

# Editorial: Reading and Applying the Book of Exodus Today

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As the old adage goes, the three rules of real estate are summed up in three words: location, location, location. By analogy, we can say that the three rules of biblical hermeneutics are also summed up in three words: context, context, context. To read and apply the Bible correctly, it is crucial that we always ask ourselves: What is the context of this text?

But more needs to be said. In asking, “What is the context of this text?” it is also important to remind ourselves that correct biblical interpretation cannot simply begin and end with a text’s immediate context, as important as that is. Given the fact that Scripture, like God’s plan of redemption, has not come to us all at once, but, instead, has progressively come over time, we must learn to read every biblical text in light of the entire canon of Scripture. In other words, if we are going to interpret Scripture correctly and not simply read biblical books in an isolated fashion, we must learn to read the “parts” in terms of the “whole” and vice versa, otherwise we will fail to interpret Scripture accurately.

In contemporary idiom, the discipline which best helps us read Scripture in its overall context is “biblical theology.” At its heart, biblical theology is the discipline which seeks to understand the whole Bible by carefully interpreting biblical texts in light of the entire canon, taking into consideration the progressive nature of God’s redemptive plan and revelation of himself through human authors. That is

why biblical theology, rightly understood, seeks to examine the unfolding nature of God’s plan as it thinks through the relationship between *before* and *after* in God’s plan, along the Bible’s own storyline. In this light, as we read Scripture, it is helpful to think of interpreting biblical books according to three horizons: textual, epochal, and canonical.

The textual horizon involves reading texts in light of their immediate context, which is normally associated with grammatical-historical exegesis. The epochal horizon goes one step further and seeks to think through where the text is placed in the unfolding plan of God. Lastly, the canonical horizon reads the book in light of the fullness of revelation that has now come in Christ. At the canonical level, we must pay careful attention to how the storyline of Scripture develops and how the particular book we are reading fits into the larger canonical presentation. Why is this important to stress? For this simple reason: unless we learn to read Scripture this way we will not only read Scripture as merely a series of unconnected segments without an overall plan, purpose, and goal, which will simply lead us to misunderstand the Bible and undercut the glory of our Lord Jesus, we will also fail to understand the divine intention of the text.

With all of this in mind, this edition of *SBJT* is devoted to understanding better the book of Exodus. Our primary goal is to help our readers interpret this impor-

tant book both in its immediate context as well as its place in the overall plan of God. It goes without saying that the book of Exodus is an important book in the Bible's overall storyline. In many ways it is a hinge book that not only introduces us to the nation of Israel, but it does so by placing them within the stream of God's glorious work of creation, the disastrous effects of the Fall, and God's gracious purposes of redemption for this world centered in the promises given to Abraham of a great name, seed, and land (Gen 12:1-3). Abraham, as presented in Genesis, is crucial since he is the one who is the means by which God will reverse the effects of sin and judgment begun in Genesis 3, and restore us and creation to its rightful role and purpose. As a result of the disobedience of Adam—our covenantal head—sin and death have entered God's good world. But thankfully, God has chosen not to leave us to ourselves. He has graciously promised that his purposes for creation and the human race will continue through his provision of a Redeemer, the seed of the woman, to bring us back to him and ultimately to restore the old creation. This promise, first given to Noah, is passed on through Abraham, by God's own gracious calling and election of him. Through Abraham, and his seed, blessing will come to the nations. In this way, Abraham emerges within Genesis as the answer to the plight of all humankind. But it is not only in Abraham that God's promises are realized, it is also in his progeny, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation of Israel. In fact, God's calling and establishing his covenant with Israel—that which is unpacked for us in the book of Exodus—is in fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and his seed (see Exod 3:6). God did not set his love on Israel because

they were better or more numerous than the nations (Deut 7:7). Neither was it for their righteousness that they were given the land of Canaan. The basis for God's calling of Israel was not to be found in them but in God's sovereign choice and covenant loyalty to Abraham (Exod 19:4; Deut 7:8). Israel, then, which serves as a kind of new Adam, will be the means by which God will bring about a resolution of the sin and death caused by the first Adam. Israel, as a nation, is the agent and means God will use to achieve the wider purposes of the Abrahamic covenant that will ultimately lead us to Christ.

Now it is in the book of Exodus that this storyline of Genesis is unpacked and developed. To understand this book aright is to understand more of God's unfolding drama of redemption, and ultimately to learn better where we fit into that plan, now that Christ has come. It is in this book, with the establishment of Israel in the exodus and the inauguration of the old covenant, that many of the typological structures and building blocks of God's redemptive plan are laid out before us—e.g., priesthood, sacrifice, tabernacle, etc.—which, as redemptive history unfolds, ultimately point beyond themselves to the coming of our Lord.

In a variety of ways, all of our articles are attempting to help us understand Exodus afresh. Some articles are seeking to place the book within its larger historical context, while others are laying out the overall theology of the book, but all of the articles combined have the goal of enabling Christians today better to read and apply Exodus for the good of the church, and for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that this edition of *SBJT* will lead to that end.