The Whole Story: Exodus

Main Theme: God reveals himself to his people and delivers them from sin and captivity.

Payoff: Reading Exodus teaches us foundational truths about God’s character—including holiness and loving-kindness—which provides framework for understanding the gospel.

Overview: Exodus continues the story begun in Genesis of God’s covenant relationship with his people Israel. The timeless stories in this book, including the crossing of the Red Sea and the Ten Commandments, are among the Bible’s best-known passages. And with good reason: God’s holiness and loving-kindness as revealed in Exodus are the bedrock for the rest of the Bible and still inspire believers today. Exodus vividly illustrates God’s faithfulness to his people and sets the stage for the coming Messiah.

Exodus breaks down into four sections:
- **Exodus 1-2**: God sets the stage for Israel’s deliverance from slavery.
- **Exodus 3-18**: God delivers Israel.
- **Exodus 19-24**: God makes a covenant with Israel at Sinai.
- **Exodus 25-40**: God dwells with Israel despite their rebellion.

Exodus features two key theological themes:

1. **The God Who Reveals**

Exodus tells the story of God introducing himself to his people. God wants his people to know him, and Israel “meets” him in different ways through each episode in the book:

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<th>Ch. 3</th>
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<td>God’s Name (I AM)</td>
<td>God’s Power (Passover)</td>
<td>God’s Standards (The Covenant)</td>
<td>God’s Character (Just and Merciful)</td>
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One overarching message emerges in all God’s revelations of himself in Exodus: he is holy. “In its simplest usage,” as one commentator writes, “the word *holy* means ‘set apart for a specific purpose,’ ‘different’ or ‘unique.’” Throughout Exodus, we see God acting intentionally to explain this foundational truth to his people. God distinguishes himself from Egypt’s oppressive rulers (1:20), false gods (8:19), and Pharaoh (14:17-18). He proves his sovereignty over the powers of nature (the plagues) and even death itself (12:29). The second half of Exodus, from God revealing himself on Sinai to the extensive tabernacle regulations, repeatedly drive home to Israel that he must be approached in awe and worship.

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Israel’s shameless idolatry in chapter 32 provides another key opportunity for God to show them his character. After Moses destroys the golden calf, he acts under God’s direction to command the deaths of everyone who had sinned. The remaining Israelites repent, and after Moses pleads on their behalf, God re-establishes his covenant with them. The passages in these chapters are heartbreaking to read, but one commentator clarifies the seeming contradictions between God’s justice and mercy:

“For Israel to worship any other god is to worship emptiness, void, nothingness. Therefore whatever measures Yahweh takes to help the Israelites or anyone else to worship the God described in the canon amount to mercy. Worshiping idols is a waste of time at best. At worst it is an insult to the one real God and a form of intellectual and spiritual self-abuse.”

2. The God Who Delivers

From Genesis 12 to Exodus 31, God acts to restore the relationship that humans destroyed in Genesis 3. Within Exodus, each chapter slowly builds up to God purchasing his people back from their sin and slavery. The opening chapters set the scene by describing a God who is personally interested in his people. He is in tune with their emotions, he hears their prayers, and he plans to keep his promises to them. Exodus makes one thing clear: God rescues his people because he loves them. He delivers them out of slavery and into a relationship with him.

The order of events in Exodus also shows that God did not demand a change of behavior from his people before he delivered them. He gave instructions for Passover not to test Israel with random rules but to teach them to see themselves as his chosen people. The covenant, including all its rules for daily living, sin offerings and tabernacle-building, did not appear until their deliverance from Egypt was complete. God delivered his people unconditionally, and Christ’s deliverance works the same for us today.

Advice for Reading: As you read Exodus, remember the entire book – from Sunday-school stories to complicated laws – tells us fundamental truths about the same God we worship today. The way God revealed himself in Exodus informed both Old and New Testament authors of the Bible, and this book was well known among the people Jesus taught during his ministry on earth. Even common phrases we sing in church today, like “Jesus in my place,” are rooted in truths found in Exodus. In fact, Jesus in John 8:58 identifies himself as “I Am,” the exact name God used for himself in Exodus 3:14. We learn so much about God and his redemption, but these stories are just the beginning. If something about God’s relationship with Israel in this book seems incomplete, you’re on the right track: the stage is being set for the arrival of the ultimate Lamb and Redeemer.

Main Application: Exodus will leave you in awe of God’s power and patience. No matter how deep your suffering, God can rescue you. No matter how often you reject him, God still wants a relationship with you.

2 “Old Testament Theology” by Paul R. House, page 121