

EXODUS

From Slavery to Service

Introduction

1. The Birth of Israel

**Slavery in Egypt (Exodus
1:1-14)**

Resources

- *From Slavery to Service: A Study of Exodus* by Diane L. Jacobson, Augsburg Fortress, 1996.
- *Exodus* from series *Interpretation: A Bible commentary for Teaching and Preaching* by Terence E. Fretheim, John Knox Press, 1991.
- *The Book of Exodus* by Brevard S. Childs, Westminster, 1974.

Introduction

- Story of Exodus a core story for both Jews and Christians
 - For Jews, a story of liberation from slavery to Pharaoh to servants of Yahweh
 - For Christians, the background to understanding the death of Christ whether as the setting of the Last Supper in the synoptics or as the “lamb that was slain” in John
 - Jesus instructs his disciples on the mountain like Moses

- Text of Exodus is the culmination of many recitations of the story for generations as instructed by God with institution of Passover celebration (Exodus 12:24-27)
- Irony plays a critical role in Exodus

History and Faith in Exodus

- Exodus is a **faithful** retelling of the story
 - Not a historical account in the contemporary sense
 - Concerned primarily to give theological meaning to the story of the people of Israel
- Present text probably formalized in the Babylonian exile
 - Captive to another nation
 - Suffering
- Ties to Egyptian context
 - Moses' name is Egyptian
 - Massive construction projects that took place in Egypt in 14th and 13th centuries B.C.

Doing Theology in Exodus

- Exodus is the word of God; it is kerygmatic
- Word is spoken in a specific context
- Theological tensions not resolved in text (compare Ex. 23:21 to 34:7)

Doing Theology in Exodus

- Contained in different types of literature
 - Story
 - Law
 - Liturgy
- Text itself leads us to theological reflection
 - Liturgical materials raise the question of meaning
 - Legal materials have their foundations in declarations about God's identity
 - "I am compassionate" (Ex. 22:27)
 - Narrative materials incorporate theological reflection (Ex. 34:6-7)

Theological Issues

Theology of Creation

- The God who created leads Israel out of Egypt
- God is “life-giving, life-preserving, life-blessing” (Ex. 1:7)
- “The deliverance of Israel is ultimately for the sake of all creation (Ex. 9:16).”
Fretheim

Theology of Creation

- God's intention for Israel to embody the creational blessing is directly opposed by Pharaoh
- "God's redemptive activity is cosmic in its effects....Exodus 15 confesses that God's victory at the sea is not simply a local or historical phenomenon but a cosmic one. God's defeat of the powers of chaos results not simply in Israel's liberation but in the reign of God over the entire cosmos (Ex. 15:18)." Fretheim
- "Israel is called out from among other nations and commissioned to a task on behalf of God's earth. Israel is to function among the nations as a priest functions in a religious community." Fretheim

Knowledge of God

- Pharaoh asks, “Who is the LORD?” (Ex. 5:2)
- God continually seeks self-disclosure (Ex. 7:17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 11:7; 14:4, 18)
- The encounter of Moses with God in chapters 3-6 is self-revelatory, with Moses drawing out even more from God

Knowledge of God

- “This is not simply a matter of ‘progressive revelation’ on God’s part or ‘progressive understanding’ on Israel’s part, as if the identity of Yahweh is set from the beginning and only needs to be unfolded. God does not remain unchanged by all that happens. God does some things that God has never done before; the interaction with other characters also shapes the divine identity. **God is not only one who is; God is also one who in some sense becomes.**”
Fretheim (emphasis added)
- Human beings matter to God

Images for God

- God as lord
 - God gives the law and demands obedience
- God as judge of both Egyptians and Israelites
- God as king (Ex. 15:18)
 - God's sovereignty distinct from that exercised by Pharaoh
 - "It is Pharaoh who is the unmoved mover...The God of Israel is a suffering sovereign." Fretheim
- God as warrior (Ex. 15:3)

Images for God

- God as ruler of the cosmic order is demonstrated by his activity
- Natural world does not resist God; human beings do
- God is a compassionate sovereign who suffers with his people (Ex. 3:7)
- God accomplishes his purposes through people, including the Hebrew midwives and Moses
 - Requires that God forego total control and take risks
 - God is willing to go with what is possible for human beings

Exodus as the Paradigm of Liberation

- Throughout history, Exodus has become the example of God bringing liberation to the oppressed
 - Basis for liberation theology
- Salvation becomes holistic; not merely for the conversion of individuals, but of society

Exodus as the Paradigm of Liberation

- Problems with this viewpoint
 - God engages in battle on behalf of the people; the people are explicitly commanded to observe God's action
 - Pharaoh is not merely a human being, but the representative of Egypt's false gods
 - Exodus is not just liberation. "Exodus moves from one kind of slavery to another, from bondage to Pharaoh to the service of Yahweh."
Fretheim

Israel's Worship & Yahweh's Presence

- Israelites transition from slaves of Pharaoh to worshipping Yahweh
- Liturgical forms of Passover and hymn of Exodus 15 are central to meaning of Exodus
- Answers question of appropriate form of worship
- Question of worship undergoes strain with “golden calf episode”

Law, Covenant, and Israel's Identity

- Exodus tells the story of a people instead of the family story of Genesis
- God saves the Israelites from slavery before he gives them the law
 - “The law is a gift to an already redeemed community. The law is not the means by which the relationship with God is established; God redeems quite apart from human obedience.” Fretheim
 - Law requires worship of God alone
 - Only God's gracious forgiveness allows continuity of the relationship after the golden calf incident

1. The Birth of Israel

Slavery In Egypt (Exodus 1:1-14)

Exodus 1:1-7

- Framed by phrase “sons of Israel”
 - Moves the story from one about a family to one about a nation
- Verse 7 uses 5 verbs to accentuate the growth of the “sons of Israel”
 - Creation language (compare with Gen. 1:28, 9:1,7)
 - God works through this family to accomplish his creative purpose (Ex. 40:34-38)
- God, the Creator, gives life and blessing through redemption

Exodus 1:1-7

- This role of God is acknowledged in Israel's confessional statements (Deut. 26:5-10, Ps. 105)
- “Exodus insists that God’s redemptive work does not occur in a vacuum. *God’s work in creation provides the basis for God’s work in redemption; God’s work in redemption fulfills God’s work in creation.*” Fretheim

Exodus 1:8-14

- Full of irony
- Sets up the cosmic symbolic world in which Exodus operates
 - Pithom and Rameses are not just cities but stand-ins for the gods of Egypt who will be judged by God (Ex. 12:12, 15:11)

Exodus 1:8-14

- “A sign of blessing for Israel is a sign of disaster for Pharaoh. *The new king of Egypt counters God’s life-giving work with death-dealing efforts.*” Fretheim
 - Pharaoh seeks to undo God’s creation
- Pharaoh has no name
 - Called the king “who did not know Joseph”
 - Joseph is the individual God used to preserve life (Gen. 45:5-7; 50:20)
 - “Knowing” is characterized by deep concern

Exodus 1:8-14

- King's speech is ironic
 - King is first to call the Israelites a people, making them equal in status to the Egyptians
 - King voices & confirms God's promise of Gen. 15:13
 - Pharaoh who wants to be shrewd or wise is in the end foolish
 - The cities built to preserve life (Gen. 41:34-36) are now to become cities of death
 - Phrase "escape from the land" (v. 10) is the same as that used by God for the exodus (13:18)
- Egypt's oppression results in the growth of Israel
 - "As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized" (Freire)
 - Oppression will have cosmic effects when liberation occurs

Exodus 1:8-14

- This relationship with oppression will mark Israel and is embedded in her law (Ex. 22:21-24)
 - “The recalling of oppression is to lead to an identification with those who suffer.” Fretheim
- Verses 13-14 employ repetition of the words **rigor** and **service**
 - *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**;
With every kind of **service** they made them **serve** with
rigor. (Fretheim’s translation of Ex. 1:13-14)*

Exodus 1:8-14

- Service to Pharaoh is harsh and cruel
 - Israel goes from service to Pharaoh to service of God
 - “The exodus does not constitute a declaration of independence, but a declaration of dependence upon God.” Fretheim
- “God is a God who takes sides. God is God of the oppressed; God enters into their difficult, suffering situations to set things right. God is a God who is concerned to move people from slavery to freedom.” Fretheim