

You Are There!

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Often when I introduce the book of Exodus in my Seminary Pentateuch class, I ask students the following “Bible trivia” question: “Are there any human beings alive today who personally witnessed the Exodus from Egypt with their own eyes?” Students are eager to mention the name of Moses, who led Israel’s Exodus and according to Jude 9 was resurrected and is thus alive today. Eventually other names are identified: Enoch, who was translated long before Israel’s Exodus, and may well have observed the Exodus from heaven. And Jesus, who as the pre-incarnate Christ was personally present at the Exodus, and ever since the incarnation has been a human being. Then the students fall silent, unable to think of any more names. . . and I explain a powerful biblical principle that has made the Bible come alive for me in a marvelous way. A principle that allows each of us to add *our own names* to that list of human beings who witnessed, yes, even experienced, the Exodus!

This principle is implied already in Moses’ instructions concerning what parents should tell their children when they would keep the Passover after they had entered into Canaan: “And you shall tell your son in that day saying, This is done because of what the Lord did for *me* when I came up from Egypt” (Exod 13:8). The same principle is underscored repeatedly in the Pentateuch in connection with the whole Exodus experience. In the various references to Passover observance, God consistently instructs future generations to consider that they personally experienced the Exodus: He “delivered *our* households” (Exod 12:27); “By strength of hand the Lord brought *us* out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exod 13:14); “*We* were

slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought *us* out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders before *our eyes*” (Deut 6:21-22).

Some forty years after the covenant-making service at Mt. Sinai, and after the whole generation of adults who actually witnessed the events had died in the wilderness, Moses calls upon the new generation born in the desert to consider that they themselves had been there. With five strong Hebrew constructions, Moses presses the point home: “The Lord did not make this covenant [only] with our fathers, but with *us*, *we—these here today—all of us who are alive. Face to face the Lord spoke with you* at the mountain from the midst of the fire” (Deut 5:3-4, author’s translation). Later in his farewell address, Moses instructs that those who in Canaan would bring their offerings of firstfruits to the central place of worship should repeat a personalized credo before the Lord: “So the Lord brought *us* out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He has brought *us* to this place and has given *us* this land, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey’” (Deut 26:5-9).

In Joshua's last charge and covenant renewal service before he dies—as the last of the adult generation who actually witnessed the Exodus—the Lord Himself retells the Exodus story, alternating between the expressions “your fathers” and “you”: “Then I brought *your fathers* out of Egypt, and *you* came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued *your fathers* . . . So they cried out to the Lord; and He put darkness between *you* and the Egyptians . . . And *your eyes saw* what I did in Egypt” (Josh 24:6-8). Even though that whole generation who physically experienced the Exodus is dead, the Lord insists that the succeeding generation of Israel reckon that they personally came out of Egypt.

Jews today still recognize this principle, as yearly they recite in their Passover *seder* (the home service which includes the *Hagaddah* or “retelling” of the Exodus story): “Let every person, in every generation, think of himself as one of those who came out of Egypt.”

This Passover principle is rooted in the biblical understanding of corporate solidarity. Israel is a single, unified corporate entity; what happens to one or some, happens to all. The history of Israel’s forefathers is the personal history of every subsequent generation.¹

A modern society of Western individualists—especially Gentiles who have never participated in the Passover *seder*—find this concept of corporate solidarity difficult to grasp or internalize. The closest I came as a child to assimilating this principle was the Sunday night “ritual” of watching that classic TV documentary hosted by Walter Cronkite. Every week I personally entered into history; I experienced the signing of the Declaration of Independence, I fought in the famous battles of the Civil War, I witnessed the delivery of the Gettysburg Address, I was onboard the Titanic as it sank. And always, Walter Cronkite would intone the title of the show as we came to the climax of the historical reenactment: “You Are There!”

Simply stated, the Passover principle is—“You are there!” The book of Exodus tells the narrative, not just of a people far away and long ago; not even just a story of our Hebrew ancestors. For all of us sharing the Judeo-Christian heritage, *we were there*. The account of the Exodus is our personal diary!

Each of the central themes of the Exodus—redemption (by the Passover lamb), liberation (from Egyptian bondage), rebirth (new life at Springtime), and removal of leaven (symbolic of the fermentation of sin)—has a spiritual counterpart in the individual who relives the story. The retelling invites us to identify the Pharaoh’s in our lives that have enslaved us, to remember the

ways that God has redeemed us and liberated us from bondage, to focus upon the ongoing experience of spiritual rebirth, and remove the leaven of sinful pride from our lives.

Already in the Old Testament there is abundant evidence, especially in the Prophets, that Israel's Exodus from Egypt occurred typologically, prefiguring the coming of the Messiah in the eschatological New Exodus.² In fact, the typological interconnection between ancient Israel's Exodus and the Messiah's Exodus from Egypt is already indicated in the Pentateuch. In the oracles of Balaam in Numbers 23-24, there is an explicit shift from the historical Exodus to the Messianic Exodus. In Num 23:22 Balaam proclaims, "God brings *them* out of Egypt; He [God] has strength like a wild ox." In the next oracle, Balaam shifts to the singular, "God brings *him* out of Egypt" (Num 24:8), and in the next and final oracle, referring to the "latter days" (24:14), Balaam indicates the Messianic identification of the "him": "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a scepter shall arise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult" (24:17).³

When we come to the New Testament Gospels, Jesus' whole life and ministry is recognized to be a fulfillment of the Old Testament Exodus typology. For example, Matthew depicts Jesus as the Representative Israel, recapitulating in His life the experience of ancient Israel, but succeeding where the first Israel failed. The first five chapters of Matthew describe in detail Jesus as the Representative Israel experiencing a New Exodus: coming out of Egypt after a death decree (Matt 2:15), and going through His antitypical Red Sea experience in His baptism (Matt 3:13-17; cf. 1 Cor 10:1, 2). This is followed by His wilderness experience of 40 days paralleling the 40 years of ancient Israel in the wilderness (Matt 4). During this time Jesus indicates His own awareness of His role as the Representative Israel in the New Exodus by consistently meeting the devil's temptations with quotations from Deut 6-8 (where ancient

Israel's temptations in the wilderness are summarized). Finally, Jesus appears on the Mount as a new Moses, with His 12 disciples representing the tribes of Israel, and repeats the Law as Moses did at the end of the wilderness sojourn (Matt 5-7).

Matthew and the other Synoptic Gospels also depict the death and resurrection of Jesus as a New Exodus.⁴ Note, for example, how on the Mount of Transfiguration, the first (resurrected) Moses spoke to the New Moses about His approaching "Exodus [Greek *exodos*] which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). Jesus' death is His ultimate Exodus experience. Just as ancient Israel had been delivered from bondage by the blood of the Passover lamb, so Christ on the cross as the Lamb of God works out an even greater deliverance—from the bondage of sin. After His resurrection He remains in the wilderness of this earth 40 days (Acts 1:3) like Israel's 40 years in the wilderness and then as the New Joshua enters heavenly Canaan as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2 NRSV).

The good news of the Gospel is that *we were there* when Jesus died. Christ's "Exodus" at Calvary is our history. The Negro spiritual asks: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? And the answer of the gospel is, "Yes, we all were there!" When He died and rose again, we were there. His death was our death, His resurrection ours! That is the meaning of 2 Cor 5:14, 15: when Christ died, we all died; we were there! In harmony with the Passover principle, we can reckon that we were there. By faith we can claim the truth of the Passover principle: His death is ours, His resurrection is ours, His righteousness is ours.

What is our response to this powerful gospel principle? In the Passover Haggadah, the "You are there" principle leads spontaneously and ultimately to doxology. Since God brought *us* out of Egypt, "therefore it is our duty to thank, to praise, to pay tribute, to glorify, to exalt, to acclaim, to bless, to esteem, and to honor that one who did all these miracles for our fathers and

for us . . . and therefore let us sing before him a new song, Halleluya!” The singing of the Hallel (“praise”) psalms (Ps 113-118) and the Great Hallel (Ps 136) are the climax of the Passover *seder*.

Soon, the Exodus typology will move into its final phase. Soon another death decree like the one in Egypt of old will take place; soon another set of plagues. Just as the last seven of the ten plagues fell on the Egyptians but not Israel, so the seven last plagues will fall on the wicked and not God’s people. Soon, praise God, will come the mighty glorious final Exodus. Not just the redemption from the penalty of sin (which Christ accomplished at the cross); not just deliverance from the power of sin (which the Holy Spirit is working out in our hearts), but deliverance from the very presence of sin.

We will stand, not beside the Red Sea, but in victory upon the Sea of Glass, celebrating our ultimate Exodus experience (Rev 15:2). We will stand in a hollow square around the Lamb, and strike our harps and lift our voices. We will sing the climactic Exodus anthem, “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (Rev 15:3). We will have experienced the Old Testament Exodus (stanza one, the Song of Moses) and the New Exodus (the second stanza, the song of the Lamb). Here in the glorious melodic “retelling” of the Exodus, the “You are there” principle of Scripture will find its loftiest expression!

¹. For many more biblical examples of the “You are there” principle in Scripture, see my unpublished forty-page paper, “Corporative Solidarity in the Old Testament,” available from my administrative assistant, Dorothy Show, at showd@andrews.edu.

². Major biblical passages announcing the Messianic New Exodus include, e.g., Isa 11:6-9, 15-16; 35; 40:3-5; 41:17-20; 42:14-16; 43:1-3, 14-21; 48:20-21; 49:3-5, 8-12; 51:9-11; 52:3-7, 11-12; 54:10,13; 55:12-13; Jer 23:4-8; 16:14-15; 31:32; Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26; Hos 2:14-15; 12:9, 13; 13:4-5; Amos 9:7-15; Mic 7:8-20. For comprehensive treatment of these and other passages, see especially Friedbert Ninow, *Indicators of Typology within the Old Testament: The Exodus Motif* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

³. See John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 407-409, for further discussion.

⁴. See George Balentine, "Death of Christ as a New Exodus," *Review and Expositor* 59 (1962): 27-41; and idem, "The Concept of the New Exodus in the Gospels," (Th.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1961).