



Week 1 – Concept of Salvation in the Old Testament

Week 1, Day 1: Sign of the Covenant

Genesis 9:12-17

¹² Then God said, "I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. ¹³ I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. ¹⁴ When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, ¹⁵ and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. ¹⁶ When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth." ¹⁷ Then God said to Noah, "Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth."

Understanding the Passage:

These first nine chapters of Genesis have covered God's joy and satisfaction with a "very good" creation to sadness over being disobeyed and having to create boundaries in relationship with human beings to becoming heartbroken as these human beings continue to spiral down. God says God will wipe human beings from the planet, along with every living thing. The world is epically ending, it would seem, the story is over. Then comes this line: "But Noah found favor with the Lord." (Genesis 6:8)

God goes into detail explaining to Noah how to build a massive ark for himself, his family, and representatives of all living creatures to stay safe during the massive flood God is about to send over the earth. "I will confirm my covenant with you", God promises. That's not a lot to go on, but it's enough for Noah to respond to in faithful obedience. After the flood comes and goes, Noah, his family, and all the living creatures get off the ark and step onto dry land. The first thing Noah does is to make a sacrifice to God. God responds by promising that God "will never again destroy all living things" (Genesis 8:21) and God responds by making God's covenant relationship with Noah official with a tangible sign—a rainbow.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Is there a tangible sign that reminds you of God's presence at a particular point in your life? Maybe a photo in your home, a piece of jewelry, a tattoo, a Bible you've written in the margins of, or an object you keep on your desk?
2. Why do you think God includes "all living creatures" in this covenant?

Week 1, Day 2: The Paradox of Staying Still and Taking Action

Exodus 14:10-15:2

¹⁰ As Pharaoh drew closer, the Israelites looked back and saw the Egyptians marching toward them. The Israelites were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Weren't there enough graves in Egypt that you took us away to die in the desert?... ¹³ But Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. Stand your ground, and watch the LORD rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never ever see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you. You just keep still." ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to get moving. ¹⁶ As for you, lift your shepherd's rod, stretch out your hand over the sea, and split it in two so that the Israelites can go into the sea on dry ground..."

*Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:
I will sing to the LORD, for an overflowing victory!*

Horse and rider he threw into the sea!

*² The LORD is my strength and my power;
he has become my salvation.*

Understanding the Passage:

After suffering hundreds of years of enslavement at the hands of Egyptian pharaohs, the Israelites have finally just been freed. It took God sending plagues on the land of Egypt and a stuttering, stubborn intermediary named Moses for the Israelites to exit the land of Egypt and start the journey toward a new land God promised to give them. Just a couple of days into the journey, though, the Israelites were shocked to see Pharaoh and his army chasing them down. Once again, Pharaoh had changed his mind. Once again, he had decided it was not in his best interest to let the Israelites leave, so he was coming to bring them back to Egypt with persuasion tactics of brute military force.

The Israelites turn to Moses in desperation. Moses gives them some very unexpected advice: "The Lord will fight for you. You just keep still." (verse 14) In the next verse, though, God adds the clarification that while only God can save them, the Israelites (and Moses) still need to take some action ("get moving" (v. 15), "stretch out your hand over the sea and split it in two" (v. 16). The paradox of the life of faith keeps us in a constant state of discerning when to "keep still" and when to "get moving".

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. When Moses and the Israelites sing a song of praise to God after they get safely to the other side of the sea, they include this line: "The Lord is my strength and my power; he has become my salvation." What was your experience of accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior? Was it a big, defining moment after a climactic experience, like the one Moses and the Israelites had? Or was it quieter or slower, across a long period of time?
2. How do you discern when to "keep still" and let God be God in a particular situation and when to step up and act boldly with courage and confidence?

Week 1, Day 3: Easy to Say, Hard to Do

Exodus 19:1-8

On exactly the third-month anniversary of the Israelites' leaving the land of Egypt, they came into the Sinai desert. ² They traveled from Rephidim, came into the Sinai desert, and set up camp there. Israel camped there in front of the mountain ³ while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him from the mountain, "This is what you should say to Jacob's household and declare to the Israelites: ⁴ You saw what I did to the Egyptians, and how I lifted you up on eagles' wings and brought you to me. ⁵ So now, if you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession out of all the peoples, since the whole earth belongs to me. ⁶ You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy

nation. These are the words you should say to the Israelites.”⁷ So Moses came down, called together the people’s elders, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ The people all responded with one voice: “Everything that the LORD has said we will do.”

Understanding the Passage:

Now that the Israelites are out of imminent danger and are moving beyond survival mode, they have capacity to begin to develop a more robust culture. God guides them toward a covenant-centric culture in which their relationship with God is the primary filter for everything they do and say, in how they treat one another and how they treat those around them.

A culture like that is not easy to cultivate, though. God knows that, so God reminds them that they can trust God in this covenant relationship. This is the same God who rescued them from slavery in Egypt just three months prior. Now, God asks for the Israelites to commit to this covenant relationship, this two-sided relationship, which involves, on the Israelites’ end, faithfulness and obedience, and on God’s end, a cherishing of the relationship and a purpose in the world. Moses presents this proposal God has to the people and they respond with unity that is powerful and yet sows some seeds of doubt: “Everything that the Lord has said we will do.” (Exodus 19:8) Will the Israelites stay united in that decision? Will this broad-brushed promise of engagement in the covenant relationship really hold? What happens if it doesn’t?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Do you think the Israelites were sincere in their response (verse 8) to God’s offer of covenant relationship?
2. What is one specific action you take to grow in deeper engagement of covenant relationship with God? (*prayer, journaling, meditation, acts of service, fasting, studying Scripture, etc.*)

Week 1, Day 4: Looking Back, Looking Forward

Isaiah 51

*Listen to me, all who hope for deliverance—
all who seek the LORD!*

*Consider the rock from which you were cut,
the quarry from which you were mined...*

⁴ *“Listen to me, my people.*

*Hear me, Israel,
for my law will be proclaimed,
and my justice will become a light to the nations.*

⁵ *My mercy and justice are coming soon.*

My salvation is on the way.

My strong arm will bring justice to the nations.

Understanding the Passage:

The prophet is writing to a community in exile. They are separated from their homes, their businesses, family and friends, the Temple, and all that is familiar and important to them. The prophet writes to help those who are suffering to find a way of grounding themselves and identifying some hope they can hold onto to keep going amid so much change and grief.

First, the prophet encourages the people to remember who they are and where they are from (“consider the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were mined” (verse 3)). Second, the prophet encourages the people with the news that their exile will end one day soon. Wait just a little bit longer, the prophet urges, building on this sense of the trustworthiness that God will come through, just as God has so many times before: “My mercy and justice are coming soon. My salvation is on the way.” (verse 5)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What grounds you when you are going through a season of change?
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to trust that God will come through on keeping a promise?

Week 1, Day 5: "O God of My Salvation"

Psalm 27:1-10

*The LORD is my light and my salvation—
so why should I be afraid?*

*The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger,
so why should I tremble?...*

⁷ Hear me as I pray, O LORD.

Be merciful and answer me!

*⁸ My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me."
And my heart responds, "LORD, I am coming."*

⁹ Do not turn your back on me.

Do not reject your servant in anger.

You have always been my helper.

*Don't leave me now; don't abandon me,
O God of my salvation!*

*¹⁰ Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the LORD will hold me close.*

Understanding the Passage:

The psalmist's relationship with God is clear, powerful, and personal. It is clear that for the psalmist, God is uniquely able to provide the psalmist with safety in danger, consistency in presence, and light in the darkness. The personal nature of the relationship really shines as well, with the psalmist naming that personal connection explicitly ("The Lord is my light and my salvation... The Lord is my fortress" (verses 1-2, emphasis added)). The psalmist's personal relationship with God also comes through in the window into the conversational communication style the psalmist has with God: "My heart has heard you say, 'Come and talk with me.' And my heart responds, 'Lord, I am coming.'" (verse 8)

The psalmist even allows us to eavesdrop as he shares a painful moment of vulnerability, begging God, "Do not turn your back on me. Do not reject your servant in anger. Don't leave me now; don't abandon me, O God of my salvation! Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close." (vv. 9-10) Whether the psalmist struggles with abandonment issues from his past or whether he is lamenting the reality that no human being can perfectly and always be present for another, the psalmist offers a poignant point here reminding us that the God of our salvation fills every need we have for deep connection and presence that stays, no matter what.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. How does the salvation you have been given as a gift through Christ inform how you process anxiety?
2. How does the invitation from God to "come and talk with" him change the way you think about and practice prayer?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. Did you grow up in a faith tradition? If so, how did they define or explain salvation?
2. How has your understanding of salvation changed over time? What studies or life experiences have influenced your perspective?
3. Do you find it easy or hard to honestly admit that you, like all of us broken human beings, need to be saved by God? If you feel resistance to admitting that, can you identify one part of your journey of life in which that resistance might be rooted?
4. Have you ever been stuck in a cycle you couldn't get out of, no matter how many times you promised yourself, "This is the last time"?
5. At the end of this session, we heard this quote from Julian of Norwich: "Our Lord does not want His servants to despair because they fall often and grievously; for our falling does not hinder Him in loving us." For those of us who are especially prone to beating ourselves up over our shortcomings, how do you receive these words?
6. Do you know someone who thinks they have done too many bad things for God to love them? How might what you've learned through this session shape a conversation you have with that person in the future?

Prayer requests and other notes: