

# “Exodus”

## Fall Series 1

### Lesson 8

## “Exodus 35-38”

**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.

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As we come to Exodus 35 we find Moses has assembled all the congregation of Israel in order to pass onto them the commands of *YHWH*. In this lengthy, and very detailed account, the focus is on the giving of the Law and the making of the tabernacle. This will be the second time that much of this same information has been given to Israel. “In both cases, the construction of the building is juxtaposed with the command of keeping the Sabbath (31:12-17; 35:1-2).”<sup>1</sup> This assembly comes after the tremendous upheaval generated by the incident of the golden calf and the death of many of the Israelites at the hands of the Levites, their own people.

As one might imagine there are many fractures and fissures in the Israelite community: a community that has never really existed as a united entity. They have never stood as an independent nation, a coherent religious community with common liturgy and common forms of worship. Despite this, God has chosen Israel to be His vehicle of reconciliation for the world. These people are in the process of being forged together into a cohesive, functional community that can fulfill its role as God’s

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Exodus: The Book of Redemption* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2010), p. 279.

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faithful community called to bless all the nations of the world.<sup>2</sup>

God chooses to display His power through this people; it is perhaps the case that a part of this display of power is to be demonstrated in the act of forming this people into a cohesive community that is united by a common faith.

The book of Exodus will devote a huge proportion of its bulk to instructions regarding the building of the tabernacle. This would seem to indicate that what is contained in these instructions is extremely important in the plan that God has for Israel. Of course this leaves us with a great many questions the first of which would seem to be, why is it so important? From the rest of Scripture it might seem that the minute detail of exactly following the orders of construction are not as important as are the motivations for doing so.<sup>3</sup> Some have also come to the conclusion that the most important aspect is the details, hence the encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders in the time of

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18. Galatians 3:6-9.

<sup>3</sup> Hosea 6:6 - **For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.** NRSV. As one example that stands at the heart of many others making this an issue of crucial importance.

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the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> In a book by Jonathan Sacks entitled *The Home We Build Together* he puts forward the idea that what God is doing here is building His people into a nation; a nation that would be cohesive and strong, equipped to fulfill the task that God has for them.<sup>5</sup> This makes a huge amount of sense to me. God does not waste words and He knows better than anyone how to help people become what He needs them to be; and He needs Israel to be a strong and cohesive nation that can stand the tests that are sure to come as God seeks to bring His good news of redemption to the world.

We live in a world today that is fractured, filled with a multitude of fissures and that has many of the same characteristics as the Israelites had in the time of Moses. Perhaps it is the case that there are things that we can learn from how God sought to forge the ancient Israelite community into a people suitable for His purposes as a nation united by a singular faith and devotion. Sacks wrote that, “Nations are constituted by, among

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 23:23 “**How terrible it will be for you legal experts and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You give to God a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, but you forget about the more important matters of the Law: justice, peace, and faith. You ought to give a tenth but without forgetting about those more important matters.**”<sup>24</sup> **You blind guides! You filter out an ant but swallow a camel.** CEB.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

other things, a shared moral code. But liberalism in its modern guises, and still more in its postmodern ones denies that there is such a thing as a shared moral code.”<sup>6</sup> If Sacks is correct, and I believe he is then one aspect of creating a cohesive community is having a shared moral code. Moses draws the people of Israel together to begin laying out for the people this shared moral code, the “...things that *YHWH* has commanded you to do:....”<sup>7</sup>

What Jonathan Sacks is addressing in the context of modern Britain is not simply a new phenomenon; it is not a strictly a twenty-first century problem nor a localized issue. It is something that was prominent in the early to mid-twentieth century too (perhaps it has always been a human problem) as can be seen in this quote from Walter Lippman given many decades ago in the context of early twentieth century America and yet seems to fit our own time equally as well as it fit into its original context:

“For there is no longer a general understanding among civilized men: they cannot fall upon a common allegiance to assuage their partisanship; they have no

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 35:1.

consensus of accepted ideas. Yet these things they must have if they are to restore the civilized order. There are no end of fashionable opinions. But as against the convictions of those who are ready to kill or be killed to achieve their ends, the civilized arguments are subtle, complicated and effete. In the epochal crisis of our time the cause of civilization is being defended by men who possess a great tradition that has become softened by easy living, by men who have forgotten the necessities in which their principles were wrought.”<sup>8</sup>

It is almost certain that this same problem has always been a challenge among people that have sought to build community and to live as community. Even at Genesis 11 there may have been the understanding that building something together worked to

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Lippman, *The Good Society* in Grosset’s Universal Library (New York NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1943), pp. 370-371.

unite people in community.<sup>9</sup> What they built together (the tower of Babel) had a purpose that was not good, but they did perhaps understand that this building of something together could act as a catalytic influence for promoting unity. People united together in cohesive unity are a powerful force; so powerful in fact that God indicates that **“nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.”**<sup>10</sup>

What are we to learn from all of this as the church of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century? God gives us help with the answering of this question, and many others in the story of the exodus, and especially in finding a possible roadmap back from sectarianism and partisanship. A people that remembers its failures and forgets its successes that has lost self-respect and that confers self-esteem on everyone else, does not inspire confidence, least of all for those living in their midst who have other sources of identity.<sup>11</sup> We, the disciples of Jesus Christ have been called to be

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<sup>9</sup> Genesis 11:1-4 - **Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”** NRSV.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 11:6. NRSV.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Exodus: The Book of Redemption*, pp. 10-11.

a part of God's plan for the renewal of universe, a part of the re-formation and redesign of the current universe to God's great plan of redemption.<sup>12</sup> God has called forth a people from the time of Jesus Christ even unto our day as He once called forth a people out of the slavery of Egypt in the day of Moses. Today, we wander in the wilderness and we are called to faith and trust in God as they were called to the same in their day.

The first thing that Moses gives to the people as a commandment from *YHWH* was that they must keep "a holy sabbath of solemn rest" (קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבָּת שַׁבְּתוֹן - *qadesh shabbath shabbathon*). The phrase *shabbath shabbathon* (שַׁבָּת שַׁבְּתוֹן) is translated as a "day of atonement" at Leviticus 16:31, and 22:32, perhaps indicating that atonement is at least one possible aspect of sabbath observance. The injunction here is almost a verbatim repetition of 31:15 with the addition here of the manner of kindling fire on the sabbath. This verse became a point of conflict within Judaism between the rabbis (the teachers who are Pharisees) and the Karaite sect of the Jews.<sup>13</sup> The observance of

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<sup>12</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began* (New York NY: Harper One, 2016), pp. 147-167.

<sup>13</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, in *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), p. 222.



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the Sabbath was intended to override even the making of the tabernacle. The Sabbath brings rest not only from the mundane but also from the holiest of labors.<sup>14</sup>

There is more happening here than just taking a day off. Sacks wrote of the Sabbath that, “It is anticipation of “the end of history,” the messianic age. On it, we recover the lost harmonies of the Garden of Eden. We do not strive to do; we are content to be. We are not permitted to manipulate the world; instead, we celebrate it as God’s supreme work of art. We are not allowed to exercise power or dominance over human beings, nor even domestic animals.”<sup>15</sup> It reminds us that we are not God and we are not in control, God is. We need to contemplate on this truth often and long to insure it is a lesson that we never forget.

At 35:4ff. there is a shift made to the topic of the contributions for the tabernacle from the members of the congregation of the Israelites. In the building of the tabernacle there are instructions from God to build a miniature universe. “It would be a place of carefully calibrated order - as the universe is a

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Exodus: The Book of Redemption*, p. 279.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Exodus: The Book of Redemption*, p. 281.

place of carefully calibrated order.”<sup>16</sup> In this, God is perhaps teaching His people about His nature as a God of order and a God who attends to the minutest detail in His works of creation.<sup>17</sup> He is also calling them to accomplish a task that is too large for any one individual to accomplish. In this He is creating in them a recognition that they need the community in order to accomplish this task set before them. Community is not the goal, the community itself has a goal, a “why.” That goal is what draws the community together in a common sense of destiny and purpose. This community is called together to serve God in His plan and His goal and in doing so it becomes something far greater than its individual parts.

At 35:10ff. there is the indication that it not only goods, but skills that are to be given as a part of the building of the tabernacle. At 35:20ff. we are told that the congregation withdrew from Moses and then returns bringing offerings to

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Exodus: The Book of Redemption*, p. 282.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 139:13 **You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother’s womb.** <sup>14</sup> **I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart. Your works are wonderful—I know that very well.** <sup>15</sup> **My bones weren’t hidden from you when I was being put together in a secret place, when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth.** <sup>16</sup> **Your eyes saw my embryo, and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me, before any one of them had yet happened.** <sup>17</sup> **God, your plans are incomprehensible to me! Their total number is countless!** <sup>18</sup> **If I tried to count them— they outnumber grains of sand! If I came to the very end—I’d still be with you.** CEB.

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*YHWH* as they were stirred in heart; from those who had a willing spirit. At 35:30ff. Moses calls by name those who were designated to perform various skilled task in the construction of the tabernacle. At 36:1ff. it is made clear that all the work that is to be done will be done according to the plan commanded by *YHWH*.

God is empowering His community and challenging them to recognize that their individual gifts are intended for a greater purpose than just to help one gifted and talented person. Those gifts and talents are intended to serve the community called together to serve as the community of *YHWH*: a community that joins with Him in His goal of redemption and restoration. The “why” is set by God and when we follow Him in obedient faith we submit to His plan and His order. We are restored to our proper place as priests serving in the temple of the universe created by God. We can then become what God intended us to be all along. We can become the reality of God’s dream for us as His image-bearers in that universe.

At 36:2 there is the emphasis on the stirring (נָשָׂא - *nasa* - to carry, or take) of the heart. The freewill giving from the people is generous and abundant, far more than what is needed for the

project; so much so in fact that at 36:6 Moses has to command the people to stop bringing gifts. Not a problem that has been experienced often among people. This came to pass because of the fact that the hearts of the people were stirred, they were lifted up perhaps by recognizing the great act of mercy demonstrated in *YHWH's* forgiving them for their great sin in the matter of the golden calf.<sup>18</sup> Out of the fact that the people are “inspired” of heart by God they pour out their generosity in gifts for the tabernacle. These gifts are given not through compulsion, or guilt, but from a stirring deep within the hearts and spirits of the people.

The people gave from the great abundance that they had received as a result of pillaging , or robbing the Egyptians.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps this is what God had hoped would happen as they recognized that all that they had, had in fact come to them as a result of God. Those who have God as their sustenance need have

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<sup>18</sup> Luke 7:41 **“A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay five hundred people for a day’s work. The other owed enough money for fifty. <sup>42</sup> When they couldn’t pay, the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?”** 7:43 Simon replied, **“I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled.”** Jesus said, **“You have judged correctly.”** CEB.

<sup>19</sup> **The LORD made sure that the Egyptians were kind to the people so that they let them have whatever they asked for. And so they robbed the Egyptians.** CEB.


no fear of being poor, or hungry.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps in this at least, they had begun to recognize this great truth that still remains a struggle of faith for the followers of Jesus today. They gave of all their finery and resources. Their hearts made them willing.<sup>21</sup> God filled the craftsman with His “divine spirit” (literally “the spirit of God” רֹחַ אֱלֹהִים - *ruach Elohim*) and they then had the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the tasks that God called them to undertake. Today we might say that they were gifted by God to do what He asked of them. At 35:34 this same phrase (רֹחַ אֱלֹהִים - *ruach Elohim*) is translated as “inspired” and related to the giftedness of teaching others.

All that was done, was done in accordance with all that *YHWH* had commanded (36:1). There is great detail given for the

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew 6:25 “Therefore, I say to you, don’t worry about your life, what you’ll eat or what you’ll drink, or about your body, what you’ll wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds in the sky. They don’t sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth much more than they are? <sup>27</sup> Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don’t wear themselves out with work, and they don’t spin cloth. <sup>29</sup> But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn’t dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it’s alive today and tomorrow it’s thrown into the furnace, won’t God do much more for you, you people of weak faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore, don’t worry and say, ‘What are we going to eat?’ or ‘What are we going to drink?’ or ‘What are we going to wear?’ <sup>32</sup> Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> Instead, desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. CEB.

<sup>21</sup> Exodus 35:29.



building of the temple and yet even with all of the detail there is still a great deal that is left to our imagination. Perhaps it is the case that apart of the inspiration of God was giving them a vision of what all of the massive detail would actually become and how it would all fit together. All of this was done under the direction of Moses.<sup>22</sup> Massive amounts of gold, silver, and bronze were used in the construction of the tabernacle.<sup>23</sup> Costly, expensive and seemingly irreplaceable commodities for a people in the wilderness.

In all of this, the focus is so powerfully upon the task placed before them that the fractures and fissures of the community seem to have shifted to the background or even to have disappeared altogether. Focusing on the construction of the tabernacle seems to have served the purpose of forging a cohesive community. There are powerful indications of obedience, commonality of the focus on the task serving powerfully as a force of cohesion as they follow the commands of God. It is interesting that the people seem to find it easier to build the tabernacle, something physical, rather than to build their lives and

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<sup>22</sup> Exodus 38:21.

<sup>23</sup> Exodus 38:24-29.

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community around a common moral code and the more esoteric concepts of faith and trust. Perhaps it is a part of being human that we seem to find it easier to focus on the physical rather than the spiritual, what we can see rather than what we can imagine. Perhaps a part of being people of faith requires us to develop our imaginations, something that is closely attuned to our spiritual nature more than our physical nature.

There is much for us to learn from this section. We need to learn that we must trust in God, completely and even if we do not fully understand everything, especially when we do not understand everything. That is why it is called faith. We are called to commit our hearts, our possessions, our skills and our wisdom to the task that God has set for us as His community of faith. We are called into community with one another and with God. It is only in community that there is the opportunity to be what we are created to be as the image-bearers of God. We today, as Christians are called to trust in God, to serve God, to give of ourselves to His vision for a redeemed world. We are called to be people of imagination, an imagination that is fueled by the Spirit of God Himself.

# Synopsis

This section comes after God has agreed to restore His covenant with Israel and as this unfolds God begins with commandments regarding the keeping of Sabbath. Sabbath is of crucial importance in maintaining and developing the faith of Israel. It is a constant reminder that they are a people that trusts God and demonstrates that trust in the way they live their lives and in the way that they view the acquisition of resources for life.

Often we speak in terms of the nation of Israel and the people of Israel and yet in so many of the ways that would define nations, even religious communities, Israel fails to meet those definitions. At the time of Moses they have never shared a common land as a nation, and they have never shared a common expression of faith in common cultic practices, or religious observances. God chooses this people over all others to fulfill His purposes of redeeming the world and restoring all of mankind to relationship with Himself.

A part of the plan of God for forming Israel into a cohesive community involves them working together in the task of building the tabernacle and all of its furnishings. God calls them to this



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plan and then gives them the skills and wisdom to implement this plan if they will cooperate with one another and with Him. He does the same for His church today. Unbeknownst perhaps to Israel He had already laid the foundations for this time in the fact that the Egyptians were robbed by Israel as they left. God has also bestowed riches upon His church today that are meant for the work of God.

God calls His church to join in His plan today as He called Israel out of Egypt. We are called to be God's community of faith trusting in Him and working together in a manner that glorifies God and allows His Spirit to help us to live beyond the here and the now and on into the imagination of what can be. We are called to be people of imagination, people of faith, people that trust God's calling in a manner that challenges us to live into the fullness of that calling as He calls us into His community of faith today.

# Questions

1. Why do you think God focuses so much on the keeping of Sabbath?
2. What do you think the purposes of sabbath are?
3. Why do you think the focus on the keeping of sabbath comes right before all the instructions for building the tabernacle?
4. What are the things that you see as the most important things needed to create community? Why?
5. What do you see as the greatest threats to cohesive community? Why?
6. Why do you think the church needs to be a community?
7. What are some ways that you are a part of promoting the community of God?
8. How do you think the story of the exodus relates to our life today as Christians?
9. What are some ways that we might learn to be the community of Jesus Christ better today?
10. How important do you think it is to be a part of a community of faith for your salvation? Why?
11. How do you use your imagination in service of God?
12. How are faith and imagination connected?
13. What are some hindrances you find in the church to using imagination in the service of God? Why?
14. What do you think the church has been asked to build along with God?

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15. What are some things that cause people to lose their focus upon the tasks of God today?

16. What are some ways that you can demonstrate your trust of God today?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is most important to know that God has always had a plan for human beings and that He has never given up on that plan. As we see God forgiving Israel after the golden calf incident we see God returning to the plan that He had for Israel before the great sin. He picks up where He left off in a way that truly demonstrates the nature of forgiveness. When you forgive someone how does your attitude change toward them from what it was before they did something needing your forgiveness?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in these words demonstrating His nature and calling His people to fulfill His vision for their lives. So often we can become distracted from those things that are truly important and we can instead focus on ourselves. In doing this we destroy community and therefore inhibit the plan of the community that God intended His people to be. It is crucial that people work together with each other and with God in order to accomplish their calling before God. What do you believe your place is within the community of God? Why?

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

Understanding that God has called human beings to live in community with each other and with Him must change our lives. So often today the focus of the world is on the individual and on individual fulfillment and yet as we see the life of Christ and the life of Moses we see a very different focus. One of the things that makes Moses so great is continual concern for the honor of God and the relationship of Israel with God. What are some ways that you seek to remain focused on those things that are a priority for God in your life?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The word of God is calling us all to recognize that we are not in control of the world in which we live: He alone has the power and wisdom to do this. He has a design, a plan for this world and He calls human beings to fulfill their role in that plan as His agents, as His image-bearers. What do you think it means to be the image-bearer of God today?