

EXODUS

STUDY GUIDE

AUTHOR

Exodus gives a few clues as to its author. Exodus 17:4, 24:4, and 34:27 all speak of Moses writing the words of the Lord. Also, as a firsthand participant or witness to events described in Exodus, it makes sense that Moses is the author of this great book.

DATE & ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

The exact date of when Moses wrote Exodus is unknown, though scholars generally agree Moses wrote the account while in the wilderness following escape from Egypt. Based on the dating of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (see below) and the 40 years in the wilderness, we can suggest a date of 1450 – 1400 B.C. for the writing. However, if the original audience is assumed to be the second generation in the wilderness, then the book could have been written closer to 1400 B.C.

Scholars believe Exodus was written near the end of Moses' life to describe the events of the prior 81 years of Moses' birth to completion of the tabernacle. The generation who had grown up in the wilderness (you'll learn more about this generation in the book of Numbers), was preparing to enter the Promised Land. Moses likely desired for them to remember their origins, the events of their great deliverance and God's care for them in the wilderness, and the covenant God established with their parents.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Why would God choose to send His people to Egypt, knowing they would become slaves? Remember, this is foretold to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-14 – "Then the Lord said to him, 'Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.'" Did God seemingly lead His people into bondage?

During the years the Hebrews dwelled in Egypt, the Promised Land was a battlefield. The Hurrians and Hittites invaded the land from the north and Egypt sent powerful armies from the south. The Promised Land experienced the continual march of foreign armies and the devastation of war. However, while the Israelites dwelled in Egypt, they "were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them" (Exod. 1:7). At the time of the great exodus out of Egypt, the northern powers of the Hurrians & Hittites, as well as the southern world powers were weak, meaning a vacuum of power existed which allowed the Jews to establish themselves back in the Promised Land.

Additionally, the Amorites who dwelled in the land promised to Abraham & Israel and that the Lord was allowing time for "the sin of the Amorites" had not yet "reached its full measure" (Gen. 15:16).

While the Israelites lived in Egypt for four hundred years, God showed grace to the Amorites until their sins had reached fulfillment and a point of no return. At that point, God delivered the Israelites from Egypt and used them to bring judgment and destruction to the depraved Amorite civilization.

LITERARY STRUCTURE

Keep in mind that Exodus is a substructure of the larger work of the Pentateuch (5 books). Exodus therefore begins the second volume within the larger grouping. You’ll notice that while a large amount of time has passed in the storyline from the end of Genesis, Exodus maintains focus on God’s chosen people – the Israelites – and ends with the tabernacle being ready for use, which the book of Leviticus will pick up & clarify how worship is to take place in the tabernacle.

Exodus is easily divided into two parts, expressed with slightly different themes:

Chapters 1-19	Chapters 20-40
God’s rescue & bringing Israel to Mt. Sinai	God’s covenant with Israel while at Mt. Sinai
Freedom from human enemies by God’s gracious deliverance	Opportunity to be God’s covenant people & adhere to His covenant requirements

However, the book can also easily be divided into three parts which show the basic themes of deliverance from bondage, divine provision, and God’s revelation of self through covenant.

1. Miraculous Deliverance of Israel (1:1-13:16)
2. Miraculous Journey to Mt. Sinai (13:17-18:27)
3. Miraculous Revelations at Mt. Sinai (19:1-40:38)

WHEN DID THE GREAT EXODUS TAKE PLACE?

Biblical scholars and historians have determined two most likely dates: an early date of around 1440-1450 B.C. and a late date of 1290 B.C. These dates are determined by use of internal biblical evidence, Egyptian records of leadership, and archaeological discoveries.

Without going into too much detail, evidence within the Bible supports an early date of approximately 1450 B.C. 1 Kings 6 places the exodus at 1445 B.C. and Judges 11:26 speaks of Israel’s presence in Canaanite land for centuries. Stelas (pronounced *stee-la*), upright stone columns inscribed with key historical events and memorials, have been discovered which also point toward an early escape date. First, the Merneptah Stela mentions Israel by name as being established in Palestine by 1229 B.C. This is not possible unless the Great Exodus took place at the earlier date. The Dream Stela indicates that Thutmose IV (Pharaoh’s younger son) will rule. This is odd considering that succession of leadership normally went to the eldest son. This stela helps prove that Amenhotep II was most likely the pharaoh during the Great Exodus, and therefore leadership had to go to the younger son because the eldest son died in the final plague of firstborn deaths.

Much support for a later date of 1290 B.C. stems from scholars assuming Rameses II as the leading pharaoh during the exodus. When Rameses II is assumed to be the pharaoh, then Egyptian timelines

of leadership show gaps and assumptions have to be made as to the length of these gaps in order to align with other evidences. However, when these gaps are removed from the Egyptian timelines and Rameses II is no longer assumed to be the pharaoh at that time, then the biblical evidence, Egyptian timelines, and archaeological evidence all point to the Great Exodus happening around 1450 B.C.

If you want to watch a really good documentary on the dating of the Great Exodus, I suggest "Patterns of Evidence: Exodus," directed by Timothy P. Mahoney.

KEY CUSTOMS

There are a few items of note that will help explain parts of Exodus and also carry forward into other books. First, the plagues which occurred in Egypt were direct judgments against Egypt’s various gods. God’s power was proven superior as the One, Holy, True, Almighty God – or as Exodus repeats, “that you will know I am the LORD.”

THE PLAGUES OF GOD VS. THE EGYPTIAN GODS

Chart by Dean Niforatos

PLAGUE	EGYPTIAN GOD	BIBLICAL OBSERVATIONS
Water turned to blood (7:14-25)	Khnum – guardian of source of the Nile Hapi – spirit of the Nile Osiris – Nile was his bloodstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplicated by the Egyptians • Occurs in Goshen where Israelites lived • Pharaoh’s heart hardened (7:22)
Frogs (8:1-15)	Hapi & Heqt – frog goddess, related to fertility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplicated by Egyptians • Occurs in Goshen • Pharaoh begs relief, promises freedom, but is hardened (8:8, 15)
Gnats/Lice (8:16-19)	Seb – earth god	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not duplicated by Egyptians • Occurs in Goshen • Attributed to the “finger of God” • Pharaoh hardened (8:19)
Flies (8:20-32)	Uatchit – fly god	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God makes a separation between Egyptians & Israelites • No more plagues upon Israelites • Pharaoh bargains but hardened (8:28, 32)
Cattle diseased (9:1-7)	Ptah, Mnevis, Hathor, Amon – gods associated with bulls & cows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affects property • Death of livestock • Pharaoh hardened (9:7)
Boils (9:8-12)	Sekhmet – goddess of epidemics Serapis & Imhotep – gods of healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affects physical bodies • Pharaoh’s magicians cannot appear in court • Pharaoh hardened (9:12)

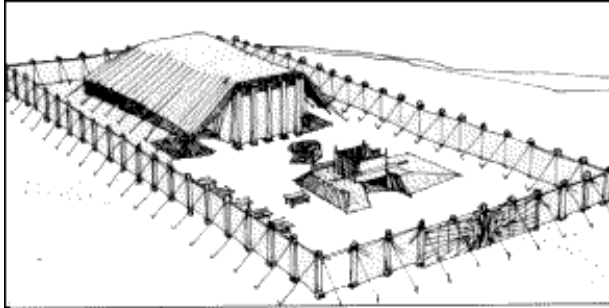
Hail & Fire (9:13-35)	Nut – sky goddess Isis & Seth – agricultural gods Shu – god of the atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical uniqueness for such a storm in Egypt • Pharaoh confesses sin & begs relief (9:27), promises freedom (9:28), but hardened (9:34)
Locusts (10:1-20)	Serapia – god protecting from locusts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharaoh offers a compromise, but it is rejected • Confesses sin again & begs relief (10:17) • Pharaoh hardened (10:20)
Darkness (10:21-29)	Re, Amon-re, Aten, Horus – sun gods Thoth – moon god	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark in Egypt at midday but light in Goshen • Pharaoh bargains (10:24) but hardened (10:27)
Death of Firstborn (12:29-36)	All the gods including Pharaoh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharaoh & Egyptians beg Israel to leave Egypt (12:31-33)

Second, the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai to Israel follows a standard pattern of treaties used in that era, called a suzerain-vassal treaty. The suzerain was the overtaking and powerful king who promised protection to those he'd overtaken (vassals). Such protections were only promised as long as his subjects demonstrated loyalty to the conditions described in the treaty. In this case, God is the divine suzerain who promises protection and blessing to His vassals (Israel) and lays out the expectations of how His people are to demonstrate loyalty to Him and behave under His rulership. Where the covenant with Abraham was an unconditional kind of covenant, what occurs at Mt. Sinai is a conditional covenant, meaning a big "IF" exists. If Israel remained true to the conditions of the agreement, then the Lord would lavish love, protection, and blessing upon them. However, if they chose disobedience, they could expect trouble. That God expresses Himself as their king establishes a theocracy – a government where God is king and humans are citizens.

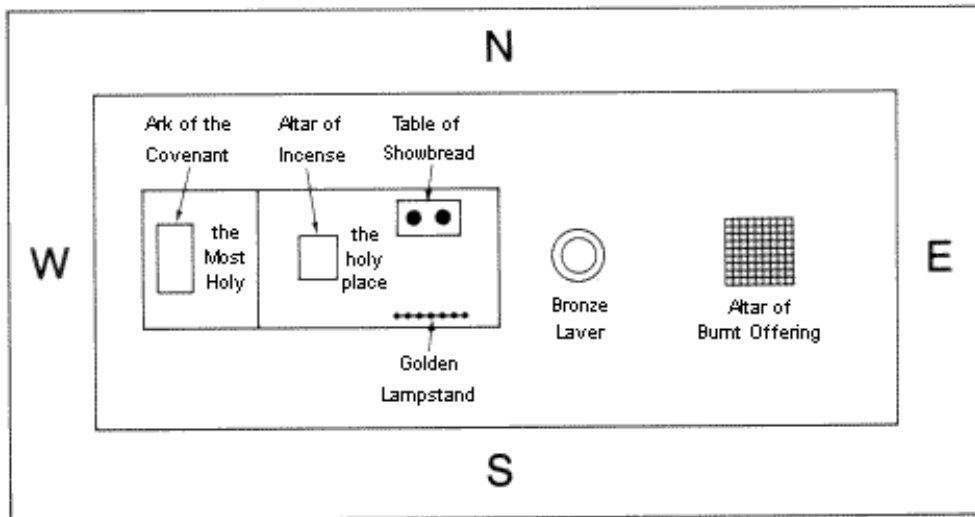
Third, chapters 20-24 make up the "Book of the Covenant," a phrase often used to describe the 10 Commandments and following details of how those commandments are to be applied in the lives of God's people. In Exodus 24:7 it says, "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people..." It was the earlier chapters that would have been read.

THE TABERNACLE

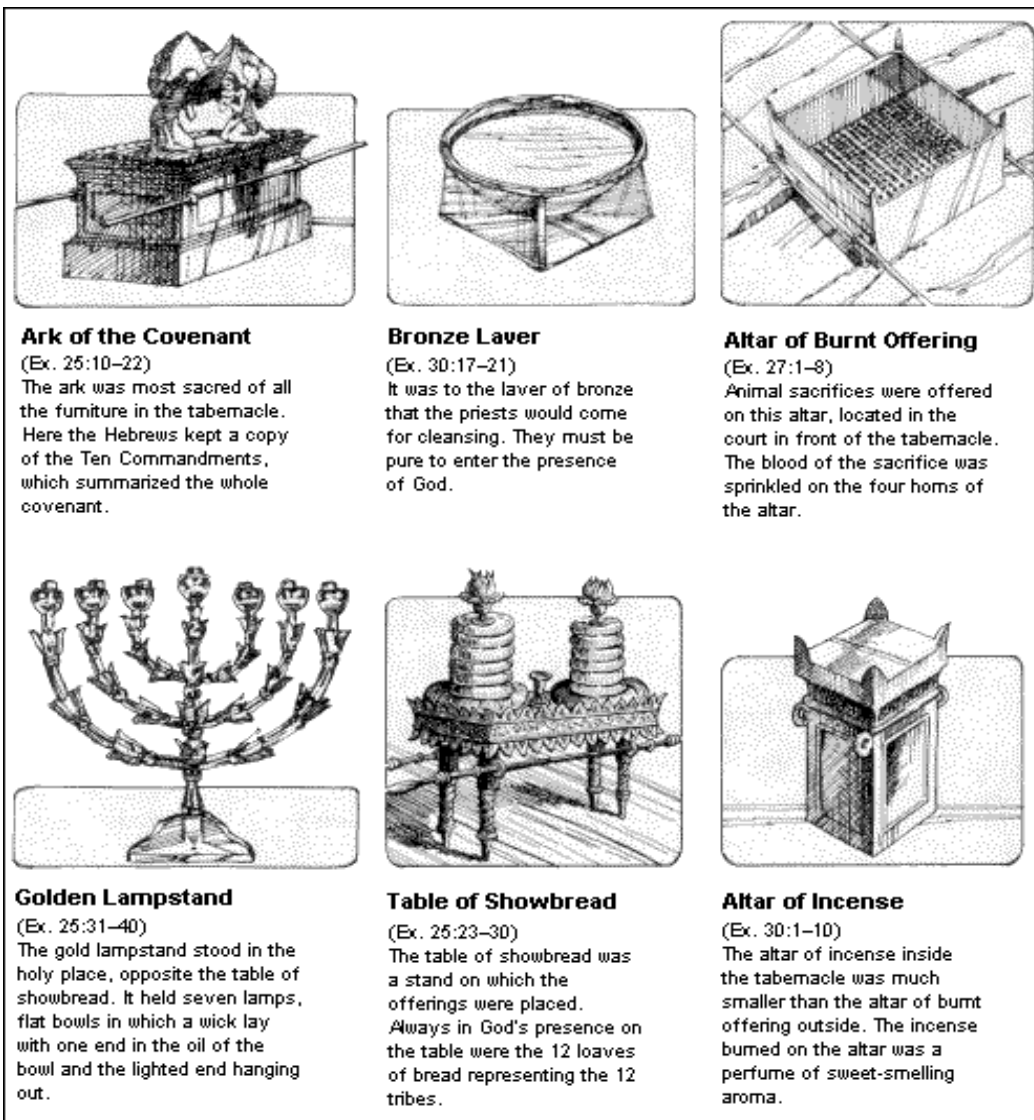
The tabernacle was a portable tent or sanctuary used as a place for worship, also referred to as the "tent of meeting. It served as the primary place of encounter between God & His people. Hint: the tabernacle is a picture of the incarnation of Jesus – when God's Son became a human being to dwell among us.



The tabernacle was to provide a place where God might dwell among His people. The term *tabernacle* sometimes refers to the tent, including the holy place and the Most Holy, which was covered with embroidered curtains. But in other places it refers to the entire complex, including the curtained court in which the tent stood.



This illustration shows the relative positions of the tabernacle furniture used in Israelite worship. The tabernacle is enlarged for clarity.



OBSERVATION WORDS

- **God** – Different ways He’s referenced & what you learn about Him
- **Jesus** – When & how is He present? What types/symbols represent Christ in the text?
- **Holy Spirit** – When He’s named directly, what He does, note miracles, etc.
- **Moses** – Who is he, what does he do, what do you learn about him, who he represents, etc.
- **Pharaoh** – What he says & does, what he represents, what we learn from him, etc.
- **Cry/God heard** – whose cry, what does God hear, what do you learn, etc.
- **Remember/Remembered** – specifically, God’s remembering

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- **Covenant** – who’s involved, who initiated, expectations, etc.
- **“I will...” (God speaking)** – what is said, why, what you learn
- **“Know that I am the Lord...”** – who is to know, purpose, etc.
- **Complain** – who is doing it, why are they doing it, what is the outcome, etc.
- **Sabbath** – purpose, expectations, blessings, etc.
- **Priest** – who, purpose, role, etc.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What do you learn about God the Father?

- Where do you see Jesus in this book?

- Where do you see the Holy Spirit in this book?

- What did the Lord teach YOU through what you read?

- Read Exod. 10:1-2 again. How do these verses change your perspective regarding tough circumstances & the believer’s role in those circumstances?

- What do you learn about the first Passover (ch. 12)? What is its purpose? What does symbolism within the feast teach? Why do you think there are provisions for foreigners & slaves?

- What was the purpose of the Dedication of the Firstborn (ch. 13)? What are we as believers to interpret of this for our lives today?

- What do you learn about complaining – against religious leaders, God, etc.?

- What do you learn about the Sabbath? (scattered throughout, but especially ch. 16 & 20)
- How do the Israelites reflect your own life?

- What do you learn about God’s expectations for living as His people (ch. 20-23)?

- How do the various elements of the Tabernacle represent God the Father, Christ the Son, and/or the Holy Spirit, and elements of Christian worship?
 - **Ark of the Covenant**
 - **Bronze Laver**
 - **Altar of Burnt Offering**
 - **Golden Lampstand**
 - **Table of Showbread**
 - **Altar of Incense**
 - What do these things speak to our approach to God and worship of Him?

 - What of the priests? What are their roles, expectations, etc. How are we to emulate them as a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9)?

- What do you learn about intercession through this book?

KEY WORD

How would you summarize what you’ve read into 1 word or very short phrase? Why did you choose that?

KEY VERSE & CHAPTER

Like key words, key verse & chapter reflect something that stood out to you from the book. It may be a means of summarizing the book, or it may be something that the Lord taught you through that verse & chapter. So, what are they for you?