

*Ordinary and flawed people who through faith
changed their world and ours...*

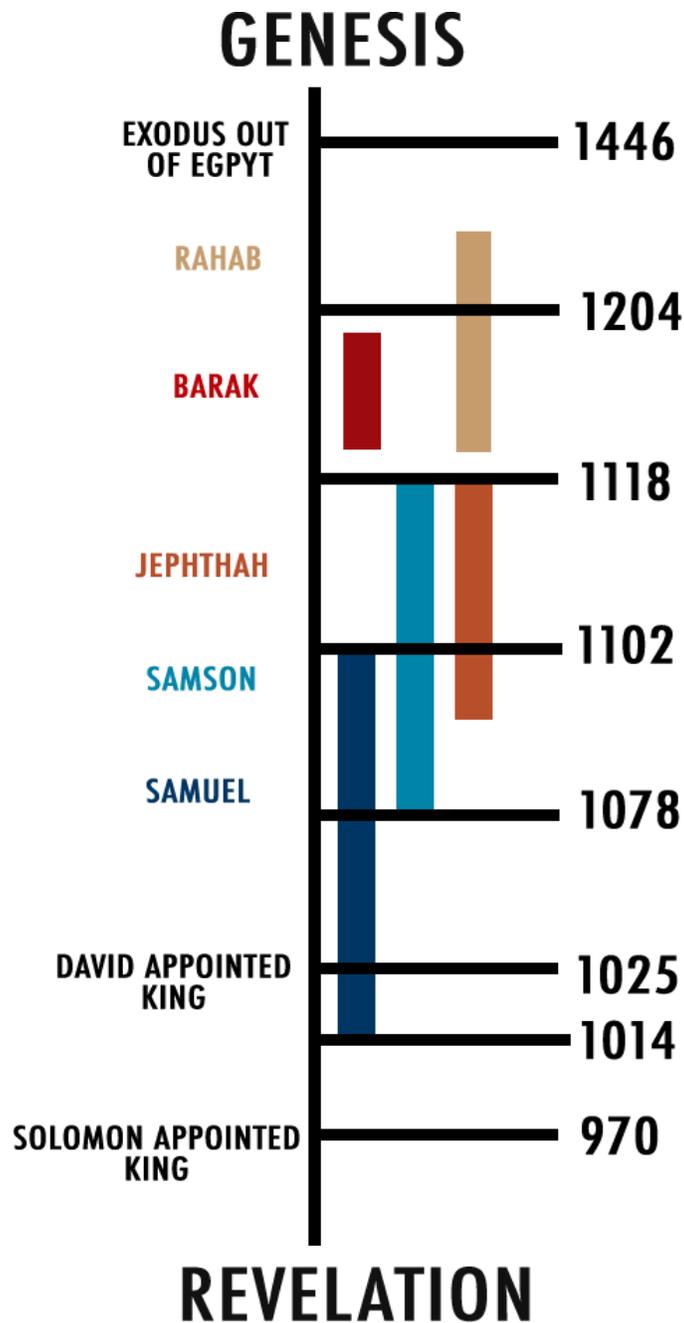


SAMSON
JEPHTHAH
RAHAB
SAMUEL
BARAK

STUDY GUIDE

e a s t s i d e CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

CHARACTER TIMELINES



Samson was one of the judges that presided over Israel. He is the last one of the twelve judges listed in the book of Judges. (Some might include Eli, Samuel, and Samuel's sons). His birth was similar to that of Samuel to Hannah, John the Baptist to Elizabeth, and even Isaac to Sarah. God promised these women, who had up to that time been barren, that they were going to have a son. The name of Samson's mother is never given in Scripture. She is referred to as the woman or the wife of Manoah. The angel that brought the news of Samson's coming birth gave instructions that he was to be a Nazirite all his life, dedicated to God. The instructions concerning Nazarites is given in Numbers chapter 6. A Nazirite was set apart for God. They took a vow of devotion, usually for a specific time, not for their whole life like Samson. Many consider John the Baptist a Nazirite. They were to abstain from many things, observe stricter cleanliness laws, and anything from the grape vine, wine, grape juice, grapes, and even raisins were prohibited. They could not cut their hair and if a man, their beards. These were symbols of their devotion. "the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines" (Jud. 13:5). At first glance there is little to commend Samson for from his life. The Nazirite Vow has three restrictions (1) abstain from fermented drink, (2) could not have their hair cut; and (3) they could not be near a corpse. A violation of all these play out in his story. In Hebrews 11 we see some of the things these people did by faith. They "shut the mouths of lions (Daniel, David and SAMSON), escaped the edge of the sword, became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. These all apply to Samson. Although Samson was clearly a flawed individual that had great potential that he never lived up to, he believed the promises of God, called out to Him in times of need and was used by God to take the lead in delivering Israel from the Philistines.

WEAKNESSES:

He was impulsive

He had an anger problem

He disregarded God's laws, even some of the ones of his vow

Sexually immoral

Pride

STRENGTHS:

Fearless

Had great confidence in the gifting God had given him

Fulfilled God's calling on his life to weaken the Philistines

LESSONS FROM SAMSON

If we live a life of compromise we waste much of the potential we have in God.

God is capable of doing great things in spite of us.

Just because God is using us does not mean we are necessarily in His will.

In the end, Samson's compromised life left him blind and bound.

Some important verses

Judges 13:5 You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

Judges 13:24 The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him.

Judges 14:5,6 Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done.

Judges 15:18,19 Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the LORD, "You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived

Judges 16:21 Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison.

Judges 16:28-30 Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think Samson is included in the "Hall of faith" of Hebrews 11?

2. Discuss the conflict with Samson's flaws and Him being a man of faith.

3. How can a life of compromise rob us of the potential life God wants us to have?

4. Are there things in your life that are robbing you of all that is available in Christ?

5. Vs 14:19 talks about the Spirit of the Lord and Samson's anger and killing of 30 men. Discuss how that lines up with scripture.

6. How does God including Samson as one of the faithful despite all his flaws, relate to your relationship with God?

Jephthah appears in Hebrews 11, Judges 11, and 1 Samuel 12. He was the ninth Judge of Israel. The period of the judges was a time following the conquest by Joshua, when the 12 tribes were trying to consolidate their holdings. This was opposed by Philistines who pressed in from the coastal west and by desert tribes like the Midianites from the east. "The scattered tribes were divided and weak. Sometimes it seemed that the other tribes of Israel did not care when tragedy befell their brethren." (NASB Open Bible, commentary on Judges, Nelson (Nashville, 1978). The time of Judges ended with Samuel's coronation of Saul to be Israel's king. Jephthah was a valiant warrior who was ostracized and exiled by his half brothers Hebr 11:9, 13,36 because their father Gilead had him through a harlot, "another woman" than their mother. A posse of "worthless fellows"* was drawn to him at Tob [probably in modern Syria], where he resettled. After Gilead, then Judah, Benjamin & Ephraim were invaded by Ammon, the men of Israel/Gilead sought out Jephthah to lead their campaign against Ammon & their allies. Hebr 11:4,8 Jephthah was offered to be the head of Israel if his leadership were successful in repelling the invasion. Before accepting, he closely queried the elders of Israel, requiring them to clearly affirm the offer of headship. Hebr 11:26 After they swore, he agreed to lead, making him the Ninth (?) "Judge" of Israel after Joshua. They all affirmed their mission by covenant at Mizpah. Hebr 11:5 Jephthah attempted a diplomatic solution to the conflict without success. Hebr 11:14ff,24 Heading to battle, Jephthah vowed to sacrifice to the Lord "whatever comes out of my house" on his successful return. Hebr 11:6 Tragically, when he returned from the God-given victory, Hebr 11:33-35 it was his maiden daughter, an only child. The daughter asked for a time to mourn – not her loss of life, but the ending of her life without any child of her own. After two months, the daughter returned from her mourning retreat in the mountains with her friends and Jephthah completed his vow to God by sacrificing her. Hebr 11:17, 33. He later defeated Ephraim – using the "shibboleth" test - after a failed attempt to settle their dispute. Hebr 11:33. When he spoke, even rashly, he kept his word even at great personal cost. Hebr 11:4,5 He reflects the sacrificial faith of Abraham and prefigures that of Jesus. Gen 22:2, Hebr 11:4, John 3:16 His heroic service produced more than 30 years of 'rest' for Israel. Hebr 11:4,5,33

WEAKNESS:

Rash judgment by the vow that he took. 11:30,31
 Impatient, proud - divisive of the Israel confederation by his decision to attack Ephraim 12:1-6
 Bitter, sarcastic with elders – 'why come to me now?' 11:7
 Ambition – he demanded headship be affirmed before serving. 11:9
 Association with "worthless" fellows in Tob 11:3
 Undisciplined – sought God while already on the way to battle 11:29ff
 Possibly dishonest in his attempt to placate Ephraim 12:2,3

STRENGTH:

Jephthah was a man of unquestionable faith 11:10, 11, 12-27, 30-32, 36, 39
 Trusted the outcome to the LORD; did not trust in his or Israel's power.
 A great warrior [sought out by the elders] 11:1,5,6
 Submitted to the Lord by covenanting at Mizpah 11:11
 Obedient to right authority 11:9ff
 Powerful faith by completing his vow to sacrifice his only child 11:39
 His obedience reflected the sacrifice of Abraham and prefigured that of Jesus
 Gen 22:2ff; Jg11:39; Jn3:16 Hebr 11:4 "better sacrifice"
 Compassion to honor her request for a time to grieve. 11:38
 He spoke directly to both friend and foe, drawing boundaries based on facts, and seeking
 diplomatic resolution of conflict in preference to military resolution. 11:7,9,12-27; 12:2ff
 Diplomatic with Ammon & [less so] with Ephraim 11:7,9,12-27; 12:2ff
 Even when he spoke rashly, he kept his word, at great personal cost. 11:30ff, 39
 Took a reward [headship] in place of 'revenge'. 11:5ff
 No evidence of retaining or acting out any resentment against his brothers
 Valiant - he fought for right when negotiation was unsuccessful 11:1, 29ff, 12:4ff
 His charisma attracted others to him 11:3
 Leadership produced 31 years of rest/peace [= following God] for Israel, even though he only lived 6 more years. 12:7,9,11,14, [Both Tola and Jair lacked leadership; Israel fell away immediately at their deaths]

Result Desired:

Effective leaders negotiate win/win agreements
 Even good heads can be overcome by emotions or self will;
 Decisions and commitments should not be made in the blind; leaders must weigh what they are willing to sacrifice, up front.
 Good heads/leaders follow through on their commitments, whatever the cost.

LESSONS WE LEARN:

... a sense of history is important context for dealing with conflict and potential conflict; faith will trust the LORD for outcomes; faith will resist even bad association; factions and parties divide and even destroy God's people (the church); God is faithful to his people even when we are not faithful to Him; God uses unlikely people to bring his people back to Himself, to save them; a good leadership example is effective beyond the span of the leader; "sometimes it seemed that the other tribes of Israel did not care when tragedy befell their brethren." - IBC "God raises up the weak to confound the strong" IBC

"People follow leadership that shows relevant skills/gifts;

Good leaders inquire about the request and result desired;

Effective leaders negotiate win/win agreements

Even good leaders can be overcome by emotions or self will;

Decisions and commitments should not be made in the blind; leaders must weigh what they are willing to sacrifice, up front;

Good leaders follow through on their commitments, whatever the cost" MLB

VERSES:

Judges 10:17 – 12:7 + Gen 22, 1 Sam 12, John 3, Judges 11:1-5; :8; :11; :12; :27-:32; :34; :37-:40; 12:5-:7; 1 Samuel 12:11

QUESTIONS – [please cite the verses that support your answers]

1. Jephthah was called a valiant warrior when first mentioned. What do you think of when you hear someone described that way? Do you agree that Jephthah was a valiant warrior?

2. Which other judge of Israel was described as a 'valiant warrior?' What did the two have in common? What were key differences?

3. What occasioned Jephthah's recall from exile? (What circumstances; who called him; why?, etc.) What determined his response? Name a few results of his response.

4. Why did Jephthah choose to make a "blind" vow to God, instead of a vow to make a specific sacrifice? Was Jephthah's conditional vow [conditioned on victory] a right action? Was it a sin? Why?

5. Did Jephthah really comply with his vow, or did he violate it by waiting two months before complying with his sacrificial vow?

6. Have you ever made a conditional vow to God? If God met your condition, have you kept your vow? If God did not meet your condition, how did you respond?

7. How did Jephthah go about doing what he was called to do? What strength did he demonstrate? What weakness?

8. How do Jephthah's weaknesses help you look at the flaws in your own life?

9. Have you ever been called to head (or actively support) an effort or activity that, if successful, would aid a past adversary or opponent? Was a "greater good" involved? What did you do? Why? What was the result of your decision?

10. What is a shibboleth? Are they good or bad? Do you have any active in your life? Does the church have any?

Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho. We meet Rahab early in the Book of Joshua. After Moses dies, Joshua is God's new chosen leader of the Israelites. Joshua is to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. Joshua's first step is to send two spies into Jericho to be his eyes and ears. Joshua is sure he has God with him, and carefully moves forward to follow God's will. The spies found Rahab as they entered Jericho. Her house was part of the city wall. We know little of Rahab's life, but we do know that the people of Jericho were living in dread and terror of the Israelites. They had heard about the conquests of Israel. Rahab had not seen the reported events happen but contrary to all others in Jericho she put her faith in the God of the Israelites. She feared Him and believed that Israel's God was more powerful than all other gods (Jos. 2:11). She believed God would take care of her and her family too. This faith allowed her to act bravely. The king learned the spies were at the house of Rahab. The king sent word to Rahab to bring the men out. In order to divert the king's men she lied and told them that the spies had left the city. Rahab had hid the spies on her roof. She begged the spies for an oath of protection for the safety of her entire family and herself. The spies agreed to her terms saying "Our lives for yours even to death", Jos 2:14. She then let them down by a rope through the window and told them to go to the hills and hide three days until those searching for them had returned to Jericho. They directed her, "Behold when we come into this land you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down". They further directed that all her family was to be at her home. They were responsible for no one not gathered in her house. Both the Israelites and Rahab fulfilled their sides of the oath. When Jericho fell only one part of the wall remained, the house of Rahab. Acts 10:35 says "Anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him." The rest of the story is found in the Gospel of Matthew. Rahab stopped her sin of prostitution, married Salmon, reportedly one of the spies that went to Jericho, and became the great-great grandmother of David. 27 generations later Jesus Christ was born.

WEAKNESS:

She lived as a prostitute.

She lived in an idol worshiping and wicked city.

STRENGTH:

Savvy and unafraid to act counter to the culture around her.

Acted in faith for a God she didn't really know yet.

Took personal risk for promised safety for herself and family.

Obedient to God – not continuing to sin in the same way.

LESSONS:

God can use anyone from any walk of life.

Symbolically, Rahab was a foreshadowing of the Gentiles being brought into the Kingdom of God. Rahab was part of a pagan culture, which by her conversion was made a legitimate bride. The scarlet cord symbolizes the saving blood of Christ. And by openly displaying the cord, she openly confessed the redeeming blood of Christ.

Commitment to a true faith in God may necessitate setting priorities contrary to the world.

God enabled sinful persons to bring Christ to the world to provide salvation. It has been suggested that He did so to substantiate that God's grace alone brought the gift of eternal life and not anything done by human goodness or righteousness.

4) Key Verses: Joshua 2, Hebrews 11:31, Matthew 1:5-6, James 2:25, Hebrews 11:6. NASB

QUESTIONS:

1. How could God bless Rahab for lying?
2. What does the scarlet cord used to protect Rahab and her family represent?
3. What are we doing in our own work place that is acceptable in our culture, but not to God?
4. Why do you think Rahab was listed as a woman of great faith in Hebrews?

Samuel, Prophet and last Judge of Israel. Samuel tells the story of the relationship between him and Israel's first two Kings, Saul and David.

Born to Hannah, about 1100 BC, a previously infertile woman so grateful to God, she gives him back to God (1 Samuel 1:11). Raised by Eli the high priest, and working around the Temple at Shiloh, he grows up representing the people before God as a Priest and delivers God's messages to the people as a Prophet. Following a defeat by the Philistines, he rallies the nation to defeat the Philistines at Mizpah. In Samuel's farewell speech to the nation, he warns the people to give up idols and serve the true God. When Saul, the King he appointed, disobeys, God rejects Saul, Samuel goes to Bethlehem and anoints the young shepherd, David as King.

Finally Samuel is listed in The Hall of Faith in Hebrews 10:11.

STRENGTHS:

Samuel was a wise and upright leader as a Priest, Prophet and Judge, dispensing God's law impartially. Samuel loved God and obeyed without question. His first loyalty was to God regardless of what the people or king thought of him.

WEAKNESSES:

He raises his sons to be flawed priests (no better than Eli's sons), so void in character, they cannot carry on the leadership of Israel as Kings.

LESSONS WE LEARN FROM SAMUEL:

Obedience and respect are the best ways we can show God we love him. While the people of his time were destroyed by their own selfishness, Samuel stood out as a man of honor.

Like Samuel, we can avoid the corruption of this world if we place God first in our life.

Samuel showed that those whom God finds faithful in small things will be trusted with greater things.

The significance of what people accomplish is directly related to their relationship with God.

One's life is in God's providential care. 1 Samuel 9:16

The kind of person we are is more important than anything we might do.

God's timing is always perfect. 1 Samuel 9

God's saving plan is fulfilled in the ongoing day-to-day lives of human beings:

1. Hannah's difficult relationship with Peninnah leads to the birth of Samuel.

2. Saul's donkey search leads to encounter with Samuel.

3. David's chore of bringing food to his brothers leads him to see Goliath.

Ordinary situations are the most meaningful in human life-and it is in these that God works for good.

KEY VERSES:

1 Samuel 3 -Speak 3 times from the ceiling if you want me

1 Samuel 3:9,20 The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and let none of his words fall to the ground.

1 Samuel 8-10-God tells Samuel to give the people what they want

1 Samuel 13:14 - Keep the Lord's command

1 Samuel 15:22 -To obey is better than Sacrifice

1 Samuel 16:7-The Lord looks at the heart.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why would God allow a defeat with the Ark in front of the people?

2. Samuel was a priest, prophet and judge. How did he show his strengths in each role?

3. The Twelve Tribes of Israel were living in the promised land, why did they continue to face threats from their neighbors?

4. What example of the power of prayer do you find in 1 Samuel 1-7?

5. Why do you think Samuel is listed in Hebrews 10:11?

Barak - In chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews, the author includes Barak as representative of great faith, despite the fact that he is not the key character in the story. Deborah, the judge and prophetess, is generally acknowledged to be the main personality in this account of the great Israelite victory over the Canaanites. It is during the era of the Judges, after the Israelites entered the Promised Land and before they acquired a king, that Barak's story takes place. Israel was often idolatrous and rebellious to God, and consequently endured periods of oppression. At the time of Deborah, Israel had been twenty years under the harsh rule of Jabin, king of Canaan. We first meet Barak when Deborah summons him to recruit an army to fight Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite forces. The only background we are given about Barak is that he is the son of Abinoam and from the tribe of Naphtali.

Deborah tells Barak that God has commanded that he raise an army of 10,000 men and march to Mount Tabor. From there he is to engage the Canaanites mighty army and chariots in battle. Barak, however, has a condition for his obedience to this plan. He tells Deborah, "If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." Deborah answers that she will surely go, but as a result, God will not give the honor of the victory to Barak.

Before the battle, Deborah again reminds Barak that the Lord has "gone ahead of you" or, in essence, promised victory. When Barak's army advances, Sisera is routed and all his army destroyed. The beautiful song that Barak and Deborah sing after the battle is a story of the victory, but more importantly it is praise for the trustworthiness of their almighty God.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES:

While the outline of the characters in the story is sparse, Barak's actions and reactions tell us about him.

Barak never questions that Deborah has the authority to speak for the Lord.

He does not back away from the direction to gather 10,000 fighting men and engage a fearful army. We know the Canaanites were militarily superior because we are told several times of their 900 iron chariots.

Barak's requirement that Deborah accompany him indicates the high esteem in which she is held, and not any lack of courage on his part. Deborah is God's mouthpiece and Barak willingly accepts that the honor of defeating Sisera should be hers.

Barak's strength lies in his faith that Deborah speaks for God and God will deliver what he has promised.

LESSONS FROM THE CHARACTER:

Barak honored Deborah because of the position God had given her. He recognized that she was God's representative and, despite being a woman, he needed her.

We should also long for God to accompany us and reassure us and mobilize us for His purposes. Although we don't live in an age when God speaks through prophets and prophetesses to reveal His intentions for our lives, we have His Word and the stories of people who are just like us.

Barak was humble enough to ask, even require, that Deborah go with him. We should always be humble enough to ask Jesus for His will and His help to accomplish that will.

KEY VERSES:

Judges 4:8

Then 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."

Judges 4:14

And Deborah said to Barak, "Arise! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hands: behold, the Lord has gone out before you." So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him.

Judges 5:3

"Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I—to the Lord, I will sing I will sing praises to the Lord, the God of Israel."

Judges 5:31

"Thus let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in it's might."

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think this person is included in Hebrews 11?
2. Why would Barak be named instead of Deborah?
3. What does the study teach you about the blessings of obedience and the consequences of disobedience?
4. What aspect of this study most encouraged or challenged you and why.
5. What other women were in leadership roles in the Old Testament? What is significant about Deborah being a judge in Israel?

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