

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 13

The Exodus

On the rugged steps of Mount Sinai, Helen, the mother of Constantine the Great, established an early Christian monastery. The building site was immediately adjacent to a bush that the local people believed to be the bush that “was burning, yet was not consumed” (Ex. 3:2).

We toured the monastery in the summer of 2010, led by Father Justin, a Greek Orthodox monk who is the librarian at the monastery (“St. Catherine’s Monastery”). Father Justin showed us the bush, which is unusually bushy by now! I asked him what kind of bush it was. He answered that it was a part of the bramble family, related to the American blackberry. It was not, however, a fruit bearing plant.

The bush was not the feature point of the monastery. In fact, it was almost tucked away in a back area, somewhat hard to find. When I commented on the near obscurity of the bush, Father Justin explained that the bush should not be a focus point, the focus should be on the revelation of YHWH God.

Father Justin asked our family why we think God appeared in a bush. Before we offered any answer, he explained that the Jews coming out of Egypt were easily prone to idolatry. God spoke from a bush because it was so ordinary and unimpressive it would never be elevated to idol status. Had God spoken from a great tree, he reasoned, the Israelites would have worshipped great trees. Had God spoken from an animal, the Israelites would have likely worshipped the animal.

Instead, God spoke from a lowly, non-fruit bearing bramble bush. Something so homely and weed-like in appearance would never be ascribed any grandness to it for idolatrous worship. Father Justin then explained that the point carried through the New Testament and into today. We elevate not *how* God said something, but *what* God said. He saw a parallel in the continued work of the Holy Spirit today. He explained that the focus should always be on God’s message, and we should never idolize or glorify the means by which the message is delivered.

Father Justin’s views on the bush, and its representative lessons for the church, stem from an approach to the exodus that finds expression in the New Testament, in the early church, and throughout Christian history. God’s hand moving among the Israelites brought forth meaning to many of the expressions of the church at large as well as to the individual believer.

The exodus story is replete with events that foreshadow the life of Christ, the walk of the believer, and the practice of the church. There are so many, we will narrow

www.Biblical-literacy.com

our focus somewhat in this lesson. Our coming lessons will return to some of the archaeological insights and issues¹ that arise from the exodus narrative. But today, we dwell on some of the wonderful lessons for the church that are set within this historical story of Israel. As this lesson continues a story line of the Exodus carried forward in earlier lessons, we begin by taking the narrative past the night of the Passover.

THE STORYLINE

Without going into great detail, the storyline is simple and fairly well known. After nine plagues wreaked havoc on the land, yet did not result in Pharaoh's release of the Israelites, Moses pronounced a tenth plague on the land and its people. About midnight, God was going to move throughout the land and take the life of the first born, from Pharaoh's own son to the firstborn of a slave girl. Even the firstborn of the cattle would die (Ex. 11:4).

The only exception to this sweeping death would be for the Israelites who followed certain instructions of God. For these Israelites, the memorial feast was known as the "Passover" for as God passed throughout the land striking the firstborn dead, he passed over the houses of Israelites who followed his instructions.

The Israelites were to kill a male lamb without blemish, take his blood, and place it on the doorposts as well as the lintel of the houses where the families gathered together to eat the Passover meal. God specifically noted that,

When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt (Ex. 12:13).

As the plague took place, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron that very night and released the Israelites from their slavery. God instructed Moses that from that time on,

The first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine (Ex. 13:1).

The people left Egypt by a route God set. God led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Before long, Pharaoh's heart hardened and he sent 600 chariots in pursuit. The chariots caught up with the Israelites before the Re(e)d Sea where an apparent

¹ Scholarship has much to say on issues ranging from the number of Israelites involved in the exodus, the route taken, the parting of the Re(e)d Sea, the making of the tabernacle, and the laws dispensed to the people. Those are saved for a later lesson.

slaughter was set to take place. While the Israelites panicked, God held off the Egyptians long enough for an amazing miracle.

As the Israelite people were in a panic, God instructed Moses to lift his staff, stretch out his hand, and divide the sea. The Israelites then crossed, while the Egyptians who followed were swept into the sea, drowning.

The LORD led Israel through the wilderness, providing good water to drink and manna to eat. Israel learned lessons of relying on the LORD in battle and Moses learned lessons of delegating responsibility. Eventually, Israel came to Mount Sinai where the LORD called Moses up on the mountain to deliver an invitation to covenant.

Then after some purifying preparations, the LORD descended on Mount Sinai in a cloud with thunder and lightning. God then called Moses up the mountain and delivered to him the Ten Commandments.

The people stayed afar, both out of fright and because God had instructed them to do so through Moses. God then delivered other laws to Moses, starting with laws concerning his own character and the building of altars. Significantly, his next set of laws dealt with the treatment of slaves, a sensitive point to these people just released from a lifetime of bondage. Following that, the laws covered a myriad of categories from torts to loaning money.

God gave Moses instructions for building the Ark of the Covenant and the other tabernacle matters. He consecrated priests from the family of Aaron. He set up taxes and called special people to do special craftsmanship on items associated with worship.

During this time, Moses was somewhat delayed in returning to a restless people. The Israelites demanded that Aaron fashion “gods who shall go before us” (Ex. 32:1). Aaron relented, making a golden calf with an altar. To this, the people professed to each other, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 32:4).

God expressed the gravity of this sin to Moses, threatening to deliver the destruction that the people deserved. Moses implored God to relent, and his intercessory prayers were answered. Moses then descended the mountain carrying the Ten Commandments written on stone by the hand of God.

When Moses actually saw what the people were doing, the idolatry and carousing angered him so much he threw down God’s tablets breaking them. Moses ground the golden calf into powder, mixed it into water, and made the Israelites drink it. Moses called out those who would obey the LORD, and the Levites answered.

Moses had them slay the rebellious and then ordained the Levites for God's service.

As Moses continued to serve the LORD and serve as his intermediary with the people, Moses was moved to ask a favor of God, "Please show me your glory" (Ex. 33:18). The LORD did not let Moses look upon his glory, but did let his goodness pass before Moses and let Moses behold his back. God then wrote the commandments on a new set of tablets Moses cut from the stone.

Moses came down from Sinai with the new set of tablets and Moses did not realize how brightly his face glowed from talking with God. The people were afraid, and Moses wore a veil to cover the brightness while talking to his people.

The book of Exodus ends with the tabernacle built and set up. At that point,

The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34).

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy carry forth further adventures of the Israelites as they are taught more law, attempt to enter the Promised Land, suffer the wilderness for forty years for their faithless fears, and live in the tug of war between belief and rebellion. One notable example is Numbers 21:4-9 where the people begin to grumble anew over the provisions of God. ("We loathe this worthless food [manna]" Num. 21:5). So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, biting and killing many. This brings the people to repentance, and at God's instruction, Moses makes a bronze serpent and puts it on a pole. Anyone bit by a serpent would live if they looked up at the serpent on the pole.

The Pentateuch ends with the people leaving Moses to die while they venture forth to conquer and dwell in Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As noticed earlier, in the midst of these events are multitudes of parallels to the life of Christ, the life of the believer, and the life and practice of the church. We consider those now.

NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION

There are a number of New Testament writers who approach the issue of Christ and the Christian walk as a fulfillment of the exodus story. It certainly makes sense on a number of levels.

Peter addressed a crowd in Solomon's Portico after healing a lame man. In his comments, Peter held Christ up as the prophetic fulfillment of the life and writings

of Moses. (Acts 3:22 “Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.’”)

Paul wrote of the way that Christ has set us free from the bondage of sin (*see, e.g.*, Rom. 6), with Christ as the mercy seat in the Ark of the Covenant.² As the mercy seat, Christ becomes the meeting place between God and man as set out in Exodus 25:21-22. Paul also wrote extensively about the “blood of Christ” which was the true meaning of the sacrificial system Moses gave the people in the law. Paul invoked the veil Moses wore as symbolic of the veil over the hearts of unbelieving Jews who refuse to gaze upon Jesus as the true glory of God (2 Cor. 3).

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul found teaching symbols in the exodus account for baptism (parting of the sea), spiritual nourishment (manna), and Christ as the spiritual sustenance of water from the rock in the wilderness.

The writer of Hebrews began his book contrasting the voice of God through the prophets with God speaking through Jesus whom he appointed “the heir of all things” (Heb. 1:1-2). Within its pages we read of Jesus as greater than Moses (Heb 3), and as the ultimate High Priest, a role Moses originally set out (Heb 4). Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of the tabernacle, of the priestly system, as well as the sacrifices Moses installed (Heb. 8-10).

Limitations of space in this lesson necessarily restrict our coverage of the many New Testament passages that relate the exodus to Christ, the church, and the believer. In our limited review, we have mentioned only a few of the oft-cited teachings from Moses and the exodus found in Paul or Hebrews. Our concentrated analysis will concentrate on the oft-overlooked gospel of John.

Jesus: Moses PLUS

The apostles had a glimpse of Jesus as fulfillment of the events of the exodus and Moses.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (Jn. 1:45).’

In this sense, Jesus himself explained that Moses and his writings were a witness to him, recorded for the sake of the people who refused to believe it:

For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me (Jn. 5:46).

² See Lesson 28 on “Propitiation” in our section on Paul’s Theology downloadable at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

In the gospel of John, Moses is actually one of the main characters of the gospel. A running theme underlying many passages is the superiority of Jesus to Moses. It is not done simply in a “Jesus is greater than Moses” style, but is done in a sense that Jesus fulfills the models or events surrounding and involving Moses. In this sense, Jesus was greater because Moses was a part of the prophecy about which Jesus was the fulfillment. If Moses was a taste, Jesus was a feast!

We see this plainly in passages like,

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (Jn.1:17).

To many first century Jews, Moses receiving from God the law, and then imparting that law to the people of Israel was the pinnacle of human interaction with the divine. When Moses received the law, it was more than a legal code. Moses received the words of God, explaining and preserving them for the Israelites. Ten of the commandments of God were even written by God himself upon stone.

This Mosaic experience gives the depth of meaning to Jesus Christ who, as John has already said, was the *incarnate* word of God. No longer God’s words of law written on stone or told to the people; Jesus was the fleshly manifestation of God’s word. Jesus embodied not just the truth of the law, but the grace and truth of God.³

Moses carries more comparisons to Christ in the fourth gospel. Some of these comparisons center on the actions of Moses. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus used an action of Moses prophetically in reference to salvation:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (Jn. 3:14-15).

This recognition by Jesus showed a greater fulfillment of the role of Moses as intermediary for the people. Moses intervened after God sent the poisonous serpents to punish the Israelites’ grumbling. God had Moses make and lift up the

³ Scholars have debated the nuances of this comparison, Rudolph Bultmann seeing the two as opposites in the nature of Paul’s comments on law and grace (*Johannes* 1951 at 4 and 53); F. F. Bruce setting the two as “old order” and “new” in “antithetical terms” (*The Gospel of John*, Eerdmans 1994 at 43); and Herman Ridderbos seeing this as a simple comparison between Moses and Jesus (*The Gospel According to John*, Eerdmans 1997 at 57). At the risk of presumption in light of those strong scholars, we suggest that the fullness of meaning is perhaps broader than these have recognized. John seems intent in his gospel on demonstrating not simply the greater nature of Christ and his work compared to Moses, but also on illustrating the foreshadowing of Christ that was present in the life and experiences of Moses.

bronze serpent to save the *physical* life of the people. Jesus was lifted up to save the eternal life of the people.

Jesus as the Manna

Like many of the events of the exodus, the reality in Christ exceeded the original in the exodus, even though the original itself was spectacular. Nowhere is this more evident than in the parallel between the manna in the wilderness and the reality of Jesus as God's real nourishment. The people were at risk to starve without adequate food for their wilderness wanderings. God sent them daily manna for food.

John recorded Jesus feeding the 5,000 with bread and fish. It brought him an instant following! Jesus seized the moment to teach his role, using the terms and experiences of the wilderness wanderings of Israel, especially pertaining to God feeding the people with manna.

Jesus first pointed out that God was the manna maker, not Moses. He then added the fuller explanation of what happened.

Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven (Jn. 6:32).

To this last comparison of the wilderness manna, Jesus added,

I am the bread of life; whoever believes in me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst (Jn. 6:35).

This sets out the manna not simply as a foreshadowing of Christ, but shows again the way Christ exceeds the prophetic foreshadowing. The manna was God's daily provision for the wandering Israelites (save the Sabbath), whereas one who "consumed" Jesus would not hunger or thirst again. Jesus explained this more fully later in the John 6 passage noting,

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh...Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever (Jn. 6:49-58).

We might note that John inserted into this narrative of Jesus as the manna, the story of the disciples rowing through a stormy Galilee. Jesus came to them

“walking on the sea” (Jn. 6:19). The comparison to the Israelites and Moses should not be missed. When the Israelites were in trouble, Moses parted the sea and they walked on dry land. Jesus did not need to part the sea. He walked on top of it!

Jesus as the Tabernacle

Sometimes John’s language that placed Jesus within a framework of belonging to or fulfilling the exodus story is not so obvious. Of course John’s gospel was in Greek while the original exodus story was in Hebrew. A good read of the two shows John’s message. Consider the early prologue passage where John wrote,

And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us (Jn. 1:14).

“Dwelt” is the Greek word *eskenosev* (ἐσκήνωσεν), a verb form that more literally means “the Word became flesh and ‘pitched its tent’ or ‘encamped’ among us.” The verb in its basic form (*skenoō* - σκηνώω) has a related Greek noun (*skene* - σκηνή), which was used over 90 times in the Greek translation of the exodus account (the “Septuagint”). It is the Greek word assigned to the “tabernacle of the LORD” (Ex. 25:9ff). In John 1:14, even though the English may not be evident, we see John extending the Lord’s presence among the Israelites in the tabernacle as mirroring the ultimate presence of God dwelling bodily among us in Jesus Christ.

John continues to echo the Old Testament story as he adds,

And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14-15).

This passage brings out words and events from several stories of the exodus. First, in Exodus 16, the people indirectly “saw the glory of the LORD” (Ex. 16:7) which they then beheld as “the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.” Moses later sought to truly see God’s “glory” (Ex. 33:18). God stated that he would show his “goodness” but Moses did not behold the face of the LORD.

Yet, when Jesus “tabernacled” among humanity, the people actually “beheld his glory.” The people of the exodus had release from bondage by the mighty outstretched arm of the LORD, but never saw his glory. In Jesus, the glory of God, the way he saved with his outstretched arm, the release from sin’s grasp, was manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Here was the true glory of God—seen by human eyes.

Jesus as Both Law and Lawgiver

Not coincidentally another interpretive incident occurred during the “Feast of Booths” (Jn. 7). Moses set out this feast at God’s instructions as a reminder of the

way the people lived in booths during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land (Lev. 23). Jesus went up to the temple in the middle of the feast and began teaching. Jesus brought up the issue that many Jews had over his healing on the Sabbath. Noting his own walk in comparison to Moses', Jesus said,

Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's body well? (Jn. 7:22-23).

Moses gave the people God's rules to live by; Jesus was God, and by definition he lived God's rules.

One of the more interesting stories that showed Christ in the Old Testament exodus account is found in John 7:53 to 8:11, the story of the woman caught in adultery. We note that there is a strong debate over whether this story was in the original gospel of John, but that debate is not set out here. It will come in a later class on John's gospel. The story itself certainly reflects John's theme of Christ within the significance and meaning of the exodus story.

In the story, Jesus is brought a woman caught in adultery. Her accusers set Jesus up with the law of Moses saying,

Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say? (Jn. 8:4-5).

The reaction of Jesus is most interesting:

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' (Jn. 8:7).

We are not told what Jesus wrote, but simply that he wrote—and that he wrote with his finger! This helps us understand the significance was not the words Jesus was writing. When Jesus wrote with his finger, he was repeating the action of God himself before Moses. Exodus makes it clear that God wrote the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets. It was the hand of God writing, not Moses.

When the Scribes and Pharisees start quizzing Jesus on the implications of the Law of Moses on the adulterous woman, there is a certain level of absurdity. Jesus wrote the Law of Moses. God's hand was the *Scribe*. Jesus did not need anyone to quote him his own law!

Similarly, the language Christ used, which John reported, when instructing his disciples before the arrest and crucifixion is relevant here.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn. 13:34-35).

Jesus not only is “commandment” or “law” giver, he is able to give a new commandment!

Jesus as God’s Messenger

In a sense, this point is made earlier in the gospel where Moses is credited with the law while Christ brought grace and truth, but we see it again in John 9 with the healing of the blind man. The healing took place on the Sabbath and involved Jesus “making mud.” Both the healing itself, as well as the task of making mud, were considered violations of the Sabbath rules as enforced by the rigid Jewish legal community.

While cross-examining the blind man, the Jewish leaders were emphatic that Christ was a sinner for his deeds. The blind man refused to agree with the judgment, merely noting,

Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see (Jn 9:25).

After a rather sarcastic interchange over why the leaders keep pestering the man, the leaders finally proclaim,

"You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." (Jn 9:28-29).

The healed man provides the contrast. He points out the absurdity of “knowing” that God had spoken to Moses, but refusing to listen to a man whom in the name of God has worked a remarkable miracle—bringing sight to the blind. Jesus then ends the story by noting that the real blindness belonged to those who refused to see him as the Son of Man.

The story underlines that Moses carried God’s message to the people. No one disputed that, including Jesus or the blind man. Yet there was another man who not only had God’s ear, but was God’s arm as well. Jesus worked the miracles of God and, by implication, was just as fully God’s messenger as Moses was.

Jesus as the Sacrificial Lamb

Early in John is a testimony to the role of Christ by John the Baptist. While people had peppered John with questions about his identity and role (Was he the Messiah? Elijah? Who?) John took on the prophetic label of Isaiah 40:3.

He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (Jn. 1:23).

In contrast to his own limited role in God's drama, upon seeing Jesus, John declared:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' (Jn. 1:29-30).

Being termed the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" sets Christ out in a role that finds meaning in the sacrificial system Moses laid out for the people of the exodus.

In Leviticus 16, God was emphasizing the rare approach that must be made in a very particular manner when the priest came into the Holy of Holies and before the mercy seat where God would appear in a cloud. Part of this approach involved selecting two male goats as a sin offering for the people. One was slain, the other driven from the camp symbolically carrying away the sins of the people. This occurred annually on a day of atonement for the people.

Additionally, a provision was given through Moses for "unintentional sins." These sins required a blood sacrifice as well. Leviticus 4:32 explains the role of the blood of a lamb in this atonement or compensation for sins.

But these were not the first sacrifices Moses told the people to perform. Before the people ever received the law at Sinai on the night of the Passover, Moses gave instruction for sacrificing a lamb. This was the lamb whose blood was spread on the posts and over the lintel of the doorways.

This point is emphasized in John's relating of the Last Supper. John makes the point that the supper events occurred around "the Feast of the Passover" (Jn. 13:1).

Jesus as "Lamb of God" is the lamb that is set before God, in a meaningful sacrifice, rather than the symbolic sacrifices of Moses. But Jesus is also "Lamb of God" in the sense that he comes from God. He is the sacrifice that God provided, not one garnered from the flocks of man.

Both gospel writer John and John the Baptist understood and made the point that Jesus was the embodiment of the sacrificial system. Jesus made sense of the system. He offered a real life in sacrifice for others, so they might have real life.

CONCLUSION

The story of the exodus is one of election (God intervening on his own to redeem his people), deliverance (God doing the necessary work to effect this redemption), and covenant (God setting out the terms of relationship between himself and his people). This is the Christian story as well. God has selected the church as his people and made arrangements to redeem it. God has set out a new covenant that finds echoes in the old, but fuller meaning in the life of Christ.

The Christian journey is one that begins in bondage, enslaved to sin and the world. Through the death of the first born of God, God brings release from this slavery of sin. Rather than experience death, those who are covered with the blood of the sacrificial lamb see the angel of death pass over them, bringing redemption rather than curse, life rather than death.

As the believer journeys to the Promised Land, one passes through waters of baptism, and draws spiritual food from the body of Christ. Christ becomes the life giving water that sustains the thirsty. God writes his laws not simply on stone, but on the hearts of his people.

Through it all, as we grumble, complain, and continue in faithless sin, God has lifted up Jesus, to save us from the poisonous venom of Satan's bite.

The exodus story is the story of the believer.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"The LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt."* (Ex. 12:29).

Plague after plague, Pharaoh's hardened heart would not grant release to his slaves. Deliverance did not come until God killed the firstborn. Layer upon layer of this exodus story is seen in the life of the believer and church. We should not fail to see the truth behind this action.

From the time of the curses announced in the fall, God had promised redemption would come by his hand, through the offspring of woman. That was a promise of life, in contrast to the death of sin. Yet the life could not come without the death. This is the consistency of an unchanging God. Sin brings death.

For the believer, the death need not be! God himself chose his own first born to die in the stead of those who choose to be covered in the blood of the lamb. We should never neglect so great a salvation!

2. *“When he sees the blood...the LORD will pass over.”* (Ex. 9:7).

The same God that protected the Israelites protects us today. Where do you need protection? Take a moment and tender that area to God. Set it before him and ask his protection.

As we do so, we are remiss if we fail to note God insisted those who wanted his Passover protection were to follow his instructions. Too often we are tempted to live outside God’s rules and instructions and yet still seek his protection. Crisis should drive us to stop and reassess. We should repent of transgression, place ourselves under God’s care, and trust him to protect us as we live wisely before him. God’s protection was not just for Bible characters. It is not just for those serving on mission fields. God’s protection is real and an everyday event for his people living under his care.

3. *“For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”* (Jn. 5:46).

I do not know if you spend much time reading ancient works. There are not many works extant that reflect writing of a time as ancient as the exodus. (This is true even if you “late date” the story as a seventh century BC creation.) There are simply no other writings like it! There is a complexity to the story line that keeps narrative going while also setting out forms and rituals for centuries of practice.

In the process of this storyline and its accompanying instructions, comes a movement born out of a life whose echoes are unmistakably found in this ancient piece. Now some might wonder whether the story of Jesus was sculpted to fit this ancient work, but that in itself would be a minor miracle. Maybe with the literate 21st century world, with the Internet, with computer research and word processors, such might happen. But in a backwards culture, in an out-of-the-way corner of the Roman world, without any such technology or resources, to have events that within a generation turn the world upside down is stunning.

Yet, this is the truth of history. I fear we lose sight of this as we transport our own abilities, resources, and mental faculties into the biblical world. We are at risk to fail to appreciate the miracle that is the church and faith today. May we stop, think about this breadth and scope of God’s mighty work, and in humble amazement, praise him!

WANT MORE?

How has God protected you? Personalize this lesson and tell some one of the mighty hand of the LORD! Then invite them to our next class. It is the quarterly social brunch next Sunday!