

International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: Solving Conflict in Old Testament Times

The Old Testament is a story about conflict and how it is resolved with God's help. The first serious disagreement comes when the first man and women disobeyed the Lord's command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord God gave the man a command. He said, "You may eat fruit from any tree in the garden. ¹⁷ But you must not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you will certainly die. Genesis 2

But the man and woman did eat. And while they did not die instantly, their happy relationship with God ended, died so to speak. They hid from God. When God found Adam and Eve, he gave them a chance to apologize for what they did. But instead, Adam blamed Eve for his disobedience and Eve blamed a snake, showing that the relationship between Adam and Eve was not in good shape either. So, God killed an animal in order to clothe Adam and Eve with skins, covering their shame. This is the first indication that sin means others suffer for what the offender did.

Watching the relationships between people and God in Genesis is like watching an adolescent growing up. Plenty of people made some terrible choices. For example, some people acted recklessly on their jealousies and killed or hurt others. Some tried to protect themselves from harm by putting their spouse in danger. Others tricked people into promising things that they otherwise would promise. Overall, not many asked God to help them. They relied on their own schemes.

When you look at our world, what are some of the bad ways people solve their disagreements and jealousies with other people?

The Old Testament is also filled with accounts of warfare as nations tried to get what they wanted or protected themselves from threatening nations. Some of the warfare was directed by God. For example, Israel was God's method to inflict judgment on nations that were very evil, so evil that people were sacrificing their children to appease their gods. At other times, nations were warring with Israel because God was judging Israel for being corrupt politically, religiously, and for having no compassion on the truly needy.

In the Old Testament, God's direct intervention in people's affairs often settled conflicts. In many cases, God supernaturally protected his people from disaster. For example, he saved them out of slavery and abuse in Egypt by sending plagues on the Egyptians. He opened up the Red Sea for Israel to cross on dry ground. He used Elijah the prophet to demonstrate God's power over other gods. Solving conflict in ancient times was mostly about God's intervention and protection rather than the steps people took to protect and defend themselves. In fact, God expected that they depend on him rather than their military might and strategies.

Restate the thoughts about conflicts in the Old Testament.

There is an interesting account of a Jewish woman who saved her people by her courageous actions. That is the person is Esther, a Jew, yet wife and queen to King Xerxes of Persia in 479 B.C. The King had a man named Haman who was second in command. Haman was very proud and became incensed that Esther's uncle, Mordecai the Jew, would not bow down to him. Haman was angry about Mordecai and tricked the King into signing a law saying that on a certain day, Jews could be attacked and killed. When Mordecai learned of the new law, he urged Esther to act and to speak up in favor of the Jews in order to save their lives. This is what he told Esther.

You live in the king's palace. But don't think that just because you are there you will be the only Jew who will escape. ¹⁴ What if you don't say anything at this time? Then help for the Jews will come from another place. But you and your family will die. Who knows? It's possible that you became queen for a time just like this. *Esther 4*

Esther decided to act on the behalf of Jews even though it was risky. If the king did not wish to see her, her life could be taken. Esther, knowing this, asks Mordecai to urge Jews to pray and fast for three days before she initiated with the King.

Then Esther sent a reply to Mordecai. She said, ¹⁶ "Go. Gather together all the Jews who are in Susa. And fast for my benefit. Don't eat or drink anything for three days. Don't do it night or day. I and my attendants will fast just as you do. Then I'll go to the king. I'll do it even though it's against the law. And if I have to die, I'll die."

¹⁷ So Mordecai went away. He carried out all of Esther's directions. *Esther 4*

Retell the story thus far.

The rest of the story is worth reading if you have never done so. There is a twist of events and Haman is demoted and Mordecai promoted. And even though the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be changed, a new law was instituted that gave the Jews the right to protect themselves. Thus, a terrible extermination was stopped.

In what way did God answer the prayers of the Jewish people in this story?

*Have you ever seen God help you through a conflict?
Please tell the story.*

What place do you think God has in solving difficult problems?



Ahasuerus and Haman at the Feast of Esther. Rembrandt van Rijn, 1660. Oil on canvas, 73 x 94 cm. Pushkin Museum, Moscow