

“Exodus”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 10

“Exodus Conclusion”

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 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 come to the end of our Exodus study I find that ending this study is perhaps harder than any that I have ever done before. Ending is hard, in particular, because I still find that the story of the exodus is so crucial for us today; not only to understanding the overall message of the Bible, but also for understanding the calling of God for life as a 21st century follower of Jesus Christ. This story is not just the story of some ancient people that lived many millennia ago, it is still fresh, rich, and challenging for us today as we seek to be a part of the plan of God for the redemption of His creation and for those seeking to know God and have relationship with Him and trust in Him. I leave you now with some main themes that I think are crucial for us today from this wonderful account.

God's Call to be a Faithful Community

Exodus is a book written to call people to faithful relationship with *YHWH* as His special **community** of faith. Despite the fact that this account was written to a specific people, with specific promises, because of the Old Testament being conceived of as a foundational story for the Christian faith, its influence has touched many nations and many peoples, through

many centuries. This tale of faith and interaction with God has served as a message of hope and expectation for a better, brighter, more just, future for countless civilizations and peoples around the world through history.

In some senses, the exodus account is a never-ending story. It is a story of promise and hope drawing people to dream of a better future, a more just future, a future dominated by light rather than darkness, and order where people live in community, peaceably with others. It is a story that casts off the sense of loneliness and hopelessness that can so often stand as a present reality in the lives of people that are oppressed by injustice, failure, and hardship. Exodus opens up vistas of new possibilities, impossible things become possible, that which was seen as beyond the reach of human endeavor becomes possible, and becomes a hopeful expectation for a better reality, a reality lived out in community with other people and with *YHWH*.

The creations of God (human beings) are not orphans abandoned to their own devices and their own ideas of justice and mercy: God seeks to teach His children the nature of true justice and mercy through His interactions with them, through

redeeming a hopeless and helpless people from the strongest nation then on the planet (Egypt). God calls people to be a better version of themselves than they could even dream possible left to their own devices. This is a book that calls for transformation and change to “become” something beyond our imagination, to become the image-bearers of God that we were created to be, living in community with each other and with Him.

Exodus expresses God’s expectations about not only how people are to interact with Him, but also how they are to live together in community with one another. They are not called to be simply individuals devoted to God, they are called to partner with Him as His community of just and righteous people devoted to Him, His mission, His plan; to be loyal like Him, to be merciful and compassionate like He is. In the Book of Exodus we are invited to walk with a God¹ who comes down and seeks to be in the midst of His people. God seeks to dwell in the midst of His faithful community, to be Emmanuel (God with us). God seeks to tabernacle in the midst of human beings, to share life with them, to be their God, trusted and loved as He loves.

¹ Genesis 3:8; 5:22, 24; 6:9; Deuteronomy 10:12; 19:9; Joshua 22:5; 1 Kings 8:23; Psalm 84:11; Hosea 11:12.

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. The tabernacle was to be a very visual and physical reminder of the desire of God for relationship with His people and His desire to live in their very midst; to be God with them, *Emmanuel*.² God calls Israel to **His plan** and then gives them the skills and wisdom to implement it if they will **cooperate with one another** and with Him. He does the same for His church today.

There was a tradition sensed by the ancient rabbis that connected the construction and assemblage of the Tabernacle with the creation of the cosmos by God. God was inviting His children to participate in the family business, the business of creation; the business of redemption and restoration of the cosmos. God calls the church to participate in this same plan: they are to make the entire cosmos a point of contact and fellowship with *YHWH*. God seeks to dwell once more in the midst of His image-bearing people, in the midst of His creation. Early Christians understood that God would do for the entire cosmos

² Matthew 1:23.

what He did for Jesus on the day of His resurrection. In this understanding, it is apparent that there is hope for all the cosmos, because of God, because a great, powerful, and merciful God seeks restoration of his creation, beginning with the source of its corruption, humankind. We live today in the time of the new exodus, when God is calling His people to trust Him, to follow Him, to follow His plan, to restore and to redeem.

The question for us is will our story be a story of faith and trust, or a story of failure and doubt?

Call to Hope, Justice, Mercy, and Compassion

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks describes Exodus in these terms, “The book of Exodus is the West’s meta-narrative of hope.”³ It contains the story of God redeeming people who were ignorant of what it meant to be a free people and had lived only an enslaved existence. It is the story of God, of Him redeeming people, and of Him bringing them into the freedom and enlightenment of true and formative relationship with Him and with other human beings. So much of our understanding of what passes for wisdom today comes from the elevation of humanity, the individual, above

³ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation Exodus: The Book of Redemption* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2010), p. 1.

all other authority and understanding. It is the case that nations and communities of faith, which in truth are defined by a shared moral code; have found that shared moral code, at least in the West, has been continually eroded, for at least, several centuries now. For the last several decades the West has wantonly adopted a set of cultural habits predicated upon the idea that the individual is all that matters.⁴ The individual has become the west's golden calf of idolatry. This has become an idol of shame for a faithless and wanton people, who have chosen debauchery and self-centeredness over faith, loyalty, love, justice, and community. This has led to a great increase of hopelessness, despair, divisiveness, and drug addiction.

Without a basic foundation, our nation, our world, and our churches will not survive in any form currently recognizable to us. At the heart of the society that has been predominate for more than two centuries, in the United States, there has been a belief that there are solid moral imperatives that were indeed laid down by God. At the heart of those imperatives stands the Book of Exodus, which lays out the vision that a people can be united by a

⁴ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), pp. 5-6.

covenant with God and that is expectant of things getting better and there being hope for a better future. In the account of Exodus it is the case that people are expected to be held accountable by the terms and expectations of God's nature as the standard for defining morality. We can see remnants of this understanding in the court proceedings when a person is asked to swear an oath with their hand on the Bible. In that moment, the idea is that God is being called to hold the person making the statement to account for the veracity of their testimony, or else they are expected to suffer the consequences of offending God. This practice is meant to convey the message that we are not on our own, God is present and He is expecting us, as human beings, to be accountable to Him.

It is in the Book of Exodus that we first see so many things that we have for so long taken for granted as part of the fabric of society: that indeed many in our modern era have chosen to reject. Not least among those things being rejected is the concept that our responsibility to God and to others stands above our responsibility to ourselves. The great sin of Exodus is the making of the golden calf and worshipping it as if it were God. The incident of the golden calf is Israel seeking to control their own

destiny and to define what is just and what is not by their own standards. This sin, like the first sin in the Garden of Eden demonstrates a lack of trust in God and His call on life, all life, to live in obedience and trust to its Creator, and sovereign.


Exodus includes a complex list of ordinances and laws that seek to build community. These complex and detailed ordinances and instructions are not simply concerned that loyalty is expressed in relationship to God, but that loyalty is expressed in the relationship of His people in community to one another. We find a clear focus upon caring for the vulnerable, the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the resident alien. Israel had lived through the experience of being resident aliens and at the time these precepts were given through Moses Israel was itself a homeless people without a country, they were refugees. God calls upon His people to reflect His nature through exhibiting an ethos of graciousness, mercy, justice, and loyalty, recognizing that this world, as it currently stands is not the home of God's people.⁵ This truth and understanding needs to be reflected especially in our dealings with those that do not have the power, or influence, to

⁵ Hebrews 13:14 - **We don't have a permanent city here, but rather we are looking for the city that is still to come.** CEB.

force justice to be brought into the world (the weak). The focus on justice is to stand at the core of the people of God as a reflection of their heart and soul, standing as true image-bearers of the heart and soul of their sovereign, YHWH. His people are to be marked out by their compassion, mercy, and justice.

God is the Sovereign King of the Universe

The story of the exodus is the story of the supreme power (God), the creator, and ruler of the universe intervening in history in defense of the powerless and the weak fulfilling His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Exodus God seeks to help Israel understand that there are no other gods like Him. He is unique and the only true God. Over time, He will make it clear that all the others (so-called gods) are merely pretenders, evil spirits, or figments of depraved imaginations. There is in truth only one true, sovereign God, who created the universe. Israel came out of more than four hundred years of living in the polytheistic world of the Egyptians, where many gods were worshipped. This environment must have affected Israel and their understanding of the universe and their perceptions of what it meant for a being to be called a god. God sought to remove the false images from their



minds and instead to plant the image of a loving and merciful God who desired real fellowship with His creation, as their sovereign creator.

God Demonstrates to Israel and the World His Love

This story is also the story of a God who continues to persist and struggle with His wayward creations to draw them to His love, and to imbue them with greater understanding. We today, like in the days of Moses, are challenged to be agents of a God who does not sit idly by in the face of oppression, injustice, and suffering doing nothing. God calls upon His children to participate in His mission, to suffer, to bleed and to die for others as redeemers that seek to follow the example of Jesus Christ. We are called to live in covenant with our God and to serve all humanity as part of that covenant with God. Even though humans may be marred and distorted; human beings are created in the image of God, and as His image-bearers they are called to participate in the restoration of that image to reflect His glory and His plan for His creation. We are called to love as God loves. We are called to bring hope, redemption and covenantal love to a world that so often has lost hope and in truth has lost all sense of true love and wallows in its

quagmire of uncertainty, selfishness, and delusion. The story of the true exodus continues as a story of restoration and redemption. God continues to dwell, through the sending of His Spirit, and His Spirit enlivened people sent into the midst of this world. He continues to seek to be “God with us” (Emmanuel).⁶

God Keeps His Promises

Exodus is a direct response to the promise that God gave to Abraham at Genesis fifteen.⁷ As Exodus begins, we see God working in the midst of the people of Israel, fulfilling the promise He had made long ago to Abraham. Exodus picks up and continues the story that was begun in the Book of Genesis. Speaking in Western terms, Genesis and Exodus are not strictly speaking history in the way we often define history. The central focus is not upon the human characters and their lives and narrating that history in all of its detail, the focus is upon how lives intersect, and are altered in their trajectory by their interaction with God. The narrative is focused upon growing the

⁶ Matthew 1:23.

⁷ 15:³ And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” ⁴ But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” ⁵ He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness. NRSV.

people's trust in God, as He calls them into being loyal community communing with Himself and each other. This loyalty is exhibited, on God's part in the keeping of His promise to Abraham.

God is a "promise keeper" and He calls upon His followers to be "promise keepers" too. He calls upon His followers to be people who trust and rely upon the promises of God and reflect this trust in their relationships with one another. His people are called to stand apart from others in exhibiting the nature of God as being faithful to His word, keeping His promises and exhibiting love, mercy and justice in relations with others. God can be counted upon, He is worthy of trust and this will also be reflected in the nature of those called after His name (His people - the church).

In Exodus, Pharaoh will be shown to be a person obsessed with his own importance and during the conflict with *YHWH* he loses all semblance of reason as a tyrant who is backed into a corner by his previous decisions, and by his arrogant self-obsession, and his trust in gods that have no power to stand against *YHWH*. We all can tend to make similar choices in our own lives; choices that put us into a corner. We are challenged by

Exodus to soften our hearts to God (not to be like Pharaoh who hardened his heart) and to recognize that God is God and we are not, nor are the many false gods of Egypt or of our world today. We need to realize that we are not in control of our destiny and to believe that we are in control is an illusion. We are called to trust in God, and in God alone, because only He ultimately has the power to keep His promises. Egypt relied upon their own abilities to manipulate their gods, and their environment in their pursuit of power and to create a sense of security. They were, in so many ways, very effective in this and had come to great power and wealth through their abilities and their techniques. In today's world, science has often taken the place of what we today would call "magic," but people still seek to rely upon their abilities to affect their safety and security through their understanding and technical skill in manipulating their environment rather than living in reliance focused upon the promises of God.

God's People Live in Hope

At one point, God calls upon Moses to tell the people to move forward toward the sea and to stretch out his hand over the sea to drive the waters back in order for them to be able to cross

this impassable barrier between them and safety. Moses does as he is told and the stage is set for one of the greatest stories ever told. God will save His people when there is **no hope** other than to trust in Him to keep His promises. In Exodus we find Israel poised in the most incredibly tenuous position with the sea in front of them and the Egyptian army in hot pursuit behind, surrounded by wilderness and danger. The situation looks hopeless and yet the very first verse of this section of Exodus (14:22) says the Israelites went into the sea on “dry ground.” The people demonstrate their trust in God by walking into the midst of the sea.

YHWH, the creator God, intervenes and the impossible becomes possible and Israel is saved and the Egyptian army is drowned. This account highlights the good decision made by Israel to follow the instructions of God and the poor decision made by the Egyptians to follow Pharaoh (who claimed to be a god) that put them on a collision course with *YHWH*. In their arrogance they ignored the fact that *YHWH* was “fighting” for Israel and too late they realized this.⁸ God is truly sovereign of all the universe and the only true and sure source of hope.

⁸ Exodus 14:25 - **The LORD jammed their chariot wheels so that they wouldn't turn easily. The Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites, because the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt!"** CEB.

We can learn much from the Exodus account regarding the nature of people, the nature of God, and the nature of keeping covenant. Paul seems to use the exodus account in many places to help the newly founded church find its way in the world as kingdom people. They continue the same struggle that is recounted in the exodus account (the struggle of faith). Will they trust in the promises of God and with singular devotion follow Him, or will they trust in themselves, or in some other being, or force, instead of in God?

What Is So Special About Moses?

One of the things that stands out in Exodus is that Moses has a very special relationship with God. That challenges us to understand what is so special about Moses? Perhaps part of the answer to this question is not found directly in the Book of Exodus, but in Numbers 12:3. There we find these words with regard to Moses: **Now the man Moses was humble, more so than anyone on earth.**⁹ Despite not finding this exact description of Moses in Exodus we are given many indications of what this looks like. Moses continually acts as a servant to the people,

⁹ CEB.

wearing himself out ministering to the people.¹⁰ Moses also continually interceded on behalf of the people.¹¹ Moses seeks to protect the reputation of *YHWH* even with regard to what the Egyptians might think of Him. He challenges *YHWH* to remember His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.¹² He challenges Him to do this to protect His own reputation among peoples of the earth.

Moses is a man who demonstrates a unique concern for the people of Israel, while also expressing great concern for *YHWH* and His reputation. The life of Moses challenges our priorities, our goals in life. With the coming of Jesus we have fulfilled the ancient promise of God to Israel to raise up a prophet like Moses who would deliver the commands of God.¹³

Conclusion

I leave you with these points to ponder as we continue to strive to be a people devoted to God in faith and trust reflecting

¹⁰ Exodus 18:13.

¹¹ Exodus 32:11.

¹² Exodus 32:12-13.

¹³ Deuteronomy 18:15-18 - ¹⁵ **The LORD your God will raise up a prophet like me from your community, from your fellow Israelites. He's the one you must listen to.** ¹⁶ **That's exactly what you requested from the LORD your God at Horeb, on the day of the assembly, when you said, "I can't listen to the LORD my God's voice anymore or look at this great fire any longer. I don't want to die!"** ^{18:17} **The LORD said to me: What they've said is right.** ¹⁸ **I'll raise up a prophet for them from among their fellow Israelites—one just like you. I'll put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.** CEB.

His nature as image-bearers of God, living in community with one another and with our God. We must keep in mind that we are called to be the Faithful Community of *YHWH*. We are called to hope, justice, mercy and compassion. We are called to live in the light of recognizing that *YHWH* is the King of the universe. We are called to recognize that as God demonstrated His love to Israel and the world we as His people are called to do the same.

Our hope rests in a God who keeps His promises and is the only being with the power to do so. Because of this, and because of who He is, we live in hope, hope of a better future where injustice, hatred, pain, and loneliness will be banished forever. We are a people called to be humble, self-effacing and to serve others and our God above ourselves. We are to be agents serving the cause of His redemption of creation, to answer the call of our King.

Synopsis

- 1. God Calls us to be a Faithful Community** - Life is meant to be lived as a people that lives in fellowship with Him and with other human beings. We are not meant to live in isolation and loneliness.
- 2. God Calls us to Hope, Justice, Mercy, and Compassion** - God calls us to be a hopeful people that advocate and live out lives dominated by justice, mercy, and compassion.
- 3. God is the Sovereign King of the Universe** - God created our universe, no one else did. As creator He is also ruler over our universe. This means He defines what is right, good, and just.
- 4. God Demonstrates to Israel and the World His Love** - God defines love for the world to see in His care, concern, and great forbearance with Israel. He seeks their good, especially when they do not deserve it, or even understand it.
- 5. God Keeps His Promises** - God made a promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and He fulfills that promise and much more through Israel and ultimately in the bringing of His Son through Israel to redeem that which was lost.

6. God's People Live in Hope - The people of God trust in the creator of the universe for a better, brighter, more just, future.

As such they have hope that is founded in the only power capable of delivering all that is good.

7. What is So Special About Moses - Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth: He sought to serve God and others above serving Himself. As such this makes him stand as unique among men.

Questions

1. Why do you think the story of Exodus is still important for Christians living today?
2. How do you see the exodus account calling people to live faithful lives today?
3. How do you see community being important in Exodus?
4. Do you think the calling of God is to live in community? Why, or why not?
5. When you hear the word *Emmanuel* what images does it bring to your mind?
6. Why do you think community might be important to God?
7. Do you think included in the plan of God is the aspect of community? Why, or why not?
8. How might you express love apart from community? What would that look like?
9. How would you define justice? Why?
10. How would you define mercy?
11. How would you define compassion?
12. How would you define loyalty?
13. How important are shared values in the formation and maintenance of cohesive community?
14. How important is working together toward common goals for the formation and maintenance of community?

15. Since God is creator and sovereign of the cosmos, what does that mean for how we should live our lives and define our roles?

16. How would you define love?

17. How do you know love actually exists?

18. How hard is it for you to make a promise? Why?

19. Do you always have the power to keep your promises?

20. Where do you find your "hope?"

21. How would you define "humility?"

22. How do you become more humble?

23. How do you determine what is important in your life?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

God is the sovereign, creator of the universe and as such all else that exists is under His dominion. This means that He has the right to define all things, to define good and evil, justice and injustice, love and hate. It also means that the only real power in our universe belongs to Him. Why do you think any of this matters to how I should live my life?

Where is God in these words?

God is in the words of the exodus story keeping His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He does this in the redemption of an enslaved people who had lived in Egypt for more than 400 years. These people were powerless, landless, and apart from God in a hopeless situation. God reaches into the darkness of their despair and draws them into the light of hope in Him as He rescues them from slavery and hopelessness. In what ways do you have hope in God today?

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

The call of the exodus account on the lives of all people who would seek the face of God is to trust in Him and in His promises. This calls us to look outside ourselves and our own strength, power, and resources. Our hope is not that science will one day rescue us from all the ills that befall our world, but that God will. Our ultimate hope and trust must be placed in Him above all else. How does this understanding change how you plan your direction in life?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to recognize the truth, the reality, that we are not alone in this world and that human beings are not the definition of the ultimate. We are called to recognize that we were created by one far greater than we are and that He has not abandoned us to despair. He calls us to Himself and to one another. We were created as beings meant to live in community. We were created to live in community with our God and with one another. It is not “good” for man to be alone. How does this understanding challenge you to live differently?