Lesson 21T – Hebrews 11:32-12:2 Jesus Perfects Our Faith
English Standard Version (ESV) Bethel Bible Resources

(32) 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 --- 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 ---

(35b) 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.

(39) 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.

(12:1) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight --- and sin which clings so closely --- and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Think on these things:

Match these people with events, from memory or by the scripture references –

A. Samson (Judges 15:14-17)	_**C**_ Imprisoned for prophesying unwanted news
B. Daniel (Daniel 6:16-24)	_**E**_ Hid godly prophets in a cave from ungodly rulers
C. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 37:4, 15-18)	_**J**_ Delivered from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace
D. Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:1-3, 20-22)	_**A**_ Defeated thousands with a donkey's jaw bone
E. Obadiah (1 Kings 18:3-4)	_**I**_ Enforced justice and God's standards upon Israel
F. Elijah (1 Kings 17-17-24)	_**G**_ Routed the Midianite army with just 300 soldiers
G. Gideon (Judges 7:1-8, 19-23)	_**B**_ Delivered from the (hungry) lions' den
H. David (1 Samuel 17:31-37, 48-50)	_**F**_ Raised the Zarephath widow's son
I. Samuel (1 Samuel 7:3-4, 13-17; 12:4-5)	_**D**_ Stoned in the court of Solomon's Temple
J. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego (Daniel 3:16-30)	_**H** Protecting his family's flock of sheep, he killed a lion and a bear. Used a slingshot to kill a giant

NOTE: Tradition holds that the prophet Isaiah was the one "sawn in two" (Hebrews 11:37). His father, Amoz, according to Jewish tradition, was the brother of King Amaziah, putting him into the royal family. The accounts of Isaiah's death are cited in Lives of the Prophets 1.1 and Martyrdom of Isaiah 5:1-14, related to persecutions by later King Manasseh (per ESV "Introduction to Isaiah" notes).

1) When we put together part of v.33 ("who through faith") and v.34 ("were made strong out of weakness"), we confirm an important teaching in the New Testament. Read 2 Corinthians 7:7-10. What is the reason God allows us to know our own weaknesses? Can you share a personal "weakness" where you have seen God work through you?

   God allows us to know our weaknesses so that we don't become conceited. He keeps us humble and lifts us up at a proper time (Jam. 4:6-10 and 1 Peter 5:6). Then personal response.

2) Based on the description in vs. 35-38, were the godly prophets able to live a life of comfort and normalcy, as most of our pastors in America do today? Were they well-respected and revered among the people as God's representatives & messengers? Especially from v.38, what would be a more apt description of their lifestyles?

   No, they were mostly rejected as outcasts because God's messages through them calling for righteous living offended most people. Yes, they were recognized as God's prophets, but they were unpopular, often treated badly and ostracized. V.38 seems a more apt description of them as "homeless" people today, barely-clothed wanderers in isolated, desert places, living in caves and outside in the elements.

3) What did Jesus say to His disciples (and us) in John 16:32-33?

   Jesus said that in this world we will often face troubles and tribulations as His disciples. But He also wanted us to have peace in the circumstances, encouraging us to "take heart" because He, Jesus, has overcome the world.

4) What reason is given for ALL the people listed in Hebrews 11 NOT to receive what God promised the world? See v.40.

   God has provided "something better" for all of us, and those who came before should NOT be made perfect before all of us receive it together. "Perfection" may refer to 'sinless selves in deathless resurrection bodies' (ESV verse notes).

5) Everything in chapter 11 was recorded for a purpose. There is a "cloud" of witnesses who have walked this faith journey and have passed on before us. According to 12:1-2 what should we set aside and what should we do now? What should we focus on to get us through the tough times?

   We need to set aside "every weight" that impacts and hinders our Christian walk. The next phrase refers to the 'particular sins' that we deal with individually --- the same old things that always seems to trip us up again and again. Both the hindrances (weights) and sins need to be addressed so that we may walk in holiness before the Lord. Additionally, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the provider and perfector of faith, who alone can bring us victory over these personal battles. We are to "run with endurance the race" God sets before US, and we benefit by understanding the issues each of the people in chapter 11 went through before they prevailed. --- Time permitting, maybe folks would open up about their personal struggles, the things that have been their 'hindrances' and the sins that are their Achilles' heel.

People and situations I want to pray for this week: