

Exodus

“If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant,
then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people . . . ;
And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5-6)

The close of the Book of Genesis anticipated the situation existing at the opening of the Book of Exodus. A numerous people had developed from the twelve sons of Jacob. The Land had been promised to his descendants to be occupied when a people sufficient to inhabit and control it was ready. Exodus is the account of the final stage toward that readiness. Exodus is the hinge between patriarchal promise and the rest of the Bible. It is the book of the birth of two special sons: Moses, the son a couple from the tribe of Levi, and Israel, the firstborn son of the Most High God. Exodus is the book of the formation of the Yahweh’s special nation and the book of the great mediator Moses.

Authorship

The question of the authorship of Exodus is inseparable from the issue of the origin and composition of the Pentateuch as a whole. Though these five books nowhere state that Moses was their author, Jewish and Christian tradition holds this to be so on the basis of numerous and specific textual references. Moses’ writing activity is referred to both within and outside the Torah. He was to record certain events (Exod 17:14; Num 33:2) and laws (Exod 24:4; 34:27); he wrote a song (Deut 31:22). Since Moses received God’s revelation of the Law and it found its way onto a scroll, it stands to reason that he was responsible for it. Joshua associates the Book of the Law with that which was commanded by Moses (Josh 1:7-8). Later on the Israelites referred to the “Book of Moses” with reference to certain regulations and procedures (2 Chr 25:4; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1). In addition, Jesus and the early church attributed the Law to Moses (Matt 19:7; 22:24; Mark 7:10; 12:26; John 1:17; 5:45; 7:23). Though there are a number of insertions and additions, especially in the later books of the Pentateuch, which post-date Moses (e.g. the report of his death and certain explanatory remarks) these are not sufficient to deny the “essential authorship” of Moses.¹ The unity of the Pentateuch is another powerful argument for a single

¹ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 40.

authorial hand, notwithstanding the co-authorship of the Holy Spirit.² Modern theories that deny Mosaic authorship fail to give an adequate basis for discovering the meaning of the text.³

Date

Accepting Exodus as the centerpiece of the Book of the Law (of Moses) it would have been composed after the nation left Sinai (1444 B.C.) but not be later than 1406 B.C., the date of Moses' death.

Historical Setting

From internal evidence about the life of Moses the events of Exodus cover the last eighty years of the descendants of Jacob's sojourn in Egypt plus about the next two years or so. Exactly when this occurred in history is debated, due to disagreement over the date of the Exodus. Archaeological evidence pertaining to thirteenth-century destruction levels in Canaan have been associated with Joshua's conquest in support of a late date for the Exodus, ca. 1290 B.C. This view has been buttressed by the reference to the building of Rameses by the Hebrews during their oppression, since a Pharaoh by that name ruled from 1290-1224 B.C. (1:11).⁴ Neither of these lines of evidence is compelling; better interpretation of the evidence is possible, which does not necessitate ignoring the clear dating information given in Scripture as to the length of the Egyptian sojourn (cf. Judges 11:26)⁵ and the termination of that sojourn (1Kings 6:1).⁶

² For a recent structural display of the unity of the Pentateuch see David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 47-102. See also John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

³ For a discussion of these theories see Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 60-78 and Dillard and Longman, *Introduction*, 40-48.

⁴ Mention of the cities of Pithom and Rameses, especially the later, are often cited as evidence for the later date of the exodus (1260) when Rameses I (1320-1318) and Rameses II (1304-1236) were ruling. Merrill shows that this will not work since the Pharaoh who had "chased" Moses into Midian had to have lived for 40 years **prior** to the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Rameses II lived for 40 years but he is the preferred Pharaoh of the late date Exodus not the Pharaoh before the Exodus. The only other Pharaoh to have lived this long during these two dynasties (18-19) was Thutmose III (1504-1450), making Amenhotep II (1450-1425) the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 58-62). There are other reasons to take Amenhotep II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, for which see Merrill, 63-64.

⁵ For a well reasoned support for a 430-year Egyptian sojourn see *ibid.*, 75-79. This longer sojourn is based on his argument for a 1446 B. C. date for the Exodus, for which see pages 66-75.

⁶ Merrill makes the likely identification of this king as Amosis (1570-1547), the first ruler of the eighteenth dynasty, and the king who expelled the Hyksos (*Ibid.*). See also W. F. Albright, "From the Patriarchs to Moses: II. Moses Out of Egypt," *Biblical Archaeologist* 36 (1973): 54. Merrill feels that it was either Amosis or his successor Amenhotep I (1546-1526) who was responsible for the repressive policies against the Hebrews.

Hence, the period extends from 1526 B.C. (the birth of Moses) to ca.1444 B.C. (Israel's departure from Sinai). It was a period of the resurgence of native Egyptian rule following the domination of the foreign Hyksos. Egypt was a strong and proud nation with a past (and future) history of dominating others. This highlights the work of judgment and liberation that Yahweh accomplished through Moses.

Original Readers / Occasion

As the central document of Yahweh's covenant with Israel, Exodus would have been available for sure to the second generation as they were about to enter the Promised Land. Their parents would have had at least parts of the canonical work since they had originally received the covenant stipulations and instructions for building of the tabernacle.

Special Issues

The Ten Plagues. The devastation of Egypt by plagues is a remarkable, and for many a problematic, feature of Exodus. Three positions can be taken regarding them: (1) they are merely a fanciful literary device to make a point about Israel's God (2) they were natural disasters that were given theological interpretations and (3) they were separate miracles orchestrated to a divinely predetermined end. The only reason to discount them as genuine miracles is if one denies that God is the transcendent Sovereign who chooses at times to alter the natural course of things. The plagues served as judgment against Egyptian unbelief, as a demonstration of the power of Israel's God over all other "deities," and as provocation to release Israel from bondage.⁷

Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart. The statements about God hardening Pharaoh's heart are often characterized as unfair on the part of the Divine Sovereign with respect to allowing for repentance and faith (cf. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12). However, it must be observed that Pharaoh hardened his own heart at least seven times (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7) before the Lord took similar action (9:12). Pharaoh was responsible for his own unbelief and therefore fell under the righteous judgment of God. The Lord's hardening of Pharaoh's heart (after the monarch's unbelief was settled) served to heighten the judgment of the plagues so as to more effectively display His own power and majesty, which in the long run may have actually brought others to repentance.

⁷ For a very readable handling of the plagues against the background of Egyptian religion see John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 79-129. See also Wolf, *Introduction*, 131-38.

Crossing of the Sea. The miraculous deliverance of the people from Pharaoh’s army through the sea became a key memorial act of salvation for the nation. The event is discounted by those who deny the miraculous, but solely on philosophical grounds. Identification of the exact location remains problematic as is the name of the sea, being properly “Reed” rather than “Red.” It is not permissible to attribute the story to a naturalistic explanation (e.g. a strong wind blowing across a very shallow swamp) for the whole Egyptian army drowned in it. Reasonable place identifications can be made on the basis of textual, historical, and geographical data. The importance of this act of physical salvation by power lies in the fact that it confirms the reality of the spiritual salvation effected through the blood of the Passover.⁸

Theme Statement

Yahweh delivers His firstborn from Egyptian slavery and constitutes him as His unique people—a kingdom of priests—by entering into a bilateral covenant whereby they might realize His protective, enabling presence and thereby manifest His name among the nations.

Outline

- I. Creation and Deliverance of God’s Son-Nation: Having become a numerous people, God brings forth a fledgling nation, created by His sovereign grace and cared for out of His steadfast love.....1:1–18:27
 - A. Birth of the Son-Nation out of Egypt: The Exodus from Egypt constitutes the birth of God’s Son-Nation.....1:1–15:21
 1. Onset of “Labor:” Affliction of the numerous descendants of Jacob precipitates Yahweh’s action in bringing the nation into being.1:1-22
 2. Provision of the “Deliverer:” Yahweh provides and prepares his deliverer for the eventual deliverance of the nation from Egyptian bondage.2:1–4:31
 - a. Moses is born and providentially cared for in his infancy by Pharaoh’s daughter.....2:1-10
 - b. Moses is protected and provided for in Midian.....2:11–4:17
 - 1) Moses flees the people under one Pharaoh until God looks down on his people under another.....2:11-25
 - 2) Yahweh appoints Moses as Israel’s deliverer.3:1–4:17
 - a) Moses is confronted with the holiness of Yahweh at the burning bush.....3:1-5
 - b) Moses is appraised of the loyal love of Yahweh for his people and called to participate in it.....3:6-10
 - c) Moses’ objections to his suitability as the deliverer are answered and turned into arguments for Moses’ acceptance of Yahweh’s call.....3:11–4:17

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 140-41.

c.	Moses departs for Egypt to petition Pharaoh for the release of Yahweh's "firstborn."	4:18-31
3.	Provocation of the Oppressor: Moses and Aaron invoke plagues on Egypt as a demonstration of Yahweh's supremacy and in order to provoke Pharaoh into releasing Israel.	5:1-13:16
a.	First Encounter with Pharaoh: At Pharaoh's first refusal to let Israel go, Yahweh reveals his plans for judging unbelief and encouraging faith.	5:1-7:7
b.	Second Encounter with Pharaoh and the nine plagues: In order to secure Israel's release in a manner that glorified Yahweh, Moses announces plagues against the land and its gods.	7:8-10:29
c.	Last Encounter with Pharaoh and the Passover: Upon the death of his firstborn, Pharaoh does release the children of Israel and they leave with the wealth of the Egyptians.	11:1-12:36
1)	The tenth plague is announced.	11:1-10
2)	The Passover is instituted.	12:1-28
3)	The tenth plague is inflicted.	12:29-30
4)	The Pharaoh lets the children of Israel go.	13:31-42
5)	The memorials of redemption are given.	12:43-13:16
4.	Destruction of the Pursuer: Having been spared in the Passover by the blood of the lamb, Israel experiences the completion of her deliverance out of bondage by the power of God as he destroys the pursuing Egyptians.	13:17-15:21
a.	Israel Delivered through the Red Sea: Yahweh leads Israel to the Red Sea so that He might exalt himself before the Egyptians and elicit Israel's faith.	13:17-14:31
1)	Guidance of the cloud and fire	13:17-22
2)	Deliverance from re-enslavement through the Red Sea.	14:1-30
b.	Israel celebrates through Songs of Redemption: Yahweh is praised for His past redemption and for His future establishment of the nation in his sanctuary.	15:1-21
1)	The Song of Moses (celebrating the past to face the future).	15:1-19
2)	The Song of Miriam (the worship of praise).	15:20-21
B.	Provision for the Infant Nation In the Wilderness: In the Wilderness of Shur Israel depends totally on Yahweh like a new-born child.	15:22-18:27
1.	Israel is tested at Marah (basic needs: water).	15:22-27
2.	Israel is tested in the wilderness of Sin (basic needs: food).	16:1-36
3.	Israel Contends with Yahweh at Rephidim (basic needs: leadership).	17:1-7
4.	Israel defeats Amalek (basic needs: victory in battle).	17:8-16
5.	Israel is encouraged and blessed by Jethro (basic needs: demonstration of the purpose of nationhood).	18:1-27
a.	Jethro confesses that Yahweh is Supreme.	18:1-12
b.	Jethro blesses Israel through Advising Moses in his role.	18:13-27

- II. Establishment of God's Priest-Nation: Having become the son-nation and having experienced Yahweh's tender care, Israel enters into a sovereign-vassal treaty with their King.19:1-40:38
- A. Covenant of Nationhood Agreed Upon: Israel accepts Yahweh's proposal to enter into a covenant of privileged nationhood as His means of testimony to all the earth.19:1-25
- B. Covenant of Nationhood Formulated: Moses mediates the institution of the sovereign-vassal treaty in a manner that confirms Yahweh's elective grace and eternal resolve.20:1-24:18
1. The Covenant Set Forth: Moses sets forth the provisions of relationship using an international treaty form.20:1-23:33
- a. Preamble introducing Yahweh.20:2a
- b. Historical Prologue summarizing what Yahweh had done.20:2b
- c. General Stipulations setting forth the general instruction for responsible living in the realms of the divine, inner-personal, and interpersonal.20:3-17
- d. The People's response to Yahweh's presence demonstrates that they have rightly understood his awesome holiness.20:18-21
- e. Specific Stipulations give concrete illustrations of how to live the Ten Commandments in daily situations.20:22-23:19
- 1) Casuistic covenant stipulations are given.20:22-22:17
- 2) Apodictic covenant stipulations are added.22:18-23:13
- 3) Covenant pilgrimage and tribute are commanded.23:14-19
- f. Yahweh assures Israel of his presence as they journey to the land by promising to guide and protect them.23:20-33
2. The Covenant Ratified: At Moses' reading of the Book of the Covenant, Israel ratifies the sovereign-vassal treaty by offering sacrifices and pledging to obey.24:1-18
- a. The People Ratify the Covenant Agreement.24:1-8
- b. Moses Receives the Covenant Document.24:9-18
- C. Covenant Apparatus Established: Yahweh directs Moses in the building of a divine dwelling place so that the nation may continue to enjoy His presence as they move from the mountain of God, even though they demonstrate sinful reluctance to remain loyal to their Creator-Redeemer.25:1-40:38
1. Israel receives instructions for the Construction and Service of the Tabernacle.25:1-31:18
- a. Offerings are commanded for the building of a sanctuary so that Yahweh may continue to have fellowship with Israel and be worshipped by them.25:1-9
- b. The plans for the meeting place are divinely detailed.25:10-27:21
- c. The priesthood of the meeting place.28:1-29:37
- d. The practice of covenant nationhood in the meeting place.29:38-30:38
- e. The provision of gifted artisans for building the meeting place.31:1-11
- f. The perpetuation of the sign of the Sabbath.31:12-18
2. Threat to the covenant's sanctity withstood.32:1-34:35
- a. Israel commits idolatry in the matter of the Golden Calf.32:1-6
- b. The response of the aggrieved Sovereign.32:7-10
- c. The mediator's successful intercession for the nation.32:11-14

- d. Yahweh acts in purifying judgment against idolatry.....32:15-35
- e. Reaffirmation of Yahweh’s Program of Promise.33:1–34:35
 - 1) Alteration of the promise of Yahweh’s presence produces a tension in the covenant relationship.....33:1-6
 - 2) The role of the mediator is developed as encouragement for continuance in the covenant.33:7–34:35
 - a) The people are encouraged that Yahweh still speaks with Moses.33:7-11
 - b) Moses is encouraged by the revelation of Yahweh’s goodness as hope for covenant life.....33:12-23
 - c) Moses receives replacement tablets accompanied by a revelation of Yahweh’s forgiving nature.34:1-9
 - d) Moses receives the “covenant renewal” on behalf of the nation on the basis of his humility and obedience.34:10-28
 - e) Moses shows evidence that hope for the covenant depends upon God’s transforming presence.34:29-35
- 3. Construction of the Tabernacle Undertaken: Having “rescued” the covenant from dissolution, Moses directs in the construction of the meeting place.35:1–40:33
 - a. Sabbath observance commanded as a reminder of the purpose of Israel’s creation.35:1-3
 - b. Provisions for the Tabernacle involving all the people.35:4–36:7
 - c. Construction of the Tabernacle and fabrication of the priestly garments according to the Lord’s instructions.....36:8–39:43
 - d. The Tabernacle erected and arranged in anticipation of Yahweh’s blessing.....40:1-33
- D. The purpose of the Tabernacle realized: Having formalized the sovereign-vassal treaty and established the covenant apparatus, Yahweh descends upon the Tabernacle to dwell among his people.40:34-38

Theme Statement

Yahweh delivers His firstborn from Egyptian slavery and constitutes him as His unique people—a kingdom of priests—by entering into a bilateral covenant whereby they might realize His protective, enabling presence and thereby manifest His name among the nations.

Theme Development

I. Creation and Deliverance of God’s Son-Nation: Having become a numerous people, God brings forth a fledgling nation, created by His sovereign grace and cared for out of His steadfast love (1:1–18:27).

On the basis of Exodus 4:22 Israel’s departure can be likened to the birth of a son. According to that imagery this section details the “delivery” of the infant nation from the womb of Egypt, having been “conceived” four hundred and thirty years earlier when seventy of

Abraham's descendants had become implanted in Goshen. The rest of the book details the provisions for this "son" to enter into its service of adulthood as Yahweh's kingdom of priests.

A. Birth of the Son-Nation out of Egypt: The Exodus from Egypt constitutes the birth of God's Son-Nation (1:1–15:21).

1. Onset of "Labor": Affliction of the numerous descendants of Jacob precipitates Yahweh's action in bringing the nation into being (1:1-22). Israel had been segregated in the land of Goshen as part of the divine plan for creating a unique people from the descendants of Abraham (cf. Gen. 46:28-34) and had become a basically homogeneous entity over the course of the 430-year sojourn in Egypt. Harsh treatment by a Pharaoh unsympathetic to the children of Israel precipitated the crisis that would result in their expulsion from the womb of Egypt.

2. Provision of the "Deliverer": Yahweh provides and prepares his deliverer for the eventual deliverance of the nation from Egyptian bondage (2:1–4:31). At this point the birth of the deliverer, Moses, becomes the focus of the book. Moses is "cast out" by his mother and then taken in by none other than Pharaoh's daughter. As Egypt had been used providentially to care for the clan of Abraham, so the King of Egypt would afford a Hebrew child the best that the country had to offer in terms of upbringing and education (2:1-10). However, before Moses leads Israel out of Egypt he himself will experience exile as he flees under a fearful Pharaoh until God is ready to deliver His people under a hostile, oppressive king (2:11–4:17). This first of a series of "flights" and "expulsions" into less hospitable environs introduces the pattern by which God will prepare his instruments for usefulness, namely, by depriving them of the basic human resources and support in order to teach them to depend entirely upon what he, and he alone could offer them.

Finally, Moses is appointed as Israel's deliverer (3:1–4:17). The process of preparing and appointing divine representatives is not a simple one. Years of softening, seasoning, and sensitizing go in to the making of a man (or nation) of God. The first 40 years are covered in one verse (2:11, cf. Acts 7:23). The next 40 are summarized in 2:16-22. The last 40 are detailed in Exodus 3:1–Deuteronomy 34:12. Literary proportion reveals the importance of the life of Moses. The appointment of Moses to his task occurs in three phases. All three stages were necessary in order to galvanize the octogenarian's resolve to act on behalf of the LORD God of his fathers (cf. 3:15). First, Moses is confronted with the holiness of Yahweh at the burning bush as the

mountain of God (3:1-5).⁹ Secondly, Moses is appraised of the loyal love of Yahweh for his people and called to participate in it (3:6-10). The third phase consisted of Yahweh dispelling four objections that Moses raises regarding his own inadequacy for the task (3:11-4:17), each objection being countered by some aspect of Yahweh's person or purpose.

Having been assured of his calling, Moses departs for Egypt to petition Pharaoh for the release of Yahweh's "firstborn" (4:18-31). This important section sets the parameters for the rest of the Pentateuch in three respects. First, it identifies Israel as Yahweh's son, his firstborn (4:22). This image underscores the fact that the nation already existed in relationship to God. This means that the Sinaitic Covenant cannot be taken as the instrument of creation of Israel, but rather as their becoming constituted as a unique nation before God. They exist by sovereign election, they will perform by mutual agreement. Secondly, it establishes the need for obedience to any and all covenant stipulations which God may inveigh (vv. 24-26). God is gracious in his election, but he is also awesomely holy in his character. Finally, it connects the mountain of God with the necessity of a mediator, since this is where Moses first meets up with his "mediator-mouthpiece" Aaron (vv. 27-31). Mountain and Mediator are the two dominant motifs in chapters 19-40.

3. Provocation of the Oppressor: Moses and Aaron invoke plagues on Egypt as a demonstration of Yahweh's supremacy and in order to provoke Pharaoh into releasing Israel (5:1-12:36). The plagues sequence has the most "actors" interacting in the book. Besides Moses and Aaron (and of course Yahweh) acting against Pharaoh, there are also the magicians of Egypt, the Egyptians themselves (mostly being acted upon) and the Israelites. One might also add all the gods of Egypt, to really expand the list. At issue are the liberation of an oppressed people (which is also the difficult birth of a son), a demonstration of the supremacy of the One true God of the universe over all pretenders to his throne, the obstinate unbelief of a world ruler, and the bold faithfulness of two old men, brothers reunited for the greatest undertaking of nationhood in world history.

⁹ The importance of the "mountain of God" must be stressed. It is the place to which he would bring the whole nation: "The mountain of God is here designated Horeb and elsewhere Sinai, though either one of those names could refer to the general area, a particular range or a single peak. Moses most likely calls it the mountain of God in recognition of the status it is going to achieve in the following chapters rather than because of any prior occurrences or superstitions. In the ancient and classical world deities normally were believed to have their dwelling places on mountains" (John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews, *The Bible Background Commentary: Genesis-Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 87. See also Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnus Press, The Hebrew University), 225.

Upon Pharaoh's first refusal to let Israel go Yahweh reveals his plans for judging unbelief and encouraging faith (5:1–7:7). Yahweh reveals that it would turn out for good in the end because it would make the effect of their liberation more impressive (5:22–6:1). Apparently the other intention in this worsening of conditions was to educate Israel in regard to the covenant basis of their existence and to elicit faith in its provisions (6:2-8). God was about to reveal himself in the characteristic uniquely embodied in the name YHWH.¹⁰ The purpose of the first encounter was realized, and life got tougher. However, Israel was not ready to take YHWH at his word (6:9).

Moses and Aaron are also being stretched in their faith. The Lord reissues the command to go to Pharaoh and demand release for Israel (6:10-11). When they object, the Lord restates his expectations (6:13) along with an explanation of his strategy (6:28–7:7). As one who stands in the place of God to Pharaoh (7:1) Moses will have a ringside seat to the struggle of the unbelieving heart. It is through the obstinacy of this potentate that Yahweh will effect deliverance to Israel, mete out judgment to Pharaoh, and manifest himself to the whole nation of Egypt (7:4-5). Moses and Aaron do respond to the revelation of God's plan and submit to his command (7:6) even though they were no longer in the vigor of youth (7:7). The intervening genealogy of Moses and Aaron underscores the Lord's sovereignty in the selection and sending of his servants.

In the second encounter with Pharaoh Moses announces plagues against the land and its gods in order to secure Israel's release (7:8–10:29). The plagues against Egypt were miraculous interventions of the sovereign God of the universe. They were designed to demonstrate the

¹⁰ Verse three should not be taken to mean that the patriarchs did not know the name YHWH, nor that they did not know God by that name, but rather that, at that point, their primary experience with the Lord was in his capacity as the Almighty. Cassuto handles this nicely: "The people of the Orient used to attribute to each of their gods a variety of names and qualities, and they associated with each designation specific concepts and characteristics. In the Egyptian texts, for example, it is stated that a certain deity is accustomed to do one kind of work under such a name, another kind of work under a different appellation, and a third task under yet another title, and so forth....With the name... 'Shaddai'...the Israelites were wont to associate the idea of the Divinity who rules over nature and bestows upon mankind fertility, as we can see from every verse in the Pentateuch, in which this name occurs...." For the patriarchs then, the multiplication of their descendants was the revelation of the 'Shaddai.' Cassuto continues, "...but by My name YHWH ..., in My character as expressed by this designation, I was not known to them, that is, it was not given to them to recognize Me as One that fulfils His promises, because the assurance with regard to the possession of the Land, which I had given them, I had not yet fulfilled." Ibid., 78-79. It seems to me that Cassuto has not emphasized the full significance of YHWH quite accurately. God did fulfill his promise to Abraham in such a striking way that it seems hard to see that this is the main emphasis in respect to the Exodus. I think that by emphasizing his *dwelling presence* as the key ingredient in the fulfillment of promise we come closer to specifying the nature of his self-revelation in the Tetragrammaton. Without question this is the emphasis of the covenant made at Sinai, "I will dwell with them."

uniqueness of the God of Israel and to deliver the people of Israel from their oppressive “hosts.” That the plagues were not random acts of wonder-working is evident from such verses as Exodus 12:12 and Numbers 33:4. The whole pantheon of Egyptian gods, not least of which was the Pharaoh himself, were being shown to be impotent in the presence of the God of Israel. Finally, the stage is set for the final provocation which results in the intended expulsion from the land.

Moses’ last encounter with Pharaoh occasions the announcement of the plague of the death of all Egypt’s firstborn, along with the institution of the Passover (11:1–12:36). The tenth plague is set off from the nine because it is the climactic act of judgment against Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and because it would hold special historical and theological significance for Israel throughout their history through its association with the Passover (12:1-28). The Hebrews’ calendar would now name this as the first month (12:2). The feast would be an everlasting memorial of redemption (12:14) and would remind the nation that her oppressor had been judged for its unbelief (12:23, 27). In addition the associated feast of Unleavened Bread would remind them of their deliverance in haste from Egypt (cf. 12:34) unto a prolonged experience under the blessing of Yahweh. Redemption by blood (from the guilt of sin) on the night of Passover would be matched by redemption by power (from the death of slavery) at the Reed Sea.

As promised, the tenth plague is inflicted and the firstborn of man and beast dies (12:29-30) forcing Pharaoh to comply with Yahweh’s command, with the consent (and wealth !) of the rest of the Egyptians (12:31-36). Though the physical “exodus” of the people is not really completed at this point, the narrative recounts the first movement of the nation (12:37) to show that this was the real thing. Before resuming the actual “exodus” narrative, additional material is communicated, from the Lord to Moses (12:43–13:2) and from Moses to the people (13:3-16) concerning the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread, and the sanctification of the firstborn. These become the memorials of Israel’s redemption from Egypt.

4. Destruction of the Pursuer: Having been spared in the Passover by the blood of the lamb, Israel experiences the completion of her deliverance out of bondage by the power of God as he destroys the pursuing Egyptians (13:17–15:21). Israel’s escape from Egypt was not yet complete. Guided by the cloud and fire, symbols of Yahweh’s presence, the nation is led into a trap from which only the Lord could deliver them (13:17-22) so that Israel might see that Yahweh would fight for them and save them from whatever threatened (14:13-14). The two key instruments in this act of deliverance were Moses and the Angel of God (14:19). The summary

statement of this section confirms that Moses is intended to be associated with the non-human manifestation of the divine presence: "...so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses" (14:31). This dual agency of mediation will reoccur throughout the rest of the book in development of the theme of the effectual working of God through his representatives.

Through the Song of Moses Yahweh is praised for His past redemption and for His future establishment of the nation in His sanctuary (15:1-19). Israel would be delivered into the Promised Land; as Yahweh had defeated the gods of Egypt, so He was capable of defeating any of the enemies that Israel would face in the land.¹¹ Miriam's Song represents the wider response of worship to Yahweh's salvation (15:20-21).

B. Provision for the Infant Nation In the Wilderness: In the Wilderness of Shur Israel depends totally on Yahweh like a new-born child (15:22–18:27).

The importance of this section is to demonstrate that Yahweh has taken it upon himself to provide everything necessary to the sustenance of the newborn nation, apart from anything that Israel may have done to deserve it (which in fact it did not). Trading upon the image introduced in 4:22, this section should be viewed as the "infancy" and "childhood" of God's son-nation.

A new-born has simple yet vital needs. At Marah God provides his fledgling people with water (15:22-27) and in the wilderness of Sin, food (16:1-36). Both of these provisions are met in the context of a test. Arousing consciousness of need is intended to demonstrate the necessity of faith. A good parent wants to help his or her child grow up with a proper understanding of what it is that produces and sustains life. God is a good parent and so his primary concern in the wilderness before the mountain was child training. For the next 40 years Israel would have a daily reminder of the Source of life and would be, thereby, challenged to trust in Him. A second provision of water is meant to focus further on the role of Moses and the character of the people (17:1-7). Moses stands in the place of God while the people are still immature in their faith (cf.

¹¹ Some have seen an eschatological import to the song as well. Gage writes: "...the intent of the Song was to praise Yahweh for the deliverance of God's people from Pharaoh, an event which was taken as an earnest of Yahweh's intent to preserve Israel from future enemies until she would safely dwell forever in the kingdom of her Savior-God....It was concluded that the celebration of the Exodus in the first half of the Song constituted a polemical disparaging of other deities, affirming the great power of Yahweh as well as revealing His name. The second half of the Song...was primarily promissory in character. It celebrated prophetically the Eisodus [sic] to come, the ultimate *eschaton* when the redeemed enjoy the security and blessings associated with the earthly dwelling of their Savior-God." Warren Austin Gage, "The Song of the Sea and the Salvation Story" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975), 51–52.

17:2).¹² As the nation matured they would face greater needs, the greatest being the enemies they would encounter along the way and in the land. Their defeat of Amalek was adequate proof that Yahweh would fight for them (17:8-16).

Moses' reunion with his father-in-law Jethro prepares Israel for her role among the nations. He confesses that Yahweh is supreme (18:1-12), which should have been encouragement that not all peoples would respond to their testimony as Pharaoh had. The incident of Jethro advising Moses (18:13-27) is recorded to encourage Israel with the expectation that as they became a blessing to the nations of the earth, so these nations would in turn bless them. It was also to dispel any tendencies to self-righteous elitism. Israel was to become a special nation by Yahweh's sovereign choice not by their own innate endowments. The stage is set for the single most important event in the nation's life, the making of covenant.

II. Establishment of God's Priest-Nation: Having become the son-nation and having experienced Yahweh's tender care, Israel enters into a sovereign-vassal treaty with its King (19:1-40:38).

Exodus 19 marks a major turning point in the narrative. Israel's origin, extending back to Abraham, and its future in the Promised Land both find their theological and practical rationale in this chapter. This is the major section break in the book.¹³

Israel will be at Sinai for nearly one full year. While camped at the mountain Moses will receive covenant stipulations, the people will enter into and then violate that covenant, Yahweh will restore them, and the nation will receive instructions for building the Tabernacle and then build it. This all centers on the Lord's desire to have fellowship with his people and to bless them among the nations.

A. Covenant of Nationhood Agreed Upon: Israel accepts Yahweh's proposal to enter into a covenant of privileged nationhood as His means of testimony to all the earth (19:1-25).

Chapter 19 contains the rationale for the covenant relationship. Verses 4-6 comprise "the most theologically significant text in the book of Exodus, for it is the linchpin between the patriarchal promises of the sonship of Israel and the Sinaitic Covenant whereby Israel became

¹² The role of Moses has also been emphasized in the preceding event when it is reported that the people saw the glory of the Lord in the cloud as he spoke to Moses (16:10-11).

¹³ The major section break of Exodus occurs at 19:1; the minor break occurs at 15:22. That break contained three elements: (1) physical movement ("Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea"), geographical placement (the Wilderness of Shur), and time designation ("they went three days into the wilderness"). So also here, the three elements are present but with heightened strength: "In the third month [time designation] after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt [physical movement], on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai" [geographical placement].

the servant nation of Yahweh.”¹⁴ This text lays out the exalted purpose for which the nation had been created, namely, to be Yahweh’s priest-nation, his representative go-between, to all the rest of the nations. It is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:2) to create from him a nation so that by that nation the rest of the earth’s people groups could be blessed with salvation. However, the outworking of this plan is conditional (19:5). Israel’s selection had been unconditional, based on a grant covenant made with Abraham (Gen. 15).¹⁵ While Israel’s existence and ultimate obedience was guaranteed, it was up to each generation to appropriate the benefits of its exalted position by adherence to the covenant stipulations of the sovereign-vassal treaty about to be set forth.

Moses relays this message to the people and they all agree to the proposed arrangement (19:7-8). Moses relays the peoples’ response to Yahweh who then instructs Moses to prepare the people to meet him on the third day. The powerful phenomena of God’s presence on the mountain (thundering and lightning, a thick cloud, smoke, and quaking) were designed to (1) establish the authority of Moses as mediator of the covenant (19:8) and (2) reinforce the fact that the God who was entering into covenant with them was a holy God who was not to be approached casually. The repetition of “mountain” in these verses establishes the physical and spiritual framework for the rest of the book. The mountain represents the barrier between a Holy God and sinful humanity. And yet Yahweh is making provision for humanity to approach him in covenant relationship. The rest of Exodus (plus Leviticus) will detail how Yahweh may be approached without violating his holiness. But at his point, before the apparatus of *Torah* and *Tabernacle* are set in place, the emphasis is on (1) the awesome transcendence of a holy God (vv. 16-19), (2) the unsuitability of the people to approach (vv. 10-15, 21-25), and (3) the necessity of a mediator through which Yahweh will rectify this otherwise hopeless situation (vv. 9-10, 17, 19-20, 24).

¹⁴ Eugene Merrill, “Theology of the Pentateuch,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 32.

¹⁵ Moshe Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (April-June 1970): 184-203.

B. Covenant of Nationhood Formulated: Moses mediates the institution of the sovereign-vassal treaty in a manner that confirms Yahweh's elective grace and eternal resolve (20:1–24:18).

Beginning with Exodus 20 Moses sets forth the formal arrangement by which Israel would function under Yahweh's sovereign rule as his priest-nation. The official document entailing this agreement is contained in 20:1–23:33 and parallels the form of the international treaty documents “attested to all over the ancient Near East from Old Akkadian to Neo-Assyrian times.”¹⁶ The ancient treaty form contained six regular elements which defined the sovereign-vassal relationship and provided for its continuance. The first three elements (preamble, historical prologue, stipulations) occur in 20:1–23:33, provision for deposit of the treaty is implied in the Ark of the Covenant's positioning, and the blessings and curses can be seen in Leviticus 26.¹⁷

1. The Covenant Set Forth: Moses sets forth the provisions of relationship using an international treaty form (20:1–23:33). Moses utilizes an ancient Near Eastern treaty form in formalizing Israel's nationhood relationship with their sovereign Lord.¹⁸ A preamble (20:2a)

¹⁶ Merrill, “Theology of the Pentateuch,” 33. See also George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Presbyterian Board of Colportage of Western Pennsylvania, 1955. Reprinted from *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, nos. 2,3).

¹⁷ See Merrill, “Theology of the Pentateuch,” 33-35. It has been objected that this law section breaks the flow of the narrative (resumed right after chapter 24) and is therefore a later insertion. In fact, just the opposite is the case. The narrative development of Israel's movement from Egypt to Canaan is woven into and wrapped around the basic covenant structure in order to highlight and underscore the covenant's significance. One does not interrupt the other. Rather, the covenant formulation is punctuated at key points by events which display Yahweh's elective grace as well as his loyal love (רַחֲמֵי). In fact, 34:6–7, through a most strategic placement, may well summarize the whole point of the interaction between the narrative movement and treaty form, namely, that no matter what Israel's failure, Yahweh does not change and will remain faithful to his covenant promises. This interplay is the key to understanding the structure of Exodus 19–40.

Another implication from viewing the Sinaitic Covenant as following the international treaty form is to see the next major break not at Exodus 40:38 but rather at Numbers 10:11. Note in Numbers 10:11 the same three elements as in Exodus 15:22 (a minor break) and 19:1–2 (the major break), namely, time designation (“...on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year...”), physical movement (“...the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai”), and geographical placement (“then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran.”) This makes the whole experience at Mt. Sinai one of receiving the covenant in the context of an ongoing relationship between Holy Sovereign and weak and failing people.

¹⁸ Chapter 20:1–17 is usually referred to as the “Decalogue” (or the “Ten Commandments”) and 21:1–23:33 as the “Book of the Covenant” as though they were distinct law codes (and for some scholars law codes with different sources from different times). However, it is best to take this whole section as a seamless composition with distinctive emphases. The form is generally straight forward. For a summary of various theories of the origination and composition of these laws see John I. Durham, *Exodus in the Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 278-283.

identified the parties involved. “I am the Lord your God” was sufficient to invoke God’s history with His people going all the way back to Genesis 1:1.¹⁹ Likewise the historical prologue is contained in the pregnant statement “. . . who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. . .” (20:2b). Yahweh is “the one who rescued His people from their helpless and hopeless bondage to Egyptian despotism. Such a king was surely qualified to be and to do all His servant people required.”²⁰

In the case of the Sinaitic covenant the general stipulations (20:3-17) and specific stipulations (20:22–23:19) sections are separated by the people’s response to Yahweh’s presence (20:18-21). Popularly known as the Ten Commandments, the general stipulations of the covenant emphasize first and foremost Israel’s duty to maintain an exclusive relationship with Yahweh to the exclusion of anything else (20:3-7). Sabbath keeping would remind Israel that the purpose of their existence stems from creation itself.²¹ The rest of the “Ten Words” deal with a person’s relationships with others in the covenant community as the general framework for preserving social harmony and thus living as a distinctive people in the world. The tenth commandment, in addition, emphasizes the internal response to the whole law as the necessary gauge of one’s understanding of and appreciation for the God who had given it. Thus, in broad, yet definite, strokes every corner of man’s realm (the divine, the inner-personal, and the interpersonal) is covered with respect to responsible living. The rest of the covenant (including Leviticus) will expand, exemplify and apply these basic stipulations.

Having evidenced an appreciation of Yahweh’s awesome holiness (20:18-21), the people now receive specific stipulations of the covenant to help them know how to apply the Ten Commandments in daily situations (20:22–23:19). There are three categories: (1) case laws (casuistic stipulations) which prescribe responses for illustrative situations so that they might imagine the composite ideal Israelite (20:22–22:17) (2) commands and prohibitions (often with penalties) which could not be covered in case illustrations, emphasizing the Lord’s absolute sovereignty (22:18-23:13) and (3) rules regulating when, where, and how to appear before the

¹⁹ It has been argued that the Genesis 1:1–Exodus 18:27 actually forms the Prologue of the Covenant which extends all the way through Deuteronomy (or Joshua). See David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 47-102.

²⁰ Merrill, “Theology of the Pentateuch,” 34.

²¹ For a discussion of the relationship of creation and covenant see Eugene Merrill, “Covenant and Kingdom: Genesis 1–3 as Foundation for Biblical Theology,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1:2 (1987): 295-308.

Lord with tribute offerings appropriate to His person and their purpose as His special nation (23:14-19). The later included three yearly feasts that were to be attended by all Israel, which celebrated the nation's past, present, and future. Yahweh does not expect Israel to try this on their own; He will be with them in the presence of His Angel (23:20-33).

2. The Covenant Ratified: At Moses' reading of the Book of the Covenant, Israel ratifies the sovereign-vassal treaty by offering sacrifices and pledging to obey (24:1-18). Since this is not a unilateral covenant (like the one with Abraham) it must be ratified by both parties. The people accept the words of the covenant (24:1-8) and then Moses ascends the mountain to receive stone tablets for deposit, tokens of Yahweh's intent to keep His word (24:9-18).

C. Covenant Apparatus Established: Yahweh directs Moses in the building of a His dwelling place so that the nation may continue to enjoy His presence as they move from the mountain of God, even though they demonstrate sinful reluctance to remain loyal to their Creator-Redeemer (25:1-40:38).

The rest of the book centers on the construction of a movable tent-like structure which will serve as Yahweh's representative dwelling place among His special people. By this means God was not restricting Himself to a tent, but rather granting Israel a unique representation of His presence so that when they left the mountain of His awesome presence they might continue to have a manifestation of His glory so as to maintain worship and fellowship.

1. Israel receives instructions for the Construction and Service of the Tabernacle (25:1-31:11). Though other nations had "houses" for their gods, Israel was not to copy any of them. Rather, they were given explicit and detailed instructions for everything pertaining to its construction (25:10-27:21) and operation (28:1-30:38). They were even directed as to how go about securing resources (25:1-9) and enlisting artisans for the work (31:1-11). Yahweh reminds Moses, through instruction to remember the Sabbath, that His relationship with Israel was rooted in creation (31:12-17). Reception of the tablets of Testimony (31:18) meant that all could now proceed as had just been set forth. However, a delay was to ensue due to the people's sin at the foot of the mountain.

2. Threat to the covenant's sanctity withstood (32:1-34:35). As Moses has been on the mountain receiving instruction for the tabernacle, Israel has been violating the most basic of their covenant stipulations. In Moses' absence Israel makes an idol, thereby incurring Yahweh's anger and the expression of His intent to destroy them and start over with Moses (32:1-10). In response to Moses' intercession, the Lord chooses, rather, to act in a purifying judgment against

the idolatry (32:15-35) and then graciously renews the covenant through the mediation of Moses, though not without tension being added to relationship (33:1 –34:35). Moses' role is actually enhanced as a result of the near fracture of the covenant (34:29-35). This whole narrative section centers on the person and role of Moses as the key to the continuation of Yahweh's covenant program with the nation. It serves to show that the nation needed a personal mediator who himself could stand face to face in communion with God, if they were ever to live acceptably in God's presence. The Scriptures will continue to unfold and develop this theme toward the advent of the final Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Construction of the Tabernacle Undertaken: Having “rescued” the covenant from dissolution, Moses directs in the construction of the meeting place which marks the time of departure from the Promised Land (35:1–40:33). Finally, construction for the tabernacle begins and is completed exactly according to specification. Even though Yahweh is holy and the people sinful, He Himself makes it possible for them to come into His presence. Everything about the tabernacle revolves around the tension between the Lord's unapproachable holiness and His gracious provision of atoning sacrifice for the purpose of fellowship.

D. The purpose of the Tabernacle realized: Having formalized the sovereign-vassal treaty and established the covenant apparatus, Yahweh descends upon the Tabernacle to dwell among his people (40:34-38).

God does descend to dwell among His people and to fulfill His promise to be with them so as to lead them into the Promised Land. The final notice regarding the cloud's indication of when to travel and when to camp anticipates Israel's departure from Sinai, which will not occur in the narrative until Number 10.

Conclusion

A difficult birth, a troubled childhood, and a rebellious adolescence are fair descriptions of the early days of Israel's existence as a nation. Having had no part in their “conception”—it stemmed from promises to the patriarchs—nor with their delivery from the reluctant womb of Egypt, Israel finds itself in the wilderness, utterly dependent upon Yahweh and His representative Moses. There the people fail to distinguish themselves as having much promise as a nation. And yet amazingly the Lord invites Israel to take up the very adult responsibility of representing Him to the rest of the nations of the world. (The fact that they agree is only slightly less remarkable.) To accomplish this, God and son enter into a covenant agreement designed to inspire, inform, and equip them for the task. Despite immediate failure, Yahweh renews His

commitment by assuring Israel that their future as His treasure of a people was secure because in one way or another He would remain available to them to fulfill their destiny—to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cassuto, U. *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*. 1st English edition. Translated by Israel Abrahams, 1951. Reprint, Jerusalem: Magnus Press, Hebrew University, 1967.
- Cole, Alan R. *Exodus*. In Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries Series. Edited by D. J. Wiseman. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973.
- Davis, John J. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971.
- Merrill, Eugene H. “A Theology of the Pentateuch.” In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*. Edited by Roy B. Zuck. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991.
- Merrill, Eugene H. “The Mosaic Covenant: A Proposal for Its Theological Significance.” Unpublished paper for Evangelical Theological Society, n.d.
- Merrill, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987, 1996.
- Sailhamer, John. *The Pentateuch As Narrative, A Biblical-Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Wolf, Herbert. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991.