

REAL PEOPLE, REAL GOD:

Moses, Part I

Most of you are probably familiar with Moses's story, but we're going to tackle this long and important chunk of Scripture from the perspective of how Moses (and the stories of Exodus) fits into the overall story of the Bible.

We began our Through-the-Bible Character Studies at Creation with God in perfect fellowship with the humans He'd created in His image. When Adam and Eve sinned, it shattered that perfectly transparent relationship between God and man. So the rest of Scripture is the story of how God works to restore that perfect relationship.

REAL PEOPLE Shift

As we look at Moses during the next few weeks, we'll ask the same question we've been asking, "What is our REAL GOD doing?" to restore that perfect relationship that was lost in the Garden. However, our second question, "What are the REAL PEOPLE doing?" will shift.

Jacob (renamed *Israel* in Gen. 32:28) died at the end of Genesis, so in the first chapter of Exodus, the descendants of Israel multiply and spread into a nation. While our ongoing study will still look at the lives of individual REAL PEOPLE, our REAL GOD begins interacting with a *whole nation* of REAL PEOPLE as a single unit throughout the rest of the Old Testament (OT).

So, our question will oftentimes become, "What are *His* REAL PEOPLE (meaning the whole nation of Israel) doing?"

Our REAL GOD's Silence

In Genesis, we saw our God speaking to, covenanting with, protecting, promising, and prospering a number of men and women but most notably Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now, as we begin Exodus, this same God has been utterly silent for 400 years. 400 years!!!

Here's something even more puzzling: Not only was God silent (ouch), but He allowed Israel to endure great hardship and slavery (double ouch)!

My question is ***WHY??*** Why would a God who wants to restore a perfect Garden relationship do these things that seem so completely UN-relational?

REAL PEOPLE Struggle and Despair

Before we judge God (which, BTW, is never a good idea), let's read the context surrounding His silence...

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Behold, the *people of Israel are too many* and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, *lest they multiply*, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.’ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.” **Exodus 1:8-11** (*emphasis* added)

The next verse explains the effect of this oppression on God's chosen people...

“But the more they were oppressed, the more they *multiplied* and the more they *spread* abroad.” **Exodus 1:12** (*emphasis* added)

The very thing the Egyptians feared came to pass. Oppression actually created a nation that spread like wildfire.

Our REAL GOD's Good Plan

Despair drives people in predictable patterns. Our REAL GOD knit every Israelite together in his/her mother's womb and understands every whim and emotion. He was building a nation. He had a plan and was allowing it to unfold. It's called divine patience...He's good at it. I'm not. Especially when there's pain involved. How about you?

From a human standpoint, 400 years of God-silence sucks lemons, right? The Israelites have now reached a point of desperation. Have you ever been *desperate*? I mean, *would-rather-die-than-live* desperate? It's terrifying and terrible—believe me, I know. God's REAL PEOPLE—the Israelites—were there.

But remember, our REAL GOD had a plan. He knew His people would suffer under slavery. He told Abraham way back in Genesis 15. And He knew that Israel—the whole nation—out of their desperation would cry out to Him.

Israel Like Israel (Jacob)

Remember how the man Israel (Jacob) wrestled it out with God one night and reached that desperation point. It's how he found his own faith in God. He later had to go through more moments of desperation in order to be humbled by God and see God's work in his life.

For the rest of our character studies, we'll see in every story the secondary character as the nation of Israel coming into it's own, finding their faith with God, wrestling it out...just like Israel (Jacob). Think of the nation's story as Jacob and God on a larger scale.

Israel Like Joseph

Remember in our last episode, how we thought God allowed Joseph's affliction and trials to hone his character, especially compared to the kind of man he may have become without those trials. And who knows what Jacob would have become without his wrestling match with God. Probably, the entire nation of Israel as a unit/a character is no different. God alone knows what we need, and He knew Israel needed to be brought to a place of crying for their God.

Our REAL GOD Gives Choices

We also see in God's silence His determination to give people a choice. During this time of silence, the Israelites had an opportunity to choose 1) the God of their fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob); 2) the gods of Egypt; or 3) to give into their despair.

Our choices today are similar. When faced with what feels like God's absence or silence, we can choose to wait on God, run to self-medications (whatever makes us "feel" better), or turn our backs on all we know about God.

REAL LIFE Example

The story of the Hebrew midwives serves as a kind of window into the nation of Israel, by allowing us to see into the REAL LIVES of two women who made the right choice. Even in the midst of a great silence from their God, they made the right choice (Exodus 1:17 tells us) ***because they feared Him.***

How did they choose to maintain a relationship with our REAL GOD—so much that they were willing to publicly disobey Pharaoh's orders—even after 400 years of silence? And remember, while their REAL GOD was silent, they lived in a culture with MANY other gods who weren't silent (well, technically they were, but other REAL PEOPLE were undoubtedly talking about their pagan gods). How did the midwives—or any other Israelite—***know*** about God if He'd been silent for 400 years?

The history of Israel and their God (stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) would have been passed down through song from generation to generation.

Think of any quippy little songs and stories you learned as a child. "Happy Birthday To You" (written in 1893 [123 years ago]) and "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" (written in 1806 [210 years ago]) What about nursery rhymes? Can you recite "Hey Diddle Diddle" (first published in 1765

[251 years ago])? Many others have been floating around and taught to children for centuries. It's the same way Israelite oral history was taught. The slaves in Egypt would have known the history of their ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—word-for-word and song-note-for-song-note during the days of God's silence.

But after 400 years, wouldn't the songs have been as meaningless as "Happy Birthday" is to some people today? And even more troubling...if nothing new was happening with their God, might they have mixed their songs and stories with those of the surrounding culture and the pagan gods?

We know the Israelites had incorporated Egyptian gods into their culture because of the golden calf they built the minute they thought Yahweh had swallowed up Moses on top of Mt. Sinai.

Throughout the OT, we'll discover that the Israelites greatest sin was NOT that they completely turned away from God, but that they added other gods *BESIDE* Him.

Recap...

We have God's nation trying to preserve their stories through song to remember what He's like in the midst of oppression and multiple other gods—finding it incredibly difficult to maintain any kind of vibrant faith in Him.

- Does this sound familiar to anyone?
- Does it feel like God is silent or distant?
- Are you trying to remember Him in the midst of hardships and oppression?
- Are you trying to cultivate and/or maintain a vibrant relationship in a culture filled with other gods?

The answer is to do what Israel did: Remember your God, and cry out in desperation.

What Does our REAL GOD Do?

It was the Israelites who cried out, but God had chosen Moses eighty years before (Exodus 7:7) to be His instrument of deliverance. Moses wasn't looking for God, but... God. Had. A. Plan.

“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.’”

Exodus 3:7-8 (*emphasis added*)

God heard ALL their cries—the whole nation. To build a nation of people ready to follow Him wholeheartedly, He needed to wait until a whole nation was desperate enough to cry out.

After 400 years of silence, God speaks to one man, Moses, in order to speak to the whole nation. And what He speaks is His Name.

“Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’” God said to Moses, “***I am who I am.***” Exodus 3:13-14a (emphasis added)

Most English Bibles translate “I AM” as: “I will be what I will be.” But my Hebrew Study Bible blew my socks off with this literal translation: “My nature will become evident from my actions.”

So, it was like God said to Moses, “Watch what I do, and you’ll learn who I AM.”

The Difference in a Name

Back in Genesis, folks had been calling God the names of His characteristics because He was actively showing His nature through his actions to those individuals (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob):

- Elohim (God as Creator and Judge of the Universe – Jewish understanding of the term)
- El Roi (God who Sees Me)
- El Shaddai (God Almighty)

To Moses, He gives one name for all time that basically means, “Yes, I AM a God who acts. Watch me! And you will know me.” Israel’s God was an active God, and that’s how they were to know Him from here on out...and *keep* knowing Him. That’s how WE are to know Him and keep knowing Him...WATCH Him!

The REAL MAN, Moses

So, Moses knows God’s new name...now what? Here’s what God expected him to do:

“Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, “**The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.**” This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Go and **gather the elders of Israel** together and say to them, “**The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, ‘I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out**

of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Exodus 3:14b-17 (*emphasis* added)

Imagine how Moses felt. He wasn't raised as an Israelite. He barely knew their customs. He was raised as an Egyptian and then fled to Midian as a fugitive. Now, at age 80, Yahweh tells him to return to the people of Israel and *LEAD* them out of slavery?

Can you imagine the Israelites' response? “Yeah, right. You mean that 400-year-old silent God that doesn't exist? The one we sing those silly songs about? He's going to come down and deliver us from bondage?”

So, God gives Moses miraculous signs to perform for the people. Really?!? More freaking out! Leprosy and a snake by the tail—really, God? We give Moses a hard time for arguing with God, but let's get REAL here. Would we have done any better?

Our REAL GOD to the Rescue

After some serious whining, Moses won't budge on the deliverer calling. Enter...big brother Aaron, who our REAL GOD describes as someone who “speaks well” in Exodus 4:14. I suppose if the Creator writes, “Speaks well,” on your resume` that's a pretty good endorsement. Again...Aaron wasn't the second-string spokesman. He was God's man for the plan. If God knew Aaron “spoke well,” that means God had been preparing him with opportunities to speak, right?

So the brothers return, gather the elders, and relay to the REAL PEOPLE their REAL GOD'S new name and His message. Do the Israelites believe it?

“And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.” **Exodus 4:28-31**

Amazing. To believe and bow down and worship this God who hasn't spoken—or even seemed to exist—for 400 years... It brings me to tears. Can you imagine the sight? The elders of Israel, overwhelmed. So far beyond words, they must hide their faces in worship before a God they thought was dead.

Now, He's on their side. The silly stories are now amazing beacons of hope...

Their God is REAL!! ***OUR*** God is REAL!!

Your REAL GOD

You may feel like God is silent in your life right now. Maybe you feel like He's been silent for a long time, or like He's never spoken to you at all. Maybe it seems like He's just a character in some silly little song you learned as a kid.

Maybe what you need to hear today is the wonderful truth that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the I AM, is REAL after all! He ***sees*** your trouble and ***hears*** your cries and ***has a plan*** to ***deliver you***.

In fact, His plan for deliverance has already been set in motion through His Son Jesus Christ! You are a slave no longer. His work is finished! You need only shake off the chains and accept His free Gift of salvation. If you don't understand what that means or how to live a life of freedom through Jesus Christ, please email me at mesu@mesuandrews.com.

If you've already taken that step of salvation but need the love and hope and peace and light of Jesus to show up and ***speak*** into your circumstances, know that Lyndsey and I have prayed for you—and continue to pray that everyone listening to this audio study or reading this post might feel His presence, hear Him speak, and know that His loving care is REAL. Rest in the I AM, and WATCH for Him to reveal more of Himself to you this week.

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