



EXODUS

Introduction

The book of Exodus opens with Moses' conflict with Pharaoh that leads to God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, a well-known story that has achieved popular-level status in our culture. However, presentations of those stories tend to give the impression that Exodus' material focuses on the liberation of enslaved people, reaching its crescendo when Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt. That unfortunate impression disregards the far more momentous second half of the book in which the liberated Israelites encounter God at Mt Sinai and enter a covenant relationship with Him. This class begins a study of the book of Exodus that seeks to help us better understand the book's story, the relationship between God's rescue of the Israelites from Egypt and His covenant with them in the wilderness, the book's connection to the larger biblical narrative, and the place it should have within our lives.

Schedule

This study will include the following (tentative) classes:

- November 19 – Introduction and overview of Exodus
- November 26 – Exodus 1-2, Israel's oppression in Egypt
- December 10 – Exodus 3-4, God commissions Moses
- December 17 – Exodus 5:1-13:16, the plagues and the Passover
- December 31 – Exodus 13:17-15:21, God defeats Egypt at the sea
- January 14 – Exodus 15:22-18:27, testing in the wilderness
- January 21 – Exodus 19-24, God's covenant with Israel
- January 28 – Exodus 25-31, the tabernacle
- February 11 – Exodus 32-34, the golden calf incident
- February 18 – Exodus 35-40, the building, consecration, and indwelling of the tabernacle
- February 25 – Exodus summary and application

Summary of the story

Genesis introduces God's intention for humanity and the creation in Genesis 1-2 before narrating humanity's rebellion against His purpose and tracing the spreading corruption their



rebellion introduced (*Genesis 3-11*). God responded to humanity's breakdown in a surprising way – God chose Abraham and promised to work through him and his family to restore the creational blessing (*Genesis 12:1-3*). *Genesis 12-50* records God's gradual disclosure of the promise's details and traces its initial fulfillment in the lives of Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob. *Genesis* emphasizes God's faithfulness to His promise despite the obstacles confronting it, challenges brought by Abraham and his family.

Exodus begins by describing the ongoing blessings of God to Abraham's family amid their suffering in Egypt, intentionally narrating their situation using language and imagery from *Genesis 1-11* (*Exodus 1-2*). Evidence of God's faithfulness to His promise prepares readers for the announcement that He "remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob"¹ (*Exodus 2:23-25*). God's remembering motivated His selection of Moses, the redeemer through whom He revealed Himself to the Israelites (*Exodus 3-4*). God's revelation of His identity through Moses crescendos at Mt Sinai, where He enters into a covenant relationship with Israel and moves His presence into their midst (*Exodus 19-40*).

Structure of the story

Exodus' story takes place in three movements, each featuring a different setting.

- Movement 1 (*Exodus 1:1-15:21*) – from Egypt into the wilderness.
- Movement 2 (*Exodus 15:22-18:27*) – through the wilderness to Mt Sinai.
- Movement 3 (*Exodus 19-40*) – at Mt Sinai.

Even though our English Bible presents Exodus as a self-contained book, its narrative belongs to the larger story in the Pentateuch (*Genesis-Deuteronomy*). That story divides into the following blocks:

- *Genesis 1-11* - primeval history
- *Genesis 12-50* - Patriarchs
- *Exodus 1-19* – exodus (traveling from Egypt to Sinai)
- *Exodus 20-Leviticus 27* - laws (at Sinai)
- *Numbers 1-36* – wilderness (traveling from Sinai to Canaan)
- *Deuteronomy 1-34* - Deuteronomy (second law delivered at the border of Canaan)

Rather than a long series of events, God carefully organized and sequenced the material in the Pentateuch to include repeating themes and patterns that prompt readers to reflect on the relationships between the material in the books. For example, consider the stories of Pharaoh and Balaam, the stories introducing and concluding the wilderness narrative. Both lengthy records feature powerful foreign kings fighting against God's people who, in the Bible's story, seek to prevent the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham (*cf. Genesis 12:1-3, 6-7*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



Exodus 1-15 – Pharaoh narrative	Numbers 22-25 – Balaam narrative
Pharaoh’s assessment that “ <u>the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us</u> ” (<i>Exodus 1:9</i>).	Balak’s assessment that the Israelites “ <u>were many...they are too mighty</u> ” (<i>Numbers 22:3, 6</i>).
God promised to do to Pharaoh - “I will <u>harden</u> Pharaoh’s heart” (<i>kbd’ – ‘to be heavy, weighty, honored,’ Exodus 7:14; cf. Exodus; 8:11, 28; 9:7, 34; 10:1; 14:4</i>)	Balak promised to do for Balaam - “I will surely do you great <u>honor</u> ” (<i>kbd’ – ‘to be heavy, weighty, honored,’ Numbers 22:17; cf. Numbers 22:37; 24:11</i>)
Pharaoh made <u>three attempts</u> to thwart the Israelites’ growth, preventing their return to their land (<i>Exodus 1:8-10</i>) – Exodus 1:11-14; 1:15-21; 1:22. God responded by <u> blessing</u> Israel, by protecting and multiplying them (<i>Exodus 1:12, 20</i>).	Moabite king Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel and drive them out of the land God promised them (<i>Numbers 22:1-6</i>). Balak ordered Balaam to curse Israel <u>three times</u> – Numbers 23:1-12; 23:13-26; 23:27-24:9. God turned Balaam’s three curses into <u> blessings</u> (<i>Number 24:10</i>).

The story and the laws

Laws occupy a significant portion of the center section of the Pentateuch (*Exodus 20—Leviticus 27*). Rather than functioning like a constitution governing the nation, **the center section of the Pentateuch tells the story of God giving Israel laws as part of His covenant relationship with the nation.** The 613 statutes it records do not exhaustively list every law God gave to the people (*cf. Numbers 31:21-24*), nor did God intend them to address every situation Israel would encounter (*cf. Numbers 9:1-9; 15:32-34; 27:1-11*). Instead, they function representatively by embodying God’s wisdom for the nation, illustrating for them the way people who bear God’s name should organize and conduct themselves in the world (*cf. Exodus 19:5-6; 20:7*). With that purpose in mind, consider the following divisions in the material:

- Exodus 20:22-23:33, **God’s covenant with Israel**
- Exodus 25-Leviticus 16, **laws for the priests.** This section includes a larger block dedicated to the tabernacle:
 - Exodus 25-31 - pattern for the tabernacle
 - Exodus 35-40 - the construction of the tabernacle
 - Leviticus 1-16 - laws concerning the priests’ roles, including sacrifices, offerings, purification, etc.
- Leviticus 17-26, **holiness laws for the Israel**

The Golden Calf incident in Exodus 32 represents a profound break in Israel’s relationship with God that led to a significant change in their laws. **The differences between the laws pre- and post-Exodus 32 indicate a change came over Israel’s covenant with God;** the simplicity of the covenant code has been replaced by the complexity of the priestly and holiness codes. **Israel’s failures led to the accumulation of more laws** (*cf. Galatians 3:19-20; Romans 7:7-25; 1 Timothy 1:8-10*). Consider the pattern of failure and lawgiving in Exodus through Numbers:

- Exodus 19:1-25; 20:18-21 - the covenant established.



- Exodus 20:1-17; 20:22-31:18 - the decalogue and tabernacle
- Exodus 32 - golden calf
- Exodus 32-34 - covenant renewed
- Exodus 35-Leviticus 16 - priestly code
- Leviticus 10 - Nadab and Abihu
- Leviticus 11-15 - laws about clean and unclean
- Leviticus 17 - goat idols
- Leviticus 17-25 - holiness code
- Leviticus 26 - covenant renewal
- Numbers 14 - the peoples' rebellion
- Numbers 15 - laws about sacrifices
- Numbers 16-17 - priests' rebellion led by Korah
- Numbers 18-19 - laws about priests and purification
- Numbers 25 - Baal worship at Peor
- Numbers 28-30 - laws about sacrifices/offerings and vows

Applications

Read through Genesis and Exodus. How does Exodus' beginning stress its connection to the narrative in Genesis?

What themes from Genesis do you find repeating in Exodus?

How do you think our nation's history shapes our conception of laws, and how does that shaping impact our understanding of Exodus?

Next week

Exodus 1-2, Israel's oppression in Egypt

