

Discovering Jesus in Old Testament Characters

What do the following OT characters teach us? Joseph, Absalom, Nehemiah, Moses, David, Esther

What weaknesses do you see in reading and teaching the “Heroes & Villains” (H&V) approach to the OT?

1. THE H&V APPROACH IS **MAN-CENTERED**. “The Bible is a book about God. It is not a religious book of advice about the answers we need about a happy marriage, sex, work, or losing weight. Although the Scriptures reflect on many of those issues, they are above all about who God is and what God thinks and wills.” (Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, p 94)
2. THE H&V APPROACH IS **MORALISTIC**. What we should and shouldn’t do rather than what God has done and is doing.
3. THE H&V IS **TOO FEELINGS BASED**. We should read the text without trying to make subjective personal application.
4. THE H&V APPROACH **FRAGMENTS THE BIBLE**. It isolates the passage from the broad sweep of biblical history.
5. THE H&V APPROACH IS **CHRIST-LESS**. Some sermons/books on OT characters could have been taught by non-Christian religions.
6. THE H&V APPROACH **SKIPS OVER THE ORIGINAL MEANING**. Could God could have written the OT for anyone but us? Actually He did. What was the author’s message for Israel?
7. THE H&V APPROACH IS **TOO INDIVIDUALISTIC** It emphasizes individual personal piety to the exclusion of our corporate responsibility and of our relationship and responsibilities to the church and the state.

Sidney Greidanus calls us to “employ biblical characters the way the Bible employs them, not as ethical models, not as heroes for emulation or examples for warning, but as people whose story has been taken up into the Bible in order to reveal what God is doing for and through them.” Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 118

What do Romans 4:22-24, 15:4, and Hebrews 11 encourage?

Guidelines to follow when studying OT people:

- Keep God, not man, in the foreground.
- Distinguish Christian morality from mere moralism by realizing that we need Jesus’ grace to obey any moral requirements and His forgiveness when we fail.
- Relate every story to the overarching plan of redemption.
- Look for Jesus when studying Jesus’ people.
- Find the original purpose for the original audience.
- Include the corporate and eternal perspective even when looking at individual earthly lives.

How do the graces and gifts of Old Testament believers bring glory to Jesus?

THE CONTROL OF JESUS Because Jesus sovereignly controls everything and everybody, He arranged and ordered every OT event and person. Thus, even though every text does not name or refer to Jesus, He is implied in every text since the events and people of every text are part of His plan of redemption. Every story is connected with the overall story of salvation. See Romans 4:1-3; James 5:11.

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS Any good accomplished by biblical characters was the work of the Spirit of Christ and reflected the formation of Jesus’ image in them. See 1 Peter 1:11. (Example: Joseph - Gen 45:5; 50:20; cf Acts 2:23)

What other OT characters and their graces show us Christ's work and image in them?

THE CHURCH OF JESUS The OT was originally written for “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38). The OT is not primarily a history of Israel but a revelation of God—it revealed Him to Israel through their history. The first question the Israelites asked when they read the OT was, what is God like? – More specifically, “What is the coming Savior like?”

With this in mind, what new questions should we be asking when we read OT books? (John 5:39; Matt 13:17)

THE CRIMES AGAINST JESUS Sin by its very definition is against God because to sin means either to violate God's prohibitive commands or to omit practicing His positive commands. (Ex: David – Ps 51:4; Joseph – Gen 39:9)

In what ways does seeing our sins as being against Jesus help us repent and turn from our sins?

THE CONTRAST WITH JESUS Whereas they failed, He succeeded; whereas they gave up, He persevered; whereas they were defeated by evil, He conquered it. (Ex: Israel in the wilderness vs Jesus in the wilderness)

THE CALL FOR JESUS In multiple texts we are confronted with the fallen condition of humanity and our need of a Savior. (Ex: Nehemiah – Neh 13:14, 22, 29)

THE CONFESSION TO JESUS By offering sacrifices, Israel was taught what their sins deserved—death (Heb 10:3-4)

What role did animal sacrifices have in the spiritual experience of OT believers? (Ps 51:16-17; Job 9:33; 19:25)

For what is more vain or absurd than for men to offer a loathsome stench from the fat of cattle in order to reconcile themselves to God? Or to have recourse to the sprinkling of water and blood to cleanse away their filth? In short, the whole cultus of the law, taken literally and not as shadows and figures corresponding to the truth, will be utterly ridiculous . . . if the forms of the law be separated from its end, one must condemn it as vanity. (John Calvin, Institutes 2.7.1, p 349)

THE COMPASSION OF JESUS Just as we see Him saving the unworthy in the NT, we see Him doing the same in the OT.

Explain how OT believers were saved by Jesus before Jesus was born, suffered, died, and rose again. (Heb 11:31-32)

CONVERSION TO JESUS Whenever we read of souls being converted in the OT, it is to the Messiah. (Heb 4:2; 11:26)

CONFIDENCE IN JESUS The Hebrews 11 examples of OT faith come after ten chapters setting forth Jesus in the OT institutions and ceremonies; we are clearly being asked to see their faith as Christ centered. (Heb 11:13-26; 12:2)

“Their faith points us to Jesus, and it does so in at least three ways: he is the object of their faith, he is the perfect model of their imperfect faith, and he is the builder of their faith.” (Charles Drew, *The Ancient Love Song*, p. 45.)

THE COPY OF JESUS While we want to connect each OT biography with the grand narrative of redemption, we must also preserve the moral application for the individual, for the church, and for society, all within a gospel framework. “Their faithfulness anticipates the perfect faithfulness of the great Savior, who is their (and our) substitute, not only in his death, but also in the way that he lived.” (Drew, *The Ancient Love Song*, 48.)

THE CROWNING OF JESUS Another way of seeing Jesus in the lives of Bible characters is by considering how He was glorified by their lives on earth—by their praises of Him and by others praising Him for them. (Heb 12:22-24)