

READER'S GUIDE TO THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Lutheran Church of God's Love
October 2021

Brief Introduction

Exodus (from the Greek word *ex-odos*, “way out”) recounts the formative events surrounding the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and the years wandering in the wilderness that followed. The book falls into two major sections roughly following geographical location. The first section of the book describes the enslaved condition of the family of Jacob under the pharaohs, the rise of Moses as leader, and Israel’s subsequent escape from Egyptian bondage after a succession of terrifying plagues. Its geographical focus is the land of Egypt. The second section of the book recounts Israel’s sojourn in the Sinai desert where the Law governing life and worship is given to Moses by the Lord, binding the Israelites to God and to one another in a unique covenant.

Other than God, the key person in the unfolding narrative of Exodus is Moses. His name is related to the Hebrew word for “draw out,” for he was drawn out of the Nile. He will also draw his people out of Egypt by the power of God. Like many other biblical personalities, Moses does not initially respond to God’s call with eagerness. And his bond to this often “stiff-necked” people through thick and thin has served as an example of realism and hope for Israel and the Church throughout the centuries.

Historical Background

Most biblical scholars maintain that the enslavement of the Israelites probably took place under the pharaohs of the 19th dynasty, the first of whom was Ramses I, who came to power around 1309 BC. The cities that the Hebrews were forced to build (see Exodus 1) fit in with the historical descriptions of the extensive building programs of Ramses II. During this time, Egypt consolidated its power over the Nile delta and moved into Canaan and an eventual confrontation with the Hittites, a powerful group moving south from their base in what is now Turkey. In this scenario, the Exodus occurs sometimes between 1291 and 1224 BC.

General Outline

- I. Israelite Oppression in Egypt (1:1-22)
- II. Early Life, Call, and Leadership of Moses and Miriam (2:1-7:7)
- III. Confrontation with Pharaoh (7:8-12:32)
- IV. Liberation from Oppression and Departure from Egypt (12:33-15:21)
- V. Journey through the Wilderness (15:22-18:27)
- VI. Common Life under the Law (19:1-40:38)

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Questions to Consider in your Reading:

- (1) Compare the lives of Moses and Jesus. As you read through the early chapters, think about the similarities and differences.
- (2) What is the difference between the Exodus and a modern-day overthrow of a government by oppressed people?
- (3) Monte Luker, professor of Old Testament at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, once said that the religion of Egypt during the 19th dynasty was a static cult of the dead whereas the religion of the Hebrews was about a living and moving God. What did he mean?
- (4) What is the role of the Law in Exodus? How does the Law function within a community of faith? Which commandments are essential and which vary according to changing and evolving circumstances?
- (5) What lessons can we draw from Moses' relationship with the Hebrew people? What lessons did Moses himself learn along this arduous journey? If you could pick three effective traits of Moses' leadership, what would they be and why? If you could identify three "growing edges" or faults in Moses' leadership, what would they be and why?