

# Benefiting From Bible Characters



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

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Learn the importance of studying Bible characters

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## Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

**Study Number:** DGW11

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**About the author:** My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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**My plea:** It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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# Benefiting From Bible Characters

The Bible contains a story. And, in this story, there is a central storyline. This main storyline is one of salvation. The story begins with the perfect creation of the world and mankind. The story quickly shifts to the introduction of sin into the world (with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden). From that point forward, the story looks forward to the Savior who would come into the world and redeem mankind from his sin. Then, the Savior (Jesus Christ) comes and lives on the earth, offering His life as a ransom sacrifice. Finally, after the Savior ascends into Heaven, the story focuses on preparing for the Savior's final coming and the end of the world.

As the more than 40 human authors reveal this God-given story, we read about various "characters" who are woven into the Bible story. These individuals were real-life characters who each had an impact on the story in some way. Some of them were faithful to God and helped Him accomplish His purposes. Some of them were unfaithful to God and tried to overthrow or rebel against His purposes.

Yet, regardless of whether they were good or evil, one benefit of studying the Bible story is to learn lessons from these individuals. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." So, there are real, living, and powerful examples of men and women who have lived life on this earth – providing us with examples that will help us live our lives for the Lord!

Therefore, not only does the Bible contain instructions and commandments that (if followed) will make us pleasing to God; but, the Bible also contains powerful examples of men and women who have either obeyed or disobeyed God. So, throughout the Bible story, we observe many "case studies" that will help us live life in a way that pleases to God – learning from both examples of those who were pleasing to God and those who were displeasing to God! We have, in the Bible, hundreds of individual "case studies" of people in various circumstances, with various backgrounds, with various strengths, with various weakness, with various abilities, with various opportunities, etc. – who are all making various choices regarding whether to follow the Lord or not!

In this lesson, we want to observe how we can benefit from a study of Bible characters. I would like us to observe some examples in the Bible when individuals referenced other Bible characters and stories. I would also like us to make our own applications regarding the use of Bible characters. Throughout this study, we will be observing four specific ways in which Bible characters can be used, according to Scripture.

## **To Illustrate Bible Truths**

The Bible is composed of many truths that we need to accept and apply to our lives in order to please God. Now, it is enough if God says a thing. However, when there is a story that is associated with it to demonstrate the point, it often becomes more memorable and is better understood. So, Bible writers (particularly New Testament writers) would appeal to Bible stories in connection with the points they were making.

## *Romans 4*

Romans chapters 1 through 3 have been demonstrating the fact that all men (both Jews and Gentiles) have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Now, in Romans 4, Paul is demonstrating that all people (both Jews and Gentiles) can be justified by faith in God – apart from the works of the Old Law (i.e. without circumcision). This truth was stated in Romans 3:26: “to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

So, to illustrate this truth about justification by faith in Jesus Christ, Paul appeals to the example of Abraham (a man of faith – and one who had great credibility with the Jews). And, he points out that Abraham was justified by faith – and not by his own meritorious works (i.e. not by circumcision).

Though you can read the entirety of Romans 4, consider just a couple passages from this chapter. Verses 1-4 say, “What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.”

Then, consider verses 9-12 (after stating the blessedness of the man to whom God “imputes righteousness apart from works,” verse 6): “Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.”

Again, as Paul attempts to get these Jewish and Gentile Christians to understand that salvation is available to everyone, regardless of nationality, through faith in Christ Jesus, this would have been a powerful point! Particularly, this would have been a great help to Jewish Christians to recognize that it was not the physical practice of circumcision that made them acceptable to God; but, that they must have faith in Jesus Christ!

## *James 2:21-25*

In the larger context of this passage (James 2:14-26), James is writing to identify the importance and necessity of works (works of obedience) for salvation. This is contrary to the ideas about salvation being by “faith only.” In fact, James teaches that faith without these works of obedience is a dead faith – and implies that a dead faith is unable to save!

Now, these statements of fact are strong enough; but, James demonstrates the foolishness of faith that does not have works by appealing to the examples of Abraham and Rahab in James 2:21-25: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?”

Both of these Old Testament examples demonstrate that individuals are not counted righteous in the sight of God only by believing in Him. Instead, they demonstrate faith in action (which is the kind of true faith spoken of in Romans 4). Both of these individuals had such confidence in God that they were willing to take certain actions which demonstrated that confidence! Abraham had the necessary works of obedience which demonstrated his faith when he was willing to offer his only son on the altar (as God had commanded him). Then, Rahab also had faith which compelled her to help the spies who had been sent into Jericho. Now, please

understand that James is talking about works of obedience (which are necessary for salvation), while Paul (in Romans 4) was talking about meritorious works (works to earn your own salvation) – particularly works of the Old Law. These two passages do *not* contradict each other.

Therefore, both of these individuals demonstrate the truth that faith without works is dead (as James teaches in this section).

#### *James 5:13-18*

In James 5:13-18, James teaches about the great power of prayer – and the place that it has in Christians praying for one another. Now, the statements that James makes about prayer are wonderful and encouraging. However, please notice how James uses a character from the Old Testament as a “case study” about the power of prayer.

James 5:13-18 says, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”

So, James states that the “effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Then, he appeals to the example of Elijah, who (James states) was a righteous man. Specifically, James references the power of Elijah’s prayer that it would not rain – and says that it did not rain for three years and six months! Then, James references the power of Elijah’s prayer that it would rain – and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced fruit! You can read 1 Kings 17-18 for more information on this account.

Therefore, this Old Testament example powerfully demonstrates the truth that prayer is truly

effective and accomplishes much when there is a righteous individual who is praying!

#### *1 Peter 3:5-6*

In the context of this passage, Peter is writing concerning the God-given responsibilities Christian women have to their husbands (both to Christian and non-Christian husbands). Specifically, he instructs that women be submissive to their husbands, for their conduct to be chaste, and for their beauty to be the inward beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. In fact, he even demonstrates how that the unbelieving husbands of these Christian women (who will conduct themselves in this way) may even be won to the Lord without a word being said!

Now, Peter demonstrates that this is the sort of conduct God wants from women by appealing to the “holy women” and Sarah. Notice 1 Peter 3:5-6: “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.”

These women had God’s approval in their conduct toward their husbands. So, this is a powerful illustration to demonstrate the kind of submissiveness and purity that God expects from Christian women today.

#### *1 Peter 3:18-22*

As Peter is making a larger point about the fact that Jesus Christ has suffered and died so that we could be saved from our sins (1 Peter 3:18-22), Peter gives us specific information about baptism. In 1 Peter 3:21, he states that baptism “now saves us.”

Now, Peter could just make the statement that baptism now saves us. However, he illustrates this by discussing that many who are now “in prison” had been preached to during the days of Noah; but, were disobedient. In contrast to those who had been disobedient and destroyed, Noah and his family were saved through water.

Consider 1 Peter 3:18-22: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly

were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

So, many perished for their disobedience. However, eight souls were “saved through water.” Likewise, Peter says, baptism “now saves us.” So, if we will listen to God and be baptized, we can be saved from the wrath of God. This truth is powerfully demonstrated through this Old Testament story of Noah and the flood.

*1 John 3:10-15*

The Bible contains many instructions to love. In fact, Christians are taught to love all men – their earthly family members, their neighbors, their Christian brethren, and even their enemies.

Specifically, in 1 John 3:10-15, John discusses the responsibility of Christians to love one another – and appeals to the example of Cain (who demonstrated his hatred toward his brother, Abel). “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

Certainly no Christian would want to be classified alongside Cain! Cain was a murderer. He was someone who truly hated his brother. However, John demonstrates the truth that those who do not love their brethren are just as sinful as Cain, saying

that they are murderers and that they (because they are murderers, like Cain) will not have eternal life!

*Applications*

Certainly, this has just been an overview of each of these passages. However, please reflect on how all of the truths that are established in these passages can be made more firm in our minds because of the illustrations that are given of past Bible characters! However, these are not the only truths that can be made more firm by considering Bible characters. As we study the Bible, we can have many truths established by looking to Bible characters.

**To Warn**

Not only can Bible characters be used to illustrate Bible truths; but, they can also be used to give warnings to those who are living. In fact, it is absolutely foolish if we refuse to learn lessons from those who have lived before us!

*Matthew 24:37-39*

In context, Matthew 24:36-51 teaches about Jesus' impending return, saying that the time of His coming is unknown to anyone on earth. Therefore, Jesus instructs that each individual make the proper preparations for His coming – and remain ready at all times!

Now, this warning is very powerful – in and of itself. However, Jesus appeals to an Old Testament example to demonstrate His point about preparedness. Matthew 24:37-39 says, “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

Just as Jesus Christ's coming will catch many unprepared, the flood (in Noah's day) also caught many unprepared. During the time leading up to the flood – even though the people were being warned, they simply refused to heed the warnings and continued living for their own indulgences. Then, when the time of the flood came, all of those who were unprepared were destroyed.

Again, Jesus uses this powerful example from the Old Testament Scriptures to warn those who are living on the earth to make preparations for His return. He warns us all (even today) that He is coming at a time that is unknown to us – and that those who are caught unprepared for His coming will be eternally punished in Hell fire!

#### *1 Corinthians 10:1-11*

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is warning Christians (those who have taken part in God's goodness) to "take heed" so that they do not fall away from God's grace (verse 12) – particularly in connection with idolatry. In fact, Paul promises that there is a way of escape that has been provided from all temptation, emphasizing that others have experienced the same kinds of temptation we experience and that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our abilities to endure (verse 13).

However, please notice how Paul appeals to the example of the Israelites in order to warn Christians about turning away from God. 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 says, "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.' Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

So, Paul says that many of the Israelites (who were God's chosen people in Old Testament times) had partaken of the goodness of God. However,

many of them chose to turn away from God – and they all experienced consequences when this occurred. Each one of the examples Paul mentions (which we'll not discuss in detail) would bring to mind a different story from the Old Testament Scriptures. Many, Paul says, died in the wilderness (before entering the land of Canaan) because of their rebellion against God. Some committed fornication and were destroyed. Some tested God and were destroyed. Some complained and were destroyed.

Therefore, in verse 11, Paul specifically states that these things all happened as examples for us – so that we might be admonished not to rebel against God and experience such destruction!

#### *2 Peter 2:4-11*

2 Peter chapter 2 begins with a warning about false teachers (in verses 1-3). Peter warns that there will be many false teachers – just as there have been false prophets before. These false teachers will deceive the hearts of many and lead them to eternal destruction.

In this context, Peter now teaches the ability of God to deliver the godly as well as His ability to punish the wicked. Consider 2 Peter 2:4-11: "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) — then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord."

Now, consider that Peter provides a number of examples to substantiate his claim. He gives encouragement of how God delivered Noah and Lot from their situations. However, he also warns that God will punish the wicked by giving the examples of angels who sinned, the ancient world of the ungodly during the time of Noah, and the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Therefore, as you consider Peter's warning about false teachers, consider yourself warned that those who rebel against the ways of God will be punished by the Almighty God – who was able to punish those mentioned in this text!

### *Applications*

The specific warnings given in these passages need to be applied today. However, these are not the only warnings that we can take from examples of Bible characters. There are many warnings that can be observed through studying the lives (especially) of those who were not faithful to God. We must choose the path of wisdom and learn the lessons of disobedience from such people!

### **To Encourage**

Not only can Bible characters be used to illustrate Bible truths and to warn; but, they can also be used to encourage us to live faithful lives!

### *Hebrews 11*

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is often called the "Faith Hall of Fame" because of all the men and women who are identified in the chapter as living faithful lives to God. In context, Hebrews 10 has just warned Christians about falling away from serving God. Chapter 11, then, provides examples of faith that they should have imitated.

This chapter demonstrates how many individuals put their complete faith/trust in God and were obedient to whatever He instructed of them. Abel offered an acceptable offering to God by faith (vs. 4). Noah moved with godly fear and prepared an ark by faith (vs. 7). Abraham acted on the promises of God and left his homeland by faith (vs. 8-12). Abraham offered his only son on the altar by faith (vs. 17-19). Joseph gave specific instructions concerning his bones by faith (vs. 22). Moses refused to be counted as an Egyptian and willingly suffered

with God's people by faith (vs. 24-28). The Israelites passed through the Red Sea by faith (vs. 29). The walls around the city of Jericho fell after the Israelites had encircled them by faith (vs. 30). Others "through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (vs. 33-34). Still others were sawn in two, tormented, tortured, imprisoned, stoned, killed with the sword, etc., etc., etc. by faith (vs. 35-38).

Now after all of these great examples of faith, consider what is said in Hebrews 12:1-2: "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, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The statement made in verse 1 applies to the examples that were given in chapter 11. The word "witnesses" has reference to spectators at an athletic competition. Specifically, we are the ones who are competing in this athletic event. We are the ones who are trying to win the "race" of life for God. These witnesses/spectators are in the crowd, cheering us on to victory. So, as we run the race of faith today, we can look around us and see the great faith of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, etc., etc., etc. Therefore, we can gain great encouragement from them and press on to live faithful lives ourselves! Then, we look to the ultimate Bible character – Jesus Christ, who has made our victory possible!

### *1 Peter 2:21-25*

In the larger context of this passage (1 Peter 2:18-25), Peter gives instructions to those who are servants. Specifically, he instructs them to "be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh" (vs. 18). He goes on to describe how that, even though they may be beaten unjustly, they need to continue to be



submissive to their masters and be obedient to the commandments of God.

As Peter gives them these unpleasant instructions, he points them to the example of Jesus' suffering (who is the perfect example)! 1 Peter 2:21-25 says, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

So, as these individuals were facing unpleasant and unjust consequences for doing what was right, Peter encourages them by the example of Jesus Christ! After all, He suffered and died unjustly – having committed absolutely no wrong during His life! Surely, with such a great example, these Christians could be encouraged to suffer whatever would be associated with living a faithful Christian life!

#### *Applications*

These specific examples ought to serve as an encouragement to us today. However, these are not the only examples we can take from the Bible to encourage us. There are many examples throughout the Scriptures that we can observe in our study that will encourage us to live for the Lord!

#### **To Learn From Examples**

Not only can Bible characters be used to illustrate Bible truths, to warn, and to encourage; but, they can generally be used to learn from their examples – whether positive examples of faithful living or negative examples of wicked living.

#### *Romans 15:4*

While it is certainly true that we live under Christ's new and better covenant today (and we do not live under the Old Testament Law), it is also true that we can benefit a great deal from the things which were written before (in the Old Testament). Romans

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

Therefore, we must recognize that Christian living is *aided* by a study of the Old Testament. While we must not look to the Old Testament to find a system of law to govern our actions today; we can be greatly benefited from studying its pages. It will teach us great lessons about God, about faithful living, about sin, and many other things! Certainly, a central component of studying the Old Testament Scriptures will be a study of the people who took part in its story!

#### *1 Corinthians 10:11*

Again, the characters of the Old Testament (and the New Testament) are beneficial for us. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:11 again: "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

Some of these Bible characters are positive examples we should imitate. Some of these characters are negative examples which serve as a warning about their wickedness. Regardless of the specific Bible character, we can learn something from each one that will be beneficial to us in living faithful Christian lives!

#### *Applications*

There is certainly much to learn from the Bible characters we read about in the pages of Scripture. Study will demonstrate lessons about prayer from Hannah, lessons about faithfulness from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, lessons about courage from Daniel, lessons about overcoming temptation from Joseph, lessons about overcoming trials from Job, lessons about rebelling against God from Korah, lessons about repentance from David, etc., etc., etc. It will certainly do us a great deal of good to study these examples!

#### **Conclusion**

Let us all determine to learn from the examples contained within the pages of God's word. They have all been written and preserved for a purpose! We can imitate the good examples and learn

from the bad ones. We can learn about God's dealings with people throughout time and about His dealings with sin. We can learn about people who faced similar things to the circumstances we are in and who struggled with the same temptations we struggle with.

Remember, from Hebrews 4:12, God's word is living and powerful. Let us always remember that His word has life-changing implications for us if we will heed the warnings and obey the commandments! Once more, God's word is not composed of a fictional story. Rather, His word is composed of a powerful and true message of salvation – and one that also contains instructions and is full of real-life “case studies” to help us live in a way that will please Him!

When your life is over, will you be counted among those who have rejected God during their lives – or among those who have been obedient to Him? Let us all study His word diligently and make the proper applications of the things we read so that we will be counted among the faithful and spend eternal life in Heaven with God together!

## Study Questions

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What is the story of the Bible?

What does Hebrews 4:12 teach you about the Bible?

Bible characters can be used...

### 1. To Illustrate Bible Truths

How do the following passages use Bible characters to illustrate Bible truths?

A. Romans 4 –

B. James 2:21-25 –

C. James 5:13-18 –

D. 1 Peter 3:5-6 –

E. 1 Peter 3:18-21 –

F. 1 John 3:10-12 –

What applications can be made from this point?

### 2. To Warn

How do the following passages use Bible characters to warn?

A. Matthew 24:37-39 –

B. 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 –

C. 2 Peter 2:4-11 –

What applications can be made from this point?

### 3. To Encourage

How do the following passages use Bible characters to encourage?

A. Hebrews 11 –

B. 1 Peter 2:21-25 –

What applications can be made from this point?

#### **4. To Learn From Examples**

How do the following passages discuss the importance of the things that have been written?

A. Romans 15:4 –

B. 1 Corinthians 10:11 –

What applications can be made from this point?