

## **Exodus, 1**

God delivered His people, Israel, through His prophetic, leader, Moses, and established them as His covenantal, theocratic, nation, through His revelation at Sinai. This included establishing among them the place of His presence—His throne—on earth, the Tabernacle.

Earth's crammed with Heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.  
*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

### **I. Exodus 1-18 The Exodus and Journey to Sinai**

God delivered His people, Israel, from Egypt with a great demonstration of His power, through His chosen, prophetic, leader, Moses, and led them to Sinai.

- A. 1:1-13:16 Preparation for the Exodus Through Ten Plagues
  - 1. 1-4 Bondage and Raising up a Deliverer—Moses
  - 2. 5:1-7:7 Initial Confrontation with Pharaoh and Further Revelation
  - 3. 7:8-13:16 The Ten Plagues
    - a. 7:8-10:29 The nine plagues  
Blood, Frogs, Gnats, Flies, Cattle, Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness
    - b. 11:1-13:16 The Tenth plague (firstborn) —the Passover, and future instructions
- B. 13:17-15:21 The Exodus
  - 1. 13:17-14:31 Crossing the Red Sea
  - 2. 15:1-21 The Song of the Sea
- C. 15:22-18:27 The Journey to Sinai
  - 1. 15:22-26 Bitter water and the LORD their healer
  - 2. 15:27-16:36 No food and manna from heaven
  - 3. 17:1-7 No water and striking the rock
  - 4. 17:8-16 Attack of the Amalekites and The LORD as their Banner
  - 5. 18:1-27 Jethro's rejoicing and advice
    - a. 18:1-12 The testimony of what God had done for Moses and Israel
    - b. 18:13-27 Jethro's advice concerning Moses' leadership

Genesis ends with the House of Israel in Egypt – Joseph dies. Exodus starts with recounting the members of the House of Israel. Key themes – Yahweh's miraculous sustenance of the people under inhospitable conditions and the people's anxious ingratitude.

Multiple sources

- “J” – basic story line (Yahweh or Lord)
- “E” Elohist – integrates almost seamlessly – formal otherworldly tone (“J” has some natural agents which are lacking in “E”, e.g., east wind propels locusts in J)

## Discovery 5 – Exodus

In “E” God speaks from the sky to Moses while in J, God descends to the mountain.

- “P” – enhances the role of Aaron
- “D” – revision to synchronize the events in the two books.

Service of Pharaoh contrasted with service to Yahweh. Period of sanctification between Egypt and Canaan. Sety I is the “new king” and Ramesses II (1279 – b.c.e. – 1212 b. c. e.) the Pharaoh of the Exodus itself.

*Chapter 2* – Moses from Hebrew masha “draw out” and Egyptian “mose” or child.

Moses kills an Egyptian and flees to northwestern Arabia (Midian). Moses is then befriended by Jethro / Reuel. Marries Zipporah and has a son Gershom “sojourner”

**Chapter 3/4** – Call of Moses. Fatal for a human to see God face to face. Burning bush “sene” and hence Sinai or Horeb. “E” source e:9-10 and “J” 3:7-8, 16-22. “P” version is in 6:5-13. Objections

- who am I? (11) (E)
- Who are you? (13) (E)
- People won’t believe me? (J) Three magic transformations
- Heavy of mouth and tongue? (J) Aaron

*Chapter 4* – Israel is Yahweh’s firstborn. Strange incident of demonic attack warded off by circumcision. Perhaps Moses was just very sick.

**Chapter 5:** 22 – Moses questions God. 6:14 – 6:27.

**Tenth Plague and Passover** – this has lots of ritual material in it, e.g., sacrifice of firstborn. Chapter 11

**Chapter 12** – Yahweh institutes Passover; Moses describes the blood rite of Passover to the elders. New calendar. Moses – the blood is designed to avert evil. Sacrifice of firstborn men and animals. Unleavened bread; nomadic ritual – no temple required. Spoils of the land.

*Chapter 13* – firstborn sacrifice – clean animals are substituted for unclean animals.

Looking ahead to time in Canaan. **Chapter 13:17** – Start of sojourn. Time of dependence, isolation, helplessness. Yahweh provides with the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud. **Chapter 14** – starts with God’s game plan to show his power over the Egyptians. People start to murmur – no graves? V.21 – Moses stretches out his hand to part the waters – echo of creation story. Mighty act.

**Chapter 15** – This is an old poem, which begins with the song of Miriam as told by Moses. Celebrate victory; look to the future in Canaan. Waters of Marah – bitterness.

*Chapter 16* – people complain about hunger – manna from the tamarisk bush (still called mann). Yahweh – test the people and make them obedient. Quail comes later.

*Chapter 17* – water from rock (testing and contention). Battle with Amalekites. Moses raises his hands and has Aaron and Hur held up his hands. Joshua mowed them down with his sword. *Chapter 18* – visit to Jethro. Institution of judges.

**Chapter 19** – the start of the Sinaitic Covenant. I saved you; now you must obey my voice and keep my covenant ... “you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priest, a holy nation.”

**Shemot.** In Jewish tradition the book of Exodus is named *shemot*, "names," from the first sentence of the book. Could the use of *shemot* here be an allusion to the importance of name in the primeval story and in Gen. 12:2. "I will make your name great"? Blessing is a prominent theme of the Priestly source (see Chapter 1). Using the phrase "sons of Israel" for the Israelites is deliberate because Jacob's name had been changed to Israel. He is the eponymous ancestor of the nation, that is, the nation takes its name from him.

**Dating the Exodus.** This is a complex issue, dependent on chronological hints in the biblical text as well as evidence from history and archaeology. There are two recognized candidates, 1440 B.C.E. and 1280 B.C.E. The early date is calculated by counting back from the known date of Solomon's temple building using the 480 years from Kings. The late date depends heavily on the date of the conquest of Canaan as determined by archaeology and then working back from the forty years of the wilderness wandering to the exodus.

**The name Moses.** Pharaoh's daughter gave him the name Moses, *moshe* in Hebrew. The Hebrew Bible attaches a folk etymology to the name ([2:10](#)); the Hebrew verb "draw out" puns with Moshe. In reality Moshe is a name derived from the Egyptian verb *msy*, meaning "be born," and the noun *ms* meaning "child or son."

**Sargon Birth Legend.** The Mesopotamian birth story of Sargon of Akkad contains similarities to the Moses birth story. Sargon was the illegitimate son of a high priestess. To keep her position she needed to conceal the birth, so she placed Sargon in a basket of reeds caulked with tar and set him afloat on the Euphrates River. He was discovered downstream by Akki the water drawer, who adopted and raised him. Sargon rose to become the architect of the empire of Akkad.

### **The Burning Bush (J)**

The word here translated "angel" can also mean "messenger."

The "flaming fire" that is such a prominent part of this story is typical of a biblical theophany, or appearance of God. In Genesis 15 God appeared to Abraham in a smoking fire pot. Here he appears to Moses in a flaming bush. On Mount Sinai he appears in lightning, smoke, and cloud. In the wilderness he appears in pillars of cloud and fire.

Moses impertinently asked God for identification: Who are you? How can I identify you to the Israelite elders? In response God identified himself as the God of the fathers, later specified as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then God in a cryptic manner said, "Ehyeh-asher-ehyeh" is my name, enigmatically translatable as "I am who I am."

### **C. Plagues ([5-11](#))**

From the perspective of biblical history the plagues were intended to reveal Yahweh's power to break Egyptian resistance. They are called God's great acts of judgment and were said to come from the finger of God. From a history of religions perspective the plagues may represent Yahweh's judgment on the gods of Egypt, including Re the sun god who was attacked in the ninth plague. From a literary perspective the plagues are arranged in three series of three disasters, with the tenth plague as the climax.

### **D. Passover**

The avoidance ritual of the tenth plague developed into a ceremonial meal called the Passover, or *pesach* in Hebrew. During this meal a roasted lamb was eaten along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (bread made without yeast) called *matsot*. Eating *matsot* symbolized the hurriedness of Israel's departure; the bread simply had no time to rise. In pre-Israelite times the Passover sacrifice and the feast of unleavened bread may have been two separate occasions, one pastorally based and the other agriculturally based. They were combined in biblical tradition and stand as a memorial and eternal ordinance of the exodus (12:14). The Passover ritual is defined not just in Exodus but also in a variety of Torah texts (see Leviticus 23:4-8; Numbers 9:1-14; 28:16-25; Deuteronomy 16:1-8).

### **E. Exodus from Egypt**

After leaving Egypt the Israelites fled into the Sinai peninsula. Pharaoh had second thoughts about allowing them to depart so he mustered his chariotry and gave chase. The Israelites took a jagged route, avoiding the main road controlled by Egyptian troops before heading south into the wilderness.

Exodus 15 celebrates the victory over Pharaoh in a poetic song of triumph. Moses and his sister Miriam led the people in a victory hymn to Yahweh: "I will sing to YHWH, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." The style and vocabulary of this hymn date it as one of the oldest Hebrew compositions in the Bible and tend to place it quite close to the time of the event itself.

### **F. Wilderness Journey**

When they arrived at an oasis the water was undrinkable, so the people complained to Moses, who changed the bitter water to sweet. When they lacked food, God rained down manna and quail. When they came to Rephidim expecting to find water, they found none. The people again turned on Moses and blamed him for their predicament. God instructed Moses to strike a rock and water flowed.

### **A. Theophany on the Mountain**

Moses brought the Israelites to the mountain in the wilderness where earlier he had met God. This very important chapter marks the moment the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai. They witnessed God's appearing on the mountain in the typical symbolic forms of the storm, including dark cloud, thunder, and lightning. Through Moses God revealed what Israel would become if only they kept their side of the covenant.

Upon arrival God first met with Moses individually, then he appeared to all the people.