

THE BIBLICAL THEME OF SHALOM

SHALOM IN EXODUS & LIBERATION

Session 5

After the tragedy of the fall and the ensuing chaos that ripples throughout all creation, the narrative of redemption, liberation and salvation begins. Throughout the rest of the video presentations, we will see God's tenacity in "setting the world to rights" (N.T. Wright). No part of God's good creation is beyond the reach of divine providence. God intends for everything and everyone to be restored in shalom. The lens through which we must view that restoration is Genesis 1-2. That is why we began with two presentations on just those two chapters. If we don't know from where we are starting, we will be lost on the rest of the journey. Since we began where the Bible begins, we already know what God is up to in the redemption process – shalom wholeness for all creation.

In Genesis 12, we pick up the trail of salvation as God begins to restore all that is broken. This part of the story introduces us to one of the most important themes in the Bible – that God intends to use people, in spite of all their frailties as a result of disobedience (Genesis 3), to accomplish this restoration.

Genesis 12-50 is a four-generation family story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the 12 sons (with particular focus on Joseph). The first insight we gain is from Genesis 12:3 where God declares this intention: "through you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Nothing less than universal blessing for all people will do because each person is created in God's image, and God intends to heal the imago dei in everyone.

The second insight comes from Genesis 15:6. Abram is childless and in his old age along with his wife Sarai. They are beyond the point biologically to be capable of bearing children. But God is not deterred, and he promises the patriarch not just a child but that from him will come a family. And not just a small clan, but more numerous than the stars in the skies. Abram "trusts" God's promise, and that is how the divine-human relationship is meant to function. The all-powerful Creator of the universe provides for humanity, and in turn, people trust God and demonstrate that trust through their lives – in what they do and how they act.

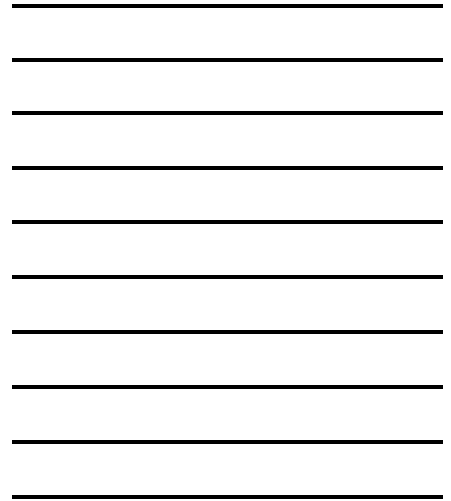
But if we know ourselves, we know that our loyalties are frail. Along the way Abraham doubts the divine promise and several times lies about his relationship with his wife. The seed of deceit has been planted in Abraham's family, and that seed germinates and grows in the subsequent generations of Isaac and Jacob.

In the fourth generation, deception has become a way of life in the family. Jealous of their father's special love for his son Joseph, the other brothers sell Joseph into slavery and report back to their parents that a wild beast has killed Joseph. Not able to extend shalom to Joseph, deception has led to heartbreak in the family. But as we will see in the video presentation, Joseph's plight in Egypt is not the last word. Remember, God intends to provide redemption, not destruction. Nothing, not even the devious plot of jealous brothers, will deter God's plan. Joseph breaks the generational pattern by extending shalom to his brothers and the entire clan, now over 70 people and growing. Egypt becomes a place of refuge and restoration. This is how salvation works. In the messiest circumstances, God breaks through with abundant salvation.

Fast forward 400 years, and the Joseph story has been forgotten by Pharaoh. Egypt is no longer a place of shalom for the lineage of Abraham. Brutal slave conditions have been imposed upon the Hebrews, now called Israel as a people. Pharaoh even mandates infanticide to control them. But through Moses, God intervenes once again, this time through plagues which leads to the Exodus, what Walter Brueggeman describes as "the defining event in the nation of Israel." These are a people who are not forgotten by God. Their cries for deliverance have been heard, and God intervenes in the exodus to release Israel from Egyptian bondage. Unjust oppression cannot, and will not, go on forever. After their passage of out Egypt, the first thing the people do is worship this God who has redeemed them (Ex. 15).

There is one more step in this salvation narrative. 400 years of harsh oppression have imprinted upon these people the culture and worldview of Egyptian supremacy, which normalizes privilege for the few at the expense of those who are required to serve Pharaoh's empire. But that is not the way the world is supposed to be. Israel has been saved from Egypt. Now they must be re-formed, transformed into a people who will center their lives on God and create culture where shalom values are the order of the day. That is what we will pick up in the next presentation.

- Myers, *Walking With the Poor*, p. 30

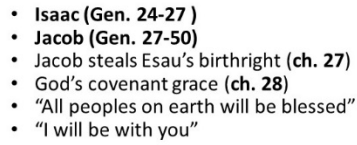


God's Universal Plan of *Shalom* (Gen. 12:2-3) "I will..."

- [illegible]

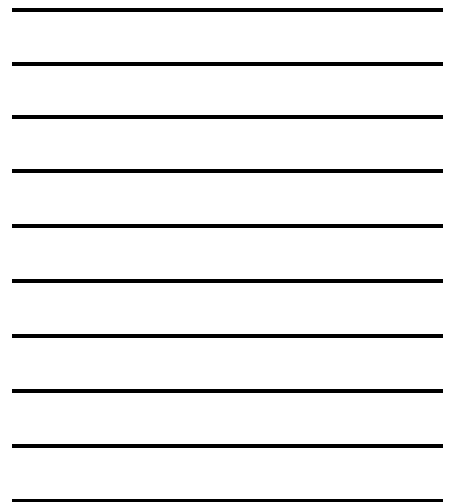
God's Universal Plan of *Shalom* (Gen. 12:2-3)
"I will..."

- [illegible]

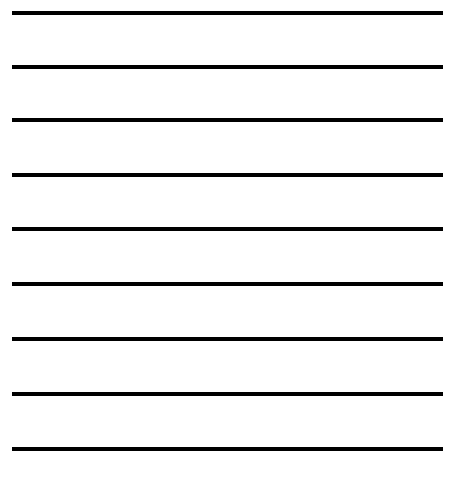
[illegible]

11 Brothers hate Joseph (ch. 37-50)
 "When his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak *shalom* to him." (37:4)

- "Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number."
47:27 / 50:15-21



YHWH = "I Am" God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:14-15)





Oppression transformed to Liberation (Ex. 1-15)

- Bricks without straw
- Promise of deliverance
- 10 plagues upon Egypt
- Passover and exodus

Moses and Miriam lead the worship choruses (15:1-21)

1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD (YHWH):
"I will sing to the LORD (YHWH),
for God is highly exalted.
The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.
2 The LORD (YHWH) is my strength and my song;
God has become my salvation.
My God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
3 The LORD (YHWH) is a warrior...



"... the Exodus story is instructive because it is *the defining narrative* for the people of Israel. It is a story of their liberation and of their formation. The liberation was from the oppression of Egypt and its pharaoh, and the formation was God transforming them from a group of slaves into a people. This was hard work. It took a day to get Israel out of Egypt and forty years in the wilderness to get Egypt out of Israel."

- Walter Brueggemann



INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

These twin stories illuminate the nature of salvation. Individual salvation and the redemption of a family in Gen. 12-50. Communal salvation and the redemption of a people in Ex. 1-19. God is always at work in both arenas – saving people from the patterns of sin embedded in every family and saving peoples from the cruelty of oppressors.

In your own life, you may see one or both of these patterns at play in your family history and in your experience of the communities you grew in with privilege and scarcity.

Take some time to journal about your personal insights as you take inventory of your life experience. Have your eyes open to the ways God has broken through these patterns of evil, personal and systemic, to redeem you and others. How has salvation broken into your life story? How have you seen chaos replaced by shalom?

As a final portion of this journaling experience, submit to God those issues, people and circumstances that are still in need of redemption. Take time to pray about all that you have written. In my experience, I have become aware that the final chapter of every story is not written by us but by God. And God is relentless in pursuing shalom on our behalf.

Notes:

SUGGESTED READING

As I mentioned in the introduction, the suggested readings are meant to expand our horizons of application, as the scriptures are not just an ancient story but also carry enormous relevance for our day and our issues as well. In that spirit, I commend to you this book:

Esau McAuley, *Reading While Black*

Anglican priest and New Testament scholar Esau McAuley has written an insightful work as he takes various biblical narratives and asks profound questions about the relevance of these texts for our world today, especially for African-Americans in this country. For example, Esau describes the relevance of the Exodus narrative for the discussion of policing in the United States today. Does God's commitment to stop the patterns of violence perpetrated by the Egyptian Empire have anything to say with the ongoing oppression that some people continue to experience as a result of their ethnicity?

The power of this book is in its courageous confrontation of some of society's most pressing issues from the perspective of scripture, the place where we should always start our conversations about how we live out shalom.

MY WRITING

I have attached two chapters from my own writings on shalom, one covering the family story in Gen. 12-50, and the other discussing the Exodus. Again, these are more detailed studies on the particularities of various passages. Feel free to use this material if it is helpful to you.

Notes:

PSALM & PRAYER PARTNER

Psalm 103 is a prayer of praise for God's intervention in the world to bring about salvation. This Psalm includes references to personal shalom, as well as what God has done through Moses to redeem Israel. It also reminds us of God's faithfulness to accomplish restoration. Use this Psalm with your prayer partner to share the details of your journal reflections. The refrain through Psalm 103 is "Praise the LORD", and that praise arises from the very specific ways that God's faithfulness is displayed personally and communally. May this be a rich time of sharing about your lives as a testimony to God's presence with you writing the redemption story of your life.

Notes:

GROUP DISCUSSION

I anticipate that this study and the exercises will prompt rich discussion as we remember our life stories and see God at work (and where we need God to still be at work bringing about shalom). You may need several group gatherings to share the abundance of your stories as together you become aware of the abundance of God's grace, mercy and intervention.

At the same time, these twin biblical stories remind us that it takes courage (Joseph and Moses) to intervene in order to stop the cycles of destruction which continue to plague our world. Where do you see the need for courageous intervention by your church in your community? How is it that you can speak shalom like Joseph did with his brothers and Moses did in confronting Pharaoh on behalf of oppressed Israel?

Notes: