

Their Names are Written in God's Book of Life

The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. (Revelation 3:5-6 ESV)

The Bible is God's history book—it's about his plan and purpose for his creation that he loves and the working out of that purpose through the people that have come to him, trusted in him, and know and love him: those who have become his sons and daughters.

When Paul the Apostle had the opportunity to introduce the real God to the pagan philosophers in Athens, he told them that God had made us and had given us everything that is necessary for life and happiness:

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' Acts 17:24-28

God's purpose in his creation is that "men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find

him..." God, in his love for us, wants us to seek and find him, to know him. The Bible is a history book of those who have sought and found God. They learned that he loves them, that he is faithful and trustworthy, and that he wants them to be his children.

This newsletter starts a series about the many, many examples that the Bible gives us of these faithful people. By learning about the faithful ones of old, our own faith can be encouraged and increased. We can learn to become close to our God as they did. The letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament lists many of the faithful ones found in Old Testament history. These newsletter articles will follow the same history. Some of those mentioned in Hebrews 11 include:

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain...

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death...

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark...

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive...

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child...

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph...

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel...

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents...

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king...

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood...

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land...

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe...

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets... From Hebrews 11

After the writer gives example after example of faithful lives, he encourages us to see this great "cloud" of witnesses and persevere in faith and not lose heart.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3

* * *

The First Family

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, starts from the beginning: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." (Genesis 1:1) In this first chapter of Genesis the creation of mankind is recorded on the sixth day. In chapter two there is more detail of the creation of the first man and the first woman. This chapter details how God provided everything that Adam, the first man, needed:

- Life itself
- A perfect place to live
- Work to do
- A fit companion
- A garden to find every kind of food
- His love.

After providing all these things for Adam, God gave him one command. This was a test for Adam: would he love, believe and trust God and, therefore, obey this one command or would he be faithless and disobedient?

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;

but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:15-17

In any real relationship and connection between people there must be trust, faith, respect, and love. When Adam and Eve chose to believe a lie instead of believing God, they broke faith with God. They did not trust him, respect him or love him. The relationship was broken and with that broken relationship there were consequences:

"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." Genesis 3:19 NIV

God had told Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that he would die. He would no longer be given life

from God.

However, God still reached out to Adam and Eve. Other consequences were given that would perhaps teach his children to turn to him for all things necessary. That in these conditions they would learn to trust him and know how much they need him. The earth was cursed so that it would not be easy to grow and make food. Thorns and thistles were given as a reminder that the creation is in need of healing as are our lives. Child bearing was made difficult so that it could be understood that life does not come easily.

In the midst of these "curses" there was given hope through a promise:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15 NIV

The promise was given that a descendant of Eve would crush the cause of death and, therefore, conquer death.

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Are you currently attending a weekly Bible Class? If not, why not join us on Thursday evening or Friday mornings for a stimulating look at God's Word.

Thursday - 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM

Friday - 11:00 AM to 12:00 Noon

At the

Hampton Inn and Suites

(Across Jefferson from Patrick Henry Mall)

Ps 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. KJV

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Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience

of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. Romans 5:18-19 NIV

This first family is not an example of faith but this history does

tell us what happens when faith and trust are broken. When there is no trust and faith in God, there is no relationship with God. There is only one outcome to faithlessness and that is death. Yet God does not want anyone to die. The question is, do we believe his promise? Do we believe God enough so that we obey him?

Abel – The First of the Faithful

Adam and Eve had many sons and daughters but the first two are mentioned by name: Cain and Abel. We are not told too much about either of these two sons but the contrast between them is remarkable.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Genesis 4:2-5 NIV

Abel was a faithful and obedient man who offered right sacrifices to God. Notice that he brought the “fat portion of the firstborn of his

flock”, that is the best portions as his offering to God. He is the first person commended for his faithful obedience in Hebrews 11:

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. Hebrews 11:4

Cain on the other hand brought “some of the fruits of the soil”. Cain offered nothing special to God and then became jealous and angry that Abel’s offering was accepted by God and his offering was not. In premeditation he killed his brother out of envy. In Cain’s world it was all about Cain.

Jesus tells us that the murder of righteous Abel is the first of many

of the murders of righteous and faithful people by those who are jealous and angry.

And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Matthew 23:35-36

God is looking for those people who in faithful obedience and in love turn to him. He found that in Abel and commended him for it.

What do we learn from Abel’s faith? What example can we follow? Abel’s faith led him to love God and give God the very best. It was a simple but profound act of faith.

Noah – Blameless in his Generation

Many generations and more than a thousand years after the Creation, people’s hearts were increasingly turned away from God. Wickedness and violence were everywhere:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every in-

tention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. Genesis 6:5-7 ESV

Only Noah, in all his generation, was considered righteous and

blameless. God decided to destroy the wicked but save Noah and his family alive. God told Noah that he was about to destroy all living things on the earth with a flood that would cover everything. And then God told Noah to build a boat—a huge

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Noah - Blameless in his generation (Continued from page 3)

boat that would save him, his family, and animals of every kind from the rising flood waters. God told Noah the exact dimensions of the ark and the exact number of all animals that were to come on board.

And Noah did everything just as God commanded him.
Genesis 6:22 NIV

It is not known how many years it took Noah to build the Ark but considering its size and the number of hands to help, it was no small undertaking. It could have been as much as 100 years. During all these years that Noah built the ark his family and neighbors surely derided him and considered him foolish. But Noah continued in his faith and obedience to God even though he was completely alone other than his immediate family in this work. Finally, the day came when God told him to enter the ark with his family and the animals. The rains came for 40 days and 40 nights and the fountains of the deep burst open. Water covered even the highest mountain and no one outside the ark survived. Even though there's evidence that Noah's father died 5 years before the rains began, Noah would see the rest of his extended family die in the flood, including possibly his grandfather, Methuselah, his mother, his brothers and sisters, and many others. Before the floods came no one had listened to Noah, the preacher of righteousness, as Peter calls him in 2 Peter 2:5, as he surely tried to warn every one of the destruction to come. But in all this Noah's faith and his obedience to God remained firm.

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew 24:37-40 NIV

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Hebrews 11:7 NIV

For 150 days the waters covered the earth. Finally, the waters receded and after 10 months the tops of the mountains started to appear. The ark rested on the mountains of Ararat. After one whole year on the ark, Noah and his family and all the animals were able to walk on dry ground. Imagine the celebration! And God made a promise:

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will

never cease."
Genesis 8:20-22

After the flood God blessed Noah and his sons and told them to "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth". He also made several promises and several commands:

All the animals, birds of the air, and fish of the sea would fear mankind and they were given to mankind for food.

No blood was to be eaten.

From each man God will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

Never again will God destroy all life on earth by the waters of a flood.

The rainbow is a sign of this promise from God.

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." Genesis 9:12-16

Throughout the Bible God gives eternal promises and makes cove-

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Noah - Blameless in his generation

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nants with faithful people. God is faithful and will keep his promises and fulfill his covenants. It is important that we know these promises and covenants since they tell us what God will do.

Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very

clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Hebrews 6:16-19 NIV

The history of Noah is given to us

as an example of faith. What can we learn from him? How can knowing Noah's story increase our faith? One thing that is mentioned several times is Noah's obedience. Noah's faith led to obedience in the face of years of difficulties. If there is no obedience, there is no faith. If faith is weak, then try just one small step of obedience. It can be the beginning of an eternal, lifelong adventure with God.

The Righteous will Live by Faith

Hebrews chapter 11 is all about faith. The writer first defines it with words:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Hebrews 1:1

The writer is also firm in his statement that without faith we are without God:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

Faith, however, is difficult to describe in just definitions and words so the writer gives example after example of faithful people in the remaining 38 verses of this chapter. He does this to under-

score how all God's people lived by faith and not by sight. Abel did not see the God that he worshipped but he still knew him and loved him in faith. Noah did not see God and certainly worked "blindly" in building a huge ship on dry ground. Yet his faith brought obedience. And life for him and his family.

God has blessed us with the history of these faithful ones in the pages of his scriptures. He gives us this wonderful book so that we can see and know that faith brings love and obedience and that love and obedience bring life, eternal life.

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you

will receive what he has promised. For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay." And, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back."

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved. Hebrews 10:35-39

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Hebrews 11:39-40

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Daily Bible Readings for January, February and March

Read the Entire Bible in One Year

Day	JANUARY		FEBRUARY		MARCH	
	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa
1	Gen 1,2	Matt 1	Exo 11,12	Matt 28	Lev 23, 24	Acts 24
2	Gen 3,4	Matt 2	Exo 13,14	Psalm 9, 10	Lev 25, 26	Acts 25
3	Gen 5,6	Matt 3	Exo 15,16	Psalm 11,12	Lev 27, Provb 7	Acts 26
4	Gen 7,8	Matt 4	Exo 17,18	Acts 1	Provb 8-10	Acts 27
5	Gen 9,10	Matt 5	Exo 19,20	Acts 2	Num 1,2	Acts 28
6	Gen 11,12	Matt 6	Exo 21,22	Acts 3	Num 3,4	Psalm 19,20
7	Gen 13,14	Matt 7	Exo 23,24	Acts 4	Num 5,6	Romans 1
8	Gen 15, 16	Psalm 1,2	Exo 25,26	Acts 5	Num 7,8	Romans 2
9	Gen 17,18	Matt 8	Exo 27,28	Acts 6	Num 9,10	Romans 3
10	Gen 19,20	Matt 9	Exo 29,30	Acts 7	Num 11,12	Romans 4
11	Gen 21, 22	Matt 10	Exo 31,32	Psalm 13, 14	Num 13,14	Romans 5
12	Gen 23,24	Matt 11	Exo 33,34	Acts 8	Num 15,16	Romans 6
13	Gen 25,26	Matt 12	Exo 35,36	Acts 9	Num 17,18	Romans 7
14	Gen 27,28	Matt 13	Exo 37,38	Acts 10	Num 19,20	Romans 8
15	Gen 29,30	Psalm 3,4	Exo 39,40	Acts 11,12	Num 21,22	Romans 9
16	Gen 31,32	Matt 14	Provb 3,4	Acts 13	Num 23,24	Romans 10
17	Gen 33,34	Matt 15	Provb 5,6	Psalm 15,16	Num 25,26	Romans 11
18	Gen 35,36	Matt 16	Lev 1,2	Acts 14	Num 27,28	Romans 12
19	Gen 37,38	Matt 17	Lev 3,4	Acts 15	Num 29,30	Romans 13
20	Gen 39,40	Matt 18	Lev 5,6	Acts 16	Num 31,32	Romans 14
21	Gen 41, 42	Matt 19	Lev 7,8	Acts 17	Num 33,34	Romans 15,16
22	Gen 43, 44	Psalm 5,6	Lev 9,10	Acts 18	Num 35,36	Psalm 21,22
23	Gen 45, 46	Matt 20	Lev 11,12	Psalm 17,18	Provb 11,12	Psalm 23-25
24	Gen 47, 48	Matt 21	Lev 13,14	Acts 19	Provb 13,14	Psalm 26-28
25	Gen 49, 50	Matt 22	Lev 15,16	Acts 20	Provb 15,16	Psalm 29,30
26	Provb 1,2	Matt 23	Lev 17,18	Acts 21	Deut 1,2	Mark 1
27	Exo 1,2	Matt 24	Lev 19,20	Acts 22	Deut 3,4	Mark 2
28	Exo 3,4	Matt 25	Lev 21,22	Acts 23	Deut 5,6	Mark 3
29	Exo 5,6	Psalm 7, 8			Deut 7,8	Mark 4
30	Exo 7, 8	Matt 26			Deut 9,10	Psalm 31,32
31	Exo 9,10	Matt 27			Deut 11,12	Mark 5

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