

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adult Bible Equipping Class
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The Exodus from Egypt was to Israel what the *Odyssey* was to the Greeks or the stories about the Pilgrim fathers and the Revolutionary War is to Americans. Nor was it to be forgotten that Yahweh was the one who had “brought [Israel] up out of Egypt and the house of bondage,” for that formula, or a variation thereof, occurs 125 times alone. Thus Israel’s national identity was intimately tied up with their deliverance from the land of Egypt in the great Exodus.

—Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 95.

OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

Exodus

I. Titles

A. Greek Title

1. The term is taken from the Greek term *ἐξοδος* (*exodos*), meaning “exit, departure.”
2. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate followed this title, as did the English translations of today.
3. The title is thematic—it picks up on the key event of the book.

B. Hebrew Title

1. The Hebrew title is derived from the opening word of the book: וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת (w^eēlleh š^emôṭ), meaning “and these are the names.”
2. Genesis 46:8 contains the same phrase concerning “Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt.” The phrase in Exodus 1:1 concerns “the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob.”
3. “This connecting phrase and the observation that the book begins with the conjunction “and” emphasize the fact that Exodus was never intended to exist separately but was thought of as a continuation of a narrative that began in Genesis and was completed in three more books, making up the first division of the Hebrew canon known as Torah.” —Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Exodus,” in *EBC*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:287.

II. Major Themes

A. Yahweh

1. The divine name was not a mystery before the book of Exodus. Genesis 4:26 states that at the time of the birth of Enosh, “men began to call upon the name Yahweh.” However, it takes on special significance in Exodus.
2. The name revealed to Moses in Exod 3:14 is אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, “I Am that I Am,” and then more simply as אֶהְיֶה, “I Am.” It begins as a *verbal* name that evokes the essence of God’s eternal nature. But in 3:15 it transforms into a noun: יְהוָה, “Yahweh.” It becomes a name which illustrates the true nature of God.
3. This marks a shift in Moses’ understanding of God. Up to this point, Moses is seen speaking to “God” (3:11, 13). But following the revelation of the divine name, he now speaks to “Yahweh” (4:10). It is not that he was ignorant of the divine name, but that he was ignorant of its meaning and significance.
4. “Moses did not anticipate being asked, ‘By what name is this deity called?’ Rather, he feared that if he announced that the God of their fathers, the patriarchs, had sent him to them, they would bluntly ask him, ‘What is his name?’ The point of their question was not the same as ‘Who is this God?’ That question would have been answered: ‘He is called Yahweh.’ But as Buber has argued . . . , the Hebrew *māh* (“What”) seeks the significance, character, quality, and interpretation of the name. Therefore, as it is implied, the name Yahweh . . . was already known to Moses and Israel (Genesis gives an abundant evidence to support the presence of the name Yahweh already in patriarchal times); what they needed to know was “What does that name *mean* or *signify* in circumstances such as we are in?” —Kaiser, “Exodus,” 2:320.
5. How did the patriarchs know the name Yahweh if Exod 6:2-6 says “I [Yahweh] appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I was not known to them”? The answer lies in the meaning of the name’s meaning in Exod 3 and the meaning of the term “know”.
 - a. “Know” in Hebrew constitutes more than intellectual knowledge. It denotes *intimacy*. It’s not that Abraham didn’t know Yahweh’s name. It’s that he never experienced the fact that God can make a promise in one generation and fulfill it in future generations.
 - b. Israel, on the other hand, will have the experience of knowing the God who made promises in past generations and now fulfills those promises with this current generation. They will experience the true meaning of “I Am that I Am”—the God who causes, yet has no cause. The God who causes to be, yet has always been and will always be, without change.

B. The Exodus

1. “The exodus is the most significant historical and theological event of the Old Testament because it marks God’s mightiest act on behalf of his people, one that brought them from slavery to freedom, from fragmentation to solidarity, from a people of promise (the Hebrews) to a nation of fulfillment (Israel). —Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 73-74.
 - a. It marked the fulfillment of God’s ancient promise to the patriarchs (Gen 15:13-14).
 - b. It marked the transition of Israel from a people to a nation.
 - c. It marked the election of Israel as the chosen people of God. “The choice of Israel as the special people of Yahweh occurred not at Sinai but in the land of Goshen. The Exodus was the elective event; Sinai was its covenant formalization.” —Eugene H. Merrill, “The Theology of Exodus,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 30.
 - d. It was used as a major impetus in Israel’s worship of Yahweh, their Redeemer (Pss 77:16-20; 78:9-16; 80:8; 81:1-16; 105:23-45; 106:6-33; 114:1-8; 136:10-16).
 - e. It was used as an appeal for faith in God’s present actions in Israel (Ps 74:2, 12-15; Isa 63:10-15).
 - f. It was used by the prophets to announce a future deliverance of Israel from exile—cast in exodus imagery—suggesting that their return to the land would be a “new exodus” (Isa 11:15-16; 35:1-10; 43:15-21; 51:9-11; Ezek 20:33-38; Jer 23:7-8; Hag 2:4-5).
2. The exodus was a redeeming act of Yahweh on behalf of Israel.
 - a. It is Yahweh who *rescued/delivered* Israel from oppression
 - b. It is Yahweh who *redeemed/ransomed* them—meaning that ownership was transferred from Egypt to Yahweh. He is their *new* master. Just as they were slaves to Pharaoh, now they have been redeemed and therefore, should have “no other gods before” Yahweh.
 - c. The Passover event is the theological heart of Israel’s redemption. The Passover Lamb, when its blood was applied to the doorpost of the house, “(1) Averted harm to that house, (2) provided a substitute that allowed the firstborn to live (12:13), and (3) propitiated the wrath of God so that the angel of death passed over the protected homes.” —Kaiser, “Exodus,” 2:293.

C. The Wilderness

1. Israel enters the wilderness in the book of Exodus and does not exit that location until the latter half of the book of Numbers.
2. The wilderness is where Moses first encounters God. It is also where Israel first encounters God. Both these encounters occur on the same mountain: Mt. Sinai.
3. The table below shows the centrality of the wilderness not only in the book of Exodus but in the Torah as a whole:

EXODUS 1:1 – NUMBERS 25:18

Exodus 1:1 -15:21	Exodus 15:22	Numbers 22:1		Numbers 22:2 -25:18
<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Wilderness</i>	<i>Sinai</i>	<i>Wilderness</i>	<i>Plains of Moab</i>
Mighty people (Ex. 1:9)	Ex. 15:22 – 18:27	Ex. 19:1 – Num. 10:36	Num 11:1 - 22:1	Mighty people (Num. 22:3, 6)
King (Ex. 1:8)	Grumbling	See chart below	Grumbling	King (Num 22:4)
	Manna / Quail		Manna / Quail	
	Water from rock		Water from rock	
	Prevailing		Prevailing	

D. Covenants:

1. **Abrahamic Covenant:** This covenant becomes the basis for Yahweh's response to Israel's oppression (2:4), and for their deliverance from Egypt (6:4, 5). Not only is He the God of the patriarchs, but He is the God who made promises to the patriarchs.
2. **Mosaic Covenant** [Sinaitic/Israelite] (19:3-6; 20-23; 24:7, 8; 31:16; 34:10-27)
 - a. *The Foundation of the Covenant:* "The covenant at Sinai marked the beginning of a new era in the history of God's people. It marked the next stage in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises." —William D. Barrick, "The Mosaic Covenant," *MSJ* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 218.
 - b. *The Catalyst of the Covenant:* The exodus event was the catalyst for their covenant with Yahweh. It marked the event that demonstrated God's election of Israel as a unique people. In this way, the covenant that followed their departure from Egypt formalized that choice by ratifying the sovereign-vassal relationship that had already been established when Yahweh redeemed them from Egypt.
 - c. *The Purpose of the Covenant*
 - 1) The covenant experience at Sinai was a worship experience for Israel. This had been clearly established by God in 3:12. "Israel entered the Mosaic

Covenant during, through, and for the purpose of worship.” —Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” 218-9.

- 2) The Mosaic Covenant transformed Israel into a “treasured nation” that would function as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (19:4-6). “Yahweh revealed that the nation of Israel would serve as a community of mediatorial priests whose responsibilities included teaching the Torah (including the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant; Gen 12:2; cf. Isa 56:6-8).” —Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” 225.

d. *The Nature of the Covenant*

- 1) Format: “When God revealed the Mosaic Covenant to Israel, He chose to accommodate the form of the revelation to a format with which they were familiar. In the ancient Near East a conquering king would often promulgate a covenant (i.e., a treaty) governing the lives of his new subjects. Such covenants exhibited a variety of patterns, but generally paralleled each other in their structures. Theologians have noted a similar structure in the Mosaic Covenant.” —Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” 220.
- 2) Conditionality: The Mosaic Covenant is the most “conditional” of the covenants in that Israel’s role as a priestly nation was conditioned upon their covenant obedience. Israel’s status as the chosen people of God was unconditional and irrevocable. Their function as mediators of the Abrahamic promises, however, rested on their faithfulness to the stipulations of the covenant.

e. *The Stipulations of the Covenant*

- 1) The Decalogue (20:3-17): Akin to Israel’s constitution, the Ten Commandments spelled out the general stipulations of Israel’s covenant obligations. It begins with an overarching command of undivided loyalty to Yahweh and ends with an overarching command against the improper desire of anything that leaves one dissatisfied with “his general lot in life.” These commands all appear in the form of uncondition, apodictic “Thou shalt not” statements.
- 2) The Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:33): Akin to amendments, elaborations, or specific applications of the principles found in the 20:3-17. These “flesh out” the Ten Commandments by providing casuistic examples of life situations where the covenant stipulations could be applied.
- 3) Historical Application: It is important that these laws “are nothing less than the stipulation clauses in a treaty document” and that they “are designed not to regulate human behavior at large, though the principles they embody are heuristic and timeless, but they find their setting in a contract whose purpose

is to provide legal, moral, and religious guidelines for a special people chosen for a special task.” —Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 36.

- f. *The Ratification of the Covenant:* After the stipulations were presented to the people, the people agreed to them (24:3). Sacrifices were made in covenant ceremony (24:5), blood of the sacrifices was placed in bowls and on the altar (24:6), and Moses read the stipulations again, to which the people again responded by saying “All that Yahweh has spoken we will do” (24:7). Then the blood was sprinkled on the people (24:8), signifying their entrance into covenant obligation before Yahweh. They were now a people who were bound by the stipulations of the covenant and would receive either blessings for obedience or cursings for disobedience.
- g. *The Sign of the Covenant:* Because circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, those who claimed to be mediators and members of that covenant were required to be circumcised as well. But that was the individual sign of participation. As a nation, the sign of the national covenant [Mosaic] was the keeping of the Sabbath (Exod 31:13-17). It marked that covenant specially by signifying that they were a people separate from the nations.
- h. *The Administration of the Covenant:*
 - 1) Tabernacle: Since the covenant was a relationship established between a suzerain (Yahweh) and his vassal (Israel), the tabernacle played a significant part in the administration of the covenant. “The Tabernacle therefore was the palace of the King, and the Most Holy Place was His throne room” —Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 49.
 - 2) Priesthood: “A significant turning point was reached, however, with the consolidation of the Israelite people into a corporate body in covenant with Yahweh. No longer would private, or even familial, worship suffice to express the theological meaning of the new relationship. A corporate people needed, as a people, a means of access to the Lord of the covenant, a means that found spatial focus in the Tabernacle but that also required a level of intercession appropriate to the changed character of the people as a solidarity who as one entity must appear before her God.” —Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 50.

III. Purpose

- A. Since Exodus is a continuation of the Torah from the Genesis “introduction,” the purpose it serves must align with the purpose of the Torah as a whole:

Book	Purpose Statement
Torah	God chose Israel as the seed of Abraham to be the priestly nation that would restore mankind to its proper role as rulers for God over His created earth.
Genesis	The God of Creation chose to bless sinful mankind through Abraham and his Seed who will inherit the Land.
Exodus	<i>Yahweh (the God of Creation, the God of the Patriarchs) redeemed/delivered the Sons of Israel from bondage in Egypt and entered into a Covenant with the Nation of Israel at Sinai.</i>
Leviticus	
Numbers	
Deuteronomy	

IV. The Literary Structure

- A. There is not one easy way to outline the book of Exodus. One way is to use the key geographical locations of the book as the major divisions:

EXODUS

1. Israel in Egypt (1:1-15:21)
2. Israel in the Wilderness (15:22-18:27)
3. Israel at Sinai (19:1-40:38)

- B. A preferable outline focuses not only on geography but also on the events as the key outlining elements:

EXODUS

I. The Redemption of the Sons of Israel from Bondage in Egypt (1:1-15:21)
Yahweh's Acquisition of the Seed of Abraham
A. The Oppression of the Sons of Israel (1:1-22)
B. The Deliverer of the Sons of Israel (2:1-4:31)
C. The Deliverance of the Sons of Israel (5:1-15:21)
II. The Revelation to Redeemed Israel at Sinai (15:22-40:38)
Yahweh's Covenant with the Nation of Israel, the Seed of Abraham
A. Yahweh's Direction of Israel to Sinai (15:22-18:27)
B. Yahweh's Giving of the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai (19:1-31:18)
1. The Making of the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai (19:1-24:18)
2. The Revelation of the Tabernacle Given by Yahweh to Moses (25:1-31:18)
C. The Breaking of the Mosaic Covenant by Israel by Renewal by Yahweh (32:1-40:38)

V. Recommended Resources

- A. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. "Exodus." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. 12 volumes. Edited by Frank E. Gæbelein, 2:285-498. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.
- B. Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*. New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006.
- C. William D. Barrick. "The Mosaic Covenant." *Master's Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 213-32.