

# Encountering the Old Testament

To Susan and Yvonne  
with love  
Proverbs 31:10

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# Encountering the Old Testament

*A Christian Survey*

*Second Edition*

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**Bill T. Arnold  
and Bryan E. Beyer**

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# Contents in Brief

**Preface 13**  
**To the Professor 15**  
**To the Student 17**  
**Abbreviations 19**

1. **What Is the Old Testament and Why Study It?** 21
2. **Where and When Did the Events of the Old Testament Take Place?** 35

## **PART 1** **Encountering the Pentateuch**

3. **Introduction to the Pentateuch: The Birth of God's People** 63
4. **Genesis 1–11: The Prelude to Israel** 77
5. **Genesis 12–50: The Patriarchs: Ancestors of Israel's Faith** 89
6. **Exodus: A Miraculous Escape** 103
7. **Leviticus: Instructions for Holy Living** 117
8. **Numbers: Failure in the Desert** 127
9. **Deuteronomy: Restoring the Covenant** 141

## **PART 2** **Encountering the Historical Books**

10. **Introduction to the Historical Books: The History of Israel's Nationhood** 157
11. **Joshua: Conquest and Division** 167
12. **Judges and Ruth: Israel's Moral Crisis** 181
13. **First Samuel: God Grants a King** 195
14. **Second Samuel: David's Reign** 209
15. **First Kings: The Glory of Solomon and the Beginning of the End** 221
16. **Second Kings: The End of National Israel** 237
17. **First and Second Chronicles: A Look Back** 251
18. **Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther: A Time to Rebuild** 263

## **PART 3** **Encountering the Poetical Books**

19. **Introduction to the Poetical Books: The Literature of God's People** 281
20. **Job: One Man's Search for Justice** 289
21. **Psalms: The Songbook of Ancient Israel** 303
22. **Proverbs: Advice on Living in God's World** 313
23. **Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs: Israelite Faith in Everyday Life** 325

## **PART 4** **Encountering the Prophets**

24. **Introduction to the Prophets: Voices of God's Servants** 339
25. **Isaiah 1–39: Prophet of Judah's Royal Court** 353
26. **Isaiah 40–66: Great Days Are Coming!** 369
27. **Jeremiah 1–20: Struggling with God's Call** 383
28. **Jeremiah 21–52 and Lamentations: Dealing with Disaster** 393
29. **Ezekiel 1–24: Rough Days Are Coming!** 407
30. **Ezekiel 25–48: God's Planning an Exciting Future!** 417
31. **Daniel: The Kingdom of God—Now and Forever** 427
32. **Hosea, Joel, and Amos: A Call for Repentance and a Promise for Blessing** 439
33. **Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: God's Plan for the Nations** 451
34. **Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: Rebuilding a People** 463

**Epilogue 475**  
**Glossary 477**  
**Notes 491**  
**Subject Index 502**  
**Scripture Index 514**  
**Name Index 524**



# Contents

**Preface 13**  
**To the Professor 15**  
**To the Student 17**  
**Abbreviations 19**

## **1. What Is the Old Testament and Why Study It? 21**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Canon: What Is the Bible?**

- Definition of “Canon”
- Tests for Canonicity
- The Formation of the Canon
- Hebrew and English Book Order

**Inspiration: How Was the Bible Written?**

- Neo-Orthodox Theory
- Dictation Theory
- Limited Inspiration Theory
- Plenary Verbal Inspiration Theory

**Textual Transmission: How Did We Get the Bible?**

- Scribal Care of the Old Testament Text
- Transmission in the Original Languages
- Transmission in Other Languages

**Hermeneutics: How Do We Interpret the Bible?**

- Use the Grammatical-Historical Method
- Understand the Context
- Determine the Type of Literature
- Interpret Figurative Language
- Let Scripture Interpret Scripture
- Discover the Application to Modern Life

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## **2. Where and When Did the Events of the Old Testament Take Place? 35**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Where Did the Events of the Old Testament Take Place?**

- Three Regions of the Ancient Near East
- Four Subregions of Israel
- Highways of the Ancient Near East

**What Events Does the Old Testament Describe?**

- Israel’s Ancestry: The Patriarchs
- Israel’s Beginnings: Moses and Joshua
- Israel’s Statehood: David and His Dynasty
- Israel’s Exile and Restoration: Ezra and Nehemiah

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## **PART 1**

### **ENCOUNTERING THE PENTATEUCH**

#### **3. Introduction to the Pentateuch: The Birth of God’s People 63**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**What Is the Pentateuch?**

**What Is the Pentateuch About?**

**What Are the Overarching Themes of the Pentateuch?**

- Sovereignty of God
- History
- Fallen Condition of Humanity
- Salvation
- Holiness

**Who Wrote the Pentateuch?**

- Authorship and Traditional Consensus
- Modern Critical Approaches

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

#### **4. Genesis 1–11: The Prelude to Israel 77**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Primeval History and Its Nature**

**Contents of Genesis 1–11**

- Outline
- Creation and Its Nature (chapters 1–2)
- Sin and Its Nature (chapters 3–11)

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Place*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

#### **5. Genesis 12–50: The Patriarchs: Ancestors of Israel’s Faith 89**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Background of the Patriarchal Narratives**

**The Story of the Patriarchs**

- Outline
- Abraham and Isaac (12–25)
- Jacob and His Twelve Sons (25:19–36:43)
- Joseph (37:1–50:26)

**Theology of the Patriarchal Narratives**

- Election
- Promise
- Covenant

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People/Places*

*Study Questions*  
*Further Reading*

**6. Exodus: A Miraculous Escape 103**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Contents of the Book of Exodus**

- Outline
- The Events of the Exodus

**Historical Problems of the Exodus**

- Historicity of the Exodus
- Date of the Exodus
- Route of the Exodus

**Theological Significance of the Exodus**

- Deliverance
- Covenant
- Presence of God

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**7. Leviticus: Instructions for Holy Living 117**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Background of the Book of Leviticus**

**Contents of Leviticus**

- Outline
- Overview

**Themes of Leviticus**

- Law
- Sacrifice
- Holiness

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**8. Numbers: Failure in the Desert 127**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Contents of the Book of Numbers**

- Literary Structure
- The Book's Use of Numbers
- Outline
- Overview

**Use of the Book of Numbers in the New Testament**

- First Corinthians 10
- Hebrews

*Summary*

*Key Term*

*Key Person/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**9. Deuteronomy: Restoring the Covenant 141**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Contents of the Book of Deuteronomy**

- Literary Structure
- Outline
- Overview

**Parallels from the Ancient World**

- The Hittite Parallels
- Treaty Structure in Deuteronomy

**Significance of Deuteronomy in Biblical Thought**

- Role of Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch
- Deuteronomy and the Historical Books

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Person/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**PART 2**

**ENCOUNTERING THE HISTORICAL BOOKS**

**10. Introduction to the Historical Books: The History of Israel's Nationhood 157**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Contents of the Historical Books**

**The Role of History in the Bible**

- Herodotus, the Father of History?
- The Jewish Canon and the Christian Canon
- History and Theology

**Authorship of the Historical Books**

- The Deuteronomistic History
- Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah
- Ruth and Esther

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**11. Joshua: Conquest and Division 167**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Outline**

**Background of the Book of Joshua**

- Joshua the Man
- Date and Authorship
- Archaeology and the Book of Joshua
- Themes of Joshua

**Message of the Book of Joshua**

- Israel Conquers the Land (chapters 1–12)
- Israel Divides the Land (chapters 13–21)
- Israel Begins to Settle into the Land (chapters 22–24)

*Summary*

*Key Term*

*Key Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**12. Judges and Ruth: Israel's Moral Crisis 181**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**The Book of Judges Contents**

- Outline
- Overview

**Historical Problems in Judges**

- Chronology
- Political Structure

**The Book of Ruth Contents**

- Literary Structure
- Outline
- Overview



## The Sovereignty of God and Faithful Living

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## 13. First Samuel: God Grants a King 195

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Outline**

### Background of 1 Samuel

- Setting
- Authorship and Date
- Themes of 1 Samuel

### Message of 1 Samuel

- A Period of Transition (chapters 1–15)
- David's Rise and Saul's Decline (chapters 16–31)

*Summary*

*Key Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## 14. Second Samuel: David's Reign 209

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Outline**

### Background of 2 Samuel

- Setting
- Authorship and Date
- Themes of 2 Samuel

### Message of 2 Samuel

- David's Rise to Power in Judah (chapters 1–4)
- David's Reign over All Israel (chapters 5–24)

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## 15. First Kings: The Glory of Solomon and the Beginning of the End 221

*Outline*

*Objectives*

### The Author and His Method

- Retribution Theology
- Regnal Formula and Sources
- Historical Perspective from the Exile

## Contents of 1 Kings

• Outline

• Overview

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Person/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## 16. Second Kings: The End of National Israel 237

*Outline*

*Objectives*

### Contents of 2 Kings

• Outline

• Overview

### Themes of the Books of Kings

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## 17. First and Second Chronicles: A Look Back 251

*Outline*

*Objectives*

### The Author and His Purpose Chronicles and the Canon

- Location in the Canon
- Relationship to Samuel and Kings

### Contents of 1 and 2 Chronicles

• Outline

• Overview

### Themes of the Books of Chronicles

- David and His Dynasty
- The Temple and the Worship of God

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## 18. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther: A Time to Rebuild 263

*Outline*

*Objectives*

### The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

- Contents
- Problems of Interpretation

## The Book of Esther

• Contents

### Theological Themes

- Ezra and Nehemiah
- Esther

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## PART 3

### ENCOUNTERING THE POETICAL BOOKS

## 19. Introduction to the Poetical Books: The Literature of God's People 281

*Outline*

*Objectives*

### What Are the Poetical Books?

### Common Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry

- Meter
- Parallelism
- Chiasm
- Acrostics

### Ugaritic Parallels

### The Poetical Books Themselves

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Place*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

## 20. Job: One Man's Search for Justice 289

*Outline*

*Objectives*

### Introduction to Wisdom Literature

- Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature
- Old Testament Wisdom Literature

### Contents of the Book of Job

- Outline
- Overview

### The Author and His Times

### Theological Themes

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Person/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**21. Psalms: The Songbook of Ancient Israel 303**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Background to the Psalms**

- The Name “Psalms”
- Authorship of the Psalms
- The Unique Place of the Psalms in Scripture

**The Division of the Psalms**

- The Basic Arrangement
- Theories on the Psalms’ Arrangement

**Psalms Titles**

**Classification of the Psalms**

- Hymns
- Penitential Psalms
- Wisdom Psalms
- Royal Psalms
- Messianic Psalms
- Imprecatory Psalms
- Lament Psalms

**The Psalms and the Christian**

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Person*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**22. Proverbs: Advice on Living in God’s World 313**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**What Is a “Proverb”?**  
**Contents of the Book of Proverbs**

- Outline
- Overview

**Authorship**

**Theological Themes**

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key Person*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**23. Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs: Israelite Faith in Everyday Life 325**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**The Book of Ecclesiastes**

- Contents
- Authorship

**The Song of Songs**

- Contents
- Authorship

**Theological Themes**

- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**PART 4  
ENCOUNTERING  
THE PROPHETS**

**24. Introduction to the Prophets: Voices of God’s Servants 339**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Prophecy’s Biblical Heritage**

- How Do the Prophets Fit into God’s Unfolding Purpose?
- Who Were Prophecy’s “Founding Fathers”?

**The Nature of Prophecy**

- The Hebrew Terms for “Prophet”
- What Are Some Common Wrong Ideas about the Prophets?
- How Are All the Prophets Alike?
- Did Other Nations Have Prophets?
- Did All Prophets Write Down Their Messages?
- How Was Prophecy Passed Down to Us?
- What Are Some Common Themes of the Prophets’ Writings?

**The Historical Setting of the Classical Prophets**

- The Assyrians
- The Babylonians
- The Persians

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**25. Isaiah 1–39: Prophet of Judah’s Royal Court 353**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Outline**

**Background of the Book of Isaiah**

- Isaiah the Man
- Isaiah’s Times
- Authorship and Date
- Themes of the Book of Isaiah

**Message of the Book of Isaiah**

- Opening Words to Judah (1:1–31)
- God’s Judgment Revealed (2:1–5:30)
- Isaiah’s Call (6:1–13)
- The Sign of Immanuel (7:1–17)
- The Coming Assyrian Invasion (7:18–8:22)
- Description of the Messianic Era (9:1–7)
- Judgment against Israel and Assyria (9:8–10:34)
- Further Description of the Messianic Era (11:1–12:6)
- Oracles against the Nations (13:1–23:18)
- The “Little Apocalypse” (24:1–27:13)
- Oracles of Woe (28:1–33:24)
- Eschatological Summation (34:1–35:10)
- Historical Interlude: Highlights and Lowlights from Hezekiah’s Reign (36:1–39:8)

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**26. Isaiah 40–66: Great Days Are Coming! 369**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Outline**

**Who Wrote Isaiah 40–66?**

- Multiple-Author View
- One-Author View

**The Servant Passages in Isaiah 40–66**

**Isaiah’s Message Continues**

- Comfort, O Comfort My People (40:1–31)
- The Coming Deliverance (41:1–29)
- The Role of the Lord’s Servant (42:1–25)

- Israel's Redemption from Babylon (43:1–45:25)
  - Judgment against Babylon (46:1–47:15)
  - Israel's Release and Exaltation (48:1–52:12)
  - The Suffering Servant (52:13–53:12)
  - Celebrating the Return (54:1–59:21)
  - The Climax of God's Restoration (60:1–66:24)
- Summary*  
*Key Terms*  
*Study Questions*  
*Further Reading*
- 27. Jeremiah 1–20: Struggling with God's Call 383**
- Outline*  
*Objectives*  
**Outline**  
**Jeremiah's Background**  
**Jeremiah's Message**
- God Calls Jeremiah to Service (1:1–19)
  - Jeremiah Describes Judah's Sad Condition (2:1–10:25)
  - Jeremiah Wrestles with People and with God (11:1–20:18)
- Summary*  
*Key Person/Places*  
*Study Questions*  
*Further Reading*
- 28. Jeremiah 21–52 and Lamentations: Dealing with Disaster 393**
- Outline*  
*Objectives*  
**Outline**  
**Jeremiah's Message Continues (21:1–52:34)**
- Jeremiah Challenges Rulers and Prophets (21:1–29:32)
  - The Book of Comfort (30:1–33:26)
  - The Failure of Jerusalem's Leadership (34:1–39:18)
  - Jerusalem after Its Fall (40:1–45:5)
  - Oracles about the Nations (46:1–51:64)
  - Jerusalem's Fall Revisited (52:1–34)
- Lamentations:**  
**A Cry of Agony**
- Outline
  - The Background of Lamentations
  - The Message of Lamentations
- Summary*  
*Study Questions*  
*Further Reading*
- 29. Ezekiel 1–24: Rough Days Are Coming! 407**
- Outline*  
*Objectives*  
**Outline**  
**Background of Ezekiel**  
**Message of Ezekiel**
- Oracles and Events Relating to Ezekiel's Call (1:1–5:17)
  - The Day of the Lord (6:1–7:27)
  - God's Glory Departs (8:1–11:25)
  - Judgment against Jerusalem (12:1–24:27)
- Summary*  
*Key Terms*  
*Key Places*  
*Study Questions*  
*Further Reading*
- 30. Ezekiel 25–48: God's Planning an Exciting Future! 417**
- Outline*  
*Objectives*  
**Outline**  
**Ezekiel's Message Continues (25:1–48:35)**
- Oracles against the Nations (25:1–32:32)
  - Israel's Restoration (33:1–39:29)
  - Israel's New Temple (40:1–48:35)
- Summary*  
*Key Terms*  
*Key Places*  
*Study Questions*  
*Further Reading*
- 31. Daniel: The Kingdom of God—Now and Forever 427**
- Outline*  
*Objectives*
- Daniel as Apocalyptic Literature**
- Uniqueness of Apocalyptic Literature
  - Characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature
  - "Biblical" Apocalyptic
- Contents of the Book of Daniel**
- Outline
  - Overview
- The Theological Themes of Daniel**
- The Sovereignty of God
  - The Pride of Humankind
  - The Ultimate Victory of God's Saints
- Problems of Interpretation**
- Bilingualism
  - Identity of the Four Kingdoms
  - Vision of the "Seventy Weeks"
  - Historical Questions
  - Date of Composition
- Summary*  
*Key Terms*  
*Key People/Places*  
*Study Questions*  
*Further Reading*
- 32. Hosea, Joel, and Amos: A Call for Repentance and a Promise for Blessing 439**
- Outline*  
*Objectives*  
**Hosea: Sharing God's Heartache**
- Outline
  - The Man
  - His Times
  - Major Themes of the Book
  - Content of the Book
  - Hosea and the New Testament
- Joel: The Day of the Lord**
- Outline
  - Joel's Background
  - Joel's Message
- Amos: Shepherd for Social Justice**
- Outline
  - Amos's Background
  - Amos's Message
- Summary*  
*Key Terms*  
*Key People/Place*  
*Study Questions*  
*Further Reading*

**33. Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: God's Plan for the Nations 451**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Obadiah: Edom Will Fall!**

- Outline
- Obadiah's Message

**Jonah: Running away from God**

- Outline
- Jonah's Background
- Jonah's Message

**Micah: Zealot for True Covenant Living**

- Outline
- Micah's Background
- Micah's Message

**Nahum: Nineveh Will Fall!**

- Outline
- Nahum's Background
- Nahum's Message

**Habakkuk: Lord, What's Going On?**

- Outline

- Habakkuk's Background

- Habakkuk's Message

**Zephaniah: God Will Judge All the Earth!**

- Outline
- Zephaniah's Background
- Zephaniah's Message

*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Key People/Places*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**34. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: Rebuilding a People 463**

*Outline*

*Objectives*

**Haggai: Dealing with People Who Just Don't Care**

- Outline
- Haggai's Background
- Haggai's Message

**Zechariah: Get Ready for God's Kingdom!**

- Outline

- Zechariah's Background

- Zechariah's Message

**Malachi: Give God Your Best!**

- Outline
- Malachi's Message

*Summary*

*Key Term*

*Key People/Place*

*Study Questions*

*Further Reading*

**Epilogue 475**

**Glossary 477**

**Notes 491**

**Subject Index 502**

**Scripture Index 514**

**Name Index 524**

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# Preface

We are grateful for the good reception *Encountering the Old Testament* has received since its publication in 1999. We appreciatively acknowledge those who have written with comments and insights; we believe your constructive criticism has further strengthened the work.

Some readers may be interested to know which author wrote individual chapters. Dr. Arnold wrote the introductory chapter on history and geography (chapter 2), all the chapters on the Pentateuch (chapters 3–9), and the Historical Books except Joshua and the Books of Samuel (chapters 10, 12, and 15–18). He also is responsible for the chapters on Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and the Epilogue (chapters 20 and 22–23). Dr. Beyer wrote the introductory chapter on the origin, inspiration, and interpretation of the Old Testament (chapter 1) and the chapters on Joshua and the Books of Samuel (chapters 11 and 13–14). In addition to the Poetical Books introduction (chapter 19), he wrote on the Psalms (chapter 21) and all the chapters on the Prophets except Daniel

(chapters 24–30 and 32–34). The chapter on Daniel (chapter 31) was a collaborative effort, although on all the other chapters the authors also gave each other the opportunity for review and comment prior to submission.

The people at Baker Academic have been most helpful as we have prepared the second edition. We are grateful for their encouragement and professionalism.

Student assistants and secretaries assisted in various ways in the preparation of the manuscript. For the first edition, Dr. Arnold's assistants were Joel R. Soza, Michael K. West, and Robert W. Wilcher; Dr. Beyer's were Cheryl Brannan, Chandra Briggman, and Judy Peinado. Joyce Hack and Jason Conrad also assisted Dr. Beyer on the manuscript preparation for the second edition. Our thanks to all of you.

As this second edition goes to press, we both know the joy of over thirty years of marriage. To Susan Arnold and Yvonne Beyer go our continued love and gratitude.



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# To the Professor

This book targets primarily students who will be taking their first course on this topic. Although we originally wrote the book with undergraduates in mind, we are pleased a number of graduate schools and seminaries have also found it useful. We hope this second edition will continue to satisfy both audiences.

We have also provided a glossary that clarifies difficult terms with which the reader may be unfamiliar. Study questions at the end of each chapter guide the reader and bring key points of the chapter into focus. Finally, a “Further Reading” list at the end of each chapter provides suggestions for students who want more information on any given topic. We hope to stretch students’ thinking, whatever their backgrounds.

The underlying slant of this book is broadly evangelical. We believe the Scriptures not only spoke to their original audience, but that they continue to speak to us today. At the same time, we recognize that people from many Christian denominations will use this book. Consequently, when we discuss issues on which evangelicals have agreed to disagree, we have often chosen to survey the basic interpretations and let the particular emphasis lie with the professor.

The survey follows the canonical order of the English Bible. We have found through our research that most teachers prefer this. However, the chapter divisions make it easy for one to follow either a canonical or chronological approach.

Outlines for each Old Testament book are taken (with some modification) from the *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989). Readers seeking verse-by-verse commentary not provided by this survey may be referred to this volume for further study.

Baker Academic has worked with us to produce a well-illustrated survey.

Illustrative materials such as charts, maps, and graphs comprise approximately 20 percent of the volume. The color format makes the book more “user-friendly” to a generation that has experienced much in the way of technological improvement. We want to give students the feeling that “they are there” as much as possible, to help them see the images the Bible so carefully paints.

We have also highlighted the relevance of the Old Testament by placing strategic “sidebars” within the text. These sidebars apply the text directly to pertinent issues of today. They help the reader understand that the Bible spoke not only then, but still speaks today. To this end, we have also interwoven application material as appropriate in the body of the text.

Finally, professors will want to be aware of three items that supplement *Encountering the Old Testament*. The first item, the instructor’s manual, is available on a compact disc, the second is a compact disc attached to the back of the book, and the third is a paperback volume.

1. Instructor’s Resource Manual with Test Items. In addition to including objective-type test items, this resource includes suggestions for using the textbook, chapter outlines, chapter objectives, chapter summaries, key terms, master transparencies, lecture outlines, and media resources.
2. Student’s Multimedia Interactive CD-ROM. Developed by biblical scholar Chris Miller and educational specialist Phil Bassett, this product provides
  - video clips of interviews with the authors
  - video clips of biblical lands
  - still photos of biblical lands
  - maps

- interactive review questions
- visual organizers

3. *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study (RANE)*. This is a collection of primary source readings related to the Old Testament. These readings are arranged in canonical order. This volume provides translations of ancient

Near Eastern documents that are useful to read hand-in-hand with the Old Testament.

It is our hope and prayer that *Encountering the Old Testament* will help students gain a deeper love and appreciation for the message that impacts every one of us—the message of the Bible.





Ethical and theological issues

# To the Student



Primary source material

Encountering the Old Testament in a systematic way for the first time is an exciting experience. It can also be overwhelming because there is so much to learn. You need to learn not only the content of the Old Testament but also a good deal about the Near Eastern world.

the text, keep these objectives in mind and take notes to help you remember what you have read. After reading the chapter, return to the objectives and see if you can perform the tasks.



Focus box: key issues and relevant applications

The purpose of this textbook is to make that encounter a little less daunting. To accomplish this a number of learning aids have been incorporated into the text. We suggest you familiarize yourself with this textbook by reading the following introductory material, which explains what learning aids have been provided.

## Summary

A list of statements summarizing the content of each chapter can be found at the end of each chapter. *Study Suggestion:* Use this summary list to conduct an immediate review of what you have just read.



Key terms, people, and places

## Sidebars

Material in yellow-colored boxes isolates contemporary issues of concern and shows how the Old Testament speaks to these pressing ethical and theological issues. Some of these boxes contain quotes from various authors, whether ancient or modern, whose thoughts shed light on the Old Testament material under discussion.

## Key Terms and Glossary

Key terms have been identified throughout the text by the use of boldface type. This will alert you to important words or phrases you may not be familiar with. A definition of these words will be found in the glossary at the end of the book and on the interactive CD-ROM. *Study Suggestion:* When you encounter a key term in the text, stop and read the definition before continuing through the chapter.



Study questions

## Focus Boxes

These boxes add interest and relevance to the text by providing practical applications or devotional thoughts.

## Key People and Places

While studying the Old Testament you will be introduced to many names and places. Those that are particularly significant have been set in SMALL CAPS. *Study Suggestion:* Pay careful attention to the people and places as you read the text. When studying for a test, skim the text and stop at each SMALL CAPPED term to see if you know its importance to the Old Testament.



Further reading

## Chapter Outlines

At the beginning of each chapter is a brief outline of the chapter's contents. *Study Suggestion:* Before reading the chapter, take a few minutes to read the outline. Think of it as a road map, and remember that it is easier to reach your destination if you know where you are going.

## Study Questions

A few discussion questions have been provided at the end of each chapter, and these can be used to review for examinations. *Study Suggestion:* Write suitable answers to the study questions in preparation for tests.

## Chapter Objectives

A brief list of objectives is placed at the outset of each chapter. These present the tasks you should be able to perform after reading the chapter. *Study Suggestion:* Read the objectives carefully before beginning to read the text. As you read

## Further Reading

A short bibliography for supplementary reading is presented at each chapter's

conclusion. *Study Suggestion:* Use the suggested reading list to explore areas of special interest.

**Visual Aids**

A host of illustrations in the form of photographs, maps, and charts have been included in this textbook. Each illustration has been carefully selected, and each is intended not only to make the text more aesthetically pleasing but also more easily mastered.

At the back of this text is a multimedia interactive program on compact disc. Designed to be informative and fun to use, this CD-ROM contains video clips of the biblical lands, photos of the Old Testament world, maps, interactive review questions, and more.

May your encounter of the Old Testament be an exciting adventure!

# 6 Exodus

## *A Miraculous Escape*

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### Outline

- **Contents of the Book of Exodus**
  - Outline
  - The Events of the Exodus
- **Historical Problems of the Exodus**
  - Historicity of the Exodus
  - Date of the Exodus
  - Route of the Exodus
- **Theological Significance of the Exodus**
  - Deliverance
  - Covenant
  - Presence of God

### Objectives

**After reading this chapter, you should be able to**

- Contrast the emphasis on beginnings in Exodus with those in Genesis
- Outline the basic content of Exodus
- Give examples of how God saved Israel
- Define casuistic law as found in Exodus
- Explain the purpose of the covenant
- Identify the three major historical problems of the exodus
- Discuss the theological significance of the exodus

The Book of Exodus is about a daring escape. Even the meaning of the word “exodus” implies a quick exit.<sup>1</sup> By God’s grace and mercy, he rescued Israel from a life of slavery in Egypt. But the book is also about Israel’s relationship with God after the nation’s departure from Egypt. Exodus describes these two main events: Israel’s departure from Egypt (rescue) and Israel’s newly established alliance with God (relationship).

## Contents of the Book of Exodus

Exodus is a book of beginnings, as was Genesis. The first book of the Bible related the beginning of everything. Genesis included the beginning of faith in the form of the patriarchal line. Exodus now continues that line, relating the beginning of the nation Israel.

### Outline

#### I. Oppression and Deliverance

- (1:1–15:21)
- A. Introduction (1:1–7)
- B. Oppression (1:8–22)
- C. The Birth of a Deliverer (2:1–10)
- D. Moses as Refugee (2:11–25)
- E. Moses’ Call (3:1–4:17)
- F. Moses Returns to Egypt (4:18–31)
- G. Increased Oppression (5:1–23)
- H. God Encourages Moses (6:1–13)
  - I. Moses’ Genealogy (6:14–30)
  - J. Moses and Aaron Warn Pharaoh (7:1–13)
- K. The Nine Plagues (7:14–10:29)
- L. The Tenth Plague Announced (11:1–10)
- M. The Passover (12:1–27)
- N. The Exodus (12:28–51)
- O. Consecration of the Firstborn (13:1–16)
  - P. The Crossing of the Red Sea (13:17–14:31)
- Q. Celebration of Salvation (15:1–21)

#### II. The Journey to Mount Sinai (15:22–19:2)

- A. From the Sea to Elim (15:22–27)
- B. From Elim to the Wilderness of Sin (16:1–36)
- C. From Sin to Rephidim (17:1–16)
- D. Moses’ Family (18:1–27)
- E. From Rephidim to Sinai (19:1–2)

#### III. The Sinaitic Covenant

- (19:3–24:18)
- A. Preparations (19:3–25)
- B. The Covenant (20:1–23:33)
- C. The Covenant Ceremony (24:1–18)

#### IV. Instructions for Israel’s Sanctuary

- (25:1–31:18)
- A. Preparations (25:1–9)
- B. The Ark (25:10–22)
- C. The Table (25:23–30)
- D. The Lampstand (25:31–40)
- E. The Tabernacle (26:1–37)
- F. The Altar (27:1–8)
- G. The Courtyard (27:9–19)
- H. The Oil (27:20–21)
  - I. The Priestly Garments (28:1–43)
  - J. Consecration of the Priests (29:1–46)
- K. The Altar of Incense (30:1–10)
- L. The Offering (30:11–16)
- M. The Laver (30:17–21)
- N. The Anointing Oil and Incense (30:22–38)
- O. Bezalel and Oholiab (31:1–11)
- P. Sabbath Instructions (31:12–18)

#### V. Apostasy and Intercession

- (32:1–33:23)
- A. The Golden Calf (32:1–33:6)
- B. The Tent of Meeting (33:7–23)

#### VI. The New Tablets (34:1–35)

#### VII. Execution of Sanctuary Instructions (35:1–40:38)

### The Events of the Exodus

The Book of Exodus describes Israel’s travels under the direction of God, from Egypt through the desert to the foot of MOUNT SINAI. So the book has a geographical arrangement: Israel in Egypt (1:1–12:36), Israel in the desert (12:37–18:27), and Israel at Mount Sinai (19–40).

## Hebrews

As the book opens, the patriarchal covenant promises are in jeopardy. The descendants of Abraham are living in Egypt, where we left them at the conclusion of Genesis. But it is now hundreds of years later. The people have grown in significant numbers, enough to become a threat to the Egyptian population (1:10). In order to control this threat, the Egyptians enslaved the **Hebrews** and attempted to control their birth rate (chapter 1).

The birth of Moses is God's answer to this terrible predicament. Exodus 2 relates how the baby was spared and raised in the Egyptian court, providing him with the best education possible (Acts 7:22). As an adult, Moses tried to take matters into his own hands in a pathetic attempt to fulfill his calling (Ex 2:11–15a). As a result, he had to flee Egypt. Moses found his way to Midian, where he started life over again. He tried to forget about the terrible plight of the Hebrews by settling into a new occupation, a new family, a new home (vv. 15b–22).

But God did not forget or forsake his people. In an important paragraph at the conclusion of chapter 2 (vv. 23–25), we are told that God knew their plight. He heard,

remembered, saw, and knew of the groaning of the Israelites. God was committed to taking action to redeem his people from Egypt because of his covenant with the patriarchs (v. 24). Because of Abraham, the Israelites must be redeemed from Egypt. Moses may have forgotten, but God had not!

Moses and God were on a collision course. The Lord was determined to save the Israelites; Moses was determined to forget about them. The famous call of Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3–4) is where the two collide. The resulting debate is classic and powerful. God called Moses to go back to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of their slavery. Moses raised four objections, all of which God answered. Finally Moses simply refused to go: “please send someone else” (4:13).

God assured Moses of his presence in Egypt and of his ultimate victory. Together with the help of his brother, Aaron, Moses would become the deliverer of his people. He returned to Egypt and warned Pharaoh of impending disaster if the Egyptian ruler failed to obey God's command to let the people go. The ten plagues were intended not only to force the Egyptians

Egyptian wall painting showing a scribe conducting a count of geese on an Egyptian official's estate.





## Laws from Ancient Mesopotamia

1. *If a man accuses another man and charges him with homicide but cannot bring proof against him, his accuser shall be killed.*

(Compare Ex 23:1–3)

2. *If a man should kidnap the young child of another man, he shall be killed.* (Compare Ex 21:16)

3. *If an obligation is outstanding against a man and he sells or gives into debt service his wife, his son, or his daughter, they shall perform service in the house of their buyer or of the one who holds them in debt service for three years; their release shall be secured in the fourth year.* (Compare Ex 21:2–11)

4. *If a child should strike his father, they shall cut off his hand.* (Compare Ex 21:15)

5. *If he should break the bone of a citizen of his own rank, they shall break his bone.*

(Compare Ex 21:23–25)

6. *If an ox gores to death a man while it is passing through the streets, that case has no basis for a claim. If a man's ox is a known gorer, and the authorities of his city quarter notify him that it is a known gorer, but he does not pad its horns or control his ox, and that ox gores to death a member of the aristocracy, he (the owner) shall give 30 shekels of silver.* (Compare Ex 21:28–36)

Selected from the Law Code of Hammurapi, Laws 1, 14, 117, 195, 197, and 250–51, Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World 6 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), 81, 84, 103, 120, 121, 128 (adapted).

### casuistic law

into compliance, but also to teach both the Egyptians and the Israelites about the sovereign character of the God of Israel. The Egyptians believed their god-king, the Pharaoh, was responsible for maintaining the life-giving Nile River and for the sun's daily rising. But the plagues demonstrated that Israel's God, Yahweh, was in control of the cosmic order.<sup>2</sup>

On the night of the release of the Israelites, God established a permanent memorial to commemorate the event, the Passover (chapter 12). Future generations must never forget God's great and mighty acts of salvation. Exodus 14:30–31 serves as a theological summary of the entire exodus event that became so central in future Israelite thought. The Lord saved Israel in that day and they saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. This sight became the concrete sign that God had accomplished salvation and brought a new life for Israel.<sup>3</sup>

The second main unit of the book traces Israel's strange odyssey through the desert. How could Israel question God and complain about their circumstances? Had they not just witnessed the greatest miracle of history? Did they not yet understand what God had done for them? Yet sin and rebellion often fly in the face

of facts. If we would only remember who God is and what he has done for us, we would quickly obey his Word.

In chapter 19, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai. The rest of the book describes the events that took place there. In dramatic fashion, God met with the nation (vv. 16–25). Now he began to transform this ragtag group of former slaves into a nation devoted only to him, a "treasured possession" (v. 5). Just as he had used a covenant to establish his relationship with the patriarchs, so now he used a covenant with Israel.

The Sinai covenant was anchored in the Ten Commandments (20:1–17). The Bible actually calls these "words" instead of commandments (Dt 10:4), because they are more like ten principles for living than laws. The rest of the law is based on them. Chapters 21–23 are called the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex 24:7). These chapters list specific cases in which the principles of covenant law are applied to life. This type of law (known as **casuistic law**) was widely used in the ancient Near East. Several parallels from Mesopotamia illustrate how the Bible often used the writing styles and customs of the day to express God's revelation.

After God gave the law to Israel, Moses led the nation in a solemn and sacred covenant ceremony, binding God and nation together (24:3–8). Moses sprinkled sacrificial blood on the altar, which represented God (v. 6). Then he read the Book of the Covenant to the people and sprinkled blood on them as well (vv. 7–8). Moses called this blood “the blood of the covenant” because the ceremony was symbolic of the kind of covenant God made

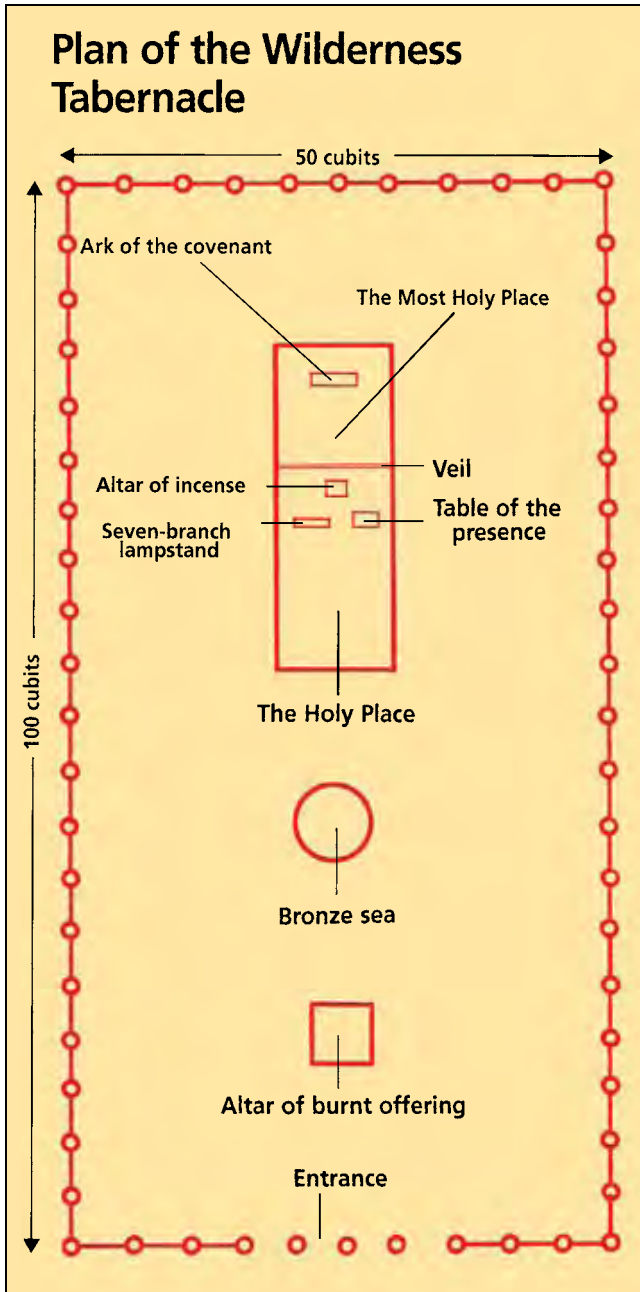
with Abraham in Genesis 15, using divided animals. Just as God bound himself to Abraham, he was now binding himself to Israel. This must surely be behind the words of Jesus: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28).

The purpose for the desert tabernacle was clear from the beginning (25:8). It was not like our churches, stadiums, or arenas, where large groups gather for various purposes. It was God’s way of living in the midst of his people. Prior to this, God had demonstrated his presence with them in the form of pillars of fire and smoke during their desert travels (13:21–22). This large tent, however, would now be God’s dwelling place. The glory of his presence, which had provided both protection and comfort, would now reside in the center of the Israelite camp. The word “tabernacle” itself (*miškān*) means “dwelling place.”

The tabernacle section of the book uses repetition. Seven chapters (25–31) give detailed instructions in how to build the tabernacle with all of its furnishings. Then four chapters (35–39) relate how Moses and the Israelites obeyed in every detail. While this may be unlike the modern literature we are used to reading, the point should be clear. The people were obedient to God, down to every detail of the tabernacle’s curtains, rings, and hooks.

What comes between the two sections on the tabernacle, however, is an example of stark disobedience (chapters 32–34). While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law of God, the children of Israel blatantly and quickly turned from the very God who had just delivered them from their life of slavery and misery in Egypt. Apparently they wanted God to look like the familiar gods of Egypt and Canaan. So, while Yahweh was creating a nation that would reflect his moral likeness, the Israelites were trying to create God in their image.

Chapter 40 is a triumphant climax to the Book of Exodus. The recurring phrase makes the point: Moses and the Israelites performed the tasks of building God’s tabernacle just “as the LORD had commanded Moses.” When all was completed as required, God’s wonderful glory filled the tabernacle (v. 34). The presence of God



that led the Israelites in pillars of cloud and fire and that met them so dramatically on Mount Sinai would now rest on the movable tabernacle. They must leave Mount Sinai behind, but God's presence would go with them.

## Historical Problems of the Exodus

Like the ancestral narratives of Genesis, the Book of Exodus gives few historical references to other times and places in the ancient Near East. Consequently, we are faced with several unanswered questions about the exodus event.

### Historicity of the Exodus

The first of these is the question of its historicity. The lack of firm extrabiblical evidence leads some to deny the event actually occurred. But the exodus is so central to later Israelite thought and theology, it is inconceivable the events could have no basis in the national history. Furthermore, it seems unlikely Israel would have been so uncomplimentary about its past as to include suffering and servitude if it were not true. Those who question the historicity of the exodus ignore too many other pertinent questions.<sup>4</sup>

### Date of the Exodus

The second problem has to do with the precise date of the exodus. Basically there are two options, though there are many variations of these. The exodus may be dated to around 1446 B.C. or 1275 B.C.

First Kings 6:1 dates the exodus 480 years before Solomon built the temple in 966 B.C. By simple addition, we derive the fifteenth-century B.C. date, 1446, for the exodus. Judges 11:26 gives three hundred years between Jephthah's day (around 1100 B.C.) and the conquest, which would also seem to suggest the earlier date.

An Egyptian inscription, known variously as the "Israel Stela" or the "Mernephtah Stela," records the victory hymn of Pharaoh Merneptah in 1209 B.C. This inscription reports the Pharaoh's victory over several peoples in Palestine, including "the people of Israel" (RANE 160). Some would argue the Israelites must

have been in the land for a considerable length of time in order to be recognized by an Egyptian Pharaoh. This would also support the early date.

However, others have contended the archaeological evidence from Palestine contradicts the earlier date and suggests instead a thirteenth-century B.C. date. The 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 must, in this case, be an ideal figure. For example, the number might be the sum total of the 12 tribes of Israel multiplied by an ideal generation of 40. The real time between the exodus and the temple would be approximately 300 years instead of 480.

Exodus 1:11 states the Israelites worked on the construction of the city of Ramesses, which is believed to have been built by Pharaoh Ramesses II (1279–1213 B.C.). Thus the exodus could not have taken place prior to 1279 B.C., when Ramesses began to rule. Also, recently published reliefs from Karnak combine with the "Israel Stela" inscription to support the later date. Since the inscription designates Israel as a "people" instead of a land or country, it may be assumed Israel had only recently arrived in the area and not yet completely settled. Thus the exodus and conquest were thirteenth-century B.C. events.

Reevaluation of the archaeological evidence shows that archaeology cannot answer this question. Archaeology can, in fact, be used to argue for the earlier date.<sup>5</sup> Singling out a definitive date for the exodus is currently impossible because of a lack of more complete information. Of course, we can still affirm the reality of the event, even if we do not know exactly when it occurred.

### Route of the Exodus

The third problem facing those who study Exodus is identifying the route the Israelites took after leaving Egypt and then traveling through the desert from Egypt to the promised land. Ramesses and Succoth (Ex 12:37) may be identified with some degree of confidence. But the other Egyptian place-names mentioned in the narrative are not clearly identifiable.<sup>6</sup>

The sea that has been known as the "Red Sea" since the days of the Septuagint is actually the "Sea of Reeds" in Hebrew. Presumably the body of water Israel miraculously crossed is one of the



theophany

freshwater lakes east of the Nile Delta where such reeds were found: Menzaleh, Ballah, Timsah, or the Bitter Lakes (some would add Lake Sirbonis to this list).<sup>7</sup> The Red Sea’s Gulf of Suez probably should be ruled out, as may the GULF OF AQABA, since these larger salt water bodies lack the reedy vegetation necessary to qualify them as the “Sea of Reeds.”<sup>8</sup>

Once across the sea and out of Egypt, there were three basic options for the Israelite trek across the Sinai Peninsula: northern, central, or southern routes.

The northern route was along the “Way of the Sea,” an international highway that stretched from Egypt to Canaan along the Mediterranean coastline. The Bible refers to this highway as the “way of the land of the Philistines” (Ex 13:17). This would have been the most direct route, though not the easiest. Archaeology has confirmed certain Egyptian inscriptions

that speak of a heavy Egyptian military presence along the highway, reaching from the Nile Delta all the way to Gaza. The Israelites, with God’s guidance, bypassed this dangerous northern route and took “the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Reed Sea” (Ex 13:18). We may assume this was a more southerly direction, taken to avoid military conflict with the Egyptians. Unfortunately, we are unable to discern just what that roundabout way was. The locations of important places mentioned in the desert narratives are still uncertain—even the location of Mount Sinai.

The central route hypothesis locates Mount Sinai somewhere in northwest Saudi Arabia, beyond the Gulf of Aqaba. Some who hold this position believe the Bible’s references to the **theophany** at Sinai describe an active volcano (Ex 19:18; 24:17, etc.). Geological evidence points to

### Dating the Exodus

Of the abundance of evidence cited in the debate, we include here only a selective list, along with the interpretation of each approach.

Evidence	Fifteenth-Century Approach	Thirteenth-Century Approach
1) 1 Kings 6:1 480 years from exodus to the temple of Solomon	The numbers are taken seriously, and are literal.	The 480 years are ideal numbers and figurative.
2) Exodus 1:11 Israelites built the city of Rameses, named for Pharaoh Rameses of the thirteenth century.	The name “Rameses” was also used prior to the thirteenth century.	Since Rameses came to power in 1279 B.C., the exodus could not have occurred prior to this time.
3) Judges 11:26 Jephthah refers to 300 years between his day (around 1100 B.C.) and the conquest of the promised land.	Jephthah was approximately correct, placing the Transjordanian conquest around 1400 B.C.	Jephthah had no historical records, and was making a broad generalization.
4) Merneptah’s Stela The thirteenth-century pharaoh mentioned “the people of Israel” as inhabitants of Palestine.	Since the pharaoh mentioned them by name, the Israelites must have been there for an extended period of time. The thirteenth-century approach does not provide enough time for Israel to become recognized by Egypt.	Other groups in the inscription are designated as territorial city-states. Only Israel is referred to as a people. Israel must have been a relative newcomer to the area. The fifteenth-century date leaves too much time.



The view from  
Jebel Musa  
(Mount of  
Moses), often  
identified as  
Mount Sinai.

volcanically active areas in Arabia at that time, while the mountains of the Sinai Peninsula were not. Also, the land of Midian was located east of the Gulf of Aqaba. So when Moses fled Egypt, settled in Midian, and eventually met God at Mount Sinai (Ex 3:1), a region in northwestern Arabia was intended.

However, the Bible's description of God's appearance at Sinai does not require an active volcano. Many theophanies of the Old Testament describe extraordinary phenomena, and Exodus 19:18 has other more plausible explanations. Moreover, Moses' connection with the Midianites is inconclusive. The Bible relates him to a Midianite subtribe, the Kenites. This Midianite clan was not settled in a single area, but was nomadic, sometimes appearing in the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>9</sup> Few today would insist on the central route as the way taken by the Israelites.

Advocates of the southern route usually accept the identification of Mount Sinai with Jebel Musa (Mount of Moses), where today there is a monastery and a basilica

of St. Catherine. The identification of Jebel Musa with Mount Sinai dates to a Christian tradition from the fourth century A.D. However, the rugged granite mountains of the Sinai Peninsula offer several other possibilities for the mountain of God: Ras Safsaf, Jebel Serbal, Jebel Katarina, or Jebel Sin Bisher.

The Israelites often gave names to places in the desert as they passed through the area. But without a continuous population in the region to carry on the traditional names, we are unable to identify locations precisely. Furthermore, the Israelites lived a nomadic lifestyle during these years in the desert. Their tents, animal-skin clothing, and containers would leave behind few artifacts for modern archaeologists to discover. As a result, we have no specific information on the route, and are unlikely to acquire any soon. However, the traditional, southern route answers more questions than the others. This is our best estimate of the direction the newly freed Israelite people took on their way to God's promised land.

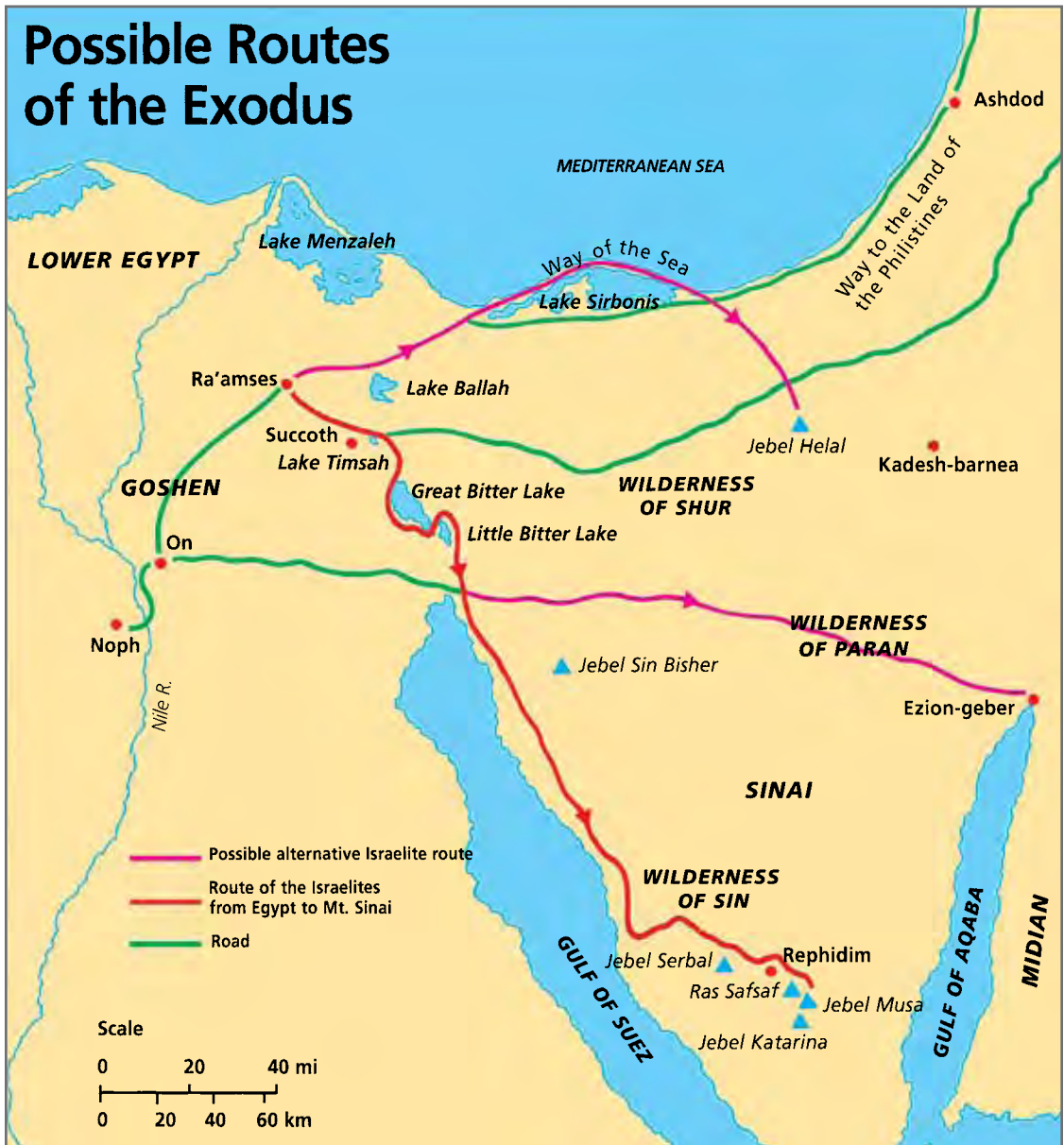
## Theological Significance of the Exodus

The Book of Exodus and the events it describes are of paramount importance in Christian theology. God sovereignly redeemed his people from a life of bondage and bound himself to them in covenant relationship. This role of God became central for the rest of the Old Testament.

The exodus as salvation event was the formative beginning of the nation Israel, historically and theologically. Similarly, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was a parallel event of salvation, which was the formative beginning for the church. Jesus spoke of his “departure” (Greek *exodos*) that he would accomplish on the cross (Lk 9:31).

### Deliverance

The theme of the first section of the book is deliverance (chapters 1–18). The people



covenant

Torah

of God were languishing under the heavy bondage of the Egyptians. They had no leadership and no hope of escape. But God was moved by his grace and his earlier commitment to the patriarchs (2:24–25). He delivered his people by providing the necessary human leader, Moses. Through dramatic plagues, God demonstrated his sovereign control of nature and broke the Egyptian hold on Israel, freeing the nation to escape. The spectacular miracle at the Sea of Reeds was the ultimate act of deliverance (chapters 14–15). The helpless Israelites were now free through no merit of their own; the Lord had become their salvation (15:2).

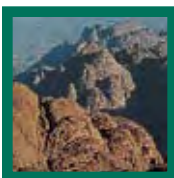
### Covenant

The theme of the second section of Exodus is **covenant** (chapters 19–40). As we have seen, the patriarchal covenant provides the foundation for the covenant at Sinai. The Abrahamic covenant (Gn 15:7–21) anticipated the covenant of blood between Yahweh and Israel (Ex 24:3–8). Just as the Abrahamic covenant involved promises

of land and descendants, the Sinai covenant fulfills those promises partially and continues them (19:4–5).

However, the Sinai agreement added a new element to the covenant. Although God had demanded ethical behavior from Abraham (Gn 17:1), the details of living in relationship to God were not available to the Hebrew people in written form. The Sinai covenant was a public and specific statement of the demands of having a relationship with God, establishing clear and uplifting instruction (chapters 20–23). Though the covenantal promises are in a sense permanent and unconditional, the covenant itself requires faithful obedience to God: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. . . . Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant . . .” (19:4–5). The Sinai covenant placed God’s **Torah** (“law”), his divine instruction, at the very center of his relationship with Israel.

The Ten Commandments and the other commands of chapters 21–23 were a natural part of the relationship between God



## Summary

1. The Book of Exodus describes how God led Israel from Egypt through the desert to Mount Sinai.
2. The Passover was God’s method of commemorating the release of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.
3. The Ten Commandments were the foundation of the Sinai covenant.
4. The tabernacle was the place where God dwelt in the midst of his people.
5. Scholars find three major historical problems with the Book of Exodus: the historicity of the exodus, the date of the exodus, and the route of the exodus.
6. The date of the exodus is placed by some scholars in the thirteenth century B.C. and by others in the fifteenth century B.C.
7. There are three possible routes for the exodus—the northern, central, and southern routes.
8. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ is a parallel event of salvation to the exodus of Israel.
9. The Book of Exodus is important theologically in terms of the way deliverance, covenant, and God’s presence are presented.

St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, situated close to Jebel Musa, Mount of Moses.



and the Israelites. The terms of the covenant were a result of God's grace and love for his people. He issued his laws for the nation *after* he had redeemed them and established his bond of intimate relationship with them. The law served as a seal on that relationship. Throughout the Old Testament, law is a positive expression of God's will for his people.

Laws are a part of life, whether they are natural laws of the universe or divine laws prescribed by God. We should not break any of God's laws any more than we would attempt to break the laws of nature. Trying to break the law of gravity, for example, by jumping off a high cliff only proves the law to be true and breaks instead the person who jumps! So it is with God's laws. Breaking them only hurts us

and proves that God's laws are just and true (Ps 19:7–10). On the other hand, obeying his law is the right response to God's grace, not as a means of salvation, but as the response to salvation.

### Presence of God

Deliverance and covenant—these are the themes of the two main sections of Exodus (chapters 1–18 and 19–40). But an emphasis on the presence of God runs throughout the whole book. The purpose of the exodus from Egypt and the covenant at Sinai, with its Law and tabernacle, can be summarized in this way: God was preparing Israel for his arrival in their midst.

The patriarchal covenant had contained the promise of descendants and a land. An element of that Genesis land-promise was living in the presence of Yahweh. When the promise was confirmed to Abraham's children, God assured them "I am [or will be] with you" (Gn 26:3 for Isaac; Gn 28:15 for Jacob). Joseph's life illustrated the principle of living in God's presence (Gn 39:2).

But at the beginning of Exodus, the land was not yet a reality and the descendants of Jacob were in danger of extinction. Even worse, the people were incapable of inheriting God's land-promise because

## Key Terms

Hebrews  
casuistic law  
theophany  
covenant  
Torah

## Key Places

Mount Sinai  
Gulf of Aqaba



## Study Questions

1. What are the two main events in the Book of Exodus? What “beginning” is established in the book? What is the arrangement of the book?
2. What was the point of collision between God and Moses?
3. What was the permanent commemoration of the Israelites’ release from captivity?
4. What were the two intended purposes of the plagues?
5. What was the anchor of the new Sinai covenant?
6. What was the purpose of the desert tabernacle?
7. What are the possible dates of the exodus? What is the evidence for each date?
8. What is the best estimate of the route followed by the Israelites after leaving Egypt?
9. What are the theological themes of the Book of Exodus? What other emphasis runs throughout the book?

they were unprepared to live in the land. Life in the promised land also meant life in God’s presence.

The Israelites were not ready for life in God’s presence because they had not yet learned of his great character. This was one of the lessons of the plagues. They were unprepared to live under his lordship, as Exodus 32 demonstrates and as we shall see in the Book of Numbers. Consequently, they were also unprepared to inherit the promised land.

The book’s emphasis on the presence of God is related to the important reference in Exodus 3:14, where God gives Moses the name “I AM WHO I AM,” and explains further that Moses should tell the Israelites “I AM has sent me to you.” This is followed immediately by the assurance that “the LORD [Yahweh], the God of your ancestors, . . . has sent me to you” (3:15). The significance of God’s personal name of intimacy, Yahweh, is that he is the God who is there for Moses and the Israelites. Moses has asked God what to say if the reluctant Israelites want to know who sent him to Egypt to deliver them. Their request for a name is their way of asking, “Exactly *what kind* of God is the God of our ancestors?” (v. 13). In response, God said to tell them, “I am (the God who is

there for you).” It would be a long journey. But Moses and the Israelites learned through the plagues and the exodus what kind of God Yahweh was (and is). He was a God who was present with them in their time of need and suffering. He was with them to deliver them mightily.

The exodus, in fact, marked Yahweh forever as the God who was present with Israel to deliver them. The statement that the patriarchs did not know God as Yahweh (Ex 6:3) does not mean they were completely unfamiliar with the name (see Gn 22:14, where Abraham used “Yahweh”). But after Moses and the Israelites, the name is associated with the exodus and the Sinai covenant. He is the One who was with his people to redeem them and to mark them with his holy presence.

God’s desire was for a “priestly kingdom and a holy nation” that he could indwell (Ex 19:6). The purpose for the exodus from Egypt was so God could dwell in the midst of his people. The coming of God’s glorious presence into the newly constructed tabernacle forms the climax of the Book of Exodus (40:34). Thus the tabernacle was the partial fulfillment of the patriarchal promise that God would be with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Eventually the temple



## Further Reading

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in Jerusalem would replace the tabernacle as the habitation of God's glory. Likewise, Christ came to "tabernacle" among us (Jn 1:14; Heb 8:1–9:15). Now the Holy Spirit dwells within the church and has therefore fulfilled the ultimate purpose for both tabernacle and temple.

At the conclusion of Exodus, God's patriarchal promises are partially fulfilled. The descendants of Abraham are free and in covenant relationship with God. They are not yet living in the promised land. But they still have the promise, and at the end of the book they receive God's presence. Exodus is about the salvation

and preparation of the Israelites for life in the land. The gift of God's presence is a prefulfillment reality.

The miracle at the Sea of Reeds became the primary symbol of salvation in the Old Testament. Likewise, the Sinai covenant became the principal symbol of an enduring relationship with God. Together, the exodus and Sinai covenant constitute the central act of redemption in the Old Testament. Here, the *promises* of God and the *acts* of God met to save his people from their bondage. The exodus and Sinai events are thus as central for the Old Testament as the cross is for the New.