



## Core Seminar Old Testament Class 5: Exodus 20-40

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### Introduction and Context

#### [Discussion Question?]

Good morning again. Last week we started Exodus; this week we hope to finish it. By way of context, we are still in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century BC, and Moses is still our author. Yahweh has just rescued His people out of brutal slavery in Egypt through great signs and wonders, judging Egypt in the process. In it all, Yahweh caused His great name to be magnified in all the earth. Now the people are heading toward to a land promised to their ancestors long ago. And on the way, they come to a place called “Mount Sinai” where they are to worship Yahweh before they go any further.

In the scope of God’s greater plan to redeem a people for Himself out of all the nations of the world, and return the world to it’s original Edenic state, we are at a real highpoint. As soon as the first sin was committed, God had promised to send a Savior. Then we saw that He promised one man, Abraham, that the promised Savior would be one of *his* descendants.

Well, it’s in today’s section of Scripture that we see Abraham’s descendants becoming a real nation. They are about to get laws and a national religion. The re-creation of humanity is slowly creeping forward, and God is beginning to dwell with His people again!

### Theme

A thematic sentence for the second half of Exodus might sound like this:

*God is establishing the covenant terms to direct His people in how to live in fellowship with Him since He will now dwell with them.*

So in this part of God’s word we’ll see the covenant laws that Israel was to live by. And we’ll also see the construction of something called “the tabernacle,” where God’s presence was. In it all we’ll see how poorly the people kept the terms of the covenant (the laws), and Yahweh’s response to them as covenant breakers. Again, biblically speaking, a covenant is an inviolable bond between two parties that, if kept, brings about great blessing, but, if broken, brings a curse. In these chapters, Yahweh will give the terms of the covenant to His people. Will Yahweh enforce the full wrath of the covenant curse should they break it? We’ll have to see.

Now, in this second half of the book there’s a lot of laws. But in this class, I’m going to talk a lot about grace. You’ll see why in a moment. But first, I want us to think about those two concepts for a moment. ***Why is it that we need to understand God’s Law if we’re going to understand God’s Grace?***

## Structure

It's important that we take a few minutes here at the beginning to talk about the structure of the second half of Exodus because that will provide us with a basic outline for our time together. In chapters 20 through 23 of our text, we have the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue as it's sometimes called, along with additional commandments and regulations regarding society, morality, and the religious calendar of God's people. These four chapters, which lay out the covenant obligations of Israel, act as prologue to the second half of the book.

Now, here's where the structure gets interesting. Chapters 24 through 40 are written using a literary device called a chiasm. A chiasm is a structure, found commonly in texts from the ancient world, in which important concepts or ideas are placed in a symmetric order for emphasis. The chiasm in chapters 24 through 40 of Exodus is especially noteworthy because it presents us, right here at the outset of the Old Testament, with a beautiful picture of the gospel. Turn over to the back of your handout and let me explain.

Section II—which covers chapter 24—is about the ultimate goal of the covenant: fellowship with God. Then III explains how that's going to happen; it gives the instructions for building the tabernacle where God will dwell with his people. But then IV, chapters 32-34, test the covenant. In chapter 32 the people sin. In chapter 33 God shows grace. In chapter 34, quite unexpectedly, God renews the covenant even after the people's rebellion. And then we continue to work our way out of the chiasm, with each section paralleling the one above it. Section V parallels section III as it describes the tabernacle getting built. And then in section VI we see the promise of section II fulfilled as God's presence enters the tabernacle.

Now, in a chiasm the most crucial piece is in the middle. The “crux” of the matter, so to speak. So what's in the middle of this section of laws, disobedience, and punishment? It's chapter 33: grace. The centerpiece of the gospel at the turning point of this second half of Exodus. As we journey through the second half of Exodus, we'll talk about each part of the chiasm in more detail. And as we do that, my hope is that we'll take away a greater awe for God's grace to us in Christ—previewed here in Exodus.

### Exodus 20-23: Covenant Obligations

Let's get right into the text, beginning with the prologue. Turn to **chapter 20**. Let's now read the law that Yahweh gives to the people on Mt. Sinai.

<sup>1</sup>And God spoke all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup>“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup>“You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup>“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.<sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup>“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup>“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup>“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup>“You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup>“You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup>“You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup>“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup>“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

<sup>18</sup>Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off <sup>19</sup>and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” <sup>20</sup>Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” <sup>21</sup>The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Okay, I need to say a few things here if we’re to understand this Law in God’s economy of grace. Remember, God’s promises to Abraham are being fulfilled here, and those promises were pure grace. A free gift. Why does God give these commands to his people, when the covenant was already made with Abraham by grace?

Well, remember that in the garden of Eden God’s plan was to display his glory and beauty *to* and *through* his creatures. We learned in Genesis 12 to 50 that he was going to do that through a particular people. But while Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received God’s promise, they were just as sinful—probably more sinful—than Adam and Eve. And that brings us to Mount Sinai.

So, why was the law added to God’s promise to Abraham? Two reasons. First. Do you remember reading Exodus 19:6? Turn back there. God wanted to have “a kingdom of priests and a *holy* nation.” That’s creation language. That’s mankind imaging God.

But look again at verse 5: they will only fulfill this purpose and be these people *if* they obey him fully and keep his covenant. God seems to be saying, “If you keep my word, if you keep my commandments, then you will rightly image me once more. I’m giving you the law as a blueprint for what this looks like!”

In other words, the first purpose of the law is that it revealed who God is. The people needed direction about *how* to image forth the Creator.

OK—but the law gets broken, doesn’t it? How does that all fit into this? In Galatians 3 (verses 17-19), we read a few important aspects to this answer.

- 1) First, we see that the law in no way replaces the God’s gracious covenant he had made with Abraham. Even when the law is broken by God’s people, God will never break his gracious promise to Abraham.

- 2) Second, the law was added because of our sin. It is there to make our sin clear to us so that we will flee to God's savior.

I want to make sure this is very clear. First you have the promise. Then you have the law. Why is the law added to the promise? First, as we saw in Exodus 19, to fulfill God's purposes of revealing his character. But second, as we learn later in the New Testament, it was added because of transgression; because through the law we become conscious of our need for a Savior.

Two reasons here, then, why the covenant of law was added to the covenant of grace.

One last point of clarification needs to be made concerning the Law. And it's this: Israelites were not saved because they kept the law. Rather, you'll notice that Exodus 20:2 says that **the Israelites were *already* saved** out of their bondage *before* they were given the law. No one has ever been saved by keeping any kind of law. Salvation has always been by grace through faith.

The application for us here should be obvious: don't use the Law as means to establish your own righteousness, as though God will approve of you if you keep it well enough. Rather, use the Law to remind yourself of your own sinfulness and drive you to Christ! Then, endeavor, by the grace and strength that God provides through His Spirit, to keep the law –not to establish your own righteousness, but – to image God more accurately to the world.

## [TAKE QUESTIONS]

### Exodus 32-34: Covenant Disobedience and Covenant Grace

Having looked at the prologue, which introduces God's law, let's venture further into the chiasm. We'll start from the center and work our way out. How did the people do in keeping this covenant? Turn to **chapter 32**, not a very happy chapter. While Moses was up on the mountain receiving the 10 commandments, here's what was going on at the bottom of the mountain: look at **verse 1**. "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'" Well, there go commandments numbers 1 and 2!

How does God respond to this covenant disloyalty? Look at **verses 7-10**.

<sup>7</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. <sup>8</sup> They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. <sup>10</sup> Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you."

He's about to disown them! Did you notice that He doesn't call them "my people" anymore, but he says to Moses that they are "your people!"

But look at what Moses does. Moses is *truly* a type of Christ here. Look at **verses 11-13**.

<sup>11</sup> But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?<sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’”

Moses intercedes on behalf of the people. And look at what Moses appeals to in God: God’s desire for His own glory. Did you see it there? Look again at verse 12. He doesn’t want the nations to see God’s actions as evidence that God is evil. And look at verse 13. Moses appeals to Yahweh’s faithfulness and covenant trustworthiness. He says, “Keep your promises! Do it for Your own name’s sake!”

God hears and answers God-centered prayers. We see that in verse 14 and the verses that follow. He shows the Israelites grace. And you’ll notice in verse 14 that they are called “God’s people” again.

Are there consequences? Definitely. But God is gracious and his plan of redemption moves forward. In chapter 34 we read that God has renewed the covenant with people, even after what they did, and gave them new stone tablets with the 10 commandments carved on them.

Before we move on to the next section, I think it’s also important to point out, even if just briefly, the interchange between Yahweh and Moses in **chapter 33**, verses 12-23. We learn here that to Moses, the covenant was not just a lot of rules to be kept in exchange for some blessings. Rather Moses was concerned that he and the people of Israel have a relationship with God. Look at **verses 15-16**. Moses doesn’t want to travel any further unless God is with them.

To know, love, and enjoy the fellowship of God is rightly on Moses’ agenda. If that is not our goal too, then this is all a wash. Church, Bible studies, gospel, etc. are not just religious artifacts to bring us social acceptance, or make us feel pious, or take away worldly stress. or order our otherwise chaotic lives. Rather, they are instruments to bring us to the greatest good: knowing, loving, and enjoying God – and the rest of His people, for the sole reason that they are just that, *His people!*

But we are not done with Moses’ request just yet. Look at **verse 18**. “Then Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory.’” God’s glory is the manifestation of all His internal perfections and beauty – the full realizations of His dazzling brilliance in who He is. Moses wants to see that. But look at what God says. To summarize: “You cannot see My face, Moses. You cannot see the full display of my holiness, and beauty, and perfections, and radiance. You cannot see my full glory. You’re a sinner – it would destroy you!” So what is God’s solution, so that He could grant at least part of Moses’ request? He protects Moses from the blast of His glory by placing him in the cleft of a rock.

Just like we’ll see ultimately with Christ’s death on the cross, God is making a way to be with his people while protecting them from the holy outlash of his glory against their sins.

**Exodus 25-31 and Exodus 35-40:1-33: Instructions for and Construction of a Covenant Meeting Place**

Now, speaking of God's glory and how that causes a problem for sinful people, let's turn the "tabernacle," our next pairing in the chiasm. The tabernacle was a tent which Yahweh instructed His people to build so that He could dwell with them, even though they were sinful. How can Yahweh dwell with His people, and "go with them" as Moses asked, if they are sinful? Well, the tabernacle offers the solution. In these very important chapters describing the Tabernacle and its worship we are pointed backwards and forwards in the Biblical storyline as this question is answered.

First, we're pointed backward:

### Backward

The tabernacle is presented in these chapters as a reconstruction of Eden. Let's look at how:

Note the parallels between this account and the creation account.

- The structure. The creation account in Genesis is structured around 7 acts of creation, each marked by the statement, "And God said." Here, read carefully and you will find seven "acts" of tabernacle building, each marked by, "And the Lord said"
  - Open up to chapter 5 and do some flipping with me. Ex. 25:1, 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12 — God speaks, and the tabernacle, his presence, is to be constructed. The tabernacle is a reconstruction of God's good creation.
- Descriptions. The tabernacle parallels Eden in that it contains:
  - Pure gold (Gen 2:12; Ex. 23:3)
  - Precious jewels (Gen 2:12; Ex. 25:7)
  - Guarded by cherubim (Gen 3:24; Ex 25:18)
- Sabbath. Here is another parallel.
  - At the close of Creation account in Genesis 2:1-3 is a reminder that God rested on the Sabbath day.
  - The last instruction in the tabernacle account is to observe the Lord's Sabbath (Ex. 31:12-18)
- God's Evaluation
  - At the end of the creation account, "God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good." (Gen 1:28)
  - After the tabernacle is built, Moses "saw all the work, and behold, they had done it just as the Lord had commanded." (Ex 39:43)
- Fall
  - Creation in Genesis 1 & 2 is followed by the Fall of Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve disobey God's command.
  - Immediately after chapter 31...what comes next? Another "fall". Exodus 32 Israel worships the Golden Calf and disobeys God's command.

Time and time again, God tells Moses that the tabernacle was to be build according to the *pattern* he had shown him. The tabernacle was to be a model of God's edenic paradise, of his heavenly abode. God was creating a place where he would dwell with his people.

### Forward

And yet, let's think about these chapters in light of what's coming ahead. Let's focus on **chapter 29**, an insightful and, frankly, astonishing chapter in which God lays out how these priests are to be consecrated and explains the function and purpose of the tabernacle. **The persevering question at this point in the Biblical narrative** — How can a sinful people dwell in the presence of a holy God? It's addressed here. Let's look at seven descriptions in this chapter.

1. Look at **verse 38**. This offering is to make atonement for sins. Verse 36 and other places in the Old Testament make it clear that sacrifices are for the atonement for sins. And notice that they have to be carried out *every day*!
2. Look at **verse 42**. "It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there." Only through forgiveness of sins that anyone meets with God.
3. You'll also notice in verse 42 that the tabernacle is the place where Moses receives revelation from God.
4. Look at **verse 43**. "There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory." The tabernacle is where God will meet and reconcile with His people.
5. Verse 43 also tells us that the tabernacle is holy because of the presence of God's glory.
6. Look at **verse 45**. "I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God."
7. And finally, **verse 46**. "And they shall know that I am the Lord their God." The goal is for God to be known, in all His beauty and glory and power.

These seven realities that describe the priests and the function of tabernacle should sound familiar to us. Jesus does each of these.

1. Jesus makes atonement for sins, once and for all.  
**Hebrews 9:26** [Jesus] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.
2. It is through this atonement for sins, found only in Jesus, that anyone can come to the Father.  
**John 14:6** "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
3. Jesus is the full revelation of God, the place where we learn the most about Him.  
**Hebrews 1:2** ...in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...
4. God meets and reconciles with His people in Christ.  
**Romans 5:11** ...we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.
5. Jesus is the manifestation of God's glory.  
**John 1:14** ...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
6. Jesus is God in a physical body, dwelling with His people.  
**Colossians 2:9** ...in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...
7. Only through Jesus does anyone know God.  
**John 14:7** "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also."

You get the point, right? The tabernacle is a beautiful picture of how God condescends to be with His people. They don't deserve such a blessing. But God does it. And it is all meant to point

forward to an even greater revelation of God, an even more immediate access to God – **the Lord Jesus Christ**.

## [TAKE QUESTIONS]

### D. Exodus 24 and Exodus 40:34-38: Covenant Ceremony and God's Presence

Let's conclude our time on a high note, with the climax of the book of Exodus. In Exodus 24, Moses, Aaron, and other important men of Israel confirm their covenant with God in an elaborate ceremony and God dwells with them. Then Moses goes up Mount Sinai and continues to have fellowship with God. However, God is not yet dwelling with the people because there is not yet a tabernacle, and the people are not yet acceptable to a holy God.

But in **Exodus 40:34-38**, the mirror to chapter 24, Moses has interceded for the people and the tabernacle is built. So everything comes together.

<sup>34</sup> Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. <sup>36</sup> Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. <sup>37</sup> But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. <sup>38</sup> For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

Finally, God is again dwelling with His people as He did in the Garden of Eden. The plan of redemption is not done yet. But we are well on our way here at the end of Exodus.

## Application

We have already thought about some application today, but before we leave, we should make one more obvious yet utterly crucial point of application. The gospel of grace is shot through every page of Scripture.

Like the Israelites, we are sinners who cannot have fellowship with a holy God without a savior, and that is exactly what God has provided for us in Jesus Christ. Let Exodus and the story of Israel and their covenant disobedience, and of God's grace and covenant faithfulness lead you to despair of your sin and cling to the cross of Christ this week with a heart full of praise to this holy God whose glory, as the text says, "filled the tabernacle." Let your prayer be the same as Moses' on the mountain: "God, show me Your glory." And then praise Him for how he has shown us His glory in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

## [PRAY]