

4 The Birth of a Nation

This is the fourth talk outline in The God Story Sermon Series. The related chapter in The God Story book is Chapter 4, *The Birth of a Nation*. The Books of the Bible this chapter corresponds with are Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Teaching Outline

Key aims

To explore how Yahweh identified with the Hebrew slaves, delivering them from the Egyptian Empire and forming them into His own special family, to discover how God desired to dwell among and journey with them into a glorious inheritance; to be inspired by Moses, the Israelites great leader whose encounters with God reveal the essence of The God Story plot.

The God Story storytelling method

The God Story Storyteller understands that to teach The God Story effectively a dual teaching method is required. This is the art of teaching in a way that both **unfolds the eternal purposes of God through history and also releases them into personal encounter**. Practically this will mean prayerfully considering in each talk outline what parts you want to 'go deeper' in and what parts you want to mention at a headline level. We trust the Spirit will inspire and guide you to find the right cadence as you aim to give a passionate sweep of the unfolding narrative while also narrowing the focus in certain places to emphasise personal application and encounter.

Key Bible passages

You may want to read a short passage of scripture before you begin your talk. The passages below are the ones we believe are most relevant to this particular talk.

We recommend you choose one of these:

Exodus 3

Exodus 19

Exodus 32-34

Teaching notes

The notes provided will equip you to understand more of the context and more of the story as you prepare your talk. Generally speaking the talk outline follows the structure of the corresponding chapter in The God Story book. We feel the key sections in the Talk Outline below relate to the main flow of the unfolding scriptural narrative and so we have included key Biblical passages and quotes from The God Story to assist you in this. We recommend using these sections to shape your talk but please choose the parts which you feel are most helpful for your context.

Opportunity for application or reflection

Throughout the teaching notes there are a few places we identify as an 'Application Opportunity' to enable preachers to think about suggested responses or a call to action. At the end of each talk outline we have included the 'Questions for Reflection' section contained at the end of the respective chapter in The God Story book. We hope this may serve as a resource to help preachers think about how they could encourage more application and reflection among their listeners. If your church is also following the associated 'The God Story Small Group Guide' you can instruct listeners that these questions will make up the main part of their small group discussion in the corresponding week.

Continue to the sermon

Introduction

Recap of previous session(s)

God found a partner in Abram, a man who left everything to walk with God, carrying with him a seed of promise for all nations. After years of contending for a sign this promise would come true (a son!) Abraham came to realise the covenantal promise of God's intimate presence was the ultimate prize. Abraham was eventually ready to steward God's plan for universal blessing. The fruit of such joyful surrender was the birth of Isaac. The seed of God's promised blessing passed through Isaac to his son Jacob. Jacob's own transformative identity journey with God was sealed by his name becoming Israel, and through the redemptive story of Jacob's son Joseph, the family of Israel (70 in all) eventually settled in Egypt.

Talk overview

The favour Jacob's family had enjoyed under Joseph's exceptional leadership in Egypt eventually ended, dissolving into a devastating regime of slavery under the tyrannical rule of another Egyptian Pharaoh. The 70 'sons of Israel' have grown to approximately 2 million. Picking up the story 400 years later we quickly realise God has not forgotten his people or his promises and through Moses; he is coming to deliver them. An epic tale of redemption and liberation will take place in the Exodus from Egypt and the blessing of a Promised Land awaits Abram's descendants. A journey through the wilderness is required first though where God desires to form them into a holy nation. God will make covenant with the Israelites, give them the law to guide them as his own treasured possession and unveil a stunning blueprint of how he longs to live among them. But it will prove more difficult to take Egypt out of the people than take them out of Egypt, and the generation who witnessed a great deliverance will ultimately forfeit their inheritance. Through all of this Moses - the meekest man in all the earth - will be the Israelites' great leader and mediator, revealing to us the essence of The God Story plot.

Talk Outline

Key Teaching Sections

1 The dark empire in Egypt

Reminder of how 400 years of slavery was foretold in Genesis 15. But note how all the elements of God's promise to Abraham **are still not fulfilled**. They are not a great nation; they do not have a Promised Land; they are living in slavery.

- + Explain how children of Israel had grown from Jacob's family of 70 (end of Genesis) to 2 million people at this point (Exod 1:6).
- + Highlight how Pharaoh's oppressive regime is one of systemic injustice and dehumanising evil (Exod 1:11-22). Egypt, like Babel, is the epitome of the anti-kingdom of God existence. God's rule and reign is against the politics of the empire.

2 Moses (Exod 2)

Describe how Moses survived Pharaoh's infanticide and note the sovereign hand of God in this narrative i.e. Moses was hidden in a river, found by the only one who won't take his life, and ends up being nursed and nurtured by his birth mum.

- + Explain Moses' internal identity conflict - because Moses was most likely raised in Pharaoh's court but disciplined by his (Hebrew) mum he battled false identity. Who really was he? This battle exploded one day in uncontrollable rage resulting in the killing of an Egyptian who had been beating a Hebrew slave (Exod 2:12).
- + Explain how Moses is forced to flee to the desert of Midian where he marries Jethro's daughter and becomes a shepherd.

» Application opportunity

Encourage people to think of the dysfunctional ways a lack of God-centred identity can spill over in their lives.

3 Burning bush (Exod 3)

Highlight how first 40 years of Moses' life were spent in Egypt and second 40 years were spent in the desert as a lowly shepherd. Moses had been humbled.

- + Emphasise how God however had not forgotten him, nor the Children of Israel (Exod 2:23-24).
- + Describe Moses' burning bush encounter - a bush on fire but not consumed (Exod 3:1-6). Imagine Moses hearing his own name spoken by God and like the other key characters in The God Story plot, Moses replies, "Here I am."

≡ Key quote

*"Through the symbolism of the bush, crackling with fire yet not consumed, God is communicating something deep to Moses. He wants Moses to know something new is happening to him: God's love is going to burn up every false and unformed part of him, in order that he might become who he was created to be."*¹

4 The God of the oppressed (Exod 3:7-10)

Emphasise how God emphatically identified with the least and the oppressed: God has seen their misery, heard their crying, was moved by their suffering, and declared he would *come down to deliver them*.

- + Describe how Moses' reluctance to accept he is the right person for the job leads to God revealing God's most personal name. (Exod 3:11-14) "Who me?" is met with "I AM"

5 YHWH – Infinite and intimate (Exod 3:14)

Focus on how the meaning of YHWH is difficult to fully translate but scholarly consensus has landed on something close to, 'I am who I am' or 'I will be who I will be.' Emphasise how God uses this occasion where he has identified himself as the God of the slave to describe his incomparable nature.

≡ Key quote

"God is essentially saying to Moses, 'You cannot comprehend me fully, you can't box me, I am beyond your terms and categories description....Yet in these moments Yahweh has come close to Moses to say he is intimately acquainted with the pain of his people. From this point on we must carry forward a holy tension when we think about God. Yahweh is both infinite and intimate, transcendent and immanent, majestic and approachable, undefinable yet knowable!'"²

6 The Exodus (Exod 5-15)

Describe how Moses goes before Pharaoh and declares God's instruction to let the Israelites go free. In response Pharaoh increases oppression and Moses' leadership has not gotten off to the best start.

+ Overview the Ten plagues (Exod 7-11):

≡ Key quote

"It will take some convincing – a series of plagues are dealt out – water turning to blood, frogs, lice, flies, livestock pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, darkness. These plagues are not random displays of God's power. This is the intentional and systematic dismantling of Egypt's local deities and with each plague comes an opportunity for Pharaoh to repent. Pharaoh hardened his heart each time."³

+ **Passover** (Exod 12): Explain how the last plague would carry the most devastating effect for Pharaoh, the death of the firstborn in Egypt. Pharaoh had refused to let the Israelites go and a great cry was heard in Egypt.

- In contrast the blood of a spotless sacrificial lamb was placed on the doorposts of Israelite homes and they were spared from the Angel of death which passed over Egypt. The blood of the lamb became symbolic for the Israelites' liberation from this point on.

- Pharaoh was outraged and ordered the Israelites to leave. Highlight how Moses led 2 million slaves out of Egypt that night.

7 Exodus and the Red Sea (Exod 13-15)

Retell the story of God leading the Israelites to the edge of the Red Sea chased by Egypt's army and how God opened up the Red Sea bringing them through on dry land and then completely submerging the Egyptians.

- + Note the mention of creation language and themes in the narrative i.e. light, dark, waters separate, dry ground. The God of Creation is creating a people for Himself.

8 The gift of the wilderness (Exod 16-18)

Describe how after the Exodus a radical new beginning had dawned for the Israelites. The Promised Land awaits.

- + **Key point:** Living in the Promised Land would mean learning how to become a Promise People. This will mean learning how to trust God's provision (i.e. manna and water from the rock) and beginning to understand themselves as sons and daughters not slaves. God had taken them out of Egypt, but now he wants to take 'Egypt' out of them.

» Application opportunity

Focus on the important role of wilderness in the Christian life. Wilderness seasons are a painful gift, revealing our attachments and weaning us off our false distorted identities. Wilderness is ultimately not a place of punishment but the place where holy patterns are scribed on our hearts, preparing us for the glorious inheritance we were originally designed for.

9 Mount Sinai, A royal identity (Exod 19– 40)

- + Read Exodus 19:3-6: *“The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*
- + Highlight how God is declaring Israel’s true identity and vocation in this passage.
 - **God’s treasured possession:** a chosen people whom God has cherished and set his love upon
 - **A Holy nation:** a people distinct from other nations reflecting the nature of God
 - **A kingdom of priests:** connectors of the beauty of God with the brokenness of humanity.

10 Ten Living Words

Imagine the scene. At this stage Mount Sinai is on fire and Moses and Aaron are called up the mountain. (Exod 19:16-25)

- + God gives Moses ‘The Ten Commandments’ (Exod 20:1-17). These are not simply ‘do’s and don’ts.’ Rather these words are Torah, literally, ‘to guide’. Explain how the Ten Commandments carry a mixture of ‘vertical’ (with God) and ‘horizontal’ (with one another) implications for Israelite relationships. Think of the Ten Commandments as the terms for God’s covenant with Israel to enable them to enjoy friendship together. Moses seals the covenant by splashing blood against the rocks. (Exod 28:8)
- + Describe how Moses remains on the mountain for 40 days and receives hundreds of other practical laws from God which are recorded in Exodus and make up much of the book of Leviticus.

≡ Key quote

“These laws were God’s way of immersing them in his culture, fathering them in his holy ways and codifying them as a promise-people. Leviticus teaches us that to worship God is to participate in a just and caring society in all of life” ⁴

11 Dwelling together (Exod 32-34)

Describe how God goes on to explain to Moses how he wants to come and live among his people.

- + **Key moment:** Take some time to emphasise how this reflects the core theme of The God Story - God's longing love to live in communion with those he created.
- + Highlight the detailed plans God gave Moses for the tabernacle and explain how every part of its design was symbolic and meaningful. In particular emphasise the Ark of the Covenant as the place of God's manifest presence on the earth.

≡ Key quote

*"The tabernacle was designed as a microcosm of the whole earth! It was constructed in 3 parts - 'The Outer Court', 'The Holy Place' and 'The Holy of Holies', symbolising the cosmic dream of God to fill the world with his goodness and glory. The sealed off section called the 'Holy of Holies' would be the location for the Ark of the Covenant. This Ark was a huge chest-like box and was to be understood as the hot-spot of God's tangible presence on the earth. If the Israelites followed the divine pattern of worship, God had promised his glory would come and his great hope was that Israel would learn how to steward his presence beyond the Holy of Holies into the outer-courts (the rest of the world)."*⁵

12 Deal or No deal

Explain the Israelite rebellion which took place while Moses was up the mountain and their worship of a golden calf.

- + Emphasise God's heart-brokenness and anger in response to this and His decision to no longer go any further with the Israelites. Yet highlight how this leads to one of the most intense moments in all of scripture as Moses and God engage in an intimate but robust heart-to-heart. Moses has learned how to engage with God as a covenantal partner with courage and conviction.

- + Read Exodus 33:12-17 - particularly highlight v.14

≡ Key quote

"God's dilemma this time, though, is that he has found a partner who won't let go of him or his dream! Incredibly, Moses has started to feel the same way God does about his people. God is angry at the Israelites' staggering act of betrayal, but Moses knows God well enough by now to know that beneath his anger, God is still unfailing and steadfast in his Love. Moses appeals to God's own heart. 'Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.' As God hears the echo of his own heart in Moses' words, his response is summed up in these remarkable words: 'The Lord relented.'" ⁶

13 Risky request and covenant renewed (Exod 33:18-34:10)

Moses has touched a place deep in God's heart and therefore he dares to ask for even more. "Show me your glory" (Exod 33:18)

- + Describe how God bends to Moses' request but only in a way that will not kill him!! God tells Moses he will go before him and let all his goodness (glory) pass before him.
- + Read Exodus 33:18-34:10
- + Emphasise how Moses returns back down the mountain, his face shining with the glory of God.

14 The wilderness wanderings (Exod 36 - Numbers 36)

Describe how after one year of intense drama around Mount Sinai the cloud lifts and the Israelites begin to move towards the Promised Land.

- + Describe how 12 spies are sent to scope out Canaan, the Promised Land. While Joshua and Caleb bring back a faith-filled report, the 10 other spies focus on the fact the land is beset with giants and difficulty. Despite God's miraculous deliverance and provision the Israelites have not learned to trust God.
- + Explain how former slaves had known a great deliverance, but they had forfeited their inheritance. And so, a journey which was supposed to take 40 days will become a wandering of 40 years. Explain how the remaining chapters of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers tell of this journey.

» Application opportunity

Many believers have known a 'deliverance' from sins but forfeited their inheritance. Encourage people to think about what could be preventing them from taking hold of their inheritance.

15 Man on fire (Deuteronomy Chapters 4-30)

The book of Numbers concludes with Israel camped to the east of the River Jordan, in the plains of Moab. Moses himself will not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Moses has made mistakes (see Numbers 20). Yet, in experiencing God's forgiveness Moses learned how to grow old with God in sweet and enduring friendship. In the end Moses has come to know God as his Promised Land.

- + Despite the fact Moses will not enter into the Promised Land himself, explain how Moses prepares the next generation, preaching his heart out in three passionate addresses which make up the main body of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy means 'second law.'
- + Instead of a mountain on fire which we saw in Exodus at the giving of the law, Moses is a man on fire preaching with passion; reminding the next generation of the great story their lives have been caught up in, exhorting them to hold fast to the terms of the covenant, to seize their inheritance, to choose Life!
- + Highlight how Joshua is chosen and commissioned to succeed Moses (Deut 31) before Moses dies and is buried by God (Deut 34).

16 Helpful summary

- + *"As the meekest human in all the earth takes his last breath, a nation has been born. From the origins of a small nomadic tribe God has formed a covenant people under his loving rule. Abraham's descendants now have a story of rescue and liberation from slavery to carry with them and their children. Forged in the wilderness and affirmed as God's treasured possession, a great inheritance awaits them. But they must learn from their mistakes if they are to be the people through whom the Eternal Family's divine desire will bring blessing to all the earth."*⁷

Questions for Reflection or Further Application

How does it make you feel to know God calls you his treasured possession, set apart for him to connect the beauty of heaven to the brokenness of earth? What is the pain in the world that breaks your heart and moves you to compassionate action? Have you had times in your life that felt like 'wilderness'? How did you see God's faithfulness and formation?

Three Sacred Themes

The closing page of each chapter in The God Story book includes a summary shaped around three sacred themes which we believe helps knit the overarching storyline together. Feel free to use this as an extra resource to The God Story Sermon Series if you feel this would be helpful to summarise each talk. You will find this for *Birth of a Nation* on p.73.

End of sermon

¹ Alain Emerson and Adam Cox, *The God Story; Encountering unfailing love in the unfolding narrative of scripture*; (London, Form SPCK Group 2024), p.58

² Ibid, p.60

³ Ibid, p.61

⁴ Ibid, p.66-67

⁵ Ibid, p.68

⁶ Ibid, p.69

⁷ Ibid, p.72

*All Bible passages quoted are taken from NIV unless stated.