

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 5: To Become a Holy Nation

Daily Reading for Week

- Exodus 30-31, Psalm 27
- Exodus 32-34, Psalm 28
- Exodus 35-40 (SKIM), Psalm 29
- Leviticus 1-4, Psalm 30
- Leviticus 5-7, Psalm 31
- Leviticus 8-10, Psalm 32
- Leviticus 11-13, Psalm 33
- Videos: Exodus 19-40, Leviticus, Holiness
- It's worth rereading Exodus 19:1 - 20:21 before meeting

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.

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Read Psalm 19 aloud as a 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.

Whole Group Discussion (45 minutes)

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 are 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 summarise 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 slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on the complexity of its meaning.

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?

Reread 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?

Questions for Examining Ourselves

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.

Read Exodus 6:1-9.

This is a striking passage. God was declaring good news (gospel) of Israel's liberation. Perhaps we expect this would have been universally accepted and celebrated. Instead, it says that Israel didn't listen because of their broken spirits and harsh slavery. Knowing nothing in life but slavery, freedom was simply an unbelievable notion to Israel, and perhaps a terrifying thought as well. Looking back on our discussion last week about our own slavery to sin and thinking about Exodus as the primary paradigm for understanding Christ, do you have any resistance in you to the good news of possible freedom from sin? Does that idea strike you as unbelievable? Does being set free scare you?

Small Group Discussion (20 minutes max)

Gather with the same group as the last couple of weeks

Questions for Examining Ourselves

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 Time of Prayer (10 minutes)

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.