

- ***READ Hebrews 11:1,2*** Every single person that is mentioned in this great hall of faith that is found in **Hebrews 11** can say that he or she exhibited faith before God in such a way that he or she has been approved by God. These men and women of **Hebrews 11** find themselves in an exalted position among the faithful of God for the great feats of faith that they displayed throughout each of their lives. The Scripture reminds us that by faith Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice up to God. By faith, Noah constructed the ark for the saving of his household long before the first drop of rain hit the ground. By faith, Abraham left his home land and even offered up his promised son of Isaac to God. By faith, Isaac.....By faith, Jacob.....By faith, Joseph.....By faith, Moses.....By faith, the walls of Jericho fell. On and on the heroes of faith are mentioned throughout **Hebrews 11**. Some are specifically named while others are mentioned without their names specifically written.
- Though we often articulate these individuals as heroes that we look up to as strong examples of God's faithful servants, this doesn't mean that we fail to recognize that these individuals were not perfect. The Bible is very up front and honest about the shortcomings of many of these people mentioned in this text. Noah had troubles with alcohol, Abraham was less than truthful about his wife Sarah at times, Isaac and Jacob played favorites with their kids, and Joseph may or may not have let his dad's love for him go to his head. Yes, these men and women were great figures of godly faith within the Bible's narrative, and yet they had their own share of faults as fallible humans.
- But then there are a few names mentioned in this chapter that might seem a little...well puzzling at best. Consider the fact that a harlot is named in **Hebrews 11:31**. Jephthah, a man who whose rash vow led to the sacrifice of his daughter, is mentioned. And maybe most puzzling of all is the inclusion of Samson. Now, we must recognize that Samson's inclusion wasn't up to the Hebrew writer for we know that men wrote as the Holy Spirit directed them. (**II Peter 1:20,21**) Therefore, we must recognize that it is God who sees Samson as worthy of inclusion in this great section of faithful servants of God.
- This leads me to the conclusion that while there are some absolute no-brainer first ballot "hall of faithers", there are others whose stories are a bit more complicated, and Samson's name might be at the very top of that list. I'd like to use our time of study this morning by considering Samson's life as a case study of complicated heroes of faith, and then we will conclude by looking at three lessons we learn from Samson's complicated inclusion in the Holy Spirit's great hall of faith.

I. Complicated Hero Case Study: Samson (Judges 13-16)

A. Born to previously barren parents for the purpose of delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

1. Samson's conception story shares similarities with other notable Biblical characters such as Samuel and John the Baptist. All three men were born to parents (at least mothers) who were previously barren and unable to have children. Manoah and his wife (unnamed) were unable to have children, but **Judges 13:3-21** details the story of the angel of the Lord coming to them and telling them that they would have a son. Manoah isn't quite convinced, so he prays to God that the messenger might return to confirm what he had told to his wife.
2. The angel returns and after some conversation, he leaves through the flame that was given off by an offering that had been given on an altar. At this point, Manoah is convinced of what has been told to him and his wife. But it wasn't just that they were told that they would have a son, but it was commanded that this son would need to adhere to the rites of a Nazarite vow (**Numbers 6:1-21**). (**Judges 13:4-7**) All of this was to be done in order that this son of theirs would be the catalyst for Israel's deliverance from the hands of the Philistines who had ruled over them for the last forty years. (**13:1**) Samson was eventually born as the messenger had said, and the Scripture records, *"So the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew, and the Lord blessed him. Then the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in the Camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol."* (**13:24,25**)

- B. Samson's desire for a Philistine woman led to his first deadly encounter with the Philistines.
1. Some time passes and the next thing we read about Samson concerns his interest in women. He finds himself in Timnah, and it is in this place that he finds a Philistine woman that strongly catches his attention. The Scripture records, *"He went back and told his father and his mother: 'I have seen a young Philistine woman in Timnah. Now get her for me as a wife.' But his father and mother said to him, 'Can't you find a young woman among your relatives or among any of our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines for a wife?'"* (Judges 14:2,3)
 2. Samson's parents were right to be upset with Samson's request because the Law strictly prohibited the intermarrying between the Jews and the pagan peoples. (Exodus 34:16 & Deuteronomy 7:3) And yet, the text seems clear to the fact that Samson was smitten by the young woman simply for what he has seen about her. He didn't care for the prohibition of the Lord because in his eyes, *"She's the right one for me."* (Judges 14:3)
 3. What also needs to be noted is the fact that all of this that was taking place, even though it was against the command of God, was going to be used for God for a purpose. *"Now his father and mother did not know this was from the Lord, who wanted the Philistines to provide an opportunity for a confrontation. At that time, the Philistines were ruling Israel."* (Judges 14:4)
 4. Let's remember that Samson was to be the catalyst for Israel's deliverance from the Philistines, and this seems to be the first incident that begins his assault upon the Philistine men of the land. The issue all revolves around a riddle that Samson puts forth (concerning a lion that he killed earlier and the honey that had appeared in its corpse 14:5-7) to thirty Philistine men with garments and changes of clothes as the wager. The men are initially stumped, but they eventually talk Samson's wife into nagging the answer out of Samson so that they might win the wager. Samson knows that they have compromised his wife, and with the strength provided by the Spirit of the Lord, Samson rises up and kills the thirty men. He then leaves the scene in a rage to return to his father's house, and his Philistine wife is given to another man. (Judges 14:8-20)
- C. Samson's father-in-law gives his wife to another man, and this leads to further conflict with the Philistines.
1. Some time later, Samson returns to spend time with his wife, but he finds out that she has been given to another man. He is incensed by what has happened, and catches 300 hundred foxes which he takes two by two and attaches a burning torch so that they might run all through the Philistine grain fields. He also goes and burns the piles of grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves. (Judges 15:1-5)
 2. Of course, the Philistines don't take to kindly to this, and their retaliation is to go to Samson's wife's home where her and her father are burned to death. (Judges 15:6) Samson's response is to then swear that he wouldn't rest until he had taken vengeance out upon the Philistines. At that time, he kills many before going to stay in a cave at the rock of Etam. (Judges 15:7,8)
 3. The Philistines retaliate by attacking Lehi, but the men of Judah are perplexed as to what warranted this attack. The Philistines lay the blame at Samson's feet, and tell the Jews to go and collect Samson for them so that they might punish him for his deeds. 3,000 Hebrews go to take Samson into custody, and Samson willingly goes by stating that he had simply done to them what they had done to him. They tie Samson up, but as soon as they arrive at Lehi, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson, he grabs a donkey jaw bone, and kills a thousand Philistines with it. (Judges 15:9-16) Following this, the Scriptures tell us that Samson judged Israel for twenty years. (15:20)
- D. Samson's love affair with Delilah leads the Philistines to plot with her against him.
1. At some point down the road, we are told that Samson continues to embarrass the pagans by traveling to the far end of the Philistines territory, sleeping with a prostitute, and then literally ripping the gate off of the walls of the city of Gaza. (Judges 16:1-3)

2. Following this, the Scripture tells us that Samson falls in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. The Philistines seek to take advantage of this by turning Delilah against Samson so that she might find the source of his great strength. For her efforts, each of them promised her 1,100 pieces of silver as a reward. **(16:4,5)**
- E. After several lies, Samson finally reveals the secret to his strength, and Delilah takes advantage of him.
 1. Samson first tells her that seven fresh bowstrings could be used to take away his strength. This effort fails. **(Judges 16:6-9)** Samson then tells her that brand new ropes tied around him would do the trick. This, too, fails miserably. **(16:10-12)** Thirdly, he tells Delilah that she simply needs to braid his long hair and pin it to the wall so that he would lose his strength. For a third time this effort also fails. **(16:13,14)**
 2. Eventually, Delilah nags Samson to the point that he actually reveals that his hair is the source of his strength. He details that he has been a Nazarite since birth, and that shaving his head would rob him of all of his strength. This of course was the truth, and Delilah shares this vital information with her Philistine comrades which leads to the his eventual capture where his eyes are gouged out from his skull. **(16:15-21)**
- F. After being taken as prisoner, Samson begs God for one more opportunity to defeat the Lord's enemies, and He grants this request.
 1. Now as a prisoner of the Philistines, Samson was taken to Gaza, bound with bronze shackles, and forced into hard labor as a grinder of grain. But, his hair began to grow back, and at the opportune time, when the Philistines sought to further embarrass Samson through making him entertain them at a feast for their god Dagon, he called out to the Lord, *"Lord God, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. With one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes."* **(Judges 16:21-28)**
 2. The Lord responds favorably to Samson's request and endows him with strength once more to kill more Philistines in that final that he had up to that point in his entire life. Thus ended the life of Samson and his twenty year reign of his judging of Israel. **(16:29-31)**

Just being completely honest...This story of Samson and his faith in the Biblical narrative just isn't all that impressive to me. Yes, he kills many pagan enemies of God, but look at all of the poor decision making and poor attitudes that this man displayed all throughout what is recorded for us. I am probably legitimately left scratching my head if this is the first time that I read of Samson name in **Hebrews 11** and then come and do some investigating into his life revealed in Scripture. So what gives? What can we learn and take away from the fact that this man is included in the Holy Spirit's great hall of faith?

II. What can we learn from the presence of complicated heroes of faith in Hebrews 11?

- A. Even those who God considered faithful often struggled in ways that coincided with their faithfulness.
 1. While we often put the great Biblical characters up on a pedestal for their great lives of faithfulness, we must remember that these people were humans just like we are. They are people who were tempted in ways just like we are tempted. **(I Corinthians 10:13)** We must remember that though they showed great feats of faith, they also had moments where they fell well short of God's great standard of holiness. This is seen with all of those who are mentioned in **Hebrews 11**, and we know this to be true about Samson.
 2. First, let's consider the bad concerning Samson. He was clearly a womanizer, or at least he really had a thing for Philistine women. They were obviously his type of women. Additionally, Samson wasn't perfect at keeping his Nazarite vows. Part of the vow was that he was not to touch anything dead, and yet he ate honey out of the carcass of the dead lion. **(14:8,9)** He also throws a party that many scholars believe would have included the dirking of alcoholic beverages. **(14:10)** Lastly, Samson seems to have been a man who's heart was dead set on retribution and vengeance for himself. **(15:7 & 16:28)**

3. And yet, we find the Lord even able to use these character flaws of Samson to accomplish the good that He desired to be done. Remember, it was Samson's desire for the first Philistine woman that is directly followed by the Holy Spirit noting that this was God's opening to cause Samson to begin defeating the Philistines. **(14:4)** Yes, Samson was flawed in some pretty bad ways, but he was also good in the sense that he was willing to serve as God's instrument for lifting the oppression of the Philistines off of Israel's back. We might want to look at Samson's situation with black and white glasses, but the reality is that his story is just flat out complicated. There are a number of different forces at play all throughout, and even some we simply don't know about because we don't have all of the story.

B. We must remember that we don't always have all of the details of one's life.

1. Remember, Samson ruled for twenty years as Israel's judge **(15:20 & 16:31)**, and yet we only have four chapters worth of knowledge about Samson's life. And the reality is that most of what we have spoken about Samson simply doesn't make him out to be that great of a guy...let's be honest about that. The bad really seems to outweigh the good in my eyes.
2. And yet, I need to be very slow to make strong judgements about someone whose life I simply don't know much about. We must be honest and admit that we simply don't know what happened during the rest of Samson's life. If we're going to be fair to the man then we might need to acknowledge the fact that there is much about the man that we simply don't know. We don't know if these situations recorded for us are the only real low points of his life.
3. I know there have been points in my life that if those were the only moments that folks knew about me then I wouldn't look to great...and I believe it wise to give Samson the same courtesy that we would like for others to extend to us. We know that we will be judged by the same measure that we judge others **(Matthew 7:1,2)**, so we might do well to show patience towards a man that we might judge harshly, especially considering that the Holy Spirit inspired a man to include him in a section of Scripture that lists some of the great heroes of the faith.

C. At the end of the day, God's judgment of one's faithfulness is all that matters.

1. And that really is what it all comes down to. It doesn't matter what conclusions we might draw of Samson. We might think that he was the worst womanizing hothead in the world, but from now on back to the writing of Hebrews and forward until the return of the Lord...Samson will be known as a man of great faith because the inspired writer of Hebrews wrote so. Again, he didn't write this on his own accord, but he did so through the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
2. This tells me that it simply doesn't matter what I think about Samson because the Lord judges him as faithful, and really...that's all that matters because I will not be the one that Samson and any other person stands before when it is time for judgement to be rendered. This is something that I really need to keep reminding myself. While I might have to make decisions in this life concerning who I will align myself with in fellowship, the reality is that I could easily make a poor judgment on earth, but God will make the perfect judgment when the time comes. **(James 4:12)**
3. Therefore, I ought to desire to be as gracious and patient towards my fellow man as I can possibly be. That doesn't mean that I run with them in and condone sin, but it means that I offer to them the same patient and loving benefit of the doubt that love demands. **(1 Corinthians 13:6)** I need to be willing to believe the best in people. I should want to believe in the goodness of others...until I just absolutely cannot because sometimes people are complicated...even great heroes of faith.

If you're like me then you've been quite hard on Samson in the past, and I think for good reason because he made some pretty boneheaded mistakes. Those mistakes we can learn from, but I think we can also learn from his inclusion in **Hebrews 11**. There are some things that we probably just don't know about the man, but I'm thankful that the Lord counts him as faithful because it fills me with hope that maybe even I, with all of my flaws, can and will be counted as faithful before the Lord, as well.