

What makes Exodus special?

The name "Exodus" comes from the Greek word meaning "exit" or "the way out." Those who wrote the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) named the book EXODUS to emphasize how God chose Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt. The Hebrew title of the book means "These are the names," a phrase that appears in Genesis 46:8 and lists the names of some of Israel's ancestors. This title emphasizes how EXODUS continues the story of God's people, begun in GENESIS - The Pentateuch.

Why was Exodus written?

EXODUS describes two key events in the history of the people of Israel. The first event is the exodus from Egypt. It begins with the birth of Moses, who, though born a Hebrew, is raised as an Egyptian prince. Only later does he heed God's call to free his own Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. The exodus story includes a description of the great disasters (often called "plagues") that God sent upon the Egyptian people in order to force their king to let the people of Israel leave Egypt. The dramatic escape from Egypt includes the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. All future generations would remember the exodus as the great example of God's saving help.

The second key event in the book occurs at Mount Sinai, where God gives Moses and the people the Ten Commandments and the laws that are to guide how they will worship and live together as God's people. Also included were instructions for making the sacred tent and its furnishings and the priestly clothes. The agreement God made with the people at Sinai was built on the promises God had first made to Abraham (EXODUS 33:1-3; see also GENESIS 12:1-3; 17:1-8). But in order to receive God's promised blessings, the people had to be loyal to God alone and follow God's commands (23:20-33).

What's the story behind the scene?

According to 1 KINGS 6:1, the exodus from Egypt occurred 480 years before the fourth year of King Solomon's reign. Solomon ruled from about 970 to 931 B.C. That would mean that the exodus occurred around 1446 B.C. However, 480 may be a symbolic number for twelve generations (40 years x 12). The small amount of historical evidence that exists (the name Rameses in 1:11) seems to point to Sety I and Rameses II as the Egyptian kings at the time of Israel's slavery and escape from Egypt. This would date the exodus shortly after 1300 B.C.

How is Exodus constructed?

The following outline divides the book into three major sections, based primarily on the location of events.

Moses leads the people out of Egypt (1:1-13:16)

- Troubled times for Israel and Moses (1:1-2:25)
- God chooses Moses (3:1-4:31)
- The God of Israel versus Egypt's king (5:1-11:10)
- Passover and the exodus (12:1-13:16)

Moses leads the people in the desert (13:17-18:27)

- Escape through the sea (13:17-15:21)
- God provides water and food (15:22-17:7)
- Victory in battle and the appointment of judges (17:8-18:27)

Moses and the people at Mount Sinai (19:1-40:38)

- God gives Moses the Law (19:1-24:18)
- God gives instructions for worship (25:1-31:18)
- The people rebel, but God remains faithful (32:1-33:23)
- God's instructions are carried out (34:1-40:38)