



Exodus 19-40

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-00:43

The book of Exodus. In the first video, we explored chapters 1-18, which tell the foundational story of how God rescued the enslaved Israelites by confronting and defeating Pharaoh while offering the way of escape through the blood of the Passover lamb. God then delivered his people by bringing them through the waters of the sea and then into the wilderness, where, surprisingly, they grumbled and complained.

Now the second half of the book of Exodus opens as Moses leads Israel to the foot of Mount Sinai, where God invites the nation of Israel to enter into a covenant relationship. And here, we reach another key moment in the biblical storyline because this is picking up and developing God's promise to Abraham.

Chapters 19-24

00:44-02:29

So remember from the book of Genesis, God promised that through Abraham's family, somehow, he would restore his blessing to all of the nations. And here, we find out more. God says that if Israel obeys the terms of the covenant, they will be so shaped by God's laws and teaching and justice that they will become a kingdom of priests, which means that they will become God's representatives and show all of the other nations what God is truly like.

Now, the people of Israel eagerly accept the offer, and so God's presence appears right on the top of Mount Sinai in the form of cloud and lightning and thunder. And Moses goes up as their representative, and God opens with the basic terms of the covenant, the famous Ten Commandments. These are like the basic terms of the agreement—how the Israelites and God are going to relate to each other. And then, after this, comes another collection of commands, which fill out the first ten in

more detail. There are laws about Israel's worship, about social justice, how they are to live together, all shaping Israel into a nation of justice and generosity that's different from the other nations.

So Moses writes down all of these laws, and he brings them down to the people, who again eagerly agree to enter into this covenant with God. And once they do so, God takes the relationship forward another step. He tells Moses that he wants his holy and divine and good presence to come and dwell right in the midst of Israel, which develops another aspect of God's covenant promises. So remember, after humanity's rebellion in the garden, it was access to God's presence that was lost. But now, it's through the family of Abraham that God's presence is becoming once again accessible through this covenant relationship, first with Israel and then somehow one day to all nations.

Chapters 25-31

02:30-03:27

So what follows are seven chapters of detailed architectural blueprints about this sacred tent called the tabernacle. There's the outer courtyard with an altar, and then, in the center, there's a tent that has an outer room and then an inner room. And then inside the inner room, which is called the most holy space, is a golden box called the ark of the covenant. And there's angelic creatures over the top of it. It's the hot spot of God's presence.

Now, there's lots of detail in these chapters, and it's important to know that every piece has some kind of symbolic value. All of the flowers, the angels, the gold and the jewels, it all echoes back to the garden of Eden, the place where God and humans lived together in intimacy. And so the tabernacle is like a portable Eden, so to speak. It's the place where God and Israel can live together in peace. At least in theory, because right here something goes really, really wrong. Israel breaks the covenant.

Chapters 32-34

03:27-05:11

As Moses is up on the mountain receiving the blueprints for the tabernacle, down below at the camp, the Israelites, they're losing patience. And so they asked Moses' brother, Aaron, to make for them a golden calf idol, so they can worship it as the god who saved them out of slavery in Egypt. Now, God's presence, it's right there on top of the mountain; they can see it. But here they are below, breaking the first two commands of the covenant they just agreed to—no other gods and no idols.

Now, what follows is really important. God knows what's happening down below, and so he first invites Moses into his own anger and pain. And he tells Moses what he wants to do—just to wipe Israel out. But Moses intercedes by appealing to God's character. He says, first of all, destroying Israel would be going back on your covenant promises to Abraham. And then Moses appeals to God's reputation among the nations. What would they think if they see you destroying your own people? And so God accepts Moses' intercession, and he relents. And while he does bring his judgment on those who instigated the idolatry, he forgives the nation as a whole and promises to renew his covenant.

And it's right here, at this point in the story, that God for the first time describes his own character to Moses. He says, "The Lord is merciful, he's gracious. He's slow to anger, abounding in covenant faithfulness. He forgives sin, but he will not leave the wicked unpunished." So we have this tension. God is full of mercy, but also he must deal with evil if he claims to be good. And above all, God is faithful to his promises even though it means, he knows, he's committing himself to a people who are utterly faithless.

Chapters 35-40

05:12-06:06

And so after renewing the covenant with Israel, God commissions Moses to go ahead and build the tabernacle. And once again, we get five long chapters describing in detail the construction of the tabernacle. And it all comes together in the final chapter where the tabernacle is finished. God's glorious divine presence comes and hovers over the tent, and our hopes are high. And so Moses, he goes right up to enter into the tent, and he can't. He actually can't go in. And that's how the book ends.

It's really surprising, but not really if you think about it. You can see now how much Israel's sin has damaged the relationship with God, in more ways than we realized. So the book opened, remember, with Pharaoh's evil threatening Israel and threatening God's covenant promise. But now as the book ends, Israel has become its own worst enemy. It's their sin that's threatening the future of the covenant.

Conclusion

06:07-06:24

And so the question as the book closes is: How is God going to reconcile this conflict between his holiness and his goodness and his presence with the sinful corruption of his own covenant people? The solution to that problem is what the next book is about. But for now, that's the book of Exodus.

