

Themes in Exodus

The Covenant: Chosen Vessel of Blessing

Warm-up exercise and prayer

What have been some times in your life when you've made an agreement with someone or a group of people that altered your future? Go around and share with one another. When everyone has had a chance to share, pray: Mighty God, thank you for choosing to save us from everything that wants to harm us. Thank you for giving us words to live by. Help us to learn your Word, to know it in the core of our being, and help it to continue to change our lives. Amen.

Read Exodus 3:7-10 and discuss the following questions

- What do you think motivates God to do this? Why the Israelites?
- In our life of faith, what experiences are similar to what God does here for the Israelites?

Read Exodus 4:27-31 and discuss the following questions

- What motivates the Israelites to worship God? When have you had a similar experience?

Read Exodus 12:12-13 and discuss the following questions

- What do you think of when you think of the Passover?
- Some think a better understanding of Passover, rather than “passing over”, would be “protect” or “have compassion on.” How would this change your interpretation of this story?

Read Exodus 19:3-6 and discuss the following questions

- What does God mean by “priestly kingdom” and “holy nation? What does God want from the Israelites?

Read Exodus 20:1-17 and discuss the following questions

- Some think “The Ten Words” would be a better translation than “The Ten Commandments.” Summarize these Ten Words in ten words or less.

Covenant

Some think God’s covenant with the Israelites in Exodus was modeled on Hittite treaties of the 2nd century BCE. In those treaties, one King was known as a Suzerain, and the other, a Vassal. The Suzerain is in a much more powerful situation, and chooses to enter into the treaty with the Vassal and promises protection to the Vassal. The Vassal continues to have some autonomy, but is obligated to the language of the treaty in order to continue to live into the promises of the treaty.

God chooses to enter into the covenant with the Israelites. The Israelites maintain some of their autonomy. **How does knowing this help or change your understanding of the Covenant?**

- What is God promising the Israelites in these commandments?
- Instead of establishing the covenant in this way, and having Moses write it on stone tablets, what would have been other options for how God treated the Israelites?
- Based on chapters 19 and 20, what might be wrong with wanting to place “The Ten Commandments” in courthouses and other public spaces?

Read Exodus 22:21-30

Here we have a list of “statutes” or “ordinances” for the people to follow. They are more social in nature. These instructions have more to do with life that is more settled, so some scholars think these came to the people much later than the original commandments.

- What is God’s main concern in these ordinances?
- Throughout the giving of the covenant, what is God asking of us and our lives?