

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

May 31, 2020

- I. God builds our faith through trials, testing, provision, protection, healing, and miracles – though all the aforesaid means are miracles.
 - A. In looking back at the OT stories we’ve considered so far, we have seen that God builds our faith through trials and testing, through His daily provision and protection, and through His miracles. And for us today, I want to add that He builds our faith through His gracious healing and His life-transforming work in us.
 - B. Some of the most profound growth in faith takes place in the trials and tribulations of life, because they challenge us to persevere in trusting God when faced with what we don’t want. It is for this reason that we read in **James 1:2-4**, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various **trials**, [3] knowing that the **testing** of your faith produces **endurance**, [and endurance in trusting God is a benefit of such great worth and power, that if you use it, it will] have its perfect result (*that is, it will bring to completion the purpose for which it is intended*), so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (*that is, lacking nothing that is necessary for trusting God regardless of the circumstances and hence remaining faithful to God to the end*).”
 - C. It is my opinion that God used this **James 1:2-4** method to test and strengthen the Israelites’ faith and their resolve to trust Him as they left Egypt and headed for the Promised Land.
 1. And as we see in these verses, this method of perfecting faith naturally results in perfecting godly living – because perfected faith requires trusting God, and trusting God includes obeying Him.
 2. Now the fact that the Israelites did not learn the lessons and gain a more perfected faith is a testimony to their failure, not God’s – for instead of projecting doom, they could have promoted faith.
 - D. Today, we are going to begin with the story of the two spies Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.
 - E. Prayer

II. The story of the two spies and Rahab

A. The story of the two spies is found in **Joshua 2:1-21**. I assume most of us know this story, so I will present an abbreviated version before pointing out some of the lessons we can learn from it.

B. **Joshua 2:1-21** . . . Joshua sent two men to spy out Jericho and the land around Jericho. While spying out Jericho, they came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. The king found out and sent word to Rahab to turn them over to the king's men. However, Rahab hid the men on her roof under neatly piled stalks of flax, and so she said to the king's men, "The men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." The king's men left the city to pursue the spies, and the gates were shut behind them.

1. Before Rahab hid the spies, she said to them, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan – to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, **please swear to me by the LORD**, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me **a pledge of truth**, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."
2. So the men said to her, "Our life for yours **if** you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you. However, we shall be free from this oath to you, unless, when we come into the land, (1) you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and (2) you gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father's household. It shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be free; but anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him.

[Oh, and one more thing] **if** you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear."

3. Rahab agreed, and when it was safe, she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.
- C. The **first truth** I want to point out has to do with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or we might say, the God of Israel demonstrating His love for all mankind, be they Jew or non-Jew, as proven by His mercy toward the prostitute Rahab and her family – simply because Rahab trusted in Him.
1. Jesus affirmed this truth in **John 3:16**, "For God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."
 2. Peter said it this way in **2 Peter 3:9**, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."
 3. And we read in **Revelation 5:9**, that the four living creatures and the 24 elders sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You (*Jesus*) to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood **men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.**"
 4. The important truth here is that saving Rahab and her family was a clear statement by God to the nation of Israel that He will save anyone who trusts in Him and proceeds to live accordingly.
 5. Jonah was arrogant enough to think God should only save the Jews, and destroy people like those in Nineveh.
 - a. Is it possible that we think some people are so evil, so unworthy of God's salvation that they ought to spend eternity in hell? This is obviously not God's perspective, and it ought never be ours either.
 - b. Of course, we may not think this way specifically, but what if we simply neglect to bring the salvation message to someone we despise or who is making our life exceedingly miserable? In the end, are we not acting like Jonah?
 6. It isn't easy to love those who hate us and mistreat us, but God loves them, as we read in **John 3:16**. Therefore, for God's sake we should at least bring them the message of salvation and give them the opportunity to repent and come to faith in Jesus Christ and proceed to live a Christ-like life.

- D. The **second truth** I want to point out has to do with the response of unbelievers to the gospel. According to this story, the residents of Jericho had heard about Israel and their God, and the stories they heard made them so afraid that their hearts melted and no courage remained in any of them. And yet only Rahab responded by trusting in God and asking to be saved from the coming destruction of Jericho.
1. So consider this – if the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, then it seems reasonable to conclude that the residents of Jericho should have joined Rahab in trusting in God and throwing themselves on the mercy of the Israelites.
 2. Yet as we know from this story and personal experience, knowing the truth does not naturally result in living according to the truth. We can fear God and still not submit to God and obey God. The reality is, we must choose to live according to what we know.
 3. Jesus said it this way in **Matthew 7:24-27**, “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. [26] Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”
 4. In other words, fear of God and knowledge of God are not enough in themselves. They must be coupled with a willingness on the hearer’s part to intentionally turn away from what is not of God and trust God enough to live according to what He says about how to live.
 5. Imagine, out of a whole city, one person believed and as a result of that one person only one family was saved. Most of us face this kind of response in our world today, and because of it, many of us become discouraged and give up on evangelism.
 - a. Remember **John 3:16**? Let us not base our efforts of evangelism on the response. Let us evangelize for God’s sake and for the sake of the one or two who may hear and respond accordingly. After all, Jesus affirms how precious converted sinners are to God when He said there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (**Luke 15:7**).
 - b. And what helps me is to see myself as simply a sower of seed., with the response left up to the hearer (**Matthew 13:3-9**).

E. The **third truth** that stands out in this story is the promise from the two spies to save Rahab and her family from death when Israel defeated and destroyed Jericho. And in making this promise, they gave an oath that upon their lives they would fulfill their promise.

1. The lesson here is that keeping our word is important. In fact, it is so important that God made it the third commandment in the Ten Commandments. Therefore we read in **Exodus 20:7**, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”
2. Jesus put it like this in **Matthew 5:37**, “Let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.”
3. It is easy to make a promise and give our word, but it is not always easy to keep our promise and fulfill our word. And sadly, it is at the point of facing how much keeping our word is going to cost that some break their word.
4. And there are those, who out of a desire to be liked will make promises to too many people so that it is impossible to keep them all. Folks like this may not even remember all the promises they have made so that the only one or ones they fulfill are the last ones or the last one.
5. This is not the godly way. When we give our word, we are to keep our word – whether to our parents, siblings, spouse, children, fellow Christians, friends, co-workers, boss, or any other person or group. Why? Because keeping our word is a demonstration of our integrity which in turn gives testimony to our faith in God and obedience to God.

F. The **fourth truth** that I want to point out was the need for Rahab and her family to **keep the conditions** of the promise **to gain the fulfillment** of the promise.

1. In other words, Rahab entered into a covenant like agreement with the two spies, and this agreement placed requirements on both parties. In other words, each party had the responsibility to fulfill their part of the agreement for the agreement to be fulfilled.
2. In a similar way, we enter into a covenant relationship with God when we repent and come to faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin, death, and eternal loss. And this agreement not one sided, as if its fulfillment entirely depends on God. It is a two-sided agreement that not only effects our eternal destiny, but our daily lives as well. We see the truth of this in the scriptures use of the conditional “IF”.

3. For example, Jesus said in **John 14:23**, “**If** anyone loves Me, he will keep My word (*that’s the condition*); and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”
 4. And Paul uses this same conditional if in **Romans 8:12-14**, “So then, brethren, we are **under obligation** (*because of the covenant we have entered into with God*) not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— [13] for **if** you are living according to the flesh (*rather than by the Spirit as proven by your godly behavior*), you must die; but **if** by the (*empowerment and help of the*) Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”
- G. And finally, there is a **truth** here about God’s seen and unseen activities. The reality is, we often see the results of God’s work on our behalf, but not the work itself. This truth is well stated by Paul in **Romans 8:28**, “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose.”
1. We know that God causes all things to work together for good, but do we see Him doing it, or how He is doing it, or how long He will take in accomplishing it? The answer is **rarely**. Most often, this part of God’s working on our behalf is behind the scenes. In other words, though we rarely see how God is bringing about the good, we do see the good that results from God’s unseen activity.
 2. The two spies saw this truth at work in the kindness and support of Rahab. How is it they stopped at Rahab’s home? And how is it that her home was part of the city wall? How is it she had a window in that wall for use in helping the spies escape? Was this not God at work – behind the scenes bringing about a good that could be seen?
 3. And of course, Rahab and her family saw the results of God’s behind the scenes work when the walls of Jericho crumbled all around them but Rahab’s section of the wall stood firm.
 4. These behind the scenes activities of God are the unseen miracles, and the not so obvious involvement of God in our lives. Therefore, when you see the good that comes, I urge you to use what you can see to build your faith for remaining faithful during the times you cannot see God’s activity in a particular situation or person.

III. Conclusion

A. God Moves in a Mysterious Way – by William Cowper, 1774
God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.