

Introduction to Exodus

Introduction

Six and a half years ago, we finished a series of sermons through the book of Genesis. For me, that series has probably had the most powerful impact on me personally in my walk with God. I pray that I will never, ever lose sight of the God of Genesis. Ever since we finished Genesis, I've been looking forward to Exodus. The God that we meet in Exodus is the same God as the one we meet in Genesis, only now He begins to reveal Himself even more fully, and in even more wonderful, and gracious ways. We remember that the point of the stories in Genesis and Exodus is not the so-called "morals" they teach, but the **God** they reveal. The key to reading Exodus is to hunger and thirst for the **God** that Exodus reveals – or maybe we should say for the God who *reveals Himself* to us in the book of Exodus. We can't possibly emphasize this enough. This is the key to reading Exodus, and in fact, to reading the entire Bible.

So who is the **God** that we find in Exodus? When we think of Exodus, what are some of the things that come to our mind? Certainly, one of the first things we probably think of is the *exodus*, or the *exit* of the people of Israel *out of* the land of Egypt. This whole "exodus" theme—where God brings Israel out of the land of Egypt—is a huge deal in the rest of the Bible – as we'll see. But the key here is to remember that the exodus is just one very important part of a much bigger picture.

I. Prologue to Exodus: God's covenant with Abraham

God didn't "wake up" one morning and find that there was a nation called Israel languishing as slaves in Egypt, and then feel in His compassion that He should do something about it.

- ✓ Exodus 2:23–24 (cf. 3:6-8; 13-17, 4:5; 32:13; 33:1) — During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his **covenant** with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

The point here isn't that God "forgot" about His covenant, and now He's remembered. The point is that what He's about to do in rescuing Israel is **because** of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We can't understand what He's about to do without understanding that it's the result of a covenant He's already made. So what was that covenant?

- ✓ Genesis 12:1–3 — Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the **land** that I will show you. And I will make of you a great **nation**, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will **bless** those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be **blessed**."

God called Abram out of the idolatrous people and culture where he lived and promised him three things: a land, a people, and a blessing. And then in Genesis 15, God "formalized" these promises with a "**covenant**" ceremony – one that included the shedding of blood.

God's covenant is more than just a really, really, really solemn and binding promise. When God makes promises to a certain person or people in the context of covenant, the result is always the *creation* of a brand new **relationship**. God is never in covenant with people who are not His own, because it's the covenant that actually makes them His people! "Covenant" is the means by which God "creates" a **people** for Himself. This is why it's so meaningful to talk about a "covenant people." And "covenant" is also the means by which God then enters into relationship with His people. This is why it's so meaningful to talk about a "covenant relationship." So this was the ultimate goal and meaning of the *promises* that God made to Abraham (land, seed, and blessing). When God made His promises, He was freely, and sovereignly, and graciously binding Himself to a covenant people in covenant relationship. So when we come to Genesis 17, we hear God speaking these words to Abraham:

- ✓ Genesis 17:6–8 — I will make you exceedingly fruitful... And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, **to be God TO YOU** and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and **I will be THEIR God.**"

Yahweh is the *only true* God of *all the universe*. But here is a unique, exclusive, covenant relationship between God and **His** covenant people! Maybe now we can better understand how wonderful these words are:

- ✓ Genesis 26:24 — The LORD appeared to [Isaac]... and said, "**I am the God of Abraham your father**. Fear not..."

I am the God of covenant! I am the God who lived, and still lives, with Abraham in covenant relationship – therefore, I will also be God to you – therefore, Isaac, I have also freely, sovereignly, and graciously bound myself to you as **your** God. So fear not!

One thing we see from all this is that no man, woman, or child can initiate a relationship with God any more than he or she could ever initiate a covenant with God. Only God can initiate covenant, therefore, only God can call us out, and make us to be His people. So today, under the New Covenant, even our repentance and faith is not the means by which we make ourselves a party to God's covenant. We can never make ourselves a party to God's covenant (for more reasons than one). God makes His covenant with whom he will (Mat. 26:28). But our free exercise of repentance and faith *is* the God-given means by which we understand that we *have* been made a party to His covenant – because of His free and sovereign, covenant-making **grace**. Covenant is the means by which God creates a people for Himself – and then also binds Himself to that people in intimate relationship.

So what of this covenant that God made with Abraham? On the very day of the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15, God said to Abram:

- ✓ Genesis 15:13–16 — Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I

will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

While God was graciously calling some out and establishing His covenant with them, there were others that He was justly leaving to their own free and willful pursuit of idolatry and sin. And until their wickedness and rebellion was complete, God *would not* drive them out before His people. So while His covenant people waited, God said that they would be afflicted for four hundred years in a land that was not their own. As it turned out, God Himself prepared the way for Israel to go to Egypt by sending Joseph ahead and raising him to a position of power in Egypt second only to the Pharaoh. And when Jacob was just on the verge of leaving the land of promise on his way to Egypt, God spoke to him in visions of the night and said:

- ✓ Genesis 46:2–4 — “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “***I am God, the God of your father.*** Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will ***go down*** with you to Egypt, and I will also ***bring you up*** again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.”

Six and a half years ago, we left off with these verses at the very end of Genesis:

- ✓ Genesis 50:22–26 (cf. 47:30) — So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father’s house... And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall ***carry up*** my bones from here.” So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Genesis ends in hope and in expectation. Exodus begins with groaning and crying out for help.

- ✓ Exodus 2:23–24 — Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his ***covenant*** with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

What God is *about to do* is not ***just*** because He’s made a promise and He would keep that promise. What God is about to do is because He has entered into covenant with a people to be God ***to them***, and as ***their*** God He would keep His promises! Indeed, in the keeping of His promises, God would reveal more, and more, and more of Himself to His people, so that they might come to know Him more, and more, and more as their covenant God.

- ✓ Exodus 6:2–5 (cf. 3:13–17) — God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty [El Shaddai], but by my name the LORD [YAHWEH] I did not make myself known to them... I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.

In other words, I'm about to take the covenant relationship that I've established to the next level, and I will begin to do this by making a fuller revelation of Myself. I will reveal Myself more fully than ever before as *Yahweh*. Twelve times, God will send some variation of this message to Pharaoh: "Let *my people* go." (5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20-23; 9:1, 13, 17; 10:3-4) God says to Moses: "I have surely seen the affliction of *my people*... Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring *my people* out of Egypt... I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring *my hosts, my people* the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt." (3:7, 10; 7:4) God is about to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt because they are *already* His people by covenant. But then we read in Exodus 6:

- ✓ Exodus 6:6-8 — Say therefore to the people of Israel, "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ***I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God***, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

Here for the first time in Scripture are these awesome, and powerful, and beautiful, and oft-repeated words: "You [will] be my people, and I will be your God." Those are covenant words. They describe the heart and soul of covenant relationship. And yet here in chapter six, God speaks to those who are already His people as though He still has yet to take them as His people. God is about to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt because they are *already* His very own people ***by covenant*** – *and* because in some way He would still take them in an even more deep and more wonderful way to be His people ***by covenant***.

II. Parts I and II of Exodus:

This is the essential "big picture" for understanding the first part (the first fifteen chapters) of Exodus: **I**. Yahweh is the God who **delivers** His people from **Egypt** (1:1-15:21)

Why did God bring His people into Egypt? – So that He might *reveal Himself* as the omnipotent Savior, rescuer, and deliverer of His people, and so that by this fuller revelation of Himself, His people might be prepared to engage with Him the more deeply in covenant ***relationship***.

This is also the "big picture" for understanding the second part of Exodus when Israel is no longer in Egypt, but in the wilderness: **II**. Yahweh is the God who **provides** for and **protects** His people in the **Wilderness** (15:22-18:27)

Why? Because they are already His very own people by covenant – *and* because in some way He would still take them in an even more deep and more wonderful way to be His people by covenant. God leads His people through the perils of the wilderness so that He might reveal Himself as the compassionate and faithful provider and protector of His people, and so that by this fuller revelation of Himself, His people might be prepared to engage with Him the more deeply in covenant ***relationship***. "***I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.***" And so now we're ready for the third part of Exodus:

III. Yahweh is the God who makes a **covenant** with His people at **Mount Sinai** (19-24)

Listen to these verses from Exodus chapter 19:

- ✓ Exodus 19:3–6 — The LORD called to [Moses] out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, *if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my COVENANT, you shall be MY TREASURED POSSESSION among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be TO ME a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.* These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Then, again, God says in Leviticus:

- ✓ Leviticus 26:3, 11-13 — “*If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them...* I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And ***I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.*** I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

Eight centuries later, God would remind His people through the prophet Jeremiah:

- ✓ Jeremiah 7:22–23 — For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: “*Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people.*”

What does the second covenant (the one mediated through Moses at Mount Sinai) have to do with the first covenant (the one that God made with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob)? Remember that “*covenant*” is the means by which God creates a people for Himself – and then also binds Himself to that people in covenant relationship. And yet God is holy and pure, and can only live in intimate covenant relationship with a people who are ***holy and pure***. Even in Genesis 17, we read:

- ✓ Genesis 17:1–2 (NET) — When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am the sovereign God. ***Walk before me and be blameless. Then I will confirm my covenant between me and you,*** and I will give you a multitude of descendants.”

A covenant *people* in covenant *relationship* with the covenant *God requires* covenant *living*. And so in this covenant that God now makes with Israel, He’s only spelling out clearly what had always been assumed since the days of Abraham. One commentator asks:

“How can [God’s people] obey and be benefited by a God whom they only vaguely understand, whose characteristics and will for them are clouded by ignorance on their part? But if his people can actually understand him, that is, be ***fully aware of this covenant stipulations*** and therefore ***know what to do to please him and receive his***

favor, they can actually live in relationship with him so that their own lives are influenced directly and constantly by his.” (Stuart)

God’s covenant *promises* to Abraham came *first*. The covenant *requirements* came afterward because of sin. The second covenant (summed up in the Ten *Commandments*; Exod. 34:27-28) *cannot* void the *promises* of the first (cf. Gal. 3:17-19). It simply establishes and reveals what is necessary for the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham – for the ultimate, full, and complete experience of intimate, joyful covenant *relationship* with a holy God. And so the goal of the covenant with Abraham and the goal of the covenant with Israel 400 years later is *the SAME!* – “*I will be your God, and you shall be my people.*”

- ✓ Jeremiah 11:3–5 (cf. Deut. 7:8; 8:18; 9:5; Feinberg, EBC; Keil & Delitsch) — Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. *So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, that I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob], to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day.*”

And so with the covenant established (the one mediated through Moses with the people of Israel), we’re ready for the fourth and final part of Exodus:

IV. Yahweh is the God who desires to dwelt among His people (**Mount Sinai**; 25-40)

What does it mean to live in covenant relationship with *God*? It means to *worship* Him with trembling and with thanksgiving as we bask in all the joys and blessings of His presence. And so the fourth part of Exodus begins with these words:

- ✓ Exodus 25:8 (cf. 29:43) — Let [the people] make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

And then, later, we read:

- ✓ Exodus 29:45–46 — I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who *brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.*

The last sixteen chapters of Exodus are consumed with the building of a tabernacle – a place where the covenant God might live *together with* His covenant people. And so eventually we’ll arrive at the climax and finale of Exodus:

- ✓ Exodus 40:34–35 — Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Conclusion

Over the years, there were many Israelites who lived by faith in God's covenant promises that He gave to Abraham. They loved the covenant requirements mediated through Moses – they loved God's laws and commands – and yet they saw that they *could not* inherit the promises by their own covenant obedience because they were sinners. They saw that for all the joy and intimacy of God's presence in their midst, there were still barriers, there were still curtains and walls reminding them of the distance between a holy God and a sinful people. And so they simply *believed* God – that somehow, someway, through the coming of the Messiah first promised in Genesis 3:14-15, God would miraculously provide for the fulfillment of *His covenant promise*. And it was *this simple faith* in God's promise that God counted to them as righteousness (cf. Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4). It was this simple faith in the covenant *promise* of God that freed them to live in joyful obedience to God's covenant *requirements*. So every single one of these Israelites was saved in this way: by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and all to the glory of God alone.

But for all this, there was still one very big problem. For all of the many Israelites who lived by faith in God's covenant promise, there were even more who didn't. They either rejected God outright and went after worthless idols, or they supposed that they could inherit God's covenant promises by means of their own obedience. So even though the covenant created a people, it didn't enable that people to live obediently, by faith in the promises of God. The covenant created a people, but not a people where all were born again from the least to the greatest through faith in the coming Messiah. And so we have as a part of the covenant not only covenant blessings for obedience, but the terrors of covenant curses for disobedience (cf. Lev. 26). Over, and over, and over again, the covenant people spurned and broke the covenant. Only a remnant, graciously chosen by God, remained faithful (cf. Jer. 7:22-26; 11:3-8). How was the promise of God ever to be fulfilled? – The promise of a people as many as the stars, who would ultimately inherit all the earth, and live together with God in joyful and intimate *covenant relationship*?

In the end, a new covenant was needed.

- ✓ Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. 31:1; see “Additional Scriptures”) — Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a NEW COVENANT with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the COVENANT that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And ***I will be their God, and they shall be my people***. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

In the New Covenant, there are no covenant curses, only covenant blessings! In the New Covenant, the *requirements* of the Old Covenant are fulfilled (Rom. 8:1-4), so that all of God's *promises* to Abraham are now “yes,” and “amen.” (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20) In the New Covenant, a

people are created who *all know* God from the least to the greatest. And now *we are* that people created by the New Covenant:

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 6:16 — *We are* the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and *I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*”

When God made His covenant with Abraham, the blood of animals was spilled (Gen. 15). When God made His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, the blood of animals was spilled again (cf. Exod. 24:6-8). But when God would make a new covenant, creating a new kind of people, He sends His one and only Son into the world. This is the one who, on the night in which He was betrayed, would take a cup and give it to His disciples, saying:

- ✓ Matthew 26:28 (cf. Hebrews 8) — This is *my blood of the covenant*, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

At every point in the book of Exodus, we are pointed to the God who would live in covenant *relationship* with us. And so at every point in the book of Exodus, we are pointed ahead to the God who would come into this world even as one of us – that by the shedding of His blood the veil in the temple might be torn in two, and we might come boldly before His very throne of *grace*. In the end, the book of Exodus points us ahead – all the way to this:

- ✓ Revelation 21:1-4 — Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a *bride* adorned for her *husband*. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*”

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Jeremiah 24:6-7 — I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and *they shall be my people and I will be their God*, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

Jeremiah 32:37-41 — Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And *they shall be my people, and I will be their God*. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

Ezekiel 36:24–28 (cf. Ezek. 11:17-20) — I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and *you shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

Jeremiah 30:18, 22 — Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt on its mound, and the palace shall stand where it used to be... And *you shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

Ezekiel 14:10–11 — And they shall bear their punishment—the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike—that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, nor defile themselves anymore with all their transgressions, but that *they may be my people and I may be their God*, declares the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 34:23–26, 30-31 — And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken. I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing... And they shall know that *I am the LORD their God with them*, and that *they, the house of Israel, are my people*, declares the Lord GOD. And *you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God*, declares the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 37:21–28 — Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and *they shall be my people, and I will be their God*. My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. *My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.

Zechariah 8:7–8 — Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And *they shall be my people, and I will be their God*, in faithfulness and in righteousness.