



EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: INTRODUCTION

To understand more about the book of Exodus, who wrote it, and what purpose it serves.

More Than a Motion Picture

In 1956 Cecil B. DeMille narrated, directed, and produced what was promoted as “The greatest event in motion picture history.” *The Ten Commandments* starred Charlton Heston in the lead role as Moses alongside Yul Brunner as Rameses and Anne Baxter as Nefretiri (historically known as Nefertari) and was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects. In 1999 the film was selected for preservation in the United States National Film registry by the Library of Congress for being “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.” The film has also aired annually on U.S. network television in prime time during the Passover/Easter season since 1973. And, as you almost certainly know, the story captured in *The Ten Commandments* is so much more than a motion picture. It is an important story to the Judeo-Christian faith and is derived from the second book of the Torah known as *Exodus*.

Exodus in the Hebrew Bible is titled שמות (shemōt) which translates to “names,” a shorthand for the first phrase in the book: “These are the names of the sons of Israel.” It is not only the second book of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), but the second book of the Old Testament and the second book of the Bible at large. This book contains the origins of the covenant name of God (YHWH), the Ten Commandments, the Passover, the plagues, and the a number of other well-known stories and concepts from both the Jewish and the Christian faiths. Beyond that, it is one of the most influential books to the theology of the New Testament’s *Revelation of Jesus to John* (more commonly referred to as *The Book of Revelation*). There are a number of reasons to study this book.

Author

Who wrote Exodus? Traditionally the authorship of Exodus is attributed to Moses, although the work itself never states this. However, in Mark 12:26, Jesus refers to “the Book of Moses,” and then describes “the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,’” which is a direct quote from Exodus 3:6. That Jesus attributes this portion of the text to “the Book of Moses” is more than sufficient evidence that Moses wrote it.

Date

Two biblical texts are helpful in answering when this book was written, or at least the timeframe for which this book gives an account.

1 KINGS 6:1

1 Kings 6:1 says, “In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the LORD.” Longman and Dillard note, “This passage places the exodus 480 years before Solomon’s fourth regnal year, for which scholars are able to give an absolute date of 967 BC. The date of the exodus is then 1447 BC or thereabouts, allowing for the possibility of a rounded-off number.”¹

JUDGES 11:26

Moreover, Judges 11:26 records Jephthah’s claim that Israel had held the land of Moab which had been under Ammonite control for three hundred years since they had entered the land. That means their wanderings would have been three hundred years prior to that point. While not as clear historically, a careful examination of the chronology places the Exodus in the fifteenth century, which corresponds to the more accurate 1 Kings passage.

With these two texts in mind and what we know from historical record, a natural reading of Exodus indicates these events likely took place sometime in the fifteenth century, although some arguments have been made due to archaeological findings for a date as early as the thirteenth century. There is not certainty and thus no dogmatic judgments should be made.

Structure

There are several ways to outline the book of Exodus. Some have suggested a two-fold division of the book as follows:

1. Part One: The Exodus from Egypt (1:1-18:27)
2. Part Two: The Law at Mt. Sinai (19:1-40:38)

This division is helpful in that it captures two of the three major movements described in text. However, others have suggested a three-fold division that accounts for an equally weighty portion of the book:

1. Part One: Israel in Egypt (1:1-13:16)
2. Part Two: Israel in the Wilderness (13:17-18:27)
3. Part Three: Israel at Sinai (18:28-40:38).

In this division, there is specific attention given to the wilderness wanderings of the people prior to arriving at Sinai wherein they receive the law.

¹ Raymond B Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 66.

There is a third way of dividing this book that is more thematic than event-driven, and it also is divided into three portions:

1. Part One: God Saves Israel from Egyptian Bondage (1:1-18:27)
2. Part Two: God Gives Israel His Law (19:1-24:18)
3. Part Three: God Commands Israel to Build the Tabernacle (25:1-40:38)

There is no right or wrong way to divide the book, but rather noting the different options for structuring this study is helpful in that it both highlights the major movements of the book as well as the major themes.

Themes

You'll notice that regardless of how the book is subdivided there are major themes that develop in the overarching narrative of the text. Below are the three major themes of Exodus that will develop in each section of the book.

SALVATION

As Israel is freed from the bondage of slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh and as they move throughout the dangerous terrain of the wilderness towards the Promised Land, the theme of God's saving power continually comes up. Israel, like us, cannot solve their own problems. They are unable to break the chains of Egypt. They are unable to overcome the threats that constantly pursue them in the wilderness. God must continually intervene to save them and sustain them as He leads them towards Canaan. This theme of salvation is predictive of what God will eventually do through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

LAW

Once the Israelites reach Mt. Sinai, God gives them their law. The law is an integral part of the Exodus story in that it ratifies God's standards before His people and demonstrates how imperfect God's people really are. They cannot keep the law, nor do they often want to keep the law. The book of Exodus proves the truth of Paul's statements in Galatians 3:24: "So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith." The word "guardian" is the Greek term παιδαγωγός (paidagōgos), the term from which we get our word "pedagogy." It's a word that means "teacher" or "tutor." In other words, the law teaches us how imperfect and in need of a Savior we truly are. We see this happen again and again throughout the Exodus narrative.

WORSHIP

The last section of the book of Exodus spends significant time discussing the tabernacle, God's earthly dwelling place during the period between Moses and David (prior to the building of the Temple). The tabernacle was seen as a place of holy ground and greatly revered by the people and even feared by other nations. The tabernacle was divided into three parts: the courtyard (Ex. 27:9-19), a Holy place, and a Most Holy place (Ex. 26:31-35). Beyond that, the descriptions of God on Mt. Sinai as well as other theophanies reveal a powerful and holy God worthy of worship and praise (Ex. 19:16). As God leads His people, saves His people, sets a standard before them, and redeems them, He demonstrates many reasons why He and He alone should be the object of worship.

What About Now?

Exodus in many ways is a precursor to the revelation of Jesus Christ in that it demonstrates God's propensity to save, His holy standard for living, and why He deserves to be worshipped. As you read this study, think of the ways in which God's saving His people correlates to how He saves you. Think of the ways in which the law reflects the perfect and sinless life of Jesus Christ, and the holy life to which Christ calls us. Think of the

ways in which we ought to worship God in light of our salvation in Christ. Exodus, while a powerful story of God’s power, pales in comparison to what God accomplishes through the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Why is this book called *Exodus*? What is the Hebrew name for this book?

2. What are three main themes of this book?

Day Two

1. Who wrote this book?

2. Read Exodus 3:6 & Mark 12:26. What does this prove about the authorship of this book?

Day Three

1. What are the three ways one could subdivide this book?

2. Which of these subdivisions do you like the best? Why?

Day Four

1. Of the three themes, which stands out as most important to you? Why?

2. What are you most looking forward to in this study?

Introduction Discussion: Powerless

In many ways, the book of Exodus reveals not only how powerful God is, but how powerless the people of God are. Talk as a group about the ways in which you are reminded of just how powerless you are, and how badly it works out for you when you try and take control of your life.

1. Icebreaker: What does “powerless” mean to you?
2. Do you consider yourself a “control freak?”
3. Would other people describe you as a “control freak?”
4. Has trying to take control over parts of your life ever worked out really badly for you? Share details with the group if you are willing.
5. How does being powerless fuel worship?
6. How does God’s law reveal to you how powerless you actually are?

Takeaways:

1. Exodus is the second book of the Torah written by Moses.
2. Exodus is a story about God’s salvation, law, and holiness displayed to His people as they are redeemed from the bondage of Egypt and moved into the Promised Land.