

# YOBL

## Year of Biblical Literacy

### Week 3: Into Slavery

#### Daily Reading for Week

- Genesis 41-42, Psalm 13
- Genesis 43-45, Psalm 14
- Genesis 46-47, Psalm 15
- Genesis 48-50, Psalm 16
- Exodus 1-3, Psalm 17
- Exodus 4-6, Psalm 18
- Exodus 7-9, Psalm 19
- Read Scripture Video: Exodus 1-18

#### Focus of time together

To enter into the narrative of early Israel's enslavement in Egypt and to reflect on our own felt experience of a very different kind of slavery.

#### Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Have one person read Psalm 113 as your opening prayer.

#### Intro to Discussion

As we saw last week, God answered the question that Genesis 1-11 poses of “how will the world be restored?” by promising to give Abraham and Sarah a huge family, with as many children and grandchildren as the stars in the sky, and vowing to give this future family a great plot of land to live in. By doing so, God will establish them as a great nation that will one day help set the world right. But in a dark and ominous scene recorded in Genesis 15: 12-16, God warned that this road to glory wouldn't be easy: *As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”*

This moment looms like a dark cloud over the rest of the unfolding Genesis story. Abraham and Sarah do indeed have a child of their own, named Isaac. Isaac marries

and has twins, one of whom is named Jacob. Then Jacob receives the name Israel and has 12 sons, the “12 tribes of Israel”. Abraham and Sarah are long dead but their family is indeed growing. However, all the while, the land which God promised to give to their descendants is still occupied so they are waiting for generations for God to provide a homeland. Then family strife breaks out and the older great-grandsons sell their little brother Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Years later, a famine breaks out and the remaining family flees to fertile Egypt to beg for aid, which they receive from none other than little Joseph himself who is now a high-ranking official under Pharaoh. Joseph forgives his brothers, brings his entire family into Egypt where they take refuge, and for a while all is well. What they meant for evil, God meant for good (Gen 50:20). For a few generations the family of Israel lives and multiplies in Egypt.

But it isn't long before a new pharaoh and the local Egyptians begin to fear and disdain these Hebrew immigrants. They come to see Israel no longer as a welcome neighbour but as a threat to their nation, wealth, land, and religious culture. So they do what fearful empires have always done, racially segregating the Hebrews and submitting them to harsh slavery. Indeed, God's dark warning to Abraham comes true. For 400 years they are immigrant slaves. By the time of the great Exodus which we'll read and discuss next week, it's been nearly 700 years since God made his covenant with Abraham and the promise of being a great world nation in a land of its own couldn't possibly be further from reality.

## **Whole Group Discussion (40 minutes)**

### **Questions for Basic Understanding**

*These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.*

1. How would you summarise the story of Genesis as it draws to a close in chapter 50? If you need some time to refresh take a few minutes to look back over it.
2. Are there any passages in Genesis that you think are key texts - texts that are especially important in the overall message of the book? Share them with the group, offering why you think the passage is important and allowing the group to share their reflections on the passage.
3. Are there any parts of the story that simply don't make sense to you or have been frustrating to read? (Note: In discussing these together, try to balance helping each other wrestle with difficult texts along with becoming comfortable with discomfort and imperfect understanding. It's okay and even necessary to admit when we don't grasp a part of the Scriptures and to not get too hung up. Keep reading.)

### **Questions for Listening to Scripture**

*These questions are to help us be affected by scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.*

**Read Genesis 50:15-25 and Exodus 1 aloud together.**

1. As Genesis concludes and the first chapter of Exodus opens, what do you think you as a reader are meant to be feeling? In other words, if you were to enter into the story, what kind of hopes, concerns, disappointments, or frustrations would the narrative draw out of you?
2. How might paying attention to the emotional thrust of the story help you understand intellectually what it's trying to tell you?

## **Small Group Discussion (25 minutes)**

### **Questions for Examining Ourselves**

*These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.*

1. At this point in the story of the Scriptures, it would have appeared to enslaved Israel that God's plans have gone terribly wrong. And the Lord has been absent for hundreds of years. Have you ever felt disappointed with life and God's role in it and felt frustrated or hurt by his absence?
2. Though none of us have likely experienced physical and political slavery, Jesus said that "everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). In what ways are you enslaved? What is this slavery doing to you and how is it making you feel?

## **Closing Time of Prayer (10 minutes)**

Pray very specifically for one another in your small group, asking God to hear and listen to any feelings of disappointment expressed as well as petitioning for God to radically liberate one another from any confessed enslavement.