

## Exodus – From Slavery to the Promised Land

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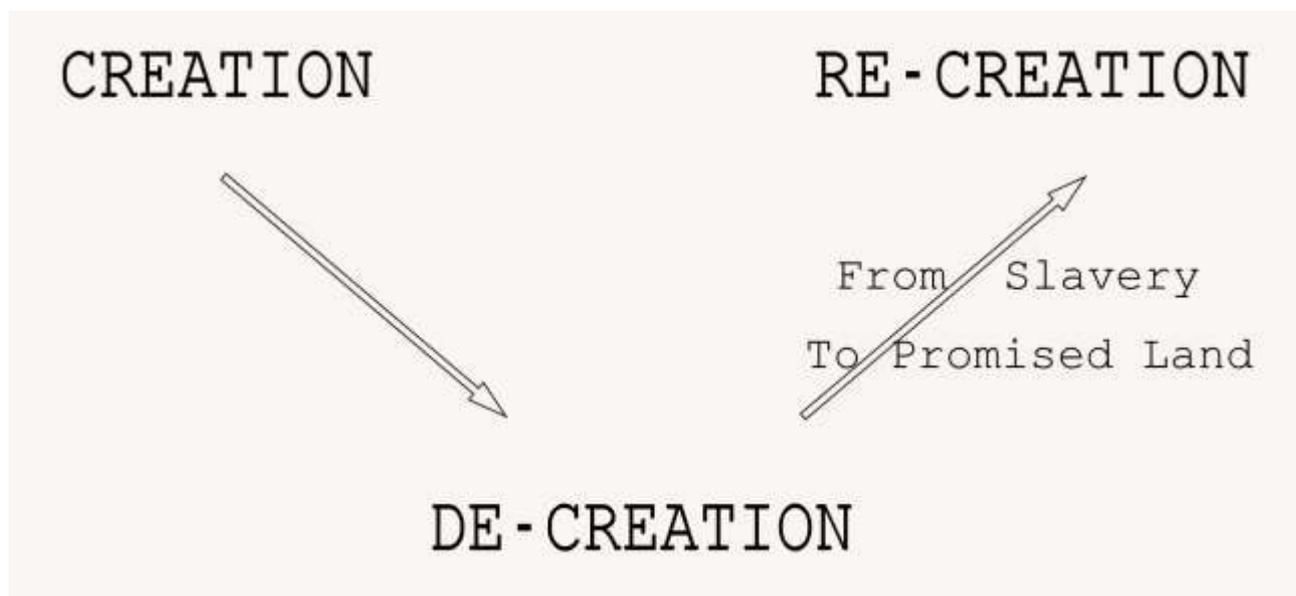
### All Things New

We have been following the Big Story of Scripture, using the framework outlined in Pete Hughes' book, *All Things New*.

We have seen that when God first created the world it was very good. Men and women were together created in the image of God to reflect God's loving care and nurturing of the world he had made. But we have rebelled against God: men and women have wanted to be gods to themselves. God's world is broken.

At the moment, we are made particularly aware of the broken nature of our world through the war in Ukraine. It is a graphic example of what happens when one person wants to become a god to himself and to dominate all others. It is an instance of human empire building which has left a trail of oppression, violence, misery and death strewn across our planet. It is the de-creation of the good world created by God.

But God is not content to leave his world in its broken and miserable condition; he plans to mend it and to make all things new.



How is God going to remake his broken world?

### Background to Exodus

Against the context of a broken world, marked by division, hatred and violence, God chose one man, Abraham, through whom he was going to make a new beginning. God made a covenant with him, promising to make his descendants into a great nation and he promising them a land of their own. God promised that through Abraham's descendants, all nations would be blessed – just as he had blessed the world he first created.

By the time we get to the beginning of the Book of Exodus, Abraham's descendants, the Children of Israel, have become a great nation. But they are living in the land of Egypt where they are slaves and are being treated with great cruelty.

### Set the captives free!

God raised up Moses from the Israelites to go and demand from Pharaoh in the name of Yahweh, the living God, the God of Abraham, "Let my people go that they may worship me." And this is what Moses is to say to Pharaoh:

This is what the LORD [Yahweh] says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so that he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son. (Exodus 4:22-23).

Israel is God's firstborn son, the one who is heir to all the promises that God has made. Pharaoh, despite the warning of many plagues, has refused to let the Israelites go free; instead he has increased their burdens. So now God will strike down Pharaoh's firstborn and all the firstborn of Egypt.

## **Set Free through Passover and the death of the firstborn**

At that is what happened. God told his people to prepare for the night when he would descend in judgment upon Egypt. Each Israelite family is to kill a lamb and paint its blood on the doorway of their homes. They are to stay in their homes that night, to cook and eat the Lamb and be ready to leave in a hurry. When God comes down in judgment no-one is safe. But when the angel of death sees the blood of the lamb he will pass-over the Israelite houses, while in every Egyptian household the firstborn male child will be struck dead.

The power and will of Egypt was broken and the Israelites were driven out of Egypt.

And this is where we pick up our reading (Exodus 13:20-22; 14:5-14; 14:19-31):

<sup>20</sup> After leaving Sukkoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. <sup>21</sup> By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. <sup>22</sup> Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people...

<sup>14</sup> <sup>5</sup> When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" <sup>6</sup> So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. <sup>7</sup> He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. <sup>8</sup> The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. <sup>9</sup> The Egyptians—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen<sup>[a]</sup> and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

<sup>10</sup> As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. <sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

<sup>13</sup> Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. <sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." ...

<sup>19</sup> Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, <sup>20</sup> coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, <sup>22</sup> and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

<sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. <sup>24</sup> During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. <sup>25</sup> He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

<sup>26</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." <sup>27</sup> Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. <sup>28</sup> The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

<sup>29</sup> But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. <sup>30</sup> That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. <sup>31</sup> And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

God freed his people from slavery by defeating and breaking the power of those who had held them captive and redeeming them through the blood of the lamb whose blood kept them safe in that day of judgment.

God redeemed his people from slavery that he might bring them into the land he had promised them as their inheritance from him. It is described as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8 etc.) – a picture of Paradise restored.

But the people's initial destination is Mount Sinai, where God will meet with his people and they will meet with him. The Lord had told Moses, "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you [plural] will worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12).

### **Recruited into the Mission of God**

On the day that the Israelites camp at the foot of Mt Sinai, the Lord calls Moses up the mountain to meet with him and says (Exodus 19:3-6):

'This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'

God has rescued his people from cruel slavery and set them free that they might worship and serve him; "I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." God has saved them by his own power and it is by his power that they will be carried home. But God's saving purpose for Israel does not involve his rejection of the rest of the world – the whole earth is his. He has saved and protected this people for the sake of his covenant with Abraham by which he promised to bring blessing to all the nations of the world.

The Israelites are to be a kingdom of priests; they are to act as mediators between the living God and the nations of the world, to be the means by which all nations enjoy the blessings promised by the God of Abraham. They should not think that God has chosen them and rejected the other nations; he has chosen them for the sake of the other nations – that they might be a light to the nations.

But they can be and do this only as they live in obedience to God's law. The law is a revelation of God's holy character and requirements. A life shaped by God's law would make Israel distinctively different from the nations around about them. They would be a people whose individual and

corporate life would reflect and commend the character of their God and enable them to become the envy of the nations, commending their lawgiver – their God – to an unruly world.

*God's people, rescued from slavery and oppression, living with God and in God's land and in accordance with God's law, would be an anticipation of a broken world restored, an anticipation of a renewed creation.*

But will Israel live up to its calling? Wait for next week's nail-biting instalment!

## **Our Calling as God's Redeemed People**

Pete Hughes writes, "As we immerse ourselves in the greatest story ever told, we find our ultimate sense of belonging, our purpose in the present and our hope for the future." That is to say, as we read this book – the Bible, that is, not Pete Hughes' book – we discover that its story is our story.

We read the book of Exodus as those who know how the story continues. We know how Israel failed to be the people that God called them to be, but where Israel failed, our Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed.

He is the firstborn Son of the Father, the Firstborn over all creation. He is the one to whom all the promises of God belong; he is the heir of all things. He is *the* seed or descendant of Abraham who has been perfectly obedient to his heavenly Father. He is the one through whom all nations shall be blessed.

He is the Lamb of God whose shed blood has saved us from the judgment we deserved: Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. Through his death and resurrection, he has broken all the powers that held us captive. He is the one who has rescued us from slavery to sin and death and, through the waters of baptism, has brought us into the presence of the living God that we may worship and serve him. He calls us to be a holy people and a priestly people: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Jesus, the light of the world, calls us also to share in his priestly mission of bringing the world to God and God to the world. As churches, Christian communities, we are to live the life of the New Creation and to be signposts pointing towards the day when all things shall be made new. We are to be a transformed and transforming people.

## **Our challenge**

You are a priestly people, called to bring the world to God and God to the world.

Pray for our broken world. This is part of what it means for us to bring our broken world to God. We are to be a people of prayer.

Pray that we, along with Christians throughout this sad and conflicted world, may be able to demonstrate a different way of living and tell the world of the one who alone can give the power to live the life of the New Creation.

Pete Hughes recounts how the evangelist Gipsy Smith used to say that there are five Gospels. There is Matthew, Mark, Luke and John but then there is the life of the Christian and of churches. Many people will not read the first four but they see how you live and hear what you say. Do we show and tell the good news of the gospel? We are to live as a people who have been made new in Christ such that we become the envy of a broken world.

Pray for opportunities to shed the light of Christ and show the love of God to those whose lives we touch this week.

How will you live out your priestly calling this week?

Peter Misselbrook

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