**BCM Bible Study: August 26/27, 2020**

**Exodus 1: Where is God?**

Getting Started (15 minutes)

* Start by introducing yourself and giving others an opportunity to do the same. You could ask them to share a variety of things about themselves (major, hometown, etc.), but include something like:
	+ Ask them to share why they decided to join a BCM family
	+ Ask them to share what they are hoping to get out of being in a family group
* Take a minute to set the tone for the semester. Communicate your personal goals and hopes for them as a group and as individuals. This is a good opportunity to set the bar high for attendance and commitment. You can say something like “My hope is that everyone will prioritize this time together each week, because I think the more consistent everyone is, the better we get to know one another, and the more we will grow together.” Be excited – that rubs off on people!
* Also please take a moment to address Covid. Review the safety guidelines (we will discuss these with you), reminding your group that while we all have different viewpoints, we must do what is best to care for the most concerned and the most vulnerable.

Introduction

Exodus is the second installment of the Pentateuch, a term that refers to the first five books of the Bible. The Pentateuch is traditionally thought to be authored by Moses and this remains the most convincing theory. Some aspects of the Pentateuch directly attribute authorship to Moses, while it is clear that some parts were edited at later times (such as the account of his death). This does not present any problem for us – the book of Exodus is a stable text, affirmed throughout history as being inspired by God.

The book of Exodus recounts the story of God delivering his people out of Egyptian slavery and leading them to Mount Sinai where he gives them his law. It is tempting to view these accounts as merely interesting stories followed by some lawgiving, but it is so much more than that. In my view, the theme of Exodus is this: “The Lord’s missionary commitment to make himself know to the nations.” (Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*) Exodus answers the question: Who is God? The book of Exodus helps us understand history through this theological lens.

All the events of Exodus – God overpowering Pharaoh with plagues and the sea, his testing/training of and provision for his people in the desert, his claiming them as his own at Mt. Sinai, the laws he sets forth, and even the details of the tabernacle – are written with the purpose of showing the reader who God is and what he is like. Through his people, God desires to make himself known to the nations that they might bow before Him. In this way, the book of Exodus is very much of interest to the reader in 2020. In this book we encounter the living God, the one who wants us to know him and be in relationship to him. As we struggle to see him in the world, we know that he is still the great deliverer and redeemer.

Setting the Stage: **Read Exodus 1:1-7**

* Take a moment to reflect on what happened before Exodus – what do you know about the life of Joseph? (see the video if you need some guidance)
* Look at how Genesis ends: **Read Genesis 50:15-20**. What do we learn about God’s character in v.20?
	+ Romans 8:28 states a similar idea. Why is it sometimes difficult to believe that God is working in difficult times?
	+ When have you seen God do what Joseph says in v.20?

An Oppressed People: **Read Exodus 1:8-22**

* What are the ways that the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites in this passage?
* Verse 8 states that Pharaoh did not know Joseph. (This could mean he really didn’t know about Joseph or that he chose to act in spite of knowing about him) Why is this significant?
	+ Had Pharaoh known Joseph and heeded the lessens learned, how might this have impacted the way he ruled?
	+ In the same way, how does remembering the past actions of God influence the way you live now?
* What was Pharaoh’s motivating factor in his actions against Israel? How do you see fear driving his actions?
* How do the Hebrew midwives show us an example of faith?
	+ Living by faith sometimes means acting in ways that put us at odds with society. What might this look like today?
* In many ways it feels like God is absent in this chapter, as his only explicit activity is mentioned in v.20. While the hand of God was apparent in the end of Genesis, he seems to have left his people to suffer in Egypt.
	+ Have you ever been through a season when God seems absent and the world seems out of control? Have you felt that way during the pandemic?
* As the reader, we have the benefit of knowing that God is in fact present with his people (2:23-25) and will deliver them. However, it is difficult to believe this for ourselves when personal experiences or world events seem to indicate otherwise. Consider this: “Israel’s political fate is never left to the caprice of international events. Rather, God is in control and he will, sooner or later, bring all of history to its proper conclusion...It is maintaining this big picture that is a mark of the mature Christian life. We doubt and we struggle, but we trust God. Things are not the way they ought to be, but we rest in God’s promises. We have faith.”
	+ What doubts and struggle do you need to bring to God?
	+ What promises can we rest on in the midst of sever struggles?
	+ The Pharaoh lived in fear; we are called to live by faith. What do these different mindsets (fear/faith) look like in daily life?
* Despite the oppression of Pharaoh how do you see a glimpse of God’s sovereignty in this passage? (see v.12)
	+ In these hard days, have you seen evidence of God’s redemptive hand? How is he already bringing beauty out of ashes?

Challenge: Take time to write a prayer to God this week. Tell him about your doubts and fears. Ask him to help you live by faith. Ask him to bring his kingdom and bring about healing. Praise him for his faithfulness in the past. We will reflect on this to begin next week.

Extra Notes:

* Exodus begins by repeating Genesis 46:8, thus explicitly connecting these stories.
* Joseph had 70 descendants coming into Egypt and that was not a coincidence. There are 70 nations listed in the table of nations in Genesis 10. Moses will later select 70 men to help him lead Israel. Later on, the Jewish Sanhedrin was led by 70 people. Jesus sent out 70 disciples to the surrounding areas. It is interesting to note that the Ugaritic tradition (this would have been contemporary with Exodus) held that 70 “sons of El” ruled in the divine council. At the tower of Babel, God dispersed the nations (remember the table of nations lists 70 list before this), and Deuteronomy 32:8-9 notes that God is dispersing the nations and giving them over to their wishes (think of the language in Romans 1) while claiming a new nation as his own through Abraham. The point seems to be this: the nations (70) have given themselves to other gods, so God will take 70 people into Egypt to assert his dominance over the gods and stake his rightful claim to every nation. (notes from *The Unseen Realm*, Michael Heiser)
* We will pick up on this theme more later, but creation and salvation are tied together in Exodus. Notice how some of the early language in Exodus echoes the beginning of Genesis (fruitful and multiply). Also, part of the Abrahamic covenant is the multiplication of the people and God is doing this despite oppression. In fact, the way the Moses writes, it is the seems that the oppression itself is driving the numerical growth. We can understand from our own experience how difficult times form us. In this way, the time in Egypt is formative and critical for getting God’s people ready for Sinai and the promised land. It is *through* creation (both multiplying the people and the elements of natural creation itself (plagues, waters of the sea, etc.)) that Israel will be saved and made to be a people. In the same way our own salvation involves a *new creation* – we are given new heart and the old is replaced with the new.
* It is ironic that the people are blessed by the very thing Pharaoh is trying to control: population increase.