

Lessons from Israel 8

The focus of Israel 2

Today, another familiar story. One that we pick up after God has worked remarkably in Israel.

He has chosen a leader and executed a plan to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt.

His character has been on vivid display in this deliverance.

Even in the choosing of this leader, Moses, God makes a few statements that help us to understand why He is working in this way.

Exodus 3:7-10

7. And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

8. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

9. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

God chooses to intervene on behalf of His people, because of His compassion. He sees the hard bondage they are facing and selects a man to lead in their deliverance.

This man had experienced first-hand their "sorrows." He was on the backside of the desert at this moment because of his rash and unwise action in defense of his brethren.

Exodus 2:10-15

10. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

11. And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren.

12. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

13. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?

14. And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.

15. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.

God chooses to work in a very different way. And Moses is a very different person by this point.

It has been 40 years since he left Egypt and rather than work in this impatient, impulsive way, he will follow God's very deliberate plan to deliver Israel.

We arrive in our context after they have exited Egypt. But they are not out of the woods yet.

The final act of God, convincing Pharaoh to let Israel go is found in Exodus 13:

23. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

24. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever.

25. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service.

26. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service?

27. That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.

28. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.

29. And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle.

30. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

31. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said.

32. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also.

33. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men.

Again, we see in the story of Israel, a look forward to the Messiah, who's blood will be of eternal consequence when judgement comes. And when we are "covered by the blood" we will have no fear of death.

But our intention this morning is to learn from "the focus of Israel," today seeing how it changes when the plan and power of God are clearly seen.

Now, throughout the story of this deliverance, God has worked with many signs and wonders. The people had seen and experienced the plagues, believing God enough to be fully obedient in this final, dramatic moment of passover.

Only a few verses later, in their first major challenge since departing Israel, their focus seems to have changed.

Exodus 14:8-10

8. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.

9. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon.

10. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD.

Pharaoh changes his mind again, deciding to pursue Israel, rather than let them go free.

And Israel cries out to the Lord, which is the right place to go, but...

Exodus 14:11-12

11. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?

12. Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

Trust that the power of life and death was in God's hands was a thing of the past, apparently, as the fear of man again gripped Israel.

There was also no consideration of God's will.

How could their calculation be that God had done all of this (so far) to provide this opportunity to flee, only to abandon them at the first sign of challenge in their freedom?

What were they people saying about God? What do we say about God when we question our circumstances and long for the past?

Exodus 14:13-14

13. And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.

14. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

The people should be thankful for a leader who remembers God. He reminds them of His presence and His faithfulness.

We often need this reminder when our focus has changed.

Exodus 14:15-16

15. And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:

16. But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.

Where there was no way forward, God chooses to make a way forward. He did this not as some sort of a blessing for a faithful nation - we saw they were lacking faith. He did this because of who He is!

Remember his words to Moses back in Exodus 3: I have seen their oppression and I will deliver them.

Exodus 14:17-21

17. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

18. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

19. And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them:

20. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.

21. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

Moses obeyed and God did exactly what He promised. Now the way was provided.

Exodus 14:22

22. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

Even a people with the wrong focus can see and will take the way of escape. Though we express anger or question God or forget His character, we still take His relief when it comes.

This is what Israel did.

Exodus 14:23-28

23. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

24. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians,

25. And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

26. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.

27. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

28. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.

God picks winners and losers for His purposes and according to His plan. When God is in the fight, the outcome is certain. And as Moses said "the Lord shall fight for you," He did. And Israel was delivered.

Exodus 14:29-30

29. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

30. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.

The people saw what God had done. They were miraculously delivered. The scene was dramatic.

Our evidence of God's intervention may not be nearly as dramatic. But we often see it.

I wonder if our focus will be changed?

Exodus 14:31

31. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.

From fear of man, they return to the fear of the Lord.

From a focus on circumstances, they return to a focus on the One True God.