

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

August 16, 2020

I. Introduction

A. Today, we will look at three OT men whose stories of faith, choices, and actions provide an example of how to live the Christian life. These three men are Caleb, Phinehas, and Elisha.

1. There are two Phinehas' spoken of in the OT, Phinehas the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron, and Phinehas the son of Eli. Phinehas the son of Eleazar is the one we will look at today.

2. Caleb and Phinehas lived during the time when Moses and Joshua were the leaders of Israel. Elisha lived and served under Elijah, and became God's replacement for Elijah.

B. Each story has specific lessons we can learn for our growth in godly living, and for this reason we will start with Elijah and end with Caleb. My hope is that you will take these lessons and apply them in your life, for God's sake, your sake, and the sake of those around you.

C. Prayer

II. Elisha – the son of Shaphat (*SHAY fat*)

A. We will pick up Elisha's story following Elijah challenge and defeat of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. **1 Kings 19:1** . . . Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. [2] Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." [3] **And [Elijah] was afraid** and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there (*How easily our faith in the presence, power, provision, and protection of God is overpowered by fear when directly threatened with what seems dire.*). [4] But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and **he requested** [of God] for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." (*The Jews put to death so many of their prophets that even Jesus commented on it in **Luke 11:47***) [5] [Elijah] lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to [Elijah], "Arise, eat." [6] Then [Elijah] looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. (*Even though filled*

with fear after being threatened with death by the queen and wanting to die before being caught by her, God was still present with and providing for Elijah – and He does the same for us whatever our state of mind at the moment.)

- B. [7] The angel of the LORD ministered to Elijah a second time and as a result Elijah went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb (*HOH reb*), which is the mountain of God. Once at Horeb, Elijah put into words that he was feeling threatened, alone, and in a job that had no chance of being successful, and would only lead to persecution and a painful death.
1. And yet, God had not abandoned him. God was with him. And in addition, Elijah was not the only godly person in Israel. There were 7,000 others who had not worshiped Baal or kissed his image.
 2. It was in this moment of Elijah's despair that God spoke to him, first with a question and then with instructions. And according to God's instructions, Elijah was to anoint Hazael (*HAZ ay el*) king over Aram (*A ruhm*); [16] and anoint Jehu (*JEE hyoo*) king over Israel; and anoint Elisha as God's chosen prophet to succeed Elijah.
- C. **2 Kings 2:1** . . . And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. [2] Elijah said to Elisha, "**Stay here please**, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, **I will not leave you.**" So they went down to Bethel. [3] Then the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; be still." [4] Elijah said to him, "Elisha, **please stay here**, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, **I will not leave you.**" So they came to Jericho. [5] The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be still." [6] Then Elijah said to him, "**Please stay here**, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, **I will not leave you.**" So the two of them went on. [7] Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. [8] Elijah took his mantle, folded it together, and struck the waters, and they were divided so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

- D. [9] When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "**Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.**" [10] Elijah said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." (*It is important to today's lesson to note the condition upon which the request was to be fulfilled.*) [11] As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a **chariot of fire and horses of fire** which separated the two of them (*Notice the diversion – God did not make it easy for Elisha to get what he requested – which means getting what he wanted would depend on how much he wanted it*). And **Elijah went up by a whirlwind** to heaven. [12] **Elisha saw it** and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. [13] He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. [14] He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and struck the waters and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" (*or in other words, "If I got the double portion, then this should work for me like it did for Elijah.*) And when he had struck the waters, they were divided; and Elisha crossed over.
- E. There are three important lessons here that are helpful to any Christian who wants to pursue godliness and godly service – to the glory of God, the spiritual health of the church, and good to the world.
1. **First**, Elisha stayed with Elijah rather than going his own way. Remember, Elisha was a prophet and he had already been anointed to take Elijah's place – so he could have gone out on his own. But Elisha saw something of God in Elijah that he wanted and believed he could not get anywhere else. So he stayed close to Elijah.
 - a. You see, Elisha's relationship with Elijah was intentional and purposeful. He knew what he needed, and he wanted it enough to do what he could to get it.
 - b. And so I ask you, do you know what you need to be a godly, God-serving Christian? Is there someone you know who has what you need? If so, have you intentionally and purposefully attached yourself to this person to gain what you can?
 2. **Second**, Elisha asked for bigger or more spiritual blessings and abilities than Elijah had. Now we don't know his reason for asking for more, but I hope it was because he realized the challenges he would face in calling people to God and godly living, and therefore wanted all the empowerment and help that God was willing to give.

- a. An example of asking big like Elisha asked is in asking for wisdom in relation to dealing with an ongoing situation or a very difficult person. In such cases I think it is wise to ask for more or even twice as much wisdom as God gave Solomon.
 - b. Another example is rather than asking God to change you, ask Him to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ.
 - c. And so I urge you, pray larger, ask bigger, push your requests of God beyond the common for the purpose of receiving the most from God that you can, and for being the most for God that you can be, and for doing the most for God that you can do.
3. **Third**, Elisha stayed focused. He did not let anything become more important than keeping his eyes on Elijah so that he could obtain the blessing he requested.
- a. Imagine having a chariot and horses of fire come between you and Elijah – especially if you had never seen such a thing before. That would be a major distraction.
 - b. Yet Elisha stayed focused on what mattered to him, and I find that this kind of focus is essential to growing in godliness and serving God according to His will and word.
 - c. What do you focus on? What diversions distract you? Do you focus on what matters most, or on lesser things? The right focus is essential to spiritual growth and godly service.

III. Phinehas - son of Eleazar (High Priest),

- A. **Numbers 25:1 . . .** While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. [2] They invited the [Israelites] to the sacrifices of their gods, and [as a result] the [Israelites] ate and bowed down to their gods. [3] Therefore, Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel.
1. Baal was the Canaanite fertility god, and there were images of Baal in various places. Baal worship was very decadent, for it included excessive feasting, drunkenness, temple prostitutes, and orgies.
 2. Therefore, Israel's sin was twofold – the worship of an idol, and the debauchery and adultery that was part of that worship.
- B. [4] **The Lord said to Moses**, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord (*Execute them publicly and possibly at the Tent of Meeting so everyone can see how displeased God is with ungodly or careless or people-pleasing leadership. And do this*), so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel."

(Doing wrong brings God's discipline, correcting the wrong brings God's blessing.) [5] So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men *(be they leaders or followers)* who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor."

- C. [6] Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman *(probably for all the men in his family to get pleasure from)*. [And he did this in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting.
1. This young man did not think he needed to hide what he was doing. This is the power of evil to dull our conscience and alter our thinking so that we begin to believe that what was wrong is right.
 2. It is probable that the weeping of the Israelites at the Tent of Meeting was due to a plague from God passing through the camp.
- D. [7] When Phinehas the son of Eleazar saw it, he arose from the midst of those [gathered at the Tent of Meeting] and took a spear in his hand, [8] and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. **So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked** *(The plague was God's direct response to the sin of Israel, whereas Moses directing the judges to put to death those who participated in Baal worship was the nation's – or what we might call the churches response to known sin in their midst.)* [9] Those who died by the plague were 24,000.
- E. [10] Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, [11] "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that **he was jealous with My jealousy** among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy.
1. God's jealousy can be compared to the jealousy of a faithful husband when his wife engages in an adulterous relationship. Phinehas' jealousy can be compared to what a father or brother or dear friend of a faithful wife feels when her husband engages in an adulterous relationship. You see, Phinehas cherished and esteemed God so much that he was jealous on God's behalf, which is why he took action to stop a fellow Israelite's unfaithfulness.
 2. How bothered or jealous on God's behalf are we as a group, or are you as an individual, when fellow believers become unfaithful to God by living in fear, returning to worldly ways, indulging fleshly lusts, or participating in sinful practices?
 3. This kind of jealousy is driven by love – love for God and love for the wayward believer, which is why we read in **James 5:20**, "He

who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

- F. [12] "Therefore say, 'Behold, **I give him My covenant of peace**; [13] and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, **a covenant of a perpetual priesthood**, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.' "
- G. Phinehas was jealous on God's behalf for the spiritual health of Israel. Just think how spiritually healthy our church would be and the church universal could be if we all were as jealous as Phinehas for the spiritual health of the Body of Christ.
 1. Do you love God, your fellow believers, and the spiritual health of the church like this? Does it bother you to see unfaithfulness to God in yourself, as well as in other believers, regardless of the form it takes?
 2. May we follow Phinehas' example and bear such love for God and a burden for the spiritual health of the church that we each would do our part in promoting faithfulness and a growing godliness in our brothers and sisters in Christ.

IV. Caleb – the son of Jephunneh (*jih FUHN nee*).

- A. As you may recall, Caleb and Joshua were the only two spies to give a good report of the Promised Land, and the only two to encourage the people to trust and obey God by entering the land and taking it.
- B. We read about Caleb's stand for God in **Numbers 14:7-10** . . . And Caleb and Joshua spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. [8] If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. [9] Only **do not rebel against the Lord**; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them." [10] But all the congregation [wanted] to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.
- C. We read God's response to Caleb's faith and public stand about trusting God enough to go into the Promised Land in **Numbers 14:24**, "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it."
- D. After Israel entered the Promised Land and made some headway in driving out the inhabitants, Caleb came to Joshua and asked him to

fulfill the promise Moses made to him about getting the area of land Caleb wanted. And because of Caleb's faith in God, he asked for the area where the Anakim (giants) lived. You can read about that in **Joshua 14:6-13**.

1. What we see in Caleb is a settled and steady faith in God that began at some point and lasted until he died. He believed in the goodness of God. He believed in the presence of God. He believed in the power of God. He believed in the word of God. And he believed in the discipline of God.
2. You see, Caleb understood that distrust of God and the subsequent disobedience were equal to rebellion against God. He understood that the majority opinion could be wrong. He was not afraid to be in the minority, or even at odds with the rest of God's people when they were turning away from or against God. And he was willing to speak up and risk being criticized, rejected, or even killed for what he knew was right.
3. Maybe the best way to say this is: Caleb believed that what God said, was true; and that what God said He would do, He would do!

V. Summarization

- A. From Elisha we learn three things help us grow in the Christian life and serve in godly ways: **(1)** It is helpful to connect yourself to someone more godly than you and learn what you can from them. **(2)** It is wise to pray big in relation to becoming the best servant of God you can be. **(3)** Staying focused on what truly matters is essential.
- B. From Phinehas we learn the importance of cherishing and esteeming God so much that we will be zealously jealous on God's behalf in relation to ourselves, our homes, and our church – which will result in speaking and working against unfaithfulness to God wherever we find it.
- C. And from Caleb we learn that a settled and steady faith in God changes us and sustains us so that we live godly living the rest of our days on the earth.
- D. May these lessons go from being biblical information to life effecting truths – to the glory of God, our own spiritual development, and the spiritual health of our church.