

# Becoming God's People I: A Time of Transformation

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*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. – Exodus 19:5-6*

## **Dormant Destiny**

The people of God had a purpose, a calling, and a character that went back to the calling of Abraham.

*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. – Genesis 12:2-3*

Abraham accepted this destiny and set out to find this place that God would point out to him, and to become that “father of many nations”. Abraham kept this vision and destiny before him – so much so that even when he made mistakes, they never deterred him from his ultimate goal.

*Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised – Romans 4:20-21*

For the children of Israel however, this calling and promise lay dormant while they were in Egypt. While they knew they were the people of God, and continued to tell stories of their past, the reality for most of them was that they saw their destiny tied to the day to day existence in Egypt. Even while they feared God and saw his hand in their lives, they were as far away from the full purpose of God as they could be. Living in a foreign land, surrounded by a dominant culture not their own and being pressed into submission by the land, Israel was being shaped into a mold not of God's making.

## **Pressed and Molded**

*Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” – Genesis 50:24*

Israel did not go to Egypt with the mindset that they would be there forever. Over time, however, they started to settle into the land because they had favor: Joseph was a ruler in Egypt and had saved Egypt from famine, so it was natural for his family to be accepted. The longer they stayed, the lines of original destiny and purpose began to blur so that Egypt became home. Even when a new ruler came in

and things went from good to bad, the concept of leaving wasn't in the forefront of their mind. They wanted relief from their tasks, but they were not trying to get to the Promised Land.

### Courage to Change

God began to reveal his destiny, first to Moses then to the leaders of Israel. At first glance the thought of God's purpose for them was inspiring, but in light of the life of Egypt that surrounded them, Israel and Moses repeatedly shrunk back to what they saw as the real power in their lives: Egypt

God's Words and Actions	Israel's Response
<b>And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt... the elders of Israel will listen to you (Exodus 3:17-18 abridged)</b>	Moses answered "but what if they do not believe me or listen to me and say the Lord did not appear to you?" (Exodus 4:1)
<b>Then the Lord said if they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground (Exodus 4:8-9)</b>	Moses said to the Lord, Pardon your servant Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue (Exodus 4:10)
<b>Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed all the signs before the people, and they believed (Exodus 4:29-31 abridged)</b>	When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them and they said, "May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hands to kill us (Exodus 5:20-21)
<b>And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant (Exodus 14:31)</b>	The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:3)

In order to bring Israel into their destiny, God had to put Israel in a place where they could begin to break the patterns that had become a part of their nature and culture.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. – Romans 12:1-*

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Renew (ἀνακαίνωσις) has at its base the concept of something that has not been there before. Renewal, then is not just getting a fresh perspective, but **instituting a change** to a different reality. Israel knew how to identify with the conditions of Egypt, but God wanted to give them a completely different perspective, not only of their experience in Egypt, but of who they were.

Note all of the action words Paul used pointed not to God, but to the people he was writing to:

- **Offer** your bodies
- **Your spiritual act** of worship
- **Do not conform**
- **Be transformed**
- **Test**
- **Approve**

Israel waited for 430 years for God to do something, and he did in a big way. God knew thought that if Israel did not **actively participate** in their deliverance, they would, in their mind stay in Egypt. Similarly Paul urged the church to **actively institute change**, and he covered every area: body, soul (mind, will, emotions) and spirit. Setting their mind on a new reality, thinking about truth and life that up until that time was not even possible for them would cause them to be transformed – literally, **changed into another form**. This is the same word used of Jesus when he was transfigured before Peter, James and John. The three disciples saw a new reality when that happened, and God calls his people to **facilitate that new reality** by changing what our mind is filled with.

### Lining Up the Scope

While in Egypt, Israel knew they were God's people. They held to their traditions, they actively feared God and saw his blessing in their lives, and persevered under the harshest conditions. There was one thing that was missing though: a vision of the Promised Land.

*Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Why, Lord have you brought trouble on this people? **Is this why you sent me?** Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, **and you have not rescued your people at all.**" - Exodus 5:22-23*

Neither Moses, nor the Israelite leaders could see past the current need for deliverance or the familiar situation in front of them. They saw God's answer as simply the elimination of trouble. God, however, did not only tell Moses that he

would deliver Israel from Egypt: he told him that he would bring them to the land of promise

*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 3:8a*

Moses and the Israelites saw relief, but did not see purpose. They saw their desire, but did not see God's will for them, and in the situation, could not tell if the situation they were facing was consistent with God's will. Paul said that when transformation happens because of a renewed mind, we would be able to **test and approve** God's will



If Israel had changed their mind and accepted the reality that they were truly people of God and allowed that to transform them into the people they should have been, they could have faced the rejection by Pharaoh without questioning God's will and intent.

*We have not received the spirit of this world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit of God does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned. - I Corinthians 2:12-14*

God's deliverance of Israel was not just getting them out of Egypt. Jesus didn't die just to save us from sin. His purpose was and is something more. There is a destination for us: for Israel, it was the Promised Land. For us it is His wonderful light:

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness **into his wonderful light**. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. - I Peter 2:9-10*

Accepting a new reality, His reality, gives us opportunity to see His direction and purpose. It gives us the ability to accept our new label. It is what God wants to establish in us **before** we actually get to our destination.

## Wilderness: The Training Ground

In the wilderness, God gave Israel the opportunity to establish a new reality – to think and act differently. He did this so that he could establish his will for Israel inside of them. He did this so that those who were His people could truly begin to walk in the reality that they were children of God, and fully understand what that meant.

Similarly God is bringing us to the reality of what it means to be his child, but to fully walk in that we have to take action to line up with His word and His vision:

## Introspection

- What is God's purpose / promise for you? Your family? Your church?
- How does Egypt appear in your life? What are the things that mold you into the person you shouldn't be?
- Where have you asked God for deliverance but did not care where He would take you?
- Look at an area where you are confident of God's will. What makes you confident? How can you substantiate that?
- Look at an area where you are not confident of God's will. What do you need in order to be confident? Are you willing to adapt to line up to His will?

## Call to Action

- Take personal inventory on what fills your mind. What are the messages that shape your thinking?
- Replace one thing from the world with a pursuit of God: a time of study; a time of intercession; a gift to an unsuspecting person;
- Take an area that you are not confident of his will and seek counsel from another, and commit to prayer and study over that area

## Study for Next Week

Deuteronomy 7, focusing on Obedience and keeping covenant.