

Introduction to Exodus

Where is it in the Bible?

Exodus is the second book in the Old Testament and, therefore, the second book in the Bible. It is also the second book of the five books that are called the Pentateuch or the Torah.

Who wrote it?

Traditionally, Moses was thought to be the author of Exodus, but the book itself does not say that. Although the antiquity of the book is generally recognized and some accept that Moses is at the root of its origin, he is not the only writer. Like Genesis, it is the product of a long period of development which involved many authors and editors.

When was it written?

Evidence indicates that the events which are described in Exodus took place around 1250 B.C. However, like Genesis, this book was most likely written and revised over a period of hundreds of years. It was probably completed during or shortly after the Babylonian exile (587-538 B.C.)

What is it about?

The name of the book comes from a Greek word that means “going out” or “departure” and is related to the English word “exit”. Exodus tells the story of one of the key events in the Old Testament: God leads the Israelite people out of slavery in Egypt. It is a preview of God’s action in redeeming all of humanity from sin through Jesus Christ.

How is it structured?

- I. The Threat to the Israelites in Egypt (1:1-22)
- II. Moses’ Early Life (2:1-7:7)
 - a. Birth and Adoption (2:1-10)
 - b. Flight to Midian (2:11-25)
 - c. God Calls Moses (3:1-4:17)
- III. Moses and Pharaoh (4:18-12:32)
 - a. First Meeting with Pharaoh (4:18-6:1)
 - b. Covenant Promises and Commission (6:2-7:7)
 - c. Plagues (7:8-10:29)
 - d. The Passover and its Commemoration (11:1-12:30)
 - e. The Exodus (12:31-42)
 - f. More Passover Regulations (12:43-13:16)
 - g. Crossing the Sea (13:17-14:31)
 - h. Victory Songs (15:1-21)
- IV. Journey to Sinai (15:22-18:27)
 - a. Testing God (15:22-17:7)
 - b. Defeat of Amalek (17:8-16)
 - c. Jethro’s Visit (18:1-27)

- V. At Mount Sinai (19:1-40:38)
 - a. Moses Receives Instructions from God (19:1-25)
 - b. The Ten Commandments (20:1-21)
 - c. The Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:33)
 - d. The Covenant Confirmed (24:1-18)
 - e. Instructions for the Tabernacle and Priesthood (25:1-31:18)
 - f. The Golden Calf (32:1-34:9)
 - g. The Covenant Renewed (34:10-35)
 - h. Further Instructions (35:1-40:38)

What are some of its themes?

- **Covenant:** In Exodus, the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob become the basis for the relationship between God and Israel. The deliverance of the people from Egypt demonstrates God's faithfulness to the covenant and the promise to bring the people into the promised land.
- **Nature of God:** Exodus gives us many insights into the nature of God. It shows God's compassion in listening to the cries of the Israelites and God's power in delivering them from their oppressors. God is described as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." (34:6-7) At the same time, God demands exclusive allegiance and obedience and will punish those who rebel.
- **Rebellion:** Throughout the book of Exodus, the Israelites challenge indirectly through murmuring and through confrontations with Moses, for example, in 17:1-7. They challenge God directly when they build an idol which they worship for bringing them out of Egypt (chapter 32).
- **Ten Commandments:** God gave the people the Commandments to show them how to honor God and love their neighbors. The ordinances in the Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:33) showed Israel how to apply the Commandments in a practical way.