

# Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

April 19, 2020

- I. What was/is God doing during Israel's/our hard times?
  - A. We have looked at three stories from Israel's past, and in all three cases I have put the main emphasis on what we could learn about ourselves from these stories. Today I want to put the emphasis on what we can learn about God and His ways in order to nurture a larger, more comprehensive, spiritually healthier view of God and nurture faith in God so that we will be better prepared to think rightly about Him and continue to trust in Him through the hard times.
  - B. Prayer
  
- II. What was God doing during Israel's times of trial, tribulation, suffering, temptation, and testing?
  - A. We will begin considering God's ways by looking at Israel's 80+ years of suffering the humiliation and hardships of slavery, and the systematic killing of their sons.
    1. We pick up this part of Israel's story in **Exodus 1:5-14**, All the [descendants] of Jacob were seventy in number, including Joseph who preceded them to Egypt. [6] Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. [7] But the sons of Israel were fruitful and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. [8] Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. [9] He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel (*Jacob*) are more and mightier than we. [10] Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land." [11] So [Pharaoh] appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built **storage cities** for Pharaoh. [12] But the more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that [the Egyptians] were in dread of the sons of Israel. [13] The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; [14] and **they made the Israelites lives bitter with hard labor** in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which the Egyptians rigorously imposed on them.
    2. **Exodus 1:15-22** . . . Then the king of Egypt made a law that the Hebrew midwives were to kill every baby boy born to Hebrew

women. But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king had commanded, but let the boys live. So the king of Egypt commanded all Egyptians to kill any baby boy born to a Hebrew woman.

- a. We don't know how long this forced slavery had been going on before Moses was born, and we don't know how long the systematic killing of the baby boys had been going on, but we do know it was at least 80 years because Moses was 80 years old when He spoke to Pharaoh about letting the Israelites leave Egypt to worship their God in the wilderness (**Exodus 7:7**).
  - b. In other words, we do know that for at least 80 years the Israelites suffered under forced labor and the systematic killing of their newborn sons – and that is a long time to suffer such painful and brutal injustice.
3. So what was God doing all those years that His chosen children were forced to endure such cruel and unjust treatment? If you were in their place, what would you be thinking God was doing?
- a. It is probable many thought God was either absent or uncaring.
  - b. It is possible some of them thought God was punishing them. But why? What had they done to deserve such ill treatment from the Egyptians?
  - c. And I suspect that some of them believed God is cruel, or that He has some evil in Him that moves Him to **either make or allow** people to suffer such cruel and unjust treatment. After all, how can a **loving, good God** allow such things to happen to anyone, let alone those He calls His own?
4. If we look to God's word – which is a primary resource for learning about the mind and ways of God – we discover that God told Abraham several hundred years prior what He was doing. We read about this in **Genesis 15:13-16**, where 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 (*Egypt*) whom they will serve, and afterward **they will come out with many possessions**. [16] Then in the fourth generation they will return here (*the Promised Land*), **for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.**"
- a. Though this prophetic portion of scripture speaks of hard times ahead for God's people, and that these hard times will last a long time, it assures Abraham that God will fulfill His promise

to make of him a great nation. And it assures Abraham that God will be with his descendants, that He will prosper them, and that He will punish those who make Abraham's descendants suffer.

- b. This whole statement is important for understanding the mind of God and for seeing what God was doing during the 80+ years the Israelites suffered in Egypt. Therefore, I want to point out two things –
  - (1) **First**, even though God was going to allow the Egyptians to enslave the Israelites and kill their baby boys, they would pay dearly for their sinful cruelty. In other words, God was not going to let them get away with it. Judgement day would come!
  - (2) **Second**, the reason that the Israelites had to endure such suffering for so long is that God was giving the Amorite tribe, along with the smaller tribes in the Promised Land an extra 400 years to come to their senses, repent of their exceedingly evil ways, and turn to the worship of Jehovah and a life of godliness.
- c. Here again, by turning to God's word, we learn that God had condemned the Amorite tribe, along with the smaller tribes in the Promised Land, to utter destruction, or as it is stated in **Leviticus 18:25**, "to being spewed out of the land." **Why?**
  - (1) Because they were exceedingly evil and had been so for so many years that God determined their evil had to be stopped.
  - (2) And how evil were they? They worshiped idols, with one of their primary idols being Molech. And their idol worship included sacrificing their children to Molech by burning them to death at his temple or drowning them in the river.
  - (3) And their idol worship included religiously approved and promoted sexual immorality of the grossest kind – such as temple prostitutes, religious feasts that included orgies, incest, open relations with neighbors, homosexuality, and relations with animals.
- d. And the extent of this evil was not recent or new. It had been willfully practiced for so long that it was an accepted part of the Amorite culture. In other words, it was so imbedded in their way of living that God determined the only way to stop it was to remove these tribes from the land.

5. However, God, being the merciful and patient God that He is, and not wanting any to perish, was willing to give these tribes an additional **400 years** to repent and change their evil ways.
6. Peter speaks of God's patience with rebellious sinners in **2 Peter 3:8-9**, "Do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. [9] The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."
7. But here is the catch – God was showing mercy to heinous sinners at His children's expense.
  - a. The reality is, while God was mercifully giving the Amorite tribe an extra 400 years to come to their senses and change their evil ways, He was allowing the Israelites to suffer at the hands of the Egyptians.
  - b. And of course, the question in most people's minds is, how can that **ever** be fair?
8. I submit to you that the real issue here is not fairness, but the redemption and eternal salvation of sinners. And to help you see this, I'm going to use you as my example.
  - a. Was it fair for Christ to suffer for your sin? Was it fair to the people around you for God to allow you to go on sinning until you finally came to your senses and repented? Didn't your sin, all those years, unjustly harm others? I know mine did – which means God's mercy overrode fairness in order to give us time to come to our senses, repent, and be converted. And I suspect you are exceedingly glad God did this. I know I am!
  - b. So, if I am grateful Christ suffered to redeem me from the penalty of sin, and if I am grateful God showed great patience in waiting for me to come to my senses, shouldn't I join God in His work of salvation by being willing to suffer – like Israel suffered – as God patiently waits for other sinners to repent and be converted?
9. This story teaches us that **there may be times**, and even prolonged times, when we are suffering at the hands of sinful people. And during those times we won't see God doing anything to rescue us from our unjust suffering. Yet God is neither absent nor uncaring! Rather, He is showing mercy and patience to sinners who need salvation – just like He did with us. Therefore, these times are not about fairness, but the redemption and salvation of sinners.

10. Now it is true, we may not know which times are these times. But we can still trust that God is good, that He knows what He is doing, and that our best option is to trust Him with a humble, thankful attitude.
- B. The second story we will use to show us more of the ways of God takes place when Israel was trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army.
1. To remind you how bad things looked and how the Israelites dealt with it, I will read **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."
  2. When we **do not fully trust** God, we are prone to question His goodness when circumstances become threatening enough to make us fearful. And when questioning God's goodness, we are prone to think of Him as absent, or uncaring, or flawed in some other way.
    - a. However, we read in **Exodus 14:1-4**, that God was present and actively caring for His people – in spite of what it looked like.
    - b. You see, God was setting a trap for the Egyptians by making it look like the Israelites could easily be recaptured. And at the same time, God was hardening Pharaoh's heart so he would think it wise to recapture the Israelites rather than thinking it best to let them go based on what God had already done to the Egyptians for enslaving and mistreating the Israelites.
    - c. Therefore, in spite of what it looked like, God was neither absent nor uncaring, which was proven by His bringing about Israel's salvation and the Egyptian army's destruction.
  3. Now you may be wondering, did the Israelites know what God was doing? After all, if they didn't know, how could they be faulted for becoming fearful and acting as if God was catastrophically failing them?
    - a. However, it appears some of them knew, because God told Moses what He was doing, and it is probable Moses passed this

information along to others. And yet it is fair to say that some of them didn't know. So now what?

- b. Well, let me ask you – is knowing that God is good and that He works all things out for good for those who love Him and live according to His will – is knowing this **enough** to keep you from being fearful, anxious, upset, angry at God, or projecting doom when faced with a threatening situation?
  - c. I suspect that for too many of us the answer is “No, its not enough.” And that raises the question, “Why not?”
4. Though there is more than one answer to the question, “Why not,” the important reality to face up to is that in spite of what we know about God, we are prone to imagine a bad outcome, project doom, worry, get angry, and question the goodness and trustworthiness of God when faced with a threatening situation.
  5. However, our problem is not the threatening situation. Our problem is concluding that God is in some way deficient, and therefore untrustworthy for allowing such a situation to even get close to us.
  6. And yet, in this kind of situation, we are as safe in God's hands as Israel was when trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. And like the Israelites, though we cannot see what God is doing, and though we may have no idea of how He will **bring good** out of our disastrous situation, if we calm down and wait on God, we will experience His salvation and gain the good He is working out on our behalf.
  7. So let me review what God was doing in this situation. (1) He was laying a trap for the Egyptians. (2) He was hardening Pharaoh's heart so Pharaoh would be drawn into the trap. (3) He was removing the threat of Israel being recaptured and forced back into slavery. (4) He was causing confusion among the Egyptian soldiers so they could not find their way out of the Red Sea before it closed in on them. (5) He was fulfilling His promise to bring Israel out of Egypt and lead them back to the Promised Land.
  8. We sing the song, “God will make a way where there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see,” and yet He is making a way for you and for me. May we believe the words we sing.
- C. The third and final story for today takes place soon after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea.
1. We read this story in **Exodus 15:22-25a** . . . Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur;

and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. [23] When they came to Marah (*MAH ruh*), they could not drink the waters, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah (*bitter*). [24] **So the people grumbled at Moses**, saying, "What shall we drink?" [25] Then [Moses] cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

2. From a human perspective, it seemed like Israel was in deep trouble because they were running out of water in an area where water was scarce.
3. However, in **Exodus 15:25b**, we learn that God was **testing** the Israelites. So why would God test them? Well, God tests us for much the same reason school teachers test their students – to see if they are learning the material and understanding how to apply the material in real and practical ways.
4. It is for this reason that we read in **1 Peter 4:12-13**, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you **for your testing**, as though some strange thing were happening to you; [13] but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.
5. Whether God’s testing is for Him, or for us, or for both of us, the important truth here is that God’s tests reveal to us where we are in the process of going from a new believer to a mature believer. Therefore, prepare to be tested, and use God’s testings to see how much you have learned in relation to what you are being taught.

### III. Conclusion

A. I will finish with a quick review –

1. When you are suffering unjustly, for a prolonged period of time, sometimes it is God giving unbelievers an extended opportunity to repent and be converted – just like He did with you.
2. When you encounter threatening situations, sometimes they are the result of God using them to save you and punish those who have mistreated you.
3. And finally, when you find yourself in desperate need of something, sometimes God is testing you to see if you are learning what He has been trying to teach you, and if you are able and willing to apply it in real and practical ways to life’s challenging situations.