

Open Heart, Open Bible

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking Theme: Redemption

Passage for weekly readings (week 15):

Exodus ch.'s 1 – 6

The Commissioning of Moses

The main Biblical link we have between Genesis and Exodus is given in Genesis ch.15, where the Lord says this to Abraham whilst in a “deep sleep”:

“Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” (v.'s13-16)

The Lord reveals this to Abraham at a time when he has offered blood sacrifice to Him, in obedience to His instructions (v.9). That four-hundred year period has now elapsed, and we are probably at some point in the early thirteenth century B.C., when it is known that the Pharaoh of that time was using slave labour to rebuild Pithom and Rameses (Ex.1 v.11). Ch.1 makes the point eloquently that insecure leadership usually oppresses those in its charge, in order to subdue them. The time has come, however, for Israel's release (2 vs.24,25), for the nation's redemption. The dictionary meaning of redemption is “to recover by expenditure of effort or by a stipulated payment”, and God is about to expend much effort through Moses to set His people free.

The repeated attempts of the Pharaoh to murder all the baby boys sets a precedent which Herod would later follow in his attempt to eliminate Jesus. The two Hebrew midwives foiled the first attempt, and even though the second was carried out more effectively, the baby Moses is saved through it all, Pharaoh's daughter being used in the process. The Lord will use anybody in the outworking of his will, whether they realise it or not! Moses is therefore schooled in the ways of Egypt, whilst never losing his sense of belonging to the children of Israel. It is this that causes him to slay the Egyptian later in life, and this which necessitates his flight to Midian as the deed became known. We know from Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7 vs.20- 44) that Moses was 40 years of age when he slew the Egyptian, and 80 when he had the experience at the burning bush (ch.3).

In this encounter with God, the Lord reveals Himself to Moses as the God of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, reminding him that He is the God of the covenant made to each of them and that the time has come for the people to enjoy their inheritance (v.8). Although the Lord told Moses to tell Pharaoh that he and the people would only go on a three-day journey as far as Horeb, nothing was said to indicate that they would return! The far bigger goal beyond was to take the Promised Land and enjoy its blessings (v.17). Also, the Egyptians were going to foot the bill! It was all revealed to Abraham those four hundred years ago, whilst in that “deep sleep”!

Moses had understandably been taken aback by this sudden intervention of God in his life, and his deep reluctance to do that which was asked of him surfaces in ch.4. The “signs” of his own staff, and his hand, which became leprous, together with the water from the Nile being turned into blood, seem to put him off, rather than encourage him. Sometimes, the challenge of moving in the miraculous is just too much for us! Aaron will be Moses’ spokesman as and when necessary (v.16).

Vs. 22,23 are the heart of this first section of the Book of Exodus, and give us important understanding as to why our God wants people out of bondage, then as now. He does not change! The Lord says to Pharaoh:

“Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you: “Let my son go, so that he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go, so I will kill your firstborn son.” Set free to worship! The emphasis here on the son being the firstborn is very important. The firstborn is the one who inherits the double portion, he is the pride of the father. God sees the whole of Israel as His firstborn. It is the firstborn of the Egyptians who will lose their lives because of Pharaoh’s hardness, and it will be this that will break his resistance. The N.T. describes Jesus as “the firstborn from among the dead” (Colossians 1 v.18), and the church of which we are a part is called “the church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12 v.23). We are God’s firstborn because we have received eternal life through Him who was “the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8 v.29). He doesn’t have second-born sons!

The perplexing incident which follows is best understood by Moses’ seeming disobedience in not circumcising one of his sons (he now had sons other than Gershom (4v.20). Zipporah, his Midianite wife, was quicker than Moses to realise what was going on at this moment, and acted promptly, so averting God’s wrath. Moses and Aaron then meet at Horeb. The elders of the nation respond well when they hear that the God of their fathers has “remembered” them – they worship (v.31).

Ch.5 is the account of Pharaoh behaving exactly as God said he would, even though Moses and Aaron only appear to be asking for a three-day respite. The request backfires, as the people are now told that they must get their own straw to make the same quota of bricks, and the two leaders inevitably have to shoulder the

blame (5 v.21). Moses speaks to the Lord in a state of almost total unbelief, and God assures him yet again that this is the time to see the covenant agreement honoured. He is strengthened after this, and tells his fellow countrymen, but they are so sorely oppressed that they cannot believe him (6v.9). Moses is devastated that his initiatives have had such dire consequences, and cries to the Lord as his doubts threaten to overwhelm him (vs.12,30). The Lord tells him to assure the Israelites of His imminent deliverance: **“I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment”** (v.6). Although Moses appears to doubt that he can ever regain the people’s confidence, his greatness lies in the fact that he and Aaron actually obeyed God, in spite of their very real misgivings. The genealogy of v.’s 14-25 gives us the Levitical descent of the two brothers.

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) There was a period of almost total spiritual drought for the four hundred years between Genesis and Exodus, although this was obviously in accordance with the Lord’s plan and purpose as revealed to Abraham in Genesis 15 vs.13-16. The God of covenant is now on the move again. Why the delay? Why does God ever delay? Is He delaying in our day?

2) The reason that God desires to set people free is that they may worship Him (Exodus 4 v.’s 22,23). Older translations of the Bible generally use the word “serve” at this point, because the Hebrew word being used here means worship in the sense of service, or bond-service. Another word is used when the meaning is adoration, as in Ex. 34 v.14 - “Do not worship any other god”. There is a similar dual meaning of the word “worship” in New Testament Greek, and Paul is using the one which means “service” in Romans 12 v.1. As we serve God single-mindedly, we become clear as to His will for our lives. God is looking for a people to serve Him i.e. – minister to Him, and outwork His will. His will for us is that we be “conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn amongst many brothers” (Romans 8 v.29). Note the connection with the firstborn again! As we become more like Jesus, we cannot but accomplish the Father’s will for our lives. Can we recommit to this as we pray through this week’s passage?

3) Exodus 3 v.14 introduces us to the name “I AM”, which is very similar to the Lord, or Yahweh, the most holy name of God referred to in 6 v.3. Jewish leaders would not even speak it. It relates to His ever-present timelessness. Jesus said in John 8 v.58 “...before Abraham was born, I AM”. This same Jesus has called us His friends (John 15 v.15). Perhaps this thought can inspire our worship this week.

Next week’s passage: Exodus 7 - 12