

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

August 23, 2020

I. Introduction

A. Today we are going to look at four women in the OT: **Shiphrah** (*SHIF ruh*) and **Puah** (*PYOO uh*), two women who feared God and therefore disobeyed Pharaoh's demand that they put newborn Israelite boys to death; **Ruth**, whose faithful fulfillment of her commitment was at first costly but then rewarding; and **Hannah**, who when disrespected and deeply hurt by derogatory putdowns and ridicule, turned to God for protection and relief rather than fighting back by returning evil for evil.

B. Prayer

II. Four OT women who teach us specific things about living a godly life

A. Shiphrah (*SHIF ruh*) and Puah (*PYOO uh*) – two women who feared God and therefore disobeyed the Pharaoh's demand that they put newborn Israelite boys to death.

1. **Exodus 1:15** . . . Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah (*SHIF ruh*) and the other was named Puah (*PYOO uh*); [16] and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." [17] But **the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them**, but let the boys live. [18] So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" [19] The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." [20] So God was good to the midwives, and the [Israelites] multiplied, and became very mighty. [21] **Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them.**"

2. Of all the things that motivate human beings, I find that the most common and universal motivator is fear.

a. This isn't all bad, because fear can be a motivator for good when we fear the right things and respond in a God-trusting, sensible, and rational way. However, irrational and exaggerated fear, or fearing the wrong things and responding in God-distrusting and irrational ways breeds sinful solutions, discouragement, foolish

thinking, unhealthy or out of control emotions, and relationship damaging choices and behavior.

- b. There is an antidote for irrational, exaggerated, and misplaced fear, and that antidote is trust in God – a trust that breeds honest and sensible thinking about the consequences and costs of its choices and behavior.
3. Shiphrah (*SHIF ruh*) and Puah's *PYOO uh's*) fear was the good kind of fear, for they feared God – and their fear of God made them wise. In their wisdom, they considered the consequences of the choices that lay before them, and they chose to act in a way that wouldn't leave them feeling ashamed or afraid when they had to answer to God. Therefore, they chose to disobey the king's genocidal order and do the godly thing in delivering Israel's baby boys.
4. **Proverbs 16:6b** says that it is by the fear of the LORD that we keep away from evil. And in **Proverbs 29:25**, we read that the fear of man brings a snare (*a trap that imprisons or destroys*), but the one who trusts in the LORD will be lifted up (*rather than snared*).
5. Finally, we learn from Shiphrah and Puah that fearing God more than someone or something else brings God's blessing. In other words, the fear of God not only keeps you in good stead with God and motivates you to do what is godly, it brings blessings from God.
6. Without question, our world is full of things to fear. In addition, most of us continue to be affected by fears instilled in us from past experiences, our culture, and our religious affiliations – be they godly and rational or senseless and irrational.
7. Therefore, I have three questions: (1) What do you fear? (2) Have you given serious consideration to the consequences of your fear? (3) If you fear God, do you fear Him more than anyone or anything else?

B. Ruth – whose faithful fulfillment of her commitment was at first costly but then rewarding.

1. **Ruth 1:1**. . . Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and two sons. [2] The name of the man was Elimelech (*ih LIM uh lek*), and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon (*MA lahn*) and Chilion (*KIL ih ahn*). Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. [3] Then Elimelech died; and [Naomi] was left with her two sons. [4] They took for

themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. [5] Then both Mahlon (*MA lahn*) and Chilion (*KIL ih ahn*) died, and [Naomi] was bereft (*deprived through death*) of her two children and her husband.

2. [6] Then [Naomi] decided to return to Judah because she heard the famine had ended and the LORD was blessing His people with food. So she departed from the place where she was, along with her two daughters-in-law.
3. [8] [However, at some point along the way], Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead (*my husband and sons*) **and** with me. [9] May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband (*that is, the homes which they shared with their husbands*)." Then [Naomi] kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. [10] And they said to her, "No, but **we will surely return with you** to your people." [11] But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? [12] "Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope (*of having a husband*), if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, [13] would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me (*to return to Judah without my husband and two sons*) than for you (*to stay here and remarry*), for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." (*It is possible Naomi was thinking that leaving Judah and giving her sons in marriage to foreign women was the reason God's hand of discipline was against her.*)
4. [14] And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but **Ruth clung to her**. [15] Then [Naomi] said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." [16] But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. [17] Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."
5. It would be expected that Ruth's husband would care for his parents until they died. And since marriage is a committed relationship,

Ruth would have become a committed part of carrying out her husband's responsibility to his parents. And so in Ruth's mind, his passing didn't change her commitment. Therefore, Ruth remained faithful to her part of the commitment in caring for Naomi.

6. It is all too common for folks to make a commitment or take a vow and then break it or diminish its importance at a future time because they get involved in something they deem more important or more rewarding.
 7. Jesus addressed this in **Matthew 5:33-37**, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the LORD.' [34] I say to you, make no oath at all . . . [37] but let your statement be, 'Yes, [and live according to your] yes' or 'No, [and live according to your] no'."
 8. Have you made a vow or commitment that subsequent times and circumstances have led you to break or diminish so you could live up to a new or seemingly more important commitment? Ruth **did not** do this, and neither should we. And though Ruth's decision was costly for a time (*she endured some hardships in caring for Naomi*), it led to God's blessings – for not only did she get a new husband and a secure life for herself and Naomi, she, a Gentile, became the great grand-mother of king David and hence part of Jesus' lineage.
- C. Hannah – who when disrespected and deeply hurt by derogatory putdowns and ridicule, turned to God for protection and relief rather than fighting back by returning evil for evil.
1. **1 Samuel 1:1** . . . Now there was a certain man from the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham (*jih ROH ham*), an Ephraimite. [2] He had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah (*pih NIN uh*); and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.
 2. [3] Now [Elkanah] would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the LORD there. [4] When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters; [5] **but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah**, but the LORD had closed her womb.
 3. [6] [Peninnah (*pih NIN uh*)], however, would **provoke Hannah bitterly to irritate her**, because the LORD had closed her womb. (*It is possible that Elkanah's favoritism toward Hannah was a*

contributing factor for Peninnah's ill-will and hurtful words). [7] [Peninnah's provocations] happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the LORD; so [Hannah] wept and would not eat (*the family's celebratory meal which was the unburnt part of the sacrifice* – **Lev 7:11-18**).

4. **[9b]** Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. [10] [Hannah], greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. [11] She made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head." [12] Now it came about, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth. [13] As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. [14] Then Eli said to her, "How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you." [15] But Hannah replied, "No, my lord, **I am a woman oppressed (*crushed*) in spirit**; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but **I have poured out my soul before the LORD**. [16] Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman, for I have spoken until now out of my great concern (*hurt*) and provocation (*sorrow*)." [17] Then Eli said, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him."
5. **[19]** The family arose early the next morning and worshiped before the LORD, and returned to their house in Ramah. And Elkanah had relations with Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. [20] It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him **Samuel**, saying, "**Because I have asked him of the LORD**." [21] Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. [22] But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD and stay there forever."
6. There are several important lessons here, but we will only consider one. Though harassed, ridiculed, and painfully disrespected by Peninnah, Hannah prayerfully turned to God for help rather than returning evil for evil by expressing ungodly anger, put-downs, and harsh words, or by harboring resentment and ill-will.

- a. This is not mankind's natural way to think or behave, but it can become our natural way if we will trust God to care for us and work all things out for good.
 - b. Peter presents Jesus as the supreme example of this kind of response in the face of provocation. We read this in **1 Peter 2:21-23**, "For you have been called for the purpose (*of suffering for Christ without sinning in response*), since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example [of suffering, so you can] follow in His steps, [22] Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; [23] [yet] while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but **kept entrusting Himself to [God]** who judges righteously.
7. God is aware that we are easily tempted to respond in ungodly ways when irritated or provoked, and so He addresses this in a number of scriptures. For example:
- a. **1 Peter 3:8-9**, All of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; [9] not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. (*In other words, bless others just as God blesses you in spite of your sinful behavior.*)
 - b. **1 Thessalonians 5:15**, See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but **always** seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.
 - c. **Romans 12:14, 17-18**, Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. [17] Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.
 - d. **Colossians 3:8, 12-14**, But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. [12] And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; [13] bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. [14] Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.
8. But, you say, that is hard to do when provoked or ill-treated. Yes, it is hard to do. But it is even harder to do if you don't work at nurturing the kind of faith in God that will give you the confidence you are safe in God's hands **if you do it**. And you won't make much

progress in doing this if you don't work at it – not just when irritated, provoked, or ill-treated, but for days and weeks before such testing comes your way so that when the test arrives you are ready to pass it.

9. So I ask, how do you respond when unkind, contemptuous words, and put-downs are hurled at you? How do you deal with people who irritate you, provoke you, or mistreat you? I urge you to follow Hannah's example and **first of all** turn to God in prayer, looking to Him to deal justly with the situation and the person involved.

III. Conclusion

- A. In summary: Fear God more than you fear anything else, for the fear of God brings wisdom – a wisdom that will lead to choices and behavior that you will not have to be ashamed of or fear the consequences of when you face God.
- B. Fulfill your commitments and vows – remembering that your first commitments and vows are never to be short-changed by subsequent commitments and vows.
- C. When irritated, provoked, put-down, disrespected, or mistreated, turn to God for help and relief rather than returning evil for evil in an effort to get relief.