

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES IN SPITE OF APPEARANCES

Exodus 1:1—14

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

In 60 seconds, make a list of as many of the names of your ancestors as you can, beginning with your parents. In pairs, briefly tell each other the “story” of one of your ancestors and how your life story is connected to his or her story.

All of us, when we stop to think about it, realize that the story of our lives is vitally connected with the “stories” that have come before us. If we think about it long enough and wisely enough we realize that our story is connected to the story of creation itself. Our small “stories” are woven into the grand story of God’s creating/redeeming story. It is a story that begins in Genesis 1:1 and will continue forever. As we begin to study the book of Exodus, Moses reminds us that this new book is part of the ongoing story of creation, which he began in Genesis.

STUDY

1. Compare Exodus 1:1-14 with each of these passages from Genesis and identify the word or phrase in Exodus 1:1-14 that refers to each one.

1:26-28: God promises Adam and Eve that they will be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. These three phrases are repeated in Exodus 1:7. Israel in Egypt is experiencing the blessing of God.

8:15-17, 9:1 & 7: God repeats the creation promise to Noah and so Israel has the promise made to Noah fulfilled in them while in Egypt.

12:1-3: The descendants of Israel become a great nation while in Egypt. They are a “blessing” to Egypt through their slavery.

15:1-6: The descendants of Abraham have become as numerous as the stars.

15:12-21: The descendants of Abraham are living in a foreign land and they are being oppressed/afflicted just as God told Abraham.

17:3-8: The descendants of Abraham are fruitful and have multiplied.

28:10-15: The descendants of Jacob have become as numerous as the dust of the earth and have spread out to the west and east, north and south. Egypt is “blessed” through their slavery.

35:23-26: All twelve sons of Jacob are listed. The entire family of Israel has come to Egypt and have been blessed while living in Egypt.

37:26-28 & 36: Joseph goes to Egypt ahead of his family. He is already in Egypt through being sold into slavery by his brothers.

39:2-6: Joseph the slave benefits his master just as Israel the slave benefits “his” master.

45:8-13: Joseph is already in Egypt and commands his father and entire family to join him there. It is God’s will the family go to Egypt.

46:1-27: All of Jacob’s family, his sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, all 70 of them, go to Egypt.

50:22-26: God through Joseph promises that the entire family of Israel is going to return to the land of promise, the land of Canaan.

2. What are some ways that the situation in Exodus 1 is not what you would expect based upon these passages from Genesis?

While vv. 1-14 is clearly stating the fulfillment of some of the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, yet it is not the complete fulfillment because the nation Israel is not living in Canaan, but in

Egypt. The promise is only partially fulfilled. Thus, while v. 7 shows God's faithfulness, yet it leaves us with a question. Why are the Israelites living in Egypt and not in Canaan? Then Moses tells us that with the arrival of a new Pharaoh who does not recognize the contributions of Joseph to the well being of Egypt, the nation of Israel is subjected to slavery. This certainly does not look anything close to what God promised. He is not watching over them and blessing them. He is not cursing Egypt who has cursed Israel. While Egypt is "blessed" through their slavery this does not seem to be the kind of blessing implied in the promises in Genesis.

3. In relation to the promises of God in Genesis, what is the point that Moses is making by telling this story?

What Moses is communicating is that the promises of God, like all promises, are looking to the future. Promises always refer to the future. When a parent promises his children that he is going to take them to Disney World, his promise is about a trip in the future. There will be signs that he is keeping his promise, like the purchase of airline tickets or the making of reservations or purchasing of new luggage. However, the promise is all about something that is going to happen in the future. When a man promises to marry a woman he gives her a ring as a pledge that he will keep his promise but the promise won't be fulfilled until the wedding day. This is the way it is with all God's promises.

Moses wants the nation Israel to remember the promises that God has made beginning at creation and repeated to their ancestors so that they will not lose heart while they wander in the desert and wait for people to die. He also wants to remind us of the same thing. Our hope and our stability in life is to be found in only one place and that is the promises that God has made to his people. These promises have been made sure by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are heirs of these same promises because, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1: "All the promises of God are yes to us in Christ." These promises are the bedrock upon which our hope and joy and peace are built. Trusting anyone or anything beyond the promises of God will only lead to destruction in your life. The promises will all be fulfilled finally when

Jesus returns. Right now, we experience only partial fulfillment as signs of the future that is coming.

4. What promises are you holding onto right now that help you to persevere through difficulty?

God strengthens us to endure the suffering of this life by reminding us of his promises.

5. In light of the story of Genesis and the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, what is shocking about vv. 8-14?

First, a Pharaoh comes to power in Egypt who does not know about Joseph and all the good he did to Egypt. How can that be? Egypt continues to exist as a nation due to the work of Joseph. If it were not for Joseph, Egypt would have crumbled under the weight of the seven-year famine. It was due to the work of Joseph that the Pharaoh's of Egypt were wealthy. He is the one who obtained all the land of Egypt as the possession of the kings of Egypt and who set up the system where every tenant farmer had to pay 1/5th of his produce to the Pharaoh for the privilege of working the land. What arrogance and what ingratitude has been at work so that a Pharaoh can come to power without any knowledge of the debt that he owes to Joseph and Joseph's family, the people of Israel?

The next shock is the racism, greed and slander of the Pharaoh. The Israelites have done nothing to harm the Egyptians but have only benefited the kingdom of Egypt. The Egyptians have no reason to fear the Israelites. However, we find in this king a full-blown racism that was hinted at in the history of Genesis. He slanders their character, making up a scenario that has never happened and for which there is no evidence it will ever happen.

The third shock we receive is that the talk turns to violence. That is what always follows the propagation of racial hatred. The Pharaoh convinces his people that the innocent people of Israel are to be feared and if not dealt with will certainly harm them. Therefore, they unjustly enslave them. The majority population, with no evidence to support their assertion but only guided by blind and ignorant racist

propaganda, enslave the entire population of Israelites living in their midst. For no reason other than an unjustified fear that they might be harmed, the majority establishes a system to oppress and control the minority population.

6. Why is this happening in light of all the promises God has made to Israel? See Genesis 15:13.

This slavery is part of God's plan for the salvation of the Israelites. In a way that we don't fully understand, the evil that the Pharaoh and the Egyptian people do to the Israelites is serving God's good purposes to save his people. Don't miss this. The Pharaoh does evil and so do his people. The Israelites are suffering real pain. Yet, in the mystery of God's providence this suffering is for a good purpose. This slavery comes upon the Israelites not because of anything they have done. The Pharaoh and his racist, greedy people cause this slavery. However, this slavery is part of God's good plan to make a people for himself to the praise of his own glory.

7. How is this similar to the suffering of Jesus? See Matt. 16:21-23, 20:17-19, 26:24, 31, 39, Luke 24:25-26, 44-45, Acts 2:22-23, 4:25-28 & 1 Peter 1:10-12.

Jesus told his disciples repeatedly it was God's will that he suffer. He frequently quoted the OT to show this was God's eternal plan. The Jewish religious leaders, Pilate and the Roman soldiers all did evil to Jesus yet the evil they did served God's good purposes. God didn't do the evil, the human perpetrators did. However, their evil acts served God's good purposes. Jesus and the other authors of the NT repeatedly claim that the OT Scriptures, of which Exodus 1 is a part, are all about the sufferings of Jesus and the glories that follow. The story of the Israelites here, is the story of Christ who suffered unjustly in order to fulfill the good purposes of God. We are to see in the unjust suffering of Israel in Egypt the unjust suffering of Jesus.

8. What is the point of verse 12?

Notice how God, in the midst of the suffering, reminds of his faithfulness. In v. 12 we are told, "the more they were oppressed, the

more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites." While the Israelites are the ones in slavery, the Egyptians are the ones who are fearful. God continues to fulfill his promise to make them fruitful. Here we are given a hint of his power to curse those who curse Israel. He fills the Egyptians with dread.

9. How does this help us?

The story of the suffering people of God, the story of the suffering Christ, is our story. God has told us this story so we can see his hand in our story and not be afraid. When we suffer we do not need to fear that God has abandoned us. Rather suffering is part of his good plan to accomplish our salvation. In our suffering, God assures of his faithfulness and his promises in numerous ways so that we will not lose heart.

God strengthens us to endure the suffering of this life by reminding us that he not only knows about but ordains our suffering for our good.

10. What are some ways that vv. 8-14 remind us of Joseph's story in Genesis?

Verses 8-14 are loaded with words that were used in Genesis to describe the betrayal and slavery of Joseph in Egypt. His brothers for no reason betrayed him, just as Pharaoh betrays the Israelites for no reason. He was enslaved unjustly and his work enriched those who were his slave masters, just like the Israelites. He, like Israel, flourished in his slavery but as a result, the wife of Potiphar made his enslavement worse. He was the one in slavery but his enemies (Pharaoh, cupbearer, baker, wife of Potiphar, his brothers) were the ones in distress. In short, when we read of the enslavement of the nation Israel we are to think of the slavery of Joseph and remember how God faithfully brought him out of his slavery and made him the most powerful man in all of Egypt. He ruled over his slave masters by the work of God.

11. According to Hebrews 12:1-4 & 13:7 what are we to remember in order to persevere in the Christian life?

This pattern of the suffering of God's people and then the deliverance of God from the suffering is the pattern we are to remember as well. Ultimately, whenever we are in the midst of suffering we are to remember our Lord Jesus whom God abandoned on the cross but whom he raised from the dead, three days later. We must remember how Christ endured this suffering in faith and then how God glorified him at the resurrection. This is our story and we can endure the suffering God sends to us just as Jesus endured the cross. We can endure by meditating on the suffering of Jesus and remembering his resurrection and his coming glory.

In addition, God has given us the stories of others, through the centuries who have endured great suffering and remained faithful. Beginning with the first Christian martyr, Stephen and the other apostles who endured great suffering for the sake of Jesus we have 2000 years of stories. God intends that we remember those who have gone before us so that we will not lose heart. We are to remember those who have gone before and fix our eyes on Jesus, hanging on the cross and enduring because of the joy set before him so that we will persevere through the suffering sent to us.

12. How has (have) the example(s) of others who have endured suffering for the sake of Christ helped you to endure suffering? How has the suffering of Jesus helped you?

God strengthens us to endure the suffering of this life by reminding us of how he has safely brought others through suffering.