

“Exodus”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 6

“Exodus 12:1-13:16”

Objective: To examine the account of the exodus from Egypt and to learn as much as we can about the nature of God, His mercy and what He desires for His creation. We will seek to do this by examining the historical background of the Exodus account, the interpretive history of Exodus amongst both Jewish and Christian scholars, where helpful. We will seek to understand the message of Exodus for us as Christians living in the 21st century American context.

Materials: The Bible, Ancient translations, Commentaries, both ancient and modern, Books, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet, and other resources as may be appropriate.

Procedures

1. To explore the message God of hope that the original audience will have understood from this text.
2. To understand how this text has inspired, challenged, and educated people down through the centuries guiding them not only in their personal lives, but the destinies of governments and nations.
3. We will seek to find out how these beliefs have played a role in the history of Christianity and how they continue to impact our existence and service to Jesus Christ today.
4. We will provide a sheet to take home as a reminder of what has been examined and to provide additional opportunities for consideration of these truths and their application in our daily living out of our eternal destiny beginning now. This sheet can be used as a discussion guide for small group discussion. We have several groups using this effectively.

As we began this study one of the things that has been prominent in our whole discussion is the role of God in the deliverance of His people. His people were held in slavery by the most powerful nation of the ancient world. A nation that had a history of relying upon supernatural power in order to protect itself and to expand its interests as a nation. They had no aircraft carriers, no air force, no cruise missiles, but their equivalent of these things was their reliance upon “magic” and their “gods.” One of these so-called “gods” ruled their nation as Pharaoh. All of this may seem far-fetched and mythical to us today who have translated our reliance for safety and security onto physical defenses and science.

We have a different world perspective, but with the same aims, which are to manipulate our environment for our benefit and our protection. The aims and goals of “science” and “magic” are not all that different and there are even methodological similarities. Those similarities differ in that science discounts the spiritual, or at least it often redefines it in terms that leave humanity alone and in charge of the universe and the “gods” and the spiritual realm on the sidelines, and out of the frame. I am not

saying that “science” is better, or worse than “magic:” I am saying that the focus and aims of both are similar and they can have analogous affects on faith and trust in God. “Magic” is condemned in Scripture, because it seeks to manipulate spiritual forces in a manner that allows people to rely on something other than God.¹

What is at stake is where does your faith lie? In whom do you place your trust?

The challenge that was set before Israel, and that which would ultimately form them into a nation, even before they possessed a land, would be the challenge of trust, or “faith.” Would they trust in themselves, in the “gods” that were so prominent among the nations, including the most powerful nation of the day, Egypt, or would they come to trust in *Yahweh*? Abraham was commended for his faith in *Yahweh*.² The challenge is the same in the Book of Exodus as it was in the beginning chapters of Genesis, are people going to trust in *Yahweh*, or are they like Adam and Eve going to doubt God, His intentions and capabilities, and pursue what seems the right path in their own

¹ Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 13:10-14; 2 Kings 9:22; 2 Chronicles 33:1-9; Jeremiah 27:8-11; Micah 5:10-15; Nahum 3:4-7; Malachi 3:5.

² Genesis 15:6.

eyes? The battle of the Exodus is not over and in the past, it still continues each day in our own hearts, in our own lives as we make choices about whom and in what we will trust. Will it be *Yahweh*, or will it be one of the false gods, who though seemingly powerful and affective are not in truth gods at all. *Yahweh* seeks covenant faithfulness. This is a central part of His character and as His image bearers He calls it forth from us as human beings.

The conflict is set. Pharaoh has repeatedly refused to allow the Israelites to go into the wilderness. God has brought crushing plague after crushing plague on the people of Egypt. Their economy is in ruins and still the stubbornness of Pharaoh persists. God will demonstrate His power for all to see and to insure that it is known that He alone is God. No other can claim that title, no other is sovereign over all the universe, and no other can stand against the will of God. *Yahweh* has once again hardened the heart of Pharaoh (11:10) and so beginning in chapter 12 He initiates the giving of instructions to Moses and Aaron regarding what is coming. He indicates through these instructions that a new epoch is about to begin. The statement about this being the “first” month of the year is a bit confusing and it appears to mean that a new era



in their life is about to begin. This is the first month of their freedom. They are about to be a free people and this fact will be commemorated annually with the celebration of Passover.

God is about to do something unique and unprecedented; He is about to intercede on behalf of one group of people that have been selected by *Yahweh* to be a vehicle of reconciliation of the whole of creation. Israel has been chosen to serve as a means of blessing all the peoples of the earth, of putting things right that have gone desperately wrong.³ Israel has been chosen and now *Yahweh* will change their position in life as slaves through His mighty hand. He chooses this moment in history in order to initiate this phase of His plan. This festival of remembrance would one day be the same time that God would send His own Son to become the true and unique Lamb that takes away the sins of the world.⁴ Jesus would initiate at this festival the great events of the redemption of God; not on the Day of Atonement or at some other point in time, but at this time. He would also use the elements of this meal to serve as an act of remembrance in perpetuity of this great act of redemption.

³ Genesis 12:2-3.

⁴ John 1:29.

Each household is to take a lamb (12:3-5) that is without blemish they are to do this on the 10th day of the month and keep it until the 14th day of the month and then they are to slaughter it at twilight. Ramban makes the suggestion that God chose only the lambs of sheep, or goats for this offering because they were Egyptian deities. The usage of these animals would demonstrate conclusively the total subjugation Egypt to the will of God.⁵ They were to slaughter the animal, taking some of its blood (12:7) and put this blood on the two door posts and the lintel of the houses where they were eating the animal. They are then to eat the lamb that same night; lamb that has been roasted, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (12:8). They are given very specific instructions regarding how it is to be cooked (12:9). They are to leave none of until the morning, no leftovers. If there are any leftovers they are to be burned (12:10). They are even given instruction about how they are to eat the food, with “loins girded,” “sandals on your feet,” and “staff” in the hand (12:11).

At verse 12 we come to the point of what *Yahweh* will now do: He will pass through Egypt. From the wording here the sages

⁵ Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash*, The Stone Edition, The Torah: Haftoros and Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings (New York NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1998, 2000), p. 350.

make the observation that they believe that God personally carried out the Plague of the Firstborn, and did not dispatch an angel, or emissary to do it for Him. This is seen as an indication that God's relationship was direct and personal with Israel. When it came time to seal His covenant with His people, freeing them from slavery in Egypt, God is not seen as delegating this task to another.⁶ The text here uses the first person verb making this indication (וְהִכִּיתִי). This striking down of the firstborn will impact not only people, but the animals. Rashi says that even the firstborn Egyptians not living in the land of Egypt were struck down and that the fact that God says he will execute judgement upon the gods of Egypt meant that their wooden idols rotted and the metal ones dissolved and melted to the ground.⁷ He ends this verse saying, "I am *Yahweh*."

At verse 13 they are told that "the blood" (דָּמָם) will be a sign for them and that when He sees it He will "pass over" (וַפָּסַחְתִּי - where we get the word *Pesach* and the name Passover from this word). The blood will stand as a marker

⁶ Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash*, p. 352.

⁷ Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Rashi*, The Sapirstein Edition, Vol. 5 (Brooklyn NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1995, 1999, 2003), pp. 114-115.

whereby God will see their faith lived out in obedience and in His mercy will spare the firstborn of the marked houses. You did not simply have to be an Israelite in order to receive protection, nationality was not sufficient; you must obediently follow the instructions of *Yahweh* which was made apparent when the blood was present on the door lintel and posts. Jesus would use this symbol of blood to call His followers to remember the greatest act of deliverance ever even conceived. Jesus, the Lamb of God, would give His own Body and His own Blood to redeem those enslaved to sin and death.

The sages infer that at the time of the Passover the blood should be placed on the inside of the inside of the door (it was a sign “to you” לָךְ) where it is not visible to outsiders. Certainly inside, or out would not be an issue for *Yahweh*. “The Jewish firstborn were saved from the plague because the blood signified that those inside the house had involved themselves in doing God’s will, they were under His protection. It was this devotion to the commandment, not the mere presence in a “safe house,” that



protected the Jews, *Rashi* notes an Egyptian firstborn who took refuge in a Jewish home would not survive.”⁸

You may be wondering why so many quotes from the ancient sages here? The modern commentaries seem to have very little interest in this section other than trying to dissect it and apply their minimalist philosophies of possible origin to it. They are more interested in pursuing their own agendas, rather than pursuing what the text will have meant to generations of people trying to be faithful and obedient to God. Their agendas seem far more intent upon elevating themselves and their apparent intelligence rather than calling people to trust God, to believe in God, and to understand the call of God for the lives of those that bear His image. It is this event that would be commemorated for centuries by the Jews and at this commemoration festival that *Yahweh* would choose to send His own Son into the world to redeem those enslaved by sin and death. In this event we see the personal involvement of God with His people, redeeming them, protecting them and calling them into relationship with Himself.

⁸ Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash*, p. 353.

This is the festival more than any other which recalls the divine action of *Yahweh* in a very personal and powerful manner. At 12:14 God tells them that they are to “celebrate” this as a pilgrim feast (אָפֶן) as an “everlasting” (עוֹלָם) ordinance. This is the inaugural festival of the Jewish people; it marked their emergence as a nation. This nationhood was not based upon revolution, triumph in battle, conquest of land, or any of the other normal manifestations of national pride. Rather, it came when the people had fallen into the pit of despair and degradation, both spiritual and physical. They were downtrodden slaves that were unable to protect even their own babies from being drowned by their oppressors. Their redemption came without even a protest on their part against Egypt. Quite to the contrary, when Pharaoh stopped giving the Israelites straw to make bricks they protested to Moses and Aaron and not to Pharaoh (5:21).⁹

The plan of God was initiated when the Jewish people in Egypt were totally powerless and this powerlessness opened up the possibility that they could be formed into a people with nothing but what was given to them by God. The plagues and

⁹ Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash*, p. 353.



miracles associated with the Exodus were designed to demonstrate the sovereignty of God over nature and to make it absolutely clear that their redemption was through the mighty hand of *Yahweh* and through nothing, or no one else. For the Jewish people, the recognition of God's majesty and mastery, and of the obligation of the people to serve Him, is made absolutely clear through the Exodus. It was in this great rescue that Israel saw His power and that they pledged themselves to Him as His people. The intent of the Festival of Passover was to inscribe upon the national consciousness the fact that the Jewish people, as a nation, came into being because of the mighty hand of *Yahweh* and this festival would serve as an everlasting reminder of this fact. No matter what hardships, or obstacles, they faced they would be reminded by this festival that those hardships and obstacles were only a temporary phenomenon that could not change the essence of what had made them a nation; the power and will of *Yahweh*.¹⁰

The festival is to be observed using unleavened bread. This type of bread would serve as a reminder of the speed and power of their redemption by the hand of God. Leaven in ancient times

¹⁰ Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash*, p. 353.



was not in a nice neat little package like it is today. It was made from a portion of old dough that was the source of the yeast. This material was kept constantly alive and growing and was used to supply the leaven for the new bread. This leaven would be worked through the new dough and would basically infect the new dough causing it to rise and respond to the action of the yeast (Galatians 5:9). Jesus repeatedly warns people of the “yeast” of the Pharisees.¹¹ The unleavened bread additionally served as a reminder that the people were not to be infected by the teachings and traditions of the people that surrounded them. They were God’s people set apart for a purpose and redeemed by His mighty hand. The prohibition against eating leaven also has to do with the purity of the newly ground grain, which was fresh, untainted, and unadulterated.¹² God calls for His people to be holy and pure.

They were to eat unleavened bread for a period of seven days (12:15), if they lived in the diaspora they were to make this length of time eight days. The penalty for violating this precept seems to suggest a level of jeopardy (being cut off from Israel) far

¹¹ Matthew 16:6; 16:11; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1.

¹² John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary series, vol. 3 (Waco TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), p. 159.



more serious than simply that the leaven represents an example of haste in the preparation of a meal.¹³ During this festival, no work was to be performed, except for the preparation of the food (12:16). We look at this today and I think we fail to realize the power of this much time devoted to focusing upon God and what He has done for us. This was a powerful time when the mind and the heart could focus on things other than work, survival, and the world. The Israelites were reminded of the everlasting nature of this ordinance (12:17-20); this celebration would allow them to focus on something other than the day to day cares of life and upon what life was meant to be in relationship to God.

Moses and Aaron are given these very detailed instructions regarding the observance of this festival. This festival would serve to draw the people together into community with each other around remembering this great act that God was about to do in order to redeem Israel from slavery and into community with God. We need to be reminded often of things, or we become distracted and lose focus. This celebration would be a part of the what would be used to form these people into a community, and a

¹³ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, p. 159.



nation that would be able to stand the pressures of doubt, insecurity and competitiveness. Unity is one of the most difficult of tasks for human beings. This task would not only be something that was needed with this generation, it would be necessary for each new generation to undergo the same call to unity in order to become the community called by God to be one as He is one and to be loyal to Him and Him alone.¹⁴

At 12:21, Moses called all of the elders of Israel together and began conveying to them the instructions given to them beginning with the selection of the lambs for Passover. He continues in 12:22 with instructions regarding putting the blood on the doorposts and not going outside the door of their houses until morning. The tedious detail of the instructions is meant to convey the extreme gravity of what God is doing and for those after the event what He has done. This is not something trivial, or small; this is something that will forever change the universe and is something only the sovereign creator God of the universe can do. I believe the complexity and detailed nature of the instructions

¹⁴ John 17:20-24.

regarding this festival are intended to convey the seriousness of what God is doing here.

Moses tells them what is going to happen with the Egyptians (12:23); they are going to be struck down by “the destroyer” (הַמְשֻׁחֵית). To be certain there has been much speculation, especially among the Jews, regarding “the Destroyer,” but really all we know for certain is what was done. In *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* here is verse 23: “*The Glory of the Lord will be revealed to smite the Egyptians, and he will see the blood that is on the lintel and on the two doorposts, and the Memra of the Lord will protect the door and will not allow the Destroying Angel to enter and smite your houses.*”¹⁵ In this event God carries out a terrifying and mysterious act that would break the hold of the Egyptians on the Israelites.

At 12:24-27 Moses continues to inform his audience of what they were to do in observing this night not only this first time, but in perpetuity. The response of the people was that they “bowed and worshipped.” Surely this should always be the response of people that encounter God and His actions. At verse 28, we are

¹⁵ Michael Maher, trans., *Targum Pseudoe-Jonathan: Exodus*, The Aramaic Bible, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), p. 192.

informed that the Israelites did just as they were commanded by Moses and Aaron. The deed of killing the firstborn was then executed (12:29-30) and every house in Egypt had someone dead in it. Moses and Aaron are summoned in the night (12:31) and they are told to “rise up” (קומו) and to go away and worship *Yahweh*. They are to take the flocks and herds and Pharaoh even asks for a “blessing” for himself (12:32). The Egyptians wanted the Israelites to leave quickly because they feared they would all “be dead” if the Israelites did not leave quickly (12:33). The people took their dough before it had the opportunity to rise and they asked the Egyptians for silver, gold and clothing (12:34-35). *Yahweh* gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians and so they plundered Egypt as they left (12:36). An added touch of favor even in the midst of terror.

At 12:37 we are told that the Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth with about six hundred thousand “men” (גברים) not counting children. On the assumption that most of these adult males were married with families, this would make the total number of Israelites leaving Egypt some two, or three million people. Modern scholars have tried to find various

ways to shrink these numbers down due to the logistical difficulties of this many people traveling across the wilderness and then being sustained for forty years in the wilderness.¹⁶ Such efforts seem to me to be based upon skeptical and minimalistic approaches that a-priori discount the abilities and impact of *Yahweh* on the situation. The plain meaning of the text most naturally indicates that two to three million people left Egypt and went into the wilderness and were protected and sustained by *Yahweh* for a period of forty years. Numbers do present significant difficulties to be sure, but surely the point of this text is that *Yahweh* is doing what seems impossible and it would be impossible for anyone other than the creator of the universe, *Yahweh*. That is the point after all; and attempts to rationalize here seem to me to blunt that point.

In addition, a “mixed crowd” also went up with them in great numbers along with large numbers of flocks and herds (12:38). They baked “unleavened” (*Matzoth* - מצות) bread because they were driven out so rapidly they did not have time to wait for their bread to rise (12:39). The Israelites had lived in

¹⁶ John W. Rogerson, R.W.L Moberly and William Johnstone, *Genesis and Exodus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 196.

Egypt for four hundred and thirty years and they all left from the land of Egypt (12:40-41) at one time. The Israelites are reminded that they are to keep a night of vigil throughout all generations as a commemoration of this night (12:42). This was to be an ordinance for the Jews, not open to foreigners, but open to slaves who had been purchased after being circumcised (12:43-44). This is part of the reasoning behind practicing “closed communion” as an equation is made in the minds of some people between circumcision and baptism. Scripture, however does not make such a link and so such a view based on this connection is unwarranted.

Aliens, outsiders were to be treated differently in the celebration of Passover (12:45-49) and only those who underwent circumcision were allowed to participate. They were outside the covenant of Israel, outside of the promise to Abraham. At 12:50-51 we are told that the Israelites followed the instructions on the very day that they were “brought out” of the land of Egypt. As we begin chapter 13 Moses is instructed to “consecrate” all the of the firstborn of all the people and the animals. These were to be separated out from the rest (13:1-2), because they belonged to

Yahweh. He had redeemed them and so they were His. At 13:3-10 further instructions are given in order to remind the Israelites of what *Yahweh* had done for them in redeeming them from slavery in Egypt. They were to keep these things as an ordinance and to do them at the proper “time” (מוֹעֵדָה) “year to year.”

The Israelites were reminded that even when they entered the land of Canaan they were to remember that the firstborn were consecrated to *Yahweh* and that they all belonged to Him.

Donkeys were treated as a special class in that they are the only non-kosher animals mentioned. They are to be redeemed with a sheep (13:11-13). At 13:14-16 the Israelites are told not only to remember, but how to answer the questions of their children when they ask what this observance means. This would become a perpetual reminder of the mighty acts that *Yahweh* had performed in redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt. In this great event God reveals not only His character, but also His aim in redeeming and restoring the world that had been shattered and broken in the sin and rebellion of humanity. This was a new and crucial step in the process of redemption. It showed that God would step directly



into the affairs of men and He would direct those affairs to save the powerless and weak with His mighty hand.

In this event God broke the hold of the most powerful nation of the ancient world, humbling them and redeeming a people that had not been a nation before. He called them to a purpose, He called them to Himself and to not forget what He had done for them. He made them a part of His redemption plan for creation. The people were to serve a great purpose in the plan of God to restore that which had been broken and shattered by the sin of Adam in the Garden. So often we normalize this and forget that with this “death” (the death of Adam), death entered into our world and the “good” creation of God was broken and corrupted. God seeks the restoration of His “very good” creation.¹⁷ With the coming of Jesus, God would connect the Exodus from Egypt with the plan of God for a new Exodus of the people of God. God plans to restore His creation and it will be inhabited by those that are “in Christ.”

¹⁷ Genesis 1:21.

Synopsis

This section of Scripture recounts the story of *Yahweh's* breaking of the hold of Egypt on the people of Israel. Egypt relied upon their own abilities to manipulate the gods and their environment for their power and security. They were very affective in this and had come to great power and wealth through their abilities and techniques. In today's world, science has taken the place of "magic," but people still seek to affect their safety and security through the implementation of manipulation and technical skill.

This account of the Passover will demonstrate that reliance upon such things are no match for *Yahweh* the creator and sovereign of the universe. Through very detailed and exhaustive instructions God will seek to impress upon Moses and Aaron, and then the Israelites the magnitude of what is about to occur. God is entering into the world and history of man to redeem His lost and broken world. The instructions regarding Passover will serve to form a festival of commemoration to continually remind

generation after generation regarding God's redemption from slavery in Egypt.

This same event would be the point in the Jewish calendar used by God to initiate the redemption of creation through His Messiah, Jesus. Jesus would use this festival to focus the hearts and minds of His disciples on the giving of His life to redeem God's people from slavery to sin and death. This festival would be imbued with new force and power as the festival of celebrating the shattering of the hold of death and sin. God would once again redeem people from slavery and set them free by His direct action in the history and in the world.

Questions

1. What are some ways that you listen to God?
2. How involved do you believe God is in the everyday running of the world?
Why do you believe this?
3. What do you think the Israelites were meant to understand from the detailed instructions given for the Passover?
4. What are some of the ways that science can perhaps be the same as “magic?”
5. How do you see the physical world and the spiritual world as impacting your life?
6. What are some things that you do when doubts creep into your life that help you to cope?
7. How does the Exodus account relate to your journey of faith today?
8. What do you look to in order to provide security in your life? Why?
9. Why do you think God intercedes so forcefully on behalf of the Israelites?
10. What do you think it means that God gets personally involved with bringing the Israelites out of slavery?
11. Why do you think symbols can be so powerful in the lives of people?
12. What are some symbols that speak powerfully to your life? Why?
13. What do you think the symbol of “blood” was intended to convey to the Israelites and to us?
14. Why do you think there is so much emphasis on the firstborn?

15. When you think of “unleavened” bread what images come to your mind?
Why?

16. What are some ways that God forms people into community today?

17. What are some things that make you want to fall down and “worship” God?

18. Why do you think people have so much trouble believing that two to three million people left Egypt with Moses?

19. When is skepticism not warranted?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that God intervenes in history directly. It is important to know that He will become involved in the affairs of men and this is something not only that happened, but that God wants us to remember happened. This remembrance is meant to change who and what we are as God's people. God is not distant and apart. He seeks direct contact and reminds us of this in the events of Passover. What are some ways that you are reminded of God being involved in your daily life?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words expressing the lengths to which He is willing to go in order to keep His promises to Abraham. We see at least a glimpse of His great power and in this account we can begin to see the great cost that will be paid by God as a result of our sinfulness. In the Passover God calls for His people to recognize His Mighty Hand redeeming them and calling them into community as His force for redeeming all of creation. When you think of God being involved in the world, what are some places that you challenged to join Him in His efforts?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

The story of the Exodus challenges us to recognize that we are not alone in the universe and that though things seem to be chaotic and dangerous God is working to restore order. We are called to join with God in His redemptive efforts. As God intervened in history in the past so today He continues to do this. God continues to fulfill His promises and to work in the lives of those who trust and believe in Him. How does the fact that God is near to you change how you make decisions about what will be a priority in your life?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to trust Him, to believe in Him and to follow the destiny that He calls us to in Him. The Word of God also calls upon us to recognize that there is a point where we can refuse the Hand of God too many times and this danger should compel us to be obedient and attentive to God. What is the greatest challenge that you see in our world that causes people to refuse to come to God?