The Book of Exodus- From Slavery to Salvation

No doubt, every child who has ever been to church knows something about the story of Moses and the great Exodus. It has been depicted in movies and cartoons, taught from a simplistic viewpoint to a deep historical and theological perspective. The word Exodus is derived from the Greek word **EXODOS, or “Going Out.”**

The Exodus story contains the 145-year history starting with the death of Joseph to the erecting of the Tabernacle. It includes the story of Moses birth, the enslavement of the Hebrews, the Plagues, Passover, the children of Israel fleeing Pharaoh, wandering in the wilderness and the ten commandments to name a few.

The Book of Exodus (Greek for Departure or Exit) is the second book of the Pentateuch and was written in a narrative form. It is considered by many to speak of God’s salvation, provision and protection towards His chosen people, although one-third of the book speaks to the Exodus events itself. The character of this book is vital to understanding the structure of the hymn sung (Exodus 15:1-12) and is one of the oldest poems appearing in the bible. Further, it shows how a newly independent nation of people had a unique relationship with God, God’s provision of the “law” intended to guild all moral, civil and ritual legislative actions required for a holy people from which the promised Savior would come forth from.

This week’s lesson will break the second Book of Moses, the **Book of Exodus** into mini sections and again, it picks up where the Genesis discussion from week 1 concluded… the Birth of Israel (Exodus 1:1-14). These sections cover 4 major categories: **1)** The Israelites in Egypt 1:1-12:36, **2)** The Exodus from Egypt to Mt. Sinai 12:37-18:27, **3)** The Covenant made with God at Mt. Sinai 19:1-24:16 and **4)** The Sanctuary and its Furnishings 25:1-40:38.

Now I know this is a ton of information to take in but the beauty is you can do so over a 7-day period leading up to next weeks lesson. I will only be able to provide the basic foundational understanding of the book, some historical information, and some real life applications and parallels to current theological premises.

Hopefully you will take this GPS roadmap and go back and study further some powerful resources by reading *From Slavery to Service: A Study of Exodus* by Diane Jacobson, *Exodus from series Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* by Terence Fretheim *or The Book of Exodus* by Brevard Childs.

1. **The Israelites in Egypt (1:1-12:36)**

When we think of the stories of Exodus, we immediately associate the story of liberation of Hebrew slaves from Pharaoh as God’s (Yahweh) chosen people and the events that followed them as they tried to reach the Promise Land. As Christians, we can similarly compare Moses instructing from the mountaintop with New Testament stories of Jesus instructing in a similar fashion. The stories of Exodus have been passed down for generations including the significance of the Passover celebration (Ex 12:24-27).

Exodus is not considered by some to be a historical account, but one based on offering a theological meaning behind the stories for the people of Israel. What it does do is lead us to theological reflections about God’s identity, His motivation to raise up a people and the promises made to be fulfilled.

Exodus picks up where Genesis leaves off: Jacob’s descendants who had multiplied and became numerous and strong in the land (1:7). We find the new king coming into power in Egypt who cared little for the service Joseph rendered on Egypt’s behalf. Being frightened, this king determined he needed to stop the Hebrews from potentially outnumbering the Egyptians to the point they could overturn the rule of the nation by joining forces with Egypt’s enemies. Therefore he determined to:

* Oppress the nation with forced labor.
* Have midwives kill off all male born children of Hebrew mothers (the midwives refused because they feared God).
* Throw all male children into the river.

**The birth and rise of Moses** begins in Ch. 2 declaring Moses was born to a Levite mother who concealed his birth for 3 months. After she could no longer hide him, she placed him in a basket near the riverbank where Pharaohs daughters bathed and sent him downstream in hopes someone would take pity on him. Moses sister, who was close by watching over him, was sent to fetch the basket from the river and asked if a Hebrew woman should come nurse the baby and his mother was sent for to come care for her own son. This is a powerful example of God’s protection and provision when He calls you forth for purpose as Pharaohs daughter easily could have had the child killed. More importantly, had the midwives not disobeyed the order, one of the Bibles’ greatest prophets and leaders would have died before fulfilling purpose. Pharaoh’s daughter raised him as her own and named him Moses (Mosheh or Mashah), which means, “drawn from the water.”

As a young man Moses travels to survey the work being done on the pyramids and discovers for the first time the oppression of the Hebrews (2:11). He became enraged by how one Egyptian was beating a slave that he murdered and covered up the body in the sand. The next day he tries to intervene in a fight between two Hebrews and is confronted by one of them who witnessed Moses murdering the Egyptian soldier. Becoming frightened and fearing death at the hand of Pharaoh, Moses flees to Midian. Often time people will obey unjust laws as opposed to standing up for the moral laws of life for fear of death, punishment or persecution by society. Moses stood up for a moral righteousness in a time when hope was lost on the Hebrew people in the same manner that he stood up for to some shepherds being abusive to some Midian girls trying to fetch water from a well (2:16) It is during this time when Moses is accepted into the household of the Midian girls father and stays with the Midianites, ultimately marrying Zipporah (2:21)

During this time of hiding, the Hebrew people continued crying out to God for help and Moses continued to live with the Midianite people. But God, having been reminded of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had mercy on them by calling Moses to help lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. It is out of the worst periods of our lives that God speaks and then charges us to do a great work in His name. Despite our past, regardless of our current and with the future in mind, He can and will use any willing to be used to fulfill purpose (Ch. 3).

So Moses age 80, his wife and sons return to Egypt, his brother Aaron, age 83 is elevated to assist him with public speaking, and they go meet with Pharaoh to inform him God demands he let His people go. As scripture tells us, Moses’ demands are met with Pharaoh’s refusal to release the Hebrew people starting the 10 plagues of Egypt. It is important to note each plague had a warning, a respite, a response and the Egyptian God the plagues attached.

**(Ch 7:14-24) First Plague**: God turns the rivers, streams, canals, pools, water in pails and jars to blood. The fish died and the river became so polluted the Egyptians could not drink. But the Egyptian magicians did the same using magic and Pharaohs refused to budge. Eventually the Egyptians found a way to work around the problem but **God’s power attacked the gods Hapi (god of the Nile), Khnum (guardian of the Nile River), Tauret (hippopotamus goddess of the river) and Osiris (god of the underworld) with** **Polluted water leading to disease, dehydration, sickness of livestock, failed crops and a hindrance to trade via the rivers, streams and canals.**

**(Ch 7:25-8:11) Second Plague:** God allows frogs to overtake the land. Pharaoh asked Moses to pray to God for the frogs to be removed and in turn he would let the Hebrews go offer sacrifice to God. Moses in turn entreats God who killed off some of the frogs leaving a stench in the land. Some frogs however returned some of the frogs to rivers and yet Pharaoh refused to honor his word. **God’s power attacked the Egyptian goddess Heqt (wife of the creator of the world and the goddess of birth). Moses’ mistake was he allowed Pharaoh to dictate the time of the compromise ultimately leading to his refusal to release the people.**

**(Ch 8:12-15) Third Plague**: This plague came with no warning as Gnats or Lice infested the land. Aaron struck the ground with his staff and lice or gnats came forth covering man and beast alike. Although the magicians attempted to duplicate this plague as they had the first two, their efforts failed and they were forced to acknowledge this plague as an act of God forcing Pharaoh to refuse to speak to Moses. **This plague attacked the gods Kheper (god of beetles and flies) and Geb (god of the earth) causing diseases and infection on the skin of animals and humans.**

**(Ch 8:16-28) Fourth Plague:** This plague God ordered Moses to meet Pharaoh at the river and inform Pharaoh if he refused, swarms of flies would overtake all the land of Egypt except Goshen, where the Hebrew people resided. This was God’s way of making a separation or distinction between the Hebrews and Egyptians. Again Pharaoh refused to release the Hebrews. **This plague attacked the gods Kheper (god of beetles and flies) and mon-Ra, (creator and king of the gods) causing diseases and infections on the skin of animals causing them to die in the fields and carry germs to plants.**

**(Ch 9:1-7) Fifth Plague:** This plague was a result of the third and fourth plagues as livestock became diseased when Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews go after warning came from Moses. All the Egyptian livestock dies but the Hebrew livestock was unaffected and the heart of Pharaoh was unchanged. **This plague attacked the Egyptian gods Apis (Sacred Bull) and Hathor (cow-headed goddess of the desert). Once the livestock became diseased, there was no meat for eating in the land, no animals to plow fields or transport people and supplies. This damaged trade, hindered work and brought some financial industries to a standstill.**

**(Ch 9: 8-12) Sixth Plague:** Pharaoh received no warning of the plague of boils that spread to all Egyptians, their remaining livestock and the Pharaohs magicians. Boils are red, painful, puss filled sores surrounding hair follicles, which leaves scars. They can be as small as a pea or as large as golf balls. They cause severe infection, fever, fatigue and can become life threatening if left untreated. **This plague attacked the gods Imhptep (physician God of medicine), Serapis (deity of healing) and Thoth (the ibis-headed god of intelligence, medical learning, magic and healing).**

**(Ch 9:13-35) Seventh Plague:** This plague came with a warning from God that He spared the Egyptians up through this plague of hail in order to show His power and might, should not be challenged further. God warned any human or livestock left in the field would die, all fields would be destroyed and every tree splintered except in the land of Goshen. This time Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and declared he had sinned again and he and his servants were at fault (9:27). Again he agrees to release the Hebrews but once the lightening, thunder and hail ceased, he refused to release the people. **This plague destroyed the flax and barley and attacked the Egyptian gods Nut (Sky goddess), Shu (wind god), Horus (hawk-headed sky god of upper Egypt) Isis and Seth (protectors of crops).**

**(Ch 10:1-20) Eighth Plague:** This plague of Locust shows Gods wrath as He hardens Pharaohs heart in order to perform signs that will be told of God’s ruthlessness when dealing with the Egyptians disobedience. They destroyed all remaining remnants of plant life, fruit and stored grains while overrunning the households of Egypt. Again, Pharaoh refused to release the Hebrews. **This plague destroyed the remaining vegetation and attacked the Egyptian gods Nepri (god of grain), Seth (god of crops), Ermutet (goddess of childbirth and crops) and Thermuthis (goddess of fertility and the harvest).**

**(Ch 10:21-28) Ninth Plague:** Without warning darkness falls upon the land of Egypt for three days except where the Hebrews lived. This darkness was such that no person could move or see in front of them. Again Pharaoh summoned Moses and agreed to release the people but God hardened his heart and he told Moses to leave his presence and never return or be killed. Moses agrees never to appear before Pharaoh again. **This plague attacked the gods Amon-Ra (sun god), Horus (god of light), Ptah (chief god of Memphis who created the sun, moon and earth), Atum, (sun god and creator who was worshiped at Heliopolis which was the center of sun worship), Tem (god of sunset and Shu (god of sunlight and air)**

**(Ch 11 and 12) Tenth Plague:**  The final plague resulted in the death of every firstborn throughout Egypt from the throne of Pharaoh to the slave-girls, to the firstborn animals across the land and laid the format for the Passover Ritual going forward. This ritual marked the head of the calendar and was considered the first month of the year. It prescribed that on the tenth of the month, everyone must take a male lamb, a year old and without blemish to sacrifice. It was to be kept until the fourteenth of the month then slaughtered during the evening twilight. The blood was to be taken and wiped over the doorpost of every house that partook of the sacrifice. The family would then eat the (whole) roasted flesh of the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs and all leftovers burned the next morning. **Passover (Hebrew: Pesach) represented the night God struck Egypt by killing every first-born man/beast and by executing judgments against the gods of Egypt and Pharaoh. It also represents God passing over those whose houses were marked by the blood of the lamb and represented the final blow that released the Hebrews from Pharaoh’s clutches.**

This final plague took the life of Pharaohs son and forced him to release the Israelite (Hebrew) people into Moses care.

1. **The Exodus from Egypt to Mt. Sinai (12:37-18:27)**

For four hundred and thirty years the Hebrews stayed in Egypt. Approximately 600,000+ men, women and children set out on foot from Rameses for Succoth including livestock, flock and herds. The Israelites baked the unleavened bread into loaves for the journey. The Exodus covers the journey out of Egypt into the wilderness and eventually into the Promised Land.

Beginning with the miracle at the Red Sea, we find Pharaoh (Ch 14:10) changing his mind and commanding his entire army to ride with him after the Israelites to force them back to Egypt. With fearful followers, God uses Moses’ staff to part a portion of the Red Sea in order for the people to cross over safely to the other side with Pharaohs army in pursuit. Once the last Israelite crossed over onto dry land in the desert of Shur, the Lord closed up the Red Sea and drowned the entire army of Pharaoh.

Following their triumph, the Israelite (Hebrews) began to sing a song to the Lord (Ch 15) declaring their devotion, strength and trust in God who delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh. This rejoicing was short lived as they quickly realized they lacked food, water and shelter needed to survive the journey. The people began to grumble and complain despite seeing first hand the protection, provision and power of God. The Lord, hearing their complaints, provided quail by day, manna by night for them to eat, and water that sprang forth from the rocks.

Even still, Moses was troubled by the grumblings of the people who complained and wore him thin. His father-in-law Jethro offered the advice that Moses continue to be the mouthpiece of God, but appoint Minor Judges to render decisions to the masses and leave the more important decisions for him to decide. By doing so, it created order, leadership and space for Moses to commune with God for direction.

1. **The Covenant made with God at Mt. Sinai (19:1-24:16)**

Three months after Moses departed Egypt with the Israelites, they came to the desert of Sinai. There Moses relays the promises of God that should the people follow His voice and obey his covenant, they would be God’s chosen people. (Ch 19L16-25) Moses leads the people to the foot of Mt. Sinai where God commands Moses and Aaron to come up and commune with Him. It is at Mt. Sinai that God lays forth His commandments to the people.

 1 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.

 2 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the Iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My Commandments.

 3 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

 4 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

 5 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

 6 “You shall not murder.

 7 “You shall not commit adultery.

 8 “You shall not steal.

 9 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

 10 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.”

Further (Ch 21-24) God outlines the Laws Regarding Slavery, Personal Injury, Property Damage, Theft, Trusts and Loans, Social Laws, False Reports Religious Laws and Fidelity just to name a few. These Laws God expected the Israelite (Hebrew) people to follow, the Elders to enforce, Moses to teach and oversee.

1. **The Sanctuary setup and its Furnishings (25:1-40:38)**

Lastly, we reach the conclusion of the Book of Exodus, which begins with the plans to erect the Sanctuary and all its Furnishings, Priestly Requirements, Census Tax, Sabbath Laws, Atonement, Religious Laws and God’s presence in the Sanctuary. I will only touch upon some of the more critical aspects and their significance.

The Sanctuary was meant to be a dwelling place for God’s presence, with specific requirements for its erection. It was to be made of the finest materials. Listed in order:

1. An Ark was to be made to hold God’s Holy Commandments made out of acacia wood, pure gold. It would include a propitiatory with cherubims of gold. (Ch 25)
2. The Table (for Sabbath) was to be made of acacia wood, plated with pure gold, and gold poles. On top would be plates (for showbread was eaten by the priests) and cups (with incense) of pure gold, pitchers and bowls for pouring libations and on the table, showbread set before God at all times. (Ch 25)
3. A Lampstand of pure beaten gold, cups shaped like almond blossoms, 7 lamps, trimming shears and trays of pure gold. (Ch 25)
4. Tent Cloth made of sheets woven of fine linen twined with violet, purple and scarlet yard and cherubims embroidered on them, 11 sheets woven of goat hair to be used as a tent covering, 50 bronze loops to hold join the tent together and then cover the entire tent itself with rams skins died red and above that a covering of tahash skins. (Ch 26)
5. The Wooden Walls made of boards of acacia wood plated in gold, with forty silver pedestals under the boards and the bars made of acacia wood. (CH 26)
6. The Veils were to be woven of violet, purple and scarlet yard, and of fine linen twines with embroidered cherubims on them. The Ark of the commandments would go behind this veil diving the holy place from the holy of holies. Outside the veil the table and lamp stand (South side) were placed opposite the table (on the North side). CH 26)
7. Altar of Holocausts would be made out of acacia wood with four corners made of horns then plated in bronze. Pots to remove the ashes, shovels, basins, forks and fire pans and poles were made of bronze. The alter itself, was in the form of a hollow box. (Ch 27)
8. Court of the Dwelling was made if woven hangings in fine twined linen, bronze pedestals, silver hooks and bands on the columns. The entrance would be made of variegated curtains, woven violet, purple, silver hooks and bronze pedestals. (Ch 27)
9. Oil for the Lamps were to be made by the Israelites of clear oil of crushed olives, used for lighting and burning regularly. From the evening to the morning, Aaron and his sons would be charged with maintaining them before the Lord in the meeting tent, outside the veil, which hung in front of the commandments. (Ch 27)
10. The Vestments included a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a brocaded tunic, a miter and a sash made of gold, violet, purple, scarlet yarn and fine linen. (Ch 30)
11. Alter of Incense (most sacred to God) was made of acacia wood, with horns springing from it then plated in pure gold. This alter was placed in front of the veil that hung before the ark of the commandments where God was to meet them. Aaron was charged with burning fragrant of incense in the morning when he prepared the lamps and in the evening when he lit the lamps. Once a year Aaron was to perform the atonement rights on the horns with the blood of an atoning sin offering. (Ch 30)
12. The Laver was made of bronze and placed between the meeting tent and the altar, with water in it. Aaron and his sons used it to wash their hands and feet when there were entering the temple or they would die. Further, they were required to wash when they approached the altar in their ministries.
13. The Anointing Oil was to be made of the finest spices, myrrh, cinnamon, fragrant cane, cassia, a hint of olive oil and blended into the sacred anointing oil used by the priests. Aaron and his sons used the oil to anoint and consecrate everything in the Sanctuary.

At the latter part of Chapter 39, the work to the Dwelling was completed and presented to Moses for final approval based on God’s commandment on how they were to be erected. In Chapter 40 we see the erection of the Dwelling and the glory of God’s presence enter in. No one could enter so long as the cloud of glory hovered over the tent during the day and as fire at night. It was present in all stages of their journey through the wilderness.