

A Summary of Old Testament Faith

The author recognizes that his list of the heroes of the faith (11:1-31) could go on forever ("And what more can I say..." v. 32), so in verses 32 – 40 he summarizes the rest of the Old Testament:

- *The Exploits of Faith*: vv. 32 – 35a

In verse 32 the author divides the remainder of his illustrations of faith into the three forms of government which progress over the life of the nation of Israel:

- Judges: "Barak, Gideon, Samson, Jephtha"
- Kings: "David"
- Prophets: "Samuel, and the prophets"

The author places the Kings before the Prophets, even though Samuel preceded David. He may have done so because the office and function of the prophet continued prominently during the reign of the kings throughout the life of the nation of Israel.

When we read the Old Testament accounts of each of the men named in verse 32, the striking feature is their weaknesses and their sins, yet the author of Hebrews does not focus on that prominent aspect of their characters.

- Barak (Judges 4) lacked courage to go to battle without Deborah
- Gideon (Judges 6) made an ephod which caused Israel to sin (Judges 8)
- Samson (Judges 13-16) is infamous for his sexual infidelities and impulsiveness
- Jephtha (judges 11) foolishly vowed to sacrifice his own daughter
- Samuel (1 Samuel 8) had ne'er do well sons, yet he appointed them as judges regardless
- David (2 Samuel 11) committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah

Yet the author to the Hebrews chooses rather to focus on their faith and trust in God, demonstrating that perseverance in the faith does not mean perfection. What did the faith of these men accomplish?

- *"Conquered Kingdoms"*

The key point: before any of the following victories had been realized, God had promised victory in each case even though the odds were against it. Through their obedience to God, they *"wrought righteousness."*

- Barak's victory over Sisera (Judges 4-5) (Promise: Judges 4:6-7)
- Gideon's victory over Midian (Judges 6-8) (Promise: (Judges 6:12-16)
- Jephtha's victory over the Ammonites (Judges 11-12) (Promise: Judges 11:23-24)
- Samson's exploits and triumphs over the Philistines (Judges 13-16) (Promise: Judges 13:5)
- Samuel's victory over the Philistines (1 Samuel 7) (Promise: 1 Samuel 7:3)
- David's too numerous to mention victories against the enemies of God's people

- *"Shut the Mouths of Lions,"* an obvious reference to Samson (Judges 14:6-7) and the shepherd David (1 Samuel 17:34-36) and quite possibly Daniel (Daniel 6:19). Faith trusts God's promises in risky and dangerous situations.

- *"Quenched the violence of fire"* no doubt refers to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3)

- “*Women received their dead raised to life again*” refers to Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-23) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-36)
- *The Afflictions of Faith*: vv. 35b – 38

- “*Tortured*”

The reference to “a better resurrection” affirms that this was a torture resulting in death. The “better resurrection” contrasts with the resurrections of the boys Elijah and Elisha raised from the dead, because those boys died again, but those who die in faith will one day be raised from the dead, never to die again.

- “*Mocked and Scourged, Imprisoned, Stoned, Sawn Asunder*”

Here the author is describing the persecution endured by the Old Testament prophet (2 Chronicles 36:15-16; Jeremiah 20:2; 37:14-21; 2 Chronicles 16:7-10; 1 Kings 22:26-27; 2 Chronicles 24:20-21)

Jesus recounts the merciless killings of the prophets (Matthew 23:37; Luke 11:47-51) in his indictment of faithless religious leaders.

- “*Destitute, Afflicted, Tormented, Wandering*”

If “*mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sown asunder*” is the public suffering God’s people endured at the hands of the world, “*destitute, afflicted, tormented, wandering*” is the effect this had on them personally and privately: psychologically, physically, spiritually, and materially.

- *The Continuity of Faith*: vv. 39 – 40

The point of verses 32 – 38 is to illustrate that the people of God have always been a minority people, a pilgrim people, a despised and forsaken people. Old Testament people put their faith in what was promised. Though they did not receive the fulfillment of the ultimate promise, they kept on believing.

The promise whose fulfillment they were awaiting was not the immediate relief of their present circumstances, but the future and final (eschatological) fulfillment of what was “better” than the temporary answer to their prayers: rest (4:1), final salvation (10:36), and a permanent kingdom (12:26-28).

God ordained that Old Testament believers would not be perfected apart from New Testament believers. The “better promises” made to the Old Testament believer are fulfilled in the new covenant, not the old, which makes the faith of all God’s people in both the old and new covenant eras contiguous with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who himself is the fulfillment of all God’s promises (Romans 10:4; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Galatians 2:15-16; 3:26-29).

The message of Hebrews 11 is that “the just shall live by faith” (Hebrews 10:36) and that this faith is not only **in** the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is the faith **of** the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:1-3). It is the faith of Jesus that empowers perseverance in the face of every temptation to “*draw back unto perdition*” (Hebrews 10:39).

“And all these, having obtained **a good report through faith...**” 11:39

The author ends where he began in 11:2, with the approval of the faith of these believers through “*a good report*,” (literally, “*were witnessed of*”) which is **God’s accounting of their faith in the inspired word** of the Old Testament. God himself is witness to the faith of the saints.