

Exodus

by Mark Glanville

This book contains an invitation to Christ followers today: to consider how Christ's word and Christ's presence may be reshaping us as kindred.

The book of Exodus is the real story of a society that was being reshaped by kinship, under the lordship of Yahweh. At the opening of the book of Exodus Israel was enslaved in Egypt—before Yahweh intervened. In Egypt human relationships were deeply fractured. The beating of a Hebrew slave and the destruction of male babies have become permanent symbols of the atrocity of slavery (Exodus 1: 15-22; 2:11-15). In slave-cultures, human beings were treated like objects, which is the opposite of true community. Yahweh emancipated Israel from slavery in Egypt and brought the nation to Mt Sinai so that they might receive his laws. God's laws shaped God's people to operate the way that God had always intended for communities to operate: as kindred. The book of Exodus is all about the formation of this renewed community that lives together before the face of God.

This book contains an invitation to Christ followers today: to consider how Christ's word and Christ's presence may be reshaping us as kindred. A thread weaving through the

biblical story, one overtone within the heartbeat of scripture, is Christ's renewing us as sister-brother, in his gracious presence. To be sure, the dynamic of 'society reshaped by kinship' is not the only trajectory in Exodus. However the dynamic of community is dominant in this book, and this lens has become important for me as I have studied it.

The biblical drama up until this point

God is the primary actor in the biblical drama. In the beginning, God created a good world with care and delight. However, God's good creation was soon corrupted by human rebellion. This is often referred to as the 'fall' of humanity (Genesis 3).

Human relationships crumble, even as humanity rebels against God. Indeed, in the very next chapter (Genesis 4) we encounter fratricide: brother kills brother. In loving commitment to the creation, God set off on a long road of restoring the world to the joy and flourishing that it was intended for.

God called a people, Abraham's family, promising to bless these people, to give them a land to flourish in, and to bless every people



group through them (Genesis 12:1-3). In Genesis, the story of the call of Abraham follows the table of seventy nations, which are symbolic of every nation on the earth. "Abraham is singled out precisely so that blessing may come to all the nations, to all those seventy nations God had scattered over the face of the whole earth."¹

The remainder of the Genesis account is the story of God's pursuit of the fulfilment of these promises: God's faithfulness to the generations of Abraham's line and also this family's relationship to the land—for the sake of the nations. As the book of Genesis closes, Jacob's household journeyed to Egypt in order to escape famine. God's people become numerous in Egypt, however they are far from the land that God had promised to them.

The drama of the book of Exodus

At the beginning of the book of Exodus, Pharaoh is the unopposed divine king, his rule oppressive and brutal. However, another story is unfolding. Quietly and powerfully, an alien God has increased the numbers of His enslaved people (Exodus 1:7), and he weaves his counter-narrative through slaves: midwives, mothers, and girls. Moses is exiled in Midian and this God now speaks a word outside of Egypt, where a perpetually burning shrub displays God's firm command of the creation. Yahweh hears the cry of the oppressed: "I have heard their cry" (Exodus 3:7). And so, Yahweh the Great King holds Pharaoh to account for his oppressive rule, emancipating this nation of slaves. Yahweh becomes Israel's new master, and Yahweh

begins to shape this new community under Yahweh's loving rule.

For two and a half months the Israelites journey through the wilderness to Sinai (Exodus 15-17), and in the crucible of the desert they learn to trust in Yahweh for every new day. Now at Mt. Sinai, the experience of slavery is still raw: the wounds from the Egypt whip still weep and the horror of genocide is agonizingly fresh. At Sinai Yahweh gives laws in that are to shape this people into a community where every member can flourish, especially

the most vulnerable. There are to be no 'Pharaohs' in Yahweh's society: accumulation of wealth and self-aggrandisement are expressly forbidden. Israel is to be a community of mutual care, of shared life as kindred. The weakest within the community are to be at the centre.

At Sinai, Yahweh also gives very detailed instructions for the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 26-31). The process of its

being built is also described, in similar detail (Exodus 35-40). Yahweh pitches-tent in the thick of it all, in the midst of the community, journeying with the nation in all of its muck and its mess. Between the instructions for the tabernacle and its construction is the golden calf episode (Exodus 32-34). Here we learn that Yahweh's characteristic response to human sinfulness is to draw near, to forgive, and with an authoritative word to nourish communities into loving fellowship ✕

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¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 28.