

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Telling the Old Testament
Story of God



SESSION 5

The Exodus Event and Covenant at Mount Sinai

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The Exodus Event and Covenant at Mount Sinai

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Exodus Event

The Covenant at Mount Sinai

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

INTRODUCTION

From our look at significant elements within Genesis in the last session, we will now move on to consider two major events in Exodus. We will focus on the Exodus event, in which the children of Israel are freed from slavery in Egypt, and we will discuss the covenant God enters into with His people at Mount Sinai.

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- identify the purpose and intended messages derived from the account of the plagues in Egypt.
- appreciate the importance of God's reintroduction of himself to the people of Israel in the wilderness.
- explain how the laws of God (including the organization of the Ten Commandments) can be summed up in the directive to love God and love neighbor.
- recognize the ongoing theme of blessing all humanity in the third covenant in the Pentateuch (Sinai).

THE EXODUS EVENT



NOTES

MOSES AND HIS CALL: EXODUS 1-4

The story of the Exodus begins with the people of Israel enslaved in Egypt. Moses is born and hid among the bulrushes in the river, due to the command of Pharaoh that all sons born to the Hebrews be killed. Pharaoh did this out of fear because the Hebrew slaves were multiplying too quickly. Egyptian leadership seems to have become afraid the Hebrews could become a threat to peace and stability.

Moses is rescued by a princess in Pharaoh's family and raised by her. When he grows up, Moses is exiled in the Sinai desert for killing an Egyptian in defense of a Hebrew slave. In the desert, Moses receives God's call at the burning bush and returns to set the people free as God's agent.

At the burning bush, God reveals His plan to save Israel as well as His personal name, Yahweh. Names like Adonia and Elohim are generic words for lord and god or gods respectively, but when Moses asks who he should tell them God is, this name, Yahweh, translated "I am," is God's response. In the burning-bush encounter the theme of promise is emphasized. The promises to the patriarchs/matriarchs are recalled, along with the new promise of deliverance and a land flowing with milk and honey.

THE PLAGUES: EXODUS 5-12

This section describes the confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh. Moses is God's instrument to perform mighty wonders (the plagues) while Pharaoh hardens his heart and refuses to let the people go free.

The 10 plagues were:

- Water to blood
- Frogs
- Gnats or lice
- Insects
- Pestilence on livestock (cattle, etc., die)
- Boils
- Hail
- Locusts
- Darkness for three days
- Death of all firstborn

 **NOTES**

It has been argued that many of these plagues have natural explanations and have actually occurred on other occasions in Egypt. Such arguments are not a threat to the power and majesty of God or to the inspiration of the Bible, for at least two reasons. First, God is the Creator who controls natural events. Second, and more importantly, these plagues occur exactly when God calls for them, and they accomplish His purposes. The miracle is found in God's control of the plagues, so that they occur according to His timing and to accomplish His purposes.

One of the important purposes of the plagues is for Pharaoh and the Egyptians to know the God of Israel. "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord" (7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 16, 29; 14:4, 18). As well, God says the plagues will let Moses and his descendants know that God is the Lord (10:2).

This purpose of recognizing, fearing, and believing the Lord is explicitly fulfilled for Israel (not for Egypt, at least not with any explicit statement) as stated in Exod. 14:31. Remember that Moses, back at the burning bush encounter with God, had implied the children of Israel did not know the person of God (3:13). If someone knows you, there is no need for you to tell them your name. However, God's people did not yet know God's name.

After the great deliverance from Egypt, that dilemma has been resolved: now they know, fear, and believe the Lord. As a result of the plagues, the following messages become evident to Israel:

- God is stronger than Pharaoh and the supposed gods of Egypt.
- God is the only one, true God.
- God is Lord of creation and in control of all nature.

CROSSING OF THE RED SEA: EXODUS 13-15

This is the story of Israel fleeing into the desert. God leads the people of Israel with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Pharaoh changes his mind about freeing them, so he pursues them, and Israel becomes trapped between Pharaoh and the Red Sea.

At the Red Sea, God splits the water and the people walk through on dry ground. Pharaoh's army pursues, and the waters close on them and drown them.

Again, there are those who have argued such an event can be explained as a natural occurrence.


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Major Palmer, a 19th-century English explorer, described a similar occurrence at Lake Sirbonis near the Suez Canal:

Strong north-easterly wind, on reaching Suez, would, by its action on an ebb tide, make it abnormally low. This would prevent, at least for a time, the return of the usual flood tide. In this way a good passage across the channel might soon be laid bare and remain so for several hours. In the morning, a shift of wind to the south, probably something like a cyclone, takes place. The pent-up flood tide, now freed from restraint, and urged on by the south wind, returns to its flow.

Notice the similarity between the Suez event and the Red Sea crossing, especially in that God drove back the Red Sea with a strong wind (Exod. 14:21).

Again, however, such claims are no threat to the authority of the Scriptures or to God's power. The miracle at the Red Sea occurred right when God ordained it, and it accomplished His purpose of freeing the Israelites from the pursuit of Pharaoh and his army. God brought about the event according to His timing, to accomplish His purposes.

WILDERNESS TO SINAI: EXODUS 15-18

This section describes the journey from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai. This material includes the following incidents:

- Making the bitter waters of Marah sweet (by throwing a tree into the waters).
- The provision of manna to eat.
- The provision of quail to eat.
- Water from the rock.
- Victorious battle against Amalek (victory comes as Moses arms were held up).

Two important themes emerge from this material:

- God's constant care and provision for the children of Israel in the wilderness.
- The complaints and rebellious attitude of the children of Israel.

THE COVENANT AT MOUNT SINAI



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EXODUS 19-NUMBERS 10

Exodus 19 describes the children of Israel arriving at Mount Sinai. They are camped at Mount Sinai from this point through the rest of Exodus, through all of Leviticus, and up to Numbers 10.

Mount Sinai holds great significance in the history of God and His people. At Mount Sinai, the children of Israel are introduced to God. This group of Hebrews has been enslaved in Egypt for years. They are separated from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by many generations. During the time in Egypt, it is likely many of the Hebrews neglected their relationship with God. As a result, many in this generation likely did not know God.

That is why, Moses argued, back at the burning bush, that the people may not know God. God has delivered a new generation of Hebrews, slaves out of Egypt, some of whom do not know Him. But certainly they are coming to know Him now. Through the deliverance from Egypt, the miracles of the plagues, and the crossing of the Red Sea, this generation of Hebrews has witnessed and experienced the power and activity of God. They have gone from not knowing God's name to seeing God in action. The powerful series of plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the miraculous provisions in the wilderness (water, manna, quail, victory in war over enemy) all become revelations of God to the Hebrews.

Now, at Mount Sinai, God formally introduces himself to this new generation of Hebrews and invites them into a "covenant relationship." God begins describing himself by reminding the people of what He has done for them, and then He invites them to join Him in covenant (read Exod. 19:4-6.)

Consider the basis of this invitation to relationship with God. When someone enters into a special relationship, he or she must consider whether the relationship is worthwhile and trustworthy. God has done many things to demonstrate His intentions and trustworthiness: God's mighty acts of deliverance, salvation, and provision as described above are included. God brings His power, love, and provision to this relationship.

Consider what the children of Israel bring to this relationship. They have been helpless slaves in Egypt. They are helpless in the wilderness, crying out for food and water. They really have nothing to offer to God.

 **NOTES**

We are the same way when we come to God. We have nothing to offer that would really benefit God Almighty. What God asks of Israel is the only thing they can offer Him, themselves. God asks for obedience in a relationship of love.

This covenant relationship of love is directed by God's Law. After the people agree to accept God's invitation to a covenant relationship, He gives them the Law, which defines the way in which God wants the relationship to function.

The epitome of the many laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers can be seen in the Ten Commandments. The focus of the Ten Commandments is the love of God and love of neighbor.

This focus can be seen in the following division of the Ten Commandments:

- Commands 1-4 address relationship with God.
- Commands 5-10 address relationships among humans.

This is confirmed by Jesus' words in the New Testament. Remember, when asked what the two greatest commandments are, Jesus replied: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus went on to say, "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

Jesus' words are reflected in the Ten Commandments, which indeed focus on loving God and loving neighbor. It is important to recognize the main purpose of the covenant at Mount Sinai. It is not to allow God to oppress His people with a list of rules. The purpose seems to be to set this people aside as the called. God calls the children of Israel to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

If Israel is a nation of priests, then who are the people of the congregation? The congregation is the rest of the world. Thus, Israel is to become a model of holiness and is to spread God's love to all people. This is consistent with the previous covenant which God established with Abraham. In that covenant God told Abraham "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Blessing the whole world is still God's plan. Now He will carry it out through the people of Israel who are called to serve as a kingdom of priests.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
 - Can you identify the purpose and intended messages derived from the account of the plagues in Egypt?
 - What is the significance of God's reintroduction of himself to the people of Israel in the wilderness?
 - Explain how the laws of God (including the organization of the Ten Commandments) can be summed up in the directive to love God and love neighbor?
 - Do you recognize the ongoing theme of blessing all humanity, within the third covenant in the Pentateuch (Sinai)?
2. Read through the account of the 10 plagues on Egypt (Exod. 7:14-12:32). List each plague. Also, notice the wording of the phrase, "Pharaoh's heart was hardened." For each plague, record who or what hardened Pharaoh's heart.
3. Explain the differences in regard to whom or what hardens Pharaoh's heart in each case.
4. List the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20. Organize the list into categories by grouping the commandments according to whatever patterns or relationships you determine.
5. Journal your reflections and insights from this session and from your reading and study. Include a discussion on:
 - How blessing the whole world through those who are called to serve as a kingdom of priests is still God's plan.
 - What part are you playing in that plan?

EXAM



NOTES

1. The story of the Exodus begins with the people of Israel enslaved in Egypt.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. At the burning bush, God reveals His plan to save Israel as well as His personal name:
 - A. Jehovah-Jireh
 - B. Yahweh
 - C. Adonai
 - D. Elohim
3. In the burning bush encounter, which theme is emphasized?
 - A. Land
 - B. Promise
 - C. Children
 - D. Bigger homes
4. It has been argued that many of the plagues have natural explanations and have actually occurred on other occasions in Egypt.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. According to this session, the miracle of the plagues is _____.
 - A. All of them have natural explanations
 - B. None of them have natural explanations
 - C. God's control of the plagues, so that they occur according to His timing and to accomplish His purposes
 - D. None of the plagues could have happened on their own
6. As a result of the plagues, the Israelites learn three lessons. Which of the following is NOT a lesson learned from the plagues?
 - A. God is stronger than Pharaoh and the supposed gods of Egypt
 - B. God is the only one, true God
 - C. God is Lord of creation and in control of all nature
 - D. God performs acts that nature could never duplicate

**NOTES**

7. It is not a threat that some of the plagues seem to have been duplicated in nature, because _____.
 - A. God is the Creator who controls natural events themselves
 - B. These plagues occur exactly when God calls for them, and they accomplish His purposes
 - C. Both A and B are true
 - D. Neither A nor B are true

8. At Mount Sinai, the children of Israel are introduced to God.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. Mount Sinai is the place at which God invites the children of Israel to join into a covenant relationship.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. The complaints and rebellious attitude of the children of Israel become evident as God's people move from the wilderness to Sinai.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Jesus' words are reflected in the Ten Commandments, which focus on loving God and loving neighbor.
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. God's calling of Israel to the priesthood is a fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Why would God have to reintroduce himself to the people of Israel once they were freed from Egyptian rule and in the desert? What had happened previously to make this necessary?
2. What is the name God gives Moses by which Moses will introduce God to His people? What is its meaning and significance?
3. What is the common name for the covenant at Sinai?
4. Jesus says that the two greatest commandments are to love God and one's neighbor as oneself. How might the Ten Commandments be summed up in these two commands?
5. How does God's desire to bless all people continue in the new covenant at Sinai? Can you explain how the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and now God's people at Sinai are linked?