

EXODUS – SHORT VERSION

The second book of the Pentateuch is called Exodus from the Greek word for “*departure*” because its central event revolves around the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. It continues the history of the chosen people from the point where the Book of Genesis leaves off. It recounts the oppression by the Egyptians of the ever-increasing descendants of Jacob and their miraculous deliverance by God through Moses, who led them across the Red Sea to Mount Sinai where they entered into a special covenant with the Lord.

The Book of Exodus is regarded by most, if not all, scholars as *the* most important book of the Old Testament because it tells us about the two most important events in Israel’s history: how God *freed* the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and how he entered into a solemn *covenant* with them at Mount Sinai. In this book, Israel becomes a nation and a people special to God.

Religious epic. As a piece of literature, the Book of Exodus is often regarded as a religious epic filled with intense suspense and drama, especially in the chapters that describe Moses’ confrontations with Pharaoh, the crossing of the Red Sea, and Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai.

Division of Chapters. The forty chapters in the Book of Exodus can be subdivided in different ways. One way is grouping them into three geographical regions where God meets Israel.

- Chapters 1-12: Land of Egypt. God works wonders to free the people from slavery.
- Chapters 13-18: Wilderness. God guides the people to safety and provides for them in the wilderness.
- Chapters 19-40: Mount Sinai. God establishes a community in covenant law and worship.

Timeline. Most scholars believe that the Exodus event took place around 1250 B.C. in an area northeast of present-day Cairo.

Major themes. The two major themes of Exodus are (1) Israel’s liberation from slavery and (2) Sinai covenant. In between these themes, we read about the wilderness episode, which will be picked up again in the Book of Numbers.

Suggested Texts to Read

Chapters 1-3—Israel’s oppression in Egypt; Moses’ adoption; Flight into the desert; Moses’ call to mission

Chapter 4:1-17—Moses’ attempt to wiggle his way out of God’s call

Chapter 5—Moses’ and Aaron’s confrontation with Pharaoh (things get worse for the Israelites before they get better)

Chapters 7:14-11:10—The ten plagues (you may want to read the account of the first and last plague)

Chapter 12:1-20—Passover ritual (first reading on Holy Thursday)

Chapter 12:29-42—Israelites’ departure from Egypt

Chapters 13:14-14:32—The Red Sea event

Chapters 16-17—Israel in the wilderness

Chapter 19 (key verses 3-8)—Israel’s solemn covenant with God

Chapter 20—The Ten Commandments

Chapter 24—Covenant ritual

Chapters 32-33—Golden calf incident (Israel breaks her covenant with God)

Chapter 34:1-9—Renewal of covenant

Chapter 40:34-38—God’s special presence with Israel in their dwelling (also called Meeting Tent, Sanctuary)