

Introduction

Exodus is a written history

The book of Exodus in terms of literary conventions is considered a history. It is the continuation of the story of God's chosen people, the Israelites. Genesis, the preceding book leaves us with the small nation of Israel as sojourners in Egypt. Exodus begins while Israel is still in Egypt, but their status has changed drastically since the events recorded in Genesis. Much discussion exists over whether or not the Exodus events as recorded are a factual, historical event. My personal belief is that these events transpired much as they were described, and the reason for my belief in a historical exodus is that so much of Judaic tradition is founded on this story. The events of the Exodus ripple throughout the Old and New Testaments much like ripples on a pond. Whether all of it is literally true, I can't say. I think we need to be careful and take into consideration some literary conventions and also consider to whom and for whom these events were recorded. They were not necessarily recorded for a 21st century American English speaking audience. Dr. Peter Pett (ret. Minister who holds his degree from King's College) states in his commentary on the Exodus:

That the Exodus happened we can be in no doubt. Its centrality in Israel's future faith confirms it. This is demonstrated by its regular representation in the Psalms as something to be sung about and seen as central to their worship, especially as related to the Reed Sea deliverance and Mount Sinai. And no nation of antiquity would have invented a story so demeaning to itself. When nations invented stories it was in order to glorify themselves not in order to demean themselves.

Long tradition supports that Moses is the author of Exodus (along with the rest of the Pentateuch). Let's take a quick look at the idea of authorship in this case. He most likely is the main *source* of information and perhaps he physically wrote it himself. More likely a scribe assisted in the recording of these events. As the Pentateuch records the event of Moses death and continues on recording events subsequent to his death, someone else must have taken over the recording of Israel's early history. Quite likely it was Joshua, or his scribe, that took up "authorship" after Moses' death.

In Exodus 24:4 and 34:27 God commanded Moses to make a written record of the covenant issued at Mount Sinai. This command seems to be issued in regards to the terms of the covenant, not necessarily the historical account of the Exodus and the desert wanderings. Acts 7:22 tells us that "*Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.*" Moses was brought up as a Prince of Egypt and would have had a world class education for his time. His training would have included everything from history, mathematics, architecture, military strategy, languages, arts and even literature. From his early training he may have thought that a record of the Exodus and the creation of a new nation should be recorded for the sake of Israel's future. Jesus himself tells us that Moses made a record of the events of Exodus. "*If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?*"

Dating Exodus

A specific date of the Exodus is not known. There is no archaeologically evidence for the Exodus. Nowhere has a hieroglyph or document been found that says so-and-so was Pharaoh, he lost control of his slave labor in Goshen and they all ran away. No self-respecting Pharaoh would have publically owned up to this utter failure and have inscribed it anywhere for anyone to see.

There are two widely held possibilities for a date. One school of thought favors the mid 15th cent. BC, about 1446 BC, under the Pharaoh Thutmose II. The second school of thought favors an earlier date coinciding with the reign of Ramses II in about 1290.

Historically speaking, the 15th century dating has some interesting facts lending support to its possibility of being the time frame of the Exodus. If we go back a few hundred years to the 18th Century, Egypt is at its peak. The 18th Century is considered the Golden Age of Egypt. Ahmenemhet I was the founder of the 12th dynasty and enlarged Egypt's borders and centralized the government at Thebes. There was great prosperity, building, expanding, the arts flourished. It would be during this dynasty that Joseph rose up in Egyptian society to the position of Prime Minister and Jacob and his descendants settled in Goshen, (near the end of 1800 BC). In the 13th and 14th dynasties Egypt experienced a decline. By the 15th and 16th dynasties Egypt became subject to the Hyksos. The Hyksos were not native Egyptians; they were a mixed race of Semitic and Asiatic descent. The Hyksos ruled Egypt until the 15th Century BC when Ahmose I, Prince of Thebes revolted and Egypt emerged as a sovereign state once again. Under Ahmose I, Egypt once again entered a period of great growth, expansion and prosperity. Egypt's borders expanded into Palestine and towards the Euphrates River. A fresh wave of Egyptian nationalism led to the oppression and enforced slavery of Semitic people in Egypt as a back-lash against the Hyksos occupiers. The Israelites in Egypt, who were also of Semitic descent, would have been included in this oppression and slavery. When we look at Pharaoh's remarks of in Exodus 1:9-10, his fears of the Israelites joining the enemy, the Hyksos, take on a greater and feasible meaning. It is thought that it was during the 15th Century that the Exodus took place. In this time line, Moses is thought to have been born during the reign of either Amenhotep I, or his successor Thutmose I. Hatshepsut, the daughter of Thutmose II, and future co-regent of Egypt, is thought to be the one who brought Moses into Pharaoh's house-hold raising him as her son and possibly her heir. Hatshepsut reigned while her step-son Thutmose III was young, and Egypt thrived under her governance. It would have been during these years that Moses spent his youth at the royal court and was raised as a Prince of Egypt (Acts 7:22). When Thutmose III finally wrested the throne from his step-mother, the tide turned in Pharaoh's house. Thutmose III attempted and succeeded in eradicating any and all of his step-mother's influence and allies within the court. Moses may have been viewed as a threat to his position as Pharaoh. These were likely the years that Moses spent in Midian. Thutmose III was succeeded by his

son Amenhotep II. This would make Thutmose III the likely Pharaoh associated with Israel's oppression in Egypt and Amenhotep II the Pharaoh during the Exodus.

If we turn to Exodus 1:10, we see Pharaoh's statement of concern over the Israelites resident in Egypt. He says, *"Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country."* Why is Pharaoh concerned that the Israelites might leave the country? I already mentioned the connection of the Israelites with the Hyksos. If they join forces with the Hyksos, Egypt's enemy, it is not the loss of slave labor with which Pharaoh is likely concerned. I think his greater concern is that in joining the Hyksos, Israel could rise against Egypt and combined be a real threat to Egypt's sovereignty. *"Leave the country"*, according to the New American Commentary, could be a mis-translation of a Hebrew idiomatic phrase. The Hebrew phrase carries a metaphoric meaning more along the lines of "water rising up above its banks and flooding the land". In this sense we can take Pharaoh's comment to mean that he is concerned that the joined Hyksos-Israelite population could rise up like a tide, overwhelm the land and take possession of it, not depart from it. As water floods the land, it overwhelms it and dominates it. This same Hebrew idiomatic phrase is also found in Genesis 2:6 and Hosea 1:11. With this translation of *"leave the land"* we can better understand Pharaoh's fear of even letting the Israelites depart Egypt. He would have a real cause for concern that in departing Egypt the Israelite's true purpose may be to unite with Hyksos forces outside of Egypt only to return and conquer Egypt.

Earlier I mentioned we need to keep in mind literary conventions as we study the Exodus. One example of this would be as we are reading we'll come across some very round or complete numbers – some very *convenient* numbers. Let's be cautious about taking these numbers literally. Often such numbers might have a metaphorical or symbolic or conventional (conventional to Israelites in the time of Moses) meaning to them. Especially numbers like 7, 10, 12, 40, or 400 seem to pop-up in various places throughout the Bible. Let's look at the number 400 for a minute. This is an interesting number. In Genesis 15:13 we're told: *"Then the Lord said to him [Abram], 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.'*" We are told in Genesis 15:16 that the descendants of

Joseph will be in Goshen for “4 generations”. And in Exodus 12:40 we’re told they will leave Egypt after 430 years. So does this 400 year period mean literally 400 hundred years, 4 generations, is it an approximation of 430 years, which in and of itself sounds very round, anyway. Or could it be symbolic of something else? Perhaps the number 400 reflects some kind of literary convention lost to time, or maybe it’s a way of saying “a long time”. Maybe it’s symbolic of a certain amount of time passing before a new “age” or new period of time begins. I think there is a strong argument for the idea of “400 years” being a symbolic divider between two distinct eras. We know that Genesis tells the story of beginnings, and relevant to our study, it tells the story of the beginnings of the tribe of people who would become the nation of Israel. At the end of Genesis we see the *Tribe of Israel* (named after Jacob) settling into Goshen in Egypt. They are a family group temporarily settling in Egypt to escape the famine in the land promised them by God through Abraham. Egypt is not their land, geographic Israel is where they belong. As the Exodus begins we see that things have changed drastically for the Israelites in Egypt. They have become enslaved and oppressed; it is time for a change for the people of God, time for a new beginning, a new era in the story of the People of God. God is ready to bring his people out of Egypt and create a nation out of them. Remember, when they first went into Egypt, they were a family group. Exodus 1:5 tells us that this group numbered only 70. Their stay in Egypt served to build their numbers under the relative protection and prosperity to be found in Egypt compared to the more dangerous and uncertain existence to be found in the land of Canaan at the time. When Exodus begins we discover that the Israelites have prospered and grown in number to be “exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them” as Exodus 1:7 describes. Their numbers do not lend themselves to be described as a tribe any longer. Their numbers, as we shall see, reflect a small nation. We can see a shift from one era to the next from Genesis to Exodus.

One other interesting note regarding these “400 years”: during this 400 year period there is no recorded word from God. Remember back to our Jesus study where we learned there was 400 years of silence – No prophet after Malachi was raised up with a fresh word from God until John the Baptist came on the scene. (An interesting parallel between the story of Moses and Jesus. Keep this in mind for future reference.) Exodus 2 ends with “*God heard their groaning and he remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with*

Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned with them". Chapter 3 immediately begins with Moses getting a fresh word from God through the burning bush and there ends 400 years of silence.

If we keep authorship, intended audience and literary convention in mind, we should be able to gain understanding and truth about Moses, about the Israelites, about the Lord and our own present day relationships with the Lord.

Background of the Exodus Story

A quick review of the history of the Patriarchs: If you remember, God called Abraham out of the Land of the Chaldees, (that is the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the land of Babylon with Babylon as its capitol) to the land God would give him, in Canaan. If he kept covenant with God, God would bless him with offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Then came Isaac and Jacob, with whom God continued his covenant within Abraham's direct family line. Jacob's son Joseph becomes the means of saving his family from famine by bringing them all down into Egypt. We have already seen that at this point it is a tribe of about 70 people. We progress from one person, to a family, to a tribe. By the time we catch up with this clan it has grown to some 2 million people, unsettling Pharaoh and setting the stage for the Exodus and giving God the opportunity to mold His people into a nation.

Note also that the Israelites were able to maintain their unity and their identity throughout this 400 year period. Joseph placed them in Goshen, physically separate from the cities of Egypt. Goshen was located east of the Nile River and the delta where the Nile spills into the Mediterranean Sea. The towns of Pithom and Ramses, (where the Israelites were enslaved and forced to make bricks) were located in this region. It was considered the best agricultural land in Egypt. The chief occupation of the Israelites was as herdsman, keeping flocks of goats and sheep and also tending the Pharaoh's cattle (Gen 47:6). This occupation would also have kept them necessarily separate from the Egyptian community. Egyptians viewed shepherding with disdain, a necessary evil, but make no mistake;

Egyptians would not have socialized with these “foreign” herdsmen and their sheep. The Israelites were in a particularly fertile area and left to themselves for quite some time to grow in numbers until the Pharaoh of the Exodus story decides these repulsive foreigners are a threat to national security (Exodus 1:10). By the time Moses leads Israel out of Egypt, they number 600,000 men, not including women and children, leading scholars to estimate that the total number of Israelites could reach 2 million in number.

The Story of Jacob

Back in the story of Jacob, God gives His chosen people a new name. Let’s take a brief look at this story as it gives some insight into the people God calls to be his own. As we all know, Jacob is the younger twin son of Isaac. From Genesis 25:26 we are told that his name means *“he grasps the heel”* or *“he deceives”*. Both seem to be accurate names. At birth it is said that he comes out grasping at Esau’s heel as if to pull him back so Jacob can come first. By the time he leaves home he has succeeded in stealing Esau’s birthright and blessing from his brother and his father for himself through deceit. He uses his cleverness against his father-in-law who deceived him multiple times before Jacob finally leaves with his wives, children and great wealth. Jacob decides to return to his homeland. As he reaches the Jordan River we find him literally grappling with, or grabbing onto the Lord. This time he doesn’t attempt deceit, he literal grabs on to the Lord in a wrestling match until he gets what he wants, a blessing and renewed faith in the covenant he inherits from his father and grandfather. This is the point in the story where we will take a closer look.

In his flight from Laban, his father-in-law, Jacob returns home to claim his birthright and renews his covenant with the Lord. When he left his homeland Esau was ready to kill him for taking these from him. Interestingly, it is in a dream that the Lord first appears to Jacob telling him *“to go back to your native land.”* (Gen 31:13) As he approaches Canaan he becomes fearful of his brother so he sent a messenger to Esau. When the messenger returns he informs Jacob that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob responds

with fear and distress and immediately sends of gifts of herds of livestock in an attempt to buy off his brother. He sends his wives, children and all their possessions across the Jabbock (an off shoot of the Jordan) hoping to protect them from an attack from Esau. *But he remains behind.*



Open your Bibles to Gen 32

Jacob is alone and separate from his family, wrestling all night with God. He wrestles with God over trusting God's promises or giving in to fear and turning tail instead of facing Esau and his army. He holds on to the Angel of the Lord until he is resolved to face and Esau and confident of God's promises. If we look back to verse 9 we see Jacob praying to God and acknowledging that all he has comes from the Lord, and he remembers the promise God made to him. *"I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted"* (32:12). He knows God will be faithful to the promise. After a night-long struggle with the Angel of God, his persistence pays off and he receives his blessing. He is no longer Jacob the grasper or Jacob the deceiver he is Israel, the one who struggles with God and overcomes. The angel tells him, *"your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."* Keep this new name in mind. Israel – the one who struggles (some versions, say "strives") with God and men and overcomes. We will see this played out in the Exodus.

5 Major Themes

The first, and probably most obvious, theme of Exodus is the physical deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, the physical extraction and migration of millions of people leaving Egypt, traveling across the desert to the Promise Land, the land inhabited by the Canaanites. This long and arduous journey allows the Israelites to establish a nation unto themselves and set apart to God. They will build from nothing a self-governing nation. Prior to the sojourn in Egypt, they functioned as an extended family, or tribe, headed by the

Patriarch – Jacob, and before him, Isaac, and of course Isaac was subject to his father Abraham. During the sojourn in Egypt, they were subject to Egyptian rule. By the end of those 400 years in Egypt, they were subject to oppressive and unjust rule, where they had no rights as foreigners and slaves. For four hundred years they have had no rights and no experience governing themselves, far from it, in fact, their every move was scrutinized and commanded by overseers and slave drivers who sole purpose was to make them suffer and extract as much work from them as possible.

In the course of the desert wanderings they will become a nation that is subject to a just and righteous God, not to an earthly power-hungry self-serving king. God will establish intermediaries, Moses and Aaron, as an earthly authority, but they will serve God's purposes, not their own. This new nation will be established through 3 sets of codes. The first set of codes has to do with moral ethics. The Lord will present the Israelites the stone tablets containing the 10 commandments and establish the Mosaic Covenant. If Israel will obediently keep the commands set before them, then God will establish them as his chosen nation and a light to the world. They will become a kingdom of priests set apart to bring the nations of the world into a relationship with God.

Through Moses God will establish a civil code of conduct through a system of governance and jurisprudence to manage civil issues among the Israelites. Moses will be established and anointed (elected by God) as a kind of combined chief justice and head of state, but again subject to the authority of God. We will see Moses fulfill this aspect of his position as he seeks counsel with God in the Tent of Meeting and acts as mediator between the Israelites and God.

Finally, a spiritual code is given by God to Moses as to the establishment of the priesthood and the tabernacle. There will be specific regulations governing the worship of God in the tabernacle. The regulations will govern who can serve in the priesthood and tabernacle; and how the tabernacle is served by the priesthood. All of the regulations governing the tabernacle and the priesthood are established according to *God's* specifications. They are not created by the Israelites based on their own ideas and experiences of worship in Egypt or encounters with pagan communities during the desert wandering.

A second theme we will follow throughout our study has to do with the emotional deliverance of Israel. These are people who are used to being a subjected people, an enslaved people, unaccustomed to defending themselves, providing for themselves and governing themselves. We'll encounter many times when they are overcome by fear preferring to return to what they know and not fight to be an independent people.

We will also follow a theme of spiritual deliverance. Through the plagues we get a good look at the One True God who calls Israel to be His people. Each plague displays his divine power and defeats the false "gods" of Egypt and their priests. Israel has a *present* God, one who travels with them, moves among them, protects them and provides for them. Think of that critical moment when Jacob is struggling *with* God. God moves and travels and rests amongst them. He meets with Moses on Mt. Sinai. He makes his dwelling in camp of the Israelites in the tabernacle. He leads them as a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. He is present, he dwells with them.

A fourth theme we will track through our study is the parallel relationship between God and Israel on the one hand, and the relationship between Jesus and the contemporary Christian on the other. The moral code of ethics established in the Sinai desert is the same one that becomes the foundation of Christianity. We share the same moral code. We also share a need for deliverance from slavery. We may not be enslaved by another nation, but sin in the world certainly is a form of slavery from which we can be delivered by Jesus. The society in which the Israelites inhabited in Egypt was rampant with sin, evil and death, just as is the spiritual state of contemporary society. We will examine this parallel of deliverance. A final parallel we will watch for is that while God called Israel to be a nation sacred to himself, Christ also issued a call and opened the way to the Kingdom of God for all believers.

The last theme we will investigate is that Moses is an archetype, precursor, or sign of who and what the promised Messiah will be. Moses is one of, if not the most important Patriarch in Judaism. We will see some parallels between the lives and character traits of Moses and Jesus that should point to Jesus being the long awaited Messiah of the Jews in the 1st Century (and beyond). We will look at this theme more closely as we progress through Exodus.