



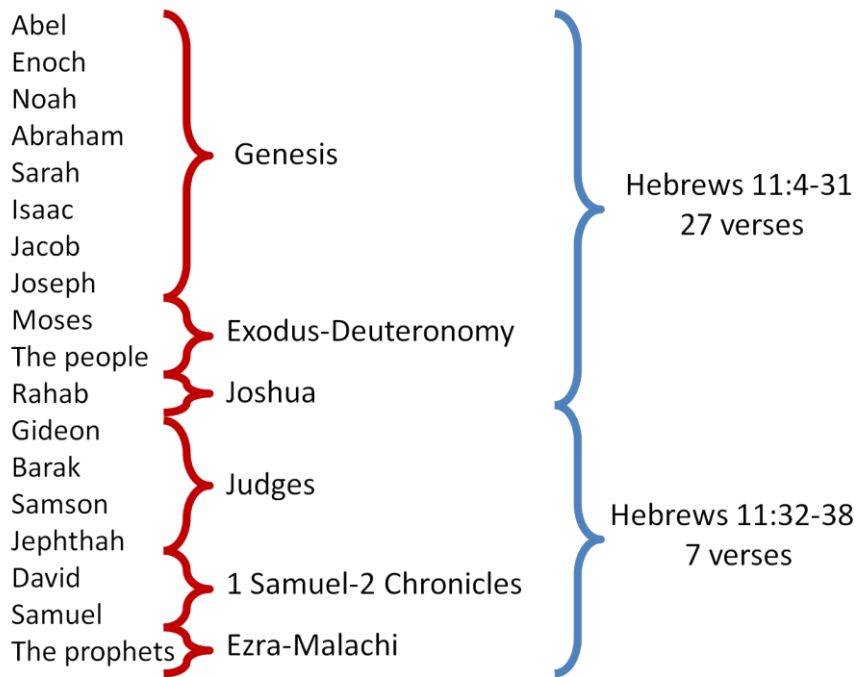
<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of<sup>f</sup> Gideon, <sup>g</sup> Barak, <sup>h</sup> Samson, <sup>i</sup> Jephthah, of<sup>j</sup> David and <sup>k</sup> Samuel and the prophets—<sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises,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

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even <sup>p</sup> chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> <sup>q</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, <sup>r</sup> they were killed with the sword. <sup>s</sup> They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—<sup>t</sup> wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

<sup>39</sup> And all these, <sup>u</sup> though commended through their faith, <sup>u</sup> did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, <sup>v</sup> that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

When it comes to Bible study, it is so easy to miss the forest because of the trees. We almost always read and study the Bible in relatively small chunks. Therefore, we tend to focus on these small parts and miss the bigger picture. For example, you may know what Romans 3:23 is about but you don't know what the rest of Romans chapter three is about, or if you do know Romans three you may not be able to summarize the book of Romans. While we certainly want to continue to dig deep into books and chapters of the Bible, we also need to understand entire chapters, entire books and entire testaments of the Bible if we are going to understand the Bible at all. The question we are going to ask is—What is the theme of the Bible?

For this reason, we are going to take a few steps back so we can survey the context of the entire Bible. This is what the author of Hebrews was attempting to do in chapter eleven but if we only



see the details of this chapter we will miss the big picture.

First, it is interesting to see all of the Old Testament characters that the author covers in this one chapter. It is far from a complete list but it is a great list. If we break it down further we see that almost half of the names appear in Genesis. The next four OT books—Exodus through Deuteronomy—were covered in less detail

and only Rahab is mentioned from the book of Joshua. Therefore, the first six books of the Bible take up over two-thirds of this chapter which is why the author wrote what he did in verse 23. *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.* In other words he was saying, “I’ve got so much more to tell you, but I am running out of time and space.” Therefore, the rest of the Old Testament was summarized in a mere seven verses.

If I were to summarize the remainder of the Old Testament, I think I would have left off a few of these men from my list and added some different ones. Gideon did win a decisive battle against the Midianites. Gideon listened to the Lord and thinned down his fighting men to only 300 men. This is one of the great stories of how God won the battle by his power and not due to the strength of men. But Gideon had all sorts of problems. First, he tested the Lord twice. *Then Gideon said to God, “Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece (Judges 6:36).* The word for test is the exact same word in Dt. 6 where God declared, *You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.* Not only did he test the Lord he led the people into idolatry. *And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family (Judges 8.27).*

In addition to his other failings, Gideon’s son Abimilech, was a wicked ruler.

The second man on the list had a lapse of faith as well.

<sup>4</sup> *Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.* <sup>5</sup> *She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and*

*the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. <sup>6</sup> She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. <sup>7</sup> And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by <sup>i</sup>the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?’” <sup>8</sup> Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” <sup>9</sup> And she said, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman” (Judges 4:4-9).*

Next on the list is Samson and he had too many failings to mention which included licentiousness, rage and anger, and revenge.

Many of us are familiar with Jephthah’s rash vow.

*And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, <sup>31</sup> then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering” (Judges 11:30).*

Moving along the list we come to David. We know that David was a murderer and an adulterer but we tend to forget that his sons were mostly evil. Amnon was a rapist. Absalom was a vengeful murderer. Adonijah tried to steal the throne and Solomon caused kingdom to be divided due to his massive fall into detestable idol worship.

Samuel was a good and just judge over Israel, but like David, he did not succeed in passing on his faith to his two sons. *Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.* (1 Samuel 8:3) Because his sons were wicked, the people demanded a king to rule over them.

We have arrived at the first part of our definition of the theme of the Bible. Acts of faith do not require perfect faithfulness. God uses imperfect people for his own purposes. Aren’t you glad about this?! It is staggering to think that God chooses to use these broken vessels for his purpose. We were talking about this on the way home from the conference this week. If God were not God it would be irresponsible of him to use us for his work. Imagine if you were running a multi-billion dollar company with a horde of misfits and incompetents. We would certainly be fired for hiring such workers. But God has a higher and more important purpose for using us.

Next I want you to notice this great list in verses 32-25. All of these things happened to the men and women *who through faith...*

- 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.

I have to say that I like this list. This is a great list of achievements of faith. Let's look at some of these in more detail.

### **Conquered kingdoms**

This description would apply to all six men listed here but it would also apply to many others who did not specifically make the list. One of my favorites is Saul's son, Jonathan. *Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few"* (1 Samuel 14:6). Jonathan was well aware of the history of his nation and knew that God defeated the Midianites through only 300 of Gideon's men. Jonathan knew that the Lord defeated the Egyptians with absolutely no fighting men. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few. This is a good reminder if you are in need of saving. You don't need an army on your side; you only need the army of the Lord.

### **Stopped the mouths of lions**

Here again the author would have had more than one person in mind.

Samson—*Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat* (Judges 14:6).

David—*I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him* (1 Samuel 17:35).

Daniel—*My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm"* (Daniel 6:22).

### **Women received back their dead**

The author obviously had two prophets in mind here.

Elijah—*Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again."*<sup>22</sup> *And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived* (1 Kings 17:21-22).

Elisha—*Then he went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm.*<sup>35</sup> *Then he got up again and walked once back and forth in the house, and went up and stretched himself upon him. The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes* (2 Kings 4:34-35).

Let's return to our definition and add some more to it.

- God uses imperfect people for his own purposes.

Verses 32-25 teach us that acts of faith can have supernatural results through the power of God.

But great faith doesn't always have great results—at least what we usually call great. Verses 35-38 tell the rest of the story. These men and women also had faith with very different results. They were...

- Were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life
- Suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment
- Were stoned
- Were sawn in two
- Were killed with the sword
- Went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated
- Wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

This is not the kind of list I like. I like the first list much better. What about you?! Let's look at some of these in more detail.

### **Stoned**

*Zechariah—Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.’ ”<sup>21</sup> But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.<sup>22</sup> Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah’s father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, “May the LORD see and avenge!” (2 Chron 24:20-22)*

*Naboth—And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them,<sup>12</sup> they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people.<sup>13</sup> And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones.<sup>14</sup> Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.” (1 Kings 21:11-14)*

### **Sawn in two**

Scripture does not describe anyone as actually having been sawn in two. However, tradition records that the prophet Isaiah was sawn in two. Whether or not the author had Isaiah in mind is beside the point. Some who followed the Lord did meet their end in this awful manner.

### **Killed with the sword**

This would apply to many under the old covenant but the example that stands out in my mind is when Saul killed those who helped David escape from Saul.

*Then the king said to Doeg, “You turn and strike the priests.” And Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests,<sup>2</sup> and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod.<sup>19</sup> And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep, he put to the sword (1 Samuel 22:18-19).*

*They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated...wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

This would also apply to many people but this description really reminds me of John the Baptist. Remember that John was the last—and greatest—of the Old Testament prophets. John lived in the desert and wore a garment made of animal hides.

Like I said—I like the other list much better but this captures the reality of saints of old. Moreover, it captures the lives of the first century believers all the way to our day.

Now we have to add this to our definition.

- God uses imperfect people for his own purposes.
- Acts of faith can have supernatural results through the power of God.

To these two parts we add...

- Acts of faith can also result in tremendous suffering, persecution and even death.

But this is not the end of our definition. These saints of old were looking to something better than conquering kingdoms and even being raised from the dead. Verses 35 and 39 complete the story.

<sup>35</sup> *Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.*

<sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

The something “better” that these men and women were looking forward to the resurrection with the living and reigning Jesus Christ, the Savior of all who place their faith in him. But how can I suddenly place Jesus into our definition. Abraham did not know Jesus, did he? Gideon and Samson don’t show any evidence of having known Jesus. These and others may not have had the complete picture but they had a sufficient picture of the coming Messiah. Moreover, both Jesus and Paul showed how Jesus was woven throughout the entire Old Testament.

*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he (Jesus) interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27).*

*From morning till evening he (Paul) expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets (Acts 28:23).*

Now let’s put our full definition together.

God uses imperfect people for his own purposes whose acts of faith can have supernatural results through the power of God but often result in tremendous suffering, persecution and even death. Nevertheless, we look forward to the resurrection with the living and reigning Jesus Christ, the Savior of all who place their faith in him.

This is the grand theme of the Bible and we were able to pull all of this together from just Hebrews 11. It’s important to note that our definition does not include other vital truths like

evangelism and discipleship. It's not an exhaustive definition but it does show how ALL throughout the Bible, salvation is displayed and revealed as coming by grace through faith. This chapter encompasses Abel Genesis 4 through the prophet Malachi—the entire Old Testament! There is a beautiful, consistent and unified message in the Bible. It is not a mere collection of stories but a unified message. There is a grand narrative that runs throughout every page of this amazing book.

Therefore, every time you pick up your Bible to read it, please remember this grand theme. Even if you are reading long lists of numbers and genealogies of hard to pronounce names, even these point to Christ.

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February 5, 2012

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<sup>f</sup> Judg. 6:11

<sup>g</sup> Judg. 4:6

<sup>h</sup> Judg. 13:24

<sup>i</sup> Judg. 11:1

<sup>j</sup> 1 Sam. 16:1, 13

<sup>k</sup> 1 Sam. 1:20

<sup>l</sup> Judg. 14:6; 1 Sam. 17:35; Dan. 6:22

<sup>m</sup> Dan. 3:25

<sup>n</sup> Judg. 7:21; 1 Sam. 17:51; 2 Sam. 12:29

<sup>o</sup> 1 Kgs. 17:22; 2 Kgs. 4:35

<sup>p</sup> Gen. 39:20; Jer. 20:2; 37:15

<sup>q</sup> 1 Kgs. 21:13; 2 Chr. 24:21

<sup>r</sup> Some manuscripts add *they were tempted*

<sup>r</sup> 1 Kgs. 19:10; Jer. 26:23

<sup>s</sup> 2 Kgs. 1:8

<sup>t</sup> 1 Sam. 22:1; 1 Kgs. 18:4; 19:9

<sup>u</sup> ver. 2, 13; [1 Pet. 1:12]

<sup>v</sup> [Rev. 6:11]

<sup>i</sup> ver. 13; ch. 5:21; 1 Kgs. 18:40; Ps. 83:9