

Bible Study Material

St. John's Anglican Church Highton

Term 3, 2009

Exodus (1-20)

Let my people go!

9 Studies in the book of Exodus

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These 9 studies have been written to marry the teaching series of term 3, 2009 at St. John's Anglican Church Highton.

Purpose

These studies are intended to be used as a helpful "resource" for our small groups and their leaders. Though they could be followed through as they are, they are certainly not written so as to be slavishly adhered to. Indeed, in the case of these studies, the passages are so long you will probably have to be a little selective.

7	No adultery	
8	No theft	
9	No false testimony	
10	No coveting	

- 4) Can you see any patterns / groupings to these commandments? What do you make of such observations?
- 5) Are there any commandments which you find difficult to understand and/or apply? Why do you think? What do you do about this?
- 6) Are you able to understand the reaction of the people in verses 18-19? What bit might have scared you off the most? Why do you think the people reacted the way they did?
- 7) What is Moses' logic in verse 20? How does this help you to understand 'the fear of the Lord'?

Application

How do you respond to the imposition of laws upon you? In what sense can it be a blessing? And in what sense a curse?

What directs your response to God's salvation of you?

What would you expect from a society which took these commandments to heart? What would they gain? What might they still lack?

If you could bring about a return to theocracy (a state like Israel was whose laws were the laws of God), would you? Why? Why not?

Exodus 20:1-21 – Loving by law

Starter – As a Christian living under a new covenant (“and not under law, but under grace”) – how do you relate to the law as given here? What place does the law serve in your Christian life and experience?

OR

If you were asked to recite the 10 Commandments, do you think you could do it? Where might you stumble? How do you account for your familiarity with them or otherwise?

* * *

Read Exodus 20:1-21

- 1) What is the significance of the very first verse of this chapter in your mind?
- 2) How significant in your mind is the preamble given in verse 2? And what is the significance of this statement and its position?
- 3) Often with law, we find it easier to stick to the letter of the law, rather than adhere to the spirit of it. Jesus expounded some parts of the law in his teaching. How adept do you feel at unpacking the spirit (full significance of these laws?

Number	Letter	Spirit
1	No other gods	
2	No idols	
3	No blasphemy	
4	Keep Sabbath	
5	Honour parents	
6	No murder	

Each study includes a ‘starter’ which is aimed at initiating some general discussion around a broad topic and also serves to introduce one of the key themes of the passage.

Additionally, all of the studies include some direction as to possible avenues for application of the teaching of the text to everyday Christian living.

The bulk of the material involves observation and interpretation of the texts at hand.

The imagined context for these studies is a small group (somewhere between 6 and 15) dedicating somewhere between 40 and 60 minutes to Bible study. Obviously, variations and adaptations should be made according to the setting and use to which these studies are put.

Introduction to the book of Exodus

The name Exodus means literally ‘departure’. It perfectly captures the central concern of the book – the Israelites’ deliverance from the land of Egypt.

The promises the Lord had made to the patriarchs were in need of new expression and fresh application to implement them. The people had steadily been multiplying, but were slaves in hard bondage, and groaned under their conditions. The Lord heard their cry and the book of Exodus chronicles his gracious and faithful response.

In the book of Exodus we see a new and greater revelation of the Lord, a mediator in the person of Moses, the Lord’s mighty arm outstretched in judgment and salvation, a new covenant made and new mode of presence in the tabernacle. In many ways, Exodus is the Gospel of the Old Testament – the book which records the great saving work of the Lord by which the people of God are born.

We look back to it through the lens of the gospel and see in it the foreshadowing of Christ. His death was the true exodus (see, Luke 9:31). Nowhere else, neither before nor since, has the mighty arm of God been laid bare both in judgment and in salvation. Jesus is the one true mediator between God and man, who by his death brought about a new and everlasting covenant, and instituted a new mode of God's presence with his people by the Holy Spirit.

As we read our way through the first half of this great book, I pray that you will see more clearly and appreciate more dearly Christ Jesus, our Saviour and Lord – and be better able to live for him!

Recommended Reading

Here are a couple of suggestions for further reading should you be inclined. If you are after other or more specific recommendations regarding secondary literature on this letter – please contact Will (will@stjohnshighon.org.au).

General

Old Testament Survey: The message, form and background of the Old Testament [2nd Ed.] ed. by William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederick William Bush (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1982, 1996)

New Bible Dictionary [2nd Ed.] (IVP: Leicester, England; 1982)

Commentary

Exodus [Tyndale] Alan Cole (IVP: Leicester, London; 1973)

G

Exodus [Interpretation] Terence E Fretheim (John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky; 1991) **T**

G – general commentary with easy accessibility and uncomplicated pastoral concern

T – more technical commentary with more academic discussion of original / Hebrew and history / background etc

Application

These very terms are taken up by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2 to describe the Christian person. How do you understand your status / position from them? And how do you understand your role?

In what sense is your experience of God and your standing before him different from those at Sinai? And in what sense is it the same?

How do you think about God's holiness? And how does this affect the way you relate to him?

Exodus 19:1-25 – Called into covenant

Starter – Is the God you worship transcendent (distant and remote) or immanent (near and accessible)? How do you think about this? How does it affect the way you relate to him?

* * *

Read Exodus 19:1-25

vv.1-15

- 1) As you read through the preparations in vv.1-15, what strikes you about the instructions that are given?
- 2) What do you expect is going to happen? And what is the purpose of this?
- 3) Why is such care to be taken? And what does this say to you?
- 4) What do you understand by the term ‘covenant’ (v.5)? What picture is painted of this relationship here?

vv.16-25

- 5) How does the description of this event impact you? Would you like to have been there? Why? Why not?
- 6) The people seem a strange mix between potentially forcing their way through / up (v.24), and wanting to retreat (see, 20:19). What might make them (want to) do either? Which one of those options would have been most tempting to you, do you think?
- 7) What lesson(s) do you think the people had to learn from this encounter?

Exodus 1-2 – Moses: the man of the many

Starter – In an ever-changing world, it can be very hard to feel settled. How do you tend to react when something (or a series of things) unsettling happens to you?

* * *

Read Exodus 1:1-22

- 1) The introduction to this book (vv.1-7) immediately taps into a rich history. How well do you know it? How does such an initial orientation shape the way you will approach what follows? What expectations does it generate?
- 2) From verse 8 the story proper is underway. What sets this new king apart and accounts for his brutality?
- 3) The new king both recognises the Israelites as a threat and himself represents one to them. What do you make of his foreign/domestic policy, juggling two peoples?
- 4) The king makes three royal decrees. What do you think they reveal about him?

Decree	Audience	Content	Outcome
vv.8-10			
vv.15-16			
v.22			

- 5) What sets the Hebrew midwives apart and accounts for their heroism?

What is the ‘fear of the Lord’?

Do you have it? How would you / others know?

- 6) A fair bit has happened between Joseph’s arrival in Egypt and the birth of Moses. How would you describe the situation of the Israelites (the descendants of Jacob/Israel) as we find them in this first chapter?

Read Exodus 2:1-10

- 7) The plight of the Israelites finds a parallel in the plight of Moses (indeed, the two are intertwined). The tale of Moses’ birth is fraught with irony. How many instances of irony can you find? What do you think is the significance of all this irony?
- 8) How does this beautiful story:
- i) comment on the king?
 - ii) raise expectations for Moses?
 - iii) reveal something of the writer’s theological convictions?

Read Exodus 2:11-22

- 9) Here Moses gets active: he ‘sees’ (v.11); he ‘strikes’ (v.12); and he ‘saves’ (v.17). Complete the table (below) of Moses’ activity. What picture of Moses emerges from it?

Action	Injustice	Victim	Oppressor
2:11			
2:13			
2:17			

Read Exodus 2:23-25

	Instruction	Obedience/Disobedience
vv.16-18		
vv.19-20		
vv.21-30		

Read 17:1-7

- 9) There is a tension going on in this passage about who is ‘testing’ whom (see, the end of v.2)? What do you make of this?
- 10) Again, what do you learn about the Lord from the way in which he responds to this latest development (compare Moses’ response – v.4)?

Application

What did living by faith look like and involve for the Israelites (see especially 15:25-26)?

In what situations have you felt your capacity to live by faith being tested? How did you / do you tend to respond?

In what sense can we respond by putting the Lord to the test? (clue: see the example of Jesus’ own temptation / testing in Matthew/Luke 4)

What is the opposite of ‘grumbling’? How easy do you find it to fall into a bout of grumbling? How can that be addressed do you think?

Exodus 15:22-18:27 – Living by faith

Starter – Which aspects of the life of faith, do you struggle with the most? Which lessons do you / have you found hardest to learn? Why do you think?

* * *

Read Exodus 15:22-27

- 1) How do you respond to this new twist in the storyline? To what extent is the people's concern valid and legitimate?
- 2) How does Moses' response (v.25) and the Lord's response (vv.25-26) affect the way you view this episode?
- 3) How do you feel towards:
 - i) the people?
 - ii) Moses?
 - iii) the Lord?

Read 16:1-36

- 4) Here we find the people 'grumbling' again. How would you paraphrase their logic?
- 5) Again, what do you learn about the Lord (& about Moses & Aaron) from the response (vv.4ff)?
- 6) Why would Moses object to their grumbling against him & Aaron?
- 7) What point does God feel obliged to demonstrate again for them (v.11)? (What does this indicate about their grumbling?)
- 8) How do the people fare in their 'testing'?

10) How does this little section serve as a conclusion?

11) By the end of this "long period", one of the major players has died. But only now (excusing 1:20!!) do we hear of the Lord's activity (vv.24-25). What does He make of all this? What picture of the Lord emerges from this? What is he like? What motivates him? etc

Application

As a Christian have you ever felt something akin to the Israelites – an underclass of threat – distrusted, maltreated, even feared? How do you react to this?

The heroism of the Hebrew midwives contains a certain challenge for us too. In what situations are you called to demonstrate a similar radical bravery to that of Shiphrah and Puah?

What makes 'fearing God' difficult? What can help cultivate this?

There is a beautiful irony to God's salvation (compare the birth of Jesus, or the death of Jesus,..). Have you appreciated this irony? What lessons does it have to teach us (about God, about our/his opponents, etc)?

The question of 'where is God in all of this?' and 'what is he up to in it?' is one few of us escape asking at some point or other. Is this a question you have been forced to ask? How do you answer it? Where do you turn?

Exodus 3-4 – Moses: the man in the middle

Starter – Which part of the Christian’s calling scares you the most? Why? How are you most likely to respond to this?

Read Exodus 3:1-6

- 1) In what sense is this little episode a model of God’s self-revelation?
What do you think are the key elements of it?

Read 3:7-10

- 2) What is the nature of Moses’ calling?
What do you make of the interplay between vv.8 & 10?
How do you think Moses would have felt listening to this?
How would you have?

Read 3:11-4:17

- 3) Fill in the table to explore Moses’ reaction.

Interchanges	Moses’ Objection	God’s Response
3:11ff		
3:13ff		
4:1ff		
4:10ff		
4:13		

- 6) What response might you expect from people who had been rescued in such a miraculous way? What (in summary) is the content of their song?

Application

To what extent do you see God’s people now as ‘an army’?
How might this affect the way you think about them/us? How might it affect what we’re on about, and what we do?

To what extent do you see yourself to be the recipient of sheer grace and miraculous rescue? How do you reconcile the faith that stands still to watch on passively with the faith that is active in will and work?

How important do you think ‘singing’ is in the Christian life?
In what sense could your whole life be considered one of praise to God for his glorious grace?

Exodus 13:17-15:21 – To the praise of his glory

Starter – What feelings do you associate with being rescued?
To what extent does it depend upon how badly in need of rescue you were?

OR

How do you celebrate victories and triumphs in life (exams passed, games / contests won, milestones reached, etc)?

Read Exodus 13:17-14:31

- 1) Why do you think the people are organised and portrayed as an army “armed for battle”?
Which comments might undermine your confidence in this army & which might bolster it?
- 2) In verse 6 we get a glimpse of another ‘army’. How do they compare in your mind?
- 3) In verse 10 the Israelites themselves get a glimpse of that army – how do they respond?
What do you make of their ‘cry of terror’?
And what do you make of their reasoning to Moses?
- 4) What exactly is Moses’ direction to the people? How do you understand Moses’ response? What comfort is there in it? What options did they have / must have raced through their minds?

overall

- 5) God had one clear purpose in all of this. What was it? Did he achieve it? How important was the *means* by which he achieved this end to the whole process?

Read 15:1-21

- 4) How do you feel:
 - i) About Moses?
 - ii) About the Lord?
 - iii) About Moses’ objections & the Lord’s responses?

Read 4:18-31

- 5) This passage contains some very “interesting” preliminaries to Moses’ mission, but notice especially the response of all the elders at the very end (vv.29-31). What does this passage have to teach us about the appropriate response to the Lord’s word and his concern?

Application

How do you understand the process by which God makes himself known to people? How do you see God do it in the Bible? What for you are the key ingredients in it?
How does this compare with your experience?

In what sense do you understand yourself to have been ‘called’ by God? And how do you understand the nature of this calling? Which tasks are most likely to shirk?

Have you experienced raising the same objections (or similar to) as Moses? Doubted your competence? Questioned others’ responsiveness? How do you handle / deal with these things?

Where do you see / experience the Lord’s concern for you?
What response is it most likely to generate?

Exodus 5:1-6:27 – Moses: making matters worse

Starter – Would you expect responding faithfully to God’s call to make life better or worse for you? Easier or harder?

Why? In what ways?

What has your experience been?

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Read Exodus 5:1-6:12

Here we see Moses’ mission launched.

- 1) What do you make of the initial interaction between Moses & Aaron and Pharaoh (vv.1-6)? What does it reveal about the respective logics they are working with? How might this serve as a model for evangelism / apologetics today? How not?
- 2) What do you make of Pharaoh’s response (vv.6-14)? How does he view religion do you think?
- 3) What do you make of the people’s response (vv.15-21 – compare 6:9)? What does this reveal about their psyche?
- 4) What do you make of Moses’ response (vv.22-23)? How do you feel about his question, language and tone? Can you relate to Moses in his frustration at this point?
- 5) What do you make of the Lord’s response (6:1-12)? What does his response reveal about him? What do you make of all the ‘covenant’ language (vv.2-8)?

Read Exodus 6:13-27

- 6) The Bible (Old Testament and New) loves a genealogy. What role do you think they serve?

- 4) What do you make of Pharaoh’s (& the rest of the Egyptians’) response (vv.31-36)? What is the difference between repentance and remorse (compare 2 Corinthians 7:10)?
- 5) What picture do we see in this episode of the salvation of God (vv.37-39)?
- 6) What point is returned to in the concluding section with the greatest weight (vv.40-42)?

Read 12:43-13:17

- 7) The further instructions contain an interesting blend of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ (see vv. 43-51). How do you understand this? (especially considering 12:38)
- 8) There is a great burden laid on clarity of purpose (see, v.3, v.8, v.9, v.14, v.15 & v.16). How does this sit with you?

Application

Why do we not celebrate Passover any more?

What traditions / ceremonies do we have? And what do they enshrine? How well do they work for you? What is important to you in them?

Are our ceremonies appropriately inclusive and/or appropriately exclusive? How do you maintain the balance here?

How clear do you think we are on the purpose of our ceremonies?

How well are we passing on our traditions (both the ceremonies and the teaching/purpose) to the next generation? What do you think our legacy will be? Why? What can be done about this?

Exodus 12:1-13:16 – The meaning of a meal

Starter – How do you keep important memories alive? Why would you do it / try to? What happens when they get lost?

OR

How do you feel about ‘ceremony’ in life / religion? What are the pro’s? And what are the con’s?

* * *

Read Exodus 12:1-28

- 1) So significant is what is about to happen, that it will be calendar defining (see vv.2ff.). What do you make of this? What does this reveal about the nature of the significance of these events?
- 2) There is a very long and detailed list of instructions which accompany this meal. What do you make of the significance of all these features?

Detail	Instruction	Significance
vv.3-4	Portions & proportion	
vv.5-6	Animals for sacrifice	
v.7 (& vv.22-23)	Sprinkling of blood	
v.8, v.15 & vv.17-20		(see, v.39)
vv.8-11	Manner of eating	

Read 12:29-42

- 3) What lesson is there in this episode about the judgment of God (vv.29-30)?

Application

To what extent have you felt the frustration Moses vents in vv.22-23 in your own Christian life in general or in respect to some ministry venture you have been engaged in? How do / did you handle this?

What do you think is most likely to help you / enable you to persevere?

There is an obvious disconnect at v.2, isn't there? Moses and Aaron come with a message from the Lord, but Pharaoh does not recognise their God. Have you met with just such a scenario? How did / would you handle it?

We too live with and relate to the covenant God of chapter 6 – under a better covenant with a greater revelation than that of the fathers (v.4) and also than that of Sinai – compare 2 Corinthians 3 & Hebrews 8. What do you understand to be the salient features of the New Covenant?

Exodus 6:28-11:10 – The ministry of a message

Starter – What do you think holds the greatest power to bring people to a knowledge of God, and to conviction concerning him? What are the options you would consider? How would you justify your response?

* * *

Read Exodus 6:28-7:7

- 7) Clearly Moses is still wrestling with the monumental nature of his task (see, 7:1). How is the Lord's response (vv.1-7) a solution? How does it explain the dynamics at work? And what are you expecting from it?
- 8) What is hardness of heart? How does it manifest itself according to 7:3-4?

Read 7:8-13

- 9) What do you make of this opening interchange?
How has all that the Lord has said previously prepare you for this?
How does the 'swallowing up' affect the conclusions you draw about this?
How does the outcome in Pharaoh's hardness of heart and refusal to listen affect the way you think about this?

Read 7:14-11:10

- 10) What follows is a long series of "miraculous signs and wonders" (7:3) which are also "mighty acts of judgment" (7:4). Can you identify any pattern(s) here?
- 11) What contribution does these plague episodes make:
 - i) to the plot of the story?
 - ii) to the characterisation of Pharaoh?

- 12) At some points we are told that the Lord hardens Pharaoh's heart (7:3, 9:12). At other points that Pharaoh hardened his heart (8:15, 8:32). Still others, we read simply that his heart hardened (7:13, 7:22). How do you make sense of all this?

Application

How does this passage affect the way that you think about the phrase a 'hard heart'? What does that look like from God's perspective?

What is the solution to hardness of heart? How would you spot it in yourself? And what can be done about it? When you confront it in others, what can you do / what can be done?

How does this passage affect the way you think about 'signs and wonders'?

How does this passage affect the way you think about 'suffering'?

Something clearly very complex is going on here - particularly in terms of the 'agency' question, and who does what in the process of a heart being hardened. How does your understanding of all this affect the way you think that mission / evangelism should be conducted?