

Exodus

by Thomas Nelson

The book of Exodus records the redemption of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and their establishment as a nation governed by terms of God's covenant and the laws of God. During the roughly four hundred years in Egypt, the family of Jacob grew from seventy people to between two and three million.

Hebrew-speaking Jews have always used the initial Hebrew words of the book of Exodus as its title, calling it *ve'elleh shemot*, which means "Now these are the names." The Greek title is *Exodus*, a word meaning "exit," "departure," or "going out."

Author

Together with the rest of the Pentateuch (Genesis – Deuteronomy), Exodus is ascribed by Scripture to Moses. Portions of Exodus specifically name Moses as the author (17:14; 24:3, 4; 34:27), and writers throughout the Old and New Testaments unite in recognizing Mosaic authorship (Mal. 4:4; John 1:45; Rom. 10:5). Furthermore, Jesus himself recognizes the Mosaic origin of the book (Mark 7:10; 12:26; Luke 20:37; John 5:46, 47; 7:19-23).

Since the eighteenth century, some scholars have challenged the Mosaic authorship of Exodus in favor of a series of oral and written sources that were woven together by editors late in Israel's history. Such arguments are far from conclusive, particularly since little lasting agreement has emerged as to the precise character and extent of the documents which are alleged to lie behind the text of Exodus as we now have it.

Date

Like the remainder of the Pentateuch, Exodus was written during the wilderness wandering of Israel between the time of the Exodus and the death of Moses. Moses probably kept a record of God's work, which he then edited in the Plains of Moab shortly before his death (c. 1406 B.C.).

The question of the date of the book of Exodus is related to the date of the Exodus event. First Kings 6:1 states that the Exodus occurred 480 years before the founding of the temple (966 B.C.), which implies a 1446 B.C. date for the Exodus from Egypt. Some scholars argue that archaeological evidence points to a date of about 1275 B.C., and they contend that the 480 years of I Kings 6:1 should be seen as a symbolic number (one forty-year generation times the twelve tribes equals 480). The archaeological evidence is ambiguous, however, and the 1446 B.C. date is adopted here.

Themes and Literary Structure

The book of Exodus is easily divided into two main sections: the redemption from slavery in Egypt (chs. 1-18) and the revelation from God at Mt. Sinai (chs. 19-40).

Central to the book of Exodus is the concept of redemption. Because of his faithfulness to the covenant promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God delivers His people from

slavery, preserves them during the wilderness wandering, and prepares them to enter the Land of Promise.

Israel was redeemed from bondage in Egypt into a covenant relationship with God. Now that the people had experienced God's deliverance, guidance, and protection, they were ready to be taught what God expected of them. On Mt. Sinai, Moses received God's moral, civil, and ceremonial laws, as well as the pattern for the tabernacle to be build in the wilderness.

Outline of Exodus

Part One: Redemption from Egypt (1:1-18:27)

1. The Need for Redemption from Egypt (1:1-22)
 - a. Israel's Rapid Multiplication (1:1-7)
 - b. Israel's Severe Affliction (1:8-14)
 - c. Israel's Planned Extinction (1:15-22)
2. The Preparation of the Leaders of the Redemption (2:1-4:31)
 - a. Moses is Redeemed from Murder (2:1-10)
 - b. Moses Tries to Redeem by Murder (2:11-22)
 - c. Israel Calls upon God (2:23-25)
 - d. God Calls upon Moses (3:1-4:17)
 - e. Moses Accepts the Call (4:18-26)
 - f. Israel Accepts the Call of Moses as Deliverer (4:27-31)
3. God's Redemption of Israel from Egypt (5:1-15:21)
 - a. Moses Confronts Pharaoh by Word (5:1-6:9)
 - b. Moses Confronts Pharaoh with Miracles (6:10-7:13)
 - c. Moses Confronts Pharaoh Through Plagues (7:14-11:10)
 - d. Israel Redeemed by Blood Through the Passover (12:1-13:16)
 - e. Israel Redeemed by Power from Egypt (13:17-15:21)
4. The Preservation of Israel in the Wilderness (15:22-18:27)
 - a. Preserved from Thirst (15:22-27)
 - b. Preserved from Hunger (16:1-36)
 - c. Preserved from Thirst Again (17:1-7)
 - d. Preserved from Defeat (17:8-16)
 - e. Preserved from Chaos (18:1-27)

Part Two: Revelation from God (19:1-40:38)

1. The Revelation of the Old Covenant (19:1-31:18)
 - a. The Preparation of the People (19:1-25)
 - b. The Revelation of the Covenant (20:1-26)
 - c. The Judgments (21:1-23:33)
 - d. The Formal Ratification of the Covenant (24:1-11)
 - e. The Tabernacle (24:12-27:21)
 - f. The Priests (28:1-29:46)
 - g. Institution of the Covenant (30:1-31:18)
2. The Response of Israel to the Covenant (32:1-40:38)
 - a. Israel Willfully Breaks the Covenant (32:1-6)
 - b. Moses Intercedes for Israel's Salvation (32:7-33)
 - c. Moses Convinces God Not to Abandon Israel (32:34-33:23)
 - d. God Renews the Covenant with Israel (34:1-35)
 - e. Israel Willingly Obeys the Covenant (35:1-40:33)
 - f. God Fills the Tabernacle with His Glory (40:34-38)

Egypt

Bordered by the Mediterranean Sea on the north, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gulf of Suez on the east, and the Lybian desert on the west, Egypt is a land with a rich and well-recorded ancient history. Some of our knowledge of Egypt's ancient history stems from the work of the Egyptian priest Manetho (c. 270 B.C.), who records events of 31 dynasties, beginning c. 3200 B.C. The chart which follows begins with Ahmosis I, the founder of the eighteenth dynasty. According to the "early date" theory of the Exodus (adopted here), the Pharaoh of the Exodus was probably Amenhotep II; according to the "late date" theory, the Pharaoh was probably Rameses II.

Egyptian Pharaohs

Ahmosis I	1570-46 B.C.
Amenhotep I	1546-26 B.C.
Thutmose I	1526-12 B.C.
Thutmose II	1512-04 B.C.
Thutmose III	1504-1450 B.C.
Hatshepsut	1504-1483 B.C.
Amenhotep II	1450-25 B.C.
Thutmose IV	1425-17 B.C.
Amenhotep III	1417-1379 B.C.
Amenhotep IV	1379-62 B.C.
Smenkhkare	1364-61 B.C.
Tutankhamon	1361-52 B.C.
Ay	1352-48 B.C.
Horemheb	1348-20 B.C.
Rameses I	1320-18 B.C.
Seti	1318-04 B.C.
Rameses II	1304-1236 B.C.
Merneptah	1236-1223 B.C.

Pagan Egyptian Gods

Religion in ancient Egypt was characterized by a complex polytheism, as a wide variety of local deities and nature gods were worshiped by the people. Many gods were associated with fertility and agriculture, and the protection of virtually every aspect of life was ascribed to some deity. The ten plagues were direct challenges to the worship of Egyptian deities who were thought to protect Egyptian life and property. In this way the supremacy of Yahweh, the God of Israel, was vividly demonstrated.

The Ten Plagues of Egypt

Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, refused to release the Hebrew people from slavery and allow them to leave his country. So the Lord sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians to break Pharaoh's stubborn will and to demonstrate His power and superiority over the pagan gods of Egyptians.

These plagues occurred within a period of about nine months, in the following order:

1. The water of the Nile River turned into blood (7:14-25).
2. Frogs overran the countryside (8:1-15).
3. People and animals were infested with lice (8:16-19).
4. Swarms of flies covered the land (8:20-32).
5. Disease killed the livestock of Egypt (9:1-7).
6. Boils and sores infected the Egyptians and their animals (9:8-12).
7. Hail destroyed crops and vegetation (9:13-35).
8. Swarms of locusts covered the land (10:1-20).
9. Thick darkness covered Egypt for three days (10:21-29).
10. The Egyptian firstborn, both of the people and their animals, were destroyed by God's death angel (11:1-12:30).

In all of these plagues, the Israelites were protected, while the Egyptians and their property were destroyed. The Hebrews were delivered from the final plague when they marked their houses, at God's command, by sprinkling the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. The death angel "passed over" the Hebrew houses.

At this final demonstration of God's power, the Pharaoh gave in and allowed Moses and the Israelites to leave Egypt. This deliverance became one of the most memorable occasions in Hebrew history. The Passover is celebrated annually even today to commemorate God's deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery.

The Ten Plagues on Egypt

The Plague	The Effect
Blood (7:20)	Pharaoh hardened (7:22).
Frogs (8:6)	Pharaoh begs relief, promises freedom (8:8), but is hardened (8:15).
Lice (8:17)	Pharaoh hardened (8:19).
Flies (8:24)	Pharaoh bargains (8:28), but is hardened (8:23).
Livestock diseased (9:6)	Pharaoh hardened (9:7).
Boils (9:10)	Pharaoh hardened (9:12).
Hail (9:23)	Pharaoh begs relief (9:27), promises freedom (9:28), but is hardened (9:35).
Locusts	Pharaoh bargains (10:11), begs relief (10:17), but is hardened (10:20).
Darkness (10:22)	Pharaoh bargains (10:24), but is hardened (10:27).
Death of firstborn (12:29)	Pharaoh and Egyptians beg Israel to leave Egypt (12:31-33).
God multiplied his signs and wonders in the land of Egypt that the Egyptians might know that He is the Lord.	

Moses

Born to Hebrew slave parents during dangerous times, Moses was miraculously protected and prepared by God to be the instrument of liberation for His people. To this end, Moses was raised in the Egyptian court and educated “in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). At age forty, after attempting to protect a fellow Israelite and killing an Egyptian, Moses fled to the wilderness of Midian. There he remained another forty years, married, and fathered two sons. Upon receiving the call of God from out of the burning bush (3:2-4:17), Moses returned to Egypt to lead the people out of Israel out of Egypt.

The figure of Moses is central to the religion of the Old Testament. As the instrument of the Mosaic Covenant and the divinely appointed recipient of the Law, Moses helped to establish the form which the Old Testament worship and life of God’s chosen people was to take for the remainder of the Old Testament period.

Though the circumstances are very different, it is an interesting parallel that Moses and Christ both faced the threat of death as infants, and that both were saved to accomplish a great redemption and to establish a blood covenant between God and His people.

Revelation at Sinai

On Mt. Sinai, Moses receives God’s moral, civil, and ceremonial laws, as well as the pattern for the tabernacle to be built in the wilderness. After God judges the people for their worship of the golden calf, the tabernacle is constructed and consecrated. It is a building of beauty in a barren land and reveals much about the person of God and the way of redemption.

The Mosaic Covenant given at Sinai was given to the nation of Israel so that those who believed God’s promise to Abraham would know how they should conduct themselves. The mosaic Covenant in its entirety governed three areas of their lives: (1) the commandments governed their personal lives, particularly as they related to God (20:1-26); (2) the judgements

governed their social lives, particularly as they related to one another (21:1-24:11); and (3) the ordinances governed their religious lives so that people would know how to approach God on the terms that He dictates (24:12-31:18).

The Mosaic Covenant did not replace or set aside the Abrahamic Covenant. Rather, it was added alongside the Abrahamic Covenant so the people of Israel would know how to conduct their lives until Jesus Christ, the Messiah, would come and make a complete and perfect sacrifice for sin, a sacrifice toward which the Mosaic sacrifices only point. The Mosaic law was not given as a way of meriting salvation, but that human beings might realize that they are helpless and hopeless apart from the saving grace of Christ (Gal. 3:19-24).

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20:1-17) were laws given by God as guidelines for daily living. Although God gave the commandments to His people through Moses at Mount Sinai more than three thousand years ago, they are still relevant today. These laws are also known as the Decalogue, from the Greek word meaning “ten words.”

The Ten Commandments are divided into two sections. The first four commandments govern our relationship to God, while commandments five through ten speak of our relationship to other people. The meaning of the Ten Commandments may be stated briefly as follows:

1. Trust God only (20:3, 4).
2. Worship God only (20:5, 6).
3. Use God’s name in ways that honor Him (20:7).
4. Rest on the Sabbath day and think about God (20:8-11).
5. Respect and obey your parents (20:12).
6. Protect and respect human life (20:13).
7. Be true to your husband or wife (20:14).
8. Do not take what belongs to others (20:15).
9. Do not lie about others (20:16).
10. Be satisfied with what you have (20:17).

About 1,300 years after God gave these commandments, Jesus upheld them. He actually placed these laws on a higher plane, demanding that the spirit, as well as the legal aspects, of the laws be observed. He placed His stamp of approval on the commandments by declaring, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17).

The Code of Hammurabi, an ancient law code named after an early king of Babylonia, bears many similarities to the Ten Commandments. However, the Law given at Mount Sinai reflects a high view of the nature of God and His holiness and His requirements of His people.

Ark of the Testimony

Also known as the ark of the covenant, the ark of the Lord, and the ark of God, the ark of the Testimony was the object most sacred to the Israelites during their time in the wilderness.

Do we know what the ark of the Testimony looked like? We cannot be positive, but there is a clear and detailed description in the Old Testament (Ex. 25:10-22). Archaeologists have

discovered depictions of the ark (for example, a stone carving of the ark was found at the excavation of a synagogue in Capernaum).

From the biblical account, we can determine these facts about its physical appearance: It was a box about 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high, made from acacia wood. Four poles were inserted into rings on the side of the ark so it could be carried by four men.

The lid on the ark, called the mercy seat, was made of gold. The Hebrew word traditionally translated “mercy seat” could be rendered “place of atonement,” because this was where the high priest sprinkled blood once each year on the Day of Atonement as the atonement for sin (Lev. 16:15). Mounted on this lid were two winged creatures (cherubim), which faced each other with outstretched wings. Inside the ark were the two stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments, which Moses had received from God at Mount Sinai (Ex. 20). It also contained a golden pot of manna and Aaron’s rod that budded (Heb. 9:4), reminders of God’s provision for the needs of the Israelites in the wilderness.

The Israelites believed that God lived among them in the tabernacle between the wings of the cherubim on the mercy seat. God spoke to Moses from this place (Num. 7:89) during their years of wandering in the wilderness as they were being prepared to enter the Promised Land.

The ark was carried ahead of the Israelites when they left Mount Sinai (Num. 10:33); when they crossed the Jordan River to enter Canaan (Josh. 4:9-11); and when they circled the walls of Jericho before that city fell (Josh. 6:1-20). After many other travels, it was finally placed in Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem (I Kin. 8:1-9), only to disappear after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The ark served as a visible reminder of God’s presence with the Hebrew people. The mercy seat, covered with gold, symbolized God’s throne and His rule in the hearts of those who acknowledge Him as their sovereign Lord.

Aaron as High Priest

When the priesthood was instituted in the wilderness, Moses consecrated his brother Aaron as the first high priest of Israel (Ex. 28; 29; Lev. 8; 9). The priesthood was set within the tribe of Levi, from which Aaron was descended, and Aaron’s sons inherited the position of high priest from their father.

The high priest’s dress represented his function as mediator between God and people. Over his regular priestly garments the high priest wore an ephod, a two-piece apron. He also wore a breastplate of judgment with twelve precious stones. These were engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:15-30). In the pocket of the breastplate, directly over the high priest’s heart, were the Urim and Thummim (28:30), the medium through which God communicated His will to the people.

The high priest was responsible for seeing that the duties of all priests were carried out (2 Chron. 19:11). His most important responsibility occurred annually on the Day of Atonement. On this day he entered the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place, in the tabernacle and made sacrifice first for his own sins, then for the sins committed by all the people during the year just ended (Ex. 30:10).

David organized twenty-four groups of priests to serve at the tabernacle during his reign as king of Judah. Kings Hezekiah and Josiah assisted the high priest in reform and restoration of the temple. In the New Testament, the high priest was referred to as ruler of the people (acts

23:4, 5) and was the presider over the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body of the Jews (Matt. 26:57-59).

The New Testament speaks of Jesus in figurative terms as a “High Priest.” He was not of the order of Aaron but of Melchizedek, an eternal priesthood (Heb. 5:10). He had no need to offer sacrifice for His own sin, for he had no sin (Heb. 7:27, 28). He offered His own blood, once for all (Heb. 9:12, 26; 10:10, 12). Therefore, we may come boldly into the presence of God through the “one Mediator between God and men, *the Man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5).

The Tabernacle

The tabernacle was a portable tent or sanctuary used by the Israelites as a place for worship during their early history. In the Old Testament, it is frequently called “the tent of meeting,” indicating that it was the primary place of encounter between God and His people. The structure was built in accordance with God’s instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai during the people’s years of wandering in the wilderness (Ex. 26; 35). With the people contributing materials and labor, the tabernacle was completed to God’s specifications. God blessed their handiwork by covering the tent with a cloud and filling the sanctuary with His glory (40:34).

The outer courtyard of the tabernacle was a fenced rectangle about 150 feet long by 75 feet wide (27: 9-19). The courtyard contained a bronze altar for animal sacrifices (27:1-8) and a laver where the priests washed before entering the tent (30:17-21).

The tabernacle itself, measuring 15 by 45 feet, had two main sections: the outer room known as the holy place, and the inner room called the Holy of Holies, or Most Holy Place (26:33).

The outer room contained an altar where an incense offering was burned (30:1-10); the seven-branched gold candlestick (25:31-40); and a table for showbread, signifying God’s presence (25:23-30).

The inner room, or Holy of Holies, was separated from the outer area by a veil, or curtain (26:31-37). This sacred part of the tabernacle was entered only once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. In a special ceremony on this day, he made atonement for his own sins and then offered sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. This most sacred enclosure had only one item of furniture, the ark of the covenant.

The lid of the ark was called the mercy seat. Upon it were two gold cherubim that faced each other. The ark contained the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments (Deut. 10:4,5), a gold pot filled with manna (Ex. 16:33, 34), and Aaron’s rod that budded (Num. 17:10).

During the years when the people of Israel were wandering in the wilderness, the tabernacle was moved with them from place to place (Ex. 40:36-38). When the Israelites pitched camp in the wilderness, the tabernacle was to be placed in the center, with the Levites, who were charged with its care (Num. 4), camping next to it (Num. 1:53). Then the tribes were to be arrayed in specific order on the four sides of the tabernacle (Num. 2). This shows what an important role the tabernacle played in the religious life of God’s people.

After the conquest of Canaan, the tabernacle was moved to Shiloh where it remained through the period of the judges (Josh. 18:1). Later the tabernacle was also stationed at Nob (1 Sam. 21:1-6) and Gibeon (1 Kin. 3:4). When the temple was completed, Solomon had the tabernacle moved to Jerusalem (1 Kin. 8:4). Apparently there was no further need for the tabernacle after the completion of the temple, which became the permanent place of worship for the nation and the center of its religious life.

The many references to the tabernacle in the New Testament should be understood in light of the incarnation, when God's Son became a human being. Because the tabernacle was the place where God and His people met, John declared that the Word had become flesh and "tabernacle" among us (John 1: 14; the Greek word is translated "dwelt" in the New King James Version). Paul spoke of Christ as the "propitiation" for sin in Romans 3:25. He used the same Greek word that referred to the mercy seat of the ark where the high priest made annual atonement. The laver where priests washed before serving in the tabernacle may be reflected in Titus 3:5.

Revelation 8:3-5 speaks of the golden incense altar. Practically every feature of tabernacle is found in the epistle to the Hebrews, a book that describes Jesus as the great High Priest and the ultimate and eternal sacrifice for our sins.

The Furniture of the Tabernacle

Ark of the Covenant- (Ex. 25:10-22) The ark was most sacred of all the furniture in the tabernacle. Here the Hebrews kept a copy of the Ten Commandments, which summarized the whole covenant.

Bronze Laver- (Ex. 30:17-21) It was to the laver of bronze that the priests would come for cleansing. They must be pure to enter the presence of God.

Altar of Burnt Offering- (Ex. 27:1-8) Animal sacrifices were offered on this altar, located in the court in front of the tabernacle. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the four horns of the altar.

Golden Lampstand- (Ex. 25:31-40) The gold lampstand stood in the holy place, opposite the table of showbread. It held seven lamps, flat bowls in which a wick lay with one end in the oil of the bowl and the lighted end hanging out.

Table of Showbread- (Ex. 25:23-30) The table of showbread was a stand on which the offerings were placed. Always in God's presence on the table were the 12 loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes.

Altar of Incense- (Ex. 30:1-10) The altar of incense inside the tabernacle was much smaller than the altar of burnt offering outside. The incense burned on the altar was a perfume of a sweet-smelling aroma.

Source

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