EXODUS
a *Good Word* Study Guide
by Tiago Arrais

The book of Exodus is very dear to me. When I think about the book of Exodus I think of at least three things.

The first, Exodus *reminds me of my past*. It was in the book of Exodus that I found my home for several years during graduate school as I tried to understand how the book depicted God's relationship to the world and humans in its pages. My work then was interested in philosophical questions. It was focused on how the God-human relationship took place and what it conveyed about a possible philosophy of the Hebrew Bible. But this was many winters ago. Today, as I sit in my home here in Walla Walla writing these words, I am grateful for the opportunity to open this book again, in this season of life, and to allow the text to speak again and again about a God deeply interested in people, in bodies, in what is done to people and bodies, and about a God who works to liberate people then and now from those who do harm to people and bodies. This leads me to the second thing I think about when I think about the book of Exodus.

The book of Exodus also *reminds me of liberation*. It speaks of the plight of a foreign people in a foreign land who end up being oppressed by the powers of the time and used as slaves for the larger goals of Empire and its subjects. In response to His covenant promises and these practices and insensibilities, God re-appears in the book of Exodus—after being seemingly absent since the ending of the book of Genesis—with a liberating word: *Let my people go*. But the word that comes to the reader in the book of Exodus is not simply an ancient word to a people long deceased. This is a word that undoes the power structures of the world then, throughout history, and even now. The book of Exodus inspired biblical authors (see how Amos mentions other "exoduses" God had worked in history beyond Israel in Amos 9:7) and many subsequent movements in history aimed toward the liberation of people who were oppressed, marginalized, and de-humanized by the powers of the time. From Egypt to North America, from Haiti to South America, the word contained in this book moved people toward new visions, promises and actions in times of distress and chaos. In the context of North American history, Joel S. Baden in "The Book of Exodus: a Biography" writes that "*Exodus provided the conceptual framework for the struggle for equality in America from its founding to the present… abolitionists and civil rights activists have turned over and over again to Exodus—not only reaffirming its centrality but renewing its relevance in each successive era*" (184-185).

The book of Exodus carries a subversive word. It should come as no surprise, then, to notice how the Gospel writers do not deprive the reader of echoes to the narrative of Exodus as they outline the birth, life, and death of Jesus—the one who would inaugurate a greater Liberation and Exodus. From the flight in and out of Egypt to the baptism "in the waters," from the journey into the desert where Jesus, like Israel, would be tempted and would learn to depend fully on God for life and provision to the veil of the tabernacle being torn at Jesus' death. These are but a few of the many echoes of the Exodus that are hidden within the Gospels. The liberating word of God moves. It moves from the Exodus, through the prophets, into the Gospels, and even now. It is in thinking of the Gospels that I turn to the third thing the book of Exodus reminds me of.

The book of Exodus r*eminds me of Divine presence*. John opens his Gospel informing the reader that the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" or "pitched a tent" with us. These words would not carry much weight if the book of Exodus did not anticipate the original story of how God comes to His people to the point of dwelling with them, and remaining with them in the tabernacle. Exodus is the precedent for the Divine movement toward humans in need of deliverance that only later we see embodied in Jesus. But Exodus does not only establish precedents, the book also *follows* precedents. Exodus is the story of how the same God who hovered over the waters of the deep chaos before the creation of the world continues to

move over new chaotic environments to bring about the possibility of life again, and again. In creation, in Egypt and in the desert God—be it by cloud or a pillar of fire—hovers over His people and leads them toward a blessing and a life that is only possible within the certainty of Divine presence. If the book of Exodus was just about the liberation of the people it would have ended in the 15th chapter with a song of liberation. But the narrative moves forward twenty-five additional chapters to highlight the desire of God not only to liberate the people from bondage, but *to be with* the people as their God.

These are a few things the book of Exodus reminds me of, and it is to this book that we turn our attention to in this new Adult Sabbath School Lesson (written by my former Andrews University professor, Dr. Jiri Moskala).

My goals for this study guide are not bold. My desire here is to simply provide additional questions and a few quotations that might stimulate deeper discussions relating to the content of the lesson and the book of Exodus itself. While these two things might seem simple, they come from a place of deep intention. Questions and words from other authors are meaningful ways in which we can all experience the charity of learning in community. While questions open up new ways of seeing what is in front of us in these texts, reading insights from others helps us to listen to the voices of those who have looked at these texts before us. To see anew and to listen. It is toward this practice of charity and interpretation in community that I have prepared this study guide.

It is my prayer that this new lesson and study guide (along with the *Good Word* discussions) might inspire us to remove the sandals from our feet so that we might move toward the holy ground of the spaces and the bodies that the God of the Exodus moves toward even today. The apostle Paul reminds us of the didactic nature of the events of the Exodus in 1 Corinthians 10—along with its relation to their time and our time—by writing: "*these things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the end of the ages have come*."

And here we still are, at the end of the ages, in the desert of history, surrounded by voices crying for liberation, awaiting a new word and the providential presence of the God of the Exodus.

As we turn to the Word, may we find them.

Tiago Arrais
Walla Walla, Washington
Spring, 2025.

EXODUS LESSON
OVERVIEW

1) Oppression: The Background and the Birth of Moses—June 28-July 4

2) The Burning Bush—July 5-11

3) Rough Start—July 12-18

4) The Plagues—July 19-25

5) Passover—July 26-August 1

6) Through the Red Sea—August 2-8

7) The Bread and Water of Life—August 9-15

8) Covenant at Sinai—August 16-22

9) Living the Law—August 23-29

10) The Covenant and the Blueprint—August 30-September 5

11) Apostasy and Intercession—September 6-12

12) "Please, Show Me Your Glory"—September 13-19

13) The Tabernacle—September 20-26

LESSON **ONE**
Oppression: The Background and the Birth of Moses *(Exodus 1-2)*

:: Key Questions

1) Why is it meaningful to consider the title of the book (Exodus x Shemot) as we think about the nature of the book of Exodus itself?

2) What kind of a world is the world in the first chapters of Exodus and how similar is it to our world today?

3) Where is God and where are "His people" in the introduction of the book of Exodus? How do the women depicted in the first two chapters of Exodus provide insights into possible answers to this question.

4) How does the author use irony and reversal in the scene of Pharaoh's daughter saving Moses? How does this moment move the story forward?

5) What can be learned of Moses in these early chapters? What do you make of his seeming identity crisis and act of resistance?

:: Theological Insights

"The book of Exodus moves from slavery to worship, from Israel's bondage to Pharaoh to its bonding to Yahweh. More particularly, the book moves from the enforced construction of buildings for Pharaoh to the glad and obedient offering of the people for a building for the worship of God. Exodus advances from an oppressive situation in which God's presence is hardly noted in the text to God's filling the scene at the completion of the tabernacle." **Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus (Interpretation)*, 1.**

"The English name of the second book of the Bible is 'Exodus,' a term that comes to us, via the Latin, as an abbreviation of the Greek title exodos aigyptou ('Road out from Egypt'). This title focuses the reader's attention on the narrative in the first fourteen chapters of the book, which tell the story of Israelites departing from Egypt. The remaining thirty-six chapters of the book recount the journey to Sinai and then the revelation there of the covenant and its stipulations; and they conclude with a description of a tabernacle and an account of its construction. The Hebrew title of the book follows ancient Semitic practice of naming a work by its opening words, in this case 'And these are the names', which is usually shortened to Names. This title, which refers to the 'names' of the sons of Jacob whose descendants are now in Egypt, conveys the connection of Exodus with the preceding biblical book, Genesis, which ends with the story of their descent to Egypt. In so doing, it indicates that Exodus is part of the larger literary unit known as the Torah, or Pentateuch." **Carol Meyers, *Exodus (NCBC)*, 1.**

"Oppression in any of its forms means death. This was the experience of the Jewish people in Egypt, a country that became a symbol of deprivation and exploitation as well as of sin, which is the ultimate cause of injustice. Set over against this experience was the experience of the exodus: liberation brings life. God liberates because God is the God of life. The messianic proclamation of Jesus Christ is likewise focused on liberation. The theme thus runs through the entire Bible and reveals to us a God who loves life; life is God's will for all beings. To believe in Yahweh, the God who liberates, and to maintain that Jesus, "the author of life" (Acts 3:15), is the Son of God, is to be a friend of life." **Gustavo Gutierrez, *The God of Life*, 18.**

LESSON **TWO**
The Burning Bush *(Exodus 3-4)*

:: Key Questions

1) Abraham J. Heschel talks about "the prophet" being one who feels deeply what God feels (pathos). Consider the possible symbolic meanings of the burning bush—what do they disclose about the nature of God, his relationship to the world, and Moses' mission?

2) Why is the revealing of God's name significant in the development of the story of God and His people?

3) What does God's statement, "I have seen... I have heard... I know... and I have come down" reveal about God's stance toward the oppressed? How should this inform the ethical sensibilities of communities of faith today?

4) How do you interpret God's anger with Moses (4:14)? What does it say about the emotional life of God?

5) How do the strange scenes in chapter 4:24-26 challenge your view of God and His relation with people? Pay attention to your thought process as you try to explain, resolve, deny what the text depicts—what does your thought process convey about how you face challenging texts in general?

:: Theological Insights

"Moses also experiences a challenge to his way of approaching and knowing the world. His encounter at the burning bush calls into question not only the reliability of *this* mysterious sight. It challenges the natural human presumption that seeing is the most trustworthy way of apprehending the world. Moses, relying on sight, had approached the bush hoping to take its true measure. He trusted that his vision would give him full access to the being and meaning of what the world put before him: what you see is what there is, and it beckons you to know it. Instead, he encounters a voice before which one can be confident only that one is in the presence of a being, but without any clue regarding its totality, never mind its identity and nature. Through speech and hearing we learn—at most—only as much as the speaker chooses to reveal to us. The mystery of what is hidden is enough to inspire caution and even awe." **Leon Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 64.**

"Exodus 3:14 is one of the most puzzled over verses in the entire Hebrew Bible… The force is not simply that God is or that God is present but that God will be faithfully God for them… God will be God with and for the people at all times and places…. Israel's own experience with God in its history will confirm the meaning of this name. Israel both understands its history from the name and the name from its history. The name shapes Israel's story, and the story gives greater texture to the name." **Fretheim, *Exodus (Interpretation),* 63-64.**

"The language of the Old Testament is so suspicious of any rhetoric which never stammers that it has as its chief prophet a man "slow of speech and of tongue." In this disability we can see more than the simple admission of a limitation; it also acknowledges the nature of this kerygma, one which does not forget the weight of the world, the inertia of men, the dullness of their understanding." **Emmanuel Levinas, "Revelation in the Jewish Tradition," *The Levinas Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 197.**

LESSON **THREE**
Rough Start *(Exodus 5-6)*

:: Key Questions

1) Pharaoh responds to Moses' call for justice by increasing oppression (questioning "rest" and adding to the labor so that the people will not regard "lying words"). What does this say about how oppressive powers react to the demands for liberation?

2) How can the Israelite response to increased hardship inform contemporary understandings of faith under oppression?

3) Egyptians perceive the Israelites as "idle." How does derogatory language precede de-humanizing actions in the Bible and in history?

4) How does God's reaffirmation of the covenant with the patriarchs strengthen the Israelites' faith (especially in 6:3)? What is the role of memory in our religious practices and liturgies?

5) Why does the narrative pause in chapter 6 to add Moses's genealogy? In what ways does the genealogy serve to legitimize his leadership and mission?

:: Theological Insights

"Perhaps nowhere is Pharaoh's hardness of heart demonstrated more clearly than in the first words he utters in the Exodus narrative: 'Who is the Lord?' In time, of course, Pharaoh will have this question answered for him more pointedly than he ever imagined, and as such, Pharaoh's question foreshadows the irony of Israel's escape from his grasp." **Peter Enns, *Exodus* (NIVAC).**

"[on 5:5 and Pharaoh's refusal to let the people "sabbath] It may explain the economic reasons for refusing the request. The Israelites are so numerous that any interruption of their labors would entail an enormous loss of productivity. It might also take up the original theme of 1:7, 9-10 that the huge population would constitute a power to be reckoned with were they to quit working." **Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*, 28.**

"…in this system there can be no Sabbath rest. There is no rest for Pharaoh in his supervisory capacity, and he undoubtedly monitors daily production schedules. Consequently, there can be no rest for Pharaoh's supervisors or taskmasters; and of course there can be no rest for the slaves who must satisfy the taskmasters in order to meet Pharaoh's demanding quotas… the "Egyptian gods" also never rested, because of their commitment to the aggrandizement of Pharaoh's system, for the glory of Pharaoh surely redounded to the glory of the Egyptian gods. The economy reflects the splendor of the gods who legitimate the entire system, for which cheap labor is an indispensable footnote!" **Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*.**

"The genealogy links Moses and Aaron with the twelve sons of Jacob in 1:1-4… it serves a credentialing purpose… After Moses' and Aaron's failures with Pharaoh and with the resultant identity issues, in view of the accusations of some Israelites (5:20), and Aaron's latecomer status, it may have been thought important to inform the questioning reader. Chapter 6:26-27 stresses that God addressed both Moses and Aaron and sent them on this mission… The Christian will be reminded of a comparable interweaving of genealogy and story of another savior of Israel (Matthew 1)." **Fretheim, *Exodus (Interpretation),* 91.**

LESSON **FOUR**
The Plagues *(Exodus 7-10)*

:: Key Questions

1) Chapter 7 begins with a clarification of the dynamic between God, Moses and Aaron in terms of prophetic activity followed by an announcement of judgment that God would bring to the land of Egypt. How does this text anticipate later prophetic activity within Israel?

2) How do the miraculous signs performed by Moses and Aaron challenge Pharaoh's authority? In what ways do the "plagues" challenge the Egyptian worldview and its pantheon of gods?

3) What does Pharaoh's continued resistance reveal about the nature of human obstinacy in the face of justice? What is the meaning of "hardening of the heart" in the sequence of the plague texts?

4) Why is it important that future generations remember the signs God performed in Egypt? How do memory and testimony serve to build community resilience in oppressed or marginalized groups (and in communities of faith today)?

5) How do the plagues (hail destroying crops and animals) reflect a breakdown of Egypt's ecological and economic systems? What do they teach us about the relationship between divine judgment and the environment?

:: Theological Insights

"The present narrative is a sophisticated and symmetric literary structure with a patterns of three groups each comprising three plagues. The climactic tenth plague possesses a character all its own. The first two afflictions in each triad are forewarned; the last always strikes suddenly, unannounced. Furthermore, in the case of the first, fourth, and seventh plagues Pharaoh is informed in the morning and Moses is told to 'station' himself before the king, whereas in the second of each series Moses is told to 'come in before Pharaoh,' that is, to confront him in the palace. Finally, in the first triad of plagues it is always Aaron who is the effective agent; in the third, it is always Moses. The controlling purpose behind this literary architecture is to emphasize the idea that the nine plagues are not random vicissitudes of nature; although they are natural disasters, they are the deliberate and purposeful acts of divine will—their intent being retributive, coercive, and educative. As God's judgments on Egypt for the enslavement of Israelites, they are meant to crush Pharaoh's resistance to their liberation." **Sarna, *Exodus*, 38.**

"Egypt was renowned in the ancient world for its sages and its workers of magic and wonders. The positive function of magic for Israelites as well as others in the biblical world has already been noted in the discussion of Moses' staff (4:2-5). Similarly, magic is not viewed negatively here. he techniques of Israel's leaders are not contrasted with those of the Egyptians. Rather, this scene shows Israel's god to be more powerful; for the magic rods of the Egyptian court, when turned into snakes, are consumed by Aaron's staff. This fascinating vignette not only introduces the signs-and-wonders narrative; it also anticipates the climax of the story of departure, when the Egyptians perish in the divided Reed (Red) Sea. In the poetic celebration of the escape of the Israelites in chapter 15, God's outstretched hand, the equivalent of Aaron's staff, causes the earth to "swallow" the pharaoh's army (v. 12); the verb is the same as in 7:12." **Meyers, *Exodus (NCBC)*, 80-81.**

LESSON **FIVE**
Passover *(Exodus 11-12)*

:: Key Questions

1) How does the Passover ritual help shape a collective identity for the Israelites? What role does the household play in Israel's liberation? How does the command to share the lamb among neighbors reflect communal values, especially under threat? How does shared ritual function in your own community or faith tradition?

2) What does the use of blood on the doorposts signify? What does this action represent, and how is it developed in the Bible?

3) Why are the people told to eat with sandals on and staff in hand? What does this urgency say about faith in movement?

4) What does the inclusion of non-Israelites in the Exodus say about God's vision of community? How might this challenge narrow views of who "belongs" in God's liberating work? How different is this from the first chapter of the Exodus (when Pharaoh turns his people against the Israelites)?

5) In what ways does the institution of the Passover tie personal piety to communal faith, trust, and deliverance?

:: Theological Insights

"A newly liberated people will create practices and institutions that are in tune with their new status. In the case of passover, however, liturgy precedes the liberative event… the ritual is set before the event occurs… the event is liturgy." **Fretheim, *Exodus (Interpretation),* 137.**

[on 12:11 - "and you shall eat it hurriedly"] "Hebrew *hippazon* expresses a sense of haste informed by anxiety. The noun is used only in connection with the Exodus. The prophet Isaiah (52:12) implicitly contrasts the future unhurried and unagitated redemption of Israel from exile with the circumstances of the Exodus: 'For you will not depart in haste [*hippazon*]." **Sarna, *Exodus*, 56.**

"[U]ntil now the Israelite slaves have been almost entirely passive. They have cried out from their miseries. They have turned a deaf ear to Moses's promise of divine redemption. They have watched from a distance the destructive effects of the plagues on their Egyptian masters. But they have done nothing to show that they deserve emancipation or even that they want to be redeemed. If they are to make the transition from slavery toward the possibility of self-rule, the people themselves must do something to earn their redemption. The tasks they are given, both before and after their deliverance, are intended in part to make them worthy of being liberated: they are to act, and they are to act in obedience to God's instructions; they are to act trusting in God and in His servant Moses." **Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 162.**

"The tragedy of Pharaoh was the failure to realize that the exodus from slavery could have spelled redemption for both Israel and Egypt. Would that Pharaoh and the Egyptians had joined the israelites in the desert and together stood at the foot of Sinai!" **Abraham J. Heschel, "The White Man on Trial" in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 103.**

LESSON **SIX**
Through the Red Sea *(Exodus 13-15)*

:: Key Questions

1) Why does God ask for the consecration of the firstborn after the Exodus? How might this ritual be understood as a way of remembering that life belongs to God, not Pharaoh?

2) What role does embodied ritual (like eating unleavened bread) play in helping future generations internalize liberation? How do our bodies remember what our minds sometimes forget?

3) How does the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night signify God's leadership? What might this say about divine guidance in uncertain, in-between spaces in our lives?

4) How does the "Song of Moses" function as a theological and political declaration? How does poetry serve to affirm collective identity and memory?

5) What does Miriam's leadership and song teach us about: a) the role of a prophet, b) the role of women in Israel's history? How can we reclaim and honor the prophetic voices of women in our own faith communities?

:: Theological Insights

"The triggering move that sets off this final and definitive burst of wonder, God's salvation act, unprecedented and unsurpassable, is a meal, an ordinary meal, a meat and potatoes meal, prepared and eaten by a family in their own kitchen. The emphasis is on ordinariness, the ordinariness of the place (home), the ordinariness of the food (meat and bread), the ordinariness of those who eat (family members). It is definitely not a gourmet meal… This is so characteristic of biblical spirituality: the ordinary and the miraculous are on a single continuum. Anything and everything that we believe about God finds grounding in what we do in the course of any and every ordinary day. We are not permitted to segregate our salvation away from the details of getting around and making a living." **Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 174.**

"The pillar-cloud was a manifestation of Yahweh himself, not merely something he sent them. By reason of being guided by the pillar, the Israelites knew all day every day that God was present with them. Here was a supernatural… visible reminder that Yahweh was at the head of his people as they marched or encamped, whether by day of by night. Therefore, even the seemingly erratic route described by 13:20 in combination with 14:1-3 could be trusted because Yahweh was directing them on it. Yahweh chose the odd route—not they." **Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus (NAC)*.**

"Miriam is explicitly identified as a prophet—a title that, interestingly, is never attached to Moses within the book of Exodus, and is assigned to Aaron only metaphorically: he plays the articulate "prophet" to Moses' silent "god" when they approach Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1). Miriam, however, has a more clearly defined prophetic role. She was a musician, and music was associated with prophecy in the ancient Near East, including Israel (1 Sam. 10:5), and further associated with prophetic performance in the context of worship (1 Chr. 25:5–6). Wilda Gafney cites Exodus 15:20–21 as an instance of 'interpretive prophecy,' part of 'the first religious musical performance in post-Exodus Israel' (Gafney, Daughters, 80–81)." **Ellen F. Davis, *Opening Israel's Scriptures*, 48.**

LESSON **SEVEN**
The Bread and Water of Life *(Exodus 16-18)*

:: Key Questions

1) What is God teaching the Israelites (and us) through the daily provision of manna and the prohibition on storing it? How does this practice challenge the empire mindset of accumulation and control? How do these wilderness experiences reshape Israel's understanding of God—not just as deliverer, but as sustainer?

2) How is Sabbath more than a religious observance—how is it a political and social act of resistance? What are modern forms of "Sabbath resistance" in today's work-driven culture?

3) How does the people's panic and complaint reflect the difficulty of transitioning from slavery to freedom? How does God's response show both mercy and formation?

4) Why is it important that this place of crisis is named "Testing" and "Quarreling"? How does remembering places of failure shape communal identity honestly and faithfully?

5) How does Jethro's advice to Moses reshape the structure of authority and justice? What might this say about listening to non-Israelite voices/wisdom from outside institutional religion?

:: Theological Insights

"Two rules govern the manna economy: limiting the daily collection to 'an omer a head' (Exod 16:16)—as much as a person can eat in a day—and refraining from collection on the Sabbath. On that day, everyone is to stay comfortably seated (!) at home (16:29–30). This is the first time Israel is called to observe the Sabbath… This is a litmus test, and a crucial one, to determine 'if they will walk in [YHWH]'s teaching [torah] or not' (16:4)… Although the rules of the manna economy seem straightforward enough, Israel has trouble following them. They try to save a surplus, and Moses gets angry (16:20); they go out to collect on the Sabbath, and YHWH gets angry (16:27–29). This is the first time God's anger is directed against the people (cf. 4:14)… This wilderness economy is of course temporary; the manna fall will end when the Israelites settle in a land where they can plant grain (Exod 16:35). Therefore, we might ask whether the virtue of restraint has enduring value for people in more ordinary circumstances, such as our own. The answer lies in the odd symbol of the clay jar of manna that Moses instructs Aaron the priest to set in the most holy spot in the sanctuary. The daily 'omer-ful' is to stand "before YHWH as a keepsake for your generations" (16:33). Ultra-perishable manna is literally enshrined as a permanent reminder of what it means for Israel to eat within limits, on YHWH's terms. The alert reader might think back to the first story about eating within a divinely set limit—a limit that the first humans violated, with the result that they were expelled from Eden. Putting together these two stories of beginnings—of humanity as a whole and of the people Israel—we might infer that eating modestly and mindfully is one of our chief obligations to the God who created us and keeps us alive." **Davis, *Opening Israel's Scriptures*, 51-53.**

"Moses here delivers His very first command to the newly freed slaves. And it deals with how they go about satisfying their appetite… Take what you need and what your household needs, but no more. The principle: to each (only) according to his needs. The implicit premise: there is enough for all." **Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 229.**

"The gift of the water of life comes from the same source as the gift of the law, a source of life for the community of faith… They bring to realization God's original intentions for the creation in the midst of chaos." **Fretheim, *Exodus (Interpretation),* 190-191.**

LESSON **EIGHT**
Covenant at Sinai *(Exodus 19-20)*

:: Key Questions

1) Why does God call the people to the mountain but also set boundaries around it? What does this tension between intimacy and distance say about the nature of divine holiness?

2) What does it mean for Israel to be a "kingdom of priests"? How does that reshape their role in the world? How was this calling applied to the church in the New Testament and how might this calling apply to faith communities today?

3) Why is physical preparation (like washing clothes and abstaining from sex) required before meeting God? What does this say about how bodies, boundaries, and holiness are understood in the ancient world?

4) How do the commandments in Exodus 20 build a new moral and social structure in contrast to Egypt's Empire? Which ones speak most directly to issues of injustice today? How does each commandment undo some part of Egypt's domination (forced labor, idol worship, disregard for the vulnerable)? How can we read the commandments as a call to social transformation, not just personal piety?

5) What does Sabbath teach us about God's justice? How is it a radical alternative to the systems of exploitation in Pharaoh's Egypt—and today?

:: Theological Insights

"Equality is the holy grail of revolutionary politics. It has often been sought, but never achieved. The two best-known attempts have been equality of wealth (through communism or socialism) or equality of power (through participative, as opposed to representative, democracy). It is unlikely that any such system will endure, because wealth and power are essentially contested goods. The more you have, the less I have. Therefore my gain is your loss. Knowledge is different. If I give all I know to you, I will not thereby know less. I may know more. Equality of dignity based on universal access to knowledge is the only equality likely to last in the long run… At Mount Sinai, all Israel became partners to the covenant. God spoke to everyone – the only recorded revelation, not to a prophet or a group of initiates but to an entire people. Everyone was party to the law, because, potentially, everyone could read it and know it. All were equal citizens in the nation of faith under the sovereignty of God. That is what happened at Sinai… Torah… was not a code written by a distant king, to be imposed by force. Nor was it an esoteric mystery understood by only a scholarly elite. It was to be available to, and intelligible by, everyone. God was to become a teacher, Israel His pupils, and the Torah the text that bound them to one another." **Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation*.**

"[I am the Lord your God] keeps the law personally oriented… Obedience is relationally conceived… Those who are given the law are already God's people. Hence the law is not understood as a means of salvation but as instruction regarding the shape such as redeemed life is to take in one's everyday affairs." **Fretheim, *Exodus (Interpretation)*, 223-224.**

"In rabbinic legend, the Decalogue was offered by God to all the other peoples of the earth only to be rejected by them. That it was proclaimed in the wilderness, and not within any national boundaries, highlights its universality." **Sarna, *Exodus*, 109.**

LESSON **NINE**
Living the Law *(Exodus 21-23)*

:: Key Questions

1) Why is God so insistent on protecting the widow, orphan, and foreigner? How does your community embody—or fail to embody—this kind of Divine concern?

2) How do these laws about Hebrew servants attempt to limit power and restore dignity? How do we engage critically with texts that still regulate servitude?

3) What do these laws of restitution teach us about making things right? What would a system rooted in restoration, not punishment, look like today?

4) How does Sabbath rest for land and laborers reflect God's concern for all creation? What systems today deny that kind of rest—and how might we resist them?

5) How do we read and apply laws that were specific to a different time and culture, yet still carry divine intent?

:: Theological Insights

"These chapters, containing the first body of Torah legislation, have become known in English as the 'Book of the Covenant,' Hebrew *sefer ha-berit*. This name is based in 24:4, , which recount that Moses put the divine commands into writing and then read aloud the covenant document to the people, who gave it their assent. The title is of major importance, for it underscores the outstanding characteristic of the collection: its divine source. Social rules, moral imperatives, ethical injunctions, civil and criminal laws, and cultic prescriptions are all equally conceived to be expressions of divine will… Unlike the ancient Near Eastern corpora of laws, the document here is not a self-contained, independent entity; rather, it is an inseparable part of the Exodus narratives. The narrative context is essential to the meaning and significance of the document." **Sarna, *Exodus*, 117.**

"[on Exodus 23:4-5] your enemy is also a human being. Hostility may divide you, but there is something deeper that connects you: the covenant of human solidarity. Distress, difficulty – these things transcend the language of difference. A decent society will be one in which enemies do not allow their rancour or animosity to prevent them from coming to one another's assistance when they need help. If someone is in trouble, help. Don't stop to ask whether they are friend or foe." **Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation*.**

"Scholars of biblical law, comparing our text with ancient Mesopotamian and Hittite legal collections, have identified numerous points of contact but also significant differences… one major difference between the two sets of laws [is that] a characteristic feature of the Code of Hammurabi is its reference to three distinct, seemingly fixed social classes—roughly, 'gentry,' 'commoners,' and slaves—and there are laws that apply differently to members of different classes. The comparable ordinances of the Lord, by contrast, apply uniformly to all members of the community… this difference reflects the more-than-political purpose of the laws: not only righteousness but also holiness, expressed in a special relationship between each Israelite and the Lord… They appear not as a detached legal code but as part of the long, unfolding story of the human race and especially of the Children of Israel, through whom God is now attempting to address humankind's proclivities for folly and mischief." **Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 241-342.**

LESSON **TEN**
The Covenant and the Blueprint (*Exodus 24-31)*

:: Key Questions

1) What are some of the possible connections between the Sanctuary and the creation of the world (and the Garden of Eden)? What is the author trying to convey with these parallels?

2) How is God's desire to to dwell with the people different from Pharaoh's rule? What does it mean that God chooses to dwell in a movable tent instead of a fixed temple (and why are these things established in the desert)? How might this shape our understanding of church, presence, and holiness?

3) Why was the Sanctuary to be built exclusively on the basis of voluntary offerings from the people?

4) Why does the priest wear names of the tribes on his garments? What does it mean for spiritual leaders today to "carry" their people into God's presence?

5) God fills Bezalel with the Spirit to create beauty (this is the first time the Spirit "fills" someone in the Bible). How might we value artisanship and creativity as divine gifts in our communities?

:: Theological Insights

"[the presence of God] beyond Sinai, is to be accomplished by constructing a dwelling place for God… assuring God's accessibility to the community. Virtually all of the rest of Exodus focuses on that portable structure… It is no wonder that the materials in this third part of Exodus are often referred to as 'the tabernacle texts.'" **Meyers, *Exodus (NCBC)*, 219.**

"There are seven divine speeches in chapters 25—3 to correspond to the seven days of creation. Some of the speeches have parallels with creation days, and both accounts conclude with a concern for keeping the sabbath (31:17; Gen. 2:1-3)." **Fretheim, *Exodus*, 270.**

"Readers who have noticed the failings and defects of prior human projects (especially in Babel and Egypt)… should be interested to see whether the new (joint) building project can correct the errors of prior human artistry and, more important, complete the Lord's own acts of making. Noah's ark, built according to a divine blueprint, was the vehicle for a re-Creation of terrestrial life. Can the Tabernacle, built according to a divine blueprint and housing the (different) Ark of the Covenant, become the vehicle for the world's second sanctification: a sacred space for the indwelling of the Lord among His people? Might the Tabernacle function somehow as a 'completion' of Creation?" **Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 455.**

"[Divine Presence] was further and further distanced from earth as a result of humanity's sins… beginning with Abraham, the Divine Presence came closer and closer, until, with the making of the *Mishkan*, it came as close as it had at the beginning… The making of the *Mishkan* was therefore a cosmic event; a return to Eden and a mending of the exile between humanity and God. God would once again have a home… among human beings. It would be sited in the centre of the Israelites' camp, travelling when they travelled, resting when they rested. No longer would the Israelites sense the presence and proximity of God only in miracles or moments of crisis. It would be a daily event, a constant epiphany. Only thus can we understand the parallels between the Tabernacle and creation." **Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation*.**

LESSON **ELEVEN**
Apostasy and Intercession *(Exodus 32)*

:: Key Questions

1) Why do the people make a calf? What does this say about how fear and impatience can cause us to recreate false security from our past, even if it enslaved us?

2) Why does Moses break the tablets? Does this act serve as protest, lament, or judgment?

3) How do we wrestle with the Levites' violence in the name of loyalty to God? Where is the line between righteous indignation and spiritual extremism?

4) What does it mean that Moses offers to be erased for the people's sake? How does this point to sacrificial love as the core of godly leadership?

5) What idols do modern people make—not golden calves, but other symbols of safety, power, or control? How does true worship challenge those attachments?

:: Theological Insights

"Hebrew *'egel* is a young ox or bull… Throughout the Near East the bull was a symbol of lordship, leadership, strength, vital energy, and fertility. As such, it was either deified and worshipped or employed in representation of divinity. Often the bull or some other animal served as a pedestal on which the gods stood… Aaron seems to have followed contemporary artistic convention. The young bull would have been the pedestal upon which the invisible god of Israel was popularly believed to be standing. His presence would be left to human imagination." **Sarna, *Exodus*, 203.**

"Lord of the universe, I want to propose a deal. We have many sins. You have much forgiveness. Let us exchange our sins for Your forgiveness. And if You should say that this is not a fair exchange, then my reply is: If we had no sins, what would You do with Your forgiveness?" **Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev in Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire*, 108.**

"Moses's instruction to the Levite volunteers is chilling. He puts the death-dealing words, which are surely of his own devising, into the mouth of 'the Lord, the God of Israel.' In God's name, he orders them to engage in wholesale (and, it seems, random) slaughter throughout the camp… When specifying whom to slay, he does not speak about the guilty but about brothers, companions, neighbors. He orders every Levite to practice fratricide… the plain text makes it appear that the killings by the Levites are less a matter of justice and more a matter of cleansing and purgation—requiring sacrificial victims as the necessary means of purification—and of frightening the many into obedience by making an example of the few." **Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 547-548**.

"We do not know what God would have done if Moses had not entered into the discussion as he did. But the picture that finally emerges from this chapter is that Moses is responsible for shaping a future other than what would have been the case had he been passive and kept silent. This text lifts up the extraordinary importance of human speaking and acting in the shaping of the future. Simply to leave the future in the hands of God is something other than what God desires. Simply to leave the future in the hands of the people is not a divine desire either." **Fretheim, *Exodus*, 292.**

LESSON **TWELVE**
"Please, Show Me Your Glory" *(Exodus 33-34)*

:: Key Questions

1) What is more devastating—the loss of the land or the loss of God's presence? How does this speak to what we truly value in our spiritual lives?

2) Why does Moses ask to see God's glory—and why does God only reveal God's "back"? What does this reveal about the limits of human understanding and God's self-disclosure?

3) What does it say about God that God chooses to rewrite the covenant rather than cancel it? How do we experience "rewriting" moments in our relationship with God?

4) Why is God so emphatic about avoiding assimilation into Canaanite religious life? How do we balance openness and distinctiveness in our faith communities today?

5) Why does Moses' face shine after meeting with God? How does Paul use this imagery in 2 Corinthians 3?

:: Theological Insights

"While the core of this incident starkly portrays human weakness and sin, our gaze must not rest solely on shame. Notice where God is in the story. How does he respond to the people and to His designated leader, Moses? Yahweh's response should give hope to all whose recall all too clearly their personal golden calves." **Jon L. Dybdahl, *Exodus (The Abundant Life Amplifier)*, 244**.

"When Moses the tablets and presents himself before God, God passes before him and proclaims the name of Yahweh. As a virtual exegesis of this name, God proclaims a summary statement regarding the nature of this God with whom Moses and Israel now have to do on the far side of apostasy… [when Moses returns] What receives special attention is not Moses' instruction of the people… but the shining appearance of his face (the verb can also be translated 'horned,' leading to many renderings of a horned Moses, e.g., Michelangelo; Chagall)… [this] shows that Moses is not simply a speaker of the word of God; in some sense he embodies that word. The people thus do not only hear that word being spoken, they see it standing before them… The embodiment of the word conveys that which is concrete, tangible, with distinct implications for the life of those who hear that word. The human response can never simply be to believe or speak; it must also mean to do, to reembody the word in the world… Moses' shining face anticipates the filling of the tabernacle with the divine glory in 40:34-38, foreshadowing that glory in both its radiance and its veiledness." **Fretheim, *Exodus*, 301, 310-312**.

"At the burning bush, seeking to know God's name, Moses asked to know God's nature or essence. He was no doubt motivated partly by a need to learn whether God's powers were adequate to the mission He proposed for him, as well as by his anticipated need to inform the people Who it was Who had sent him to them. But Moses was, I believe, primarily motivated by an intellectual desire to learn the truth about the divine, knowledge sought for its own sake. Here, although Moses's philosophical interest is clearly still present, he feels strongly his political responsibility for the Israelite people… He now wants to know not the Lord's essence but His *ways* in the world… whether, and on what basis, He is capable of forgiveness." **Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 555**.

LESSON **THIRTEEN**
The Tabernacle *(Exodus 35-40)*

:: Key Questions

1) Why does the text emphasize Sabbath again—right before the Tabernacle is built? What does this teach about how we balance action and rest?

2) Why is the spinning of yarn by women mentioned specifically? What might this tell us about valuing unseen or domestic labor as spiritual (35:25-26)? What is the significance of all the careful repetition and detail (in all of these chapters)? How do these descriptions help reframe "tedious" tasks as acts of worship?

3) The expression "as the Lord commanded Moses" appear seven times in both chapters 39 and 40. What could this convey about the relation between Sanctuary and creation?

4) How does it change everything that God's glory now fills a tent, not a mountain? What does it mean that God's presence is not distant, but inhabiting the midst of the people?

5) How is the story of Exodus not just about freedom from, but about freedom for? What does it mean that God's final act in this book is not delivering more laws, but dwelling with the people?

:: Theological Insights

"the completed Tabernacle is erected on New Year's day, as Exodus 40:7 records. This underscores the idea that a new era in the life of the people has begun…" **Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 156.**

"Seven times in chapter 39, describing how the Israelites constructed the Tabernacle, we hear the phrase 'as the Lord commanded Moses.' Seven times in chapter 40, narrating how Moses set up the Tabernacle, we hear the phrase 'as the Lord commanded him.' Where have we heard this language before? The answer takes us back to another construction project, the first in the Torah: Noah's ark. Three times we hear virtually the same phrase… There is deep symbolism here, if we can decode it. It seems to be this. God creates order. Human beings create chaos. It is only when human beings create their own symbolic order – the ark, the Tabernacle – by precise and exacting obedience to God's command, that there is a chance for humanity to survive. This whole way of seeing things is diametrically opposed to myth. In myth, chaos is built into the structure of the universe. Gods fight. Elements clash. Tragedies happen, and not all the virtue in the world will save us from them. At best, we can try to placate or entice the gods. Conflict and chaos are 'out there,' in the capriciousness of nature and its fundamental indifference to humankind. In Judaism the problem of chaos is not out there, but 'in here,' in the human heart… With this we reach perhaps the deepest and most controversial thesis implicit in the book of Exodus, and central to Tanakh as a whole. *Without God, human beings will fail to create a just society*. Without the Divine Presence symbolised in the Tabernacle at the heart of the camp, human beings will do what they have always done: oppress one another, fight with one another, and exploit one another." **Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation*.**

"Exodus concludes with remarks not about God and Moses but about the cloud, the people, and their movements… Even though they will depart the "holy" mountain, the Children of Israel will bring with them a portable Sinai in miniature." **Kass, *Founding God's Nation*, 586-587**.