

Introduction to Exodus

Author and Date

Exodus (meaning exit) was probably written by Moses, like the rest of the Pentateuch. There is no agreement among scholars as to the date when the events of the exodus took place. A common view is that the exodus occurred in c. 1446B.C., though some scholars believe it took place around 1260B.C.

The Theological Message of Exodus

Exodus continues the story Genesis begins. God had promised Abraham that he would make his descendants into a great nation (Gen. 12:2) after they had been “sojourners in a land that is not theirs,” a land in which “they will be afflicted for four hundred years” (Gen. 15:13). During those 400 years in Egypt, the descendants of Abraham grow into a numerous people (Ex. 1:7), so numerous that Pharaoh considers them a political liability. He therefore enslaves them (1:8–14; cf. Gen. 15:13), setting the stage for God, the King of creation, to redeem his people.

How and why the Lord does so demonstrates his character. God is a covenant-keeping King. He remembers his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 2:23–25). He calls Moses to lead the people, informing the incredulous shepherd that he is “I AM” (3:14), the eternal God, the God of the living (cf. Matt. 22:29–33). He assures Moses that he rules over Pharaoh and will set Israel free (Ex. 3:7–22), just as he had promised Abraham (Gen. 15:14).

God delivers Israel from slavery, idolatry, and sin (Exodus 5–15). Pharaoh asks, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?” and refuses Moses’ request for Israel’s release (5:2). God systematically introduces himself through a series of plagues, nullifying Egypt’s gods in the process (chs. 5–12). Egypt’s gods do not rule the Nile, the crops, the weather, or the well-being of Egypt’s children. The Lord is God; there is no other (Deut. 4:35–39).

Since there is no other, the Lord alone can forgive sin. Before freeing Israel from slavery, God frees them from their sin, accepting the blood of the Passover lamb in their place (Ex. 12:1–32). The annual observance of Passover marks Israel’s beginning as a forgiven and free people (12:43–51). Once he frees his people, the Great King feeds them in the desert (chs. 16–18). No wonder John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and no wonder Jesus makes his final Passover the first Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:20)!

Through Moses, his covenant mediator, God then instructs his covenant people Israel in how to please him (Exodus 19–31; 35–40). Their purpose is to serve as his priests in a fallen world (19:5–6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9–10). He begins with the Ten Commandments, which provide the basis for all that follows (Ex. 20:1–17). He teaches them about ethical living and proper worship (20:22–23:33). These instructions reflect Israel’s relationship with God; they do not create that relationship. As Paul puts it in Ephesians

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Weekly Overview

2:1–10, God saves us from sin by grace through faith that leads inevitably to works God has chosen for us to do in his strength.

Sadly, even freed, forgiven, and instructed people sin. In Moses' absence the people worship an idol (Ex. 32:1–6). At Moses' request, God forgives the errant people (32:11–14). Why does he do so? As he explains to Moses, he does so because he is merciful, gracious, patient, covenant keeping, forgiving, and just (34:6–7). Surely the events in Exodus prove this description's accuracy.

In response to God's forgiveness, Israel returns to God in obedience, prepares to worship him, and constructs the tabernacle (chs. 35–39). God comes to dwell with his covenant people as their divine Ruler (ch. 40; cf. 29:42–46). The King has freed his people to serve him and others. The rest of the Bible builds on these truths.

Outline

- God Hears, and Remembers His Covenant (1:1–2:25)
- God Comes Down and Calls His Deliverer (3:1–4:17)
- God Redeems His People (4:18–15:21)
- God redeems his people through his promise (4:18–7:7)
- God redeems his people through his plagues (7:8–10:29)
- God redeems his people through his Passover (11:1–13:16)
- God redeems his people through his power (13:17–15:21)
- God Leads His People (15:22–18:27)
- God Instructs His People (19:1–40:38)
- God instructs his people through the commandments (19:1–20:17)
- God instructs his people through the covenant (20:18–24:11)
- God instructs his people through the tabernacle (24:12–40:38)