



Exodus

The story of Exodus picks up the story of God's people where Genesis leaves off. At the end of Genesis, we find Joseph's family living in Egypt. Exodus opens some years later with a new Pharaoh who began to oppress God's people and enslave them. Exodus, then, tells the story of how they left Egypt (including the founding of the great festival of Passover), crossed the Red Sea, entered the wilderness and came to Mount Sinai where God made a covenant through Moses with his people and gave to them commandments, including the Ten Commandments. It also tells the story of how they rebelled against God and built a golden calf, before repenting and recommitting to the covenant once more (including the building of the Tabernacle).



How long will it take?

Reading time: 3 hours
Short of time? Just read Exodus 1-3; 7; 12; 14.15-15.1; 20; 34



Genre

History and Law



Anything tricky?

As with many Old Testament stories, some find the portrayal of God to be quite challenging – especially a God who will kill the first-born sons of people in order to get what he wants.

The sections on law towards the end of the book (especially chapters 25 onwards) are not so much tricky as quite boring to read.



Inspiring quotes

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

(Exodus 3.14)

² I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;
³ you shall have no other gods before me.

(Exodus 20.2-3)

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

(Exodus 20.11)



About the Author

Traditionally Moses was regarded as the author of the first five books of the Bible (Genesis–Deuteronomy); known in Judaism as the Torah and in Christianity often as the Pentateuch (or five teachings).

Today many scholars would argue that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch but that these five books grew up over a long period of time and were written down and edited from oral tradition.



About the times

One of the biggest debates around the Exodus and events surrounding it is whether it is possible to date it with any level of certainty.

Some offer a date around the fifteen century bc (counting backwards 480 years from the construction of Solomon’s temple); others offer a date between 1250-1200 bc using archaeological evidence (though others dispute the reliability of this evidence); others still argue that it is impossible to date the event at all.

Other books set around this time

At least in part, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy which are all set around the time of the giving of the law.



What kind of Book is it?

Exodus falls into two categories

- Theological history (i.e. history that is told with an eye to communicating what we believe about God). With the Exodus, the underlying theme is that God is the God who frees people from slavery.
- Law, i.e. the giving of the commandments by God so that the people, in doing the law, were able to express their membership of the covenant.



How is it structured?

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| 1.1-15.21 | God’s people in slavery in Egypt |
| 15.22-18.27 | The journey from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai |
| 19.1-24.18 | The revelation of the Law at Sinai |
| 25.1-31.18 | Instructions for the building of the Tabernacle |
| 32.1-34.35 | The rebellion against God and subsequent forgiveness |
| 35.1-40.38 | The people built the Tabernacle as commanded by God. |



Look out for...

One of the key strands of Exodus is the making, breaking and re-making of the covenant between God and his people. Keep this in mind as you read through the book and ask yourself why it is that the people struggled so much with keeping the covenant.

You will notice that in Exodus, as in Deuteronomy, the people are both given Ten Commandments and other commandments. Keep an eye out in the book for how the Ten Commandments relate to the many other commandments in Exodus.

Divine calling and human response – allied to the covenant are the twin themes of God's calling to his people and their response to him (from God's calling to Moses onwards). Look out for this theme as it unfolds through the book.



What could this mean for me?

Of course one of the major themes in this book is God freeing his people from slavery, they are freed physically from Egypt in Exodus 14, but their minds still seem to be in captivity for a long time afterwards. As you read look out for this and reflect on the ways in which you are still held captive by things from your past.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Talk about the Exodus. If you know the sweep of the Bible at all well you will know that the Exodus is one of the most important events in the imaginations of God's people. Talk about why you think it is so important and in what way it might continue to be important today. You might like to think about whether there is anything that occupies our national imaginations in the same way (e.g. the battle of Hastings? the blitz?)
- Exodus contains the thread (that runs through quite a lot of the Old Testament) of God's reaching out to his people and their inability to remain faithful to him. Why do you think they (and we) struggled so much with faithfulness?
- Exodus says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he wouldn't do what God wanted. Talk about this, what do you think is going on here?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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