

## Overview: Exodus 1—19

Exodus opens with the Hebrews in bondage under a pharaoh who “did not know Joseph.” It is the story of God “remembering his covenant” and delivering his people from slavery through Moses, his chosen leader. This section of scripture is extraordinary in what it reveals about the person of God and his plan for humanity: God the redeemer, his people, the redeemed. Exodus is a central biblical narrative, retold and reworked in every generation of biblical revelation.

### Structure 3:1—22 [4:1—17]

Scene #1 (3:1—9): *Theophany—The Burning Bush*

setting	plot and dialogue	purpose clues
<i>Context:</i>	<i>Narration &amp; Dialogue:</i>	3:8. “I have come down to deliver them” is the center of this narrative. It is set up effectively in 2:23—25 where God “heard” and “saw” and “remembered,” but now “I have come.”
Preceding narrative:	3:1—4. <i>Summons.</i>	Also explained in connection with God’s faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant, a critical link between the Genesis and Exodus narratives.
Moses’ failure (2:11—22)	Note the contrast of 2:22 and 3:4. What a dramatic moment this had to be.	
linking summary (2:23—25)	After all these years God calls out to Moses.	
Following narrative:	Instantly, Moses is transported from the mundane to the supernatural.	
Moses sent to Egypt (4:18ff)		
<i>Identify:</i>	3:5. <i>Warning.</i>	
<u>who</u> —Moses and God (angel of the Lord)	Watch your step! Moses hides his face in fear.	
<u>where</u> —Mt. Horeb (Sinai)	3:6—9. <i>Revelation.</i>	
<u>when</u> —after Moses had been in Midian for 40 years (see Acts 7:30)	The gears of time begin to engage.	
	Note that there is no dialogue. The Lord (v.4) or angel of the Lord (v.2) <i>declares</i> the presence and purpose of God.	

Scene #2 (3:10—22 [4:17]): *God Commissions Moses*

setting	plot and dialogue	purpose clues
<i>Context:</i>	<i>Narration &amp; Dialogue:</i>	3:12. God’s sign to Moses provides poignant
Preceding narrative:	3:10. <i>Commission.</i>	bookends to the narrative (19:17,18).
God will deliver Israel 3:1—9	What must have been virtually forgotten over the 40 years in Midian is “now”	3:15. For the third time (2:23—25, 3:6), we are
Following narrative:	a reality: It is time for Israel to be released and “now” is the time for Moses to receive his calling. The dialogue shows a new humility in Moses, but not a mature trust in the Lord.	reminded that the Lord is the God of promise, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How many times does the text say, “I will”? The Lord is active, not some abstract concept or natural force.
<i>Moses goes to Egypt 4:18ff.</i>		
<i>Identify:</i>		
<u>who</u> —Moses and God	3:11,12. “ <u>But who am I?</u> ”	
<u>where</u> —Mt. Horeb		
<u>when</u> —after God reveals himself to Moses	Moses’ self-doubt. God’s reassurance—the sign which will be evident <i>after</i> Moses leads God’s people.	3:15. YHWH the “memorial-name” of God suggests deeper insight into his purpose—is it this amazing event, the exodus, that is his “signature act,” his “memorial”? At the end of the plagues, the Passover is established as “memorial, a permanent ordinance” the “beginning of months for you.” (12:2,14). Clearly we’ll need to explore this in the “theology” section of the study.
	3:13—15 “ <u>In whose name?</u> ”	
	Moses raises the question of authority.	
	God’s response: “I AM”, the Hebrew verb “to be.” Note in the narrative, “I have” (3:7,8) “I will” (3:17) and “I	3:16—22. This section is really a summary of what follows in the narrative through 12:36 (Egypt is plundered). It suggests that neither the past nor the future surprise God, that he

am” (3:6).

is the sovereign Lord of history.

3:16—22. An explanation of what Moses is to do when he returns to Egypt and what will happen when he confronts the pharaoh.

[4:1—9] “What if I fail?”

[4:10—17] “I am ungifted”

- state the *main point* and how each scene supports, illustrates, or applies it
  - “*I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up to a good and spacious land...*”
  - Scene #1. The reader is connected with the God of promise, the God of history. He is both *sovereign* (3:6—9) and *holy* (3:5).
  - Scene #2. God sends Moses (3:10). But it’s God who is the central figure: God will “be with you” (3:12), and God will “bring you up” (3:17). Note that all of the action is the Lord’s—it is he who knows what the pharaoh will do (3:19) and it is the Lord’s “hand” that will strike Egypt with miracles that “I shall do in the midst of it” and “I will grant favor in the sight of the Egyptians.”

### **Content** (muscle) of the narrative

**Historical/cultural:** Like all literature, biblical narratives were written to a particular audience within a particular historical-cultural context. Inductive method searches for an understanding of these dimensions as they relate to the original meaning of the text.

Here are some basic tools serious students of the Bible will need to have available:

- J. D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*
- W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
- Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel’s History*
- Robert Thomas, ed., *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (NASB)*
- D.J. Wiseman, ed. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*
- **for free online resources see *Biblegateway.com* or *biblos.com***

*Identify and describe* customs, objects, events, and peoples relevant to the story.

E.g.: “Redemption” and the “Go’el” (Exodus 6:6)

E.g.: “Covenant” and “cutting a contract” (Genesis 15)

E.g.: Plagues in historical-cultural context. see K.A. Kitchen, “Plagues of Egypt,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 1001, 1002 (also see John Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*).

see Exodus 12:12; Numbers 33:4, the Lord’s victory over “the gods of the Egyptians”

<b>Plague</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Egyptian Deity</b>
Nile turned to blood	7:14—25	Khnum: guardian of the Nile Osiris: Nile was his bloodstream Heqt: takes the form of a frog
Frogs	8:1—15	unclear reference
Gnats	8:16—19	unclear reference
Flies	8:20—32	Hathor: mother goddess
Cattle	9:1—7	Apis: symbol of fertility Imhotep: god of medicine Nut: sky goddess
Boils	9:8—12	Seth: protector of crops
Hail	9:13—35	Isis: goddess of life
Locusts	10:1—20	Re, Aten, Horus: sun gods
Darkness	10:21—29	Pharaoh: son of Osiris, giver of life
First born son	11:1—12:36	

**Theology:** Old Testament narratives are written from a theological perspective and meant to advance the ongoing revelation of God in history.

*Identify and define key theological terms or concepts.*

Different names for God are used in narratives and point to different aspects of his character. Some of the more common examples are:

- El, Elohim, God (plural of magnification)
- El-Shaddai God Almighty
- El Elyon Most High God
- Yahweh LORD, Lord (His proper name, God of covenant)
- Yahweh Elohim Lord God
- Adonnai Lord

Also: Rock, King, Judge, Shepherd, Father, living God, first and last.

### **What does the text say about God?**

*Describe what the narrative teaches about the plan of salvation.*

Any reference or allusion to a blessing, promise, or covenant needs to be identified and described in the narrative context.

Contrast between God and religious practices and deities of Israel's neighbors should be noted.

Is the narrative an example of a pattern of salvation? For instance, is it a story of redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, etc. What terms are used to describe the plan of God in the world?

### **What does the text say about the plan or nature of salvation?**

*Describe what the narrative teaches about the human condition*

What is wrong with humanity? How does sin manifest itself?

### **How does the story describe or illustrate human sin?**

*Consider how the narrative reflects or advances key theological themes in the OT.*

Are there clear allusions or references to other biblical texts? How might that relate to the meaning of the narrative? Is the text used in subsequent revelation?

### **How is this narrative used in other texts? How does the narrative use other texts?**

***Muscle: Exodus 3:1—22***

#### ***Theology:***

*Identify and define key theological terms or concepts.*

- Burning bush on Mt. Horeb (3:1,2).

Meeting God in the mountain is not uncommon in the OT. In cultural context, the mountains were the dwelling places of the gods. In the OT, God transcends the earth, but mountains are a common place for the

human/divine connection: Eden (Ezek. 28:13,16, cf. Gen. 2:10—14), Horeb/Sinai (Exod. 3, 19, 34...), Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7).

God is also identified with fire. “The Lord is a consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29).

- Angel of the Lord (3:2,4).

See also 13:19; 23:20—23; 32:34. In context, the angel of the Lord and the Lord are the same.

- Holiness of God (3:5). *qados, hasid*.

Related to “fire,” “sacred,” and “glory,” holiness is the separateness and utter uniqueness of God from all creation. In contrast to the “holiness” of the gods of the ancient world (Exod. 15:11), Yahweh is holy in an ethical sense. Holiness relates most closely with God’s *righteousness*, God dwells in “unapproachable light” (1 Tm. 6:16).

God’s *justice* is necessary as a perfect moral Being: “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

God’s righteousness, his essential holiness, also relates to *mercy*. Salvation and is always undeserved, but freely given (Isaiah 45:8; 46:13; 51:5).

Moral monotheism vs. ancient near east polytheism. Substantial implications exist for the concept of morality and social justice.

The purpose of man’s creation is conditioned by the general purpose of the universe. According to the *Enuma Elish*, the universe was created for the benefit of the gods... Even Babylon was built for the gods... man’s creation was conceived and executed not as an end in itself or as a natural sequel to the formation of the rest of the universe, but rather as an expedient to satisfy a group of discontented gods. Man’s purpose in life was to be the serves of the gods...

Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*

It is small wonder, therefore, that all polytheisms tend to be religions of the *status quo*, and that none of them has ever produced a thoroughgoing social revolution based upon a high concept of social justice... In the

Bible, however, a state of tension exists between God and creation... A profound disharmony exists between the will of god and the existing social order.

G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment*

- God is not impassible (3:7,9,16)

God is affected by his creation. He has “seen the affliction of My people”; “the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me;” “I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.”

- God of promise

Links to the Abrahamic Covenant (3:6-8, 16,17).

Promise to Moses also (3:12), the “sign” that God is indeed with Moses.

- YHWH: God’s “memorial name” (3:14,15)

Names in the Old Testament world reveal something of the person (e.g.: Jacob). While God is referred to by many names, his proper name is YHWH: I AM. That God would bring attention to this personal pronoun here as a “memorial name” is significant. It brings focus to the reader that this is a decisive, signature action of God—that he will be known by his redeeming his people from bondage! It is not that the name Yahweh was unknown to God’s people (Gen. 4:26), rather the character imbedded in the name was yet to be realized (Gen. 17:1). Now the reader is about to learn who Yahweh really is.

- God’s sovereignty.

God is the central actor in this narrative. God has acted in the past, is active in the present, and will act in the future.

*Describe what the narrative teaches about the plan of salvation.*

- Abrahamic Covenant is in operation—blessing of nationhood and blessing to the world. What God promises, God will deliver.
- Yet God chooses to effect his plan in history through people. Moses is called and commissioned by God for his appointed task. He has freedom. He makes mistakes. He objects. Yet, God will use this imperfect vessel for his purpose.

*Describe what the narrative teaches about the human condition*

- “Fear of the Lord” (3:6).

The utter humility of sinners before a holy God (see Isaiah 6:3—5). The expression “fear of the Lord” is used 124 times in the Old Testament. It relates to “amazement,” “awe,” and genuine “fear.”

Fear of the Lord guards the heart (Hebrews 11:27; Isaiah 8:12—14). Who you fear is who you serve. Indeed, the fear of the Lord produces persuasion (2 Cor. 5:11).

Fear of the Lord is the basis for wisdom (Prov. 1:7).

- Total inadequacy for the task

The narrative section 3:11—4:17 focus on Moses’ objections to God’s commission based on his complete inadequacy for the task. God responds to each of the four objections:

- “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” (3:11). God responds, “I will be with you” and promises Moses a sign.
- By what authority? Or in whose name am I going? (3:13). God responds by using his memorial name.
- “What if they don’t believe me or listen to what I say?” (4:1). God will use even a common stick to arrest their attention.
- “I have never been eloquent of speech” (4:10). God will provide Aaron.

- God will allow his people to be subject to the historical realities they face

Receiving the promise land (3:8,17) will come through direct confrontation with Pharaoh (3:19,20).

*Consider how the narrative reflects or advances key theological themes in the OT.*

- Advancing the Abrahamic Covenant.

We have seen that the entire narrative is filled with reference to the Abrahamic Covenant. Fulfillment is coming!

- Slavery and redemption: key biblical theme of salvation. This text is really crucial to the inter-textual hermeneutic.

13 times Isaiah alone refers to God as the *Redeemer*. The exodus from Egypt is the paradigm, or model of redemption that will echo through Israel's history and overflow into the New Testament. We have already seen that exodus is a central *motif* in biblical literature.

### **Application** (skin) of the narrative

*How the narrative instructs God's people to be faithful to him.*

Biblical narrative relates both to the original audience and to all of God's people throughout time (Deut. 6:4-9; Hebrews 11; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1—6)

- What actions, attitudes, or convictions are being called for by the author to his original audience? (cognitive, relational, and active elements of application—see Deut. 6:4—9). In narrative, application is closely tied to the human drama—how are characters presented? Should we be like them or should we see in them a cautionary tale?
- How do these attitudes, convictions, or actions relate to us?
  - So in what ways might we relate to Moses in Exodus 3 and 4? The main point of the narrative is clear: God has come to deliver his people from Egypt (3:7), but that plan includes Moses. In what way can we relate to his situation? In what way can we relate to his reactions? In what way are we instructed through Moses?

**Assignment:** Exodus 15:1—18 The Song of Moses. This is a response in poetry and song to the exodus. It highlights two important dimensions of inductive study: *theology*—what it says about God and his plan for humanity, and *application*—what is an appropriate response to God's redemption.

1. Identify and define each of the characteristics of God.
2. In personal meditation on these characteristics, describe how two of them speak to your life today. How they challenge, clarify, or comfort you.