

Famous Men and Women in the Old Testament

A careful study of the Scriptures in the Old Testament reveals that one of their primary purposes is to teach us about the lives of the men and women who lived before us. The reason for this is made clear in the book of Ecclesiastes.

That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after. Eccl 1:9-11

Since there is "nothing new under the sun," "that which has been is what will be" and "that which is done is what will be done" everything faced by those recorded in Scripture will be faced again by you and I. If we do not learn from their failures then they will also become our failures. If we learn from their success and follow their conduct as a template or example then their success will become our success. This is the very point of I Cor. 10:1-12(don't do what they did or we will fail as they failed) and Heb 11:1-12:3(if their faith is ours, we will be victorious as they were victorious).

God has encouraged us to learn as much as we can about them. It will be the goal of this class to teach, make applications for today and train us in the necessary tools to make their lives as valuable as possible to us. There are at least five important reasons for us to study them.

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| 1. They are a Great Cloud of Witnesses. | 2. Written for our example and admonition. |
| 3. They were Written for Our Learning. | 4. They make us Wise unto Salvation. |
| 5. MOST IMPORTANT REASON: Our heritage and the beginnings of our elect race. | These are our fathers and mothers. |

1. A Great Cloud of Witnesses

The Eleventh Chapter of Hebrews has been called the great chapter of faith. But although the word *faith* carries itself through the entire chapter there is another word that also helps us see the importance of the lives of these men and women to us today. It is the word *witness*(noun)/*testimony*(verb).

"martureo... to be a witness, to bear witness, testify, i.e. to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, or that (so in the N. T.) he knows it because taught by direct revelation or inspiration... to prove or confirm by testimony. b. emphatically; to utter honorable testimony, give a good report... pass. ... to be borne (good) witness to, to be well reported of, to have (good) testimony borne to one, accredited, attested, of good report, approved..." (Thayer, p 390-391; 3140)

There are two witnesses in this section. The first is God who is bearing witness to the value of the conduct of these faithful men and women. He bore witness of them that they were "accredited, attested, of good report, approved." He did this at the time they lived by recording how He used them. He now testifies here in Hebrews their lives were the quality of life He wants each of us to imitate.

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it **the elders obtained a good testimony**. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which **he obtained witness** that he was righteous, God testifying of His gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken **he had this testimony**, that he pleased God.... 39 And all these, having **obtained a good testimony through faith**, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Heb 11:1-5; 39-40*

The second is the testimony they are now giving to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that it is all worth it! That any and all sacrifices that must be made to maintain our faith and trust in God are more than worth all the efforts we must put forth. These men and women are ready to "affirm

that one has seen or heard or experienced.”

12 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, Heb 12:1

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| Abel | 11:4 |
| Enoch | 11:5 |
| Noah | 11:7 |
| Abraham & Sarah | 11:8 |
| Isaac & Jacob | 11:9, 20 |
| Joseph | 11:22 |
| Amram & Jochebed | 11:23 |

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| Moses | 11:24 |
| Joshua & Israel | 11:30 |
| Rahab | 11:31 |
| Gideon | 11:32 |
| Barak | 11:32 |
| Samson | 11:32 |
| Jephthah | 11:32 |

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| David | 11:32 |
| Samuel | 11:32 |
| the Prophets | 11:32 |
| Daniel | 11:33 |
| Shadrach/Meschach & Abednego | 11:34 |
| Multitudes | 11:33-38 |

The more we can learn about these people the more powerful their testimony will become and the clearer we will see why God testified about them. These lives can change our lives. They can motivate us and convict us. They can reprove and rebuke us. They can exhort and admonish us. They can provoke us to love and good works. How many of these people do we know well? How often are our decisions modified or plans changed because their lives help us see what we must do to be successful and victorious?

2. Written for our Example and Admonition

There are so many similarities between Israel leaving Egypt and journeying to the promised land and our leaving the world and journeying toward the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit used their lives as an example for our own. For the most part the testimony is negative with God showing us through their own mistakes what we can't do to avoid their fate. He began with the similarity of how the journey began and unfolded.

There are several parallels between how Israel left Egypt and how we leave the world. They were *baptized into Moses* as we were *baptized into Christ*. They “*all ate the same spiritual food,*” (manna) “*and all drank the same spiritual drink*” (water miraculously provided) in the same way we eat a spiritual food (unleavened bread) and a spiritual drink (fruit of the vine) (1Cor 10:1-4; 16-17; 11:20-34). So what they did is what we do, so “*these things became our examples,*” and “*all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition*” (1Cor 10:6,11). Their journey to the promised land began as ours. Their relationship with God was similar to ours and their temptations are our temptations.

For us today, “*by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,*” while for them they were “*all baptized into Moses.*” (1 Cor 12:13; 10:1-2). What did Israel do in passing through the Red Sea with water piled up on both sides and a cloud covering them that so closely imitated what sinners do in baptism that Paul could call their path through the sea a baptism?

While in Egypt, “*The Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor: and they made their lives bitter with hard service*” (Ex 1:13-14). This bondage was so harsh, “*the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God*” then “*God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob*” (Ex 2:23-24). Pharaoh refused to let them go until the tenth plague, but even after leaving Egypt they were not yet free: “*Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us*” (Ex 14:5). As long as Israel was on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea they were not safe. “*The Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea. As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD*” (Ex 14:9-10).

God saved them as “*the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*” Then when “*the waters returned*

and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. In passing through the Red Sea and “being baptized into Moses,” “the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians.” (Ex 14:22, 28, 30).

Before this “baptism” they were still in bondage and under Pharaoh’s power. After their “baptism,” Pharaoh and his army were destroyed and they were saved. The similarities of this type and antitype of baptism:

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| We were buried with Jesus in our “ <i>baptism into Christ</i> .” | Rom. 6:4 |
| They were buried with Moses in their “ <i>baptism into Moses</i> ” | 1Cor 10:1-2 |
| After “ <i>baptism into Moses</i> ” no longer slaves to Egypt. | Ex 14:22, 28 |
| After “ <i>baptism into Christ</i> ” no longer slaves of sin. | Rom 6:6 |
| After “ <i>baptism into Moses</i> ” under the dominion of God through Moses. | |
| After “ <i>baptism into Christ</i> ” under the dominion of God through Christ. | |

Those who refused to pass through the sea perished by Pharaoh’s army and those who refused to enter the ark perished by the flood. Do we see the point? Those who refuse to be baptized will perish in their sins! The children of Israel have many parallels to us today. They were baptized just as we are baptized. They were baptized to Moses when they went through the Red sea.

But in spite of all the blessings the “baptism unto Moses” gave them, their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. The things they did that led to their destruction are critically important. The knowledge gleaned by knowing their lives could spare us what destroyed them. But this can only happen if we know their lives and remember them during the course of each day. Toward this end all negative examples God has revealed must be learned. If we do not know them we can’t use them as examples and they will not admonish us.

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| All Israel in the days of Moses | Ex. - Deut. |
| 10 Spies / Joshua & Calab | Num 13-14 |
| Korah & Balaam | Jude 11 |
| Nadab & Abihu | Num 10:1-2 |
| Aaron & Miriam | Num 11 |
| Jannes & Jambres | 2 Tim 3:8 |
| Pharaoh | Rom 9:15-18 |

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| Israel’s unfaithfulness: |
| lust after evil things |
| sexual immorality |
| idolaters |
| tempt Christ |
| Complain |

But not all the examples are negative. James wanted us to learn about the lives of all the prophets and Job so we can learn from their example and be strengthened.

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. Jas 5:10-11

So the OT prophets From Genesis (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham) to Malachi are examples we must learn and have instant recall if they are to do the work God intended for them to do for us.

3. Written for Our Learning

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Rom 15:4-5

The term “whatsoever” helps us see the fulness of the importance of all that is written in the Old Covenant. Not for law and obedience but for learning, so we can learn patience and comfort and might have hope.

“*hosos* ... a relative adjective ... of time (as long as): ...b. of abundance and multitude; how many, as

many as; how much, as much as:... (A. V. often *whatsoever*), ... Romans 15:4..." (Thayer 3745)

There are 37 books in the Old Testament. They have been arranged into five categories with either five or twelve books in each:

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| Five | Books of Law, |
| Twelve | Books of History, |
| Five | Books of Poetry, |

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| Five | Books of the Major Prophets |
| Twelve | Books of the Minor Prophets. |

All of these "*were written aforetime*." If we imagine these books as the boundaries of a lake, then all that is written within them is like the surface of the water within that boundary. This relative adjective takes all the things in all these books, draws a circle around all of them and expresses everything written in them as within the boundary of that circle. Nothing is overlooked, no exceptions. From the Genesis account of creation and sin in the garden to the final words of Malachi. From Cain and Abel to Nadab and Abihu along with Balaam's talking donkey. They are all written for our learning. Nothing superfluous or unimportant. Even the distinctions of days and meats is still for our learning. All the prophecies and their teachings are for our learning. It is all for our learning. Look at Hebrews and Galatians and think of how much what was written aforetime has great importance to our understanding of the New Covenant.

Again, Hebrews eleven teaches that all the characters in these things written aforetime are a great cloud of witnesses we need to learn. The same is true of 1Cor 10 where the negative side of these characters are also discussed. We have much to learn from Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel; Noah; Abraham; Isaac; Jacob; Joseph; Moses. We learn from Nadab and Abihu; Saul; David; Solomon. We learn things from their lives that keep us from making the same mistakes. We learn from the law, we see the New Testament truths revealed and expounded upon there. We learn from prophecy. We learn that our faith has great basis and foundation. Many things are learned from a careful reading and meditation of the Old Testament scriptures.

Studying, learning, and having good recall of these Scriptures has the ability to increase our patience or endurance,.

"hupomone... 1. steadfastness, constancy, endurance... in the N. T. the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings... 2. a patient, steadfast waiting for... 3. a patient enduring, sustaining..." (Thayer, p. 644; 5281)

While Paul and James both reveal that the primary way that this "*patient steadfast waiting for*" is developed is through our own personal trials, Paul gives another here.

And not only so, but we also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh stedfastness; 4 and stedfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope: Rom 5:3-4

Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; 3 Knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. 4 And let patience have (its) perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

As we read their lives we are stirred by their own patience and seek to emulate it.

Take, brethren, for an example of suffering and of patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we call them blessed that endured: ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful. Jas 5:10-11

A study of these Scriptures helps us see that all who serve God suffer persecution, trials and sorrows. We see through their example that it can be done. Others have suffered far worse than we and that knowledge can help when we are struggling. We can remain under them and be victorious. The Scriptures will help us.

Another great value behind the Old Testament scriptures revolves around the comfort they bring. As one looks carefully at the definition of this word, there is some difference of meaning which even the translators have taken into account. While some translations(ASV KJV NKJV) have *comfort* and others(ESV NASB) *encouragement*. When Greek speaking people used this word they were expressing they were right up next to them conveying an important message. While this close

depending upon the need, it conveyed the emotion of entreaty, exhortation, encouragement or consolation and comfort.

“paraklesis... (parakaleo, q.v.)... 1. prop. a calling near, summons,... 2. imploration, supplication, entreaty... 3. exhortation, admonition, encouragement... 4. consolation, comfort solace... 5. univ. persuasive discourse, stirring address, --instructive, admonitory, consolatory; powerful hortatory discourse...” (Thayer, p. 483; 3874)

The Scriptures do all of these things. They draw us right up next to God’s side and allow him to implore, encourage, console, persuade, and comfort. Which one English word can convey all this? The things written aforetime become a mentor, a comforting and encouraging friend to help us. They will bring us encouragement, admonition, beseeching and begging necessary to motivate us in any dire situation that we might be called upon to pass through in life. We can be stirred by David, by Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, We can be warned by Saul and Jeroboam. We can be comforted by Job and Jeremiah. Most any need that comes up in our life can be met by one or another man or event found in the Old Testament.

Learning the things written aforetime, gaining perseverance and comfort and encouragement leads us to have this hope. Hope is a compound emotion made up of two essential things. First, it must be based upon something we want to happen, something we are looking forward to and will bring us great joy. Thus it is something we want and desire very deeply. Second, it must be something that can be expected.

“elpis... expectation, hope; i.e expectation whether good or ill; 1. rarely in a bad sense, expectation of evil, fear;... 2. much more freq. in the classics, and always in the N. T. , in a good sense: expectation of good, hope; and in the Christian sense, joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation...” (Thayer, p. 205-206; 1680)

Every Christian has the former. It is the latter that brings such great difficulty with hope. Everyone wants to be saved and receive eternal life. But with all the troubles, trials and sins, it is sometimes very difficult to believe that we will actually receive it. So it is the “*confident expectation*” element of our hope that many find difficult. This is one of those areas with the things written aforetime shine most brightly. When we see the mercy and compassion of God toward Israel even when they were wicked adulterers, idolaters and murderers, we begin to grasp how deep God’s love and mercy can be. David’s sin with Bathsheba gives hope to all who struggle with temptation and sin. Samson gives hope to those who have fallen through their own folly but want to do better. Moses gives hope that even the most public of sins can be forgiven. Rahab that regardless of how wicked and low we have gone, we can rise above it. On and on we go. There is so much the Old Covenant can do to give hope. All we must do is learn it and be ready to apply it both to ourselves and to others.

When David committed adultery and murder, he sought to hide it. He would have greatly preferred that these lapses in his life be forgotten, but thousands who have sinned in similar ways have received hope from God’s forgiveness of this man. Job spoke in such a way that God told him he had “*condemned him that he might be justified*”. Yet God forgave and blessed him. Noah got drunk, Abraham lied, Sarah laughed, Moses failed to sanctify God, on and on it goes. Brethren there is hope in the Old Testament. Foolish are we indeed when we fail to find it and pass our days on the earth in worry and concern over things that could be resolved in an instant if we would but allow that Old Covenant to become our friend and guide.

4. Make Us Wise unto Salvation

The Old Covenant Scriptures are those Timothy was taught from childhood. Paul had taken up that education and completed it. These Scriptures will give us the wisdom to receive our salvation. All Scripture is profitable and all the characters recorded in the Scriptures will not only make us wise unto salvation, but since they are given by inspiration of God, they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. We never know what can be learned in any obscure passage of Scripture. God’s promise is that with the knowledge of all Scripture, the man of God will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:14-17

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| God's testimonies become our counselor: | <u>Ps 119:24;</u> |
| They make one wiser than their enemies: | <u>Ps 119:98</u> |
| Give more understanding than all teachers | <u>Ps 119:99</u> |
| Understand more than the ancients | <u>Ps 119:100</u> |
| A lamp to one's feet and light to one's path | <u>Ps 119:105</u> |

Jesus used Moses at the burning bush to prove the resurrection. He also used the queen of Sheba, the men of Sodom, Solomon, David and the showbread and many other characters to illustrate and elaborate on important points. Points we may not fully understand until all the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation.

5. MOST IMPORTANT REASON:

These are our fathers, our heritage, the beginnings of our elect race. We are now strangers, sojourners and pilgrims. Just like our father Abraham and the more we understand about his life and the lives of his other children, the better prepared we will be to deal with it in our own lives.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 1 Pet 1:1

And if ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear: 1 Pet 1:17

Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lust, which war against the soul; 1 Pet 2:11

By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a (land) not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Heb 11:9-10

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Heb 11:13

It is of the highest importance that each of us see ourselves in this light at all times that we understand that we are not of this world and that we will never be able to fit in.

Added to this is the greatness of what we have become a part of. We are now working out God's eternal purpose in the church continuing the great purpose that began with Abraham and continues with us his children.

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh — who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands — 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ... 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, Eph 2:11-13; 19-20

Paul made it clear to the Romans that what Israel had before Christ's death we still have today. For we were grafted in to the same root and lump as they.

4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. Rom 9:4-5

For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. Rom 11:16-18

As we get to each character, we will bring out one or more of these points. It is an enriching study that we should through ourselves into with all our heart.