

“A Nation is Formed”

Apprentice Track Workshop: Biblical Story

Session 3

Have you ever been rescued from somewhere or something? What was that like?

[Ross]

1) The New (Good) Problem: Too many babies!

As God forms this family into a great nation, we're going to see him provide the 4 necessary elements required for any nation. From Abraham through Joseph the main problem we saw in Act 1, Scene 1 was a lack of babies, a lack of multiplication. But as we turn from Genesis 50 to Exodus 1, now the people of God are experiencing a new problem, too many babies.

- a) The growing population of the Hebrews is mentioned 11 times in the 22 verses of Exodus 1. Moses really wants to emphasize just how much God had done to provide for them.
- b) This is the same kind of language that God uses back in Genesis. In Genesis 1 he commissions Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” and here we find that is exactly what the Israelites are doing. Abraham’s family is fulfilling God’s original intention for humanity as a new Adam and Eve.
- c) But this is also the language of God’s Covenant with Abraham whose descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and stars in the sky.
- d) God used the land of Goshen like a womb. Goshen, mentioned in Genesis 47:1, was a fertile choice land on the Nile delta, it is no wonder the Hebrews were so prosperous.
 - i) But this population boom presented a new problem. A new Pharaoh came to power and was incredibly afraid of what would happen if the Hebrews continued on this path. So they were forced into labor for 400 years. But, “the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied. So, on top of slavery, Pharaoh resorted to infanticide.

[Justin]

2) The New (Unqualified) Leader – One of the repeated storylines within the grand story of Scripture is that when God’s people are in need of redemption he almost always raises up a hero, a flawed but effective leader to bring his people salvation. And that is just what we see starting in Exodus 2.

a) Things Working Against Moses

- i) Almost murdered as a baby. Moses’ mother dodges Pharaoh’s plot to kill the baby Hebrew boys.
- ii) Not raised by his parents.
- iii) A known murderer. We’re only told of one story from the life of Moses before his encounter with God at the burning bush- he kills an Egyptian who was beating

another Hebrew and then flees to the desert when he realizes this has tainted his reputation.

- iv) Not a great public speaker (Ex. 4:10)
- v) Viewed as an outsider by his own people. Not only was he viewed as a murderer before fleeing to the desert, but once he returned to Egypt, the Hebrews initially chafed against his leadership because they thought he was making life harder for them by appealing to Pharaoh. This rebellion against Moses' leadership, of course, would continue for decades.

b) Things Working for Moses

- i) Well-educated – he was brought up in elite circles.
- ii) Familiar with Pharaoh's court
- iii) Called & Empowered by God
 - (1) At the end of the day this would be all that mattered. God himself met with Moses in the burning bush, God himself caused the Plagues and parted the Red Seas.
 - (2) And it is only because of this quality (his calling and empowerment by God) that Moses would go on to take a central place in the OT alongside Abraham before him and David after him.

[Ross]

3) The Dramatic Exit

a) Preparation and Plagues -

- i) God, the main character and central actor in the drama of Scripture was using key sociological changes in Egypt to prepare the Hebrews to depart Egypt. We've already talked about the bursting population, the new Pharaoh, slavery, infanticide, and increasingly oppressive working conditions. God was using all this to pave the way for their dramatic exit.
- ii) When God begins to take action he does so with resounding effect. He sends Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh's court and they put Pharaoh magicians to shame with their power. After this one by one, each of the ten plagues begin to chip away at Pharaoh's stubborn resolve. The heightening intensity of the plagues demonstrate just how lopsided Yahweh's battle against the Egyptian king really was. After each one, Pharaoh changes his mind at the last minute because God had hardened his heart. But God slowly cripples the arrogant and rebellious king until he is forced to surrender- though it costs him every first born son in the realm- including his own son.

[Justin]

- b) **Passover, Plundering, and Parting** - The actual exodus or departing from Egypt takes place in three main events.
 - i) Passover

- (1) A Lamb - Before the night of the killing of the first born of Egypt, God had ordered the Hebrews to kill a lamb without blemish at twilight. Spread the blood over their door posts and then get dressed and ready to leave. And then roast the whole animal over a fire and eat it, ready to leave with their cloak on, belt tied around their waste and staff in hand.
- (2) Unleavened Bread - They were to also prepare unleavened bread, bread that didn't need to take time to rise. That is what they would bring with them on their journey. In Exodus 12:39, Moses says that after the Israelites had left Egypt (but before they crossed the Red Sea) they took out the unleavened bread and baked it and ate it "because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves." So in other words, they had to eat unleavened bread because they were forced by God's providence to leave Egypt so quickly. It's not like they were bad planners. God's sovereign rescue plan was so dramatic, so powerful, and so sudden that unleavened was the only thing they could make fast enough- so even their food became a symbol for how powerful God's salvation was.
- ii) The Plundering of Egypt- But God's power was shown off in another way as well. We often skip this detail in our retelling of the Exodus but in Exodus 12:35-36 we're told that the Egyptians had been so beat down by the Plagues that they basically paid the Hebrews vast sums of gold, silvery, and jewelry to leave. That is how resounding God's victory over Pharaoh had been.
- iii) The Parting of the Red Sea- But then, we come to the final event of the Exodus- the famous parting of the Red Sea.
 - (1) Israel had escaped and were several day outside Pharaoh's capital when God tells Moses, "I will harden Pharaoh's heard and he will pursue [you] and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his army and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." And that is exactly what happened.
 - (2) In the middle of the night, Moses lifted up his staff and two walls of water formed. The Israelite's walked through on dry land. Then the Egyptians followed. But at sunrise, while the entire army was in the middle of the land bridge, the Lord threw them into a panic and their chariots caught bogged in the mud causing a traffic jam. Then, with the army in a quagmire and disarray, God caused the waters to return to normal and engulf the entire army.
 - (3) God had gotten glory. He had single-handedly saved his people.

[Ross]

- 4) **The Law** – Immediately after this dramatic escape. God takes his people into the dessert of the Sinai Peninsula. Here, at the base of Mount Sinai, God entered into a covenant with the people of Israel, he gives them a Law.
 - a) A shared legal tradition is essential to nationhood. At this point Israel has a booming population, a leader, and now they are receiving a law. They only need one more element to form a legitimate nation and fulfill the promise to Abraham.

- b) What is the Law? Often times, when the bible refers to the Law they are referring to the Books of Moses, the entire first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). But specifically, the Law is all the instructions God gave to Israel through Moses while in the wilderness. And even more specifically, the center of the Law is found in Exodus 19-24, which is the book of the Covenant.
- c) Overview of the Book of the Covenant
 - i) In chapter 19 the covenant is initiated. The people are about 3 months into their journey out of Egypt they're at the base of Mt. Horeb and God descends in a cloud of thunder and glory. Moses goes up and here's from God and then goes down to relay his words.
 - ii) Then in chapters 20-23 the Covenant is described. And there are two sections of the covenant. First, there are the 10 Words, in chapter 20, today we call these the 10 commandments. You must not... The first four direct their worship. The last 6 speak to human to human relationships. Then in chapter 21-23 he unpacks how the 10 commandments should be applied in specific ways for the nation as a whole. There are laws about how to worship God- what kind of altars to use and how to observe the sabbath exactly. Then there are laws about how to pay debts, how to deal with murders, thieves, those who commit adultery, slavery, and other social injustices. Whereas the 10 words are universal these are specific applications.
 - iii) And then in chapter 24 God confirms the covenant with a ceremony. Some oxen are slaughtered, and the blood is thrown against an altar- this is called the blood of the covenant. Then God invites Moses and 70 elders from the tribes up on the mountain and they commemorate the covenant with a meal in the presence of God and his glory.

[Justin]

d) Purpose of the Mosaic Covenant

- i) The Law was Israel's path to blessing and the good life. God's intent was for Israel to be a nation in which justice and equality reigned, where his people would be able to enjoy his presence and worship him in holiness. The Law prescribes how Israel would do this.
- ii) The Law created a national way of life, a culture, that bore witness to the surrounding nations of the goodness of God's design. They were to be a compelling counterculture. They were blessed to bless others.
- iii) The Law explains the conditions of the Covenant.
 - (1) The Mosaic Covenant is unique among the Biblical covenants because nowhere else do we find God so explicitly state what his people must do in order to attain the blessings of the covenant. But that is not the Case with the Law. It is very clear what God expects of them and what the consequences would be if they don't fulfill their end of the bargain- they would be exiled from the land he was giving to them.

- (2) But in reality God knew Israel couldn't perform. He knew they would fail- and that they would fail big time (spoiler alert!). So the purpose of the Law is not to be the ultimate means by which God would restore and redeem humanity to a state more glorious than Eden. The Law could never usher in God's promise to dwell perfectly with his people under his reign as they were intended.
- (3) Instead, the law is like a 1,400 year-long object lesson showing humanities inability to keep the covenant. If we as a race were ever going to be restored to right fellowship with God, it would not be by our own efforts- it would have to be accomplished by the efforts of God alone.

[Ross]

5) The Wandering – Let's now return to our narrative and the story of Israel after Egypt.

- a) After the Parting of the Red Sea, in Exodus 16-18 they make about a 3-month journey to Mt Sinai, which as you can see on the map is traditionally located in the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula. And the people of Israel camp at the foot of Sinai for about a year. And the narrative account of what takes place during this year can be found in the second half of the book of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and the first 10 chapters of Numbers. Three major things happen during this year.
- i) In the second half of Exodus, The Tabernacle is built and God fills it with his presence.
 - ii) In Leviticus, God gives the people specific instructions about how to worship him and make sacrifices.
 - iii) And then in the first part of Numbers, the people prepare to leave and make the two-week journey from Mount Sinai north east into the promised land.
- b) But of Course, that is not what happened. They do however make it to the edge of the promised land in just a short time. They stop just south of Canaan at an oasis called Kadesh-Barnea. They had made really good time and so before crossing into the land they send twelve spies to travel from the southern end to the northern end of the land in 40 days.
- i) The Report: The land is prosperous, *but* the people are strong and the cities are well fortified.
 - (1) The Majority opinion: We are not able to go up against the people!
 - (2) The Minority Opinion: We can overcome them!
 - ii) The Result: God promises victory and judgment.
 - (1) God hears the people cry out in fear and then makes his presence known in the Tabernacle. There he promises to do all the work of driving out the great nations from the land.

- (2) But then, because of their rebellion- he also promises that none of the Exodus generation will see the land- instead, they would wander just outside the land for 40 years.

[Justin]

- 6) **Reflections: The Pattern of Redemption** - As we consider this drama, there is one theme I want to draw out, specifically because it connects to the larger storyline of Scripture. In the Pentateuch we see a *pattern of redemption* that prefigures later salvation history. There are three aspects of this pattern that we see in the Books of Moses:
- a) **1) First, the problem: the people are oppressed in slavery.** The exodus is the salvation of God's people *out of* something: in this case, out of tyrannical captivity.

[Ross]

- b) **Second, the solution: the LORD's single-handedly acts to save the people, sparing them from his judgment through a blood sacrifice.** The concept of redemption, of course, refers to purchasing freedom for a slave. The death of the Passover lamb is the ransom price for the firstborn sons of Israel.

[Justin]

- c) And **third, the result: the LORD leads his people to the promised land where they can worship him and be in fellowship with him.** When Moses tells Pharaoh that God wants his people free, he says the reason is that the LORD's people can go to *worship* God. So, Israel is rescued *out of* slavery with the intent of taking them *into* a land where they can worship as God's people in God's place under God's rule. And this last point is critical. If we only think of the Exodus as a release from physical slavery, we will misunderstand all the references to it that come later in the Bible. Instead, we need to see the ultimate goal as worship and relationship. And this worship comes only after rescue, we worship in response to grace not in an effort to earn it.
- d) These three aspects of God's redemption – the problem of slavery, the solution of salvation by sacrifice, and the result of restored worship – will be major reoccurring themes in the rest of the Bible. In some places Old Testament authors make a direct connection to the events of Egypt and the Pentateuch, in other places we see these three elements though the Exodus and Law-Giving is not specifically alluded to or mentioned.

[Ross]

7) Recap of Three Central Themes

- a) **God's Kingdom** – In Act 1, Scene 2 we see two aspects of God's kingly rule emerge.
- i) First, God's is clearly shown to be king over all creation.
- (1) Yahweh is not just a local deity like so many of the ancient god's in the pantheons. Instead God is sovereign even over Egypt and Egypt's Pharaoh- the greatest empire of the world.

- (2) And not only is he sovereign over human politics, but also over nature. He brings the plagues, parts the sea and brings judgment supernaturally on his own people. There is not one square inch of this universe that does not belong to its creator.
- ii) But on the other hand, one of the things we see in the formation of the new nation of Israel is that God chose to make his rule and reign visible and manifested in a special way through one particular group of people. So he reigns sovereignly over all the earth, and ultimately, the whole goal of history is to bring all things under subjection to God- he will obviously and visibly reign in the New Heavens and New Earth. But at the same time, he wants to make his kingdom known through his people, so he governs his people, leads them, and provides for them in a special way. In that sense, the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament is limited to the people of Israel.
- iii) So, which is it? Is God's reign universal or limited to his people? In God's reign over the nation of Israel, we get a glimpse at God's future intent for all humanity- life under the gracious reign of her king (the same is true for God's reign in the Church today).

[Justin]

b) God's Presence

- i) In the same way, God's presence is uniquely experienced by Israel during this phase of history. Of course, we know that God is omni-present- he exists everywhere.
- ii) Yet at the same time, God's presence was especially with Israel. As they left Egypt he led them by day and night with a cloud and pillar of fire, sat at the base of God's Mountain, built the Tabernacle, and wandered through the wilderness. God was once again dwelling with his people just as he had dwelt with them in the Garden. Or more importantly, In the Exodus, God showed Israel and all the world the beauty of his presence with his people. He fights for them, guides them, and communes with them. All of this is just a whisper of what he will do in full once Christ returns and brings the New Heavens and New Earth.

[Ross]

c) God's Promise

- i) As we mentioned last week, it is really important to keep track of the Covenants of Scripture as we move through the narrative. The covenants are the formal relationships God enters into with his people, they are promises he makes to them. And these promises form the backbone for the storyline.
- ii) In the formation of the nation of Israel, God brings about his specific promise to Abraham. God's promises to Abraham's family get even more specific with the formation of Israel. God has fulfilled his promise to make a great nation- that's what they are becoming. They already have a population, a leader, and a law system. Now they just need a territory to occupy.

- iii) Scripture begins with God's covenant to Adam in which he commissions him to represent his reign as his image bearer and to be fruitful and multiple- to spread his reign across the planet working outward from the Garden. And then in response to the Fall God says that this mission will be hindered by curses, but there would be one to come to crush the serpent and reverse the curse.
- iv) And so in Israel, God is also keeping his covenant with Adam. Just as the first man and woman, Israel is commissioned to bear God's name and image, bearing fruit and multiplying as they represent his rule on earth. The nation of Israel is intended to be a little Eden for a watching world.