
THE STUFF OF HEROES

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

History lessons bore most students—especially when teachers simply list long-ago dates and names of far off places that have little relevance to today’s world. Who really cares when (or where) the Crimean War pitted an Anglo-French alliance against Tsarist forces, or why the famed “*Charge of the Light Brigade*” ended so disastrously? Basically, no one!

But when a seasoned river-guide relates the story of a catastrophic spill from a raft that took place years ago when white-water thrill-seekers steamed too close to the out-cropping on the south side of the river, we pay attention—especially when we find ourselves on the south side of the river near that very finger of stone jutting out from the grey granite! The Bible has lots and lots of such historical *information*...

In addition to being a precise narration that chronicles God’s dealings with His people—both as a nation and as individuals—the Old Testament provides us with profound insights into the goings-on in the spiritual dimension. The stories it contains are “*written for our instruction*” (1 Corinthians 10:11) to develop and mature us as children of God. We are invited to read the events not merely to glean an accurate glimpse of history, but to extract principles and understandings about spiritual matters and the invisible realm.

Since the history of God’s people is so vast, and most of it had to be left out of the Bible record, we have to ask ourselves why the stories we read were included in the anthology God edited! May I suggest that His aim was to give us both a natural and spiritual history from which to learn? The Books of the Old Testament relate instructive episodes of times and people past, and the stories contain lots and lots of guidance for us in the 21st Century.

There are hundreds of such Bible passages: historically and literally accurate; and, spiritually instructive! For instance, the people of God were delivered from Egypt by the hand of Moses; that is history. But the choices Moses made that enabled him to become a deliverer (i.e., forsaking worldly reward-systems), and the lessons he had to learn along the way (i.e., the inadequacy of taking matters into his own hands) serve as excellent training for our own journey and ministry.

Not only does the Old Testament provide us with historical parallels to our life-experience, it also lays out the spiritual laws that govern the cosmos, both in the heavens and the earth. Just as the physical universe operates according to basic principles (like gravity), so, too, does the spiritual dimension. And some tenets administrate both realms! For instance, “*What we sow, we will reap.*” In the natural arena, when we plant an orange seed, an orange tree eventually emerges from the soil; in the invisible realm, it explains why we receive when we give—or why unforgiveness toward others produces such misery for us.

And finally, we can discover much about the heart of God by seeing the way He interacted with His people long ago. God names Himself, “I AM,” the ever-present, ever-the-same, now-as-always One; He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and how He has been, is how He is going to be. “*Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8). What has been true about the Lord will continue to be true in the future, so when we read about the ways in which He dealt with His people in the past, we can see patterns that repeat themselves today.

We’re going to look at two interesting passages—one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament—to see if we can learn about *the stuff of heroes*.

GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Bible is not a fanciful, mythological rendering of super-humans; instead, it is like a reality show—providing a glimpse of people like us (in the New Testament) responding to Jesus’ words and deeds. The Gospels provide us with a *camera eye view* of the people/events in Jesus’ life from four points of view.

Just as four children who are raised in the same home have different personalities, so the Gospel writers relay the essential life-message of Jesus Christ in four profoundly distinct narratives.

Four Different Gospel Narratives

Matthew, who was radically converted (later in life) from a hopelessly irreligious lifestyle, keeps reminding us that we can be changed just as profoundly as he was; *Mark* was a fiery and impetuous member of the “next” generation in his day, and he gives us the best action narrative; overcome by the simple reality that God loved him; *John* always highlights God’s love in the person of a kind, mercy-eyed Savior.

Luke, on the other hand, composes an analytical letter to appeal to irreligious people throughout the wider Roman Empire. Luke was exposed to ideas and peoples beyond the narrow confines of historic Israel, so his account emphasizes the widespread appeal of Jesus’ words, and the provision available to all people—Jews and Gentiles—to have their sins forgiven. Being trained in the

sciences, Luke “investigated everything carefully from the beginning,” and he records things in “consecutive order” so that we can “know the exact truth” about Jesus for ourselves.

Luke fills his pages with a huge cast of supporting characters and interesting sub-plots surrounding Jesus’ life (like the interaction between Elizabeth and Mary while both are pregnant). Each person has a personality and a distinct part in the unfolding drama. Dr. Luke creates an incredible mosaic of 1st century personalities and choices they make about God’s working in their midst. We can see ourselves in Luke’s gospel-mirror! How people respond to Jesus then reflects our responses over 2000 years later...

According to Luke, “Heroes are made of ordinary stuff!”

EZRA AND ZECHARIAH

The Book of Ezra covers portions of Jerusalem’s history, dealing with the reconstruction of the *temple in Jerusalem*, after the Babylonians had sacked the city and most of its inhabitants were sent into exile. Nearly 70 years later, after the Babylonian Empire gave way to the Persian Empire, several of the exiles returned to Jerusalem in an attempt to restore worship in the *temple*. It is a perfect picture of our spirits being renewed when we receive Jesus as our Savior, and His Spirit comes to dwell in our heart. The Book of Zechariah, though positioned near the end of the Old Testament, actually takes place during the *temple* reconstruction, and it contains several prophecies upon which God’s people relied—and, thereby, were able to complete the task God had given them.

These two books give us compelling insight into the process by which ordinary people become spiritual heroes: “*Heroes see a temple in a string!*”

“For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—these are the eyes of the Lord which range to and fro throughout the earth.” ~Zechariah 4:10