

Entering “Exodus”

⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

⁸ I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.’ ”¹

Exodus 6:6-8

If there is one foundational book, upon which everything else in the world is grounded, it has to be the Pentateuch. Pentateuch comes from two Greek (and Latin) words (*penta-* + *teuchos*) meaning “Five books.” Normally we think of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy as five *separate* books. But when Moses penned them, in his mind they were to be viewed as interconnected Parts of one large work. If for no other reason than that this is the foundation of everything else, we have before us an extremely important document to study, understand, and apply.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 6:6–8.

The Pentateuch is organized as followed. You have the Book of Origins (**Genesis**) consisting of 10 sections, each marked out by the phrase “these are the generations of . . .” Genesis tells us about the generations (or “account” or “history”) of the **heavens and the earth** (**Gen 1:1-2:4**); the generations of **Adam**—the first man (**5:1ff**), the generations of **Noah**—the first man of the post-flood world (**6:9ff**), of **the nations** (**10:1ff**), of **Shem**, the son of Noah and ancestor of Abraham (**11:10ff**), of **Terah**, Abram’s father (**11:27ff**), of **Ishmael** (**25:12ff**), of **Isaac** (**25:19ff**), of **Esau** (**36:1ff**), and of **Jacob** (**37:2**). As you can see from this list, Genesis narrows its focus like a magnifying glass narrows the sun’s energy into a searing hot beam of light. The intention of Genesis is, therefore, to teach us about the origin of God’s chosen people.²

Exodus is literally a “road-out,” from two Greek words *ex-* + *hodos*. Everyone knows that an exodus is a mass departure from one place to another. But the book of

² One might refer to the chosen people here as “Israel.” But to prevent us from thinking that by “Israel” we mean a nationality, strictly speaking, rather than the spiritual reality (i.e. Gal 6:16), I have kept the term “chosen people,” so as to be more inclusive to modern ears. I believe this explains why Moses did not begin Genesis with Abraham or Jacob, but with Adam, the first elect/chosen man, from whom all elect people (including the nation of Israel corporately speaking) proceeds.

Exodus is a miraculous mass departure of Jacob's children from the **land** of slavery in Egypt to the **land** of Sinai in the wilderness. Or I might put it another way, it is from the **house** of slavery to the **house** of God's dwelling place in the midst of his people (be that at Sinai or in the pillars of cloud and fire, or in the tabernacle).

Very briefly, **Leviticus** teaches Israel about the Laws that they—and especially the priests and Levites—must obey if they are to enter the Promised Land. **Numbers** chronicles the forty years of wandering in the wilderness because of the unfaithfulness of the people. **Deuteronomy** (Lit. second law) is a covenant treaty document that teaches a new generation that would enter the Promised Land all about God's faithfulness by recounting their journeys and the laws that were given in the previous three books (Ex, Lev, and Num).

I have decided that I want to take you through the fantastical journey of the Exodus. Thus, today's sermon is going to be an introduction to Exodus by looking at the passage that more than any other describes the thesis of the

book: **Ex 6:6-8**. I want to give you this introduction in order to provide a birds-eye view of the book, prior to getting into a detailed verse-by-verse study. **Why?** Because you need to see that this book is much, much more than a fun story followed by a bunch of boring laws (which is probably how many people view the book).³ This is a book **about God**, about **miracles**, **freedom**, **disobedience**, **submission**, **order**, **obedience**, **covenant**, **election**, **grace**, **relationship** with the LORD, especially including the means whereby you come to know him. And so it is about God's limited presence, the word, and the sacraments and how the LORD uses those to come near to his people.

Perhaps the most practical matter is one that I am greatly concerned with in our day. It is the idea of a **destination**. Exodus is not just leaving a place. It is about heading towards a new place. But today, it is becoming increasingly popular for Christians to think about traveling instead of the destination. We are a nation of

³ I often say that when reading through the Bible in a year, most people get bogged down in Leviticus, never to finish their task. But it is probably more correct to say that come ch. 21 of Exodus, the tediousness of the Law in Leviticus makes itself plain, so that a lot of people probably end up getting stuck in their reading before ever making it to Leviticus.

tourists and consumers. It's no wonder. So, churches are being named "Pathways," "The Journey," and "The Odyssey," and I for the life of me don't understand it.

You know, I recently went to Israel. I like to be a tourist (at the appropriate time). But I loved the *destination*. It was the airplane and the airport I could live without. Likewise, when Israel went into the wilderness, they were supposed to receive the Law and then head fairly quickly to the Promised Land. But they complained, grumbled, and rebelled. So God *punished* them by forcing them to wander in a wilderness for 40 years. Their journey wasn't a blessing (though of course God used it for the good of those who would enter the land). It was a curse. But God continued to hold out the destination so that they might yearn for milk and honey, not so they would settle for the wasteland. I understand wanting to live faithfully in the wilderness. We are called to do that. I understand wanting to learn contentment. But I also understand that both of these come by *looking towards the goal*, not by continually looking at your dirty feet that walk along

dusty hot paths. When you do that, all you will think about is Egypt's leeks and melons.

Thus, Exodus is a multifaceted book, capable of teaching us about a great many things. Moses gets at this in chapter 6. Jehovah said to Moses, “Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD’” (Ex 6:6-8).

Let's look at this passage now. It begins with the LORD telling Moses to **speak to the people**. “Say therefore to the people of Israel.” This introduces two major themes of the book. One is the idea of **mediation**; the other, **representation**. Mediation is where one person stands

between two people or parties. He acts as an intercessor, a go-between. The Levitical and Aaronic priesthood will become prominent later in the book. But here, in the person of Moses, it is more the idea of representation. Moses was God's chosen vessel to represent himself to God. He is referred to in other places as God's prophet. It was Moses who had the personal connection to and interaction with God, not Israel.⁴ This brings up the theme of [election](#), which I will come to shortly.

We might say that the priest represents the people to God, while the prophet represents God to the people. But here is the important thing. The people are [never allowed to have direct contact with the LORD God](#). They may only approach him through a mediator, and God may only approach them through a representative. This presents some trouble for the people who long to look upon his holiness, to gaze into his face, in order to hear his “still small voice.” They very much need to start reading their Bibles.

⁴ Douglas Stuart, Exodus, *NAC*, p. 36.

In Exodus, mediation of God's presence causes people to rebel (sounds familiar), because, well, Moses isn't exactly God. There **just isn't that moving experience** that they think that there should be when Moses talks. I mean, he even calls himself a stutterer. Then, there is a growing concern that **Moses is just promoting himself**. How are they to know that God has really called *him* (after enough miracles, the people become used to them, and think that anyone can reproduce them). Then, it seems as if **Moses is becoming a tyrant**, demanding all sorts of things from the people that no one in Egypt ever demanded (as if). Maybe God isn't speaking to Moses at all, and the Law is just his way of keeping the power to himself. All of this and more is a direct result of Moses being God's representative.

Yet, if God had chosen to speak directly to the people, we learn in the book that God would actually break out *against* them, for they are not a holy, but a stiff-necked people that refuse to do what they are told. So, **the representative actually protects the people from God**. Do you ever think that you need protection from God? They didn't either. They were too used to gods of gold

that couldn't move or talk. They may look at all of this negatively, but it is actually for their benefit that God has Moses speak to the people.

The first thing God tells Moses to tell the people is “**I am the LORD.**” This shows us God's name, but more so, his **covenantal** name. It also shows us that God is a **personal** God, a Being that interacts with his creation. It shows that God is a **relational** God. He has a friendship with Moses, and he is about ready to show all of these things and bring them to bear in the most fantastic demonstration of power and love in world history: the Exodus of Abraham's children from slavery.

So what does the LORD want to say to the people? “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.” Here Moses tells us about freedom, liberty, deliverance, and redemption. These are the great buzz-words of Democracy. They play well in political speeches, in war-speeches, and in movies. They

strike a deep chord in humanity, because **we long to be free.**

Israel, of course, has been in slavery for hundreds of years, since the time that a new Pharaoh came along that did not know about Joseph and the good things he had done for Egypt. And it was an act of God's love for them, that he told them that he would deliver them from their enemy. He has heard their cries and pleas, and now he is about ready to perform mighty acts, never before seen.

This tells us that **slavery of one people under the thumb of another is not an ideal** that God somehow delights in. He does not command it. He does not sanction it. Indeed, as one commentator observes, **“The treat of bondage to a hostile great power is one of the curses of the Old Testament.”**⁵ And so, our own Founding Fathers were right to say that the natural order of things is freedom rather than slavery. They did not want to be under the yoke of Britain, any more than any group of people wants to be under the yoke of another group. Unfortunately, they did not carry their ideals out perfectly, as the history

⁵ Stuart, 20.

of the black man and to a different extent the red man has shown.

Yet, there is something in Exodus that even many of our Founding Fathers did not seem to want to pick up on. Today, it would be even less appreciated than back then. For, **Exodus does not stop with mere freedom**, as if God were releasing the people to begin a democracy. Rather, God continues, **“I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.”**

You see, God sets Israel free from Egypt **so that they may become his treasured possession**. To put it another way, deliverance of a people from submission to their oppressors to submission to God constitutes the great theme of the book. Exodus is not about pure freedom, but the **freedom to serve God**. It is about rescue from human bondage and sin’s bondage to slavery to the LORD. First they serve Pharaoh; then they are to serve God.

Honestly, this is one of the great lessons for God’s people no matter if they be national Israel or the NT Church. It is

as Paul tells the Roman Christians drawing directly from the ideas of Exodus, “you have been set free from sin, and have become slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:18). You have “become slaves of God” (Rom 6:22). “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. . . Therefore, serve one another in love” (Gal 5:1, 13). This is why Paul almost always introduces himself in his letters as a “slave” (*doulos*) of God. In this way, the book of Exodus actually stands at the beginning of our own Christian experience.

This is not exactly what people today want to hear. They think that the best form of freedom is to be ruled by nobody but themselves. To put it in civic terms, they don't even want democracy. They want anarchy. Pure rebellion. What they do not realize is that if they are not ruled by God or by other people, then they are ruled by their own sinful passions and desires. **Everyone is a slave to something.** There is no such thing as a free person in the absolute sense. The biblical point of view is that the best master you could ever have is God, because he alone knows what is best for you, what will make your life coherent, content, and complete.

It is the getting out of slavery to Egypt that makes up the first half of the book. It is coming under God's rule that is the theme introduced in the second half. We can think about this by looking at the rest of our passage today and thinking about its implications. When God takes his people and becomes their God: 1) Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, 2) Who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 3) I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. 4) I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.”

What do we see as we complete the passage? We see that what God gives us is 1. True knowledge. 2. True (but not absolute) freedom. 3. A covenantal relationship in which that freedom is able to thrive. 4. A future hope.

First, then, is true knowledge of God. You know, Solomon wrote that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov 9:10). He wrote that “The fear of the

LORD is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7). What does this mean? It means, to put it bluntly, that if you do not fear the LORD, you do not *know* anything at all.

Let us put this matter in a religious arena. I would submit that everyone on earth (who can think and communicate) claims to “know” the truth about “God.” Some claim that they know that there is no god. Others claim that they know that Allah is god. Others, that there is a pantheon of gods. Still others, trying to refuse such a dogmatic stance, nevertheless claim that they know with absolute certainty that no one can know such a thing with absolute certainty. In other words, even the agnostic—who tries to come off as open-minded—nevertheless claims to know the truth about God. They know the truth about God that no one can know the truth about God.

But Romans tells us that everyone has a properly basic belief in God.⁶ “Although they *knew* God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him” (Rom 1:21).

⁶ Alvin Plantinga defines a basic belief as one that is “self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses.” In Dewey J. Hoitenga, Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga, p. 182. He puts belief in God in this category.

How did they know God? By his **invisible attributes**, namely, his **eternal power** and **divine nature** which are perceived through the senses in the things that have been made (**vs. 20**). **But what did they do?** They exchanged the **truth about God for a lie**, and thus bow down to sticks and stones, or more properly, they bow down to the things that their own hands have made. That is, they worship themselves.

But you see, if people have abandoned true knowledge about God, then there is a sense in which they do not know God at all. Thus, God comes along, takes a little child, used to the idolatry of their brutal masters, and begins to teach them about himself all over again. In other words, he gives them true knowledge of God.

He begins the process by demonstrating his **unequaled power** among the gods to do whatever he wants. He is the only one that can, because he is the only true God. He toys with the Egyptians until finally, he breaks their backs. Then he leads his son into the wilderness to begin learning about his **character** and **holiness**, as he alone is set apart

from the gods of men. It takes a whole generation to pass away before the fear of God catches on in the hearts of their children. But once they move to capture the Promised Land, God has ensured that knowledge of him is now wide spread and accepted. Their head knowledge is now combined with godly fear, and so in the days of Joshua, all of the promises to Abraham are fulfilled.

When you come to understand what God has done in the history of this small, rebellious nation; then *you* should be moved to fear him too. And in the process of learning to fear him, you suddenly find that your knowledge of him is established and begins to grow. But only when you fear God, can this begin at all. And so God preserves for you the Exodus tale in order to create faith in your heart. That is one of my own **goals** in preaching this book to you: **That the LORD may be pleased to bring you to faith, to establish you in faith, and to increase your faith in Him.**

The **second** thing is that God establishes true freedom. He is the God “**that brings you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.**” Through his powerful, outstretched right

arm, the LORD displays his power to the whole earth, and also his ability to deliver. He tells Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (Ex 9:16; cf. Rom 9:17). God wants to make it known what he can do so that he might be worshipped far and wide.

Thus, the theme of **liberty** is closely connected with God’s delivering power, his right to do with his creation whatever he chooses, and his chief-end, to glorify himself among his creation. Do you not understand, that slavery cannot be escaped on your own, by your own skill or cunning. Only by changing masters does it come about. Not by human initiative, but by God’s gift of grace alone. Like Israel, you have no chance whatsoever to save yourself, to liberate yourself. For, you are not born free, but a slave: a slave to sin and death. As someone has said, “God must make the demands (“Let my people go!”); the people on their own, with or without Moses, would never have dared even to ask.”⁷

⁷ Stuart, p. 35.

Thus, divine sovereignty, election, grace, and worship are things that I hope you will see again and again as we walk after our fathers in the Exodus. And as you learn about them, may God be pleased to spark a fire in your heart, to fuel your love for him in ways you have not known or have long ago forgotten.

Third, “I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” You may think that the idea here is about the future hope of the land. But don’t move so quickly. That promise rests on God’s uncompromising stance towards his **covenantal oath**. This is the meaning of bringing up Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It isn’t that these guys were perfect, sinless, men that God owed. Rather, it is that God unconditionally chose them apart from their works, entered into covenant with them, and swore to do things for them.

In Exodus, Israel is God’s God son (4:22). Did you know that no other ancient nation claimed Yahweh as their God? This shows just how far away the whole world had moved from the LORD since Babel. Paul’s claim about this was

dead on. People do not naturally want the LORD to be their God, because he is a holy God that we cannot approach on our own. And so, God adopts Israel to be his son. As in an adoption today, the children do not do the choosing of the parents. It is the other way around. This is the meaning of the covenant.

Covenant has been called the warp-and-woof of Scripture. It seems to be the way that God himself moved men to organize the Bible. Moses, especially, has been concerned with covenant. It is there in **Genesis 2**, in the form of a **covenant of works**, whereby Adam would obtain eternal life if he would but obey a single commandment.

It is there in **Genesis 3**, after the fall, for the first time as a covenant of grace, whereby God swears unilaterally to perform salvation and redemption for a chosen people. For, this was what was sworn to Eve, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (**Gen 3:15**). **Do you hear the oath there?** God will, through a chosen vessel, destroy Satan and put

an end to sin and death. That is God's covenant oath to Adam and Eve.

It is there, for the first time in an actual word, in **Genesis 6**: “I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you” (**Gen 6:18**). God swore to save Noah because he had found grace in God's eyes. Thus, he gave him an ark and saved he and his family from destruction.

It is there in **Genesis 9**, especially in the promise given to **Shem**, the son of Noah.

“I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you. . . ‘Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem’” (**Gen 9:9, 26-27**). That promise of a seed would go through the line of Shem and will establish itself in a nation through **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**. Thus, God enters into a covenant with each of them. “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your offspring I give this land’”

(Gen 15:18). “I will establish my covenant with Isaac”
(Gen 17:21). David sums it all up in the psalms, “He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance’”
(Ps 105:8-11).

God entered into a blood-treaty with these men. God called them. They answered. But this covenant was a **covenant of grace**. God swore to give Abraham’s children a land, and so God must give it to them. Not because Israel deserved it, but because God’s word is on the line. Today, people think nothing of their word. But there was a time, not so long ago even in America, when all you needed for a contract was a man’s word.

As **part of the covenantal relationship**, God comes to his **people**. As we have already said, he doesn’t do this directly, because he does not want to break out amongst

us. Rather, he does it through means: Mediators, symbols, and sacraments. “God shows himself to his covenant people by symbols behind barriers. He does not fully disclose himself in the manner that New Covenant believers look forward to as one of the great joys of heaven.” “He put symbols of himself (a visible brilliance associated with his glory; the gold-surfaced ark of the covenant) behind barriers that keep his people from direct access even to those symbols, let alone to the very God of gods that they symbolize. These barriers include such things as distance (God normally comes to the top of Mount Sinai while the people are strictly forbidden to go anywhere above the base of the mountain), darkness (God usually ‘appears’ within a thick, dark cloud that conceals most of his glory and through which no human eyes can penetrate), and the tabernacle (with its layers of thick curtains and hide covers, its special floor-to-ceiling curtain shielding the ark from view by everyone, even priests.”⁸ You can say, then, that because they could not see God, and sometimes not even his symbols, that he demands that they trust him by faith alone.

⁸ Stuart, 40.

So, **these symbols strengthen their faith**, from the Red-Sea baptism, to the Passover-Communion, to the sacrifices that cover their sins, these things are means of grace for the people. Today, since we do not yet see God face-to-face, he is still pleased to give us symbols that hide his full-presence so that we might not be destroyed too. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and preaching are all symbols or tokens of invisible realities that were manifested to men in God-clothed-in-flesh; the God-man Jesus Christ.

He is the ultimate symbol of God, being one with the Father. The symbols of the Exodus each pointed to him in their own unique way, and as we move through this book, I hope to be able to show many of them to you in ways that maybe you have not thought about before. Thus, going through Exodus will make your understanding of Christ and the new covenant even greater than anything that and OT saint could have, because you have the fullness of the Godhead explained to you by the NT writers, who themselves have much commentary on the book of Exodus.

It is this covenantal relationship that we have with Christ that gives us the only setting in which true freedom can work. For, we know that no matter what we do, nothing is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. **This keeps us from being afraid of God,** afraid of repenting, afraid of obeying, afraid of trusting, because we know that because of the covenant, nothing is going to destroy God's love for us. This is the only soil in which freedom is able to truly grow and thrive.

Finally, there is a **future hope**. This future hope was in the form of a Promised Land. Unfortunately, in Exodus, we do not get to see the people go into the Land. But Moses concludes the Pentateuch by telling us that they will. The way we leave the Exodus is with God traveling with the people wherever they go on their journeys in the wilderness. Their hope is ahead of them, not on the journey itself. Yet God is with them on their journey, and so they should not despair of traveling in those places where they would go.

This is a final word to you today. **God did give them the land which he swore to their fathers.** Yet, there that promise was not entirely fulfilled, because the Land itself was only typical of a future land for the people. In a very real sense, we can say that Jesus is the Land which God has chosen, so that anyone who is found in him, can be said to have arrived at their eternal destination. And yet, even this is not the final word on the matter. Because God has sworn a physical land to his new covenant people. It is a land that we looked at last week in 2 Peter, a new heaven and new earth.

When you consider this land, then you remember that your journey in the wilderness is not yet finished. And so it gives you **comfort** and **strength** to continue on. Yet, when you know that Christ has already arrived in that place, and is even now building a mansion for you there, you realize that your story is **not identical** to the one in the Exodus. For you are both wandering and yet have crossed over through baptism into **the Land of Pure Delight**. You await the wedding feast of the Lamb, yet you have had the Angel of Death pass you over as you delight in the feast for

God's people. Therefore, let us consider all that is in front of us today and use this as a means of preparing ourselves for the days and months to come as we [enter Exodus](#).

May God be pleased to give us his presence as we draw near to the word, through his Son and through the Spirit.
Amen.