

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

March 29, 2020

- I. Direction of teaching for the next several months.
 - A. Over the past two Sundays, we have looked at temptation, testing, reaping what we sow, chastisement, punishment, and God's blessings and curses – as recorded in **Deuteronomy 27-30**.
 1. My purpose for covering this material was to give you a backdrop or foundation for better understanding the ways and work of God in the stories we are going to look at from the Old Testament.
 2. And my primary purpose for looking at selected stories from the OT is to teach us or remind us –
 - a. how God sees and deals with us,
 - b. how easy it is to distrust God when our sense of well-being is threatened in some way,
 - c. how our attitude toward God and life affects our view of God, faith in God, and behavior when going through difficult times,
 - d. and the wisdom of living a God-trusting, God-pleasing, grateful, and contented life – for that is the only kind of living that makes us inwardly peaceful and full of joy regardless of the circumstances.
 - B. Today, we are going to look at the story of Israel being freed from slavery in Egypt only to be trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army which was coming to recapture them.
 - C. Prayer
- II. Fear in the face of imminent danger and possible loss of life feeds distrust of God and anger over the assumed outcome.
 - A. This story about Israel being trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army – with no escape in sight – **began 430 years earlier**.
 1. Listen as I read this earlier part of the story, for in it we discover that **430 years before the exodus**, God told Abraham that he would have a son, that he would become a great nation, that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed for a time, and that they would one day be freed from their enslavement.
 2. **Genesis 15:12-16**, “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. [13] God said to Abraham, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where

they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. [14] But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward **they will come out with many possessions**. [15] As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. [16] Then in the fourth generation they will return here (*the Promised Land*), for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

3. We read about the fulfillment of this prophecy in **Exodus 12:40-41**, “Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. [41] And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.”

B. My purpose in giving you this bit of history is to show you that 430 years before Israel’s exodus from Egypt, God prophesied that Israel would wind up in Egypt, be enslaved and oppressed by the Egyptians, set free from their slavery, and return to the Promised Land. In addition, God said Israel would plunder the Egyptians so as to leave Egypt with many possessions.

1. In other words, the Israelites who came out of Egypt had a history, a history that included God’s call of Abraham, God’s promise of a son to Abraham, God providing a ram in place of Isaac, God’s care and protection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, God’s provision for Israel in Egypt during the famine through Joseph, and God’s prophecies about their future enslavement and ultimate freedom.
2. Now it is likely that the Israelites knew these stories, for the retelling of family and tribal history was a common practice.
3. However, the Israelites that came out of Egypt had a more recent and personally experienced history that included being enslaved, cruelly treated, and having their newborn sons killed. And while all this was happening to them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob seemed to be absent and uncaring, for as far as they could tell He did nothing to protect them or even rescue them.
4. I believe Moses realized the power of recent events to outweigh the historical stories of God’s faithfulness. And I say this because in his discussion with God at the burning bush, Moses said, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now **they may say** to me, 'What is His name?' (*Or in other words, who is he?*) What shall I say to them?” [14] God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the

sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" [15] God [went on to say], "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you'" (**Exodus 3:13-15**).

- C. The reality is, when current events are filled with such things as trials, tribulation, injustice, suffering, sickness, and sorrow, **anxiety and fear knock on our door**, and in so doing sorely test our trust in the goodness, care, and protection of God.
1. And when our faith in God is sorely tested by current events, we are prone to forget or push aside the stories of God's faithfulness, goodness, and protection that we have read in the Bible.
 - a. In fact, when we are in the clutches of trials and tribulation, we are prone **to ask why** God isn't doing something about our situation, rather than patiently waiting for Him to act on our behalf.
 - b. And when a challenging situation seems extra difficult or has gone on and on with no relief in sight, we are prone **to conclude** that God doesn't care like He claims, because if He cared, He would have solved our problem by now.
 - c. And when feeling like a victim or suffering at the hands of someone who is simply evil is added to asking why and concluding God's doesn't care, we are prone to **feel anger toward God** for allowing events or people to cause us such misery and suffering.
 2. You see, this is what the Israelites cycled through – mentally and emotionally – when they were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army with no escape or relief in sight.
- D. So try to picture this: After the tenth plague, Pharaoh agrees to let the Israelites go off into the desert to worship their God. As Moses leads Israel out of Egypt, the Israelites borrow fine clothing and expensive jewelry to use in their worship – thus plundering the Egyptians just as God said they would.
1. And in these moments of new found freedom, newly gained riches, and a leader who faced Pharaoh and won this freedom for them, life looked great!
 2. But the story doesn't end there. You see, Moses led them up to the edge of the Red Sea – which was okay with them until they saw the Egyptian army quickly coming up behind them. And it was the

realization that they were trapped between the Red Sea and an army that was probably intending to slaughter some and recapture the rest that brought fear, dismay, distrust, and anger.

3. We read this part of the story in **Exodus 14:10-12** . . . As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. [11] Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? [12] "Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

E. This seems to be a dismal picture of Israel's situation – or is it?

1. Could it be that there were facts, and bits of history, and other pieces of pertinent information that Israel neglected to consider in those moments when all they were envisioning was a horrible, and even terrifying outcome?
2. The reality is, they were neglecting to consider specific information and certain known truths.
 - a. **First**, they were neglecting to take into account that their God – the God who had identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – was on their side.
 - (1) True, He had let them suffer in Egypt for a time, but their history also told them that this same God had gotten Joseph to Egypt and made him second only to Pharaoh in order to preserve the nation of Israel during the famine.
 - (2) Now they also knew that this same God used Joseph's evil brothers, Potiphar's adulterous wife, and unjustified jail time to get Joseph into his ruling position. Which is helpful information when trying to understand the ways of God.
 - (3) After all, it could be that God was once again using difficult, fear inducing, seemingly hopeless circumstances to complete His work of freeing the Israelites from Egypt.
 - b. **Second**, they could have recalled God's 430 year old promise and prophecy that He would give Abraham and his descendants a land of their own, but before getting that land they would suffer enslavement and oppression, and when finally freed, they would plunder those who held them slaves. And of course, the

fulfilling of the prophecy part of the promise – in their sight – could have been a reason to trust God as they stood trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army.

- c. **Third**, they had just experienced the tremendous power of God, first hand, in the ten plagues – plagues which harmed the Egyptians but did not touch them.
 - d. **Fourth**, they could see God was using Moses to not only deal with the Egyptians on their behalf, but also to lead them out of Egypt.
 - e. **Fifth**, we read in **Exodus 13:21**, that as they left Egypt, the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.” In other words, in spite of the apparent hopelessness of the current situation, God was visibly with them.
 - f. And in **Exodus 14:1-4**, we read that God told Moses, that He was going to lead Israel in a way that would make it look to Pharaoh like they were wondering aimlessly so that Pharaoh would think it wise to go after them and return them to Egypt as slaves. But God was doing this to lure Pharaoh and his army into a trap that would destroy them.
 - (1) In other words, God was making Israel look confused and defenseless in order to trap and destroy the Egyptians – which meant the Israelites had no reason to be afraid.
 - (2) Now it is probable that not everyone could have known this, but surely enough of them could have known this to spread the word to the entire group.
3. And yet, in spite of all this information, as Pharaoh and his army were getting closer, the Israelites acted as if their world was falling apart, that God was failing them, that Moses had duped them, and they were doomed to a horrible outcome.

F. How could the Israelites fall so far after seeing the ten plagues?

1. I don't think it is fair to be too hard on the Israelites. They may have known the stories of God's deliverance in the past, and they certainly saw God's power at work in the ten plagues.
 - a. However, they were new to trusting God. Remember, this same God had allowed them to suffer under oppressive slavery and the murdering of their newborn sons for the last 80+ years.

- b. So it is understandable that they weren't certain or thoroughly convinced God was going to rescue them.
2. Therefore, in spite of what they knew about God – historically, and in spite of what they had seen God do in the recent days and weeks, they allowed what they could see in the moment to promote distrust of God, lower their opinion of God, and feed their anger at God.
3. In other words, the immediate threat to their well-being fed fear, and their fear fed a doomsday perspective, and their doomsday perspective fed distrust of God's goodness, and in their distrust of God's goodness they assumed the worst – about God, about Moses, and about their future.
4. Do you see how easy it is to turn against God and distrust His goodness when we assume the worst simply because we cannot see **if** or **how** God will rescue us?

G. Moses gives good advice

1. In spite of Israel's distrust of God and anger at himself, Moses gave them good advice. And this is a picture of the kindness and goodness of God, for he could have lectured them about their distrust, their bad attitude toward God, and their anger at him – but he didn't. He gave them good advice.
2. And we read about this in **Exodus 14:13-14**, where Moses said to the people, "**Do not fear! Stand by** (or *calm down and stand still*) **and see** (or *quietly and patiently watch what God will do for you*) the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. [14] The Lord will fight for you **while you keep silent** (or *while you silently and calmly watch*)."
3. I believe it was important for Moses to begin his advice with, "Do not fear!" Why? **Because this kind of fear is the enemy of faith the driving motivation to disparage God.**
 - a. You see, this kind of fear promotes a low and even condemning view of God.
 - b. It projects doom and gloom so that we expect the worst even before anything bad has happened.
 - c. This kind of fear compels us to turn on those who love us and are simply trying to help us.
 - d. And it is this kind of fear that makes self-preservation more important than spiritual growth and stronger faith. You see, this kind of fear only robs and destroys, so run away from it.

4. The next piece of advice Moses gives is, “Calm down, stand still, and patiently wait while you watch what God does for you.”
 - a. In **Hebrews 11:1** we read, “Now faith is the **assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**”
 - b. Those whose faith has grown to include this kind of assurance and conviction, calmly and patiently wait for God to do what He deems best in the situation.
5. And finally, Moses encourages the Israelites to believe that God will fight for them while they calmly watch.
 - a. The reality of the situation is well-stated in **Jeremiah 29:11**, “For I know the **plans that I have for you,**” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”
 - b. Think about this! God did not raise up Moses, perform ten plagues, have the Israelites plunder the Egyptians, and bring them to the edge of the Red Sea just to have them slaughtered or re-enslaved by the Egyptians. God’s plan for Israel was to bring them to the Promised Land – and He had not abandoned His plan even though current events made it look like He had.

III. Conclusion

- A. What do you do in the face of fear, trials, and suffering when it appears only the worst can happen and no one or nothing can stop it?
- B. How often do you use what appears to be God’s failings in the past as the basis for deciding to trust Him in the moment?
- C. And what information do you seek out when you are tempted to distrust God and to think ill of Him?
- D. May we be children who so trust in our Father that, in spite of the circumstances we want to say, “I love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Psalm 18:1-2).