

## The Book of Exodus Introduction

Exodus is the second book of the Bible. It is also the second book of the “Law,” God’s covenant with the nation of Israel. The predominate individual in Exodus is Moses, who is mentioned 295 times in its 40 chapters. So remarkable is Moses that he is mentioned 357 times in Leviticus-Deuteronomy, 105 times in the historical books (Joshua-Esther), 8 times in Psalms (77:20; 90:1 - which he wrote; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32); 7 times in the prophets (Isa. 63:11-12; Jer. 15:1; Dan. 9:11, 13; Micah 6:4; Mal. 4:4); and 80 times in the NT. In all, his name is found 852 times in the whole Bible. By way of contrast, “Jesus” is mentioned 987 times.

### NAME:

The English name derives from a transliteration of the Greek name *exodus* (19:1) or “exit.” The Hebrew title, as was customary, came from the first word or two of the text. In the case of Exodus, it would be “These are the names” (1:1) or shortened to “Names” (*Shemoth*).

### AUTHOR:

While the book does not explicitly attribute Moses as its author, there are occasions where he is said to have written certain aspects of the book: 17:14; 24:4; 34:4, 27-29. Other passages attribute the authorship to Moses: Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 1:1. Jesus (John 5:45-46) and NT writers attribute the “Law” (of which Exodus was a central part) to Moses: Matt. 19:8; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 12:26; Luke 2:22-23; 20:37; John 1:45; 7:19-22; Acts 3:22; 26:22-23; Rom. 10:5.

Additionally, the Jewish historian Josephus (*Apion* 1:37-40) attributes the writing of the law to Moses. However, as early (or late depending on your perspective) as the twelfth century A. D., “scholars” were doubting that Moses wrote the law. See further, below under “Documentary Hypothesis.” Stephen stated in Acts 7:22 that Moses was trained in the wisdom of the Egyptians. Consequently, Exodus reflects accurately the time period in which Moses lived. As we move through the text, we’ll draw the reader’s attention to Egyptian words used in the text. Chronologically, there’s no reason to doubt that Moses wrote Exodus as soon as God’s glory inhabited the temple at the very end of the book (40:34). If he was, as the evidence shows, guided by the Spirit of God (Num. 11:17), he could have easily done just that.

### SOURCES:

The book of Exodus continues in many ways the story began at Genesis 1:1. In fact, Exodus 1:1 begins with the conjunction “and,<sup>2</sup>” indicating it is the continuation of the story of Genesis. Additionally, the last two words of Genesis are “in Egypt,” which is where Israel is when Exodus begins. Thematically speaking, Exodus is also a continuation of the story of Genesis. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land (Gen. 15:13) and Exodus is the fulfillment of that promise.

God also promised Jacob that he would return to the promised land (Gen. 46:1-4), which Joseph fulfilled (Gen. 50:1-13). But Joseph also clung to that same promise (50:22-26), which is fulfilled in the book of Exodus (13:19).

For many years, scholars have observed some similarities between the Law of Moses and Ancient Near Eastern treaties. In fact, the word “covenant” could be understood as a treaty (see Genesis 14:13; 21:27, 32; 26:28; 31:44). It should not surprise us if God chose to use a mode of communication well-known and understood by humans as a means of communicating His will to His people. Such a treaty would identify the “suzerain,” the king or lord. It would give

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<sup>1</sup> See also the section “Author” in the Introduction to Genesis commentary.

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus and Numbers also begin with “and,” continuing the same story. Deuteronomy was written about 40 years later than the first four books. It does not begin with “and.”

a brief history of his relationship to the “vassals.” The treaty would involve stipulations expected from both the suzerain and the vassals. It provided for copies to be stored in respective temples, references to divine witnesses to the treaty, and blessings for submission to the treaty. In large outline, the Law of Moses reflects that pattern, indicating that it was a “treaty” between God and Israel. This behavior (having a “treaty” between a people and their God) would have been unique to Israel among Ancient Near Eastern people.

#### PURPOSE:

The theme of the Bible is the salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. In order for God to become man, He needs an earthly mother in which the spirit of the Word (John 1:1, 14) can grow and develop. The Word’s mother, Mary, would need a family (Israel), a home (Canaan), and a Law which would create her nation (the Law of Moses).

The book of Genesis gets the plan started as God chose Abraham through whom the nation would come (12:1-3). He also promised Abraham the land of Canaan would be his once his descendants sojourn for 400 years (Gen. 15:13-16). When Genesis ends, Abraham’s family is in Egypt. The story of Exodus is the story of God bringing Israel out of Egypt, showing His power both to Israel and to the pharaoh of Egypt. Throughout the lives of the patriarchs, God had not shown His power as He will do at the exodus and subsequently at Mount Sinai. The verb “to know” is used 45 times in Exodus, with 26 of those times through chapter 16. Once God brings Israel out of Egypt, He will give them the Law at Mount Sinai, to keep them faithful to Him (monotheistic) until Jesus comes to earth. Additionally, He will give them stipulations regarding worship, including the description of the tent for worship in which God can dwell among the Israelites until Jesus, Himself, comes to earth.

#### THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS PROBLEM:

The “documentary hypothesis” purports to find “documents” which lay behind the biblical books, particularly the Pentateuch (Gen., Exo., Lev., Num., and Deut.). It took centuries for “scholars” to decide the obvious (“Moses wrote the law”) was not true. In 1670, a Jewish scholar named Spinoza published his views that Moses could not have written certain passages. That view prevails among the academics even today. Propp notes unabashedly that “there is ample evidence that Moses did not write Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy...”<sup>3</sup> In broad terms, his “evidence” consists of hints that the author lived later than the events recorded (which we would not deny), contradictions (which are embellished and exaggerated), so-called contradictions (which, under closer and honest evaluation turn out not to be contradictions), and duplications. Propp says that the “accepted model” of the documentary hypothesis is “pretty close to the truth.”<sup>4</sup>

The common abbreviations for the hypothetical documents are: JEPD. The “J” is the so-called *Jehovah* document (wherein “Jehovah” is the preferred name for God), the “E” document (the *Elohim* [“God”] document), the “P” (Priestly) document, and the “D” document for Deuteronomy. Yet, scholars with even more active imaginations have broken the Pentateuch into even smaller documents such as JE or J<sup>1</sup> and J<sup>2</sup>, J<sup>3</sup>, E<sup>1</sup>, E<sup>2</sup>, P<sup>a</sup>, P<sup>b</sup>, K, L, S, and N. Relative to Exodus, Propp admits that separating a so-called “J” source from the so-called “E” source is difficult outside of Genesis (where we would also disagree with their presuppositions).<sup>5</sup> Rather, Exodus is supposed to be composed of P, JE, J, and E. Propp writes this after he makes such comments as: “Christian scholars have effectively dealt with most of” the supposed “evidences” for multiple documents.<sup>6</sup> Finally, to our satisfaction, he writes “my thesis

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<sup>3</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

[of multiple documents, p.h.] is neither proven nor provable.”<sup>7</sup> However, in his view, the documentary hypothesis “is merely the *simplest* model that accounts for most of the evidence.”<sup>8</sup>

We would respectfully disagree. The *simplest* hypothesis is to accept the evidence as it exists. Moses wrote the essence of the Law (see above under “Author”) with, perhaps, some updating done by some later scribe (perhaps Ezra). Jesus believed Moses wrote the Law (see above); the simplest hypothesis is to take Jesus at His word. Among the weaknesses of the hypothesis are:

- 1) It rejects the Mosaic authorship of the Law.
- 2) It is guided by an anti-supernatural bias. Its adherents are predisposed to reject biblical writers being guided by the Spirit of God.
- 3) It rejects the historicity of the events recorded in the book.
- 4) It acknowledges (minor) similarities between the Jewish religion and other ancient near eastern religions but ignores the (major) dissimilarities.
- 5) It ignores natural human behavior in both writing and speaking. For example, when this writer gives a presentation, he often repeats himself (the “so-called contradictions” mentioned above). He often uses synonyms while he repeats himself (the “doublets” used as evidence for multiple authors). Scholars who subscribe to various documentary hypotheses see repetitions in the biblical text as evidence for different writers. They also see synonyms oftentimes as evidence for different writers. Neither of those presuppositions are necessary.
- 6) The hypothesis assumes that since the oldest Hebrew manuscripts in existence date to about 200 BC, therefore the original writings can’t date as far back as Moses (1400 BC or 1200 BC). They must date no later than Kings David or Solomon or Ezra. But that forces one to ignore the history of the text itself, the ascribed authorship to Moses, and assumes that the manuscripts in the 200s BC are not simply copies or translations of other manuscripts that have been copied and passed down through the centuries. It assumes that God would not guide the process, to ensure its accurate transmission, from the time the document left Moses’ hands until it was translated into Greek.
- 7) The problem creates reconstructions of events and the record of the events which are baseless.

These presuppositions are extremely subjective, as evidenced by the multiplicity of documents created in the imagination of so many scholars. Modern scholars seem to be coming back around closer to the truth, however. Scholars such as Bernard Childs have suggested we study the Law as a whole, since that was how the Jews accepted it into their canon. That point is certainly true as the verses noted above under “Author” show, that Jesus and His apostles accepted Moses as the author of the Law. Quite frankly it is impossible to know the history of “Exodus” from the time it left the hand of Moses until it found itself translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt and years later into the Dead Sea Scrolls. Far too many scholars are far too dogmatic in the midst of their deep ignorance.

Ultimately, our view of the “sources” of the law will reflect our view of the nature and plan of God. Would an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God guide the process of writing so that His people would have an accurate (“Moses wrote the law, guided by the Spirit of God”) understanding of the nature of God, His expectations, and His plans? Regardless whether certain phrases and place’s names were updated by a minor editorial effort, wouldn’t God make sure the text still reflected accurately what He wanted both Israelites and Christians to know and understand? We write our commentary under the conviction that He would. Because of the resurrection (and His other miracles), we need to follow Jesus’ lead and accept the Mosaic authorship of the Law, and of Exodus.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

## GENRE:

Exodus is one component, out of five, of the “Law of Moses” (the “Pentateuch”). However, the Hebrew word often translated “law” (*torah*) does not mean “legal material.” It refers to “instruction” or “teaching,” being related to the verb “to instruct.” So, much of the Pentateuch is narrative, not law. In fact, largely speaking, the first 19 chapters of Exodus are narrative while the last 21 chapters are legal material. The book also contains songs (poetry) and other minor genre. However, in its broadest classification, Exodus is considered part of the Law of Moses. It is law set within narrative, a narrative that began with Genesis 1:1.

## ROUTE OF THE EXODUS:

First, scholars do not know where Israel crossed the “Red Sea” or “Sea of Reeds,” recorded in Exodus 14. It is fashionable for scholars, even so-called conservative scholars, to suggest some “shallow” body of water. We reject outright such an interpretation, depending on one’s definition of “shallow.” The Bible says that the whole Egyptian army drowned in the sea (Exo. 14:24-31). That would require a deep body of water, not a shallow body of water.

Secondly, scholars cannot correctly identify and locate most of the places where Israel camped between leaving Ramses in Egypt until they reached Mount Sinai. In fact, scholars are not sure where Mount Sinai is located. It is remarkable that the Israelites did not think so highly of the location of Mount Sinai to preserve memory of it throughout their history. Perhaps it is better said that God did not see proper to preserve its exact location in the history of Israel. This is probably because mankind has a tendency to “sanctify” places and objects and give them a veneration which they should not have.

The so-called “northern” route of the exodus would have been the shortest and quickest. It would have gone along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. However, because it was fraught with dangers (cf. Exo. 13:17), God chose not to lead Israel that way. Instead, Israel likely took a southern route and Mount Sinai is believed to be in the southern area of the Arabian peninsula. There could have been a “central” route, but the evidence suggests the southern route is more likely.

## WRITING:

We have already discussed the author of Exodus, as well as the whole Pentateuch, Moses of Egypt. The preferred writing material in Egypt from 3000 BC would be papyrus. It was also customary to engrave their pictures (hieroglyphics) on stone. In the wilderness, the most obvious writing material available would have been leather. In the east, in Mesopotamia, the material would have been clay. In Exodus, gold was written on in 28:36 while stone is mentioned several times: 24:12; 34:1; see also Deut. 4:13; 12:32; 27:2 ff; Josh. 8:32; Job 19:24. Because God required Israel to have a high respect for His commandments (Deut. 4:2; Jer. 26:2), we would expect Israel to take great care to preserve the written records God had left through His spokesmen, i. e., prophets.

It was the common practice among Ancient Near Eastern peoples to write down events shortly after they occurred. Therefore, it is baseless to assume, as most modern scholars do, that there was an oral period of traditions being passed down from generation to generation. As we have already indicated, there is no reason why Moses could not have written Exodus shortly after God glorified the temple by His presence at the end of the book.

## TEXT:

The text of the manuscripts of the book of Exodus have been well preserved. There are few serious textual questions in the book. This argues that the Jews took the book very seriously, as having been written by the great law-giver Moses. The book had “canonical status” (i. e., divine authority) as soon as it came from the hand of Moses. Jesus treats the text with the same respect.

The Massoretic Text (MT) is the Hebrew text passed down by the rabbis known as the Masorettes who lived in the Medieval times. The Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) originates from

ancient Shechem and can be compared to the MT. It has roughly 6,000 minor differences. The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation, made by 70 Jewish scribes, for the library in Alexandria, Egypt around 300 BC. The LXX came to be used by NT writers more often than the Hebrew text. There are a few other Greek translations as well: Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) are a library of scrolls found in the Qumran community which date to the inter-testamental period. Every book of the Bible has been found, in some form, except Esther. Its Hebrew texts date, obviously, before Jesus but are remarkably consistent with the MT.

#### ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS:

There are some elements from other documents that find some parallels in Moses' story, particularly from the Legend of Sargon from Mesopotamia as well as the Myth of Horus from Egypt. While Moses' life might have some parallel ideas with other stories, the differences between the account in Exodus and other accounts are very different. In the same way, there are parallels in the Mosaic laws and laws from surrounding countries, which do not prove one "borrowed" or copied from the other. However, many laws of Israel relate specifically to Israel as God's chosen people.

#### DATING:

If one accepts the chronologies of Genesis as they are written, then the exodus occurred 2,666 years from the creation of the world.<sup>9</sup> Based on 12:40-41, many believe Israel was in Egypt for 430 years. When we study that passage, we'll present reasons to believe the LXX translation is probably correct and that the sojourn in Egypt was closer to 215 years long.

There are two major positions on the dating of the exodus, with the writing of the book likely sometime during the 40-year wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness. The two dates are 1290 BC or 1445 BC. If the 1290 date is correct, Seti I (1303-1290 BC) would be the pharaoh in the time of Moses; he was succeeded by Ramses II (1290-1224 BC). If the 1445 date is correct, Pharaoh Amenhotep II reigned from 1453-1425 BC while Thutmose III reigned from 1483-1450 BC.

Egyptian documents do not mention the Hebrew people. That should not surprise us since they lost their army, at one time, through the pursuit of the Hebrew people! What mighty nation wants to leave a record of such an ignominious defeat? On the other hand, the Bible does not mention a specific Pharaoh's name in either Genesis or Exodus, which makes reconciling biblical history and Egyptian history a serious challenge.

According to Egyptian documents, in the 14th and 13th centuries, Egypt was involved in many building projects and, in particular, in the Nile delta area. Ramses II (1290-1224 BC) was particularly interested in building projects. The first reference to Israel in Egyptian sources is the Merneptah Stele, dating from the 13th century, named for Pharaoh Merneptah (1224-1214 BC)<sup>10</sup>. During the 13th century, archaeological evidence suggests there were many settlements started in the hill-country of Canaan. Some scholars suggest these settlements were Israel's, once they left Egypt. Scholars too often assume they know how the Israelites settled in Canaan and how that settlement ought to be reflected in the archeological evidence. What archaeology can't answer is the question: was the settlement more like an invasion by a military, or was it more like a slowly progressing infiltration? The Bible does not support one or the other, since the Bible is not interested in presenting that aspect of the settlement.

Yet, if we are to take 1 Kings 6:1 at face value, that Solomon built the temple 480 years after the exodus (his fourth regnal year would be 967 BC), then the exodus occurred around 1445 BC. Judges 11:26 would seem to confirm that estimation. If one were to accept the 13th century date for the exodus, based on the perceived archaeological evidence, then 1 Kings 6:1

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<sup>9</sup> Blenkinsopp, 41.

<sup>10</sup> This is the oldest reference to Israel outside of the Bible.

(and Judges 11:26; see also Acts 13:19-20) would have to be understood differently than it appears. If one takes the biblical text as it appears, then one would have to assume that archaeology is not being interpreted as precisely as those scholars would have us believe. At this point, we accept the biblical text as it appears and leave archaeology to catch up with the biblical text.

In his commentary, Prager relates his view of the truthfulness of the Bible by contrasting his view with that of Harvard Professor (and secular Jew) Alan Dershowitz.<sup>11</sup> If Dershowitz and the Torah differ, Dershowitz believes *he* is right, and the Torah is wrong. If Prager and the Torah differ, Prager believes the *Torah* is right, and he is wrong. I agree with Prager's view and this commentary will reflect that conviction.

#### THEOLOGY:

As we have done with our Genesis and Matthew commentaries, we will wait until we have studied through the whole text of Exodus before we summarize the theology of Exodus. It is appropriate to do it this way, so that we have worked methodically through God's word and then we examine the broader themes. The "Theology of Exodus" will be the last chapter in this commentary.

#### APPROACHING THE NEW TESTAMENT:

As we study each chapter, indeed each section within a chapter, we will note when and where the NT makes use of that text. The book of Exodus is used by NT writers frequently, after Psalms and Isaiah. As we noted earlier, "Moses" is found 80 times in the NT.

#### PLAN OF THE COMMENTARY:

Since we anticipate Bible students from all backgrounds making use of this commentary, we will present comments that will be of interest to all levels. After making our own translation, we will point out significant words and grammar, relevant points from archaeology and history, and then make appropriate comments (the heart of a "commentary"). We will point where Exodus depends on or refers to the book of Genesis. Finally, we will suggest ideas of application, beginning with those who experienced the events immediately, followed by Moses's audience (who would have *read* about the events rather than experienced them first hand), later Jewish audiences (particularly the prophets), and then the Christian audience which would include you and me. Sarna<sup>12</sup>, citing Hoffman's *The Doctrine of the Exodus* (page 11), states there are a minimum of 120 references to the exodus in the Hebrew Bible. That makes it an extremely important event in Israel's history and theology.

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<sup>11</sup> Prager, xxiv.

<sup>12</sup> Sarna, xii.

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