

Confirmation 2020-21
Session 5 – Exodus
October 11, 2020

Background Information

Exodus is THE central story of the Old Testament, the grounding for how the chosen people of God come to understand who they are and who their God is. It is easy to reduce Exodus to a story of Pharaoh and Moses, Israelites and Egyptians, but the story is really about God. In many ways, this story is epic. There is slavery, murder, kings, and kingdoms. A bush bursts into flame without being consumed. Bizarre plagues of frogs, flies, locusts, and boils strike the land. A sea parts so that God's people may escape a murderous army. At the heart of it all is God's faithfulness to God's people - God keeping the promise that they have not been forgotten and that God will be their God.

God will not stand for injustice and suffering. God hears the cries of the people and takes action. Oddly enough, God takes action through Moses, a Hebrew raised among royalty, a murderer who has fled to Midian for sanctuary, a stutterer and a slightly doubtful man. Moses becomes God's great leader, bringing the word of God against Pharaoh: "Let my people go."

And bizarrely, it works. At the edge of the Red Sea, the people of God, once enslaved, celebrate their freedom and the promise of a land just for them. Even more bizarre, almost as soon as their songs of praise have faded, God's people start forgetting the great and mighty acts God performed to save them. They complain and want to turn back! They let themselves be captivated by powerless idols. But their *unfaithfulness* cannot undo God's *faithfulness*. At Mount Sinai and in the wilderness, they will be taught, over and over again, what it means to be the people of God.

What you need to know

The first part of Exodus declares who God is. God calls to Moses from the burning bush and declares, "I AM WHO I AM." Throughout the story, God demonstrates what that means: God hears, listens, considers, and then acts. God is not far off but is intimately concerned with how we are treated and whether we are allowed to live the full life given us at creation. And if we are not? Well, God does not stand for oppression. Violent rulers and brutal treatment do not make God back down. God will act to save.

The second part of Exodus teaches what it means to be God's people. God gets the people out of slavery, but then must get the slavery out of the people. They have become accustomed to the ways of Egypt. They think power is the sign of who is "on top." They believe that any idol will do for worship. And they whine that it would have been better to live as well-fed slaves than to die free in the desert, even though God is providing the food, water, and safety they need! God works through signs, miracles, and finally through commandments given at Sinai to teach the people how to live as God's people: to be faithful, to be just, and to be merciful.

We can forget, but God remembers. Like the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai worshipping a golden calf, we may forget who God is and what has been done for us. We may grumble or complain or even struggle to believe that God is at work at all. None of this negates God's promises. God doesn't choose the Israelites (or us) because of our faith, but because of God's faith. God's faithfulness does not depend on our acknowledgement. This is why we remember the story of Exodus in the baptismal liturgy. Just as God promised to be with the Israelites at the sea simply because God was faithful, so has God promised to be with us in our baptism and beyond. God has a hand out to us; nothing can ever change that.

Exodus is a story that calls for response. It's an epic tale of a suffering people, whose cries God hears and responds to. But while God could act alone, God chooses to invite people to respond in trust that they will be led where they need to go. Problems often begin for God's people when

they start to take charge of the story. They are invited to live within it, but they are charged to remember the God who has brought them out of Egypt. Responding to the freedom God gives us means learning to live in faithfulness and community – something the people of God are constantly working on. But no matter how often we struggle, God's promises remain.

About the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)

The introduction to Exodus is found beginning on page 124 in the LSB. Please read the article entitled “Background File,” “What’s the Story?” and “What’s the Message.” These articles can be found at the beginning of every book of the Bible and are very helpful in getting a basic understanding of each book’s content.

Into the Story

You will recall from *Session 4 – Genesis*, that it concluded with Joseph and his family settling in Egypt where Joseph had won favor with Pharaoh. In Exodus 1 we hear the story of how, over time, the prosperity of the Israelites (the name given to the descendants of Israel, the father of Joseph) became a burden that threatened the Egyptians. And so, with the memory of Joseph well in the past, Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites. It was a bitter life for the Israelites, but the God of their ancestors was watching and listening.

God chose to liberate the Israelites by raising up a leader for them. That leader was Moses, and his story from his birth to his death, has become an important story for Jews and Christians to the present day. Moses' life was blessed and cursed. His parents gave him up in order to save him from death. He was raised by daughters of Pharaoh and became a prince of Egypt. Maybe you watched the cartoon by the same name, "the Prince of Egypt."

Later, as an adult, Moses betrayed his Egyptian upbringing and returned to his humble Israelite roots. That is where God found him and told him that God was aware of the struggle and hard life of the Israelites under the

slavery to the Egyptians, and God was going to use him, Moses, to set God's people free.

Throughout the story of Exodus, the Israelites stumble and fall (metaphorically speaking) and God accepts their confession and forgives them. There is often some penance to be done, but God takes them back eventually. It is a great story full of drama and action and violence, but also grace, and of course God prevails in the end.

This story is more than a story of antiquity. It is also our story. None of us are owed anything by God, and yet God called us at our baptism and asks for our faithfulness. Though we try, the call of self-centeredness is also a strong call, one that we prefer to answer more times than not.

God hears us when we cry out. This is a significant statement. It is not unfaithful to cry out to God, to lament, to complain and express our anger and hurt. God hears. Maybe you have experienced hurt and pain of human existence. You are not alone. God listens to people; few human rulers like Pharaoh listen to their people. A true God, and a true ruler, is one who cares for the people and seeks to free them from what holds them captive.

Essay Questions

In your own words, briefly answer the three questions below:

1. In Exodus, the slavery to the Egyptians becomes a metaphor in the New Testament for the Christian's slavery to sin. Explain how slavery to the Egyptians is similar to our slavery to sin.
2. Moses is far from a perfect leader, not a superhero that Hollywood would have designed. Why do you suppose that is? And was his choice effective? What does this mean for us?
3. When we read the story of Exodus in its totality we likely will come to the conclusion that the story is a mess. The Israelites are faithfulness and turn their backs on God again and again. It could

be said that this story is important for us because we are just like the Israelites. Do you agree or disagree and why?

Below are six major stories/themes included in the book of Exodus. Pick three of them, and in your own words, answer the following essay questions.

4. ***Moses***

Read Exodus 2:1 - 6:13 and in 100-150 words, summarize Moses' life up until the Exodus becomes a reality.

5. ***Ten Plagues***

Read Exodus 7:1 – 11:10 and in 100-150 words, explain the purpose of the ten plagues on Egypt.

6. ***Passover***

Read Exodus 12:1-28 and in 100-150 words, explain the institution of the Passover and why it is to be observed by Jews even today.

7. ***The Exodus***

The Read Exodus 14:1 - 17:16 and in 100-150 words explain the significance of this passage.

8. ***The Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant***

Read Exodus 25:10-22 and 26:1 - 27:21 and in 100-150 words explain the purpose of the Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant that was supposed to be kept in it.

9. ***The Golden Calf***

Read Exodus 31:18 – 32:35 and in 100-150 words explain the sin of the Israelites, what Moses made the people do, and what God said God would do because of their sin.

Email your answers back to Pastor Jesse by email at pastor@zionohio.org no later than next Sunday, October 18.