

Chapter 4 – Deliverance

The Exodus (“the way out” compare the English word “exit”) of the descendants of Jacob/Israel from slavery to freedom is the event from which God’s people take their identity. They are those whom God set free and claimed as God’s own people. The commemoration of this act of deliverance, or Passover, is thus a reminder of the people’s complete dependence on God. Having been created by God as human beings, they are now created as a community through whom God intends to bring blessing to the rest of humanity. Their very existence is a testimony to God’s power to rescue from bondage.

The Pharaoh and the rest of the Egyptians behave like every dominant group that sees the “different” minority growing larger: they respond in fear and try to eliminate the perceived threat to their way of life.

What are the Egyptians afraid the Israelites will do to them?

Why is the solution to kill only the male Israelite infants? Why not kill the females too?

Describe how Moses’s family acts to save his life.

How does Moses’s sister turn the tables on the Egyptians?

Notice on page 36 the sentence, “. . .she [Moses’s mother] took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son.” In the following paragraph we encounter Moses as a grown man.

What is involved in growing up as Pharaoh’s grandson that qualifies Moses for the job God has in mind for him?

In response to seeing the oppression of his own people (how did he know they were his people?), Moses acts with impulsive violence to rescue one individual worker and then is surprised when he learns that the man he rescued has spread the word (wouldn’t you have told somebody?). So Moses has to leave town in a hurry.

How does spending several years “tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law” qualify Moses for the job God has in mind for him?¹

Moses does not perceive himself as qualified to deliver the people. What is God’s response to Moses’s first objection: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?” (p. 37)?

¹ In antiquity the king or leader of the people was often referred to as “shepherd.” The phrase “shepherd of the people” appears often in Homer’s *Iliad*. Moses’s and David’s experience as literal shepherds prepares for Jesus’s self-designation as “the good shepherd” in John’s Gospel.

Even after God has afflicted the Egyptians with nine “plagues” of discomfort and economic ruin, Pharaoh still has not kept his periodic promise to let the Israelites go. At this point, many people ask, “Why did the whole Egyptian people have to suffer for Pharaoh’s stubbornness? The Biblical writers lived in a world-view in which the leader represented the whole community and the leader’s sins brought down misfortune from the gods on the whole community. The individual’s vices and virtues brought down punishment or blessing on that individual’s entire family as well.

Just as God created an ordered world out of the watery chaos in Genesis 1, now God creates a people by bringing them through the watery chaos of the sea. The TNIV has “the Red Sea.” Some translations have “the Reed Sea.” This ambiguity in the Hebrew has given rise to what we call a “rationalization” of the story; that is, “the Israelites just walked across a shallow marsh after the wind had blown all night and dried it out a little.”

Does this way of thinking about the story appeal to you? Why or why not?

The rest of the chapter is about God’s provision for the people as they moved through the desert toward Sinai/Horeb (“the mountain of God”).

Thoughts on Christian Maturity

Have you ever sensed God calling you to do something for which you did not feel qualified? What did you do about it?

Did you find it a little odd that the Israelites were sure the Egyptians were going to kill them at the edge of the sea, even after God had shown so much power in all the plagues?

Have you ever given in to anxiety about a situation despite God’s faithfulness in your past experience?

Right at the end of chapter 4 is the story about how God fed the people with *manna* (translation: Whatchamacallit?)

What do you think was the point of not allowing people to keep more than they needed?

What would motivate people to try to keep more than they needed?