

Echoes of Exodus in the Great Commission?

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. Today's question is, do you see any parallels between the Great Commission and the Exodus? I don't want to get echo crazy. Just from a surface level, there seem to be some connections. Confrontation with the name, ascending out, baptism, and the nation's call to the Lord.

Am I crazy, or is there something going on here? I don't think you're crazy. I'll begin by reading the passage in question. I'll read Matthew's version.

Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen. Now, I think there are connections with the story of the Exodus, just that these connections are less direct and more.

They take a circuitous route back to the Exodus. And I also think there are more direct connections to other narratives. So at the beginning of the book of Matthew, we have an allusion to the Old Testament and the beginning of Genesis in particular.

[1 : 09] So the beginning of Matthew reads, The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. And then it goes, Abraham begot Isaac, etc. And so it draws our attention back to the story of Abraham.

It also, at the very beginning, where it says the book of the genealogy, that's a sort of catchphrase that we find throughout the book of Genesis. So it draws our attention back to Genesis. And then the final verses of the Great Commission draw our attention back to the final verses of the Old Testament in the original arrangement, which I've mentioned before, but I'll read now.

Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord of heaven has given me, and he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.

Who is there among you of all his people? May the Lord his God go with him and let him go up. So when we read that account, it should be fairly obvious that there are close comparisons to be drawn between this and the end of the story of Matthew.

What we should notice also is even within Matthew 23, we have this list of the blood slain from Abel to Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, and that draws our attention back to 2 Chronicles again.

[2 : 44] So Matthew is working with a Genesis to 2 Chronicles vision of the Old Testament, one that comprehends the whole historical narrative of the Old Testament and shows that Christ comes to recapitulate and sum up this entire narrative to complete what Israel had failed in.

And so he walks through the pattern of Israel's own experience. Peter Lighthouse is very good on this. In his recent commentary, Jesus as Israel, his commentary on Matthew, that's part one, I'd recommend that and I'll leave the link for that below.

There's also an article that he has online on the typology of all of this and I'd recommend that too. I'll leave the links for both of those. The parallels between Matthew's account of the Great Commission and 2 Chronicles, its final chapter, are found in Cyrus's declaration of the universality of his kingdom, that all the kingdoms of the earth have been given to him by God, the divine source of that authority, the commission to go, and the divinely commanded task, and then the assurance of divine presence that God will go with them on the way.

And in all of these respects, I think what we're seeing is Christ and Matthew drawing attention to Christ as the builder, as the one leading a new return from exile, a new return to the building of the temple.

And so Christ is the one who will establish his church. Christ is the one who will pour out his spirit, forming the temple of the Holy Spirit in the body, in his body of believers.

[4 : 28] And Christ is the one who ascends on high, like Moses, receives the spirit, and gives it to the people as Moses ascended and gave the law. So there are patterns working out here, and those patterns draw our attention back primarily to the return from exile.

But there is more going on here. I think there is also a reference back to the story of Joshua. If we read the very beginning of the story of Joshua, we have a number of parallels.

After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, Moses, my servant is dead. Now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, the children of Israel.

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given you, as I said to Moses, from the wilderness and this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life, as I was with Moses. So I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

[5 : 43] Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and you will have good success.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. And so there are a number of parallels here. God declares that everywhere that Joshua's foot treads has been given to him, to the very ends of the land.

He assures Joshua of his presence with him and charges him to obey all of the law that Moses has commanded him. And so this mission that the church has is like the mission to return under Cyrus's decree to rebuild the temple.

And it's also like the mission of Joshua, the conquest of the land. And these conquest themes come out quite prominently within the story of Acts. And I've written on these in the book on Echoes of Exodus.

[6 : 55] I'll leave the link for that below. These themes are fairly familiar in scripture and they occur on a number of occasions. Now, how does this all relate to the Exodus more generally?

I believe the primary emphasis is not found upon the original Exodus, but the entrance into the land, which is the completion of the Exodus story to one, or an initial completion of it.

A greater completion is seen in the building of the temple. But this initial completion or completion of the key phase of the Exodus story is they leave the wilderness and enter into the land crossing over the Jordan.

And as Joshua, the prophet and leader who leads the mission into the land takes over from the desert prophet. So we see Christ taking over or the church leading its way into the promised land.

And that transition is paralleled in some respects on Jesus' transition from the desert prophet of John the Baptist. So there's another transition that's taking place here that has similarities, but also some differences.

[8 : 01] Now, when we look at the story of the Exodus, one thing we'll notice is that there are symmetries to be found. The whole story of the Exodus taken in the entire story of Genesis to Joshua is a story of there and back again, in some sense, that there is an entrance in or leaving Egypt, going into the wilderness.

And then there's a drawing back of those themes as they enter into the land. So there is a chiasmic structure, a bookended structure. So you begin with Moses' encounter with the angel of the Lord in the burning bush, for instance.

And then you have Joshua's encounter with the commander of the armies of God. You have the judgments that are going to fall upon Egypt and then the judgments that are going to fall upon Jericho.

You have the celebration of the Passover before the crossing of the Red Sea. And then you have the celebration of the Passover after the crossing of the Jordan. You have the crossing of the Red Sea and then the crossing of the Passover that are paralleled with each other, both of which are attached to God's establishing the rule of a particular leader.

Moses in the first case, Joshua in the second. And then you have the manna being given, the manna being cut off. Then you have the event of the charging of Joshua.

[9 : 31] And then maybe that could be associated with the events of Sinai. The connections get weaker at that point. But what you have is more generally a bookended narrative. So the events that we see at the end have correspondences in the events that we see at the beginning.

And that, I think, helps us to see why we would see some sort of echoes of Exodus at this point. Because what we're seeing is a recapitulation in reverse of Exodus events as the opening of that chiasm in the original Exodus is recapitulated in reverse as they enter into the land.

And so you start off with the meeting with the angel, the Passover, the crossing of the Red Sea, giving of the manna, etc. And then you have the cutting off of the manna, the crossing of the Jordan, the celebration of the Passover, the destruction of Jericho, and the meeting with the angel. And these themes, as they play out in reverse, show us that the whole story of the Exodus, from the going out of Egypt into the entering, until the entering into the Promised Land, is a coherent, integral narrative.

And that, I think, helps us to read also some of the significances of the different events. That Joshua's experience being paralleled with that of Moses in many respects.

[10 : 49] Joshua is a second Moses. He receives the spirit of Moses. He's one that is named by Moses. He continues the mission of Moses. And in many respects, the church's commission is of a similar character.

The church is commissioned by Christ, and the church continues in his mission. This is one of the things that we see in the mission of Elijah and Elisha, for instance. Elijah is given a mission on Mount Sinai.

And that mission involves anointing his successor, anointing Haziel, king of Syria, and anointing Jehu. And he doesn't do those things. He only does one of them.

He only anoints Elijah. But Elisha does the others. And Elisha's completion of Elijah's mission shows that those two missions are actually one mission. And in many respects, that's what we see with the mission of Christ and his church.

That this mission of Christ and his church is a single mission carried out by the Spirit. And Christ gives his Spirit to his church so that they might continue his mission in the power of his Spirit.

[11 : 51] In a similar manner, the mission of Joshua is a completion and a conclusion of the mission of Moses. Moses does not bring them in. Joshua brings them in and he completes what Moses has started.

There are other things that are significant here. There are the themes of the bringing back from exile. This exile theme is also related to wilderness wanderings. Wilderness wanderings are a sort of exile.

But there's the building of the temple, the establishment in this new land, this giving of a new inheritance, this going out into new territory.

These themes are very prominent within the story of Joshua, within the story of Cyrus' decree, that there is authority, there is commission, there is land and inheritance that's given and there is presence that will go with you on the way.

And so the mission of Christ that he gives to the church is to be understood in terms of all these paradigms. It's also to be understood in terms of the fundamental calling of humanity, the vocation that's given at the very beginning, to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth, to subdue it and to exercise dominion over all of its creatures.

[13 : 03] That be fruitful in multiplying, filling the earth, etc. is a pattern that is played out within the Great Commission. It's played out within the story of Joshua's entrance into the land, in the story of Cyrus' decree and the consequent re-entrance into the land and rebuilding of the temple.

And so I think these themes do exhibit echoes of Exodus or be it at one remove from the original Exodus event. I think it can help us to understand what's taking place in the story of the church. The story of the church is patterned in many ways according to the Exodus and according to the entrance into the promised land and these give us fundamental paradigms for what's taking place. What we're not looking for is sort of direct one-to-one relationships between everything. Rather these are musical connections and you can have overlaid themes that intertwine and interplay with each other.

So in some respects we are in the wilderness. In other respects we are entering into the promised land. In other respects we are still in Egypt and those themes can play in different ways in a musical way within the New Testament helping us to realise where we're situated by not giving us a direct situation that this is a one-to-one relationship with the original Exodus narrative but rather these are the themes that will help us to find our bearings to see in which respects we are situated in a wilderness position in which respects we are situated in the Egypt position and in which respects we are entering into the promised land.

[14 : 42] And in different respects each of those things can be true. There is a lot more that I could say about this. I have written with Andrew Wilson a book on the subject and I'll leave the link for that below.

I've also done quite a bit of writing elsewhere and you can dig that up on my blog in my 40 Days of Exodus series which is uncompleted but I'll leave the link for that and in various other pieces I've written on other sites.

If you would like to ask any further questions please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you would like to support this and future videos please do so using my Patreon account. The links for both of those are below.

Thank you very much for listening, for your time and Lord willing I'll be back again tomorrow. God bless.