

Exodus 1 “Forgetting Joseph”
Psalm 105
Acts 7

January 15, 2017

What is the book of Exodus doing?

The purpose of the book of Exodus is to help Israel remember the gospel –
the good news of their salvation.

But if you are going to remember the good news –

you need to remember where you came from –

you need to remember the misery of your old life in slavery.

Exodus is the book that introduces the Ten Commandments at Sinai –
yet Exodus first tells the story of Israel’s salvation.

The gospel always comes first.

God never says *do this and then I will save you* –
rather, God says,

“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods beside me.”

Psalm 105 reminds us of the story of the Exodus – from Abraham to Moses.

Many of the longer Psalms are designed to tell stories.

We have tried to select tunes that are suitable for story-telling.

There are 9 stanzas – so you have time to familiarize yourself with the tune –
and that way you can focus on the words –

the story that we are telling to one another.

Remember the story of Abraham – of Jacob – of Joseph – of Moses.

Because whether you are Jew or Gentile – this has become your story in Jesus.

Sing Psalm 105

Read Acts 6:8-7:22

We’ll come back to Acts 7 in coming weeks to hear the end of Stephen’s sermon –

but today it was especially appropriate because Stephen’s sermon

celebrates the first recorded adoption story in the Bible:

the adoption of Moses.

We’ll hear about that story next Sunday

(no, despite all my efforts, I can’t always make the schedule work perfectly!).

But there is a more important adoption in view in our text for today.
God's adoption of Israel.

There is no Hebrew word in the Old Testament for "adoption."
Indeed, God will say in Ex 4 – 'Israel is my son, my firstborn.'
We don't normally think of "firstborn" as an adoptive term –
but think about *how* Israel becomes God's firstborn son!

Did God's wife give birth to Israel?

No.

Okay, then "firstborn" must be used metaphorically.

How is Israel God's firstborn son?

We sang about this in Psalm 105.

We read about this in Acts 7.

God told Abraham to leave his father's house and go to a land that I will show you.

God promised Abraham an inheritance –

if Abraham would abandon his claim on Terah's estate.

Genesis 12 is, as it were, the adoption of Abraham.

And in the book of Exodus we hear how Abraham's Seed has become a nation –
the nation of Israel.

Introduction: "And These Are the Names..."

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: ² Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³ Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴ Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

The first word in the book of Exodus is the word 'and'.

"And these are the names..."

Indeed, the first six words of the book of Exodus are a direct quotation of Genesis 46:8.

Genesis 46 expands the genealogy in order to name all 70 of Jacob's family in Egypt.

But Genesis 46 – five chapters ago – is also the last time that we heard the voice of the LORD.

In Genesis 46, verse 2:

2 And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob."

And he said, "Here am I."

3 Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father.

Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation.

4 I myself will go down with you to Egypt,

and I will also bring you up again,

and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."

That was the last time that God had spoken in 400 years.
The next time that we will hear the voice of the LORD
is at the burning bush, when God will speak to Moses.

Think about this:

The last thing that God had said was
“go down to Egypt.”
Go to the land where your children will be enslaved.
Go to the land where for 400 years I will be silent
and I will allow all sorts of awful things to happen to your children.

But do not be afraid.

I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again.

God is teaching his people something.

There is no way to life except through death.

There is no way to freedom except through bondage.

You cannot bypass the way of the cross.

There is no shortcut that can avoid Jesus.

But at the heart of this call to bear the cross is the promise:

“I myself will go down with you...and I will also bring you up again.”

This is also why from the time that Joseph went down to Egypt (in Genesis 39)
until the time that the LORD appears to Moses at the burning bush (in Exodus 3)
the name of Yahweh is only used *once*.

In Genesis 49, verse 18, when Jacob is blessing his sons – *in Egypt* –
he pauses to say, “I wait for your salvation, O LORD.”

I know how hard that is!

I look at the 250 years that African slavery existed in North America,
and you can see the same sorts of patterns
that Israel experienced in their 400 years in Egypt.

I hear the voices of African slaves crying out with Jacob,
“I wait for your salvation, O LORD.”

It has been said that the white church learns about Jesus from Paul,
but the black church learns about Jesus from Moses.
There is a reason why the black church resonated with the book of Exodus.
For the gospel brings freedom to the captive.

Our text for today connects us back to the story of Genesis in lots of ways:

1. “Be Fruitful and Multiply”: The Seed of Abraham in the Land of Egypt (v1-7)

⁵ All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶ Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. ⁷ But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

What does verse 7 remind you of?

God had told Adam, “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.”

The word translated “land” is the same word from Genesis 1 – translated “earth.”

“The earth was filled with them!”

The Seed of Abraham is fulfilling the calling of Adam.

In Genesis, the Promised Land, the land of blessing, and of life,
is always connected to having children, the Promised Seed.

Land and Seed go together – children and inheritance.

Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden--the land,
and were commanded to be fruitful and multiply--the seed.

When they are cast out of the land of life (Eden)
and are cast into the land of dust and death,
they are told that their hope is in the seed of the woman.

And when God called Abraham in Genesis 12,
he called him to go to the Promised Land (verse 1),
which he promised to give to his seed--his offspring (verse 7).

Then God blessed him, saying:

"I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Remember those three parts of the Abrahamic blessing:
Land, Seed, blessing to the nations.

Because now the seed of Abraham is fruitful and multiplying, and filling the earth.

Of course, when it says that the “land” was filled with them –
it probably only refers to the land of Goshen – the eastern part of the Nile delta.
That was where Joseph had settled them.
And all the places named in Genesis and Exodus are in that small corner of Egypt.

But that “small corner of Egypt” is in a very strategic location!

2. “A King...Who Did Not Know Joseph”: The Oppression of Israel (v8-14)

⁸ *Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.*

This is the key to the whole story.

A King who did not know Joseph.

This does not mean that the new Pharaoh did not know the *story* of Joseph.

This means that the new Pharaoh did not *like* Joseph!

We sang the story of Joseph in Psalm 105 – and heard about it from Stephen in Acts 7.

Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, had two wives, two concubines, and twelve sons.

Joseph, his favorite son, was sold into slavery by his brothers.

Joseph wound up in prison in Egypt

but then interpreted Pharaoh's dreams correctly,

and warned Pharaoh of a coming famine.

Pharaoh was so impressed that he set Joseph over all his kingdom,

and Joseph oversaw the collection and distribution of food.

But then, during the famine,

Joseph's brothers--the ones who had sold him into slavery--

came to Egypt looking for food.

Joseph discovers that they have repented of their wicked deeds,

and so encourages the whole family to come down to Egypt.

And when Jacob comes down to Egypt in Genesis 47,

he stands before the most powerful king in all the world

and *blesses* Pharaoh.

Why does Jacob bless Pharaoh?

Remember that God's blessing included the words:

"those who bless you will be blessed."

This Gentile king had submitted his kingdom to the rule of the Seed of Abraham.

He had placed all his kingdom in the hands of Joseph.

That Pharaoh had *known* Joseph!

And he humbled himself to receive the blessing of Jacob,
humbling himself that he might receive life.
The promise to Abraham was “those who bless you shall be blessed.”
Pharaoh had blessed Jacob and his family,
and now the blessing of God was coming even to the Gentiles.

Even to Egypt!

This turns the world upside down!

Remember that the book of Genesis was written after the Exodus.
This story would have been read by the Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt,
after spending **four hundred years** in slavery to the Egyptians.

And you want me to believe that Pharaoh is good?

The whole Pentateuch presents Egypt as the land of death.
Remember, you have to go *down* to Egypt.
just like you go *down* into death,
just like you go *down* into the grave.
It would be fair to say,
that Egypt is HELL.
to go to Egypt is to go to Hell.

But something unique happened when Joseph was in Egypt.
Pharaoh had terrible dreams,
and he listened to Joseph and believed what Joseph said.
Joseph told him that a terrible famine was only seven years away,
and if he didn't prepare for it wisely,
all of Egypt would perish.
Pharaoh believed Joseph,
and not only that,
he made Joseph the second most powerful man in Egypt.
and as if that were not enough,
when Joseph brought his family down from Canaan,
Pharaoh told them to take the very best part of the land.
and further,
put them in charge of his own flocks.

Pharaoh blessed the seed of Abraham.
and because of that, Jacob blessed Pharaoh.
Now notice what has happened:
everything is upside down.

Perhaps we miss this in a culture where land isn't important,
but this is the wrong place for blessing to happen!
this is the wrong land!

God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham.
This is Egypt.

That's why in Genesis 46:2,
God had to come to Jacob and say,
"Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt...
I will go down to Egypt with you,
and I will surely bring you back again."

Because although the land is very important,
there is something else that is even more important:
the seed of Abraham.

Land and Seed go together.
Those who bless Abraham's children will be blessed,
and those who curse Abraham's children will be cursed.

Up north in Canaan,
the Promised Land,
wicked men are in charge,
men who don't care about Abraham or his seed,
and the famine turns the Promised Land,
the land of life,
into a land of death.

Down south in Egypt,
the forbidden land,
the land where bad things happen,
Joseph, the seed of Abraham, is in charge,
and God's blessing turns the land of death,
into a land of life.

When Abraham's seed rules the land,
God's blessing comes.

When Abraham's seed are ignored and rejected,
God's cursing comes.

What has happened in Egypt,
is that Pharaoh has blessed the seed of Abraham--the descendent of Isaac.

So even Egypt,
the land of death,
the land where bad things happen,
becomes a land of life,
a land where blessing comes to the children of Israel.

Why?

Because Pharaoh has recognized that God is with Joseph,
and Pharaoh has seen that those who bless Joseph are blessed.

And in Pharaoh we see the first glimpse of the promise
that in Abraham, all nations will be blessed--even Egypt.

Pharaoh humbles himself before the Seed of Abraham
and accepts the blessing of Jacob –
because he understands that without the Seed of Abraham ruling on the throne,
Egypt would have perished!

Paul says in Galatians 3:16 that the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed,
and that that seed is Christ.

Those who bless the name of Christ will be blessed,
and those who curse the name of Christ will be cursed.

Pharaoh was one of the first Gentiles to realize this,
and so he gave authority over all his realm to the seed of Abraham.
And because of that, he lived,
and his people lived.

When another Pharaoh arose who did not realize this,
who did not acknowledge the seed of Abraham,
his firstborn son was killed,
and thousands of his people died.

So how did this happen?
How did we get a king who did not know Joseph?

We know a little about the pharaohs of Egypt –
this time period is fairly sparse in details –
but the basic outline is pretty clear.

There are two chief options for the date of the Exodus.
Some point to 1 Kings 6:1, which says that Israel came out of Egypt 480 years
before the building of Solomon's temple.
Solomon's temple was built around 966 B.C.,
so 480 years earlier was 1446 B.C. –
so some argue that the Exodus must have been in the 15th c. B.C.
But others point out that 480 years
is simply Hebrew shorthand for saying 12 generations
(a generation being 40 years).
And they argue that the evidence of Egyptian (and biblical) history
makes more sense for an Exodus in the 13th c. B.C.

But however you work the chronology,
the same basic dynamic was in play:
there was a foreign dynasty – the Hyksos –
that took power in Egypt around 1650 B.C.
and after around a hundred years, the Egyptians drove them out.

The Hyksos were a Canaanite people – from the same area as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It would make sense if Joseph came to power during the Hyksos period –
since the Hyksos rulers of Egypt were looking for allies.
It would also make sense if later Egyptian rulers would repudiate the Hebrews
as dangerous foreigners who might ally with their enemies.

And that is exactly what the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph says:

⁹ *And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.
¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our
enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.”*

I should note that the translation of the last phrase is contested:
ordinarily in Hebrew, the phrase translated ‘escape from the land’
means something like “overcome” “overwhelm” or “take possession.”

In other words,
Pharaoh thinks that Egypt has an immigration problem.
We’ve allowed all these foreigners to come in –
they’ve lived off our welfare system for all these years,
and now there are too many of them.
The problem is *not* that they might “escape” –
the problem is that they might *take over!*

But of course, in the ancient world, they didn’t *deport* illegal immigrants –
they simply enslaved them!

This fits what we know of Egyptian history.
Even though they have now been in Egypt for some time
(perhaps a century or so),
they are still foreigners – outsiders –
and thus dependent on the Egyptians.
And with the change in government
the sons of Israel recognize that they are now vulnerable.
With the fall of the old regime, they have no friends in high places.

¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.

Verse 11 gives us a clue as to the possible timing of the Exodus.

Ramesses II (who reigned from 1279 to 1213 BC)

built a large administrative center out of mudbrick called “Pi-Ramesses.”

Pi-Ramesses is located in the same small region called Goshen in the Bible –

and was abandoned two centuries later and forgotten –

so the only time that anyone knew about Pi-Ramesses was from 1250 to 1050 BC.

But the central point of our text is to show us how the sons of Israel were enslaved.

It was a gradual process.

First, they were put to forced labor.

Then, as they were marginalized and made outcasts,

the Egyptians became more and more afraid of them.

That is the point of verse 12-14.

¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. ¹³ So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

Notice how verses 13-14 escalate in language:

“ruthlessly made them work as slaves” – is repeated at the beginning and at the end:

“made their lives bitter”

“with hard service”

“in all kinds of work”

“ruthlessly made them work as slaves”

In a properly functioning society,

there will be the proper balance of work and rest:

“six days shall you labor and do all your work – but the seventh day you shall rest.”

In a properly functioning community,

no one will be made someone else’s life bitter with hard service.

Yes, because of the fall – because of sin –

we now experience work as *toil* – there is *pain* in our work (Genesis 3).

Life since Genesis 3 is hard enough without other people adding to it!

But the Egyptians turned the Israelites to forced labor and slavery.

And you can see how Pharaoh’s plan is supposed to work:

first we marginalize the Israelites and work them hard –
remove them from any political influence;
second, once they have no one to defend them and protect them –
then we can actually enslave them.

And from there the next step is genocide.
We'll come back to the end of chapter 1 next week.

I want to close today by zeroing in on verse 14.

The key word here is the word “work” – or “service.”

Let me re-translate verse 14 to make this clear:

“So they made the people *serve* with rigor,
and made their lives bitter with backbreaking *service* in mortar and brick
and with every kind of *service* in the field;
and every kind of *service*
they made them *serve* with vigor.” (Stuart, 71)

Pharaoh made Israel *serve* him.

God will say to Pharaoh,
Israel is my son, my firstborn.
Let my son go, that he may *serve* me.

Already here in chapter 1, Exodus is setting before us the central theme:
Whom will you serve?
Will you serve Pharaoh – the king who would destroy you?
Or will you serve the LORD – the king who will bring you into the Promised Land?

That sounds easy, doesn't it!

It's harder than it sounds.

Because in order to serve the LORD, you have to leave everything you know and love.
Yes, you are promised a glorious inheritance –
but you can't have it yet.
There is a long wilderness to cross first.
Will you love the LORD your God with all your heart –
even when you are hungry and thirsty in the desert?
Will you trust God – even when you can't see the reason for what you are going through?

Jesus said that the one who would be his disciple
must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.