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## *Exodus/Covenant*



### **I. Introduction**

Exodus is the story of getting out of Egypt on the part of the Israelites, but also becoming a people united under God's covenant. Those are the two big themes. The first part of the book, up through chapter 19, is the story of God's deliverance, taking people who had grown into a huge nation with a very substantial population as a big ethnic group within Egypt and delivering them from Egypt by miraculous means and bringing them to, of all places, a very isolated mountain in the Sinai Peninsula wilderness. Then at that mountain, where they continue right through the end of the book of Exodus, they begin to learn what it is to be God's people, because He gives them His covenant. We will talk about two things—the Exodus and about covenant when we talk about the book of Exodus, the leaving of Egypt and the uniting as a people under God's law in connection with this book.

### **II. The Growth and Oppression of the Israelites in Egypt (1:1-2:25)**

The book opens with a story about how the Israelites had grown enormously but also become progressively oppressed as a people in Egypt.

#### **A. Growth of the Israelites**

For a long time, the lineage of pharaohs that Joseph was familiar with and had worked for was prominent. During that time the Israelites enjoyed a very nice status in Egypt. They were foreigners, resident aliens, but they were protected and benefited by the government. Then there came a time when that particular group of pharaohs, that dynasty, was out of favor and a new group was in, and the “pharaoh who knew not Joseph” began to realize that a very

## EGYPTIAN OPPRESSION

## MOSES' BIRTH AND CALL



large group of foreigners was living in his midst. Pharaoh was afraid that a group like this might well join with the enemies of the Egyptians if there was war.

### B. Egyptian Oppression

Egyptians were a very xenophobic people—they were a people who tended to be extremely afraid of outsiders and particularly nervous about those that came from Asia. This is part of the background of the story. The Egyptian people went along with the pharaoh in feeling that the best way to handle the situation was to oppress and suppress the Israelites, because they were basically Asians. These were people from Asia Minor as opposed to North Africa, which Egypt was part of.

## III. God's Miraculous Deliverance of Israel from Egypt via Moses (3:1-15:21)

### A. Moses' Birth and Call

Along comes Moses. The stories about his birth are interesting, how God protected him and caused it to be possible for him to grow up as a person who was sort of adopted as the son of one of the daughters of the pharaoh. He was kind of a princeling in Egypt. Thus Moses knew Egypt from the point of view of the Israelites, who by this time were slaves, and also from the point of view of the Egyptians, their overlords.

God called Moses in an unusual way. Moses ended up having to flee Egypt because, in anger over the way that Israelites were being mistreated, he killed an Egyptian. He was an outlaw. From age 40 to age 80, he lived in the Sinai wilderness. He married there; he was a shepherd. Then at age 80, God called him to go back to Egypt to link up with his older brother, Aaron, and to lead the Israelites out of the nation. This was no easy task. Egypt was a great superpower. It was the most powerful nation of that time.

### B. Ten Plagues



Hebrews 10:10

*We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

God made sure that the process would work by a series of ten plagues. These plagues dominate the first part of the book. The story starts with some very simple plagues, plagues like frogs and flies and blood, and so on. We might say these things were kind of annoying for a time, but eventually went away and did not bother the Egyptians. Then it builds with plagues that get worse: plagues like hail and locusts, things that can really devastate the agricultural economy, as any economy in those days was. The plagues progressed until one comes to the tenth plague in which God actually kills the firstborn son in any family that did not have the protection of blood.

### C. Preparation of the Israelites

What Moses tells the people, as God tells it to him, is that they must involve themselves in a very careful ceremony. To get out of Egypt, without this horrible destruction that God is going to bring as a punishment on that nation that had enslaved them and so cruelly treated them, they were going to have to have the protection of blood on their houses by sacrificing a lamb or a goat and taking some of that blood and smearing it around the doors of their houses. Here is an early instance of the protection of blood, of the need for God to see blood.

The writer of Hebrews comments on this and says that this is the sort of thing that had to be done. The writer of Hebrews says there is practically no case where you can have atonement for sins without the shedding of blood. So the Israelites begin to learn about the way that God will protect them by the shedding of blood. From our perspective, we can realize this points to Christ's shedding of blood. All sacrifices do that; they eventually lead to Christ. They prime the people for an awareness of Christ's sacrifice, which is the central sacrifice, the pinnacle of the whole idea of substitutionary sacrifice in the Bible.

### D. Good-bye Egypt

With the tenth plague, the pharaoh has obviously had enough. Some of his advisors and some of the people had been urging him to let the Israelites go by earlier plagues, but he sends them forth. They leave quickly and they move quickly, because just after the pharaoh gives them this



indication, as God knew he would, the pharaoh changes his mind and sends troops after them. We read in chapters 13 and 14 about the troops chasing the Israelites and how the Israelites were protected by God during that time. God gave them the protection of a pillar of cloud that was a protection of shade and also guidance for them in the daytime. That pillar turned to a glowing fire at night, which gave them light and also protection during the evening. Following the pillar, the Israelites moved to one end of the Red Sea. What were they going to do? Behind them were the pharaoh's troops (read about this in chapters 14 and 15). In front of them was the water; they were trapped, so it would seem.

### E. Crossing of the Red Sea

Then came an event that is noted in the Bible as one of the great miracles. Every miracle is special, and if the miracle involves you or me, the miracle is special to you or me; but this was a miracle of deliverance that the prophets of Israel would look back upon and mention many times, a miracle of deliverance that people identified with, as creating them as a nation. Indeed when Moses sings the musical poem that we find in chapter 15, he speaks about the people "You oh God created," bringing them over and through the water. God allowed Moses to have the sign that would part the waves: just holding out his hands with his staff in them and the waters of the Red Sea separating, and the Israelites heading right into it on dry land, coming across part of it to the other side. The Egyptians rushed in after them in their excellent chariots and their horsemen and their horses and their troops as well; and the whole army drowned as the waters then rolled back over the pursuers.



## IV. On the Way to Mount Sinai (15:22-18:27)

We have, by chapter 15 of the book of Exodus, a people who were a gang of slaves; who did not have any particular military prowess to deliver themselves with; who have left the only land any of them has ever lived in except for Moses; and who were now out of Egypt. They have been protected from a powerful pursuing army and they are heading to a mountain in the wilderness of Sinai. By chapter 19, they get to that mountain. They have had some

## Mount Sinai



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## Receiving the Torah



hardships in between. There has been some grumbling on the part of the people, and they have shown themselves to be just what you might expect a huge crowd of thousands upon thousands of people to be like. To have in them some people of faith, and some people of doubt, and some people who, once the hardships of travel in the wilderness come to their attention as they obviously did on those sore feet and dry mouths, tend to wonder if they made the right decision, and so on.

## V. Receiving of the Law (19:1-24:11)

### A. Presence of God

By chapter 19, various dangers having been passed, they are now at a place called Sinai, and there they are told to encamp. God gives them an interesting warning; His warning is they must not go up the mountain. They have come to this mountain as a place where God tells them to camp so they will encounter Him, but they cannot go up the mountain themselves lest they die. Moses only can be accepted. Why is that?

The answer is something that the Bible tells us about in many different ways, called the notion of the presence of God. God's presence is a wonderful thing if you are righteous; but if you are not righteous, His presence is very dangerous. We live in a world where, mercifully, He is actually somewhat withdrawn from us. We are not in His very presence as we will be in heaven if we know Christ as Savior and Lord. We are more distant from God than that. If we have accepted Christ as Savior, we have God's Spirit in us; that is a presence of God that is very special. But these Israelites were far from being a righteous people. There were plenty of flaws and faults, plenty of doubters among them, and there had been episodes already of uncertainty and lack of faith. So one representative, Moses, goes up to the mountain. What does he get there? He gets laws—that is what he gets.

### B. Receiving the Torah

Starting with chapter 20, we have the laws of Israel. We are out of the material that we describe as the Exodus, per

תורה  
(Torah)  
=  
Law

Exodus 20:3

*You shall have no other gods before me.*

## Ten Commandments:

1. No other gods
2. No graven images
3. Do not misuse God's name
4. Keep the Sabbath
5. Honor your father & mother
6. Do not murder
7. Do not commit adultery
8. Do not steal
9. Do not give false testimony
10. Do not covet

se. And now with chapter 20, we are into the remaining half of the book, chapter 40, with the descriptions of laws that God gave to His people. All the laws together of the first five books of the Old Testament, the books of Moses, constitute 613 commandments. That is a lot of commandments. But even so, it is important to understand that that does not cover everything. In other words, there is a distinction between the kinds of laws that you find in the Old Testament and the way that we think of modern law as functioning.

In modern law, there is an attempt to be exhaustive, to be complete. You make a law for everything that you want to prohibit, and thus modern societies have thousands upon thousands of laws. There are federal laws, state laws, and local laws in a country like the United States adding into the thousands and tens of thousands, depending on where one lives. But ancient Israel had only 613. That is because people viewed laws in ancient times as paradigms—that is, models—rather than as technical statements of pure prohibition or injunction of action. In modern times, a criminal can get off sometimes in a court case by noting that the law does not quite cover his situation—in other words, getting off on a technicality (you could not do that in Bible times). Sure there might be a law about what to do if your ox gores somebody else's sheep, but it does not happen to mention what to do if your goat gores somebody else's sheep. This did not bother anybody in Old Testament times; they extrapolated from the laws they did have. They understood that the laws were indications of the kind of behavior and they followed from those indications to any other particular circumstances. It did not have to be mentioned in the exact form of the court case for the court case to go forward.

### C. Ten Commandments

That is an important thing to keep in mind because the greatest paradigms of the group are right in the Ten Commandments that begin the laws in Exodus 20. There we have these wonderful statements of principle, "... have no other gods before me." That is briefly stated, but it is intended to mean that God really is the only God. Moses does not have to say to the Israelites, "What God means by this is that He is the only God." No, you can say it that way

*‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*

and it covers all the implications, all the extrapolations.

“Make no graven images”—in other words, the prohibition against idolatry. This does not have to specify every kind of image, or every kind of artwork, or everything that people might worship. The point is: worshiping anything other than God, trusting in anything other than God for your salvation, for the important things of your life, is wrong.

Moving on to the statement of “keeping the Sabbath holy,” not all the details of how one does this are spelled out. In the New Testament, we see the Pharisees overdoing it by far, criticizing Jesus because of the way His disciples plucked a bit of food to be eaten from plants that they would pass. The Pharisees, having figured this out on their own how this law should be applied, take it into technical realms in which it was never intended. They legalized it; instead of seeing as Jesus did that the Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath.

The Ten Commandments are organized by four laws that refer to our responsibility to God, and the remaining six refer to our responsibility to others. Don’t steal, don’t give false testimony, don’t covet, and so on. We have a balance shown right away in those first ten that we also find in the other laws as well—a balance of responsibility to God and a responsibility to our neighbor. Jesus said that we can take two of the laws, neither of which is in the Ten Commandments but which are such wonderful summaries, and understand that the whole Law and the Prophets really hang on them—kind of like explanations of them. One is that wonderful statement in Deuteronomy that we are to love the Lord our God with all our strength, all our heart, mind, and soul. And the other, He says, is like it; it is parallel to it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” That is from the book of Leviticus.

Why bring in Deuteronomy and Leviticus when we are talking about Exodus? The answer is: though the Law starts in Exodus 20 and keeps going through the end of Exodus 40, it has not at all come to a conclusion. This is just the beginning. The Law is going to continue with Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, which we will talk about further.

ברית  
(Berit)

=

Covenant

### Major Components of an Ancient near East Vassal Treaty:

- Preamble
- Historical Prologue
- General Stipulations
- Specific Stipulations
- Blessings and Curses
- Divine Witnesses

## D. Basic Laws of the Covenant

What do we have going on in Exodus? First, we have a whole section of laws that are basic laws that the people need to know. Sometimes these laws found in chapters 20-24, for the most part, are called the “covenant code.” It is a term scholars use just to describe the fact that these laws get you going, get you started on the covenant.

What is the covenant? The covenant is a relationship. It is a contractual relationship. It is a legal relationship. It is a deal between God and His people. God promises to protect His people and benefit them, to watch over and save them. They promise, in turn, to honor Him, to keep His laws, and to do the things that He says constitute righteousness.

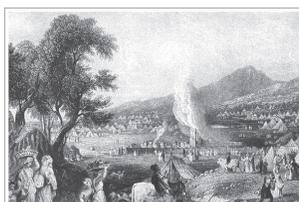
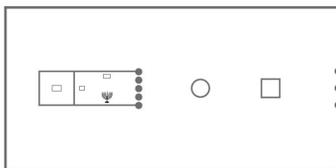
## E. Features of the Covenant

We observe in the covenant that there is usually a preamble that just identifies who the makers of the covenant are; that is, God and Israel. Then we observe there is a prologue: the story of how the Israelites got to know God and how He rescued them from Egypt. As it were, they owed Him something, and they are His people who He has redeemed and has provided safety for.

Then we find the stipulations. Most any law code, any covenant, has stipulations. Those are the rules, the actual individual laws by which you live. There are also places where one finds what are called “document clauses.” These are prescriptions for preserving that law. Some of these are found in Exodus and other books of the Pentateuch, as well. We also find sanctions, that is, blessings and curses. God will reward those who are faithful to His law, who keep His covenant; but He will punish those who do not, because they have signed on to a covenant relationship. And if they break it, they certainly ought to be punished.

Finally, a sixth element in the covenant is witnesses. God calls heaven and earth as His witnesses—a way of saying everything is to be a witness to this. His people are to keep His law. This is of significance, because you know many ancient peoples did not have covenants. As long as they just worshiped their idols they thought they were doing fine. They could live any way they wanted. They could

## The Tabernacle



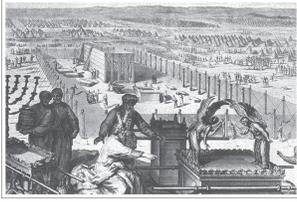
misuse and abuse people for their own personal profit or power. They could have ethical standards or not have ethical standards and figure they could get away with it because all the gods needed from them was worship and the bringing of their sacrifices. This was not so for the Israelites. God wanted them to be a holy people. So He gave them His law; He gave them His models for behavior, from which they had to extrapolate, out of which they could not squeeze by with technicalities.

## VI. Directions for Worship and the Building of the Tabernacle (24:12-40:38)

After that material up through chapter 24 or so, called the covenant code, we begin with a lot of directions about building the tabernacle. This sure can seem kind of like dull reading. You start reading at Exodus 24 and keep reading 25, 26, and 27, and so on. It can get slow. You are reading about making this tabernacle, and about how the priests are to be dressed, and about certain ritual procedures that take place, the three annual festivals described, and how you are to come as a people to a central place of worship together, and so on.

### A. Worship

We need to appreciate the fact that worship is very important to God. God's people should be worshipers. Also, we need to appreciate the fact that there is a difference between the sacred and the profane—something that in modern times, in our culture, has been diminished greatly. God caused His people to understand that difference. There is the profane, the common, the trivial, the everyday; but there is also the sacred. God wants to be worshiped and He wants all His people who belong to Him to be worshipers of His. He gives elaborate instructions for the building of the tabernacle, the center place for worship, where the people will gather, where the sacrifices that symbolize the need for something else to die on your behalf, where the procedures of worship will all be undertaken.



## B. Building of the Tabernacle

Much of the end of the book of Exodus is devoted to describing chapter after chapter how the Israelites, in fact, made that tabernacle and did all the things that went with it, just as they had been instructed to do. You have the command for several chapters, and you have the fulfillment. The command and the fulfillment go together—not exciting reading but very important information.

## VII. Conclusion

As you read the book of Exodus, remember that this is instruction in holiness, this is instruction for people who need to know they belong to God, and the first thing that anybody does who belongs to God is to worship Him. In modern times, a person who says, “Well, I do believe in God and yet I don’t enjoy going to church,” is really denying the most basic responsibility of the believer: to be a worshiper of the God who has rescued you, and who saved you, and has brought you into His people.