



PALMA CEIA

Presbyterian Church

Exodus, Liberation, & the People of God (Ex. 21-40)

Gathering Together Around God's Word

*Sunday, January 23rd 2022
10:05am in EM 307/308 & Zoom*

Background

The second half of Exodus begins with the Book of the Covenant (chs. 21-23) which helps clarify what the Ten Commandments mean in practice and daily life. This is followed by instructions on building the tabernacle. The granular detail might not make for exciting reading but is an important part of the story: this is where God's presence will rest among Israel. Afterwards, the narrative returns for a few chapters (chs. 32-34) to find Israel once again restless and asking Aaron to build them an idol to worship. Moses returns to find chaos and has to intercede on behalf of Israel to God. The Covenant is renewed and the book transitions from the narrative to a discussion of the building of the Tabernacle and all its furnishings. Exodus ends with the glory of God settling upon the newly constructed tabernacle.

- 19:1-24:11** The Covenant at Sinai
- 24:12-31:18** Instructions Regarding the Tabernacle
- 32:1-34:35** Rebellion, Covenant Breaking, Covenant Renewal
- 35:1-39:43** The Construction of the Tabernacle & its Furnishings
- 40:1-38** The Tabernacle is Set Up and the Glory Descends

Exodus, Liberation, & the People of God

The Book of Exodus has had an enduring impact on communities of faith for centuries. The story of God hearing the cries of Israel and releasing them from the bondage of Egypt echoes throughout scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments. The Book of Exodus reveals God to be a God of history, a God of action, a God of relationship. This narrative, and the promise that God hears our cries, has been an important source of inspiration and hope for oppressed peoples throughout history.

The use of the Exodus story in other parts of the Bible is known as “the Exodus Tradition.” This larger Exodus Tradition is found in Deuteronomy, Joshua, the historical books (*e.g.*, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings), the Psalms, the prophets (*e.g.*, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea), and elsewhere. These references uplift Moses as a prophet and the source of divine law, recount the works of God, and admonish Israel for their unfaithfulness or behavior (*...remember that you were slaves in Egypt*).

This revisiting of the Exodus Tradition continues in the New Testament as well. For example, in the Gospels the Last Supper and arrest of Jesus are framed around the celebration of the Passover. The discussion of the “new covenant” at the Last Supper (cf. Luke 22:20) hearkens back to the story of Exodus. Language around the new covenant is also found in II Corinthians (3:6) and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chs. 8-9). Additionally, the story of Moses and the exodus is recounted in a long speech by Stephen in Acts 7.

Outside of scripture, the Exodus Tradition has been an important memory and narrative of reassurance for various groups of believers. The story was of particular importance to African American slaves who found many commonalities between their own realities and that of the Israelites. In the 1950s and onward, many Liberation Theologians in South America, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere used the story of Exodus as an interpretative lens for their own work of liberation. And in America, during the same time period, the Civil Rights Movement regularly referred to Exodus and the story of God hearing God’s people and setting them free.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king’s anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. [Hebrews 11:24-30]

Harriet Tubman and 'Go Down Moses'

from *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* by Sarah H. Bradford

- *HARRIET TUBMAN, known at various times, and in various places, by many different names, such as "Moses," in allusion to her being the leader and guide to so many of her people in their exodus from the Land of Bondage; "the Conductor of the Underground Railroad;" and "Moll Pitcher," for the energy and daring by which she delivered a fugitive slave who was about to be dragged back to the South; was for the first twenty-five years of her life a slave on the eastern shore of Maryland. Her own master she represents as never unnecessarily cruel; but as was common among slaveholders, he often hired out his slaves to others, some of whom proved to be tyrannical and brutal to the utmost limit of their power.*
- *"Among American women," says the article referred to, "who has shown a courage and self-devotion to the welfare of others, equal to Harriet Tubman? Hear her story of going down again and again into the very jaws of slavery, to rescue her suffering people, bringing them off through perils and dangers enough to appall the stoutest heart, till she was known among them as 'Moses.'*
- *I give these words exactly as Harriet sang them to me to a sweet and simple Methodist air. "De first time I go by singing dis hymn, dey don't come out to me," she said, "till I listen if de coast is clar; den when I go back and sing it again, dey come out. But if I sing:*

*Moses go down in Egypt,
Till ole Pharo' let me go;
Hadn't been for Adam's fall,
Shouldn't hab to died at all,
den dey don't come out, for dere's danger in de way."*

- *And so by night travel, by hiding, by signals, by threatening, she brought the people safely to the land of liberty. But after the passage of the Fugitive Slave law, she said, "I wouldn't trust Uncle Sam wid my people no longer; I brought 'em all clar off to Canada."*
- *Joe thought it best to submit. He stripped off his upper clothing, and took his whipping, without a word; but as he drew his clothes up over his torn and bleeding back, he said, "Dis is de last!" That night he took a boat and went a long distance to the cabin of Harriet's father, and said, "Next time Moses comes, let me know." It was only a week or two after that, that the mysterious woman whom no one could lay their finger on appeared, and men, women, and children began to disappear from the plantations. One fine morning Joe was missing, and his brother William, from another plantation; Peter and Eliza, too, were gone; and these made part of Harriet's next party, who began their pilgrimage from Maryland to Canada, or as they expressed it, from "Egypt to de land of Canaan."*

- *"But it was not possible for such virtues long to remain hidden from the keen eyes of the Abolitionists. She became known to Thomas Garrett, the large-hearted Quaker of Wilmington, who has aided the escape of three thousand fugitives; she found warm friends in Philadelphia and New York, and wherever she went. These gave her money, which she never spent for her own use, but laid up for the help of her people, and especially for her journeys back to the 'land of Egypt,' as she called her old home. By reason of her frequent visits there, always carrying away some of the oppressed, she got among her people the name of 'Moses,' which it seems she still retains.*

The Spirituals

“Enslaved people refused to surrender their humanity and resisted the ‘soul-killing effects of slavery.’ They fashioned life anew—creating families and fictive kin, hush arbors and praise houses, churches and associations of all kinds. These socio-cultural forms necessarily were covert and fragile. But above all, the slaves configured and sustained an innermost realm of spiritual consciousness; the foremost expression of that consciousness is the spiritual. Indeed, the spiritual constitutes a most outstanding of the human capacity to wring transcendent beauty from hellish circumstances. These songs emerged and were nurtured within that religio-cultural ‘circle’ in which historians agree the slaves were able to exercise some measure of autonomy. The spirituals refract a critical reading by the slaves of their profoundly ambiguous, yet crucial, encounter with Christianity, the religion that had been used to justify their enslavement, to shore up an ideology of their inferiority, and to bind them in so perilous a condition and place. Yet, the enslaved people sang for themselves a world.”

— M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience*

‘Go Down Moses’

When Israel was in Egypt's land,
Let my people go,
oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go.

Refrain:
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
tell old Pharaoh: Let my people go.

The Lord told Moses what to do,
Let my people go,
to lead the Hebrew children through,
Let my people go. [Refrain]

As Israel stood by the waterside,
Let my people go,

at God's command it did divide,
Let my people go. [Refrain]

When they had reached the other shore,
Let my people go,
they let the song of triumph soar,
Let my people go. [Refrain]

Lord, help us all from bondage flee,
Let my people go,
and let us all in Christ be free,
Let my people go. [Refrain]

Martin Luther King, Jr & The Civil Rights Movement

- “Using the story of Exodus, King brought unity to the civil rights movement, gave his followers the confidence to continue fighting against racial injustice, and helped them understand the prolonged struggles they were to endure and the importance of non-violence in their campaign for freedom.”

“Moreover, King specifically uses the term “children” to reinforce the theological parallels he established between the Israelite Exodus and the civil rights movement. In Exodus 6:5-6, God speaks to Moses and promises that he will deliver the Israelites from oppression. God states in these verses, “And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments.” Thus, as King often reminds his followers that they were God’s children, he asserts that God always looks after them as his chosen people. Urging them to take action against racial inequality, King wants all his followers to feel confident that God helps bring their efforts to fruition. Fully aware of their suffering, God gives them a mandate as well; as he blesses and justifies the struggle, he guarantees justice for the oppressed, and judgment and punishment for the oppressor. Therefore, King assures the movement’s supporters that, as children of God, they are much more than what their prejudiced society perceives them as; even though they had gone through much suffering, their struggles would soon end in glory with God’s help.”

— Ramon Tuason, “[The Biblical Exodus in the Rhetoric of Martin Luther King](#)”

- “As you know, if I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of general and panoramic view of the whole human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, “Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?” — I would take my mental flight by Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn't stop there. I would move on by Greece, and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle,

Socrates, Euripides and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality...

But I wouldn't stop there. Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy." Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding — something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee — the cry is always the same — "We want to be free."

“Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr from his speech “[I've Been to the Mountaintop](#)” given in support of striking sanitation workers in Memphis TN on April 3, 1968—the day before he was assassinated

Liberation Theology & The Exodus Tradition

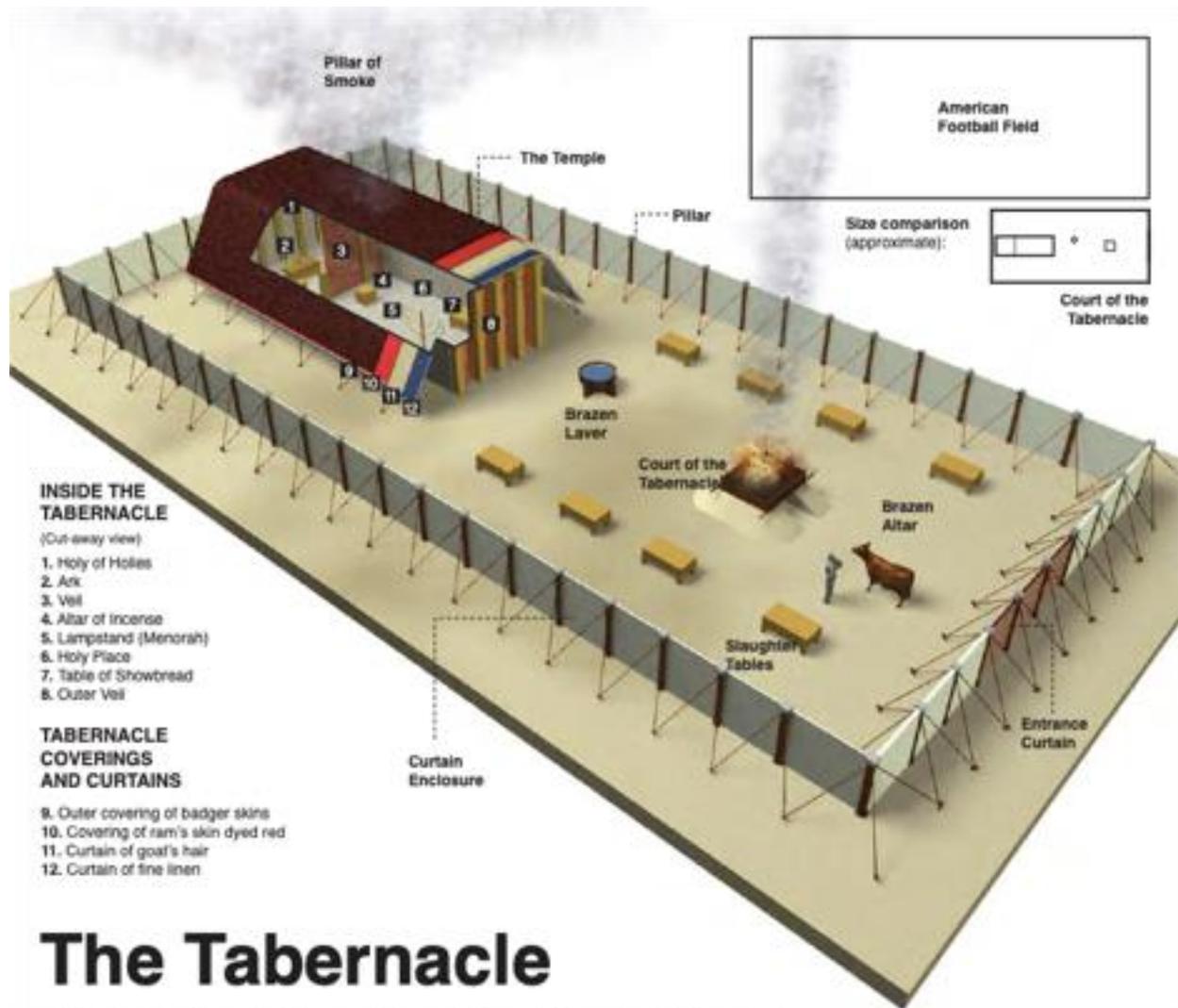
- “The Exodus was the experience which created the consciousness of the people of Israel. The people formed in the structuring center which determined its way or organizing time and space. Note that I am not saying simply that the Exodus is part of the contents of the consciousness of the people of Israel. If that were the case, the Exodus would be one item of its information among others. More than an item of information, it is its structuring center, in that it determines the integrating logic, the principle of organization and interpretation of historical experience. That is why the Exodus does not persist as a secondary experience...It has come to be the paradigm for the interpretation of all space and time.”

— Rubem Alves, “Pueblo de Dios y la liberación del hombre”

- “The liberation of Israel is a political action. It is the breaking away from a situation of despoliation and misery and the beginning of the construction of a just and fraternal society. It is the suppression of disorder and the creation of a new order. The initial chapters of Exodus describe the oppression in which the Jewish people lived in Egypt, in

that 'land of slavery' (13:3; 20:2; Deut. 5:6): repression (1:10-11), alienated word (5:6-14), humiliations (1:13-14), enforced birth control policy (1:15-22). Yahweh then awakens the vocation of a liberator: Moses."

— Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*



The Tabernacle

This portable temple was built in the wilderness by the Israelites circa 1450 BC after they were freed from Egyptian slavery. The tabernacle was the first temple dedicated to God and the first resting place of the ark of the covenant. It served as a place of worship and sacrifices during the Israelites' 40 years in the desert while conquering the land of Canaan.

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