

# The Pentateuch

LESSON  
ELEVEN

AN OVERVIEW OF EXODUS



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# The Pentateuch

## Lesson Eleven

### An Overview of Exodus

#### INTRODUCTION

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Every organization goes through changes, but these changes can be quite disruptive when the leadership passes from one generation to the next. When the last founding member of a church dies, or the entrepreneur of a business retires, those left in charge face new challenges. So, one question that nearly always comes up is this: How much should the new generation follow the priorities and practices of the previous generation?

In many ways, the people of Israel faced this question as they camped on the border of the Promised Land. Moses was quickly approaching the end of his life, and the Israelites were facing many new challenges. So, they needed to know how much they should continue to follow the priorities and practices that Moses had established for them. Would they need to follow a different path? Or should they continue in Moses' ways? The second book of the Bible, the book we now call Exodus, was designed to answer these and similar questions.

This lesson looks at a portion of *the Pentateuch* that covers the second book of the Bible. We've entitled it "An Overview of Exodus." In this lesson we'll explore a number of basic issues that will prepare us to look more deeply into what Exodus meant when it was first written and how we should apply it to our lives today.

Our lesson will divide into three main parts. First, we'll look at some initial considerations we should keep before us as we study Exodus. Second, we'll investigate the structure and content of the book. And third, we'll look into some of the major themes of Exodus. Let's look first at a number of initial considerations.

#### INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

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As followers of Christ, we rightly believe that the book of Exodus was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it's God's Word. This belief reminds us that we aren't dealing with an ordinary book. Exodus is sacred Scripture that God gave to his people. So, in one way or another, as followers of Christ, this book has authority over you and me today. But at the same time, we should never forget that God first gave this book to people who lived thousands of years ago. So, it's important to ensure that our modern applications are true to the purpose of the book when it was first written.

We'll introduce four different initial considerations as we begin to look at Exodus. First, we'll touch on its authorship. Who wrote the book? Second, we'll explore its occasion, when and where the book was written. Third, we'll summarize the original meaning of Exodus. And fourth, we'll address how these matters should guide our modern application of the book. Let's look first at the authorship of Exodus.

## AUTHORSHIP

The question of Exodus' authorship is part of a long and complex debate over the authorship of the Pentateuch as a whole. But in this lesson, we'll mention just a few ways this debate applies to Exodus.

A cursory reading of Exodus tells us, at the very least, that Moses had a great deal to do with the content of the book. Exodus repeatedly claims that God revealed much of it directly to Moses on Mount Sinai. This includes the Ten Commandments, the Book of the Covenant, and the instructions for Israel's tabernacle.

But, as we've seen in other lessons on the Pentateuch, most critical scholars have rejected Moses' authorship. They've argued that the theology of the Pentateuch, including Exodus, is far too advanced to have come from the days of Moses. And they maintain, instead, that it couldn't have been completed before the end of the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C.

Although these critical outlooks are widespread, the historical and theological presuppositions behind them are highly speculative and unreliable. Also, from an evangelical perspective, it's crucial that we follow the authoritative testimonies found in the Scriptures. Old Testament authors and Christ and his apostles and prophets all unanimously endorsed the perspective that Moses was the one responsible for the entire Pentateuch, including the book of Exodus.

Now, evangelicals have rightly qualified this belief in Mosaic authorship by calling Moses the "fundamental," "real," or "essential" author of the book. This means it's highly unlikely that Moses simply sat down and wrote all of Exodus with his own hand. But Moses was a reliable eyewitness to every event reported in the book, except perhaps those involving his birth and early childhood. It's likely that he followed the custom of national leaders in his day and employed scribes, or amanuenses, to write under his direction. Still, whatever took place, we can be confident that Exodus was composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit sometime during the days of Moses.

**The question of who wrote the book of Exodus is an important question, and as we read through the text of the book itself, and take seriously the history of the events that it records, there's no reason to think that Moses didn't write the bulk of the book of Exodus as we presently have it. Moses is portrayed in that book as God's spokesman. Throughout the Pentateuch he's portrayed as a unique spokesman, throughout the history of God's people, one who knew God like no other prophet after him until Jesus himself. And because he knew God so intimately, spoke with him face-to-face as a man speaks with a friend, and had that important role as God's spokesman to the people. And because the Old Testament, as it continues after the Pentateuch, refers back to this book of the Torah of Moses and encourages the people to meditate on it day and night, it makes sense to think that Moses is the author of the book. Now, there may be some updating that has happened of place names or even of some of the grammatical forms and things like that as time goes on, that happens**

**by an inspired hand, a prophetic hand in Israel. But yeah, I think the book of Exodus comes from Moses' pen, from Moses' stylus... And so, Moses is portrayed not only as God's chief spokesman in Israel, but also as an author, the writer of a book.**

— Prof. Thomas Egger

With these thoughts about Mosaic authorship in mind, we should turn to a second set of initial considerations, the occasion, or circumstances, in which Exodus was written.

### OCCASION

Broadly speaking, Moses wrote Exodus sometime between his call at the burning bush, in Exodus 3:1–4:31, and his death on the plains of Moab, in Deuteronomy 34:1-12. But the evidence enables us to be more precise than this. At least two references in Exodus reveal that the book was actually completed when Israel was encamped on the border of the Promised Land. Listen to Exodus 16:35 where we read these words:

**The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan (Exodus 16:35).**

Obviously, these events must have occurred before the book of Exodus was completed. So, we know that Israel had already wandered for “forty years.” And they had arrived at “a land that was settled” or “the border of Canaan.”

A similar glimpse into the time of final composition appears in Exodus 40:38, the last verse of the book:

**So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels (Exodus 40:38).**

Notice that this passage mentions God's glorious presence over the tabernacle “during *all* their travels.” This historical note makes it evident that Moses completed the book of Exodus late in his life. He wrote *after* the Israelites had finished their forty years of wandering and had arrived on the plains of Moab.

So far, we've looked at several initial considerations concerning the authorship and occasion of the book of Exodus. Now, we're in a position to summarize its original meaning. Why did God have Moses compose the book of Exodus? And how did Moses hope to impact his original Israelite audience on the plains of Moab?

## ORIGINAL MEANING

From the outset, we should note that Moses had a number of general goals that often appear in the Old Testament. For instance, Exodus is doxological because it consistently led Israel to praise and worship God. But it's also theological because it repeatedly explains truths about God. And the whole book is political in the sense that it was designed to shape the national life of Israel. It's also polemical because it opposes false points of view. It's moral because it reveals how Israel was to obey God. And it's motivational because it encourages loyalty to God and warns against disloyalty. These and many other similar goals generally characterize the entire book of Exodus.

While Exodus shares these and other characteristics with a number of biblical books, Moses also had a unique, prominent purpose for writing Exodus. It's helpful to summarize this unifying purpose along these lines:

**The book of Exodus vindicated Moses' divinely-ordained authority over the first generation of the exodus to direct the second generation to acknowledge Moses' abiding authority over their lives.**

This summary touches on three factors that give us a helpful orientation toward the original meaning of Exodus. First, it reminds us that, for the most part, the book was written *about* the first generation of the exodus, but at the same time, the book was written *for* the second generation of the exodus.

Everyone familiar with the book of Exodus knows that most of it describes events that occurred when Moses brought Israel out of Egypt. We may call this time, "that world" of history. Even so, everything Exodus says about "that world" of the first generation was designed to speak to the *second* generation of the exodus, what we may call "their world."

Now, it's important to keep in mind that very few ancient Israelites could read. So, when we speak of the second generation "audience," we don't mean that every man, woman and child picked up a copy of Exodus and read it for themselves. On the contrary, like other portions of the Old Testament, Moses wrote Exodus primarily for the *leaders* of Israel. Joshua, tribal elders, judges, and the priests and Levites were Exodus' primary focus. And it was these leaders' responsibility to deliver and explain the content of the book to the rest of Israel. For this reason, Exodus most directly addresses issues that the second generation faced as a nation.

It's also important to note that most of Moses' attention to "their world" remained implicit. Still, the second generation moves to the foreground often enough for us to be confident that Moses wrote with "their world" in mind. As we've already noted, both Exodus 16:35 and 40:38 refer to the second generation. In addition, the genealogical record in Exodus 6:13-27 extends to Phinehas, Aaron's grandson. And we'll see later that a number of other passages address matters that were particularly relevant for the second generation. These and similar references indicate that Moses took into account both the first and second generations of the exodus as he composed this book.

A second facet of our summary of Moses' original purpose for Exodus is that everything it said about "the first generation" was written, "*to direct* the second

generation.” That is to say, Moses wrote Exodus as a fully authoritative book that his original, second generation audience was to obey in service to God.

As we read the book of Exodus, it becomes clear that Moses carefully shaped his historical record to make it relevant for the second generation. In order to address those who camped with him on the border of Canaan, Moses had to pay careful attention to the many differences between the first and second generations. He was aware that they lived in different times and places, and that they faced different challenges. So, Moses skillfully designed each portion of Exodus to highlight points of contact between them. These connections allowed his original audience to bridge the gap between themselves and their forebears.

## Backgrounds

Moses formed three basic types of connections that made the authority of his book evident to his original audience. His simplest connections consisted of historical backgrounds. These passages focused on the historical roots of the original audience’s privileges and responsibilities.

One type of historical background appears in Exodus 3:8 where God’s promise to Israel connects to the fulfillment of that promise. In this verse, God promised to bring Israel up out of Egypt into “a land flowing with milk and honey.” This prediction was relevant for Moses’ audience because they were on the verge of seeing it fulfilled in their day.

Another type of historical background appears in God’s commands to the first generation and the subsequent obligations of the second generation. For instance, in Exodus 20:1-17, Moses reported how God gave the first generation the Ten Commandments. This event formed the basis of the moral obligations for the second generation.

## Models

In addition to historical backgrounds, Moses also provided his audience with historical models that they were to emulate or reject. To establish this kind of connection, Moses shaped some passages to point out substantial similarities between the first generation and the second-generation audience.

In many passages, Moses used these kinds of similarities to give his original audience negative models to reject. For instance, Israel’s repeated, rebellious grumbling during the march to Sinai, in Exodus 15:24, 16:2-12, and 17:3, represented negative models that the second generation was to reject.

By contrast, Moses also gave his audience positive models to emulate. For example, Israel complied with God’s instructions for tabernacle construction in Exodus 36:8-38. This represented a positive model for the second generation to emulate as they served God at the tabernacle later on.



And Moses also provided mixed models, characters that exemplified both positive and negative qualities. As just one example, in Exodus 7:8-13, Aaron obeyed God and threw down his staff before Pharaoh. His obedience contributed to Israel's release from Egypt. But, in 32:1-35, he made a golden calf for the people to worship, and his disobedience led to Israel's severe punishment. This gave the second-generation audience a mixed model to both emulate and reject.

## Foreshadows

In the third place, on a few occasions Moses shaped his record of events to serve as historical foreshadows, or adumbrations, of his second-generation audience.

**Often in biblical narrative, as in modern film and literature, authors will use foreshadowing. And we have a good example of this early on in the book of Exodus when Moses, having left Egypt, arrives at the well and he saves, or delivers, Jethro's daughters from these mean-spirited shepherds. And the text depicts Moses as being in the role of a deliverer, as it were. Well, that foreshadows what God is going to do through him. He's going to go to Egypt and deliver God's people from bondage.**

— Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

This type of connection doesn't occur in Exodus as much as in some other Old Testament books. But in certain cases, Moses described events from the past in ways that almost perfectly matched the experiences of his original audience. These foreshadows indicated that history was, as it were, repeating itself in the days of the second generation. For example, in Exodus 13:18 the Israelites "went up out of Egypt armed for battle." This military arrangement of the first generation foreshadowed how the second generation was also arranged as an army ready to enter the conquest.

In a similar way, Exodus 40:34-38 notes that once the tabernacle was functioning properly, God appeared as smoke and fire as he led his people in their march. This historical reality anticipated how, after 40 years, the presence of God was about to lead the second-generation audience forward in their own day.

As we've just seen, Moses shaped his record of the first generation's history to serve as backgrounds, models and foreshadows for the second generation. He did this to direct them in service to God. But all of this brings us to the third, and perhaps most important, element in our summary of the original meaning of Exodus. The book of Exodus was designed primarily to vindicate Moses' divinely-ordained authority over the first generation so that the second generation would acknowledge Moses' abiding authority over their lives.

Now, it's important to mention that Aaron often appears alongside Moses in the book of Exodus. But even when Aaron is included, every substantial portion of Exodus called the second generation to affirm Moses' continuing authority over them. They were

to submit to Moses' theological outlooks, his moral principles, national policies, and the like. Later in this lesson, we'll see in some detail how pervasive this theme is. But, at this point we'll briefly mention just two ways the book emphasizes the importance of Moses and his authority over Israel.

First, it's not difficult to see that Moses occupied center stage in the drama of Exodus. To be sure, the first two chapters of Exodus don't immediately introduce Moses. But after we learn his name in Exodus 2:10, everything that happens in the book is somehow explicitly tied to Moses. When God was ready to deliver his people from Egypt, he called Moses. Moses was instrumental in every miraculous judgment against the Egyptians. The parting of the sea occurred as Moses obeyed God and stretched out his hand over the water. Moses served as Israel's leader when God led the nation from Egypt to Mount Sinai. God made his covenant with Israel through Moses. Moses delivered the tablets of the Law and the Book of the Covenant on God's behalf. God gave Moses his instructions for the tabernacle. Moses served God during the crisis of Israel's idolatry at the foot of Mount Sinai. And Moses led the construction of the tabernacle.

Second, the book of Exodus repeatedly highlights Moses' authority over Israel. The book deals with the fact that the Israelites questioned Moses' authority as their leader in passages like Exodus 2:14; 5:21; 15:24; 16:2 and 3; and 17:2. But at other times, the Israelites acknowledged Moses' authority over them in passages like Exodus 4:31; 14:31; and 20:19. And we read of God's reassurance, that he himself ordained Moses as Israel's authoritative leader, in passages like Exodus 6:1-8 and 10-13; 24:2; and 34:1-4. As just one example, listen to Exodus 19:9 where God explained his upcoming theophany, or divine appearance, to Moses on Mount Sinai:

**I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you (Exodus 19:9).**

As this passage points out, God appeared on Mount Sinai in "a dense cloud" so that when the Israelites heard God speaking with Moses they would "always put their trust in [Moses]." As we can see here, this verse draws attention to the most prominent reason Exodus was written. The book of Exodus vindicated Moses' abiding authority over Israel.

**When evangelicals deal with a book like Exodus or, for that matter, any other book, they all have a natural tendency to be theocentric, and by that I mean make everything centered around God and to say that every book and every aspect of every book is *all* about God. But in reality, when you take a look at the book of Exodus, you don't quite get that impression. God is important, and in many respects, God is the main character, at least in the sense that he controls and he works the history that the book of Exodus talks about; he's the one that delivers Israel from Egypt; he's the one that gives the law; he's the one that gives the tabernacle. But at the same time, when you look at the literary portrait that's given of those events in the book of Exodus, what you discover is something that may seem strange at first, but I**

think it's true, and that is with one exception, God doesn't do anything in the whole book of Exodus apart from doing it through Moses. And the only thing that God does explicitly in the book of Exodus that's separated from Moses is when God blesses the midwives in the first chapter. And so, what we find in the book of Exodus is that God appears and he does things for Israel, but Moses is always right there, because he's the instrument by which God's doing it. And the reason for this is because Moses and his life were just about over, and Moses was about to leave Israel, but God was not going to leave Israel. And so the reality is that as you read the book of Exodus, what you're dealing with is the book that's being completed on the plains of Moab, dealing with the fact that Moses was going to leave Israel. And as a result of all of that, when we take a look at the book of Exodus, Israel is asking questions like these: Who's supposed to lead us? How are they supposed to lead? What are the priorities they're supposed to have? What kind of authority should we follow in our day now that Moses is about to leave us? And the book of Exodus is designed to answer those kinds of questions. The fact is that God did deliver Israel from Egypt, but he delivered Israel from Egypt through Moses. Yes, God gave Israel the law, but God gave the law through Moses. Yes, God gave the tabernacle, his holy war tent, but he did that through Moses. And that's the emphasis of the book of Exodus. And so, the book of Exodus vindicates for the second generation the authority of Moses by telling stories about what happened in the first generation and how Moses was exalted by God before the people, and because of that exaltation, Moses is supposed to be exalted before the second generation, even though he was about to pass away.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Now that we've touched on some initial considerations related to the authorship, occasion and original meaning of Exodus, we should make a few comments on its modern application. How should the book be applied to followers of Christ today?

### **MODERN APPLICATION**

A book as complex as Exodus can be applied to modern life in countless ways. We know this because every person is unique and faces different circumstances. And we'll look more carefully at modern application later in this lesson. But at this point, it will help to note some general outlooks we should always keep in mind as we apply Exodus to our lives today.

As followers of Christ, we know that the book of Exodus applies to us because it's the Word of God. But there are significant differences between us and the original

audience. And for this reason, we must always turn to the New Testament to guide us in our modern application. The New Testament offers us guidance by referring or alluding to Exodus around 240 times. But one New Testament passage is particularly helpful. Listen to 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 where the apostle Paul wrote:

**Our ancestors were all under the cloud and ... they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:1-5).**

As we see here, Paul referred to a number of events that are reported in the book of Exodus. But now look at 1 Corinthians 10:11, as the passage continues:

**These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:11).**

Together, these verses explicitly affirm the relevance of the book of Exodus for followers of Christ. As Paul put it, “these things happened to them as examples.” And they “were written down as warnings for us.” Paul’s words here help us see that Exodus was written not only about “*that* world,” and not only for “*their* world,” but it was also written for “*our* world.” To put it in terms of this lesson, the book of Exodus wasn’t just designed to direct its original audience. It was also intended “for *us*,” for followers of Christ.

Listen to how the apostle described the world of Christ’s followers. We are those “on whom the culmination of the ages has come.” The word “culmination” is translated from the Greek word *τέλος* (*telos*), which is frequently translated “end” or “goal.” Christians live in the time when God’s plan for history is reaching its end or goal in Christ. In common theological terms, we who follow Jesus live in the “eschatological” or “last” age of history.

To understand what Paul had in mind, we must realize that when we come to saving faith in Christ, we become part of a journey. We actually enter the “last days” of Moses and Israel’s journey from slavery and tyranny in Egypt to freedom and blessings in God’s Promised Land.

The New Testament as a whole teaches that the eschatological age, or the last days in Christ, unfolds in three main stages. So, from a biblical perspective, this final phase of Moses and Israel’s journey began with Christ’s inauguration of his kingdom during his earthly ministry. And the journey of Moses and Israel in the book of Exodus moves forward in these last days as we live in union with Christ during the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history. And finally, just as Moses and Israel traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land, the last days of our journey in Christ will end with the consummation of his kingdom, when, in his glorious return, we’ll enter the new heavens and new earth.

So, as 1 Corinthians 10 indicates, we should apply every theme in Exodus to modern Christians in the light of the inauguration, continuation and consummation of the last days in Christ.

We can make these connections in several ways. For example, Exodus tells us that Israel entered into covenant with God in Moses at Mount Sinai. In a similar way, Christians enter into the new covenant in Christ. But this new covenant began with Christ's first advent; it continues now; and it will be completed at Christ's second advent.

As another example, Exodus reports God's presence in the tabernacle in Moses' day. The New Testament teaches that God's presence is even greater in Christ. Jesus himself was the presence of God who dwelt among us in the inauguration of his kingdom. In the continuation of the kingdom, the Holy Spirit now dwells in individual believers and corporately in the church. And at the consummation of history, God's glory will fill everything as the new creation is made his holy dwelling.

Exodus also reveals God's defeat of his enemies in Moses' day. And the New Testament teaches that Christ defeats sin and death. Christ began the final stages of this defeat as God's mighty warrior in his first advent. The church follows Christ now as his army by wearing the full armor of God in spiritual warfare. And when he returns in glory, Christ will complete his great cosmic war against the enemies of God.

Additionally, in Exodus, the Israelites were headed for their inheritance from God in the Promised Land. This was their first step toward spreading God's reign throughout the earth. The New Testament teaches that Christians gain their inheritance in Christ. Christ himself secured his inheritance in the inauguration of his kingdom. As Christians today we continue to enjoy the down payment of our inheritance in the Holy Spirit. And when Christ returns, he — and we in him — will inherit all things.

These and other broad connections clarify how Exodus' prominent focus on Moses' abiding authority still applies to us in Christ. In brief, Exodus called its original audience to remain faithful to Moses' authority in the light of what God was doing in their day. And Exodus now calls us to remain faithful to Moses' authority in the light of all that God has accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish in Christ.

Now that we've touched on some initial considerations about the book of Exodus, we should turn to our second main topic in this lesson: the structure and content of the book.

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## STRUCTURE & CONTENT

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The book of Exodus consists of forty chapters containing many different characters, settings and events. We find a variety of literary forms like narrative, song, genealogy, list, laws, speeches, prayers and instructions. And these complexities make it difficult at times to differentiate the major divisions, sections and smaller segments of the book. So, it's fair to say that Exodus can be outlined in many ways. But the basic structure and content of the book isn't difficult to discern when we remember the book's original purpose.

The book of Exodus has two main divisions. The first half, in 1:1–18:27, focuses on Moses and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt to Mount Sinai. The second half, in 19:1–40:38, deals with Moses and Israel’s preparation for Canaan at Mount Sinai.

We’ll look in particular at how these two major divisions focus on Moses’ abiding authority over the second generation of the exodus. Let’s start with Moses and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt to Mount Sinai.

## **DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT (EXODUS 1:1–18:27)**

Moses and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt begins with a focus on Moses’ authority *before* Israel’s deliverance. We find this in Exodus 1:1–4:31. Then, in 5:1–18:27, Moses centers on events *during* Israel’s deliverance. Let’s look first at what Exodus tells us about events before Israel’s deliverance.

### **Before Deliverance (1:1–4:31)**

Events before Israel’s deliverance can be divided into two parts. First, Moses’ birth and upbringing begins in 1:1 and runs through 2:10. Following this, we learn of Moses’ rise to leadership over Israel in 2:11–4:31. We’ll start with the story of Moses’ birth and upbringing.

***Birth and Upbringing (1:1–2:10).*** These verses spoke to any objections against Moses’ authority that may have arisen because Moses spent his youth in the courts of Egypt. As the story begins, Pharaoh feared a rebellion due to Israel’s increasing numbers. He devised three shrewd plans to control Israel’s population. But his imposition of hard labor failed. His command for midwives to kill Israelite boys at birth failed. And most importantly, his command for Israelite boys to be drowned in the Nile failed.

Irony runs throughout these episodes. But the greatest irony appears when Pharaoh’s own daughter foiled his last plan by rescuing Moses from the Nile. Then in 2:10, Pharaoh’s daughter gave Moses his name saying, “I drew him out of the water.” Now, in Egyptian, “Moses” simply meant “son,” indicating to most people that Moses was a member of the royal court. But Pharaoh’s daughter clearly explained that she chose the name Moses because it sounded like the Hebrew verb *מָשַׁח* (*mashah*), meaning “to draw out.” So, in the ears of faithful Israelites, Moses’ name didn’t indicate that he was Pharaoh’s son. Rather, the name Moses mocked Pharaoh by reminding Israel of how Pharaoh’s attempts to harm them had failed.

***Rise to Leadership (2:11–4:31).*** The narrative of events before Israel’s deliverance from Egypt then turns from Moses’ birth and upbringing to questions about Moses’ rise to leadership over Israel in 2:11–4:31.

In Exodus 2:14, an Israelite slave confronted Moses and asked, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us?” This entire section answers this question by explaining how Moses became Israel’s authoritative leader. The answer to the Israelite’s question appears

in a six-step chiasm, a literary structure in which earlier and later sections parallel or balance each other.

First, Moses' flight from Egypt in Exodus 2:11-15 vindicated Moses as Israel's leader by explaining that he had fled from Egypt because he had killed an Egyptian in defense of an Israelite slave.

Second, Moses joined with a Midianite family in 2:16-22. Verse 22 notes that the name of Moses' son was, "Gershom." As this passage explains, this name sounded like the Hebrew expression גֵר שָׁם (*ger sham*), meaning "a sojourner there." The name indicated that Moses felt like an alien among the Midianites. In other words, he never lost sight of his true Israelite identity.

The third segment, in Exodus 2:23-25, points to God's remembrance of his covenant. In this section, the Israelites cried out for help, and God responded by remembering his promise to Israel's patriarchs.

The fourth segment corresponds to the previous section. Chapter 3:1-4:17, tells of God's commission to Moses at the burning bush. Here, Moses' leadership is vindicated by the fact that God remembered his covenant with Israel's patriarchs by calling Moses to bring Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

The fifth section, in Exodus 4:18-26, corresponds to the second section of Moses' time with his Midianite family. This section describes Moses' departure from his Midianite family. The passage focuses again on Gershom because Moses failed to circumcise him. In this section, God threatened to kill Moses in accordance with his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:10-14. But even this event demonstrated God's support of Moses' leadership. We know this because God responded with mercy when Zipporah, Moses' Midianite wife, circumcised Gershom.

And finally, in balance with Moses' opening flight from Egypt, Exodus 4:27-31 reports Moses' return to Egypt with Aaron. Moses' rise to leadership is vindicated here as well. In 4:31 we learn that the Israelites believed and worshiped God because he had sent them Moses.

**Listen, the way that we all tell stories, the way anybody tells a story, there's a beginning and an ending, there's a lead up, there's a turning point, and there's a lead down from, and that's going to be symmetrical... So, we shouldn't be surprised when we find this kind of symmetrical structure in biblical narrative. As a matter of fact, it's what we would expect to find in biblical narrative. Biblical storytellers, biblical narrators are not fabricating their material. They're not manipulating their material to get it to work this way artistically; this is just the way that we tell stories and we would expect to find it. And expecting to find it, knowing how a narrative plot works, gives us a tool in terms of what to watch for and what to look for.**

— Dr. Gordon H. Johnston

Now that we've looked at Moses and Israel's deliverance from Egypt in the period before Israel's deliverance, we should turn to Moses' activities *during* Israel's deliverance in Exodus 5:1–18:27.

### **During Deliverance (5:1–18:27)**

Moses' activities during Israel's deliverance begin with his time in Egypt, found in Exodus 5:1–13:16. Following this, we learn of Moses' leadership in the march from Egypt to Mount Sinai in Exodus 13:17–18:27. Let's look at Moses' time in Egypt.

***In Egypt (5:1–13:16).*** Moses' time in Egypt answers objections that may have come against Moses because his initial efforts in Egypt inadvertently contributed to the Israelites' suffering.

In 5:1–6:27, we read two parallel sequences that both involve Israel's rejection of Moses' leadership, Moses' lament, and God's reassurance. The first sequence appears in 5:1–6:8. The Israelites rejected Moses for provoking Pharaoh against them. Moses humbly lamented. And God reassured him of his call to lead Israel.

The second sequence, in 6:9–27, follows a similar pattern. But following Israel's second rejection of Moses, and Moses' second lament, God's reassurance comes in the form of a genealogy. Chapter 6:13–27 traces the line of Moses and Aaron from their ancestor Levi to Aaron's grandson Phinehas. Levi, of course, was one of the twelve patriarchs of Israel. And, Phinehas, according to Numbers 25 and 31, led the Israelites in faithful service to God in the days of the second generation. Here, God reassured the second generation that Moses and Aaron were true Israelites, descended from the tribes of Jacob. And in Phinehas, they could see first-hand the faithful legacy of Moses and Aaron and be assured that these men had been called by God to lead them.

This brings us to the second main portion of Moses' activities in Egypt: God's miraculous judgments on Egypt in Exodus 6:28–13:16. These chapters vindicated Moses' authority by pointing to the crucial role he played in God's supernatural acts of judgment against the Egyptians.

The introductory judgment of snakes appears in 6:28–7:13. Aaron's staff miraculously changed into a snake and demonstrated God's power over Egypt by swallowing the snakes produced by Pharaoh's magicians. After this introductory miracle, a series of nine judgments appears in Exodus 7:14–10:29. These nine judgments divide evenly into three series, each of which begins with Moses confronting Pharaoh at the Nile.

The first series runs from 7:14–8:19. It includes the miracles of water turning to blood, frogs covering the land, and gnats rising from the dust. The second series runs from 8:20–9:12 and includes a plague of flies, a plague on the Egyptians' livestock, and a plague of boils. The third series runs from 9:13–10:29. It includes judgments of hail, locusts and darkness. Moses' crucial role in all of these miraculous judgments vindicated his authority as Israel's leader. Finally, the last judgment of Passover closes this section in 11:1–13:16. After God killed every first-born son in Egypt, Pharaoh finally let Israel go.



Having looked at the events during Israel's deliverance that took place in Egypt, we should turn to the ways God also vindicated Moses' authority in the march from Egypt to Mount Sinai in Exodus 13:17–18:27.

***In the March (13:17–18:27).*** Now, despite the troubles that Israel experienced in the march to Sinai, it's important to note that Israel didn't leave Egypt unprepared. Exodus 13:18 explicitly tells us that the Israelites left Egypt "armed for battle." In light of this military theme, this entire section is characterized by conflicts with other nations and by the need for water and food for the Israelite army.

Israel's march in battle array divides into four main segments. The first segment deals with the vindication of Moses' authority at the sea in 13:17–15:21. In Exodus 14:31, after Israel had crossed the sea on dry land, we read this vindication of Moses:

**The people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant (Exodus 14:31).**

This verse forcefully presents the main points of this segment. The army of Israel "feared the Lord God and put their trust in him." *And* they also put their trust "in Moses his servant." Of course, the message was obvious to the original audience of Exodus. They too were to trust God and Moses in their day.

After this, Israel's army marched to the desert of Shur in 15:22-27. In the desert of Shur, the people challenged Moses' authority by grumbling against Moses because the water he had found was undrinkable. So, God exalted Moses as Israel's leader by providing him a piece of wood that cured the water.

In the third segment, the Israelites arrived in the desert of Sin in 16:1-36. In the desert of Sin, the Israelites challenged Moses' leadership again by grumbling against Moses and Aaron. But this time, in verse 7, Moses insisted that they were actually grumbling against *God*. And God vindicated Moses by granting Israel quail for food and by regularly giving them manna.

**God confirms Moses' authority by providing for the people's needs in the wilderness. Even though they grumble against Moses and against the Lord, God graciously provides them with water from the rock, he provides them with manna from heaven, and all of that is not only out of fatherly care for them, but also to confirm that Moses is indeed the one that he had sent... We oftentimes don't, as Christians, think about believing in a man, putting our faith in a man, but here's a case where the people actually are called to put their faith, not only in the Lord, but in Moses as the Lord's instrument and agent in this case. We saw that on the backside of the Red Sea too, when God had his mighty victory over the armies of Egypt, passing through the sea. There on the far side of the sea, it says that the people rejoiced and they praised God, and they put their faith in God and in Moses.**

— Prof. Thomas Egger

The fourth and final place to which Israel marched was Rephidim in Exodus 17:1–18:27. This relatively long segment divides into three episodes. First, in Exodus 17:1-7, the people tested God when they grumbled again about water. In response, God commanded Moses to take elders with him to Mount Sinai. There, God instructed Moses to strike a rock, and water came out. Despite this miracle, however, the Israelites quarreled even more with God. They defiantly wondered in verse 7, “Is the Lord among us or not?” The next two episodes put the matter to rest.

Now, to understand how these episodes answer the question, we need to remember something the Israelites knew well. In Genesis 12:3, God had promised Abraham that he would bless all who blessed Israel and curse all who cursed them. So, in line with this promise, in Exodus 17:8-16, when the Amalekites attacked Israel, God defeated them and cursed the Amalekites.

Then in the final episode of this segment, in 18:1-27, Jethro came to Moses in peace. Because Jethro blessed the Israelites, Jethro was blessed by God. These two events demonstrated beyond any doubt that God was among the Israelites just as he had promised Abraham. As the army of Israel followed Moses, they received the protection of God’s powerful presence.

So far, we’ve seen how the structure and content of Exodus first deals with Moses’ authority by focusing on Moses and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt to Mount Sinai. Now we should turn to the second half of the book in Exodus 19:1–40:38. These chapters demonstrate Moses’ authority by turning to Moses and Israel’s preparation for Canaan at Mount Sinai.

### **PREPARATION FOR CANAAN (EXODUS 19:1–40:38)**

Most students of the Bible are familiar with what happened to Moses and the Israelites as they encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai — how God gave them his law and his tabernacle. But Exodus only tells us a few of the things that actually happened there. We know this because the book of Leviticus tells us several other things that occurred at the time. For this reason, we know that these chapters are highly selective. They were designed to accentuate certain perspectives on these events. And as we’ll see, they focus especially on how God displayed Moses’ authority over Israel at Mount Sinai.

Moses and Israel’s preparation for Canaan breaks down into two main sections. The first section appears in Exodus 19:1–24:11 and deals with Moses’ authority and Israel’s covenant. The second section, in 24:12–40:38, emphasizes Moses authority and Israel’s tabernacle. Let’s look at Israel’s covenant.

#### **Israel’s Covenant (19:1–24:11)**

Now, the record of Israel’s covenant answers a crucial question for the original audience of Exodus: Why should the second generation of the exodus submit to the covenant law that their forebears received from Moses at Mount Sinai? Why shouldn’t they follow a different path?

The chapters devoted to Israel's covenant answer this question in four steps. First, in Exodus 19:1 through the beginning of verse 8, we find the initiation of Israel's covenant with God.

***Initiation of Covenant (19:1-8a).*** These verses give the basic terms of the Mosaic covenant: God had shown the Israelites benevolence; he required loyalty from them; they would be blessed if they obeyed him. Exodus 19:8 closes the episode with Israel's enthusiastic and unanimous response: "We will do everything the Lord has said." And of course, the point was clear; the second-generation audience of Exodus should imitate their forebears. They should recommit to God's covenant through Moses with equal enthusiasm.

***Israel's Trust in Moses (19:8b-20:20).*** The second step of Moses' authority and Israel's covenant focuses on Israel's trust in Moses as the mediator of God's covenant. It begins in Exodus 19 in the second half of verse 8 and runs through 20:20. You'll remember that in Exodus 19:9, God made this promise to Moses:

**I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you (Exodus 19:9).**

Notice here that God said he would appear on Mount Sinai and speak with Moses so that "the people ... [would] *always* put their trust in [Moses]." Then the scenes that follow explain how God kept this promise.

The main body of this step consists of two parallel series of God's instruction, Moses' obedience, and God's theophany. The first series appears in 19:10-19 where God instructed Moses to prepare Israel to meet with God. Moses obeyed God's instruction, and the result was a dramatic theophany on Mount Sinai — the glorious, visible and audible manifestation of God's presence there.

Then, we read the second series in Exodus 19:20-25. God instructed Moses once again to prepare the people, and Moses obeyed. As a result, in 20:1-17, the narrative returns to the theophany on Mount Sinai where God spoke the Ten Commandments for all of Israel to hear.

In balance with God's promise in the opening segment of this section, Exodus 20:18-20 explains that God's promise to Moses was fulfilled. These verses depict how, after hearing God's voice from the mountain, the Israelites were so terrified that they asked for God to stop speaking to them directly. They begged Moses to speak to them on God's behalf. The implication of this request for the second-generation audience is clear enough. Their own forebears turned to Moses as the mediator of God's covenant law and they should too.

***Moses' Covenant Law (20:21-23:33).*** The third step in this section on Moses' authority and Israel's covenant is found in Exodus 20:21-23:33. These chapters present the content of Moses' covenant law. This entire step vindicates Moses authority by noting that God himself commanded Moses to deliver the law to Israel.

This step is introduced in 20:21-26. Here, God instructed Moses to tell Israel his laws for worship — instructions on idols and altars. These verses largely elaborate on the first two of the Ten Commandments. Following this, God instructed Moses to tell Israel the content of the Book of the Covenant in 21:1–23:33.

To understand how the Book of the Covenant was to function in Israel, it's important to note that in Exodus 21:1, God described the Book of the Covenant in this way:

**These are the laws you are to set before them (Exodus 21:1).**

The Hebrew term here translated “the laws” is **הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים** (*hammishpatim*). This term has the connotations of “legal judgments,” or what we might call “case laws.” This designation for the Book of the Covenant gives us a clear orientation toward God’s twofold covenant law through Moses. Essentially, the Ten Commandments functioned as statutory laws, or general legal principles in Israel. And the Book of the Covenant presented legal precedents on a wide variety of topics that Israel’s judges were to follow. Many of these precedents resemble the kinds of laws in the *Code of Hammurabi* and other ancient Near Eastern law codes. These codes and the Book of the Covenant were designed for judges to apply in the courts of their nations.

**The Book of the Covenant has many parallels to other legal codes that we have in the ancient Near East from the late third millennium down into the second millennium B.C. It differs in the sense that it’s in a covenant context. Hammurabi’s code is the most famous of these, the most extensive of these law codes... The way the laws are formulated in the “if-then” pattern — with the “then” usually giving the civil sanction for the situation — is very similar to how the laws are formulated in Exodus 21:1 through, I think, about 22:16, I think it is, in a kind of “if-then” structure, which has been called a casuistic form, a case law form. When we get into the actual details, the differences between ancient Israelite society and the society of ancient Babylon, let’s say, a city-state in Mesopotamia, is very different. A city-state in Babylonia, like Babylon, is a very stratified society, which has free persons, freeborn persons and commoners at another level, and then slaves. It also has a very differentiated economy with different economic roles in the society. There’s a powerful temple complex which plays into the whole economy. The palace, the royal palace is a major factor in the structure of the society. And it’s almost like a feudal society, like we think of in a medieval feudal society. The Israelite society is much more egalitarian, not in a modern individualistic sense, but it’s based on an agrarian economy and a tribal organization for land tenure. So, there isn’t the same distinction, there isn’t the same societal stratification that you find in Hammurabi’s Code, let’s say.**

— Dr. Douglas Gropp

***Ratification of Covenant (24:1-11).*** In the fourth and closing step of Moses' authority and Israel's covenant, Exodus 24:1-11 records the ratification of the covenant. This fourth step completes what began with the initiation of the covenant in Exodus 19:1 through the beginning of verse 8. Note in particular that Exodus 24:3 and 7 both echo 19:8 where Israel repeated in unison their commitment to do all that God commanded.

Beyond this, the last scene of this step describes how the leaders of Israel ascended Mount Sinai, saw God, and ate and drank in wondrous harmony with him. The wonder of this scene of peace and harmony with God was designed to dispel any hesitation the original audience of Exodus may have had. How could they experience peace and harmony with God? Only by acknowledging the abiding authority of God's covenant law through Moses in their own day.

Now that we've explored Moses and Israel's preparation for Canaan at Mount Sinai by looking at Israel's covenant in Exodus 19:1–24:11, we should turn to the last major focus of Exodus. An emphasis on Moses' authority and Israel's tabernacle appears in Exodus 24:12–40:38. These chapters support Moses' abiding authority by focusing on the crucial role he played in establishing God's tabernacle.

### **Israel's Tabernacle (24:12–40:38)**

Most students of the Bible think of Israel's tabernacle as little more than a chapel for worship, but recent archeological discoveries strongly suggest that it was much more than this. It was the custom in ancient Egypt for Pharaohs to go out to battle with their armies. When they did, they lived in elaborate tent structures, mobile palaces as it were. These royal war tents consisted of covered inner and outer rooms that were surrounded by a courtyard. At these tents, armies would do homage to their king and would receive directions from the king. Along these same lines, Exodus presents God's tabernacle as more than a chapel for worship. It was his royal war tent. And as such, it was where the army of Israel did homage to its divine king and where Israel's divine king revealed his directives to the army of Israel.

***Instructions for Tabernacle (24:12–31:18).*** The record of Moses' authority and Israel's tabernacle divides into three main parts. First, Exodus 24:12–31:18 consists of God's instructions to Moses for the tabernacle. God's instructions for the tabernacle begin in Exodus 24:12-18 with God's call for Moses to receive the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. Then God's specific instructions for the tabernacle appear in 25:1–31:17. These instructions give detailed descriptions of the tabernacle's furnishings and architecture. God also dictated guidelines for the personnel and practices of the tabernacle with directives for priests, artisans, and skilled laborers. And he gave direct instructions regarding the weekly Sabbath. The number and length of these details reflect the importance of observing certain protocols at God's royal war tent. Then, after this main body of instructions, we find Moses' successful reception of the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments in Exodus 31:18. This marks the end of God's instructions for the tabernacle.

Now, on several occasions in this section, God explicitly pointed to the fact that his directives were not just for the Israelites at Mount Sinai. They were also for Exodus' second-generation audience. In places like Exodus 27:21; 28:43; 29:9 and 42; 30:21; and 31:16, God used several variations on the phrase, "a lasting ordinance for the generations to come." This indicated how various aspects of his instructions for the tabernacle were to be observed by future generations. Of course, the point of these notations for the original audience was clear. They were to observe God's instructions for the tabernacle in their own day as well.

**There are a number of parallels particularly in the technology of the way the tabernacle is put together as it's described in the book of Exodus, how it can be put together with poles and stands and so on and then be dismantled and carried so that it becomes effectively mobile. There are parallels to that in Egypt in many different periods, but the most outstanding parallel is to the relief of Ramses II in his Battle of Kadesh in the Abu Simbel temple, which commemorates this battle of Kadesh, which he claims to have won but most scholars think he was, sort of, he was lucky to get out alive. But there's a relief on the wall of Abu Simbel which depicts his own tent, his own war tent, and it has the same exact dimensions as the tabernacle with a kind of a square inner room, which must have been his throne room, and then a longer hallway, which was twice as long as the inner room, and outside of that is a rectangular court, much like the rectangular court around the tabernacle. Also, we can see in the relief that his four divisions of his army are placed in the four sides of his camp, much like as is described in the book of Numbers. The tabernacle is surrounded first by the Levites and then by four sets of three tribes on all four directions.**

— Dr. Douglas Gropp

***Failure and Renewal (32:1-34:35).*** After God's instructions for the tabernacle, Moses recounted Israel's failure and renewal at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 32:1–34:35. These chapters divide into three main steps. In 32:1–35, we read of the Israelites breaking their covenant with God by worshiping the golden calf at Mount Sinai. These chapters vindicate Moses' authority because Moses identified himself closely with Israel and interceded for them. At the risk of his own life, Moses mediated and won God's favor toward Israel. And God did not utterly destroy the nation.

Then, the second step of this section, in Exodus 33:1–23, turns to the threat of God's absence. Having agreed not to destroy the nation immediately, God commanded Moses to move forward. But God threatened to remove his presence because he might destroy Israel along the way. But once again, Moses identified himself with the nation, interceded successfully on Israel's behalf, and removed the threat of God's absence.

The third step of this section, in 34:1–35, involves God's covenant renewal with Israel. God confirmed that he would go with Israel toward Canaan by renewing his

covenant. And this chapter exalts Moses as Israel's leader by reporting his effective intercessions during the renewal of the covenant.

***Completion of Tabernacle (35:1–40:38).*** Finally, the section on Moses' authority and Israel's tabernacle closes with the completion of the tabernacle in Exodus 35:1–40:38. These chapters begin with a reminder of the weekly Sabbath in 35:1-3. Then God gave Moses the commission to build and operate the tabernacle in 35:4–39:43. Exodus 40:1-33 depicts the actual building of the tabernacle. The details in these verses demonstrate how the building of the tabernacle, God's royal war tent, conformed perfectly to God's earlier instructions. And this section ends in 40:34-38 with God's blessing on Israel in response to the tabernacle's completion.

This final scene of God's blessing on Israel focuses once again on Moses' authority. It encouraged the original audience to submit to Moses by observing all the protocols of God's tabernacle, so that they too would receive God's blessing. Listen to Exodus 40:36-38, the last verses of the book:

**In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out — until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels (Exodus 40:36-38).**

Moses closed his book with this glorious summation of Israel's travels toward Canaan. He pointed out that God's presence remained because the first generation submitted to Moses' instructions for the tabernacle. The second-generation audience could see God's magnificent presence with their own eyes. And if they hoped to keep God's presence with them as they moved into the conquest of the Promised Land, they would have to submit to Moses' tabernacle instructions — the instructions for the royal war tent of their divine king.

Now that we've explored some initial considerations and the structure and content of Exodus, we should turn to our third main topic: the major themes of this book. What are some of the most important issues in Exodus that impacted the lives of the original audience? And how should these major themes be applied to followers of Christ today?

## MAJOR THEMES

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Throughout this lesson, we've pointed out how the book of Exodus was designed to highlight Moses' abiding authority over Israel. As important as this theme is, we always have to keep in mind that it's not the *only* theme in the book. While these Scriptures do build a case for Moses' authority, they do this by drawing attention to a number of other issues related to this prominent, unifying theme.

**Exodus actually weaves so many different themes other than the authority of Moses together that we could summarize it in many, many different ways. But one of the most helpful strategies to summarize the main themes of the book is to explore how this book emphasizes the kingdom of God. Now, that’s a theme that runs through the whole Bible, and it even reaches its culmination in the New Testament, so it’s an important theme for us to look at in this book. Now, sometimes modern Christians miss this facet of Exodus, but we all know that Exodus deals with the time when God formed Israel into a *bona fide* nation at Mt. Sinai, and the time when he prepared them to become a kingdom in the Promised Land and later, then, throughout the whole world. And so, we can see this emphasis on the kingdom of God in the book, but one of the best ways to see it is to see how Exodus characterizes God. God is a primary character in the book of Exodus, and it has a lot to say about God, but it primarily emphasizes that God is Israel’s king.**

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Exodus is the first book in Scripture to refer *explicitly* to God as king. In Exodus 15:1-18, after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, Moses and the Israelites sang a song to the Lord. The body of the song draws the experiences of the first and second generations of the exodus together. It focuses on God’s past deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and also on Israel’s future success in the conquest and settlement of Canaan. Interestingly, Moses’ last words at the sea draw both the past deliverance from Egypt and the future conquest and settlement of Canaan together under the kingship of God. Listen to Exodus 15:18 where Moses drew his entire praise of God together with these words:

**The Lord reigns for ever and ever (Exodus 15:18).**

As this verse indicates, God’s mighty acts for both generations of the exodus displayed his glory as the divine king of Israel, the one who “reigns for ever and ever.”

In this light, it will be helpful to organize the major themes of Exodus by considering four ways Exodus emphasized God’s kingship in the days of Moses. First, we’ll explore God as Israel’s royal covenant keeper in Exodus 1:1–4:31. Second, we’ll see how Exodus gives special attention to God as Israel’s victorious royal warrior in Exodus 5:1–18:27. Next, we’ll look at the theme of God as the royal covenant lawgiver in Exodus 19:1–24:11. And finally, we’ll consider the theme of God as Israel’s present warrior in Exodus 24:12–40:38. Let’s look at each of these themes, beginning with God as the royal covenant keeper.



### **COVENANT KEEPER (1:1–4:31)**

Although the theme of God as Israel’s royal covenant keeper appears throughout the book of Exodus, it’s primarily emphasized in Exodus 1:1–4:31. These chapters rehearse events from before Moses’ birth to Moses’ rise to leadership over Israel. Listen for instance to Exodus 2:24 where we read:

**God heard [the Israelites’] groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob (Exodus 2:24).**

This verse is important because, apart from a brief note that God blessed the midwives who feared him, this is the first time Exodus mentions God. So, from the outset, Exodus portrayed God as the royal covenant keeper, the one who “remembered his covenant.”

Whenever the Scriptures mention God and his covenants, they implicitly focus on him as Israel’s divine king. During biblical times, God covenanted with people in ways that were similar to how great kings in the ancient Near East made treaties with other nations. Today, we often call these international treaties “suzerain-vassal treaties.” In these treaties, greater kings, or suzerains, established solemn arrangements with lesser kings, or vassals, and their nations. The Israelites understood that, as Israel’s faithful *covenant keeper*, God was also their divine king. And he fulfilled his covenant with Israel’s patriarchs by acting in the days of Moses. So, God’s covenant with Moses wasn’t contrary to his earlier covenants with Israel’s patriarchs. Rather, it was in fulfillment of them. Listen to this emphasis in Exodus 3:14-15 where God revealed his name to Moses.

**I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: “I AM has sent me to you... The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14-15).**

Notice here that God told Moses to identify him to the Israelites in Egypt with three different names: “I AM WHO I AM,” “I AM,” and “the Lord.”

To understand how these names relate to God as the royal covenant keeper, we need understand that all three names are variations of the same Hebrew verb הָיָה (*hayah*). This word is most often translated by some form of the verb “to be.” It’s easy to see that “I AM WHO I AM” — or “I will be who I will be,” as the Hebrew may be translated — and the shorter form, “I am,” or “I will be,” involve first-person forms of this verb. But the name translated “Lord” requires a bit more explanation.

The term “Lord,” translates the so-called divine tetragrammaton, the four-letter Hebrew name of God that is often transcribed “YHWH”. Recent archeological discoveries have indicated that this term should be pronounced “Yahweh.” Yahweh is most often translated “Lord.” But it’s actually a third-person form of the verb “*hayah*” and may be translated, “he is” or “he will be.” In fact, following certain conventions of the Hebrew language, it is likely to mean “he causes to be” or “he will cause to be.” Along these same

lines, “I AM WHO I AM” may be translated, “I *cause* to be what I *cause* to be.” And “I AM” may be translated, “I *cause* to be.”

Assuming this understanding is correct, in these verses the name Yahweh, and these associated names, directly pointed to the fact that God was *causing* his covenant promises *to be*. In other words, he was keeping his covenant promises to Israel’s patriarchs by bringing them to fulfillment.

It isn’t difficult to see why Moses emphasized that God was faithfully fulfilling his covenant promises. In Genesis 15:14, God had promised to deliver Israel from hardship in a foreign land. Moses’ audience needed to know that God was fulfilling this promise in their day. They needed to see that every blessing in their past, present and future was the result of their divine king keeping his covenant with their patriarchs.

In many respects, the same is true for followers of Christ. God keeps the covenants he made with Israel’s patriarchs in *our* past, present and future as well. Passages like Luke 1:68-73 teach us that the final fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham began in the inauguration of Christ’s kingdom, during his first advent. In addition, passages like Galatians 3:15-18 tell us that during the continuation of Christ’s kingdom we must continue to trust in God and his promises to Abraham. Also, verses like Romans 4:13 teach that, at the consummation of Christ’s kingdom, the glorious eternal reward we’ll receive in Christ will be in fulfillment of God’s promise to Israel’s patriarchs.

We are in Christ. Christ is the heir of Abraham’s covenant. And God will not fail to keep his covenant with Abraham. These and similar applications to our world flow out of every passage in Exodus that reveals God as Israel’s covenant-keeping king.

**The book of Exodus demonstrates that God is always faithful to his covenant, because even when the children of Israel rebelled against Moses and they did not honor what God had done with them in the past, God kept his promises to deliver them. God wouldn’t have given up because of their rebelliousness, but he had to achieve the goal that he had set to deliver them. And this goal that God has set for all of us to draw us closer to him. No matter how much distance we walk away from God, God tries and God keeps on drawing us closer to him. No matter how broken we are, he comes closer to us so that he can fix us and so that he can bring us back home. So, the book of Exodus, it’s a reflection of the life that God has called us. And he is there to deliver. In fact, the book of Exodus is the book of delivery. People have fallen and they need to be delivered, and we do that every day. And God does that. He specializes in drawing us closer to him even when we are running away from his grace.**

— Rev. Dr. Cyprian K. Guchienda

In addition to the major theme of God as Israel’s royal covenant keeper, we should note the emphasis on God as Israel’s victorious royal warrior in Exodus 5:1–18:27.

## VICTORIOUS WARRIOR (5:1–18:27)

Archeological discoveries in every major empire of Moses' day show how common it was for divine and human kingship to be linked to victory in war. So, even a slight allusion to God as Israel's victorious warrior was an indication that he was also Israel's victorious king.

We'll look at God as Israel's victorious royal warrior, first, when Moses was in Egypt. Then we'll examine this theme when Moses and the Israelites were in the march from Egypt to Sinai. Let's start with Moses in Egypt.

### In Egypt

This theme appears throughout Exodus, but we can see it especially during Israel's deliverance in 5:1–13:16. God's miraculous judgments against Egypt not only vindicated Moses' authority; they also displayed God's victory as Israel's royal warrior.

In Exodus 12:12, God summed up the significance of his greatest judgment, the judgment of Passover, in this way:

**I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn — both men and animals — and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord (Exodus 12:12).**

Notice that in this verse God declared, "I am the Lord," or "I am [Yahweh]." Here again, God identified himself as the one who remembers his covenant by causing its fulfillment. As Israel's victorious royal warrior, he was going to "strike down every firstborn [of] both men and animals." In other words, he was going to destroy the Egyptians and their society because they had made themselves his enemies. And along with this human emphasis, God would "bring judgment on all the *gods* of Egypt." He would defeat the false gods, the evil spirits that the Egyptians worshiped.

We can see this duality in Yahweh's miraculous judgments against Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Most, if not all, of these judgments also brought victory over one or more of Egypt's false gods. For instance, when Aaron's staff became a snake and swallowed the snakes of Pharaoh's magicians, it wasn't just a victory over Pharaoh. It was a victory over the divine power symbolized by the cobra that decorated Pharaoh's crown. When God turned the Nile to blood, he demonstrated his power over Egyptian gods and goddesses that were associated with the Nile, like Hapi, Sepek, who took the form of a crocodile, Khnum, and Hatmehyt whose symbol was a fish. The plague of frogs displayed God's power over Hekhet, the Egyptian goddess depicted as a human with a frog's head. No Egyptian gods have been conclusively associated with the plague of gnats. But scholars have made a number of suggestions such as Geb, the god of earth. This plague also may have served to humiliate the Egyptian priests and magicians. The plague of flies may have been directed against the god Khepre, who is often represented as a flying beetle. The death of livestock displayed God's power over an assortment of gods depicted as bulls, such as Apis, Buchis, Mnevis, Ptah and Re, as well as Isis, queen

of the gods and Hathor goddess of beauty and love. Both of these goddesses were depicted as cows. The plague of boils was likely a display of God's power over Sekhmet and Imhotep, who were associated with disease and healing. The judgment of hail displayed God's power over Nut, the goddess of the sky and Shu who held up the sky. The locusts were in defiance of Senehem who protected from pests. The judgment of darkness showed Yahweh's power over the great sun god Re, or Amon-Re. Then the closing plague of death for the firstborn was an affront to Min and Isis, deities associated with procreation. As these associations indicate, God's miraculous judgments in Egypt not only demonstrated his victory over his physical enemies, but also over his spiritual enemies, the forces of Satan.

We've seen the theme of God as Israel's victorious royal warrior when Moses was in Egypt. But God's victory over human and spiritual enemies also appears when Moses and the Israelites were in the march to Sinai in Exodus 13:17–18:27.

### **In the March (13:17–18:27)**

Of course, the fact that God led the army of Israel through hardships on the way to Mount Sinai reveals him as Israel's royal warrior. But perhaps the best way to illustrate this facet of Exodus is to turn again to Moses' song at the Red Sea. Listen to Exodus 15:3-4 where Moses sang:

**The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea (Exodus 15:3-4).**

Here Moses explicitly identified Yahweh as "a warrior," and then repeated that "[Yahweh] is his name." This close association between God's name and God as a warrior formed the background of the familiar Old Testament expression "Lord of hosts" or "Yahweh of armies." As his name indicates, God, the royal warrior, causes the hosts or armies to be, and he defeats his enemies. In this case, he overcame "Pharaoh's chariots and his army" by hurling them "into the sea." Then, in Exodus 15:11, Moses also identified the spiritual side of God's victory when he said:

**Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11).**

God's victory not only showed his power over the human army of Egypt, but it also displayed his triumph over all of Egypt's false gods.

**What's it mean that God is a victorious warrior? Well, in the ancient world it basically means that God is the Lord of creation and the true King, and that's exactly what we see in Exodus 15. In 15:11 it asks a great question in this praise: "Who is like the Lord?" And the answer is, no one. There's no one, and specifically, there's no other gods or goddesses that are like God. So this is, when we talk about God being**

**a victorious warrior, this is a powerful statement in a context where there were hundreds of other deities that were vying for the title of God. And basically, what the Bible does is really subtle. It asks the question, “Who is like the Lord?” And the answer is no one, with the point being: You may think there’s other gods, but at the end of the day, there’s only one being who’s worthy of the title God, and that’s the Lord. And then Exodus 15 ends with “The Lord will reign for ever and ever.” And that’s the kind of warrior that we want fighting for us.**

— Dr. Brian D. Russell

The book of Exodus emphasized Yahweh’s victory over Pharaoh and his false gods to give the second-generation audience confidence. God was able to defeat *their* physical and spiritual enemies too. They learned about how God had fought for their forebears in the past. In this way, they also learned how he would give them triumph in the future as they entered the conquest of Canaan.

In much the same way, as Christians learn of God’s great victory in Exodus, we can reflect on what the New Testament teaches about Christ’s victory. In passages like Matthew 12:28 and 29, John 12:31, and Colossians 2:15, the New Testament teaches that Christ acted as our divine royal warrior when he inaugurated his kingdom. But while Jesus defeated Satan and the false gods of the world, he also mercifully offered forgiveness and reconciliation with God to all who would surrender to him.

And, in passages like 1 Corinthians 15:25, Hebrews 1:3 and 1 Peter 3:22, we learn that Jesus is our royal victorious warrior during the continuation of his kingdom. Throughout church history we are to imitate Christ’s strategy of defeating Satan and other evil spirits in the world. And we are to continue to offer forgiveness and reconciliation with God through faith in Christ.

Finally, in passages like 2 Thessalonians 1:6 and 7, Hebrews 10:27, and 2 Peter 3:7, we find that, at the consummation of his kingdom, Christ will return as the divine royal warrior once again. But at his return, Christ’s merciful offer of reconciliation will end. Those who have refused to come to Christ will suffer the same fate as Satan and his minions — the eternal judgment of God.

Having looked at the major themes of God as Israel’s royal covenant keeper and victorious royal warrior, we should turn to a third major theme in Exodus: God as Israel’s royal covenant lawgiver in Exodus 19:1–24:11.

### **COVENANT LAWGIVER (19:1–24:11)**

As we saw earlier, these verses draw attention to Moses’ authority and Israel’s covenant law. In the ancient Near East, people believed that both human and divine kings revealed their wisdom through the laws they gave. So, it wouldn’t have surprised the original audience of Exodus that God was their royal covenant lawgiver. But, for us to recognize how Moses emphasized this theme, it will help to look at *why* God gave his law in the book of Exodus.

Every major Protestant tradition has spoken of three main uses of the law. The first is what's often been called "*usus pedagogicus*," the pedagogical use of the law. New Testament passages like Galatians 3:23-26, Romans 3:20, and Romans 5:20 and 21 teach that God uses the law to incite and expose sin. In this way, human beings are driven to Christ for salvation. Second, Protestants refer to what's sometimes been called "*usus civilis*," the civic or political use of the law. In this use, the law restrains sin in society by the threat of God's punishment. But, as true as these outlooks are to the teachings of Scripture in general, the book of Exodus emphasizes what's been called "the third use of the law." This is sometimes referred to as "*usus normativus*," the normative use, or "*usus didacticus*," the instructive use. In this case, God's law is the norm, or instruction, for those who are already under his grace. So, in the book of Exodus, God gave the law primarily to guide his people, Israel, toward his blessings.

This theme appears in many places in Exodus. But it's especially evident in 19:1–24:11, beginning with the initiation of God's covenant with Israel and continuing through the ratification of the covenant. Listen to Exodus 19:4 where God told the Israelites:

**You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself (Exodus 19:4).**

We see here that even before the Israelites received the law, they'd already experienced God's grace. In verses 5 and 6, God then turned to the requirement of Israel's obedience to the law and the benefits of loyalty. He said:

**Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6).**

Having already received God's grace, Israel would be his "treasured possession," "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" if they obeyed his law. Clearly, God's law wasn't given so that Israel might *earn* their salvation. The law was his gift to his people after he'd already shown them mercy.

A similar pattern appears in Exodus 20:1-17. In 20:2, God initiated the Ten Commandments with a declaration of his benevolence toward Israel, saying:

**I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery (Exodus 20:2).**

Once again, we see that God's mercy preceded his law to Israel. It wasn't until after this declaration that God gave Israel the Ten Commandments. And, as a number of the Ten Commandments state explicitly, Israel would receive blessings for obedience to the law.

**Maybe some people think of the law of God as constrictive and antithetical to grace, but when we look at the way that God gave the law in the Old Testament, we can see that it was a gracious thing for**

**God to give the law in the way that he did. What we see is that God gave the law to his people after he had redeemed them from bondage of slavery in Egypt. As he lead them out and powerfully intervened on their behalf, he then brings them into the wilderness and condescends to them and reveals his plan for how they are to live under the lordship and the kingship of God who is their great King. And so, the law is not something that God required his people to keep in order that he *then* might redeem them. Instead, the law was given *after* God redeemed them from Egypt and shows his people the way that they are to live under the lordship of God as great King, and how they are to live among one another as a redeemed people. And so, whenever you read about the law in the Old Testament, it's already being given in the context of God's gracious condescension to his people.**

— Dr. Brandon D. Crowe

God also exhibited this pattern during the ratification of the covenant. In Exodus 24:1 and 2, he graciously invited the leaders of Israel to come up to him on Mount Sinai. In verses 3-8, the people pledged obedience to the law. And in verses 9-11, the leaders of Israel celebrated the blessing of peace with God, and actually saw God.

For the original audience, this emphasis on the gracious and beneficial character of God's law in the past alerted them to their need to follow God's law in their own time. The law was their gift from God in their current circumstances and in the future as well.

Along these same lines, as followers of Christ, every time we see God's commands to Israel in the book of Exodus, we are to view them as God's gracious and beneficial gift to us in Christ.

Now, we know that in the inauguration of his kingdom, Jesus and his apostles and prophets gave the church new revelations to help us apply Moses' law to our age. But passages like Matthew 5:17, Romans 8:4 and Hebrews 8:10 make it clear that Jesus and his followers didn't discount the authority of Moses' law. And the same is true during the continuation of the kingdom. Today, we must not attempt to obey God's law as if Christ has not come. But we must apply it today in the light of God's further revelation in Christ. And, as we know, when Christ returns at the consummation of his kingdom, his people will be fully sanctified. Then we will obey the perfect law of God, written on our hearts, in the new creation.

We've looked at the major themes in the book of Exodus by exploring God as Israel's royal covenant keeper, as the victorious royal warrior, and as the royal covenant lawgiver. Finally, let's look at the theme of God as Israel's present warrior in Exodus 24:12–40:38.

### **PRESENT WARRIOR (24:12–40:38)**

**The book of Exodus offers a very interesting take on the kingship of the Lord over Israel. Often when people study the Old Testament,**

**they think of Israel’s first king as Saul, and he is the first earthly king, so to speak. But when you read Exodus 19:5 and 6, it talks about Israel being a “kingdom of priests.” Well, you can’t have a kingdom without a king, and so, really, the perspective of Exodus 19:5-6 is that the first king of Israel is actually God himself. And even though God is not incarnate in Christ in the Old Testament, he nevertheless makes himself visible as king and his kingship in Christ visible through these images of the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The tabernacle becomes a symbol of Emmanuel, “God with us.” And so, God’s kingship is visible in these figures and symbols that he gives to Israel by which he shows his own rule and kingship through Christ over Israel.**

— Dr. Don Collett

We see the theme of God’s kingly presence most clearly in Exodus 24:12–40:38. This fourth major division of Exodus focuses on Moses’ authority and Israel’s tabernacle. These chapters rehearse how God gave Moses instructions for the tabernacle, how Israel failed at the foot of Mount Sinai, and how Moses led Israel in the tabernacle’s construction. Each of these events emphasized God’s presence with his people. In Exodus 33:14, God assured Moses:

**My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest (Exodus 33:14).**

The expression “My Presence” in this verse translates the Hebrew noun פָּנִים (*panim*), a term that is usually translated “face.” In a number of passages in Exodus and elsewhere, God’s “face” signifies his special, intense, attentive, and often visible presence with his people.

Although God is omnipresent, he devotes himself to his people in special ways throughout the Bible. In this portion of Exodus, God’s presence resided near and in the tabernacle. As we mentioned earlier in this lesson, the tabernacle was much more than a chapel or a place where Israel held worship services. Israel worshiped God at the tabernacle because it was God’s royal war tent. Much like ancient human kings lived in royal war tents when they led their armies into battle, God took up residence in his tabernacle to lead Israel’s army toward the conquest of Canaan.

Now, in Exodus 32:1–34:35, the presence of God with his people was seriously threatened. In this episode, we learn of Israel’s failure and renewal at Mount Sinai. When God first saw that the Israelites were worshipping the golden calf at Sinai, he threatened to destroy the entire nation except for Moses. But through Moses’ intercession, God relented and only punished those who had sinned. Still, God threatened to remove his presence from his people as they moved forward. But the thought of marching forward without the presence of the divine king was unthinkable. Listen to Exodus 33:15-16 where Moses said to God:

**If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.  
How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your**



**people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? (Exodus 33:15-16).**

Notice here that Moses asked God not to send Israel ahead “if [his] Presence [did] not go with [them].” He sought reassurance that all was right between them. And he asked God not to take away what distinguished them “from all the people on the face of the earth,” namely, God’s presence with them. In Exodus 33:17, God responded in this way:

**I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name (Exodus 33:17).**

It’s no wonder then that Exodus 40:38, the last verse of the book, highlights God’s presence with Israel at the tabernacle:

**So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels (Exodus 40:38).**

**God is present with his people. He’s present with Moses in the bush. He’s present with his people with this pillar of fire and this cloud, guiding them at night with the fire and the cloud during the day. And then as we move into the latter chapters of the book, the parts of the book that often get ignored, God gives them a tent, a tabernacle. And within this tabernacle tent he gives them the Ark of the Covenant, where God’s presence is symbolically there. And the thing I love about this is we see that God is a God who wants to be with his people, which, for me, foreshadows nicely what we encounter in John 1, when it says:**

**The Word became flesh and tabernacled with his people (John 1:14, literal).**

**God in the Old Testament wants to be with his people, and ultimately God sent his Son Jesus to be with his people in the New Testament.**

— Dr. David T. Lamb

The New Testament applies this major theme of God’s special kingly presence to followers of Christ in all three stages of Christ’s kingdom. Passages like Matthew 18:20 and John 2:19-21 explain that in the inauguration of his kingdom, Christ himself was the supernatural royal presence of God with his people. In fact, John 1:14 draws an explicit connection between the tabernacle of Israel and Jesus’ first advent. Listen to this verse:

**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).**

The expression “made his dwelling among us” derives from the Greek term σκηνόω (*skénoó*). The Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, used this same term for the Hebrew verb שָׁכַן (*shákan*) that appears in Exodus for God’s presence in his tabernacle. So, this verse indicates that Christ’s incarnation was God with his people leading them to victory.

In addition, passages like Acts 2:17 and Romans 5:5 teach that when Jesus ascended into heaven, he poured out his Spirit on followers of Christ. So, throughout the continuation of Christ’s kingdom, the Holy Spirit indwells his church. As God filled the tabernacle with his presence, the Spirit fills his people with his special, intense presence that guarantees us of God’s guidance and victory day by day.

And of course, New Testament passages like Revelation 21:3 also teach that Christ’s incarnation and the presence of the Spirit now are but preludes to the wonder of God’s royal presence in the new creation. When Christ returns in the consummation of his kingdom, he will make all things new. And the entire creation will be filled with the visible glory of our present warrior king.

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## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson entitled “An Overview of Exodus,” we’ve introduced some initial considerations to keep in mind, including its author, occasion, original meaning, and modern application. We’ve also explored Exodus’ structure and content by dividing the book into two main divisions. And we’ve looked at a few of the major themes including how several dimensions of God’s kingship are highlighted throughout the book.

The book of Exodus had tremendous significance for its original Israelite audience as they were encamped with Moses on the border of the Promised Land. As the Israelites contemplated the challenges of living for God in their day, Exodus called on them to reaffirm their commitment to Moses as the God-ordained leader of their nation. The book reminded them of Moses’ role in their deliverance from Egypt to Mount Sinai. And it reminded them of how God had prepared them for the Promised Land.

In much the same way, as followers of Christ today, the book of Exodus calls on us to affirm our loyalty to Moses’ authority, but in the light of what God has accomplished in Christ. As much as God did through Moses as the leader of Israel, the book of Exodus shows us how much more God has done through Christ. In Christ, God has forever delivered us from slavery to sin and the dominion of Satan. And in Christ, God has given us the presence of Christ’s Spirit and instructions to guide us. And in this light, the book of Exodus gives us countless opportunities to learn more and more about how we are to follow Christ as he leads us to our eternal inheritance promised in the new heaven and the new earth.

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