

YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS

THE BOOK OF EXODUS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS: THE BOOK OF EXODUS

LESSON 1	<i>the more the people are oppressed, the more they multiply</i>	4
LESSON 2	<i>God hears his people groaning</i>	10
LESSON 3	<i>God reveals his name: 'I AM WHO I AM'</i>	15
LESSON 4	<i>God sends Aaron to help Moses</i>	20
LESSON 5	<i>Pharaoh does not know the LORD</i>	25
LESSON 6	<i>God remembers his covenant</i>	29
LESSON 7	<i>first plague: the Nile is turned to blood</i>	34
LESSON 8	<i>plagues of frogs, gnats, flies & a plague upon the cattle</i>	38
LESSON 9	<i>plagues of boils, hail & locusts</i>	43
LESSON 10	<i>a plague of darkness & a final warning</i>	48
LESSON 11	<i>final plague: death of the firstborn</i>	53
LESSON 12	<i>deliverance through the Red Sea</i>	58
LESSON 13	<i>song of Moses & song of Miriam</i>	64
LESSON 14	<i>manna from heaven & water from the rock</i>	68
LESSON 15	<i>Moses receives wise counsel</i>	74
LESSON 16	<i>God speaks to Moses on the mountain</i>	78
LESSON 17	<i>the Ten Commandments</i>	82
LESSON 18	<i>practical application of the Law of the Covenant</i>	86
LESSON 19	<i>the blood of the covenant</i>	92
LESSON 20	<i>God asks the Israelites to make a sanctuary</i>	97
LESSON 21	<i>holy garments for the priests</i>	102
LESSON 22	<i>consecration of Aaron & his sons</i>	108
LESSON 23	<i>worship instructions; God chooses his artisans</i>	113
LESSON 24	<i>the golden calf</i>	118
LESSON 25	<i>despite the people's sin, the LORD renews his covenant</i>	123
LESSON 26	<i>the people begin constructing the tabernacle</i>	129
LESSON 27	<i>the tabernacle is completed</i>	134
LESSON 28	<i>the glory of the LORD</i>	139
INDEX OF SCRIPTURE CITATIONS		146
INDEX OF TOPICS		151
RELATED CHURCH TEACHING		154
THE PATTERN OF THE TABERNACLE		156

AND GOD SPOKE all these words, saying,
“I AM THE LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.
You shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make for yourself a graven image,
or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth;
you shall not bow down to them or serve them;
for I the LORD your God am a jealous God,
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children
to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,
but showing mercy to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”
—the book of *Exodus* 20:1–6



YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS

THE BOOK OF EXODUS

EXODUS 1:1–22

1¹ These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵All the offspring of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. ⁷But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them.

⁸Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹And he said to his people, “Behold, the sons of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. ¹⁰Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” ¹¹Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹²But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the sons of Israel. ¹³So they made the sons of Israel serve with rigor, ¹⁴and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor.

¹⁵Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” ¹⁷But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. ¹⁸So the king of Egypt called the midwives, and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” ¹⁹The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and are delivered before the midwife comes to them.” ²⁰So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong. ²¹And because the midwives feared God he gave them families. ²²Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”



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THE MORE THE PEOPLE ARE OPPRESSED, THE MORE THEY MULTIPLY

Link to a free lesson video and other study materials at www.turningtogodsword.com.

The Old Testament book of *Exodus* intersperses details pertaining to God's covenant laws with stirring narrative describing how the LORD delivered the descendants of Jacob out of slavery in Egypt. This dramatic account inspired Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 epic religious film *The Ten Commandments*. The first chapter in the book of *Exodus* sets the stage for the birth of Moses, whose arrival on the scene as a male Hebrew baby automatically condemns him to death—yet he survives in the first miraculous event connected to the Exodus. God's commitment to the covenant made with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is an underlying theme in the book, and the LORD's rescue of the sons of Israel (Jacob's descendants) is presented as evidence of God's great love for their forebears.

What situations can you point to in your own life that demonstrate God's love for you? What points to God's unwavering love for all of humanity? From what do you think such great love stems?

1 **Read the book of *Exodus* 1:1–5.** The 70 persons referred to as offspring of Jacob can trace their lineage directly to the patriarch. What reason might the author of the book of *Exodus* have for focusing on Jacob's direct descendants? How did Joseph come to be in Egypt before his family moved there from the land of Canaan? If necessary, refer to the final 14 chapters in the book of *Genesis*.

2 **Read the book of *Exodus* 1:6–7.** What information does this passage suggest about how long the descendants of Jacob had been living in Egypt? What does it disclose about how the Israelites have fared during their sojourn there?

3 **Read the book of *Exodus* 1:8.** Egyptian monarchs at the time of Moses called themselves “pharaohs,” a title that the author of the book of *Exodus* switches to later in this chapter. What might the author of the biblical text mean by recording that there is a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph? Consider whether the author is implying that the pharaoh never had heard of Joseph.

4 **Read the book of *Exodus* 1:9–10.** According to the biblical text, how does Pharaoh regard the sons of Israel who are living in Egypt? What does he fear that the Israelites might do in the event that Egypt were to go to war with another nation? Pharaoh also expresses concern about the Israelites continuing to multiply. Why might the fruitfulness of the Hebrews be of particular concern to Pharaoh? What does this fruitfulness suggest about God's people?

ex•o•dus a way out

The English title for the book of **Exodus** comes from the ancient Greek ἔξοδος (*exodos*), combining *ex-*, meaning “out,” and *-hodós*, meaning “path” or “road.” **Exodus** literally is a “way out.” The biblical text describes how the LORD, through a series of dramatic events, leads the descendants of Jacob out of slavery in Egypt. As important as the original **Exodus** was for the Hebrews, it was equally meaningful later for Jews who saw it as foreshadowing their return from the Babylonian Exile. Christians see it as foreshadowing Jesus leading his followers out of bondage to sin and death and into the new Promised Land of eternal life.

7 Read the book of *Exodus* 1:15–16. In this passage, Pharaoh decides on a new policy regarding the sons of Israel. What is that policy, and how might the Hebrews be expected to react to it? Why might the author have chosen to include the names of the midwives Pharaoh instructed to carry out his policy? Consider why male and female babies are to be treated differently.

8 Read the book of *Exodus* 1:17–19. How do the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah react to Pharaoh’s edict? What does the text suggest is motivating them to behave in a way that might put their lives in danger? How do Shiphrah and Puah respond when Pharaoh questions why they have been allowing male Hebrew babies to live? Consider whether it is likely that Pharaoh considers their explanation to be feasible.

9 Read the book of *Exodus* 1:20–21. The author discloses that God seems to approve of the midwives’ actions. What specifically does God do for the people to indicate his approval? What specifically does he do for the midwives to indicate his approval? What does this suggest about the way in which Christians should respond to issues of life and death in the present day? What problems arise when humanity attempts to take control over life and death?

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE EGYPTIANS?

Most Christians are familiar with events described in the book of *Exodus*, but the familial relationship between the Hebrews and the Egyptians often is overlooked. Descendants of Jacob are Hebrews, taking their name from Eber, great-grandson of Noah’s son Shem. The Egyptians are descendants of Egypt, son of Ham and grandson of Noah. The genealogies of Noah’s sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—are recorded in the tenth chapter in the book of *Genesis*.



GOD IS THE LORD OF LIFE

The book of *Exodus* 1:15–20 recounts the reactions of Hebrew midwives to Pharaoh’s edict that all male Hebrew babies were to be killed. Lurking just under the surface of that edict is the notion that giving birth to a male child is somehow more desirable than bringing a girl baby into the world.

Plenty examples of this sort of thinking continue to beset humanity. Consider what may have prompted Pharaoh to wish to eliminate male Hebrew children but not the females. Why might he have expected such a policy to give him more control over the descendants of Jacob?

There is more to the story. Scripture abounds with instances in which men and women decide to get involved in life-and-death issues without taking God’s will into consideration.

The LORD’S interest in maintaining control over these areas of human existence can be seen as far back as the book of *Genesis* 3:22–24, in which God expels Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden to prevent them eating from the tree of life.

Arrogant human behavior surrounding life-and-death issues also can be seen at work in the present day. In all cases, God is not pleased when humanity ignores the fifth of the Ten Commandments, found in the book of *Exodus* 20:13 and repeated in the book of *Deuteronomy* 5:17: “You shall not kill.”

Paragraph 2258 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* focuses on Catholic teaching: “*Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: No one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.”

In the first chapter in the book of *Exodus*, the midwives who oppose Pharaoh’s edict are rewarded with families, considered a blessing in the ancient world. Shiphrah and Puah also receive the distinction of being among the few women whose names are recorded in Scripture.

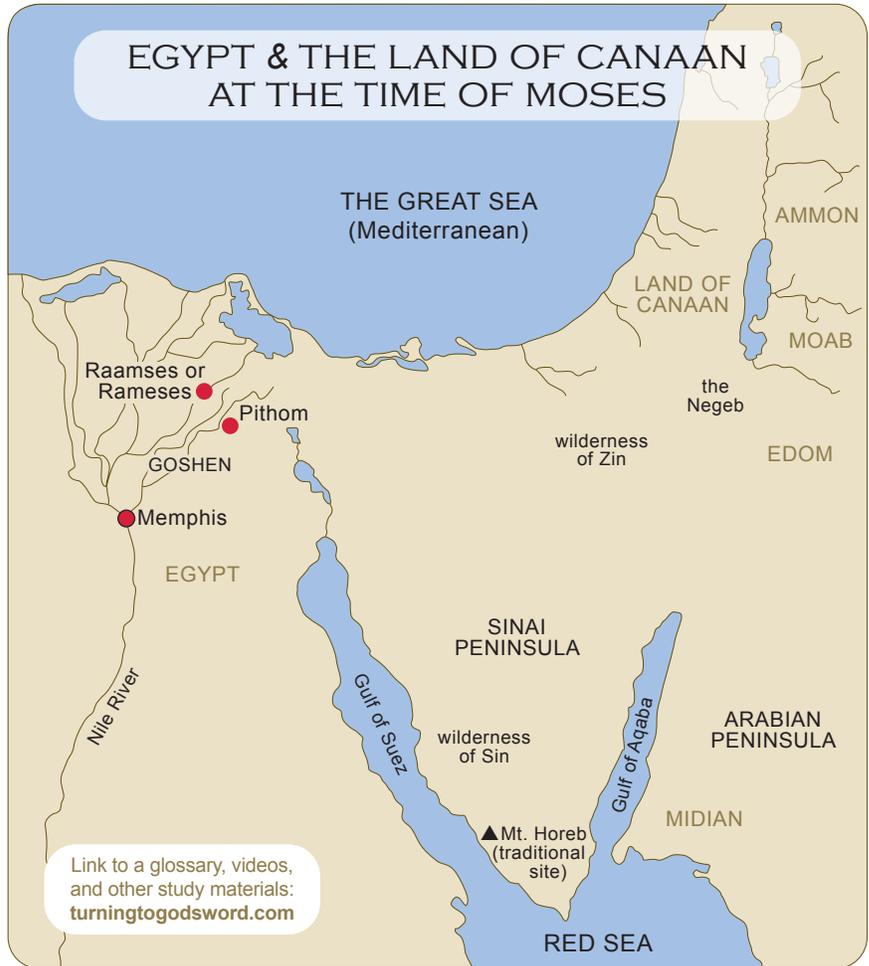


WHEN DID THE EXODUS OCCUR?

The book of *Exodus* 1:8 quickly informs readers that it is set during a time when a new king had arisen in Egypt, one “who did not know Joseph.” Scholars have found it extremely difficult to determine which king (or pharaoh) might be referred to in the opening chapter, making it difficult to pin down an exact date for the events described.

The primary contenders for ruler at the time of the Exodus are Ramses II (often spelled Rameses or Ramesses) or his father, Seti I. Most scholars now think the Exodus began sometime between 1270 and 1250 BC, though a few hold to an earlier date of 1440 BC.

The book of *Exodus* picks up the story of salvation history where the book of *Genesis* left off—with the family of the patriarch Jacob settling in Egypt during a famine. The last 14 chapters in the book of *Genesis* recount how Jacob’s son Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers but then rose to great success in Egypt.



10 Read the book of *Exodus* 1:22. Pharaoh continues his harsh policy against male children born into Hebrew families. Who does Pharaoh now enlist to see to it that Hebrew boy babies are not allowed to live? What does Pharaoh specifically ask be done to these infants? Consider the effect that Pharaoh’s policy would have had on the Israelites living in Egypt.

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF EXODUS?

Authorship of the first five books in the Old Testament traditionally has been attributed to Moses, but the description of Moses’ own death and burial in the book of *Deuteronomy* 34:1–8 presents a logical problem.

In the mid-1800s, biblical scholars postulated that the book of *Exodus*—and the books of *Genesis*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*—may be compilations of four different versions of events. These are labeled J (Yahwist—referring to God as Yahweh or LORD), E (Elohist—referring

to God by the more generic term Elohim), D (Deuteronomist—focusing on the Old Covenant), and P (Priestly—displaying a strong interest in Hebrew liturgy and religious ritual).

Most scholars accept some version of this Documentary Hypothesis, although no ancient documents supporting it have been located. J sections are thought to be the oldest, dating to the 10th or 9th century BC, with E written after 900 BC, D compiled between the 7th and 6th centuries BC., and P added during the 6th and 5th centuries BC.