

Sermon Guides for Genesis – Exodus

Series Title: The Story Begins

Tag Line: Genesis and Exodus for Today

Dates (2020): January 5, 12, 19, 26

Key Verse:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters....

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:1-2, 31)

Series Overview

This is the beginning of our year-long journey through the Bible. As the curtain rises on the stories of creation, the fall of humanity, the families of Abraham, and deliverance of the Israelites, the curtain also rises on the unfolding of God's grace, power, and love. We will begin to see the threads of this grand narrative arc that will carry us through all 66 books of the Bible: God desires to be known and to be in a relationship with us. And God desires for us to be in healthy relationships with one another.

The stories of Genesis and Exodus may seem like mere ancient stories from long ago, or fanciful fairy tales we tell our children. But they are stories for and about today, describing who God is, who we are, and why we need God. We all struggle with questions about ultimate purpose and destiny. Why am I here? Am I more than just a collection of molecules taking up infinitesimal space in a vast universe? Do I matter to God? The stories of Genesis and Exodus show us that God has been at work in our lives and in our world since the beginning. God created us, and God doesn't give up on us when we stumble. God is faithful to God's promises, and provides a way through our misery and wilderness.

Colors, Images, Mood, Vibe:

Green and brown (earth, creation colors); yellow and orange (sunrise colors).

Images of earth, curtain rising, clouds parting, sunrise.

Feelings of anticipation, excitement, hope, brightness, the unfolding of something new.

Sermon 1

Title: In the Beginning

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 19

Key Word: Creation

Theme: Creation, Noah, Babel

Main Idea: God is the source of all life, and God doesn't give up on us when we sin.

Sermon Description:

Throughout the first chapter of Genesis, we hear the refrain, "And God saw that it was good." God's intended purpose for creation, and for us, is to live up to the goodness with which we were originally created. The stories of creation, the fall, the flood, and the dispersion of nations at Babel repeats a cyclical theme that will be revisited throughout the Bible: God calls us to our best selves; we obey for a season; we fall prey to sin and disobedience; and God works to redeem us and bring us back to reconciliation.

These origin stories remind us of God's goodness and power, as well as the responsibility we have as recipients of God's goodness and power. We are called to be stewards of creation, to be guardians against sin, and to be faithful and risk-taking when God summons us to serve.

Sermon 2

Title: The Roots of Our Family Tree

Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32

Key Word: Family

Theme: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Jacob Wrestles with an Angel

Main Idea: There is no such thing as a perfect family in the Bible. But even in our strained family relationships, God offers the possibility of love and forgiveness.

Sermon Description:

Most of Genesis is a scrapbook of dysfunctional family photographs. As much as the Patriarchs and their families are esteemed for their heroic faithfulness, they all had their blemishes. Abraham lied about Sarah to protect his own life. Jacob was a trickster who wrestled with God and others. Joseph was vain and brash in his younger years, and was part of a family of envious brothers and a father who played favorites.

But these are much more than just quaint family vignettes. They speak to our human condition today, and offer a metaphorical reminder of God's relationship with God's people. Rather than place full trust and obedience in God, we often devolve into internal squabbling, self-preservation, and grudge holding. It is not the noble qualities of these family members that are most instructive to us. It is in their failings, that we might avoid them ourselves.

Sermon 3

Title: The God Who Delivers

Scripture: Exodus 14:1-30

Key Word: Liberation

Theme: Moses, Plagues, Crossing the Red Sea

Main Idea: God promises, and God delivers. We can count on it.

Sermon Description:

In 400 years, the small band of Jacob's family had grown to a multitude of Israelites, leveraged by Pharaoh into subservience as slaves. Their story of liberation from Pharaoh under the leadership of Moses has become an archetypal story of God's favor for and deliverance of the oppressed throughout the centuries. It became a key narrative for the Civil Rights Movement, the liberation movements in Latin America, and many others.

The essential theme is this: God is on the side of the oppressed, and God calls us to play a role in their deliverance. The story of Moses is also a reminder that God sees potential within us that we do not see in ourselves, surrounds us with people who support us in God's work (Aaron and Miriam), and is stronger than any other force at work in the world (Ten Plagues, Passover).

Sermon 4

Title: Rules to Live and Love By

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17

Key Word: Community

Theme: The Ten Commandments

Main Idea: God's rules are not restrictive, but liberating. They give us "freedom to" rather than "forbidding us from."

Sermon Description:

The wilderness was an essential part of the Israelite freedom story. As much as it would have been easier for them to skip right from Egypt into Canaan, there was a necessary distance between the two, a stretch of time between the Red Sea and the Jordan River. Those forty years in the wilderness were a formative time for them, as they would receive the basic instructions that would be critical to forming in them a decent, ordered community, and teaching them what utter reliance on God looks like.

The Ten Commandments, which encapsulate the Hebrew laws in Exodus through Deuteronomy, can feel antiquated to us, even primeval. But they are crucial in orienting us toward God (Commandments 1-4) and others (Commandments 5-10) in relationships of holiness, respect, and love. They are rules to live and love by today.