

Themes in the Exodus (Exodus – Numbers 13)

1.) The wrong way to approach difficulties in life is to complain, especially about God.

One of most obvious themes from the Exodus from Egypt is that complaining is not acceptable to God. When the children of Israel met adversity, almost immediately, they began to complain about their conditions, eventually implicating God as the root cause of their difficulties. By complaining, they deluded themselves and others into thinking that their troubles were far worse than they actually were and lost sight of the reality: God was daily protecting and caring for them. Mentally, with each instance of complaining, they prepared themselves for their ultimate rebellion against God in Numbers 14. They forgot how God had continually cared for them in the wilderness and demonstrated His power.

Passages for Consideration:

- Exodus 3-4: Moses complained about the task that God had given to him; God ultimately rebuked Moses for his lack of faith in Him.
- Exodus 5:15ff: The Israelite foremen complain that Moses is causing more problems for them.
- Exodus 14: Israel complained at the Red Sea that it would have been better for them to stay in Egypt rather than come out and be killed.
- Exodus 15:22: Israel complained about having no water.
- Exodus 16: Israel complained about having no food.
- Exodus 17:1-7: Israel complained about having no water again.
- Exodus 20: Israel complained that God was too frightening for them to hear Him directly. They asked Moses to intercede for them.
- Exodus 32: Israel complained that they did not know what had happened to Moses, and they had Aaron make a golden calf for them to worship.
- Numbers 11:1-3: Israel complained, and God punished them with fire.
- Numbers 11:4ff: Some people complained about not having enough meat, which caused all the Israelites to complain about it, which caused Moses to complain to God about the Israelites.
- Numbers 12: Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses' wife and his position of leadership.
- Numbers 13-14: The ten wicked spies complained about the difficulty they would have in taking the land, which caused the rest of Israel to complain about it as well (even to the point of "God hates us" in Deuteronomy 1:26-27). This final instance of complaints and rebellion caused God to punish the people by forcing them to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

2.) The right way to approach difficulties in life is to pray to God, trust in His power, and remember what He has done for you already.

In contrast to their complaining, there were a few times where the Israelites (or, at least, a few of them) met adversity with prayer and trust in the Lord's power. In these cases, their prayers were answered, and they were able to meet whatever challenges they were faced with. When they did not trust in God nor remember what He had already done, they lost their faith and failed to obey God.

Passages for Consideration:

- Exodus 1:15-21: God blessed the midwives because of their faith and obedience.
- Exodus 2:23-25: Israel prayed to God because of their afflictions in Egypt; God remembered His promises to Abraham and acknowledged them.
- Exodus 5:22ff: Moses approached God about the troubles that they are experiencing in Egypt, and God reassured him that He was going to rescue the people, as He promised.

- Exodus 14:10: When they were trapped by the Red Sea, the people complained against Moses, but they cried out to the Lord. The Lord, of course, delivered them all from the Egyptians.
- Exodus 17:8ff – Moses trusted in God, and the people were able to defeat Amalek.
- Exodus 33-34 – After they recognized their sin, the Israelites and Moses obeyed God, approached Him with humility, and ultimately God forgave their sin (golden calf) and dwelled with them again.

3.) God uses events/difficulties in our lives to refine our faith and prepare us for future challenges.

Even from the beginning of this time period, God demonstrated His absolute power to the Israelites. He showed them His ability to deliver them from Egypt and fulfill His promise to Abraham (Genesis 15), to give them whatever provisions were necessary on their journeys in the wilderness (manna, quail, water, etc.), and to help them win physical battles against their enemies (Amalekites). He was aware in the beginning of their journey that the people would not have a strong faith, and did not subject them to physical warfare until they had sufficient time to develop trust in Him. God gave them all of these signs and demonstrations of His power to prepare them for their ultimate test: the conquest of Canaan.

Passages for Consideration:

- Exodus 1: The Israelites were oppressed by the Egyptians in a multitude of ways.
- Exodus 4:29-31: The Israelites saw the signs of God and heard His words and believed in Him.
- Exodus 7-10: The first nine plagues demonstrated God's absolute power. The magicians were not able to mimic the plagues from 3rd plague forward, and God did not afflict the land of Goshen (where the Israelites lived) with any plagues from the 4th plague forward.
- Exodus 12: God gave the Israelites the Passover to protect them from the 10th plague. They were spared from the plague, and were allowed to leave Egypt with many gifts of gold, silver, and clothing from the Egyptians.
- Exodus 13:17-18: God knew that the people were not yet ready for physical warfare. They needed further refinement of their faith and trust in Him, first.
- Exodus 13:21-22: God demonstrated His power by giving the people a continual guide: a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night.
- Exodus 14: God demonstrated His power by opening the Red Sea for the Israelites.
- Exodus 15: God demonstrated His power to give the people water.
- Exodus 16: God demonstrated His power to give the people food daily.
- Exodus 17: God demonstrated His power to give the people water, again.
- Exodus 19: God demonstrated His power by enveloping Mt. Sinai with fire, lightning, and smoke.
- Exodus 32:35: God punished the people with a plague after they had sinned with the golden calf.
- Exodus 35:30: God gave special abilities to Bezalel and Aholiab to help construct the tabernacle.
- Exodus 40: God's glory filled the tabernacle, and the pillars of cloud and fire remained over it.
- Leviticus 9:23-10:3: God burned up the burnt offerings as well as Nadab and Abihu.
- Numbers 11: God burnt up complainers, and also sent a huge group of quail on the people.
- Numbers 12: God struck Miriam with leprosy.

4.) God demands perfect obedience and a complete dedication of our lives to Him in exchange for the blessings he bestows on us. Anything less than this is not acceptable to Him.

When God gives commandments for His people, He expects that they will be followed exactly as they were given. There were times when the people did obey God completely and were blessed because of their obedience. On the other hand, there were times when some did not obey God's commandments exactly, and they were punished for their disobedience.

Passages for Consideration:

- Exodus 12: The people observed the Passover just as God had commanded and they were saved from the plague of the death of the firstborn.
- Exodus 19:5: God demanded that the people would “indeed” (“truly”) serve Him – this reinforces the concept that the people needed to completely trust and obey Him.
- Exodus 19:8: The people understood this requirement, as they promised that they would do “all” that the Lord spoke to them.
- Exodus 24:3, 7: After hearing many of the terms of the covenant, the people once again affirmed that they would obey “all” that the Lord had commanded them.
- Exodus 32: The people did not do as the Lord had commanded them, and the covenant was broken.
- Exodus 25-40: The Lord gave very specific commandments regarding the construction of the tabernacle as well as the office of the priesthood. The people were to follow these instructions exactly (and did, see Exodus 39:42).
- Leviticus 8-9: The Lord gave commandments regarding the consecration of the priests, which the Israelites obeyed completely. The Lord gave His approval by manifesting His glory before them and consuming the burnt offering completely in fire.
- Leviticus 10:1-3: Nadab and Abihu did something “which He had not commanded” and were killed.
- Numbers 1:54: The Israelites took the census just as God had commanded.
- Numbers 2:34: The Israelites arranged their camp just as God had commanded.
- Numbers 3:51: The additional firstborn were redeemed just as God had commanded.
- Numbers 4:49: Moses took a count of the Levites, just as God had commanded.
- Numbers 9:23: The Israelites did everything at the commandment of the Lord.