

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

October 04, 2020

I. Introduction

A. Today we are going to use several OT stories to try and gain a better understanding of the mind of God – specifically in relation to why He does some of the things He does.

1. I know God says in **Isaiah 55:8-9**, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

2. And these words are true, for there is much we don’t and even can’t know about God. And yet, God has revealed enough about Himself that we can know some things about Him, and sometimes we can know why He does what He does.

B. Today, we are going to attempt to do this by looking at what we might call God’s extreme responses to sinful behavior. My purpose for doing this is to reinforce a mentally and spiritually healthy view of God, which in turn ought to feed an unwavering faith in the goodness of God.

C. However, I want to caution you about one thing in regard to today’s study. God’s seemingly extreme responses to disobedience and sin are only one aspect of His response to sin and sinners. Generally speaking, His dealings with sin are more complex and diverse than His approach in the area we are going to look at today. So please keep this in mind as we look at the following OT stories.

D. Prayer

II. God’s seemingly extreme responses to disobedience and sin – from the Flood to the two prophets who were killed by lions.

A. I want to begin by laying a foundation that will help us keep perspective for the rest of what we will look at today.

1. We read in **Psalms 103:9** that God will not always **strive** with us, but neither will He keep His **anger** forever. And in **Isaiah 57:16** God says, “I will not **contend** (*strive*) forever, nor will I always be **angry**; for the spirit would grow faint before Me, and the breath of those whom I have made.

2. The foundational truth is that God **strives** with us, but not without end. And God gets angry at us, but not forever. There is an end to God’s striving, and there is an end to God’s anger.

3. When the scripture says God **strives** with us, it means He is intentionally and specifically working to bring us to our senses so that we turn away from disobedience and sin and turn to living a godly life of faith in Him and obedience to Him.
 4. Some examples of God striving with us are:
 - a. The blessings and the curses that are brought upon us to reinforce godliness and discourage disobedience and sinfulness;
 - b. The convicting work of the Holy Spirit;
 - c. Warnings and teachings from God through the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers that God raises up, equips, and empowers at various times in history;
 - d. And specific circumstances (*beyond the general application of the blessings and curses*) that God brings upon us personally in order to get our attention about a specific area of sin. Jonah is an example of this in relation after fleeing to Tarshish rather than going straight to Nineveh.
 5. The important truth to keep in mind as we work our way through the rest of today's teaching is that God has been and continues to strive with us to discourage the growth and practice of sin and encourage the growth and practice of godliness – be it on a national level, community level, or individual level.
 6. However, God won't do this forever. In other words, if we remain resistant to His striving, He will back off at some point and allow two things to happen –
 - a. **First**, He will allow us to have our way – which will result in getting so immeshed in the mindset and activities of our sin that we will become blind to the truth and resistant to reason.
 - b. **Second**, He will bring to bear the fuller consequences of our stubbornly disobedient and intentionally sinful behavior – if not in this life then certainly in the next.
 7. Regarding God's anger, if we are His children, He will not remain angry forever. We can repent and return in spite of how evil we have been, and we may even cry out for relief from our punishment as Israel did in the Book of Judges, and God will bring relief.
 8. And so with this in mind, let's look to God's word regarding what often appears to many of us as God's extreme responses to sin.
- B. We will start with the Flood as an example of what appears to be an extreme response to sin. According to **Genesis 6:3**, God's first life-altering move against the growth of evil and the rampant practice of sin was to limit the general life span of mankind to 120 years.

1. Yet because evil was so pervasive on the earth, we read in **Genesis 6:5-8**, “That the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. [6] The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. [7] The LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.’ [8] But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.”
 2. Sin had grown so great and sinner’s hearts had become so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (**Hebrews 13:3**) that God wanted to wipe out all the living things on the face of the earth, including the beings He created in His own image and for His own pleasure.
 3. However, God didn’t do that, for He found one righteous man, Noah, and used Noah to save his family and all the creatures on the Ark. But with that exception, God did wipe out the rest of mankind and all the living creatures on the face of the earth that weren’t in the Ark – and that seems extreme.
 4. But so was the sinfulness of the people – for God said there was only one righteous man among all the people living at that time. Imagine, only one person out of all the people on the earth at that time who believed in God enough to listen to God and please God and live according to God’s will and word.
 5. Now you may think the flood was extreme, but when you consider the destruction and damage that unrepentant sinners willingly, knowingly, and even intentionally do to children, spouses, siblings, parents, extended family members, neighbors, communities, and the nation, ending the sin by removing the sinner is the only option if you want to secure the protection and well-being of everyone else. By the way, we use prisons for this in our culture.
- C. The next example of what may seem to be an extreme response to sin on God’s part comes from the Law as given to Israel. Under the Law, some offenses or sins or acts of disobedience were to be dealt with by the community stoning to death the person or persons who committed the sin. For example:
1. We read in **Deuteronomy 13** that anyone who practice idolatry, or who encourages others to practice idolatry, or who somehow gets involved in idolatry is to be put to death – whether he or she is a prophet, priest, father, mother, sibling, extended family member, cherished friend, or even a whole village or city.

- a. Individual idolaters were to be stoned to death by the people in their village or city. The people in a village or city that turns to idol worship were to be killed by the edge of a sword.
 - b. Now I want to emphasize the part where the community has to be the ones doing the stoning. Imagine getting that close to such a horrific act against a family member or friend or neighbor. In a situation like that, not only does the penalty seem extreme, but the administration of the consequence seems extreme.
 - c. Yet here is what God says about the **WHY** of all this. **Deuteronomy 13:11**, “Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will **never again do** such a wicked thing among you.”
 - d. Do you see God’s mindset on this? His thinking is that it is better to lose the individual than to lose a family or a village or a city or a nation – or the world. And it is best to put the sinner to death through a community action that has the greatest possible impact on the most amount of people.
 - e. I suspect if we gave serious thought to the heinousness of sin and the horrible destruction it brings to those effected by the sinner, we would see the wisdom of God’s ways over the ways we currently deal with sin and unrepentant sinners.
2. According to **Deuteronomy 17:1-7**, God repeats His response to idol worship of any kind by anyone, and so we read in **vs 7**, “So you shall **purge** the evil from your midst.” To **purge** is to cleanse or purify something – and in this case it is purging the home, community, or nation – by removing whatever makes it impure. And God affirms the penalty is death by community stoning.
 3. We read this same “**purge the evil**” message in **Deuteronomy 19**, which deals with first degree murder, manslaughter, secretly changing boundary markers to enlarge one’s property at the expense of another, and giving false testimony against another person. God’s purpose is to protect the spiritual health and general well-being of everyone, as stated in **Deuteronomy 19:19-20**, “Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. [20] The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you.”
 4. **Deuteronomy 22:13-30** presents an extensive description of right and wrong related to sexual morality. Not every kind of sin is met with stoning by the community, but most acts of immorality are.
 - a. Once again, God expresses His purpose for this response by saying, “thus you shall purge the evil from Israel” (**Deut 22:22**). In our day, it is easy to think this is an extreme response.

- a. **First**, the loss of the 36 soldiers was a reminder to Israel that personal and individual sin would have a damaging effect on others, and maybe even do harm to the entire nation. The reality is, the consequences of personal sin cannot be kept to ourselves. It spreads like oil on water. Therefore, to deter the individual sinner is in the best interests of all.
 - b. **Second**, Jericho was the first battle fought after Israel entered the Promised Land. They had just come from spending 40 years waiting for the previous generation to die because they didn't trust God enough to obey Him regarding going into and taking the Land. Therefore, it was as if Achan learned nothing from those 40 years. And one who won't learn is a danger to us all.
 - c. **Third**, Achan was part of the generation that received the law and knew about the blessings for righteousness and the curses for sinfulness. Yet he ignored them and did as he pleased. Those who ignore God and His word unnecessarily make life worse for everyone effected by their choices and behavior.
 - d. **Fourth**, Achan's sin was at the beginning of Israel's life in the Promised Land, and I believe God was making a strong statement for the sake of convincing the rest of Israel that sin will not go unpunished, and whatever you gain from sin is not worth it given the cost of sin. You see, if God allowed Achan's sin to go unnoticed and unpunished, it wouldn't be long before more Israelites would think they could sin and get away with it – and that to the moral and spiritual harm of the whole nation.
 - e. The writer Ecclesiastes expressed this truth in **Ecclesiastes 8:11**, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil."
 - f. I believe God acted in a similar way for the same reasons when He took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the church about how much of the money they were giving from the sale of their land.
- E. The last story we will look at today is about a prophet from Judah who was killed by a lion for disobeying a direct command from God.
1. This story is found in **1 Kings 13:1-25**, where we learn that God told a prophet from Judah to go to Bethel and speak a word to king Jeroboam while he was at his altar burning incense. The prophet was to give God's prophetic words to Jeroboam and then return

- home a different way than he came, and without eating or drinking along the way.
2. While the prophet was returning home, an old prophet who lived in Bethel heard about the prophet from Judah and decided to go after him and ask him to dinner. The story goes like this: [15] Then the old prophet said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread." He said, "I cannot return with you, nor go with you, nor will I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. For a command came to me by the word of the LORD, 'You shall eat no bread, nor drink water there; and do not return by going the way which you came.'" The old prophet said to him, "I also am a prophet like you, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'" **But he lied** to him. So the prophet from Judah went back with the old prophet and ate bread and drank water in his house.
 3. While eating dinner, the word of the LORD came to the old prophet, and he said to the other prophet, "Thus says the LORD, because you have disobeyed the command of the LORD, and have not observed the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, but have returned and eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which He said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no water"; your body shall not come to the grave of your fathers." When the prophet from Judah continued on home, a lion met him and killed him.
 4. Though God's actions in this situation may seem extreme, especially since the old prophet lied, there are two truths that help explain why God did what He did.
 - a. **First**, as Peter said in **Acts 5:29**, "We must obey God rather than men." And we have Samuel's words in **1 Samuel 15:22** "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams."
 - b. **Second**, James makes it clear that there is a danger in being a teacher, or in this stories case, a prophet, for teachers will incur a stricter judgment (**James 3:1**).
 5. I conclude the prophet knew better, but was either lax in being obedient or allowed human words to override God's words.

III. Conclusion

- A. God's dealings with sinners are not always this extreme, but when He is, let us not judge God as less than good, but rather let us look at why God has done what He did and see if that helps us understand Him and helps us grow in confidence that He is perfectly good.