

WEEK 9

BIBLE PROJECT

PRESSED INTO COMMUNITY

Genesis 12-Exodus 24

Israel is one huge conglomeration of a family that God seeks to become a nation. So he pursues a strategy to meld them together.



WHAT IS THE GOAL? GOD'S PROJECT

For that goal to be achieved God is establishing a model and a megaphone that will both demonstrate and proclaim his plan and his will for the world.

Observations on the historicity of the Patriarchs from John Bright:

Patriarchs, though not named outside of the Bible fit perfectly in the Middle Bronze Age 1996 - 1500 BC

1. Names fit perfectly – in a class known to be current in Mesopotamia & Palestine – Ebla, etc, include names Eber, Abram, Ishmael, Esau, Saul, David, Israel et al.
2. Numerous incidents recorded in Genesis fit the second millenium but not later eg: Sarah and her slave Hagar, expulsion of that child forbidden; Rachel's theft of Laban's gods, varied law of primogeniture which is explicitly forbidden later in Israel's history [Deut 21: 15-17]
3. Mode of life and nature of wanderings fit well in the cultural and political milieu of the early second millenium. Semi-nomads in a land sparsely populated and politically not formed yet.
4. Towns mentioned are known archeologically to have existed: Shechem, Bethel, Jerusalem, Hebron and Beersheva.

John Bright, History of Israel (Fourth Edition), p. 92: "The evidence ... gives us every right to affirm that the patriarchal narratives are firmly based in history."

BIG IDEA SUMMARY: Strategy for Unification involves five factors.

- Circumcision, Passover
- Exceptionalism: another name for HOLINESS
- Expectations and hope of a future destination
- Suffering
- Character training and discipline

THE Bible moves from a single man Abraham, with a single son, Isaac, to Jacob with 12 sons and inheritors (Gen 49) who with their children move down to Egypt—some 70 plus Joseph people (Gen 46.27 and Ex. 1.5). By the time they leave Egypt there will be some 600 thousand (*eleph*) men, plus women and children. (Ex. 12:37) However you construe the number, there is a huge development. No longer are they a family, even a large family, but now a multitude. Will they be a mob? Or a Community?

Introduction: The historical development of a people who are instrument by which God reclaims his creation into the BLESSING OF doing his will, living in harmony with each other and the world, and fellowshiping directly with God.

How do they get from a gaggle of tribes, living as slaves, into a model and megaphone for God's Blessing?

- Clear identity
- Common experience
- Covenant Community
- Corporately accepted code of conduct

Application:

- Witness can only be effective if our experience with God makes an identifiable difference in our lives. To the extent that "holiness" (exceptionalism) is visible God becomes real.

- God's Covenants both Old and New Testaments are covenants of grace. God always acts first to create his people and then he commands response→ obedience. **THUS THE LAW OT/NT is as valid as the promise. If salvation applies, so do God's requirements for obedience.** If there is no obedience, the judgment of the covenant signs applies to those who have received either circumcision or the sacraments.

BIG IDEA

CIRCUMCISION as a means to unify through a clear identity and Covenant mark.



Stone represents the stone knife.

For the rest of its OT history, Israel will continually contrast itself with “the uncircumcised.”

Begun in Genesis 17, Circumcision is commanded in Leviticus 12:3—first mention of the 8th Day.

Re-circumcision of the whole people in Joshua 5 must have made a huge impression.

Interestingly, no further mention is made of circumcision throughout the rest of the OT—except the command to circumcise their hearts in Deut 10, Jeremiah 4 & 9.

Throughout the rest of the OT Israel distinguishes itself from its non Israelite neighbors by calling them the “Uncircumcised.” For example: Judges 14:6 (Samson), 1 Samuel 17:26 (David calls out Goliath; 1 Sam. 31.4, Saul does not want to die by an “uncircumcised Philistine. *Etc.* including: *Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength! Put on your garments of splendor, Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.* 1 Samuel 17:26 See a concordance or do a search in www.Biblegateway.com for “circumcise” and “uncircumcised.”

A means to the end of marking God's people as His own and unifying them into a blessing community. Later superseded as essential in the NT because of Christ's work.

To be circumcised was to wear a permanent physical mark that God is significant to that person/family. Eg: crucifix to a Roman Catholic; a fish symbol on door or car or pin; a dove may mark someone as a Pentecostal or charismatic.

To make or enter into a covenant literally means to cut the terms indelibly into blood. It always involved blood—**Genesis 15** animal sacrifice. And see also Exodus 24.

The symbolism is this: “If I don't keep the stipulations of the covenant which apply to me, this is what will happen to me: I will be cut off—I deserve the curse, death.” (See Gen. 17.14 *Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.*”)

Jesus Christ fulfills that curse for us. Therefore circumcision is no longer either effective nor acceptable as a spiritual benefit for Christians—it is not prohibited, but simply of no spiritual effect. Christ is our circumcision—he took the curse and was cut off. Colossians 2:11-12 *In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Genesis 22 fits this pattern. The sacrifice of Isaac is the reverse of the knife ritual. Here God had asked Abraham to threaten the very promise of innumerable offspring by the knife—to cut off Isaac as if Isaac had not been circumcised. Could Abraham have known that God would stop him? Heb 11.17-19 states Abraham believed God could raise him [Isaac] from the dead if necessary to keep his promise. For what God had promised in Genesis 15 was that if he failed to keep his covenant to make a nation in his name, he [God] would be cut off. Therefore, he [God] was obligated by his own sworn word to provide a substitute—in Genesis 22 it was the ram caught in the thicket. In the NT, God can no longer escape his own oath and he must himself be cut off in Christ as the substitute for a world which cannot be restored in any other way to fulfill the covenant made with Abraham—blessed to be a blessing.

But it cannot be emphasized enough: God makes no demands on Abraham until he has committed himself to give Abraham a blessing—circumcision follows God's binding of himself to Abraham.

Circumcision discussion.

- Why did it become so important?
- What was the effect of circumcision on Israel and on the other peoples surrounding them?

For Israel their future is consecrated even by the act of circumcision. This act sets apart even the means of procreation by sanctifying the means God uses to fulfill his own mandate to be fruitful and multiply so that you will be a nation whose seed is like the stars in the sky.

PASSOVER

Even before Exodus gives us the story of the actual Exodus, God gives the Israelites the Feast of Passover to COMMEMORATE their actual liberation from slavery. (Ex. 12.14). A lamb was to be slaughtered and the blood put over the doorframe of each house. Only households which had blood on the doorframe would not suffer the death of the firstborn. Another example of the biblical principle of substitution.

Distinctive Worship—the last thing God wants is a group of people who worshipped like their pagan neighbors. Worship of the creature rather than the creator was not God's plan. Therefore, no images. No worship that attempts to manipulate the divine instead of glorifying the ONE TRUE GOD. Not even to consider that manipulation of the fertility cults by prostitution and child sacrifice.

BIG IDEA #2: Exceptionalism: another name for HOLINESS

SEE WEEK 8 STUDY:

BIG IDEA: Three boundaries create exceptionalism.

1. Geographic
2. Cultural
3. Genealogical

BIG IDEA: Expectations and hope of a future destination

THE Boundaries were not only a visionary prospect, they also created the COMMUNITY that was a means to realizing the vision.



PROMISED LAND like California to the gold rush

The concept of a destination was a powerful uniter to the un-formed community of Israel. It was like the NEW WORLD to the Puritans. It was like the new [1948] state of Israel to the survivors of Holocaust and the oppressed Jews from around the world. It was the period of western expansion in the United States in the 19th Century—Manifest Destiny.

BIG IDEA: Suffering—OPPRESSION/SLAVERY



Olive Press implies pressure which is what produces oil.

THE experience of common suffering unites people. And if the period of suffering results in a common deliverance, that unity is even more effectively created. That's exactly what happened to Israel. The Exodus was the signal event in the history of the nation. Whatever else happens, they remember and celebrate the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea.

We've experience that bonding: the bombing of Pearl Harbor for our parents' generation. The destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, will be a day seared into our consciousness that united this nation against Islamist terror.

And of course, the new state of Israel is formed by the crucible of Nazi extermination attempts. NEVER AGAIN is a cry of Unification.

FINALLY, THE GREATEST UNIFYING FACTOR:

BIG IDEA: Character training and discipline



The precision mechanics are required for purpose to be achieved

Exodus 20-23 is the COVENANT which includes a code meant to give Israel a common code of conduct as well as bind them to their Suzerain God.

The Covenant contains more than requirements and is based not on simple legalism. It follows the pattern with which the leaders of Israel would have become familiar: the contemporary Suzerainty treaties from the Hittites on. The GREAT KING assumes responsibility for the king/people conquered and offers to become protector and “friend” in return for fealty, tribute and obedience.

Sinai is a Covenant which contains law because God has already assumed responsibility for Israel—he rescued them by his power and miracles from bondage from the greatest power the world had ever known—Egypt.

The Law is given, not in order that Israel might win God’s favor or approval—they are already CHOSEN, APPROVED AND SAVED. The LAW comes **after** the exodus, not before it. Now God is not asking them to save themselves, but only to preserve themselves. The Law is given as a means of forming a united people.

The elements of the treaty form from the ancient Hittites illustrate this truth and can be compared with the Abrahamic Covenant.

Both Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants have requirements. They are not entry requirements, but consequences of the admission of the people into God’s plan. They represent God’s Project in that they describe what a people would look like when they do GOD’S WILL. Comparison with contemporary codes of other ancient peoples shows that Israel’s covenant limited the damages and to a large extent humanized “punishments.”

God’s Covenant demanded obedience of those with whom he made Covenant. In one way to view it, obedience was the sign that a person was included, not the price of admission.



Covenants Compared

Treaty Form	Abrahamic	Sinaitic
Preamble	I am the Lord your God Gen 17.1b	I am the Lord your God Ex. 20.2a
Historical prologue	I have made you the father of a multitude of nations Gen 17.5b <i>et al.</i>	Who brought you out of the land of Egypt ... Ex. 20.2b&c
Covenant Obligations of people	Walk before me and be blameless – Gen 17.1c	You shall have no other gods before me – fundamental obligation to the great king followed by other requirements – Ex. 20.3-17
Covenant Obligations of the King	Promises of seed, land & nationhood; to be God forever – Gen 17.2.4-8	Specific promises of conquest & blessing. Ex 23. 20-33
Sanctions	to be cut off for failure. Gen 17.14	Ex 20.5 & scattered through the law: 20.7, 23.7, 23.21 and other places as punishments
Consumation oath covenant cutting	Gen 17.22-27 as if to say “God to so to me and more also as I have done to the foreskin	Ex 24.7-8: People promise –Moses sprinkles them with sacrificial blood – this is the blood you will owe if you keep not this covenant

Assignment for week 9—

Read Leviticus

Next Week we will use the entire time to review and discuss the big ideas and content of the first 8 weeks. Make a list of what you see are the big ideas.

Please write down and bring in questions that these studies raise for you.

MARKERS:

Numbers 2	Organization of the camp
Numbers 6	Aaron's benediction
Numbers 10	Ark of the Covenant
Numbers 13	Spies to Canaan
Numbers 14	Joshua and Caleb Minority Report
Numbers 15	Tassels and ribbons
Numbers 16	Korah's Rebellion
Numbers 20	Rock and water incident