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## Exodus 2008

### An Introduction - Exodus 1:1-5

This year commemorates the 3453<sup>rd</sup> year since the exodus of the Hebrews from the land of Egypt in 1445 BC. The events of this second book in the Bible are so important that they continue to impact the world at large, not just the Jewish and Christian communities. Its importance in Judaism includes the Ten Commandments, the tabernacle, the law codes, the priesthood, the festivals, and the worship forms at the very heart of Jewish and Christian worship. Beyond this the basis for civil law and government is patterned in large measure after the precedents and laws established in Exodus.

Here, for the first time, ethical behavior became a central focus of human relationships. For the first time, the promise of redemption became the drama of redemption on a national scale. God clearly revealed Himself as the God of history. He linked Himself to a people and transformed a loose collection of tribal families into a nation called Israel. Also, the nation's purpose as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation," is clearly revealed. There is hardly a biblical doctrine that does not receive attention in the book. Genesis is the book of beginnings, and Exodus follows as the book of foundations.

### The Historical Setting

The events of Exodus are linked to the past as recorded in Genesis. Exodus also is linked as the second of the books attributed to Moses and called the Pentateuch, which means the "five books" and refers to the unity of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

### 1. The Linguistic-Grammatical Link

There is a logical and sequential relationship between Genesis and Exodus. First, there is a linguistic link. The name Exodus was assigned to this book by the translators of the Septuagint (LXX). It of course refers to one of the main events of the book, the release from Egyptian bondage. But the name in Hebrew is *wealeh shamoth*, which means "now these are the names." This follows the pattern throughout the Pentateuch in which the Hebrew name of each book is the first word or words of the book. In the case of Genesis, for example, the Hebrew name is *bereshith*, which is the first word in the Bible and means, "in *the* beginning." "These are the names," then, is the linguistic link between Genesis and Exodus because the first thing named in Exodus is Jacob and his twelve sons.

Second, there is a grammatical link in that the Book of Exodus begins with a simple conjunction, the letter *waw*, which when used as a conjunction is variously translated as "now" or "and." But regardless of the translation, the conjunction *waw* is and does what every conjunction is and does. It is a connector that connects what precedes it with what comes after it. The first four books of the Pentateuch all begin with the conjunction, the letter *waw*, suggesting that connectivity between them. Only Deuteronomy, the last book in the Pentateuch, begins with the word, *'eleh*, meaning "these" in the opening phrase "these are the words which Moses spoke. . . ."

## 2. The Historical Link

How did the Hebrew people wind up in Egypt? In the second statement of the covenant of Abraham in Genesis 15:1-21, God spoke to Abraham and explained the future of his descendents. This prophecy related three facts:

1. The Hebrews would be servants in a foreign land, Gen 15:13a.
2. Their servitude would turn to affliction. They would be slaves in a foreign nation for four hundred years, and in the fourth generation, which in the time of the Patriarch's of Genesis was 400 years, Gen 15:13b.
3. In the fourth generation, He would deliver them from the bondage and Abraham's descendents would come forth from the land with great possessions, 15:14-16.
4. In the fourth generation, they would return to the land. God also added a mysterious announcement, "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete," 15:16. This enigmatic statement refers to the longsuffering character of God. The Canaanites had the witness and example of Abraham and his descendents. They would have another 400 years, and if there was no change, they would be judged when the Hebrews returned to the land.

The last fourteen chapters of Genesis present the life of Joseph. He was an outstanding young man in many ways. He was also a godly young man as evidenced in the recurring refrain that the "Lord was with Joseph," e.g. Gen 39:3, 5, 21, 23. He also declared that his family was in Egypt by the will of God who used him, as a means of preserving his family, 45:4-8; 50:23. Exactly why God led them to Egypt is never made fully clear. By the close of the events of Genesis the family of Jacob was comfortably established in Egypt and they enjoyed the favor of the unnamed Pharaoh because of Joseph, see Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History*, pp.145-149; David and Patricia Alexander, *Eerdmans's Handbook to the Bible*, p. 155.

Genesis closes with the death and burial of Joseph in Egypt, sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century BC. Four hundred years later, see Gen 15:7-17, the story is taken up again. During this time there were at least four major developments:

1. The appreciation for the life-giving leadership that Joseph had given to the Egyptians faded away.
2. The presence of the Hebrews was seen as a liability and threat, and they no longer saw them as the descendants of the savior of their nation or remembered the leadership of Joseph.
3. The Hebrews greatly increased in numbers and were perceived as a security threat to the native Egyptians, see Exod 1:7-10.
4. The Egyptian response was to take final steps to implementing measures to impound the Hebrews as slaves, Exod 1:11.

### **3. The Providential Link**

The events of these four hundred years in Egypt were part of a prophetic vision that God gave to Abraham at the time of the sealing of the covenant that He made with him, Gen 15:7-17. The details of this vision are clearly given. The Hebrew nation would be resident captives in a strange (foreign) land. There they would serve their captors for four hundred years, after which they were to be delivered. They would be released to come out of that land and would receive great wealth. This narrative seems to suggest several divine purposes for the captivity of the Hebrews in Egypt:

1. It was to be a time of preparation for claiming the Promised Land. In the land of Egypt, they learned to serve and suffer. Oppression and suffering would teach them patience, endurance, and dependence upon the Lord.
2. Their sojourn in Egypt and the exodus from the land would be a concrete demonstration of God's determination to redeem His people from bondage, a great lesson in redeeming grace.
3. The Hebrews needed a better physical and spiritual environment than Canaan afforded in order to grow and develop to be ready to become a nation. Egypt was able to provide that venue for growth, development, education, wealth, and cultural sophistication, all things that could not have happened in Canaan without dramatic divine intervention. God chose to do it this way in Egypt.
4. There was great material wealth in Egypt, part of which was destined to become the wealth of Israel. When they left their captors gave them gifts, Exod 3:21; 11:2, 3; Ps 105:38, which were their just wages for their years of enslavement and work. The gifts were considered payment for their labor over the 400 years of service under oppressive circumstances.
5. There also is one other matter related to the Canaanites themselves. God told Abraham that the Hebrews would remain in Egypt until the iniquity of the Amorites was "full," Gen 15:16. The moral climate was so serious that God brought them to Egypt. In going back the Hebrews would be a strong

and formidable foe, able to claim the land and turn it from its debauched forms of sin and idolatry by expelling the Canaanites from the land. They would be the judgment of God on the Canaanites, who were given 400 years, while the Hebrews were in Egypt, to respond to the grace of God.

These are historically verifiable events that match the facts recorded in Exodus. All of the people, places, and events of the book fit well into the time when it purports to have happened in the mid-fifteenth century, 1450 BC. Archaeological evidence has confirmed the historical accuracy of the events recorded here in Exodus and there is no doubt that we are looking at factual records not a fictional story, see J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, pp. 40-41.

### **The Name of the Book**

As stated earlier, Exodus is not the original name of the book in the Hebrew Bible. This name comes from the Greek Septuagint, a translation of the Old Testament book into the Greek language. The Hebrew name for the books of the Pentateuch are taken from the first word or phrase in the book. The Hebrew name for Genesis is taken from its opening word, *bereshith*, which means "in the beginning." Likewise, the Hebrew name of Exodus is *we'elleh shemot*, which means "Now these are the names . . ." The name Exodus from the Greek *exodon*, which means "departure," and focuses on one of the main events of the book.

### **The Author of Exodus**

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century the authorship of the Pentateuch was generally regarded to be Moses. In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Bible in general and the Pentateuch in particular came under attack from liberal scholars who fabricated a theory of an evolutionary multiple authorship and editorship. For nearly a hundred years, this idea was debated but now the pendulum has swung back. There are still many who hold to the evolutionary model called the "JEDP theory." But the greater numbers of conservative scholars today believe that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Old Testament. Evidence within the Pentateuch, the Old Testament, and the New Testament consistently cites Moses as the author, see e.g. Exod 17:14; 24:3, 4; 34:27; Josh 1:7, 8; 8:30-35 24:1-7; 2 Chr 17:9; 31:3; Ezra 6:18; 7:10; Neh 13:1, 2; Dan 9:11-13; Mal 4:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 2:22-24; John 7:19-23.

### **The Date of Exodus**

Here again conservative and liberal scholars differ. Conservative scholars generally agree on the date of 1445 BC, while more liberal scholars prefer a date of 1220 BC. This date is extrapolated from the use of the names of the supply cities Pithom and Rameses in Exodus 1:11. Use of the name Rameses is linked with Rameses II who ruled from 1304 to 1236 BC and was known for his oppressive policies. This is not a conclusive connection since the name Rameses was used in the time of Joseph in

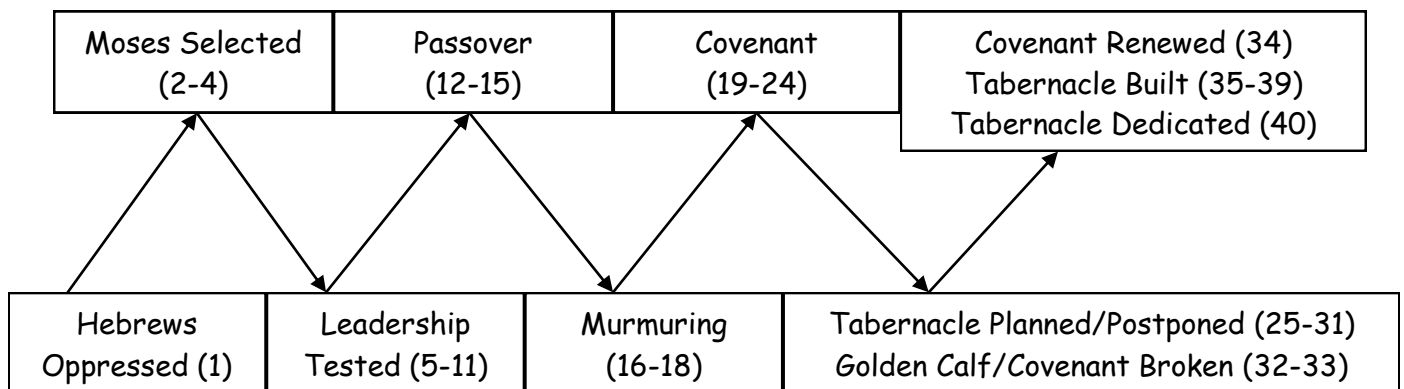
Genesis 47:11. Reference to the "land of Rameses" does not rule out the existence of a city built in the land of Rameses at a much earlier time. The date of 1445 BC is still the best choice. Moses' ministry began in 1445 BC and continued through the 40 years in the wilderness, concluding with his death in 1405 BC.

### Contents of Exodus

Only the first fifteen chapters of the book are concerned with the circumstances of deliverance and exodus from Egypt. This leaves almost two-thirds of the book, another 25 chapters, that address all the other themes and events subsequent to the departure from Egypt. **Chapters 1-4** present the plight of the Hebrews when their residency turns to oppressive slavery. In also is in these chapters that God identifies a leader chosen to bring the Hebrews from their bondage. **Chapters 5-11** turn to the circumstances related to securing release from Egyptian slavery. **Chapters 12-18** turn to the institution of the Passover and the subsequent release of the Hebrews to return to Canaan. **Chapters 19-24** present the revelation of the covenant, including the Ten Commandments. **Chapters 25-31** present the institution of the priesthood and the tabernacle. **Chapters 32-34** discuss the breaking of the covenant and renewal of the covenant. **Chapters 35-40** present the completion and dedication of the tabernacle and the institution of worship.

The following illustration notes the peaks and valleys of the book. There is a peak to balance each "valley" in the book. The book begins in the "valley" of oppression and ends on the "peak" of the dedication of the tabernacle and the appearance of the cloud of the glory of the Lord in chapter 40. Other peaks occur with the institution of the Passover, the Covenant, Renewed Covenant, and the building and construction of the tabernacle. The valleys also include the tests of leadership, murmuring, and the postponement of the Tabernacle due to the Golden Calf incident.

### The Spiritual Peaks & Valleys of the Book of Exodus



## Relevance of Exodus

Why study Exodus? Any consideration of the books, which make up the heart of the Old Testament message must surely give attention to Exodus. *Genesis* presents for us the beginnings, the gathering of the raw material. Exodus relates the building of the foundation of Jewish religious and national life. In Exodus the essence of Hebrew theology, worship, and culture emerges and still impacts our culture today (Roy L. Honeycutt, Jr., "Exodus," *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, p. 297). All the thought of later generations was impacted by the events that unfold in this great book. In fact, the message of Exodus is so far-reaching that it is relevant to the needs of the human family in the twenty-first century, (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, pp. 16-18). Consider the following vital issues that are current in our culture today:

1. Fatalism. Many people today have based their personal philosophy on a "what will be; will be" type of fatalism. "Don't worry, nothing will turn out right anyway." Those who believe this way see the individual as the pawn of big business and big government. It is easy to adopt such an attitude if one concludes that he or she can do nothing to alter his or her destiny. Exodus presents a perspective on life that shows us a God who is in control of events. He is aware of the injustices and inconsistencies of life. He is in control of history, and He is acting to consummate His redemptive work.
2. Conformity. Fatalism is fed by the conviction that the individual is of little or no consequence in today's society. "What can just one person do?" "One person can't change the system!" These are common phrases that reflect the popular notion that there is nothing one person can do about the way things are. This often leads to a false conclusion that attention should focus on one's self because no one else will. This attitude has produced the "Me" generation, with "it's all about Me" syndrome that has engulfed our culture today. This conformity to being uncooperative and non-conformist has created a new individualism resulting in self-centeredness, emotion, and a shallow easy believerism.

Exodus is the story of how God used one man, Moses, to turn the backwash of discontent to a tide of faith, which swept His people to freedom. A college professor of mine used to say, "One plus God is always a majority!" Never was that illustrated any better than in the life of a man like Moses. Yes, one person can "buck city hall." One person can change the system provided that person is sold out to God as an available instrument. Such total surrender is never easy. It wasn't for Moses. But God can and will use us provided we meet one qualification; that is our availability. Standing for righteousness and godliness is not popular today and has never has been popular. Jesus taught us

that if we would dare to assert ourselves for Him and the things of God, we should expect to be unpopular (Matt 10:16-23).

3. Escapism. When fatalism grips the land, you will find people inventing a myriad of amusements, pleasures, and diversions as various forms of escapism. These amusements (sports, drugs, alcohol, T. V., movies, travel, hobbies, etc.) become a substitute for real fulfillment. This escapism concludes the real world is only bearable because a person can "lose" themselves in his or her form of escapism and salve his or her troubled spirit long enough to get through until the next available avenue of escape.

God offers the most constructive alternative. It is escape to reality instead of from it. The spiritual dimension puts one in touch with the ultimate reality—God. Thus, the Christian may participate in amusements, but they are enjoyed for their own sake and not as an escape from reality and responsibility. Exodus is the story of the escape of a people to reality not from it. They were called by their creator to accept their responsibility of being a covenant people called to minister to a world that needed desperately to know God.

4. Morality. Certainly one cannot consider the exodus and the covenant without the profound impression of God's moral demands on His people. We live in a world that has concluded itself too mature to be concerned with "do's and don'ts." It is amazing that human beings have the unique ability to be unable to see any correlation with the relaxation of moral values and the decay of society. Many people are sure that morality can be educated, legislated, or otherwise indoctrinated into our culture. People may agree to the laws (the Hebrews confirmed the covenant, Exod 19:8; 24:3, 7, then broke it, Exod 32:1); they may endure the education but unless they experience the grace of God on a firsthand basis (Exod 34:6-7) there is little hope of constructing an external morality. With moral decay everywhere, we need to return to a standard of morality—God's. That standard is at the center of every page of God's Word.
5. Materialism. Without a proper perspective on material things, one is always in danger of being "owned" by his or her possessions. The Hebrew people knew that all they had was given them by God when He brought them out of Egypt (Exod 11:1-3). While they made many mistakes in the wilderness, failure to be good stewards was not one of them. Moses had to restrain the people because they gave so much for the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 36:2-7). In God's economy, material things are provided for use in the accomplishment of

His purpose with us. Proper recognition of this fact leads to good stewardship; a state where God truly owns and controls all we are and all we have.

6. Spiritism and the Occult. Interest in the occult and spiritism was as popular in Moses' day as it is in our own. Most forms of occultic worship are built around fear, superstition, and cultic rites designed to enslave participants. Moses stands in bold contrast to the magicians of Egypt who sought to control people with devices of the occult. Moses included a strict warning from God against participation in such rites (Deut 18:9-14). Modern spiritism is even more dangerous! God's warning still stands against participation in such things.
  
7. Biblical Relevance. One of the common mistakes of many who study the Bible is the assumption that the New Testament did away with the Old Testament. Study of the Old Testament is judged to be of little value. Exodus is so foundational to many concepts found in the New Testament. The serious Bible student cannot afford to "write-off" the Old Testament, especially the Pentateuch (first five books). Concepts such as grace, mercy, redemption, the love of God, the Passover (Lord's Supper), tabernacle, ten commandments, etc., are presented in the context of God's dealings with people in real-life situations. The truth is that we cannot hope to understand the New Testament if we do not attempt to understand the Old.

### **Conclusion**

The Book of Exodus is linked to the events in Genesis that precede the Hebrews' sojourn in the land of Egypt. This link is reflected in the grammatical and linguistic links in the text as well as the historical and providential links of the biblical record. This book of Moses is the second one of the five books of the Pentateuch. It is the foundational book of both the religious and national life of Israel. While some question the authorship and date of the book, conservative scholars find conclusive evidence that Moses wrote the book over the 40 years of his ministry from 1445 BC to 1405 BC. There are spiritual peaks and valleys in the book that reflect the struggles of the people that God called to be His own special possession, Ex 19:5-8. They were called to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation," 19:6.

In addition to the importance of Exodus in understanding the birth of the nation of Israel and its spiritual, religious, and theological history, the book also is necessary to understanding many important concepts in the New Testament. The message of Exodus makes it a very relevant book by speaking directly to many of the pitfalls of our twenty-first century culture. Most important of all, Exodus contains the seeds of the Gospel. Pictures of Jesus are everywhere in the book, from the selection of a Savior, to the deliverance from the plagues, to the Passover, tabernacle, sacrifices, offerings, and feast days.