



The Good News

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Learning from the Past

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In Rom. 15:4 Paul writes, *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”* The fact that we have the books of the Old Testament intact, despite the many thousands of years since their writing, speaks to God’s power in preserving the words that He wants us to know. It is clear that God wants us to read the Old Scriptures, to find within them lessons that we can apply to our lives and use them to also warn each other of the dangers and mistakes that people have made in the past. George Santayana once wrote, *“Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”* (“Life of Reason”, 1905) There are many lessons to be learned from the past that are recorded in the Old Scriptures, both from those who made mistakes and were not always faithful to God and from those who obediently followed after God in faith. It is important that we consider the different ways to find lessons in the lives of those that have been recorded, so that we may never repeat the mistakes of the past, and always repeat the formula for success among those that were faithful. Let us consider only three of the many ways we can learn from the past:

Consider the character: We have an enormous multitude of examples scattered throughout the Old Testament that provide details and insights into the character of certain individuals. An excellent example of this is the difference between King Saul and King David. King Saul made a few mistakes early in his reign, mistakes that, to the human mind, might not be considered very serious, such as offering sacrifices in Samuel’s place. Yet, after the unlawful sacrifices by Saul, God tells Saul through Samuel that the kingdom was to be taken away and given to a man

“after God’s own heart”. We see that this man, David, committed sins that, again to our minds, might be considered vastly worse in degree by sleeping with another man’s wife and then arranging the death of the husband. Yet, there is a difference between the two: the character of Saul was one that considered himself above everyone else, even the Law. As a result, he did not seek to always follow the commands of God. David, on the other hand, always sought to be pleasing to the Lord, even if he wasn’t always perfect.

Consider the influence: Throughout the Old Scriptures, we have recorded for us individuals who were in positions of influence and used it for good or bad. For example, Esther was a woman who, through God’s providence, came to a position of great influence as queen and used that influence to help save the Jewish nation. On the flip side, we have the example of Aaron who had an opportunity to use his influence to stop the people from seeking the leadership of an idol and instead joined with the people and helped create the idol, thus becoming a bad influence. We also have examples of people who, simply by their actions, became influences of good upon others, such as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego who refused to bow to King Nebuchadnezzar’s idol and, by way of God’s saving power, ultimately caused the king to identify Jehovah as God.

Consider the faith: Perhaps the most obvious and notable of lessons to be learned from the Old Scriptures are the examples of faith or, at times, the lack of faith in the people of God. With reference to the people of faith in Hebrews 11, the Hebrew writer points out that all of these are to be considered a “great cloud of witness” (Heb. 12:1) for us that we can use to motivate us to be better servants of God.

Therefore, as we seek out the New Scriptures authored by Christ, by which we obtain salvation and to which we must submit, let us also remember what has happened before and, in doing so, let us make ourselves stronger with the learning.