

Study 3: God Responds to Injustice

Last week we sat with the magnitude of injustice and evil, both during the time of Noah in the Bible and here in our world today. Today's text focuses on one of the most significant events that shaped God's people. The Israelites are enslaved, suffering under the oppressive rule of the Egyptian empire. This story of liberation foreshadows the ultimate liberation God will bring for humanity through Jesus, but we'll get to that later! #spoileralert

While slavery might seem like an injustice far in the past, it has taken on various forms in our world today. In 2017, the International Labour Office reported that there are globally 40 million victims of modern-day slavery, a quarter of whom are children¹. Annual revenue for this industry is \$150 billion USD². The 13th Amendment³ abolished slavery in 1865 in the United States, *except as a punishment for crime*, leading to the growth of the prison labor industry, otherwise known as the Prison Industrial Complex⁴. God still hears the cries of the oppressed today and invites us to work towards their flourishing.

Discuss

- What does God have to do with the injustice we see in the world? Do you think God is affected by the injustice in the world?
- How, if at all, have you ever experienced God's presence or help in the midst of pain?

¹ [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery Report](#)

² <https://www.ijm.org/slavery>

³ While the 13th Amendment to the Constitution may have abolished most forms of slavery in the United States in 1865, its provision for enslavement as punishment for crime led to the growth of the prison labor industry, the effects of which we still live with today. This overwhelmingly affects poor people and people of color.

⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/12/the-prison-industrial-complex/304669/>

i Evil and violence increase on earth, and God promises to never destroy the earth again (Gen 9). We see a hint of God’s ultimate plan to save humanity when God makes a promise to a man named Abraham: I will turn your family into a great nation (people); I will give you a good land (place); I will be with you (presence)—all for the purpose of being a blessing (Gen 12). Generations later, the Israelites (descendants of Abraham) resettled in Egypt because of a famine. Their immigrant community grew, and the Egyptians enslaved them. Moses was supposed to be killed in a mass genocide of Hebrew baby boys. Because of some fearless women, he is instead adopted into Pharaoh’s household, raised as Egyptian royalty. Everything changes after he murders an Egyptian guard for beating a Hebrew slave, one of his own people. Moses flees and settles in Midian. (Exodus 1-2)

Exodus 2:23-3:1-12

^{2:23} During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. ^{3:1} Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn

up.” ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” ⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the

home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses

said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Discuss

- What verbs describe God’s actions in the text?
- Why does God talk to Moses? What do you notice about their interaction?
- Describe God’s plan to rescue the Israelites and the role that Moses plays. How does this further shape our understanding of God’s response to injustice?
- Additional questions (optional)
 - What repetition, contrasts, or imagery do you see in the text? (O)
 - What is the difference between Moses' perspective and God’s perspective in the story? (I)
 - Why might it be significant to the Israelites that God sees, hears, and responds to their cries? (I)
 - Moses doesn’t feel qualified to be used by God, yet God still chooses him and assures Moses of God’s presence with him. In what ways are you tempted to feel unqualified for being used by God to pursue justice for our world? (A)

Summary + Reflection

God is not a passive bystander to injustice. God sees, hears, and comes down to rescue the Israelites from the oppressive hand of the Egyptians to bring them to a land where they can flourish. Through Moses, Hebrew by birth but raised Egyptian, belonging to both cultures yet

at home in neither, God brings liberation. Had Moses not noticed the burning bush and followed his curiosity, he would have missed a powerful encounter with God. God's plan to rescue the Israelites will work not only because of who *Moses* is, but also because of who *God* is. When we cry out to God, we are not yelling into a void. God sees, hears, and responds to *us*. Last week, we had a window into God's emotions in response to injustice. This week we see that God takes action. God chooses to bring *shalom* by using unlikely people like us. Have we heard God calling out to us to go and seek shalom for those around us who are crying out to God for justice and liberation? Have we responded? What if some injustice continues because we're not listening?

- Take a minute to pause and listen; replay the interaction between God and Moses in your mind. Where do you place yourself in the story? (e.g. tending to the flock, curious about the burning bush, hearing God calling to you, wondering if you are qualified, etc.) How might God be speaking to you?

Apply

Spiritual Practice: Intercession

Intercession is prayer that helps us have eyes to see the world the way God does and pray accordingly. What cries for justice have you read about or seen in the last few weeks? Spend 5-10min each day praying on behalf of others. Copy these bullet points into a note on your phone to help you pray:

- God, have compassion and mercy on: [who has been crying out for justice?]
- Hear their cries for: [what have they been crying out for?]
- God, would you: [what are you asking God to do in response?]
- If you are asking me to go, help me to obey and know you are with me, Amen.

Reflect + Share

Journal your responses to these questions, then share them with your group.

- Where are you in the story? How is God speaking to you?

Closing Prayer & Announcements