

“Exodus”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 3

“Exodus 25-31:18”

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.

This section begins with YHWH delivering instructions to Moses regarding the giving of offerings. It is of note that Moses is instructed to take an offering for YHWH from those whose “hearts” (לב) “prompt” them to give. It is important to notice this emphasis on their hearts prompting them to give. So often I have heard sermons and lessons that focus on the benefits to the giver in giving. While these benefits are genuinely real they stand as counter to what God is calling forth from His people here. He is not calling His people into some sort of transactional, mathematical, arrangement where they buy His favor and blessings. The offerings that they give are to come from the prompting of the heart, from within a person. In psychology “prompting” is defined “...as a cue or hint meant to induce a person to perform a desired behavior.”¹ When children are young people use prompts to teach them to say and do things. For instance when someone gives something to a child I have heard parents say, “And now what do you say?” This is done in order to induce a response of “thank you.”

¹ http://www.bbbautism.com/prompting_and_fading.htm

In this section, God is prompting a response from His people; the response of “giving” that comes from within, from within the heart of His people. He desires people who are not prompted to give by some external stimulus, or by expecting something in return, but out of a genuine gratitude, or love that comes from within. These offerings are to be used in order to build a “sanctuary” (מִקְדָּשׁ - “sacred place, sanctuary” - Exodus 25:8). This is to be a place set aside for YHWH to dwell “among” His people. This is the goal, and the purpose of this structure. This is not to be a marketplace, or a place of bargaining where transactional agreements are worked out between God and His people, this is to be a place where the living God dwells in the midst of His people.

At Exodus 25:9 we have Moses being told that this dwelling place is to be constructed according to a “pattern” (תְּבִנִית - *Thavnith* - In the Old Greek translation the word used here is παράδειγμα - *paradeigma* - from which we get our English word *paradigm*). This pattern is shown to Moses by God. The building, this dwelling place, is going to be a huge focus in the remaining text of Exodus. This tremendous emphasis on the specific



instructions and pattern for this structure initiate for us a huge number of questions. One is why would God be so specific? The answer to this question was important for the original audience and it is important for us today in the church. So often we have been taught that God has a “pattern” a design in mind for the church today as His dwelling place, the place where His Spirit dwells. Our understanding of this type of theology has a major impact upon how we see not only Scripture, but also upon our perception of, and our individual role within the church.

This part of Exodus, in particular, is focused upon the act of the covenant making. Covenant making was a common form of building relationship during this time in history.

“...to be in covenant with other people
involves believing that we and they
belong to the same moral community;
that in this community each person
matters in his or her own right and not
merely as something useful to society;
that we participate in the moral
community by entrusting ourselves to

others and in turn by accepting their entrusting; and that in the moral community each of us has enduring responsibility to all others.”²

Covenant functions to define the common moral understandings and common expectations that each member that is part of a community shares. Covenants vary in many ways, but one of the major ways that covenants vary is in the conditions that are specified. One of the commonalities of all covenants is the goal of creating a loyal community whether it be between two people as in a marriage, or within a nation where to fail to retain covenant loyalty is defined as treason.

In the Hebrew covenant, the one that God is making with Israel, the terms of that covenant are many, and extremely detailed in their specificity. There are said to be some 613 ordinances in this covenant that are required to be kept in order for the covenant to remain in force and not be breached. There are in fact remedies mandated for instances when breach of the covenant does occur; but even in a covenant of such detail and specificity the overarching

² Joseph L. Allen, *Love and Conflict: A Covenantal Model of Christian Ethics* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1995), p. 17.

goal is to connect the heart of the covenanters with one another in loyal community with one another. We see this emphasis, on loyalty, expressed in this text within the emphasis on the prompting of the heart to keep the covenant and primarily to retain covenant loyalty. The problem with human beings is that very often they can focus on doing the bare minimum, focusing on the strict obligations rather than upon that which comes from the depths of the soul, the heart. The focus can then become upon doing without there being any genuine element of “being.” Clearly, as we can see from Exodus 25:2, God was intent on more than having a contract that had no real effect on the heart His people. Over and over again, throughout the history of the Hebrew Scriptures it will be apparent that Israel will try to practice covenant faithfulness without giving their heart to God. They will focus on the outward sign without allowing the inward change to genuinely be the driving motivation for covenant loyalty.

As we come back to the tremendous detail given with regard to the building of the Tabernacle and all its fittings and furnishings at least one of the reasons for this is in order to form the people descended from Jacob into a single nation, a cohesive society fit for

a purpose. According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks there are two ways of getting people to do what we want. “We can force them: that is the answer of power. Or we can pay them: that is the answer of the market. But neither involves treating other people with dignity and respect. ... If I force you, or pay you, to do what I want, then I am using you as a means, not an end.”³ Why then, the pattern, this is still a question that calls for an answer? As Sacks points out there is in fact a third option to the use of force, or pay.

That third possibility is covenant in which we seek to create co-operation by not getting you to do what I want, but by joining together in a moral association that transforms the “you” and “I” into the “we.” We help each other because there are things we care about together. “Covenant is a binding commitment, entered into by two or more parties, to work and care for one another while respecting the freedom, integrity and difference of each.”⁴ God chooses to use this third way of binding people together as a cohesive society that does not resort to “force,” or “pay.” It is crucial for those participating in covenant to realize this critical point. Unfortunately, all too often human beings fail to keep in focus the

³ Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 151.

⁴ Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, p. 151.

nature of covenant and its call for “care,” “integrity,” and “respect.”

Without this focus the terms of covenant become impossible to keep and thus any benefits of the covenant are negated and the consequences of failure to observe covenant are called into play.

Without the devotion of the heart, without integrity, without respect, covenant transfers its working back to force and pay, at least on the part of those failing to observe these core elements of covenant. In a covenant with God one can always be assured that He is acting out of “love” (from the heart), with integrity, and with respect. The weak link in a covenant with God is the human element. It is so easy for our perspective to shift and for our heart to move from the place that reflects true care and compassion to a hardness and indifference that so often focuses on the mechanics of covenant without the motivation of the heart. In so doing, the covenant is broken and cannot now fulfill its task of bringing parties together in a mutuality that can be called “we.” Certainly in the case of covenant with God the covenant partners are unequal and yet God chooses to enter into covenant when the benefits for the “we” of the covenant are only in the direction of the human beings. God’s motivation and drive for community are not driven

by any sense of self-interest, or self-benefit. Despite this, God still chooses to pursue covenant.

In the covenant with ancient Israel, He seeks to draw them together not only with Himself, but with each other. In the task of the tabernacle He calls them to work together, side by side for a common set of goals that we will draw them together as a society and as a community. Israel as a nation was unlike other nations that were drawn together by sharing a common land, for their mutual protection and benefit, or due to the force of annexing them into a more powerful nation. Israel possesses no land, they are, up to this point in their history, protected by an invincible God and therefore they are not under threat. God cares for their every need and now calls them together to undertake a mutual task in order to form them into a nation that is meant to fulfill the promise⁵ made to their ancestor Abraham and to be recipients of the covenant⁶ for the land.

⁵ Genesis 12:3 **“I will bless those who bless you, those who curse you I will curse; all the families of earth will be blessed because of you.”** CEB.

⁶ Genesis 15:18-21 ⁸ **That day the LORD cut a covenant with Abram: “To your descendants I give this land, from Egypt’s river to the great Euphrates, ¹⁹ together with the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”** CEB.

The promise is unconditional, while the covenant (The Law) would be conditional.⁷ The promise was that through Abram all the “families” (nations) of the earth would be blessed. The covenant with the descendants of Jacob was meant to be a part of fulfilling this promise. Paul understands this and in Galatians makes this point clear in chapter 3. The point of God’s promise, and of the covenant, stand in alignment with the nature and desires of God. God continues to seek the restoration of His creation back to the state of being “very good.”⁸ In the calling of Israel into covenant with Himself God calls those with whom He makes covenant into His mission of redemption and restoration. That mission has a wider scope than a single nation, family, or individual: God seeks to create in Israel a cohesive nation that can become a light set upon a hill that can become a “holy” people. A people fit for the purpose of blessing all the nations and fulfilling the promise made to Abram who would later be known as Abraham.

⁷ Galatians 3:17 I’m saying this: the Law, which came four hundred thirty years later, doesn’t invalidate the agreement that was previously validated by God so that it cancels the **promise**.

¹⁸ If the inheritance were based upon the Law, it would no longer be from the **promise**. But God has given it graciously to Abraham through a **promise**.

3:22 But scripture locked up all things under sin, so that the **promise** based on the faithfulness of Jesus Christ might be given to those who have faith.

3:29 Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the **promise**. CEB.

⁸ Genesis 1:31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. NRSV.

So often the vision and focus of people turns inward rather than focusing upon others and in so doing becomes warped and in time can become unfit for its intended purpose. In God's call to His people, in building the tabernacle with all of its detailed fittings and furnishings, God is calling his people into community. He calls them into a community that is to be driven from the heart, with a compassion toward God and in this compassion the call is to begin to see the world and others through the eyes of God. God calls Israel to be a force for redemption, a force that He can use to call all of His children home. In working together on this sacred dwelling for God they are called to be formed, shaped, and molded. They are to be a people that share in God's mission, in God's passion of reconciliation and restoration. God seeks to dwell in the midst of His people.

As one examines the book of Revelation one can see this theme powerfully and poignantly portrayed in Revelation 21:3: **I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God."**⁹

⁹ CEB.

The nature of the covenant was that Israel was to stand as a priesthood drawing people into community for the purposes of God.¹⁰ In Judaism, they see the Torah as describing two acts of creation: "... God's creation of the universe, and the Israelites' creation of the *Mikdash* or *Mishkan*, the sanctuary that travelled with them in the desert, ..."¹¹ The linkage here is to connect the mission of Israel with the mission of God. The Israelites are called to be actively and consciously involved in the mission of God, not God involved in their mission.

This connection is made more apparent when one compares the creation account in Genesis with the calling of God in Exodus to build the sanctuary.¹² God calls His people to join Him in His mission of redemption. In what ways is your day planned around being a part of God's redemption of the universe back to Himself and to its state of being "very good?" This was the calling of Israel; they were to be a people that walked alongside God in His act of redemption. They were to be instruments in the hand of God to reach all the peoples of the earth so that the blessing promised to

¹⁰ Exodus 19:4-6.

¹¹ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Exodus: The Book of Redemption*, in the Covenant and Conversation series (Jerusalem: Maggid Books & The Orthodox Union, 2010), p. 199.

¹² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Exodus: The Book of Redemption*, p. 199.

Abram would become a reality. This was the purpose of their covenant with God, it was not about going to heaven, it was not about individual salvation it was about the plan of God, to redeem creation. So many simply do not understand this message. This is perhaps why Jesus reminded His followers that narrow is the way.¹³

As we look at the account of the exodus we are reminded of what is going to happen. As the people near the moment when they would be called to cross over the River Jordan, twelve spies are sent out. When those spies give their report ten of the spies gave a report that they should not enter the land, the task was too great, the odds too large.¹⁴ Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, gave a different report calling the people to arms and to faith in YHWH.¹⁵ At this point the people turned on Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua intending to stone them to death.¹⁶ What are we then to learn from the calling of God to build the tabernacle? God calls the people to join together in community, to join with God and with each other in the work of redemption. Working together bonds people together,

¹³ Matthew 7:13-14 - 7:13 **“Go in through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to destruction is broad and the road wide, so many people enter through it. ¹⁴ But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.** CEB.

¹⁴ Numbers 13:25-33.

¹⁵ Numbers 14:6-9.

¹⁶ Numbers 14:10.

at least that is the goal of such things. They are to be bound together one with another, but more importantly they are to be bound together with God.

The work of God can often be detailed, tedious, and demanding. It demands that we use all of the skills, gifts, endurance and patience that are at our disposal, and even then, it will be obvious that we are insufficient for the task. Our task is too large and too hard to accomplish in our own strength and abilities. Only with the intervention of God will it be possible to accomplish this task. Our calling is a calling to trust in God and to follow His voice wherever it might lead. We may not understand, or see how success is possible, that is where our trust in God is the most critical. We are consecrated as priests to serve the purposes of God.¹⁷ We are set apart for this task, we are called to this task. Whether we work sweeping streets, teaching children, as a banker, a doctor, a lawyer, whatever we do, we are called to do all of these things as part of the plan of God to redeem this world. There were lots of different tasks to perform in the construction of the

¹⁷ 1 Peter 2:9 ⁹ **But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light.** ¹⁰ **Once you weren't a people, but now you are God's people. Once you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy.** CEB.

tabernacle, tasks that required lots of different skills. It was in everyone working together that the completion of the tabernacle was made possible.

This work symbolized a greater task, a larger goal, which was to redeem all of creation to make all of creation the dwelling place of God. This was always God's plan and it is still God's plan today. As part of the consecration of the tabernacle there were many animals that were sacrificed, but for the greater tabernacle we have a better sacrifice.¹⁸ This is what the writer of Hebrews writes regarding in Hebrews chapter 9. He calls the people to connect the building of the Tabernacle with the continuing mission of God to redeem His creation.

At 30:11 YHWH speaks to Moses regarding taking a census. What is the purpose of a census in this context? The underlying purpose is military (Numbers 1:2-3). The question then is why are

¹⁸ Hebrews 9:23-28 - **23 So it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be cleansed with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things had to be cleansed with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ Christ didn't enter the holy place (which is a copy of the true holy place) made by human hands, but into heaven itself, so that he now appears in God's presence for us. ²⁵ He didn't enter to offer himself over and over again, like the high priest enters the earthly holy place every year with blood that isn't his. ²⁶ If that were so, then Jesus would have to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. Instead, he has now appeared once at the end of the ages to get rid of sin by sacrificing himself. ²⁷ People are destined to die once and then face judgment. ²⁸ In the same way, Christ was also offered once to take on himself the sins of many people. He will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. CEB.**

sacrifices associated with taking a census. At the time of registration (פְּקֹדָה - pekod a technical word for a particular type of registration) a “ransom” is required (כֹּפֶר - kofer) that is to be paid in order to ward off a plague. Just such a plague is recorded in 2 Samuel 24, during the reign of David. It appears that David omitted the cautionary measure of giving the ransom. Such a registration is in order to ascertain combat readiness.¹⁹

From 30:17 we find very detailed requirements for making the implements of the tabernacle. The issue of purity and washing stands out very prominently. The Israelites are then informed about how to make anointing oil that will be used to anoint the temple and its instruments in order to consecrate them and the priests for service before YHWH. From 30:34 there are requirements for making incense that is to be burned. Both of these items were to be made solely for usage at the tabernacle and if any of the people make it for themselves they are to be cut from the people.


At 31:1 Moses is informed that certain men have been called out for specific purposes and at 31:3 he is informed that they are

¹⁹ E. A. Speiser, “Census and Ritual Expiation in Mari and Israel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 149 (1958), pp. 17-25.

filled with the “Divine Spirit” (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים - *Ruach Elohim* - literally *the Spirit of God*). It is this Spirit which will give them the abilities to serve as craftsman and to devise the artistic designs that they will use. They will do the things in the manner that has been commanded to Moses. Here we have the Spirit of God empowering His people with skill and knowledge that is beyond human ability to do on their own. It seems a bit like what we find in the Book of Acts in the New Testament.

At 31:12, Moses is commanded to speak to the Israelites regarding the keeping of His sabbaths, reminding them that this is to be a sign between *YHWH* and Israel throughout the generations. Anyone who “profanes” it is to be put to death (Exodus 31:14) and anyone who does work on this day is the “cut off” from among the people. At 31:15 it says anyone who does any work on this day is to be “put to death.” This section concludes with God giving Moses the two tablets of the covenant that were written with the “finger of God” (31:18).

Doing things together as a community working in the power and under the direction of God was not just for the people of ancient Israel, this is also a tremendous lesson for the church today.



We, like these people so long ago, are called to a prescribed task, the task of participating with God in restoring His Kingdom and redeeming His people. We have a divine appointment as those who are called into the service of God. We are called to be agents of God's plan of redemption, we are called into covenant loyalty with God and with each other as we live our lives in service of something greater, more lasting and better than anything we can do apart from the empowerment and direction of God. As this was the calling for the ancient people of Israel it is still our calling today as members of the church of Jesus Christ, the community of the New Covenant.

Synopsis

In this section there are instructions given with regard to the giving of offerings. The focus is upon the motivation for giving being from the heart. This focus will be central in the covenant making between God and Israel. God wants the devotion of the people to be more than transactional: He wants the motivation to be from the heart and not about what they can get from God.

There are many detailed and intricate instructions given for the building of the tabernacle. This tabernacle is to be a structure that will be the point of contact between God and His people. He will dwell in their very midst. God seeks close intimate relationship with His people, not just some transactional agreement. In the building of this intricate and detailed tabernacle God is all seeking to form His people into a community that is cohesive and useful for the purposes of God: for reaching out and fulfilling the goal of blessing all the peoples of the earth as had been promised to Abram.

A huge part of covenant making is the fact that in order for a covenant to have lasting significance loyalty and trust are essential elements. It is a reality that those who are a part of a

covenant community must entrust themselves to one another with a common sense of moral responsibility and care and concern for each other in order for the covenant community to have an enduring covenant.

In the people of Israel, God sought to create a covenant community that would be loyal, moral, and committed from their heart to YHWH. The purpose of this covenant community would be to then bless all people and to work as a force to participate in the redemptive plan of God to restore all of creation to the “very good” creation that God had made it to be and still intended for it to be. At the heart of the covenant with Moses was to be the perspective of serving the purposes of God rather than the serving of self and of being a part of the plan of God to redeem His creation and to proclaim His love to all people. The people were called into community to love each other and to love God.

Questions

1. What role do you think the heart plays in the keeping of covenant?
2. How is motivation related to salvation?
3. What are some ways that you see God prompting people to have not simply right actions, but a heart that is aligned with that right action?
4. What are some moments in your life that have drawn you into close relationship with others? Why do you think this happened?
5. What do you see as being of central importance in preserving the cohesion of a covenant community?
6. What are some ways that you demonstrate responsibility to others in your church community?
7. How is the issue of loyalty related to covenant community?
8. What are some ways that you would seek to repair damage done to a covenant community caused by a breach of covenant terms?
9. Do you think it is possible to force, coerce, people to adhere to covenant terms? Why, or why not?
10. How important are integrity and respect in covenant keeping?
11. How do you think self-interest affects covenant with God?
12. What do you think is the core mission of the Christian's covenant with Jesus Christ?
13. What do you think it means for God to want to dwell with His community?
14. How do you think the building of the tabernacle served as an object lesson to the Israelites of the mission of God?

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15. What do you think the purpose of the community of the church is?
 16. How do you think God is involved in the mission of the church today?
 17. How do you see the Spirit working in the world today bringing about the goals of God for His people and His universe?
 18. In what ways can people today express their loyalty to God?
 19. When you give your offering to the church what motivates you to do that?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that God seeks community with His people. He seeks for that community to be genuine and based on more than just selfish transactional ideology. God seeks relationship that comes from a genuine loyalty not just a mercenary, contractual, relationship. It is often the case that adherence to a code of ethics becomes transactional in nature rather than coming from an ethos; from the heart. What are some of the ways that you evaluate whether a relationship is genuine, or not?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words leading His people into deep and genuine relationship with Him: not just because they are afraid of Him, or because they think that relationship will benefit them in some way. God loves us with a true, self-sacrificing, love and He calls us as His image-bearers to have the same type of love for Him. This type of love is expressed most powerfully in the life and death of Jesus Christ. What is the greatest expression of self-sacrificing love that you have personally experienced in your own life from another human being?

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

As we examine the message that God intended to convey to His people, in the time of Moses, that message still speaks powerfully to us today. We today live in a very fast paced, active, world and it is easy in the midst of all that fast paced activity to fail to carefully consider what is truly important. We often fail to take the time to feed our spirits, instead focusing upon our bodies. Think about the amount of time you give each day to caring for your body. Which is more important your body, or your soul?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

God has continually reached out to His children across all of time in so many ways. Our attention span and focus is quite limited. We most often have to be told things in multiple ways and many, many, times before we consider something to be important. Human beings are very gifted at blocking out what they do not want to hear, or see. God understands this about us and so He has continued to repeat the same message, and calling, from the very beginning of our existence, up to this very day. He calls us to trust Him, to believe in Him, and to love Him. He calls us to these things because this is why we were created. He created us with the capacity to do these things. What are some ways that you seek to answer the call of God for loyalty and love in your life?