

Book of Exodus

Exodus relates the story of freedom for God's people from slavery and the beginning of their national identity.

The book is strategically important to both Old Testament history and a proper understanding of Hebrew customs and institutions.

It is a vital connecting link between the age of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph), and the remaining books of the Law (Leviticus and Deuteronomy).

It relates how God fulfilled His promise to Abraham by multiplying his descendants into a great nation (Gen. 12:2), and then redeeming them from bondage (Gen. 15:13-14).

God then gave them the law (Chapters 20 to 23) and instructions for building the tabernacle, the place from which He would meet with His people in worship.

Exodus emphasizes God's covenant faithfulness (2:24; 3:6; 6:4-8; 15:13).

The deliverance from bondage was a crucial event in the experience of the Israelites.

Centuries later, many authors of the Psalms and prophetic books acclaimed it as the most significant miracle in their history.

The deliverance serves as a beautiful type of the sinner's redemption from the bondage of sin.

God is presented in several interesting roles in the book:

1. He is the One who controls history;
2. He is pictured as the great "I AM";
3. He is a holy God;
4. He is the God who remembers;
5. He is the God who acts in salvation;
6. He is the God who acts in judgment;
7. He is the God who speaks;
8. He is the God who is transcendent; and
9. He is the God who lives among His people.

Historical Setting:

The following is a brief presentation of approximate dates of events in the Book of Exodus.

Jacob and his family entered Egypt about 430 years before the Exodus (12:40; Gal. 3:17), which would be about 1877 B.C.

During this time, Israel experienced physical prosperity and increase (1:7).

Then Joseph died about 1800 B.C. (Gen. 50:26).

About 1720 B.C. the Hyksos took over Egypt (1:8; “There arose up a new king over Egypt”), and intense bondage began for the Israelites.

The Hyksos were the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and so the oppression then continued (1:15-22).

Moses was born about 1527 B.C. during the reign of Amenhotep I (1545 – 1525 B.C.), and fled into exile about 1487 B.C. (2:15), during Hatshepsut’s reign (1504 – 1483 B.C.).

Based upon two key scriptural witnesses, the Exodus took place in approximately 1447 B.C.

According to (1 Kings 6:1), the temple of Solomon was begun in the fourth year of his reign (967 B.C. or shortly thereafter), which was the 480th year after the Exodus.

This would be in the reign of Amenhotep II (1450 – 1423 B.C.).

Further confirmation of this “early” date for the Exodus is found (in Judges 11:26), where Jephthah reminds the Ammonite invaders that the Israelites have been too long in possession of the contested land of Gilead for the Ammonites to challenge their legal right to hold it.

The time period is given as three hundred years before Jephthah’s day, which was about 1100 B.C.

A New Testament reference substantiating the “early” date is found in Acts 13:19 and 20, with a reference to 450 years which includes the Exodus itself down to the career of Samuel and even to David’s capture of Jerusalem about 1004 B.C.

In spite of the scriptural evidence, many scholars today favor a considerably later date.

The most favored one at present being 1290 B.C., which would be about 10 years after Rameses II began his reign.

A still later date of about 1225 B.C. is favored by a few scholars.

Title:

The Greek Septuagint (LXX), and the Latin Vulgate versions of the Old Testament assigned the title “Exodus” to this second book of Moses, because the departure of Israel from Egypt is the dominant historical fact in the book (19:1).

In the Hebrew Bible, the opening words, “And (or Now), these are the names,” served as the title of the book.

The opening “And” or “Now” in the Hebrew title suggests that this book was to be accepted as the obvious sequel to Genesis, the first book of Moses.

(Hebrews 11:22), commends the faith of Joseph, who, while on his deathbed (ca. 1804 B.C.) spoke of the “exodus” of the sons of Israel, looking ahead over 350 years to the Exodus, see (ca. 1445 B.C.).

Authorship – Date:

The evidence that supports the Mosaic authorship of Genesis (see that book’s Introduction), also applies to Exodus.

There is positive testimony beginning in his day and continuing into modern times through an unbroken chain.

Unlike Genesis, which is anonymous as far as internal evidence is concerned, Exodus claims in more than one place that Moses wrote at least substantial portions of the book.

In (17:14), he was told to write on a scroll the story of Israel’s victory over the Amalekites.

Also (24:4), records that “Moses wrote all the words of the LORD,” which probably included at least 20:18 – 23:33, the law code known as the “Book of the Covenant.”

In Joshua’s day, Moses’ law was still mandatory for the people (Joshua 1:7).

In David’s day the king referred to God’s “commandments ... written in the law of Moses” (see 1 Kings 2:3).

Hilkiah the priest discovered “the book of the law” in the temple (2 Chron. 34:14).

During the Babylonian exile, Daniel read of the curse “written in the law of Moses” (Dan. 9:11).

Ezra the priest set up Passover observances for the returning remnant, “as it is written in the book of Moses” (Ezra 6:18).

And the Old Testament ends with Malachi’s exhortation, “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant” (Mal. 4:4).

Jesus quoted from (Exodus 20:12), using the introduction, “For Moses said” (see Mark 7:10; Luke 20:37).

The apostle Paul noted, “Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law” (Rom. 10:5).

The testimony of both the Jewish community and the Christian church throughout history has been that Moses wrote the Book of Exodus.

Mosaic authorship of Exodus is unhesitatingly affirmed.

Moses followed God’s instructions and “wrote down all the words of the LORD” (24:4), which included at the least the record of the battle with Amalek (17:14), the Ten Commandments (34:4; 27-29), and the Book of the Covenant (20:22 – 23:33).

Similar assertions of Mosaic writing occur elsewhere in the Pentateuch: Moses is identified as the one who recorded the “starting places according to their journeys” (Num. 33:2), and who “wrote this law” (Deut. 31:9).

The Old Testament corroborates Mosaic authorship of the portions mentioned above (see Joshua 1:7-8; 8:31-32; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; Neh. 13:1; Dan. 9:11-13; and Mal. 4:4).

The New Testament concurs by citing (Exodus 3:6), as part of the “the book of Moses” (Mark 12:26), by assigning (Exodus 13:2), to “the law of Moses,” which is also referred to as “the law of the Lord” (Luke 2:22-23), by ascribing (Exodus 20:12 and 21:17), to Moses (Mark 7:10), by attributing the law to Moses (John 7:19; Rom. 10:5), and by Jesus’ specifically declaring that Moses had written of Him (John 5:46-47).

At some time during his 40 year tenure as Israel’s leader, beginning at 80 years of age and ending at 120 (7:7; Deut. 34:7), Moses wrote down this second of his 5 books.

More specifically, it would have been after the Exodus and obviously before his death on Mt. Nebo in the plains of Moab.

The date of the Exodus (ca. 1445 B.C.), dictates the date of the writing in the 15th century B.C.

Scripture dates Solomon’s fourth year of reign, when he began to build the temple (ca. 966/65 B.C.), as being 480 years after the Exodus (1 Kings 6:1), and thus then establishing the early date of (1445 B.C.).

Jephthah noted that, by his day, Israel had possessed Heshbon for 300 years (Judges 11:26).

Calculating backward and forward from Jephthah, and taking into account different periods of foreign oppression, judgeships and kingships, the wilderness wandering, and the initial entry and conquest of Canaan under Joshua, this early date is confirmed and amounts to 480 years.

Scripture also dates the entry of Jacob and his extended family into Egypt (ca. 1875 B.C.), as being 430 years before the Exodus (12:40), thus placing Joseph in what archeologists have designated as the 12th Dynasty, the Middle Kingdom period of Egyptian history, and placing Moses and Israel's final years of residence and slavery in what archeologists have designated as the 18th Dynasty, or New Kingdom period.

Further, Joseph's stint as vizier over all of Egypt (Gen 45:8) precludes his having served under the Hyksos (ca. 1730 – 1570 B.C.), the foreign invaders who ruled during a period of confusion in Egypt and who never controlled all of the country.

They were a mixed Semitic race who introduced both the horse and chariot as well as the composite bow.

These implements of war made possible their expulsion from Egypt.

Background – Setting:

Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt, the setting for Israel's dramatic departure, was not a politically or economically weak and obscure period of Egyptian history.

Thutmose III, for example, the Pharaoh of the Oppression has been called the "Napoleon of Ancient Egypt," the sovereign who expanded the boundaries of Egyptian influence far beyond natural borders.

This was the dynasty which over a century before, under the leadership of Amose I, had expelled the Hyksos kings from the country and redirected the country's economic, military and diplomatic growth.

At the time of the Exodus, Egypt was strong, not weak.

Moses, born in 1525 B.C. (80 years old in 1445 B.C.), became "educated in all the learning of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), while growing up in the courts of Pharaohs Thutmose I and II and Queen Hatshepsut for his first 40 years (Acts 7:23).

He was in self-imposed, Midianite exile during the reign of Thutmose III for another 40 years (Acts 7:30), and returned at God's direction to be Israel's leader early in the reign of Amenhotep II, the pharaoh of the Exodus.

God used both the educational system of Egypt and his exile in Midian to prepare Moses to represent his people before a powerful pharaoh and to guide his people through the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula during his final 40 years (Acts 7:36).

Moses died on Mt. Nebo when he was 120 years old (Deut. 34:1-6), as God's judgment was on him for his anger and disrespect (Num. 20:1-3).

While he looked on from afar, Moses never entered the Promised Land.

Centuries later he appeared to the disciples on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3).

Historical – Theological Themes:

In God's timing, the Exodus marked the end of a period of oppression for Abraham's descendants (Gen. 15:13), and constituted the beginning of the fulfillment of the covenant promise to Abraham that his descendants would not only reside in the Promised Land, but would also multiply and become a great nation (Gen. 1-3, 7).

The purpose of the book may be expressed like this: To trace the rapid growth of Jacob's descendants from Egypt to the establishment of the theocratic nation in their Promised Land.

At the appropriate time, on Mt. Sinai and in the plains of Moab, God also gave the Israelites that body of legislation, the law, which they needed for living properly in Israel as the theocratic people of God.

By this, they were distinct from all other nations (Deut. 4:7-8; Rom. 9:4-5).

By God's self-revelation, the Israelites were instructed in the sovereignty and majesty, the goodness and holiness, and the grace and mercy of their LORD, the one and only God of heaven and earth (see especially Exodus 3, 6, 33-34).

The account of the Exodus and the events that followed are also the subject of other major biblical revelation (compare Psalms 105:25-45; 106:6-27; Acts 7:17-44; 1 Cor. 10:1-13; Heb. 9:1-6; 11:23-29).