
WEEK 5 - TO BECOME A HOLY NATION

RECAP & PREPARATION

Daily Readings for the Week

- Exodus 32-34, Psalm 28
- Exodus 35-40 (skim), Psalm 29
- Leviticus 1-4, Psalm 30
- Leviticus 5-7, Psalm 31

Resources for this Week

- Video: Exodus 19-40, Leviticus , Holiness

FOCUS OF TIME TOGETHER

To enter into phase 2 of Israel's great exodus story where God begins transforming them into a *holy* nation, and to meditate on what it is we are saved *for*.

GROUND RULE/GOAL/VALUE FOR THE WEEK

Value: Hospitality

In the context of community group, to be hospitable means to intentionally make safe space for others to be honest and vulnerable. Being humble often requires us to be more careful about how we talk, often being slow to speak. We can go one step further though and practice being quick to listen. Try to focus this week more on creating space for others to share safely than on filling space with your own contributions. Listen attentively and actively, asking clarifying questions and earnestly expressing interest in what others have to offer.

If this week or in future weeks anyone in the group feels a distinct lack of safe space to be themselves, address this with the group and work together to practice hospitality toward one another.

CONNECTION AND UNITY EXERCISE (MUTUAL INVITATION, EXPLAINED AT THE END)

Using the discussion technique of Mutual Invitation, invite everyone to describe the physical place they feel most at home. Try to use good descriptive words to paint a textile picture of this place (sights, smells, sounds, the emotions or physical sensations you feel being there, etc).

OPENING PRAYER

Read Psalm 19 slowly as your opening prayer.

INTRO TO DISCUSSION

As we said last week, the Exodus story is *the* foundational story of the Jewish people and the entire Old Testament, and therefore, of Christianity and the New Testament as well. But the Exodus story isn't just about escape and liberation *from* slavery and oppression. The second half of the story is about what Israel was delivered *to*, or what they were saved *for*. This part of the Exodus paradigm is just as foundational to Jewish and later Christian thought as is their

initial salvation from slavery. The Scriptures never dare to separate salvation *from* and salvation *for* because here in the original Exodus they go hand in hand.

It's with this in mind that we ought to interpret the scenes at Mt. Sinai beginning in Exodus 19. There, the narrative of the story comes to a screeching halt. We've covered nearly 700 years since God called Abram in Genesis 12 and now the next 3.5 books - the rest of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy - are entirely devoted just to this brief 40-year period in the wilderness. This part of the story constitutes a crucial period of *preparation*. Before God leads Israel into the Promised Land, He has to train them to become the holy nation He established and saved them to be.

So God begins at Sinai to give Israel lots of instructions. In total, Israel eventually receives over 600+ commands and guidelines and records them for future generations. These are referred to as *Torah*, which is Hebrew for *guidance* or *instruction*, but is later referred to more generally as "the *law*". These instructions are so important to this story of Israel's foundations that these first five books of the Bible are collectively given the same name : The Torah.

So to recap our journey so far: Essentially, the opening prologue of Genesis 1-11 set up a problem: The world is broken and needs fixing. How will this happen? The rest of Genesis tells the story of God creating a family called Israel who will participate in a great restoration project. When God then rescues them from hundreds of years of slavery, it is in order that they might get going with this good work. How are they to do this? With God's precious Torah, the best set of social laws and guidelines the world has ever seen. By living according to these blueprints, they would accomplish what it was they were saved *for* - to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation that would restore the world.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Hermeneutic Tool for the Week: Pay attention to the pace of the Scriptures, especially in narrative texts. When the pace slows down as it does in the middle of Exodus, that likely indicates something very important and worth noticing is happening.

Questions for Basic Understanding

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

1. Have you ever thought about salvation in terms of what we're saved *for* or have you mostly only thought in terms of what we're saved *from*?
2. Have you ever had any idea of what Leviticus and the intricate set of commands in the second half of Exodus are about?
3. How would you summarize what is happening during this time in the wilderness (from Exodus 19 on through Leviticus) and what is the point of these texts?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

What part, if any, of this week's reading was rich and life-giving for you and what parts were simply tedious and frustratingly strange?

Re-read Psalm 19:7-13

1. Look at the words the psalmist uses to describe God's Torah: Perfect, refreshing, trustworthy, right, joy-bringing, radiant, firm, righteous, precious, sweet, and of great value. Do you or have you thought of the Old Testament "Law" in this way?
2. Do you have any adverse, negative feelings toward the Law? Why do you think this is?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Questions for Self-Examination

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

1. In light of the past few weeks, what would it look like for you to re-examine your faith in terms of God wanting to liberate you from slavery in order to become a part of a special, holy people that lives according to God's good decrees? Do you long for good commands to live by like the Psalmist and early Israel did or do you actually want freedom from any rules or expectations along with freedom from sin and slavery?
2. In Romans, Paul describes the essence of Christianity as "having been set free from sin and having become slaves to righteousness" (Romans 6:18). Are you ready to become a slave to righteousness?

CLOSING

Pray with one another based on your conversation the past few weeks. Again, be brutally honest with God and each other. If you truly desire to become slave-like in your obedience to God's ways of life, express whatever feelings you have at this moment in your journey and ask for his faithful help. Be very specific with what you feel and what you need. If you don't truly see God's laws as trustworthy and right, express this to Him in prayer and ask that He would reveal to you what about them is good and illuminating and life-giving.

MUTUAL INVITATION - A DISCUSSION TECHNIQUE

To practice humility and becoming aware of your tendencies in group discussions, we are going to utilize a special discussion technique. We've borrowed the exercise from Eric Law's book *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*. Law calls it "Mutual Invitation" and uses it to reveal and equalize the power dynamics that exist in groups. He finds it especially effective in multicultural communities because it helps reveal how often the white majority members perceive greater personal power within the community than do many minority members. It is very helpful in making group members aware of how they interact within the group and then also assisting them to reflect on how this affects the community. It may be useful for your group to use this discussion format on a regular basis, or you may decide just to practice it a few times as a training of sorts. Here's how it works:

- The discussion leader should let the group know approximately how much time will be allocated for this particular portion of discussion.
- Then the leader will introduce the topic or question to be discussed. This will typically come from the small group material. It is often helpful if the small group has access to the material to refer back to the question during the discussion.
- Next, the leader introduces or reminds everyone of the discussion process which is as follows: "The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you don't want to say anything, simply say 'pass' and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited."

Note: The first time you practice this, it will likely be very awkward. The tendency will be to give up and go back to the whoever-wants-to-talk-can-talk approach. However, persist through this to at least try it a couple times. Also, do not allow people to interrupt or speak when it is not their turn. Gently remind them that it is not their turn to speak. Similarly, if someone "passes" and chooses not to speak, do not pressure them into doing so. If a person speaks very briefly or passes and then does not remember to invite the next person to speak, do not invite for him or her. Simply point out that this person has the privilege to invite the next person to speak. By ensuring that this person still has the privilege to invite, you affirm and value that person independent of that person's verbal ability.