

Introduction to the Book of Exodus

An unsolved mystery.

Jacob was sent down to Egypt to see his son Joseph and was promised that God would make him the father of a great nation and God would bring him and his family back to Canaan (Gen. 64:1-4.). Why did they end up ill-treated by the Egyptian leaders being treated like slaves? Why did it take 400 years for the nation to be able to return to Canaan? None of these compelling questions are answered.

Motyer summarises, 'This is the mystery of divine government of history, whether it be on a national, domestic or individual level: the great and loving God is in control, and because he is truly sovereign he works out his purposes in his way, not ours (Is. 55:8). He grants no explanations, but grants his people sufficient insight into his ways, his character, his intentions and his changeless faithfulness so that, however dark the day, they can live by faith and be sustained by hope' (Comm. 19).

Themes in Exodus - Covenant.

The concept of covenant spans Genesis and Exodus. The covenant ('promise') relationship set up by God is solely dependent on his gracious love. Abraham's life of fellowship with God (Gen 17) is a response of obedience to the covenant God established (Gen 15). Exodus opens (chapter 1) with the description of the terrible plight of the Hebrews in Egypt and moves to a cry for help to God a prayer which he answers. Their increase is a sign of God's blessing in fulfilment of the creation call (Gen. 1:28). During this long and painful time in Egypt the Hebrews had not forgotten God so when Moses came with a message from the God of their forefathers (3:13-14) they knew this God.

Themes in Exodus - The divine name.

There are many titles for God in the OT but only one personal name YHWH (with vowels added to vocalise as Yahweh). The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was now revealing more of who he was in preparation for rescuing his people and forming them as a people ready to occupy the promised land. To declare to Moses that 'I am who I am, is to announce God's 'is-ness'. In every place, time and circumstances God 'is', always was and always will be ever present. The old hymn rightly expresses this in the line, 'God is here and that to bless us. Moses is to reassure the Hebrew people that God has not forgotten them, he **is** with them and **will** be with them and will bring them 'out of Egypt' (3:7-12). To experience and enjoy God's presence the people are called to respond in obedience to God. God (Yahweh) is the one who will redeem them (6:6), give the Law (20:2) and will indwell his people in the tabernacle (39:46).

Themes in Exodus - the blood of the lamb and the NT links.

The Lord (Yahweh) is at the centre of the Passover. The Passover is His Passover, He is the redeemer, deliverer and law giver. The Exodus account 'binds into one the covenant-working God, the fresh focus on his name and the blood of the Passover Lamb, whose death is seen in propitiatory [God turning away his anger] and substitutionary [in the place of another] terms' (Motyer, Comm. 21).

In the NT (Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22) Jesus' baptism introduces the revelation of the unity and plurality of God as Trinity. In John 1 we see the link between the baptism of Jesus and him being described as the 'lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. So, Yahweh is the personal name of the Triune God foreshadowed in the OT and revealed in the NT. Likewise the Passover lamb is Jesus, the Son of God (see the links made by Jesus at the Passover meal, Mt. 26:26-29).

Themes in Exodus – the two sons of God.

Through Moses God declares Israel as 'my firstborn son' (4:22). At the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew God declares that Jesus is 'my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased' (Mt. 1:1, 16, 3:17). Jesus like the Israelites in Exodus was threatened by contemporary powers, experienced suffering and rejection and made the journey into and out of Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15, and 4:1-11). Exodus tells of the story of the son of God who stands in need of salvation; Matthew tells of the Son of God who brings salvation.

The shape of Exodus (following Motyer's outline, 24).

Part 1. Israel in Egypt: God as Saviour (1:1-13:16)

- a. The Lord's hidden providence (1:1-2:22)
- b. Yahweh [the Lord] revealed (2:22-6:13)
- c. The Saving Lord (6:14-13:16)

Part 2. Israel at Sinai: God as Companion (13:17-24:11)

- a. The Lord's public providence (13:17-17:16)
- b. Yahweh revealed (18:1-23:33)
- c. The covenant Lord (24:1-11)

Part 3. Israel around the tabernacle: God as Indweller (24:12-40:38)

- a. The Lord's provision (24:12-31:18)
- b. Yahweh revealed (32:1-34:35)
- c. The indwelling Lord (35:1-40:38)

At the heart of Exodus is God's grace and law (19-24) which is bracketed by His saving work, his companionship in spite of His people's unfaithfulness and His final indwelling in the tabernacle. [Notes from Motyer, Comm. The Message of Exodus].

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