL ONE BODY

Hebrews 11:39 continues: “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” This further concludes what was originally developed in verses 13–16: “These all died in faith, having not received the things promised... they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one... therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.” The author wants to communicate that the family God has created is not two separate groups of people - the Old Testament heroes of faith on one side, believers in Jesus’ better sacrifice on the other. It is one family, one body, and neither half is made perfect without the other. Chrysostom aptly comments, “For if we are ‘all one body,’ the pleasure becomes greater to this body, when it is crowned altogether, and not part by part” (*Homilies on Hebrews* 28.2).²

CONFIDENCE AND HUMILITY

Hebrews has been working for 11 chapters, communicating that Jesus is superior to quite literally EVERYTHING! Here, at the end of chapter 11, he continues that purpose. All the stories of the faithful in chapter 11 point to a people undeserving of the victory God provided, yet they still saw victory (whether it was a victory they looked back to the prophets to remember, or one in their own lives). All the Old Testament heroes lived by faith without the revelation of Jesus. They saw victories in their lives without seeing the ultimate victory for their life. They lived and died in faith, like Abraham with his sacrifice of Isaac: “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead” (Heb. 11:19), and each person, whether in victory or death, believed that God likewise was able to raise them from the dead. We can stand firmly on our faith in the resurrection not merely because of stories of women whose sons died, were raised, and yet died

² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* 28.2, quoted in Sigurd Grindheim, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 605.

again—but because our Lord and Savior died and was resurrected, never to die again. This should give us both confidence to enter his presence and humility, knowing the victory is His, not ours.

What About Now?

Passages like this one cover a lot of ground in a short period, and sometimes so many stories of faith and victory can make it easy to miss the application to our own lives. But while the author has provided many examples of faith, it may help to see it as two groups: those who through faith became mighty in war, and those who were bound in chains; those who stood in fire without burning, and those who suffered flogging; and those who escaped the sword, and those who were killed by it. Both groups stood firm on the promise of God and held firm (Heb. 4:14, 10:23) not shrinking back (Heb. 10:39). Likewise, we are to live with a faith that is not determined by our circumstances or results, but “that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). These stories show that when there is victory, it is the Lords, and when there is defeat it is not the end, for we believe that He will raise us on the last day. The day is coming when Jesus will return and “He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). Just as the world was not worthy of those who clung to the promises of God even in death, it is also not worthy of those who live by faith in the completed work of Jesus. Remember, “just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb. 9:27-28). Eagerly wait for Him who is faithful, and you will be in eternity with God regardless of whether you receive temporal victory or death.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 11:32. Who does the author name?

2. What do they have in common despite their different stories?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 11:33-34. What victories and deliverances are listed?

2. Read Hebrews 11:35. What is the shift you see from 32-34?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 11:36-37. What kinds of sufferings are described?

2. Read Hebrews 11:38. What does the author mean when he says “of whom the world was not worthy”?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 11:39. What did the people receive? What did they not receive?

2. Read Hebrews 11:40. What does it mean that “apart from us they should not be made perfect”? How does this connect all believers of every age together?

Discuss the Text!

Session 29 Discussion: Humility

We often think of humility with a comparison mindset - that I must describe myself as less than you in order to not be prideful. But humility is better understood through faithfulness. We are humble not because we are less, but because the God we are faithful to is able to do what we are unable to do, even if He decides not to do it. Real humility isn't about where I rank compared to others (for we all are at the bottom together); it is about the God I trust. Talk as a group about true humility.

1. Icebreaker: Is there a time you tried to “be humble” by putting yourself down?
2. Are there certain ways that you compare yourself to others (in pride or humility)?
3. Have you had to trust God's timing in a situation where you thought He would act but He didn't?
4. Do you ever excuse your lack of action on the basis that if God wanted to do something He would not need you?
5. Kid Talk: Ask your kid if there was a time they tried something on their own and it didn't go well, maybe a puzzle, a chore, tying their shoes, or a hard level in a game. Did they end up asking someone for help? If so, how did it feel to let someone else step in? Explain to them that we ask for help from God the same way. He is able to help us do what we can't do on our own and He wants us to come to him.

Takeaways:

1. While the outcome of those who live by faith may be victory or suffering, God is still faithful to give what He promised - a resurrection with eternal life in the city of God.
2. The family of God is one body and will be crowned together.