

EXODUS

Ralph Porter

Author and Date

The Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch continues as a basic assumption which affects Exodus.

Author--As with Genesis, Mosaic authorship dates Exodus in the fifteenth century B.C.

Events--While the background information included in the introduction begins with the entrance of Jacob and his sons into Egypt in 1876 B.C., the majority of the events described occurred in a period of about eighty years, from about 1526 to 1446 B.C.

Background

Exodus begins where Genesis ends.

Jacob's family is in Egypt, under the protection of the Pharaohs. There they remained and multiplied for about four hundred years, until they were strong enough to be considered a threat to Egypt itself.

Although many unresolved questions remain concerning the specific details of Egypt's history at the time of Moses, some conservative scholars place Moses' ministry in the eighteenth dynasty of Egypt. An attempt to reconstruct some of the history of the period produces interesting insights into the biblical narrative.

Joseph served as administrator in Egypt during the twelfth dynasty. As long as that Pharaoh, or his descendants, lived, they would have continued to honor those who had served them so well. However, in 1786 B.C. that dynasty fell (90 years later).

Internal conflict developed and the competition continued until the Hyksos took over. The Hyksos, Semites from western Asia, controlled the Delta area and established the capital of Egypt in Avaris, which was later renamed Rameses.

The Hyksos had no reason to honor Joseph's descendants since he had done nothing for them. Since they were a relatively small part of the population, Israel's rapid growth became a threat to their continued existence. Thus they began to enslave the Israelites in order to keep them under control. This condition existed for various generations.

After more than 150 years of Hyksos domination, Ahmose established the eighteenth dynasty in 1567 B.C. Although the Egyptians were back in control and could have again honored the descendants of Joseph, after so many generations, no one remembered his role in their history. All they could remember was this useful population of Semitic slaves. Thus they continued to abuse Israel.

A later descendant of Ahmose, Tutmose I, ruled Egypt from 1528 to 1508 B.C. Moses was born in 1526, during his reign. His daughter, probably Hatshepsut, found Moses hidden in a basket and protected him from her father's decree. This is especially significant inasmuch as she was the only child of Tutmose I and his official wife. She later married a weaker, sickly son of Tutmose I, who died shortly after taking the throne. Since they had no son, the logical candidate was the son of a lesser wife who was only ten years old when his father died.

Hatshepsut was a strong person and soon took control of the throne. A potential threat existed that her adopted son might be given precedence over the son of another woman, if she had the chance.

Moses undoubtedly posed such a threat. However, after 21 years of domination by her, Tutmose III took independent control of the throne. His resentment for her is probably reflected in his response to Moses when given an excuse. Tutmose III was a great king and accomplished great things for his country. Moses waited nearly forty years in the wilderness for his death.

The next Pharaoh, Amenhotep II (1450-23) was also a strong king. He was a military man, and known for great accomplishments during his early years. However for some reason not explained in historical documents, Amenhotep is not reported to have conducted any military campaigns in the last twenty years of his reign. This of course would be a logical result of the military loss suffered by the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

The story of the rise to the throne of Tutmose IV reports that he was not the firstborn son of Amenhotep II, but was promised the throne by the gods. This account also corresponds to the biblical record.

It is against this foreign background of suffering and slavery that God liberates His people and prepares them for national life as His people.

Purpose and theme

Genesis described the origin of Israel. It traced the beginnings of the universe, man, sin, the nations, and finally, the people of Israel. Through Genesis we learn how and why Israel came into existence. Where their enemies came from. We also find in it the explanation of how Israel came to be present in Egypt at the time of the Exodus.

Building on that base, Exodus describes **the birth of Israel as a nation.**

- * It explains how God controlled history even in that pagan land, and used circumstances there to make Israel into a nation.
- * Their growth is traced from a family of seventy men, to a nation of 600,000 men, not including women and children (= *about 2.5 million people!*).
- * God strengthens them to the point where even powerful Egyptian rulers fear them.
- * He uses their suffering to unite them, so that together they might take possession of the promised land and defend its borders.

Exodus describes how God brought Israel out of bondage and established them as His people.

- * He **redeemed** them and thereby made them His own.
- * He gave them a **covenant** which would govern their relationship with Him and with one another.

- * He provided them a **place where they might enjoy fellowship with Him and worship Him** for His repeated demonstrations of love.

Purpose–The book was written that Israel,

- * having become aware of where she has come from, might **realize her debt to God and her need of dependence on Him.**
- * This awareness should cause them to **trust, serve, worship and obey Him.**
- * As Israel voluntarily submitted to God's authority over her, she would thereby bring **glory to God.**

Organization

Exodus demonstrates two distinct, yet related, bases for organizing its structure. The book is easily organized on the basis of the geographical elements in the story.

1. The account begins in Egypt 1-13:16
2. Following the liberation of God's people from Egypt, their travels to Sinai are described 13:17-18:27
3. The remainder of the book is dedicated to revealing the events which occur at Sinai 19-40

At Sinai, the most important events are related to God's revelation of Himself and His instructions for His people. Thus the nature of the story changes radically after their arrival at Sinai.

1. First half of book concentrates on historical events which occurred, both in Egypt and on the road to Sinai. 1-18 **The REDEMPTION of God's People**
2. Second half, while also historical in nature, places emphasis on the revelation of God, or His legislation for His people 19-40 **The REVELATION of God to His People.**

Argument

I. Redemption of God's people 1-18

A. Liberation from Egypt 1-13:16

1. Justification for liberation 1

In order to demonstrate the need for God to redeem His people from Egypt, Moses first describes the conditions under which Israel was living in Egypt.

- a. Their multiplication 1:1-7

He begins by describing again Israel's entry into Egypt. From a small group of seventy, at the time of Joseph's death, the nation multiplied and filled the entire land of Egypt. God's blessing on them was evident even in a pagan land.

b. Their oppression 1:8-14

A new king who owed no debt to Joseph took over Egypt's throne. As he saw Israel's rapid growth, he became frightened by the threat they posed to him. This may be an indication that his was a minority government, ruling only by superior power. In any case, he was frightened by the threat they posed and used oppressive tactics to keep them under control.

c. Their elimination 1:15-22

In spite of the oppression, Israel continued to multiply.

Finally, the king decided that the only recourse was obligatory birth control. He ordered the midwives to kill all Hebrew males at birth. The midwives, however, because of their respect for God, protected the Hebrews. Their protection of God's people resulted in blessing for them, just as God had promised Abraham.

Pharaoh tried again, decreeing that all male Hebrew babies should be thrown into the river. Such oppression and murder of God's people required God's intervention to protect His people from extermination.

2. Preparation for liberation 2-7:7

a. The deliverer 2-4

God began to prepare for the liberation of His people by sending a deliverer who would be raised in Pharaoh's own home.

- (1) His birth 2:1-2
- (2) His preservation 2:3-10
- (3) His choice 2:11-14

As time passed, Moses was forced to choose between his royal inheritance as son of Pharaoh's daughter, or his natural people, Israel who continued in bondage. Upon witnessing the abuses against his own people, he made his choice to identify with Israel (2:11-14).

- (4) His escape to Midian 2:15-25

Knowing that word of his decision would soon reach Pharaoh, Moses escaped before Pharaoh could hurt him. During his long stay in Midian, the Pharaoh died. In the meantime, Israel's suffering continued. After many years of such suffering, God's time to free His people arrived. At last they were ready for the deliverer (2:23-25).

- (5) His encounter with God 3-4:17

God appeared to Moses and told him that He was about to rescue Israel from the Egyptians. While Moses was excited about God's plan and desired to see the deliverance of Israel, he did not think he could do the job. Thus he began to make excuses (3-4).

- (6) His return to Egypt 4:18-28
- (7) His meeting with the elders of Israel 4:29-31

b. The mission 5-7:7

- (1) Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh 5:1-21

Eventually Moses gave in and went. Following their meeting with the elders of Israel, Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh (5:1-21). They announce to Pharaoh that Yahweh has sent them to ask for Israel's release so that they may worship Him (5:1). Pharaoh responds in contempt, "*Who is this Yahweh that I should obey Him?*" In the chapters that follow, Pharaoh will find out Who Yahweh is!

- (2) Moses' complaint before God 5:22-6:12
- (3) Moses' family record 6:13-27
- (4) Moses' spokesman before Pharaoh 6:28-7:7

3. Realization of liberation 7:8-13:16

a. Pharaoh's question answered 7:8-12:51

When Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh, the basic issue at stake was that reflected in Pharaoh's earlier question; "*Who is this Yahweh that I should obey Him?*" By means of the supernatural evidence given, Pharaoh is about to find out who Yahweh is.

The evidence given would demonstrate the authority of Yahweh, as well as that of His messenger. The miracles make it apparent that this is a conflict between Yahweh and the gods of Egypt.

In spite of the clear demonstration of God's power and authority, Pharaoh rejects the messenger of God and His message. Thus his heart is hardened and his kingdom and family are judged by God.

While the Passover was to be a judgment against Egypt, it also served as a test of Israel's faith and obedience to God. Israel would be delivered from the judgment, but only if the people were obedient to conditions commanded by God. God was in control and their redemption was to be on His terms (12:1-13).

b. Israel's commemoration established 13:1-16

After describing the events of the first Passover and its implications for Israel, Moses explained the procedures God established to remind them of His work in their behalf.

The firstborn was considered God's (1-2)

They were to celebrate Passover every year to remind them. (3-10)

They were to pay God to redeem the firstborn. (11-16)

B. Journey to Sinai 13:17-18:27

After describing God's act of redemption, the author describes their journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. The trip can be divided in 3 logical phases:

1. To the sea 13:17-14:14
 - a. Israel's route 13:17-22
 - (1) Long route chosen 17-18
 - (2) Joseph's bones taken 19
 - (3) Pillar of fire given 20-22

God did not leave them to find their own way through the desert. He went ahead of them to guide them (13:20-22). They had a continual reminder of His presence with them. This reminder would also serve as a basis to be sure of His protection in difficult circumstances.

- b. Pharaoh's pursuit 14:1-9
 - (1) God's plan 1-4
 - (2) Pharaoh's intent 5-9

In spite of the plagues which had revealed Yahweh's superiority to Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, Pharaoh hadn't surrendered. When he stopped to think about what he had done, he suddenly realized that he was in trouble. Thus he went after Israel (14:1-9).

God's plan was to draw the armies of Pharaoh into a trap. By the destruction of the armies of Egypt, His superior power would be demonstrated and He would receive glory.

- c. Israel's fear 14:10-14
 - (1) People's complaint 10-12

By any human standard, the Israelites didn't have a chance. Pharaoh was convinced that he could easily overpower them. The Israelites were also convinced of their hopeless situation. They were terrified (14:10-12).

- (2) Moses' promise 13-14

Moses responded to them with a promise (14:13-14). If they would just be quiet and watch, they would see God's hand at work. God would fight for them. They would never again be troubled by these Egyptians.

2. Through the sea 14:15-15:21
 - a. God's promise 14:15-18
 - b. God's provision 14:19-22
 - c. Egypt's pursuit 14:23-25
 - d. Egypt's destruction 14:26-28

- e. Israel's salvation 14:29-31
- f. Moses' song 15:1-18
- g. Miriam's song 15:19-21

3. To Sinai 15:22-18:27

Although Israel should have been convinced to trust Yahweh and to submit to His rule forever, the effect was short-lived. As they continued into the third phase of their journey, from the sea to Sinai, new tests of their faith caused new doubts and new complaints.

- a. Bitter water sweetened 15:22-27
- b. Food shortage solved 16
- c. Water shortage supplied 17:1-7
- d. Enemy defeated 17:8-15
- e. Overload redistributed 18

II. Revelation to God's people 19-40

After three months of travel, Israel arrived at Sinai where God revealed to Moses two important parts of His plan for His people. He gave them **the law which would reveal to them God's standards of conduct for His redeemed people**. He also gave them the plans for **the tabernacle so that they might worship Him and enjoy fellowship with Him**.

A. The law of God revealed to His people 19-24

1. Israel's covenant relationship with God defined 19-20

Having brought Israel out of Egypt to be His own people, God had to reveal to them the basis for their conduct before Him. That basis is His covenant relationship to them which he first defines briefly.

God has chosen them to be His. He has cared for them and drawn them to Himself. Therefore, they should respond to His love by submitting to His authority over them and obeying the regulations established in His covenant. Such conduct will distinguish His people from the other nations of the world. If they live by His standards, God will care for them and bless them.

In order to make clear and to facilitate their recall of the laws God has established, He summarizes them in ten basic commandments which they are to obey (20:1-17).

These commands speak specifically concerning their relationship to Him, as their God (1-11), and concerning their relationship to other people (12-17).

The revelation of God's greatness frightens the people. Moses uses this fearful reaction as a basis to warn them. The fear of the Lord should serve to keep them from sinning (18-21). Such a great God ought not be taken lightly.

- 2. Israel's social relationship with men regulated 21-23:9
- 3. Israel's religious regulations established 23:10-19
- 4. God's angel to lead them 23:20-33

God promises to send His angel before them to protect and to guide them. If they will listen to His direction and submit to Him, God will give them victory over their enemies. Little by little He will give them control over the land. They are to recognize only Him and make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land nor their gods.

5. God's covenant confirmed 24

B. The way to God revealed to His people 25-40

While on the mountain, God gave Moses the second major revelation for the life of His people. He revealed the plans for the tabernacle by which they might learn the proper way to worship and to approach their God.

The preceding section demonstrated the separation between God and man. Only Moses was allowed to approach God. Now God reveals His plan to dwell among men. The plan begins with God, who desires to dwell among men. The provision is described from God toward man. It allows for man to draw near to God, but only on His terms.

1. Plan described 25-31

2. Plan delayed 32-34

a. Disobedience manifested 32:1-6

At a time when Israel should have reached a spiritual peak, while Moses was on the mountain receiving God's law, they disobey God and cause a delay in His program for them. Rather than wait for Moses, the people become impatient and make their own gods. They make a golden calf and call this god, whom they worship their own way, "Yahweh."

b. Judgment decreed 32:7-10

God tells Moses what the people are doing and threatens to destroy them (7-10). God offers to start over with Moses and make a nation from his descendants.

c. Intercession received 32:11-14

Moses rejects God's proposal and intercedes for God's people (11-14).

Moses reminds God of his covenant promise to be faithful to Israel. God accepts Moses' message and restores His people.

d. Judgment enacted 32:15-35

Although God is willing to forgive Israel and fulfill His covenants to her, He must first punish those who have been disobedient (15-35).

Moses returned from the mountain to see the sad scene. As he witnessed what was happening, he became angry. He threw the tablets down and broke them. This action may have been for the purpose of protecting the people, since it was the tablets which were the basis of the condemnation of their acts. He also destroyed the calf they had made.

- e. Separation threatened 33:1-6
- f. Presence promised 33:7-17

Moses refuses to go unless God goes with them (14-16)

- g. Revelation requested 33:18-23

Moses has talked to God face to face but now he wishes to see Him and to know Him completely.

- h. Covenant reconfirmed 34:1-35

Having resolved the problem caused by Israel's disobedience and having received God's promise to accompany them again on their journey to the land, the covenant is again confirmed to Israel.

- 3. Plan completed 35-40

After the people saw God's compassion and forgiveness revealed in the reconfirmation of the covenant, the time came to go to work on the tabernacle.

Upon completion of the task, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (40:34-38). This was the climactic event.

Exodus reveals an exciting part of God's plan. In it the promise God made to Abraham and his descendants is fulfilled in their experience. God delivers His people from bondage in Egypt, makes them into a great nation, teaches them to follow His directions and trust Him, provides all their physical needs, instructs them in the conduct He expects from His children in the midst of a pagan world, and, finally, reveals to them the way to fellowship with Himself. The book concludes in triumph. God now dwells in the midst of His people, revealing Himself to them daily. The people of God are now prepared to move into the land He has promised them, to claim the possession, and to enjoy fellowship with their God in the land He has given to them.

Practical Lessons

1. God controlled history to make Israel into a nation.
He controls history today also--even in pagan lands.
2. God bought His people and brought them out of bondage.
He bought us, too, in order to free us from sin's bondage.
3. God expects His people to submit to His authority over them.
 - * To realize our debt to Him.
 - * To realize our dependence on Him.
 - * To submit to His authority in our daily lives.

*Write down some practical lessons God wants us to learn from Exodus.
What should you do about them?*