

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

June 07, 2020

- I. God builds our faith through trials, testing, provision, protection, healing, and miracles – though all the aforesaid methods are miracles.
 - A. Last Sunday we began with a review of **James 1:2-4** as a reminder that God uses hard times to build our faith. Today we will begin with **Acts 2:22-24**, as a reminder that God also uses miracles (*or obvious signs and wonders as the NT refers to them*) to build our faith.
 - B. **Acts 2:22-24**, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst (*in other words, God gave the people miracles, signs, and wonders to encourage them to trust in Jesus and live according to the teachings of Jesus*), just as you yourselves know—[23] this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (*That is, it was God’s plan all along to give the people signs and wonders as encouragement to trust and obey Jesus, **and** to allow the people to put Him to death on a cross.*), you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men (*the Roman governor and soldiers*) and put Him to death. [24] But God raised Him up again (*another miracle designed in part to encourage faith in Jesus and obedience to His teachings*), putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”
 - C. Again, my purpose for starting here is to reinforce, from the scriptures, God’s use of signs and wonders to encourage those coming into the Faith to trust Him and obey His word as they begin and progress through the Christian life. So with that in mind, we will look at God’s use of miracles along with monument type reminders to strengthen our faith and our resolve to trust and obey Him in spite of the circumstances.
 - D. Prayer
- II. In entering and beginning to possess the Promised Land, God worked two miracles on Israel’s behalf and gave them three reminders of His power and presence with them: (1) they crossed the Jordan on dry ground, (2) they took 12 stones from the Jordan and set them up in Gilgal as a monument to having crossed the Jordan on dry ground, (3) Joshua set up 12 stones in the Jordan River as a monument, (4) Joshua encountered the captain of the host of the Lord – as proof God was with them, and (5) the walls of Jericho crumbled down without the Israelites touching them.

A. We will begin our study today in **Joshua 3:7-13** . . . Now the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. [8] You shall, moreover, command the priests who are carrying the ark of the covenant, saying, '**When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall [step in and] stand still in the Jordan.**'"

1. [9] So Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Come and hear the words of the LORD your God, [because] [10] (*when what I am about to tell you comes to pass, and therefore is verified, then*) **you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you** the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite.
 - a. In other words, before crossing the Jordan, God told the Israelites that He would give them a miraculous sign as an assurance or guarantee that He would do two things.
 - b. **First**, the miraculous sign would assure them that He would be with them – even though His presence would be unseen from this time forward. In other words, the Israelites would have to trust God's word that He was with them because they would no longer have the visible assurance of His presence in the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.
 - c. **Second**, the miraculous sign would assure them that God would fulfill His promise to go before them in driving out the inhabitants of the Land as they moved forward in possessing it.
2. [11] Behold, the ark of the covenant of the **Lord of all the earth** is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan...[13] It shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap. [14] So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, [15] and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark **were dipped in the edge** of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), [16] the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap...so the people crossed opposite Jericho. [17] And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while

all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

- a. I find it interesting that God parted the waters at the Red Sea for the generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt, and then He did it again for the generation of Israelites going into the Promised Land. And those who were now the oldest in Israel would have crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. Imagine seeing such a miracle twice in your lifetime.
 - b. There is one other thing about this that catches my attention. It appears God intended to do this miracle all along, because He led Israel into the Promised Land from the east side of the Jordan River, which meant they had to cross it to enter the Land.
 - c. What a faith building experience this would be for those ready to trust God when facing giants, well-equipped armies, and walled cities as they took possession of the Land.
3. In a similar way, we experience miraculous signs when we come to repentance, put our faith in Christ, and begin our journey on the narrow path of Christian living. For example:
- a. We experience the miracle of God's grace in that while we were still willful sinners, Christ died in our place, and in so doing, He paid the penalty we owe for having sinned.
 - b. We experience the miracle of God's gracious mercy in forgiving us for rebelling against Him – He who is the supreme authority, and in forgiving us for breaking His laws – laws that are absolute and unconditional – for as the writer of Hebrews says, “Anyone who sets aside the law of Moses dies on the testimony of two or three witnesses, how much severer punishment will we deserve if we trample under foot the Son of God, and regard as unclean the blood of the covenant – by which we are sanctified, and insult the Spirit of grace” (**Hebrews 10:28-29**).
 - c. We experience being freed from the power of sin over us so that we no longer are slaves of sin – which enables us to freely move forward in becoming new creations in Christ Jesus (**Romans 6**).
 - d. We experience the gift and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who among other things is given to us as a pledge or assurance that we will eventually receive the fullness of our salvation and inheritance, in eternity, as promised by God (**Ephesians 1:14, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 5:4-5**).

- e. And as for God going before us in dispossessing the enemy, He is the One who **has given** (*past tense*) us everything necessary for life and godliness (**2 Peter 1:3-4**). He is the One who keeps us from being tempted beyond what we can bear (**1 Cor. 10:13**). And He is the One who renews and transforms our mind so we can become mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy (**Romans 12:2**).
- 4. You may have never crossed a flowing river on dry ground, but God has done **for you** the miracles I just mentioned. And it is possible you have experienced more than those upon and since entering the Christian life – for God uses these kinds of experiences to encourage and build your faith for living a godly life.
 - a. So let me ask: Does the memory of these miracles feed your faith when faced with trials, tribulation, or suffering?
 - b. Do you see God doing things of this nature in the recent past to encourage your faith and promote obedience?

B. **Joshua 4:1** . . . Now when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD told Joshua to take twelve men, one man from each tribe, and have each of them take up a stone from the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight." So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, and Joshua said to them, "Cross again to the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder. [6] Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' then you shall say to them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan.' So these stones shall become a memorial (*a monument to preserve the memory of this occasion*) to the sons of Israel forever."

1. [9] **Then Joshua set up twelve stones** in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day.
2. [18] It came about when the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up to the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and went over all its banks as before (*remember, the Jordan overflows all its banks*

all the days of harvest). [19] Now the people camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. [20] The twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. [21] He said to the sons of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' [22] then you shall inform your children, saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.' [23] For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed [24] so that **all the peoples of the earth** may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and so that **you** may fear the LORD your God forever."

3. Vs 24 presents two truths that are too important to pass over.
 - a. **First**, the miracle of crossing the Jordan River on dry ground had a dual purpose: (1) to show the world that God's power exceeds the power of nature and the laws of nature He himself established at creation; and (2) to instill a fear of God (*because of His great power*) in the Israelites that would last them all their lives.
 - b. The **second** truth that is too important to pass over is the fact that in spite of God's power, including His power over nature and the laws of nature, it is not enough for those who don't want to believe. Nor is it enough for those who believe but don't want to obey.
 - c. In our day, it is common for people to laugh at or discredit even the idea that God could or would stop the waters of the Jordan River from flowing downstream. After all, science clearly shows that water seeks its own level. In other words, you cannot dam up a flowing river and not expect the backed up water to flood the surrounding area. And once you open the dam, the backed up water would flood the low areas downstream.
 - d. Yet there is no mention of either of these things happening in our story. So why would we accept such a story as true? I accept it as true because I believe that God, the creator of the natural world, is able to rearrange it so that it works, for a time, according to His will rather than according to the laws of nature He, himself, set in motion at creation.
 - e. My point is that for those who believe God can and does do such things, unexplainable miracles, even though unexplainable, affirm that God is mighty – even to the degree of being more

powerful than the laws of nature. And for those who believe like this, the fear of God is a logical conclusion.

- f. However, there are those who do not believe in God and are intent on discrediting God. There are those who choose to elevate science over God – as if God is bound by the discoveries of science and the laws of nature. For folks like this, no miracle is big enough to convince them God is all-powerful or that He is to be feared in a way that compels them to live according to His will and word.
 - g. In which camp are you? Does this story give you an awe and fear and reverence for God, or does it prompt you to question its truthfulness, and hence the value of trusting God?
- C. As a side-note to today's focus, I am going to include **Joshua 5:10-12** . . . While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover. On the day after the Passover, they ate some of the produce of the land – unleavened cakes and parched grain. **The manna ceased on the day after** they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.
- D. [13] Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" (*Notice the courage of Joshua. It is much like the courage of David in facing Goliath. This kind of courage is born out of being confident you are safe in God's hands.*) He said, "No; rather I indeed come now as **captain of the host of the LORD.**" (*It is not clear if the host referred to is Israel or God's angels, though it is probably God's angels. What we are sure of is that as captain, this man with his sword drawn will be leading the way, that is, he will be going before the Israelites in clearing and possessing the Land – just as God promised He would do. I believe God gave Joshua this very personal experience to reinforce Joshua's confidence that no matter what happened, God was both with him and out front leading the way.*) And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" The captain of the LORD'S host said to Joshua, "**Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy**" (*God, speaking out of the burning bush, said the same thing to Moses.*) And Joshua did so.

E. **Joshua 6:1** . . . Now Jericho was tightly shut because of they feared the Israelites; no one went out and no one came in. [2] The LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. [3] You shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days. [4] Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. [5] It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead."

1. Imagine seeing river water stopped so a whole nation of 1+ million people could cross on dry ground. Imagine seeing this miracle happen twice. Now add to that, seeing the wall of Jericho crumble down – without any human action – so that the Israelite army could enter the city and defeat its inhabitants.
2. Such are the actions of God to build our faith and reinforce the necessity and wisdom of living according to His will and word.
3. Yes, as we have often said and taught, God uses hard times, trials, testing, and suffering to teach us, transform us, and build our faith. But He also uses miracles and provides us with moments that we can turn into monuments to gain stronger faith and reinforce our resolve to live according to His will and word.

III. Conclusion

- A. Are you going through life with your eyes open? Are you seeing both the hard times and the miraculous times that come from God to build your faith and reinforce your resolve to live according to His will and word? Have you singled out a moment here or there to establish as a monument in your life to look back on when tempted to fear or grow anxious or turn away from God's way to go your own way?
- B. We will end with the song, HE IS GOOD.