

Reformation Fellowship Notes • March 25, 2018

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Handout #34

Exodus: Some Final Comments

I. Introduction

- A. We have concluded our journey through the text of Exodus.
- B. What we will do today:
 - 1. An example of the use of Exodus in OT
 - a) Idolatry
 - 2. Main themes of Exodus
 - 3. The Jewish Feasts as an annual recapitulation of Exodus

II. Importance of Exodus for the rest of the Bible

- A. Exodus is frequently alluded to in the rest of the Bible.
 - 1. OT—Psalms and Prophets
 - 2. NT—Matthew, Paul
 - 3. I thought about showing a number of examples of this.
 - a) Project was too big for now.
- B. Idolatry is a major issue in Exodus.
 - 1. Many passages warn against idolatry.
 - a) First of Ten Commandments is a prohibition of idolatry.
 - 2. The greatest crisis in Exodus involves idolatry.
 - a) Golden Calf
- C. Adultery becomes the “root metaphor” for understanding idolatry.
 - 1. Metaphor is a major means of communication in the Bible.
 - a) In John, Jesus uses metaphor extremely often.
 - (1) His interlocutors consistently misunderstand him because they think he is speaking literally.
 - (2) Just before he dies, he speaks plainly, and the disciples are surprised.
 - 2. How does a metaphor work?
 - a) We all know.
 - (1) We use them all the time.
 - (2) But we rarely reflect on how they work.
 - (a) So we can get confused.
 - b) X is likened to Y.
 - (1) There is something(s) about X that is true of Y.
 - (2) We can therefore understand that thing(s) in X, which is less familiar, by understanding that thing(s) in Y, which is more familiar.

- c) There are several aspects of adultery that match aspects of idolatry.
 - (1) We understand adultery because it is a common feature of human relations.
 - (2) We can use the more familiar, adultery, to help us understand the less familiar, idolatry.
 - d) The primary similarity is the exclusive nature of the relationship.
- D. Several hints in Exodus indicate that idolatry is like adultery.
- 1. Word “play” in 32:6 has the connotation of “to commit adultery.”
 - 2. People forced to drink gold in water (32:20).
 - 3. 3,000 were killed (32:28).
 - 4. People were required to remove jewelry (33:5).
 - a) Later Jewish tradition likens the covenant made with God to a marriage between the people and God.
 - 5. God is a jealous God (34:14).
- E. As one progresses through the Bible, the metaphor of Israel as God’s adulterous wife is used several times.
- 1. Idolatry as represented in Hosea:
 - a) In an act of prophetic theater, Hosea is told to take a prostitute as a wife.
 - (1) She will run after other lovers.
 - (2) But when they don’t take care of her, she will return to Hosea.
 - (3) He will punish her by cutting her off from his wealth.

The main function of the husband in Hosea’s metaphor is the satisfaction of the wife’s material needs. Extending the metaphor, it is God who satisfies Israel’s needs by giving grain, wine, and oil. When God sees that he has been betrayed, he swears to kill his wife by thirst and to have no mercy on her children. The betrayal is analyzed as an extension of the same motif—that Israel prefers other lovers because she thinks they satisfy her needs more successfully: “Because she thought, ‘I will go after my lovers, who supply my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.’” (Halbertal, p. 13)

- b) So Israel leaves God and goes in search of other gods whenever she feels like she is not being cared for like she would like to be cared for.

The sin of idolatry is whoredom. Israel gives her favors to whoever pays her the highest fee, but idolatry is worse than ordinary prostitution because in this case the fee is always being paid with the husband’s faithfulness and love for his wife, and the wife’s faithless behavior. For the wife sexual relations are based on pay, and she believes that the lover pays more. In theological terms, the Israelites relate to God as to a supplier of material goods, and when he seems to have disappointed them they turn to other gods. (Halbertal, p. 13-4)

- c) In the end, God will regain the love of Israel by wooing Israel like he did in the beginning.

Hosea also alludes to the date of the couple's marriage in his description of the end of the crisis: "Assuredly, I will speak coaxingly to her and lead her through the wilderness and speak to her tenderly. I will give her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a plowland of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt" (Hosea 2:14-15). The reconciled couple return to the place where they first met and renew the days of their youth. A clear romantic flavor has been added to the metaphor, as God is not only a supplier of material goods but also a lover. Moreover, this passage shows us that the couple met in the desert at the time that the Israelites left Egypt. (Halbertal, p. 14)

- d) So, in Hosea, Israel's idolatry is seen as an adultery-like act, just as we see it in Exodus.
 - e) And Hosea sees the time that God was with Israel in the wilderness as a honeymoon period of their relationship.
2. Jeremiah sees that period of time similarly.

"I accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride—how you followed Me in the wilderness" (Jeremiah 2:2).

- a) He goes on to describe how Israel later strayed away looking for other lovers.
3. Ezekiel develops similar adultery imagery, but he likens Israel not to a prostitute but to a nymphomaniac.
- a) Instead of going to the highest bidder, Israel pays her lovers to come to her.
 - b) Ezekiel then explores the question of how reconciliation is possible in this case.
 - (1) The wrongdoing is so great.
 - (2) This makes the forgiveness unspeakably gracious.
 - (3) This results in eternal gratitude from the wayward wife.
 - c) Ezekiel also alludes to Exodus.

"Nevertheless, I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish it with you as an everlasting covenant" (Ezekiel 16:60).

- 4. In each of these cases, it is understood that an exclusive marriage-like relationship was consummated in the wilderness between Israel and God.
 - a) The covenant on Mount Sinai was that moment.
 - b) The last six chapters of Exodus are the honeymoon period of that relationship.

F. Exodus is the relevant background for very many passages in the OT and NT.

III. Main Themes of Exodus

A. Portraits of actors

- 1. People of Israel

- a) Rebellious
 - (1) They reject or question Moses' leadership.
 - (2) They complain and want to go back to Egypt.
 - b) Obstinate
 - (1) They repeat their rebellion despite God's acts of care and provision.
 - c) Impatient
 - (1) Incident of the Golden Calf was the result of impatience.
2. God
- a) Loyal to promises
 - (1) After hundreds of years, God acts to fulfill promise to patriarchs.
 - b) Powerful
 - (1) Plagues demonstrate this—
 - (a) Over gods of Egypt;
 - (b) Over forces of nature;
 - (c) Over human power.
 - (2) Miraculous provision demonstrates this.
 - (a) Water
 - (b) Manna
 - (c) Quail
 - c) A God of admirable moral character
 - (1) Compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth; forgiving but just (34:6-7)
 - d) He can be related to as a person.
 - (1) He is not just an impersonal force.
 - (2) Moses was able to change God's mind.
 - e) He knows what he is doing and is able to do it.
 - (1) He has a plan.
3. Moses
- a) Humble
 - (1) He was humbled by his experiences before leading the people out of Egypt.
 - (2) Numbers says he was the very humble (12:3).
 - b) Moses' intercession for the people was a high point.
 - c) Loyal, loving, forgiving—
 - (1) Characteristics that mirror those of God himself.
 - d) We see growth in Moses.
 - (1) Early on, we see one who is defeated, rejected, and burned by this ungrateful people.
 - (2) Later, he is willing to give his eternal life for this same ungrateful people.
- B. Nation building
1. What is the difference between a crowd and a nation (people)?
 - a) What is a nation?
 - (1) A nation is interconnected people with a common purpose.
 - (2) A nation often has shared familial ties.

- (a) But not every nation has shared familial ties.
 - (i) America is an example of this.
 - (b) Not every group with shared familial ties is a nation.
 - b) The text indicates that the Israelites were not a people.
 - (1) When the Israelites left, a mixed multitude also went with them (Exodus 12:38).
- 2. By what process does a crowd become a people?
 - a) Shared history
 - b) Shared traditions
 - c) Shared values
 - d) Close personal ties
- 3. We see each of these happen in Exodus.
 - a) Shared history
 - (1) God brings them out of Egypt through the wilderness.
 - b) Shared traditions
 - (1) Festivals and religious practices
 - c) Shared values
 - (1) Law
 - d) Close personal ties
 - (1) Common, long-term project
 - (2) Constructing the tabernacle
- 4. Exodus explains how the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became a people.

C. Redemption

- 1. Exodus is the ultimate story of redemption.
 - a) God made promises to the patriarchs.
 - b) To make good on those promises, God began to act.
 - c) God raised up a man, Moses, to provide leadership.
 - d) God hammered Egypt with ten plagues.
 - (1) Last plague killed all the firstborn of Egypt.
 - (2) The firstborn of Israel were spared by virtue of the blood of sacrificed lambs.
 - e) God miraculously freed them from slavery.
 - f) God offered to make a covenant with Israel.
 - (1) Israel agreed to be obedient to God.
 - (2) They formally “signed” the agreement.
 - g) The people of Israel immediately violated the agreement.
 - (1) They made and worshiped an idol.
 - (a) They wanted God with them.
 - (i) God had already planned for a tabernacle.
 - (ii) The people were impatient.
 - (2) The covenant was nullified.
 - h) God wanted to destroy Israel and start over.
 - (1) Moses persuaded him to relent.

- i) God reconciles with the people of Israel.
- j) The people built the tabernacle.
 - (1) God dwelt in the midst of the people.

IV. Jewish Feasts

- A. Twice God told the Israelites to keep the Feasts.
 - 1. Once before the Golden Calf
 - 2. Once after
 - 3. This is a big deal.
- B. What is the purpose of the Feasts?
 - 1. Details for the Jewish Feasts are very sparse.
 - a) Feasts were named and instructions were given as to when they are to be celebrated.
 - b) They present a puzzle to be solved.
 - 2. Traditions were developed around each Feast.
 - a) These traditions arose in the context of a people immersed in the biblical text.
 - b) But it is also a people that views the traditional teachings of the rabbis as more or less authoritative.
 - c) So there are various traditions that have developed.
 - 3. Careful reading of the text reveals that the Feasts are all based on events in Exodus.
 - a) This is a minority view.
 - b) But there are people who agree with me.
 - 4. I found this section in the *Jewish Way* by Rabbi Irving Greenberg:

The Exodus is the core event of Jewish history and religion. The central moment of Jewish religious history is *yetziat mitzrayim*, exodus from Egypt. In this event, a group of Hebrew slaves were liberated. The initiative for freedom had to come from God, for the slaves were so subjugated, that they accepted even the fate of genocide. Moses, called by God, came to Pharaoh with a request that the slaves be given a temporary release to go and worship in the desert. Then, step by step, the power of Pharaoh was broken; step by step, the temporary release escalated into a demand for freedom. Thus the Torah makes its point that the entry of God into history is also a revelation of human dignity and right to freedom and foreshadows the end of absolute human power with all its abuses.

The Exodus inaugurated the biblical era of the Jewish people's history. In Judaism's teaching, the Exodus is not a one-time event but a norm by which all of life should be judged and guided. The Exodus is an "orienting event"—an event that sets in motion and guides the Jewish way (and, ultimately, humanity's way) toward the Promised Land—an earth set free and perfected. And as they walk through local cultures and historical epochs, people can gauge whether they have lost the way to freedom by charting their behavior along the path against the Exodus norms. An analogy: A rocket fired into space navigates by a star such as Canopus; it even makes a mid-course correction by measuring its relationship to the celestial marker. So

does the Exodus serve as the orienting point for the human voyage through time and for mid-course corrections on the trajectory toward final redemption.

The Exodus is brought into life and incorporated into personal and national values through the classic Jewish behavior model—reenactment of the event. The basic rhythm of the year is set through the reenactment of the Exodus (Passover), followed by the covenant acceptance (Shavuot), and then by a restaging of the exodus *way* (Sukkot). For the Israelite living in biblical times, the holidays were concentrated in two months: the first month, Aviv, in later times renamed Nissan, which incorporated the seven days of Passover; and the seventh month, Eytanim, in later times renamed Tishrei, with one day of Rosh Hashanah, one day of Yom Kippur, seven days of Sukkot, and an eighth day of closure (Shemini Atzeret). Both months were dominated by the Exodus holidays. The only other annual holiday was Shavuot, which occurred on one day in the third month. (Greenberg, pp. 25-26)

5. I go a little farther.
 - a) I think each *individual* Feast maps onto a specific event in Exodus.
 - b) The seven day Feasts represent events that are not point-in-time events.
- C. Here is how I think each individual Feast maps onto the events in the Exodus narrative:
1. Spring Feasts

a) Passover (Pesach)	The first Passover
b) First Fruits	Crossing the Red Sea
c) Feast of Unleavened Bread	Flight into the wilderness
 2. Pentecost (Shavuot)

Making of the Covenant (Giving of the Law)

 3. Fall Feasts

a) Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashannah)	Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai
b) Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	Moses asks God to forgive the Israelites.
c) Feast of the Tabernacles (Sukkot)	Journey with God through wilderness
- D. I think there is very good reason to think that the Feasts also map onto events in the history of salvation.
1. Salvation is an exodus from the cosmos (world of sin).
- E. Here is how the Feasts map onto the events in salvific history:
- a) Passover

The crucifixion

 - b) First Fruits

Resurrection

 - c) Feast of Unleavened Bread

Period before the ascension

 2. Pentecost

Coming of the Holy Spirit

 3. Fall Feasts

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| a) Feast of Trumpets | Second coming |
| b) Day of Atonement | Judgment day |
| c) Feast of Tabernacles | Eternal kingdom |

- F. If this is correct, Exodus provides a picture of the work of Christ.
1. For example, Moses is a picture of Jesus appealing to God for our forgiveness.
 2. The last 6 chapters of Exodus are a picture of eternity.

V. Conclusion

- A. I hope this expedition through the book of Exodus has been helpful.
1. I have learned a lot.
- B. I hope this helps you celebrate Easter.
1. Easter has become a neglected holiday.
 - a) It has very little cultural support.
 2. But it is a very significant holiday.
 - a) It is what allows us to escape the angel of death and make our exodus from the world of sin.
 - b) This is well worth celebrating.