

Class Notes

Exodus Overview

Exodus 1-40

Dr. Carmen Imes

Join guest instructor Dr. Carmen Imes to explore the structure and main themes of the book of Exodus. Study the impact of God's covenant with Israel to learn what it means when God moves into the neighborhood.

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Module 1: Moses Delivered and Commissioned

SESSIONS 1-6

Examine the context and setting of the exodus event. Learn how the story of Moses sets up the pattern for the rest of the book of Exodus.

Session 1: Exodus and the Exodus

Key Takeaways

- The exodus event establishes and helps define the identity of the community.
- Pay attention to who is named and who is not. The biblical authors illustrate the priorities of the text with details like these.
- Moses' deliverance and commissioning sets the pattern for later events in the book.

Did the Events in Exodus Really Happen?

> "As a constitutive event, the exodus is recognized as an event of such import that the community would not be what it is without its having occurred."
>
> Fretheim, Terence (2010). *Exodus (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*. Westminster John Knox Press.

See: Deuteronomy 26:1-9; Joshua 24:1-28; Isaiah 43:14-21; Psalm 105

When Did the Exodus Happen?

A summary of Nahum Sarna's *Exodus* from the Jewish Publication Society.

15th Century

The argument for dating the exodus to the 15th century is largely based on 1 Kings 6:1, which counts 480 years from the exodus to Solomon's reign. Major challenges to this date arise in that Pharaoh lived at Thebes during that time, 400 miles away, and controlled Canaan.

Perhaps this number is somewhat symbolic, representing 12 generations at 40 years per generation, when in reality the number is considerably smaller.

13th Century

Based on the location of the storage cities being built in Exodus 1:11, some date the exodus to the 13th century when Pharaoh lived near Pithom and Rameses. At this time, Egypt had lost control of Canaan, and the archaeological record attests to the existence of "Israel" as mentioned on Pharaoh Merneptah's Stele (c.1224-11).

But what about the 480 years? Furthermore, geography and archaeology of the conquest don't match exactly.

Which Pharaoh?

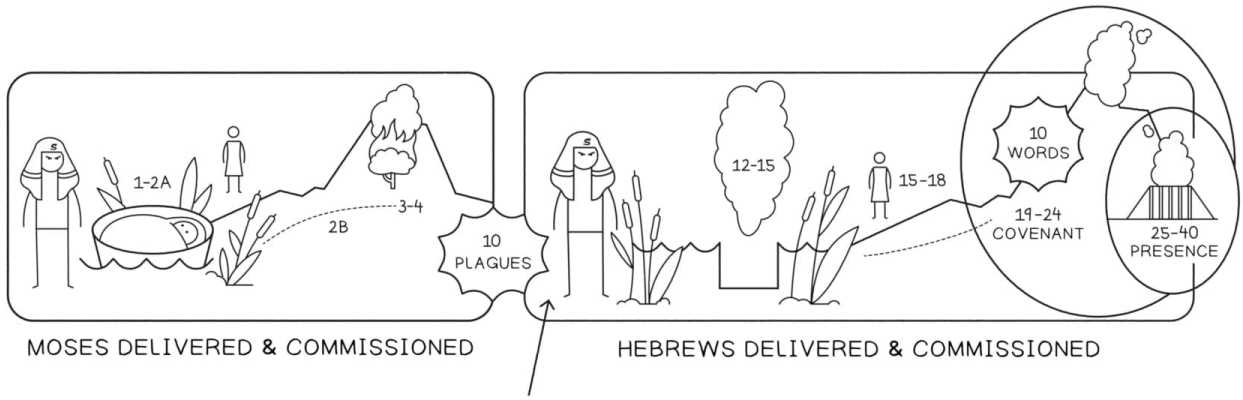
He is unnamed in the text, but pay close attention to whose names we learn.

Note: The mention of Pithom and Rameses in Exod. 1:11 does not solve this, since a scribe could have updated the city names later.

Literary Design of Exodus

Exodus 1-4: The Saga of Moses
- 1-2: Moses delivered from pharaoh
- 3-4: Moses commissioned by YHWH

Exodus 5-40: The Saga of the Hebrews
- 5-18: Hebrews delivered from Pharaoh
  - 5-11: Ten plagues
  - 12-15a: Passover and exodus
  - 15b-18: Wilderness journey
- 19-40: Hebrews commissioned by YHWH
  - 19-24: Covenant
  - 25-40: Presence



Exodus Overview. Illustration created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

Recommended Resource

The Liturgy of Creation: Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context by Michael LeFebvre

Reflection Question

In Exodus 1:1-2:10, who is named, who is unnamed, and why?

Session 2: Proliferation and Oppression

Key Takeaways

- Exodus 1 is littered with vocabulary recalling themes from Genesis.
- Pharaoh, who considers himself a god, inverts the human vocation of being an image bearer who rules with justice and wisdom.
- From the first chapter, Exodus highlights the role of women in resisting injustice.

Creation Echoes

> **Genesis 1:28** Instructor's Translation
>
> Be fruitful [prh] and multiply [rbh], fill [mlʾ] the land [ʾrṣ] and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and over birds of the heavens and over every living creature that roams upon the land.

> **Exodus 1:7** Instructor's Translation
>
> But the children of Israel were fruitful [prh] and they swarmed [šrṣ; cf. Gen. 1:20-21; 9:7] and they increased [rbh] and became very, very [mʾd; Gen. 1:31] numerous, and the land [ʾrṣ] was filled [mlʾ] with them.

Note that in Genesis 1:28, humans are to rule over the fish, birds, and other living creatures. Humans are not commanded to rule over other humans.

Pharaoh's Fear

Pharaoh identifies a challenge to his control—the Israelites outnumber his people (Exod. 1:9). His solution is to keep them from multiplying so that they will not fight him and leave (Exod. 1:10).

His plan to solve this problem takes three forms: harsh labor, murderous midwives, and Nile drowning.

In this chapter, pay attention to who is named and who is not. The Hebrew midwives are named (Exod. 1:15), even though Pharaoh is not. The midwives' courage in defying Pharaoh is remembered for all time.

Come, Let Us

Pharaoh repeats the arrogance of the brick makers in Genesis 11, whose city and tower tried to establish their own fame and avoid being "scattered" (Gen. 11:3-4). God has already demonstrated his commitment to opposing the proud. In response, God will reverse (Exod. 6:1) Pharaoh's oppressive policies (Exod. 5:12).

Store Cities

The building of מסכנות (*mishkenot*) in Exodus 1:11 mirrors the building of the משכן (*mishkan,* the tabernacle) in Exodus 25-40. These were likely warehouses with supplies for Pharaoh's funerary cult, ensuring that Egyptians would worship him long after his death. YHWH calls the people to build a tabernacle to worship him instead.

Reflection Question

Reflect on the vocabulary links between Exodus 1 and earlier Genesis stories. How would you describe the way that Exodus 1 recalls earlier stories?

Session 3: Delivering the Deliverer

Key Takeaways

- Moses' deliverance in the reeds anticipates Israel's deliverance through the Sea of Reeds.
- Moses' deliverance through the waters of the Nile echoes Noah's deliverance through the waters of the flood.
- Seeing things the way God sees them, as the key women in this narrative do, is a first step toward trusting God and acting the way he does.

A Tale of Three Daughters

In chapter 2, three daughters introduce a theme of "seeing" that connects back to Genesis and carries on throughout Exodus.

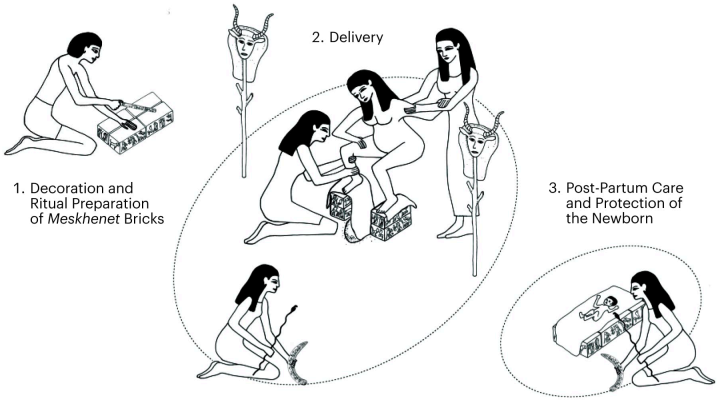
- The daughter of Levi "saw that he was good" (Exod. 2:2).
- The baby's sister "stood at a distance to see what would happen to/for him" (Exod. 2:4).
- The daughter of Pharaoh "saw the basket ... saw the baby ... and felt sorry for him" (Exod. 2:5-6).

Language of seeing punctuates the following chapters as God looks on the Israelites in compassion (Exod. 2:25), sees their misery and suffering (Exod. 3:7), and sees the way the Egyptians are oppressing them (Exod. 3:9).

Delivery Stool or Birthing Bricks?

In Exodus 1:16, the word *abnayim* translates to "two stones." This term has been interpreted several ways. It could refer to:

- Birthing equipment: See Jeremiah 18:3 (potter's wheel)
- Genitalia: This would be the only such occurrence
- Birthing stool: Possible, but Pharaoh's instruction in verse 16 would be strange
- Ritual bricks: See Josef Wegner, "Tradition and Innovation: The Middle Kingdom" on birthing bricks used as a stool and then rearranged for a newborn ritual



Reconstruction of the Practice of Childbirth During the Late Middle Kingdom. Wegner, Josef (2010). Tradition and Innovation: The Middle Kingdom. Academia.edu.

Women Delivering the Deliverer

Midwife, mother, sister, daughter, wife—each woman courageously defies Pharaoh by working within her sphere of influence to resist injustice.

- Shiphrah and Puah (the midwives)
- The boy's mother
- The boy's sister
- The daughter of Pharaoh
- The maidservants of Pharaoh's daughter
- Zipporah (chapter 4)

Pharaoh had "let the girls live" (Heb. *hayah;* Exod. 1:16, 22) but women became his greatest threat. Their "liveliness" (Heb. *hayeh*) was the reason they kept bearing sons (Exod. 1:19).

Reflection Question

Reflect on the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:5-6 and compare it to the description of Yahweh's compassion in Exodus 2:25. How does this illustrate the possibility of human participation in God's work?

Session 4: Becoming Moses

Key Takeaways

- Moses' naming foreshadows his role as deliverer, but it also embraces the ambiguity of his identity.
- When God identifies himself, he also solidifies Moses' identity.

Naming Moses

Moses' name presents readers with several interpretive possibilities. In Hebrew, Moses means "one who draws out." This speaks of both his deliverance by the hand of Pharaoh's daughter and his role as God's chosen deliverer. However, in Egyptian, Moses means "son of ..." potentially drawing attention to ambiguity surrounding Moses' identity.

Who Is Moses?

The beginning chapters of Exodus wrestle with questions about Moses' identity. How is he identified in the first two chapters? How does Moses' commissioning clarify his identity? Ultimately, God speaks the words that settle the questions about Moses' identity. "I am the God of your father, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob" (Exod. 3:6).

Moses and the Betrothal Scene Pattern

> "M. expands on the five-element betrothal type-scene identified by Robert Alter in the OT. He identifies seven additional typical elements that help constitute a larger betrothal journey narrative in which the betrothal type-scene is situated. The full pattern comprises the following elements: (1) a groom-to-be travels to a foreign land; (2) he meets (a) young woman/women at a well; (3) someone draws water; (4) the suitor gives a gift or performs an ingratiating service; (5) the suitor reveals his identity; (6) someone rushes with news of his arrival to the woman's family; (7) the family responds with a greeting/invitation; (8) a betrothal is arranged; (9) the suitor resides with the woman's family; (10) the suitor returns home; (11) he is received by his kin at journey's end; and (12) the suitor resides with his kin. Next, M. shows how the pattern is creatively adapted in various stories in OT, Intertestamental, and NT literature, including narratives about Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Ruth, Saul, David, the entire story of Tobit, and the encounter of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in the Fourth Gospel. Interpretation of these narratives is informed by recognition not only of their conformity to the pattern but also their innovative use of it."
>
> Abstracted by: William J. Urbrock for *Old Testament Abstracts*

For further discussion of this topic, see Martin, Michael W. (2008). “Betrothal Journey Narratives.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly 70*. 505-23.

Moses’ Hybrid Identity

For further discussion of Moses’ hybrid identity, see Mbuvi, Amanda. “Multicultural Moses: Reexamining and Icon.” *Biblical Archaeology Review Volume 45, (no. 4-5)*. 16-18.

Reflection Question

How does Moses’ commissioning clarify his identity?

Session 5: Commissioning Moses

Key Takeaways

- Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai are two names for the same “mountain of God.”
- The burning bush is a rich symbol with many layers of literary and theological meaning.
- The identity of Yahweh doesn’t hang on the meaning of the name but on the demonstration of his character.

Horeb vs. Sinai

In Exodus 3:1, Moses is tending flocks when he comes to “Horeb, the mountain of God.” Yet when the Israelites gather to worship God, the mountain is called Sinai. Exodus 3:12 coordinates the two locations, demonstrating that these are two names for the same place. These names could reflect different sources, interchangeability, or a name change over time.

Horeb

Possible explanations for the use of the name Horeb include:

- The name of a wider area (Exod. 17:1-7)
    - However, it is once called “Mount Horeb” (Exod. 33:6)
- Wordplay with *hereb*, the word for “sword” (Exod. 32:27)

Sinai

Possible explanations for the use of the name Sinai include:

- The whole desert (i.e., synecdoche, Exod. 19:1)
- May be a new name for the mountain
- Wordplay with seneh-bush (Exod. 3:2-3)

Literary Significance of the Burning Bush

God's concern for Israel frames Moses' encounter at the burning bush (Exod. 2:23-35 and 3:6-10). One image this literary frame creates is that of the bush representing Israel in the midst of fiery oppression in Egypt (cf. “iron furnace” in Deut. 4:20; 1 Kgs. 8:51; Jer. 11:3-4). Though they are in the flames, they will not be consumed.

For more information, see Janzen, J. Gerald (2003). "And the Bush Was Not Consumed." *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 31. 219-25.



O'Keefe, Seraphim (2020). Mural for the Burning Bush Chapel of St. John of the Ladder in Greenville, South Carolina. Orthodox Media.

In this mural by Seraphim O'Keefe for the Burning Bush Chapel of St. John of the Ladder, the Virgin Mary holds her hands in a prayer position that makes her like a chalice to receive Christ's flesh and blood. Moses' two encounters with God at Sinai, in which God revealed his name and his commands, frame the icon.

This icon reflects a centuries' old tradition of associating the burning bush with Mary (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa). She, too, had the glory of God within her, but it did not consume her.

For more information, see Davis, Ellen F. (2001). *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*. Cowley. 45-49.

The Call of Moses

God calls Moses' name twice, "Moses, Moses," mirroring the call of Abraham, Jacob, and Samuel (see Gen. 22:1-11, 31:11; 46:2; and 1 Sam. 3:4). Moses' response, "Here I am," indicates his full availability and commitment to God.

The Name of God

God reveals his name to Moses in three statements.

- God said to Moses, "I will be whoever I will be (*'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh*)."
- And he said, "This is what you shall say to the Israelites, 'I will be' (*'ehyeh*) has sent me to you."
- And God spoke again to Moses, "This is what you shall say to the Israelites: 'YHWH (*yahweh*), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob has sent me to you.' This is my name in perpetuity, and this is how I am to be invoked from generation to generation."

These three statements create anticipation by gradually unveiling the personal name of God. God will flesh out the meaning of his name by acting on their behalf (see Exod. 34:6-7).

For more information, see Surls, Austin (2017). "Making Sense of the Divine Name in the Book of Exodus: Etymology to Literary Onomastics." *Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement*, 17. Eisenbrauns.

Knowing YHWH's Name: Three Possibilities

Why does Moses ask God's name?

1. No one knew YHWH's name before this.

- References to YHWH in Genesis could reflect a later perspective.
- But 4:1 presumes that the name will be "verifiable" (see also Gen. 4:26).

2. Moses did not know YHWH's name. Pharaoh's daughter raised Moses, so this is possible.
3. Moses is confirming the divine identity. In a polytheistic context, Moses needed verification.

Moses' Objections and YHWH's Responses

- God responds to each of Moses' objections.
- Who am I? (Exod. 3:11) — I will be with you.
- Who are you? (Exod. 3:13) — I will be whoever I will be.
- What if they don't believe me? (Exod. 4:1) — What is this in your hand?
- I am clumsy-mouthed. (Exod. 4:10) — I will be with your mouth.
- Send someone else. (Exod. 4:13) — What about Aaron, your brother?

Reflection Question

Reflect on Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. What do you notice that you had not seen before?

Session 6: Confronting the Firstborn

Key Takeaways

- Moses' return to Egypt in Exodus 4:18-31 is a tightly constructed literary unit that creates the first part of a frame to Israel's deliverance story.
- Zipporah's intervention delivers Moses' life. This carries forward the theme of women delivering the deliverer.
- Moses' identity as a covenant member is solidified in this story. He could not lead Israel in obedience to Yahweh when he was not compliant to Yaweh's instructions himself.

Textual Unity

Exodus 4:18-31 is a tightly constructed literary unit with an important literary function.

- Mention of the *htn*, or relative by marriage (4:18; 4:25-26)
- Commission of Moses and Aaron (4:19; 4:27)
- Firstborn of YHWH and Pharaoh (4:22-23)
- Pharaoh and YHWH sought to kill Moses (4:19; 4:24)
- YHWH would kill Pharaoh's son and Moses' son (4:23-24)
- YHWH's and Aaron's encounter (פגש) with Moses (4:24; 4:27)
- Moses' intention to see his brothers and Moses and Aaron's arrival in Egypt (4:18; 4:27-31)

Literary Function

- The conversation with Jethro frames Israel's deliverance story (Exod. 4:18; 18:7).
- The women delivering Moses frame Moses' deliverance story (1-2; 4:24-26).
    - Zipporah (צפרה) sounds like Shiphrah (שפרה) in Hebrew.
- Circumcision anticipates Passover (4:24-26; 12:8, 12-13).
    - Both rituals protect from YHWH killing the firstborn.
    - In both rituals, blood is applied by "touching" (נגע; 4:25; 12:13, 22-23).

> "Once again it is a woman who, by her quick-wittedness and insight, saves Moses. [Zipporah] stands in the train of the midwives, Moses' mother and sister, and the daughter of Pharaoh. Moses owes his very life to a series of actions by women, two of them non-Israelites. ... Moses is thus revealed as one who does not himself stand without need of mediation with God."
>
> Fretheim, Terence (2010). *Exodus (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*. Westminster John Knox Press. 80-81.

Theological Function

Moses' near-death experience sounds like Jacob's and like Balaam's.

Genesis 32: Jacob	Exodus 4: Moses	Numbers 22: Balaam
Left father-in-law	Left father-in-law	
Journeyed to meet brother with wives and sons	Journeyed to meet brother with wife and sons *on donkey*	Journeyed to the Israelites *on a donkey*
Encountered God where he spent the night with an uncertain reception	Encountered God (*angry*) where he spent the night with an uncertain reception	Encountered God (*angry*) with an uncertain reception
Left with his staff	Took his staff	Took his staff
Spared by the angel who spoke to him	Saved by his wife who spoke to him	Saved by his donkey who spoke to him
Left encounter injured	Left encounter injured and with bloodied "feet"	Left encounter injured with a crushed foot
Met and kissed his brother	Met and kissed his brother	

Theological Function of Exodus 4:24-25. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

An Enigmatic Scene

Moses' encounter with God on the way back to Egypt is filled with ambiguities and raises many questions.

- Who is YHWH trying to kill, Moses or Gershom?
- Why would YHWH try to kill Moses right after commissioning him?
- Why is Moses entirely passive in this story?
- Why had Moses not already circumcised his son?
- Was Moses already circumcised?
- How did Zipporah know what to do?
- Whose "feet" does Zipporah touch with the foreskin? Her son's? Moses'? YHWH's?
- Is this a reference to actual feet or a euphemism for male genitalia (cf. Deut. 28:57; Isa. 6:2, 7:20)?
- Who drew back from whom after she performed the ritual?
- What does her statement mean?

Unlocking the Enigma

Zipporah's statement: "you are a blood relative" (חתן־דמים אתה לי) uses the same root *ḥtn* that means "father-in-law" in 4:18. The basic meaning is kinship by marriage. In his article, "'Lest Ye Perish in the Way': Ritual and Kinship in Exodus 4:24-26," Christopher Hays argues, "through this ritual, Zipporah claims her family's relationship to the Divine Kinsman, YHWH" (Hays, 2017).

No matter who Zipporah circumcised, whose "feet" she touched, and to whom she spoke, her ritual action and statement resolved the uncertainty of their covenant status. YHWH announced his intention to kill the firstborn of Egypt; now Moses' family is fully identified with the descendants of Abraham.

Circumcision

Circumcision is the incision or complete removal of the foreskin, and in the Bible it is the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14). Other cultures practiced circumcision at puberty or marriage, but the Israelites performed it on the eighth day after birth for every male community member, even foreigners (Exod. 12:48).

Circumcision was not practiced on the wilderness generation (see Josh. 5:5)! God's people had failed to circumcise their sons on the way and died in the wilderness. Joshua rectified their oversight by acting as Zipporah had done, circumcising the "sons of Israel" with flint knives to ensure their covenant status.

Reflection Question

Do you still have any questions about the enigmatic scene in Exodus 4:24-25?



Module 2: Exodus from Egypt

SESSIONS 7-14

Walk scene-by-scene through the dramatic confrontation between Yahweh and Pharaoh. Reflect on how God's justice and mercy work together through these challenging passages containing the 10 plagues.

Session 7: Let Them Go!

Key Takeaways

- The purpose of the release of the Israelites is for them to worship Yahweh.
- The purpose of the confrontation is that the nations will know Yahweh.

Signs

God gives Moses four signs that demonstrate Moses is God's chosen representative.

- Return to the mountain (Exod. 3:12)
- Staff into snake (Exod. 4:2-5)
- Diseased hand (Exod. 4:6-8)
- Water to blood (Exod. 4:9)

Pharaoh was often depicted with a shepherd's staff and a snake headdress, representing a goddess of lower Egypt. Snakes were associated with royal authority.

Moses' staff would confirm his authority to Pharaoh and initiate five plagues, part the Sea of Reeds, bring water from a rock, and decide the battle against Amalek.



Andreas F. Voegelin, Antikenmuseum Basel, and Sammlung Ludwig (2010). Golden Coffin. NBC News.

King Tutankhamun with rod/staff and flail/whip and snake headdress.

With a Mighty Hand and an Outstretched Arm

The phrase “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” appears throughout the Hebrew Bible in reference to God’s show of power in delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

- Mighty hand: Exodus 6:1; 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 14:31
- Outstretched arm: Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2; 26:8; Jeremiah 32:21

> **Deuteronomy 26:8** NIV
>
> So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders.

The use of this phrase challenges the common depiction of the Pharaoh as the one with a “mighty hand and outstretched arm.”



Anonymous. Palette of Narmer (31-30 B.C.E.). Wikimedia.

Narmer Palette, detail (2 ft. tall). Pharaoh Narmer, followed by his sandal bearer, is smiting the head of a foe. The “mace-pose” was standard for over 3,000 years in Egypt. See the Khan Academy article on the Narmer Palette for more information.

Purpose of Release

The expressed purpose for the release of the Israelites is that they might worship and serve God.

> **Exodus 5:1** Instructor's Translation
>
> YHWH, the God of Israel, says this: “Send away my people, **that they may celebrate a festival in my honor in the wilderness**.”

This is the first prophetic announcement in the Bible, following the standard format, “Thus says YHWH” (cf. Exod. 7:16, 8:1).

Purpose of Confrontation

Pharaoh refuses God's demands because he does not know who YHWH is. The purpose of the confrontation is to demonstrate to Egypt and the rest of the world who YHWH is.

> **Exodus 5:2** **Instructor's Translation**
>
> But Pharaoh said, "**Who is YHWH** that I should listen to his voice by sending Israel away?
> **I do not know YHWH**, and furthermore I will not send Israel away." "Let my people go!"

Let My People Go

There are two main ways the text expresses the demand for the release of the Israelites: שלח ("send away"; *piel*) and הלך ("let go"; *hiphil*).

You Will Know that I am YHWH

In six of the ten plagues, God makes his purpose clear—that "you will know that I am YHWH."

- Blood: "By this you will know that I am YHWH" (Exod. 7:17)
- Frogs: "so that you may know there is no one like YHWH" (Exod. 8:10)
- Flies: "so that you will know that I, YHWH, am in this land" (Exod. 8:22)
- Hail: "so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth" (Exod. 9:14)
- Hail: "so you may know that the earth is YHWH's" (Exod. 9:29)
- Locusts: "that you may know that I am YHWH" (Exod. 10:1-2)
- Firstborn: "you will know that YHWH makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel" (Exod. 11:7)

Reflection Question

What is the purpose of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh?

Session 8: Signs and Wonders

Key Takeaways

- The plagues function symbolically as de-creation.
- The plagues point beyond themselves to later events in Exodus.
- The plagues serve as a warning and reminder of the disastrous non-life state outside the people's covenant relationship with Yahweh.

Literary Patterning in the Plague Narrative

Plague #	Forewarning	Timing	Command
1	Yes	"In morning"	Station self
2	Yes	None	Go to Pharaoh
3	None	None	None
4	Yes	"In morning"	Station self
5	Yes	None	Go to Pharaoh
6	None	None	None
7	Yes	"In morning"	Station self
8	Yes	None	Go to Pharaoh
9	None	None	None
10	Yes	None	None

Literary Pattern of the Plague Narrative. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

The Plagues as an Attack on Egypt's Gods?

The suggestion that each plague confronts a particular Egyptian god is an argument from silence. Many of the connections are quite weak. However, the plagues were clearly an affront to the order of Egyptian society and worship, especially to the very important concept of ma'at that governed Egyptian society. Ma'at is the ancient Egyptian concept of truth, balance, order, harmony, law, morality, and justice.

The Plagues as Natural Chain-Reaction Disasters?

The suggestion that the plagues were naturally occurring phenomena related to each other in a chain reaction is intriguing, but cannot account for all the plagues. Furthermore, it does not acknowledge the text's claim that each plague miraculously started and stopped at Moses' command.

The Plagues as Un-Creation

The literary design and repetition of themes suggests that the plagues are presented as a form of un-creation.

- Chaos in place of order
- Loss of dominion over creatures
- Boundaries erased between domains
- Creation no longer "good"

The Plagues as Signs of Judgment to Come

In "The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster" from *What Kind of God?*, Terence E. Fretheim identifies links between the plagues and the sea crossing in which the plagues "point beyond themselves toward a disastrous future" (Fretheim, 2015).

- Moses' staff "swallows" Egyptians' staffs, and Egyptians "swallowed" by the sea
- Water of the Nile turns to blood, and Egyptian armies killed in the sea
- Frogs "covered" the land, and the sea "covered" the Egyptians
- Dead frogs piled up, and dead Egyptians piled up
- Not one fly remained, and not one Egyptian remained
- Locusts driven into the sea, and Egyptians driven into the sea

The Plagues as Signs of Deliverance

Fretheim also notes that the narrator tells the story in such a way that we are invited to compare YHWH's treatment of the Egyptians and the Israelites (Fretheim, 2015).

- "They could not drink the water" (Exod. 7:24; 15:23)
- "Raining" hail vs. "raining" bread (Exod. 9:18; 16:4)
- "Came up and covered the land" (Exod. 10:14-15; 16:13)

The Plagues as a Warning

> **Deuteronomy 28:58-60** NIV
>
> 58 If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name—the LORD your God— 59 the LORD will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses. 60 He will bring on you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you.

Reflection Question

Reflect on the plagues as a form of de-creation. How does this help you connect Exodus to Genesis? How does this set up what is yet to come in the rest of Exodus?

Session 9: Hard Heart

Key Takeaways

- Pharaoh's heart is described in two ways: heavy, implying that he was guilty of injustice, and hard, meaning “resolute.”
- God knew Pharaoh would resist, but he gave him many chances. Pharaoh’s evil reaches a point of no return, so God bends Pharaoh’s evil to his purposes and lures him into his own destruction.

Pharaoh’s Heart: Two Views

Heavy Heart = Guilty

YHWH co-opts an Egyptian concept expressed in the Book of the Dead where the gods weigh a dead person’s heart on a balance against a feather. A heart heavier than the feather is guilty of injustice. YHWH finds Pharaoh guilty by his own standards.



Papyrus of Hunefer (1275 B.C.E.). Wikimedia.

“Judgment scene from the Book of the Dead. In the three scenes from the Book of the Dead (version from 1275 B.C.E.) the dead man (Hunefer) is taken into the judgment hall by the jackal-headed Anubis. The next scene is the weighing of his heart, with Ammut awaiting the result and Thoth recording. Next, the triumphant Hunefer, having passed the test, is presented by the falcon-headed Horus to Osiris, seated in his shrine with Isis and Nephthys” (British Museum).

Hard Heart = Resolute

As in Hebrew, the Egyptian concept of a hard heart is not "cruel" but "resolute". YHWH inverts the positive Egyptian concept of stoutheartedness and shows that Pharaoh's ideals are contrary to YHWH's. Pharaoh fails to define good and evil on YHWH's terms.

Who Is Doing What Kind of Hardening?

	קשׁה (*qšh*) ≈ hard	חזק (*ḥzq*) ≈ strong	כבד (*kbd*) ≈ heavy
Commission		**4:21 Yahweh > Pharaoh (future)**	
Second Commission	**7:3 Yahweh > Pharaoh (future)**		
Staff > Snake		7:13 Pharaoh (*qal*)	
Nile > Blood		**7:22 Pharaoh (*qal*); "he would not listen"**	**7:14 Pharaoh (state; adj); "he refuses"**
Frogs			**8:15[11] Pharaoh > Pharaoh**
Gnats		**8:19[15] Pharaoh (*qal*); "he would not listen"**	
Flies			**8:32[28] Pharaoh > Pharaoh**
Cattle (Plague)			**9:7 Pharaoh (state; *qal*); "he did not send away the people"**
Boils		**9:12 Yahweh > Pharaoh**	
Hail		9:35 Pharaoh (*qal*)	**9:34 Pharaoh & Servants > Pharaoh & Servants**

Theological Function of Exodus 4:24-25. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

	קשׁה (*qšh*) ≈ hard	חזק (*ḥzq*) ≈ strong	כבד (*kbd*) ≈ heavy
Locusts		**10:20 Yahweh > Pharaoh**	**10:1 Yahweh > Pharaoh & Servants**
Darkness		**10:27 Y > Pharaoh**	
Death of Firstborn		**11:10 Yahweh > Pharaoh**	
Firstborn Consecrated	**13:15 when Pharaoh > Pharaoh (summary)**		
Sea of Reeds		**14:4 Yahweh > Pharaoh (future)**	
Sea of Reeds		**14:8 Yahweh > Pharaoh**	
Sea of Reeds		**14:17 Yahweh > Egyptians (future)**	

Theological Function of Exodus 4:24-25. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

- Generally speaking, causation shifts from Pharaoh to YHWH. (Exception: Hail falls in the second group of five, but Pharaoh and his servants make their hearts heavy.)
- Pharaoh never makes his own heart "strong" (resolute), he always makes it "heavy" (guilty).
- YHWH only makes Pharaoh's heart "heavy" (guilty) once. YHWH almost always makes it "strong" (resolute).
- YHWH and Pharaoh each make his heart "hard" once.

Pharaoh's Heart in the Literary Design of Exodus

Plague 1	**Plague 4**	**Plague 7**
חזק כבד שׁלח	כבד שׁלח	חזק כבד שׁלח

Pharaoh's Heart in the Literary Design of Exodus. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

In the morning Forewarning Magicians Staff Did not listen	In the morning Forewarning Did not send	In the morning Forewarning Stretch hand Staff Did not send Never before
Plague 2 כבד שלח Forewarning Magicians Staff Did not listen	**Plague 5** כבד שלח Forewarning Did not send	**Plague 8** חזק כבד שלח Forewarning Stretch hand Did not send Never before
Plague 3 חזק Magicians Staff Did not listen	**Plague 6** חזק Did not listen	**Plagues 9/10** חזק חזק הלך שלח Forewarning (#10) Stretch hand Did not send Never before

Pharaoh's Heart in the Literary Design of Exodus. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

- Pharaoh imposes “heavy” labor and ends up “heavy-hearted.”
- Moses “strengthens” the snake, while YHWH “strengthens” Pharaoh (Exod. 4:4, 21).
- YHWH sends “heavy” swarms of flies, plague on livestock, hail, and locusts in response to Pharaoh’s “heavy heart” in those episodes (*lex talionis*).
- Even in passages where causation of the heavy/strong heart is not explicit, the context makes clear that Pharaoh is at fault (Exod. 7:14; 9:7; 7:22; 8:19[15]).
- The heavy heart goes with inaction, while the strong heart goes with refusal to listen.
- YHWH’s “strong arm” overcomes Pharaoh’s “strong heart” (Exod. 6:1; 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 14:31).
- YHWH’s “glory” (heaviness) outweighs Pharaoh’s “heavy heart” (Exod. 14:4, 17-18).

Does Pharaoh Lose Free Will?

> “Exodus gives no sign that Pharaoh longed to submit to Yahweh as his sovereign and was prevented from doing so; he received numerous rebukes, explanations, and commands that imply opportunity to submit.”
>
> Coover-Cox, Dorian (2006). “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart in Its Literary and Cultural Contexts.” *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 163.

Reflection Question

Do you find any of the explanations from this session helpful in wrestling with God hardening Pharaoh’s heart?

Session 10: Passover Ritual

Key Takeaways

- The instructions for celebrating the Passover ritual initiate the opportunity for later generations to participate in the events of Israel's founding story.
- The Hebrew word *pesach*, often translated "passover," can also be translated as "protect," and this translation seems to fit the Exodus 12 event most accurately.
- Exodus gives us an interpretive lens through which we see God working for the liberation of the oppressed so that the world will know who he is.

The Literary Function of the Passover

Why interrupt an epic narrative with ritual? Performative ritual allows every generation of Israelites to participate in this foundational event and make it part of their own story.

> "The historical event is at one and the same time a liturgical event."
>
> Fretheim, Terence E. (2010). *Exodus (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*. Westminster John Knox Press. 136.

Passover

This event initiates a new calendar (Exod. 12:2). It is a new creation event, fulfilling God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16.

Translating Passover

What is the Passover? Has the word "passover" been mistranslated? According to the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, the verb פסח (*pasach*) can mean:

1. Pass over, spare (?)
2. Limp, leap
3. Protect (?)

The third meaning seems most appropriate in these contexts.

> **Exodus 12:23** **Instructor's Translation**
>
> And YHWH will pass through [unrelated word] to strike the Egyptians and will see the blood upon the lintel and the two door posts. And YHWH will פסח **the doorway** and **will not allow the destroyer to enter your**

> **house to strike you**.

> **Isaiah 31:5** Instructor's Translation
>
> Like swooping birds, thus will YHWH of hosts protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver, פסח **and rescue**.

Who Can Participate in the Passover?

God gives restrictions in Exodus 12:43-49 based on covenant lines, not on ethnicity. Circumcision is the approved sign of covenant membership.

The Firstborn Belong to YHWH

YHWH's claim on the firstborn of Egypt extends to the Israelites as well. Every firstborn belongs to him and must be sacrificed (in the case of animals) or redeemed (in the case of children) for five shekels (Num. 18:15).

Wilda Gafney argues that this law includes daughters as well as sons. Although Exodus 12 verses 12 and 15 specify only male animals are to be sacrificed or redeemed, the language for humans is arguably generic (*bekhor, 'adam, beney Israel*). For more information, see Gafney, Wilda C. (2017). *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Exodus and Liberation Theology

Exodus has been a major source of inspiration for liberation theologies of Latin America and the American South. When we read the Bible with the oppressed, we notice two things. 1. "Salvation" is not primarily spiritual or other-worldly, but sets the oppressed free from those who abuse earthly power. 2. Humans are invited to participate in the task of liberation here and now.

Here are a few more key things to notice.

- Exodus does not liberate for the sake of freedom but for worship of YHWH.
- The people go from serving Pharaoh to serving YHWH.
- The family of Abraham is the specific target of YHWH's deliverance.
- The liberation of the Hebrews becomes the basis for the call to treat others well in biblical law.

Reflection Question

Did you previously know that the Hebrew word *pesach*, translated as "passover," could also mean "protect"? Does this translation help make sense of the Passover event and God's action on behalf of Israel?

Session 11: Sea Crossing

Key Takeaways

- The Hebrew phrase *yam suph*, often translated as "Red Sea," translates literally to "reed sea."
- When the number of Israelites crossing the sea is translated as "600,000 men" plus families, it creates challenges with other parts of the text.
- There are a variety of views that attempt to harmonize the exodus account in the Bible with other biblical evidence and the archaeological record.

What Body of Water Did the Israelites Cross?

- Hebrew: *yam suph* = "Sea of Reeds"
- Greek translation: *eruthran thalassan* = "Red Sea"
- Both "gulfs," the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba, were *yam suph*
- Some scholars think it became the "red" sea because each of the cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west) was associated with a color (Black Sea is north, Red Sea is south, etc.) From *Smithsonian Journeys*.
- First mention of the Sea of Reeds: Exodus 10:19; 13:18; 15:4; 15:22; 23:31 (e.g., 1 Kings 9:26 shows that Ezion-geber is on the shore of *yam suph*, too)

Sea of Reeds in the Literary Design of Exodus

The Hebrew name Sea of Reeds forges an important connection with the deliverance story of the infant Moses, whose mother placed him among the "reeds" in the Nile, and whose name means "one who draws out."

Just as Moses passed through the reeds to escape death by Pharaoh's hand, so the Israelites passed through the Sea of Reeds to escape death by Pharaoh's hand.

How Many Hebrews Left Egypt?

English translations say "600,000 men" plus families (Exod. 12:37), but this translation creates some historical challenges.

That would likely mean over 2 million Israelites total, however, the archaeological record doesn't show evidence for this size of population, in either Egypt or Canaan at that time. Furthermore, how could 12 brothers become 600,000 men in four generations (Exod. 6:14-25)?

Other logistical problems arise when considering the size of the camp and the length of time needed to cross the Sea of Reeds.

Making Sense of the Numbers

There are several options for reconciling this verse with the historical record.

- Archaeologists could be wrong, and the 600,000 number is correct.
- The numbers are rhetorical or symbolic.
    - Numbers multiplied by 10 for rhetorical reasons (Allen, 1990). This accounts for round numbers that fit with the exact number of firstborns in relation to the Levites.
    - Numbers represent the population during a later period (Fretheim, 1991). This is a way of affirming that later Israelites were participants in the exodus event.
- The phrase is mistranslated and should read "600 military units" plus families.

Translating *'Eleph*

Hebrew does not use numerals, but instead spells out numbers in full. שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף = Six hundred אלף (*'eleph*) on foot, men without children.

The word *'eleph* has four possible meanings in a Hebrew lexicon.

1. Thousand
2. Head of cattle
3. Military unit
4. Clan (tribal unit smaller than a tribe)

> **Judges 6:15** NRSV*
>
> "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My אלף is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

> **Joshua 22:14** NRSV*
>
> And with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the אלף of Israel.
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Reflection Question

Summarize the different views for interpreting the number (600,000) of Israelite men leaving Egypt in Exodus 12:37.

Session 12: Prophetic Song

Key Takeaways

- The Torah's poetry often conveys the heart of its theology.
- The major themes in Exodus are all expressed in the Song of the Sea.
- Miriam, the prophetess, becomes a prominent witness of God's actions that save Israel.

The Literary Function of the Song of the Sea

Like liturgy, songs make history memorable. The people are not jubilant about their escape until a body of water stands between them and slavery. The people do not rejoice until their oppressors are brought to justice. Freedom is not enough on its own. As long as the possibility of re-enslavement remains, freedom is incomplete. The Song of the Sea celebrates justice, and it shows us how the Torah's poetry often conveys the heart of its theology.

The Themes of the Song of the Sea

Victory

- YHWH struck the gods of Egypt (Exod. 15:1-12; cf. Exod. 12:12-13).
- "Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Exod. 15:11)
- He turns to stubble the army that demanded stubble (Exod. 15:7; cf. 5:12).

Renown

YHWH's deliverance establishes his reputation among the nations; Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Canaan tremble (Exod. 15:14-16).

Creation

- YHWH's deliverance creates Israel as a new nation and dismantles Egypt.
- The "deeps" cover the Egyptian army (Exod. 15:5; cf. Gen. 1:2).
- The Israelites walk through on "dry ground" (Exod. 15:19; cf. Gen. 1:9-10).

Rest

- YHWH's deliverance culminates in proximity to his presence in the land.
- YHWH will "bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance" (Exod. 15:17).

The Literary Function of Miriam the Prophet

Miriam witnessed Moses' rescue from death in the River of Reeds (Exod. 2:4). Though only a child, Miriam brought women together to participate in redemption (Exod. 2:7-8).

Miriam witnessed Israel's rescue from death in the Sea of Reeds. Now a grown woman, Miriam brings together the women to celebrate redemption (Exod. 15:20-21).

Miriam's participation links these two redemption stories and reminds us of how many times God used women to accomplish his purposes. Shiphrah, Puah, the daughter of Levi, the daughter of Pharaoh, the maidservants, Zipporah, the women who plundered Egypt, and now the women who celebrate what God accomplished.

Her song echoes the theme of the plague narratives—that you may know that I am YHWH—by announcing its fulfillment—sing to YHWH for he is highly exalted. As a previous Pharaoh had mandated that the Israelites hurl their sons into the river, now YHWH hurls Pharaoh's warriors into the sea.

Reflection Question

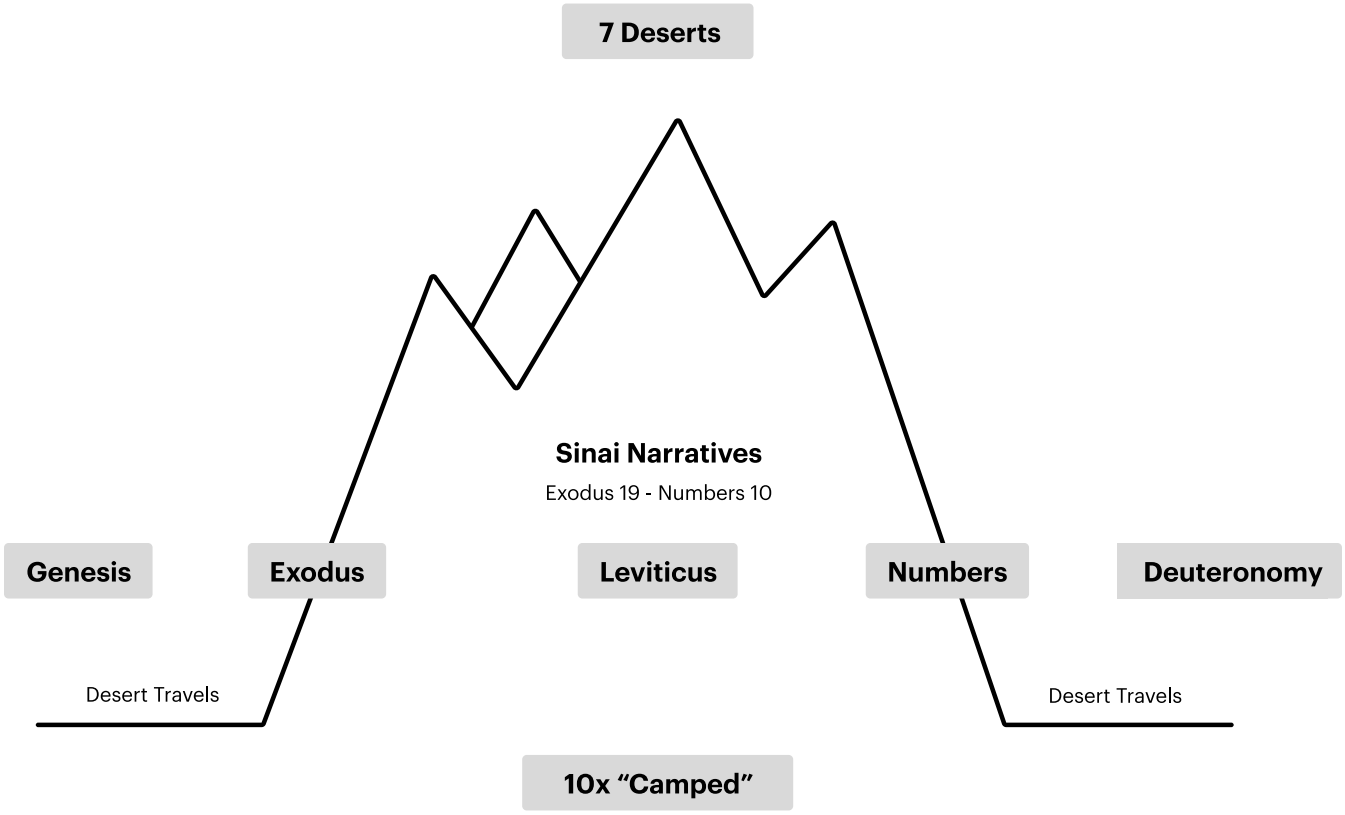
What themes from the earlier parts of the book of Exodus do you see expressed in the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:1-18)?

Session 13: Liminal Space

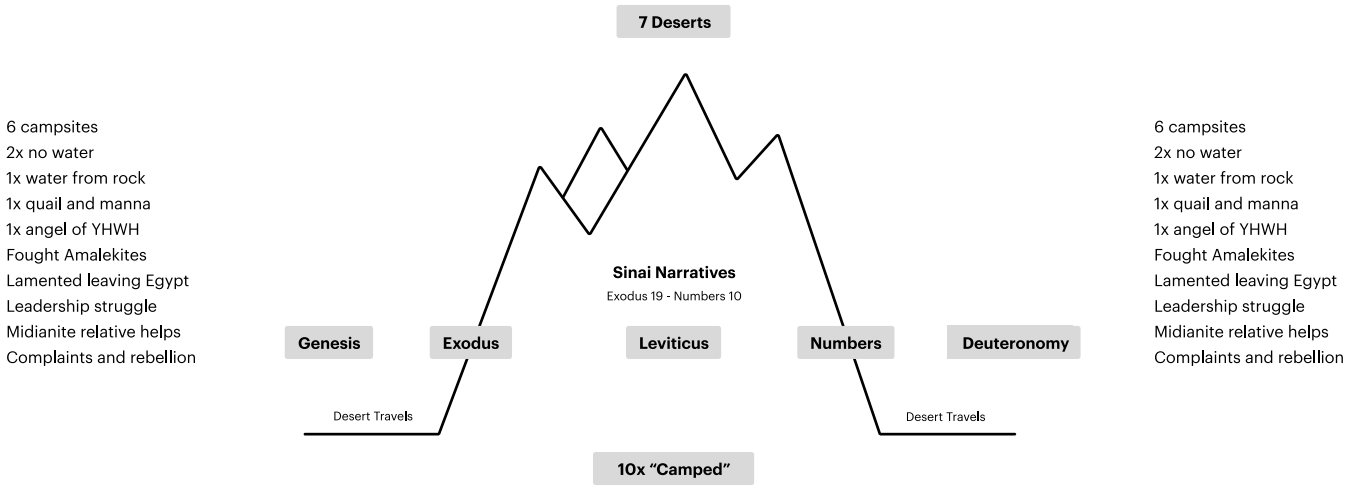
Key Takeaways

- The wilderness narratives recount a liminal space for God to form Israel as a new nation.
- The wilderness narratives in Exodus 15-18 mirror the wilderness journey of Numbers 10-21 in a chiasm that frames the entire Torah.

Sinai at the Center of the Torah



Sinai at the Center of the Torah. Imes, Carmen Joy (2019). *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*. IVP Academic. 14.



Narrative Frame Around Sinai. Imes, Carmen Joy (2019). *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*. IVP Academic. 14.

Literary Frame Around the Sinai Narratives

The wilderness wanderings of Exodus and Numbers form a literary frame around the Sinai narratives. On both sides of the time at Sinai, the biblical authors arranged a series of events.

- 6 campsites
- 2x no water
- 1x water from rock
- 1x quail and manna
- 1x angel of YHWH
- Fight Amalekites
- Lament leaving Egypt
- Midianite relative helps
- Complaints and rebellion

Chiasm in the Wilderness Journeys

Exod. 5-15 YHWH's showdown with Pharaoh, king of Egypt

- **Exod. 14:19-20** Angel of YHWH protects Israel from Egypt's army
  - **Exod. 15** Song of victory over Pharaoh, king of Egypt
    - **Exod. 15:22-25** Springs of water provided

Chiasm in the Wilderness Journeys. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

				Exod. 16:1-17:6 Food?; Sabbath; opposing Moses; water from rock						
					Exod. 17:8-16 Joshua wins battle with Amalekites					
						Exod. 18:1-6 Moses' family (conflict)				
							Exod. 18:13-18 Moses' leadership burden			
								Exod. 18:19-27 Assisted by Midianite kin (Jethro)		
									Exod. 19:1-2 Arrival at Sinai	
										Exod. 19 - Num. 10 Sinai Narratives
									Num. 10:11-13 Departure from Sinai Exodus	
								Num. 10:29-32 Assisted by Midianite kin (Hobab)		
							Num. 11 Moses' leadership burden			
						Num. 12 Moses' family (conflict)				
					Num. 13-14 Joshua and Caleb; battle with Amalekites/Canaanites lost					
				Num. 15:32-21:9 Sabbath; opposing Moses/Aaron; water from rock; food?						
			Num. 21:16-18a Springs of water provided							
		Num. 21:18b-35 Song of victory over Sihon, king of Ammon								
	Num. 22:21-35 Angel of YHWH protects Israel from Moab's curses									
Num. 23-24 YHWH's showdown with Balak, king of Moab										

Chiasm in the Wilderness Journeys. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

Key Themes of the Wilderness Narratives

The people's ingratitude and rebellion meets God's gracious provision in cycles of work and rest, which result in a contrast between serving YHWH and serving Pharaoh.

Reflection Question

Have you had a season where you experienced what felt like a liminal time? How did that time shape you or help form your identity?

Session 14: Burden of Leadership

Key Takeaways

- Two conversations with Jethro frame Israel's deliverance story (Exod. 4 and 18).
- Jethro represents the first of many nations who will acknowledge Yahweh's greatness because of his victory over Pharaoh.
- It seems noble of Moses to shoulder the burden of all the people, but it's unwise.

Exodus 18 in the Literary Design of Exodus

Exodus 4:18-31 and Exodus 18 frame Israel's deliverance story.

- Moses speaks with Jethro (Exod. 4:18a; 18:5-12).
- Jethro offers a blessing of peace (Exod. 4:18b; 18:7).
- Zipporah travels with Moses' sons (Exod. 4:20; 18:6).
- The noun *ḥōtēn*, which can mean father-in-law or other male in-law, appears in both passages (Exod. 4:18; 18:1, 7-8, 24, 27); Zipporah also uses the related noun ḥātan (Exod. 4:25-26), which refers more broadly to a relative by marriage.
- Aaron greets Moses with a kiss at the mountain of God (Exod. 4:27); Moses greets Jethro with a kiss near the mountain of God (Exod. 18:5-7).
- Both passages include Aaron and the "elders of Israel" (Exod. 4:29; 18:12).

Note the vague location in Exodus 18:5. This reserves "Sinai" for later so that this incident can participate in the wilderness framing of the Sinai narratives.

Jethro's Testimony

> **Exodus 18:10-11** NIV
>
> 10 Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.

Jethro's testimony affirms the literary structure of the book: rescue of Moses + rescue of Israel = the nations know YHWH is greater than all gods.

Exodus 18 in the Literary Design of the Torah

Exodus 18 and Numbers 10-11 frame the Sinai narratives.

- Moses receives advice from a Midianite family member (Exod. 18:17-23; Num. 10:29-31).
- Moses struggles under the burden of leadership (Exod. 18:13-16; Num. 11:10-17).
- Moses appoints elders to share the burden (Exod. 18:24-26; Num. 11:24-25).

Moses' complaint in Numbers 11 echoes Jethro's words from Exodus 18.

> **Exodus 18:18b** Instructor's Translation
>
> For this thing is too heavy for you; you are unable to do it alone.
>
> כי־כבד ממך הדבר
> לא־תוכל עשׂהו לבדך׃

> **Numbers 11:14** Instructor's Translation
>
> I myself am unable alone to carry all this people, for it is too heavy for me.
>
> לא־אוכל אנכי לבדי
> לשׂאת את־כל־העם הזה
> כי כבד ממני

Reflection Question

Reflect on Jethro's role in bearing witness to Israel's deliverance and Yahweh's greatness. How do you see this connecting to other biblical themes?



Module 3: A Covenant at Mount Sinai

SESSIONS 15-22

Examine God's commandments in their historical and literary context to better understand their meaning and see how they teach us about God's character and nature.

Session 15: Commissioning the Nation

Key Takeaways

- At Sinai, God redefines Israel's identity.
- As God's *segullah*, or "treasured possession," Israel is being called to fulfill a special purpose in representing God to the nations.
- Peter calls the New Testament Church, made up of Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus, God's *segullah*.

Key Terms for the Sinai Narratives

- Theophany: the visible manifestation of God's presence
- Covenant: a formal, permanent agreement between two parties
- Decalogue: the Ten Commandments
- Stipulations: the requirements of the covenant to which both parties agree
- Ratification: the official ritual by which a covenant takes effect
- Tabernacle: the authorized place of God's holy presence (tent)
- Priesthood: the official tabernacle service by authorized men from Levi
- Ordination: the official ritual in which someone becomes a priest
- Consecrate: set apart, make holy
- Cult: the entire system of worship (tabernacle, priests, sacrifices)

> **Exodus 19:4-6** NIV
>
> 4 "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 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, 6 you will be for me a **kingdom of priests** and a **holy nation**." These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

What Does It Mean To Be God's Treasured Possession?

The Hebrew word *segullah*, often translated "treasured possession," is used in two primary ways. Concretely, it refers to the personal treasury of a king (1 Chron. 29:3 and Ec. 2:8). Metaphorically, *segullah* is used to identify a covenant partner with special responsibility to represent the sovereign (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Mal. 3:17).

Related words in Ugaritic (*sgl*) and Akkadian (*sikiltu*) are also used in these two ways.

Who Is YHWH's Treasured Possession?

Usually, Israel is the treasured possession because of the Sinai covenant (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Ps. 135:4). But Malachi 3:17 envisions a future day in which YHWH will select a new *segullah*.

That new acquisition prompted Greek translators to choose a slightly different phrase. περιούσιος becomes περιποίησις.

> **1 Peter 2:9-10** NIV
>
> 9 But you are a chosen people, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy nation**, God's **special possession** (περιποίησις), that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter applies covenant titles from Sinai to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. He sees the Church as the fulfillment of Malachi 3:17—God's acquisition of a new *segullah*.

Reflection Question

How does God redefine the identity of the Israelites in Exodus 19:3-6?

Session 16: Law as Mission

Key Takeaways

- The Israelites were set free from oppression before they received the law. The law was not a means of earning God's compassion or protection.
- The law was not a burden. The law was seen as a mark of God's favor and a special distinction for the people of Israel.
- The law was likely given in duplicate on two tablets, as was common with covenant records, to act as a witness and reminder for both parties.

Literary Context of the Decalogue

The first question to ask in framing the literary context of the Ten Commandments is what has happened in the story so far leading up to Sinai? One prominent thing to note is that the law is given after they are already saved from slavery in Egypt. The law is not Israel's means of salvation!

Historical Context: How Did the Israelites View the Law?

> **Deuteronomy 4:5-8** NIV
>
> 5 See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow
> them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your
> wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great
> nation is a wise and understanding people." 7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them
> the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8 And what other nation is so great as to
> have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?
>
> See also Exodus 19:8; 24:3, 7

The law was viewed as a gift of wisdom that set Israel apart from the other nations.

How Many Stone Tablets Were There?

> **Exodus 31:18** Instructor's Translation
>
> When he finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, he gave to Moses the **two tablets** of the [covenant] document (עדות), tablets of stone, inscribed by the finger of God.

> **Exodus 32:15** Instructor's Translation
>
> And Moses turned and he went down from the mountain, and the **two tablets** of the [covenant] document (עדות) [were] in his hand, tablets inscribed on both sides, inscribed on front and back.

> **Exodus 40:20** Instructor's Translation
>
> And he took and he set the [covenant] document (עדות) into the ark ...

What Is the Significance of Having Two Tablets?

Historical context provides insight into the practice of providing duplicate copies in a covenant ritual. In this excerpt from the treaty between Suppiluliuma and Shattiwaza, each party retains a copy to place in their temple so the gods can be witnesses and guarantors of the agreement.

> "A duplicate of this tablet has been deposited before the sun-goddess of Arinna, because the sun-goddess of Arinna regulates kingship and queenship. In Mitanni land [a duplicate] has been deposited before Teshub, the lord of the [sanctuary] of Kahat. At regular [intervals] shall they read it in the presence of the king of the Mitanni land and in the presence of the sons of the Hurri country."
>
> Kitchen, Kenneth A. and Lawrence, Paul J. N. (2012). *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*. Harrassowitz. No. 56A, 1.391.

Reflection Question

What new insights have you gained about how the law functions in this narrative or in the biblical story?

Session 17: No Other Gods

Key Takeaways

- The Ten Commandments are given in the context of God rescuing and restoring his people, which is about moving them into freedom.
- There are different traditions for numbering the Ten Commandments.
- The command that forbids making idols recalls the role humans have as the image of God.

The Textual Unity of Exodus 20:2-6

> **Deuteronomy 4:5-8** NIV
>
> 5 See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow
> them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your
> wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great
> nation is a wise and understanding people.” 7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them
> the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8 And what other nation is so great as to
> have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

There are several features that suggest a strong unity within all the parts of Exodus 20:2-6.

The first thing that God speaks is his self-identification in Exodus 20:2. It makes sense to understand this as a part of what follows.

The prohibition against making statues of anything that is “in the heavens above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth” reflects the three-tiered cosmos of Genesis 1 with separate domains and inhabitants.

Grammatically, the command to have “no other gods” refers to plural gods, but the command to not make “a statue” is singular. For the pronouns in 20:5 where the text says, “do not bow down to them (plural),” the nearest plural antecedent is not the idol (20:4) but the other gods (20:3).

How Many Commands Are in This Passage?

A Verse 2 (motive): I am Yahweh your God.

The Unity of Exodus 20:2-6. Adapted from Greenstein, Edward (2011). “Rhetoric of the Ten Commandments.” *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition*. T & T Clark.

	B **Verse 3 (prohibition)** : You are not to have any other gods.	
		C **Verse 4 (prohibition)** : You are not to make a carved image.
	B' **Verse 5a (prohibition)** : You are not to bow down to or serve them.	
A' **Verses 5b-6 (motive)** : I am Yahweh your God.		

The Unity of Exodus 20:2-6. Adapted from Greenstein, Edward (2011). "Rhetoric of the Ten Commandments." *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition*. T & T Clark.

The Point of the First Command

Exclusive loyalty to YHWH means that the people will serve only YHWH.

The Consequences of Idolatry

In the BibleProject video on the image of God, Tim says that the temple doesn't have an image or idol of God in it because God has already made humans as his image. When we show allegiance to anything other than God, we not only rob God of the praise he deserves, we also diminish ourselves as those made to represent God.

Reflection Question

Reflect on the prohibition against making carved images for worship and its connection to the creation of humans in the image of God in Genesis 1.

Session 18: Bearing His Name

Key Takeaways

- Israel bears Yahweh's name and thereby represents Yahweh among the nations.
- The covenant formula "I will be your God and you will be my people" can be seen as a summary of these two commandments: worship no other gods and bear God's name faithfully.

History of Interpretation of the Name Command

> **Exodus 20:7** Instructor's Translation
>
> You shall not **lift up / carry** the name of YHWH, your God, in vain, for YHWH will not acquit one who **lifts up / carries** his name in vain.
>
> לֹא **תִשָּׂא** אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַשָּׁוְא כִּי לֹא יְנַקֶּה יְהוָה אֵת אֲשֶׁר־**יִשָּׂא** אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לַשָּׁוְא

Most translators assume this command is elliptical, and that it implies words that are not directly stated.

There are two possible gaps in the command, "You shall not lift up [. . .] the name of YHWH [. . .] in vain," and two prominent interpretations that seek to explain each of these gaps.

Some interpreters fill the first gap with an implied "hand" (i.e., "You shall not lift up [your hand] to the name ..."). The implication of this inference is that this is a command against taking oaths in YHWH'S name.

Other interpreters fill the second gap with the implied "on your lips" (i.e., "You shall not lift up the name of YHWH [on your lips] in vain"). The implication of this inference is that this is a command against speaking the name lightly or, in some traditions, speaking the name at all.

But what if the name command is not elliptical?

Historical Context of the Name Command

When we examine the historical record for context, we find that divine name inscriptions appeared most commonly in three places: official seals, stone inscriptions, and human branding.

In each of these, inscription of a god's name implied ownership, sovereignty, and an obligation to protect whatever was inscribed. The god's reputation was then bound up with the fate of what he or she owned.

Literary Context of the Name Command

In the surrounding chapters, two significant themes help inform interpretation of the name command.

- Covenant / election: The vassal is a “treasured possession” (*segullah*) of the sovereign and represents him through loyal service.
- High priest as representative: The high priest “carries” the “names” of the Israelite tribes as their representative and wears YHWH’S name on his forehead.

The High Priest Bears Names

> **Exodus 28:29** NRSV*
>
> So Aaron shall **bear the names** of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the holy place, for a continual remembrance before Yahweh.
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

> **Exodus 28:36-37** NRSV*
>
> 36 You shall make a medallion of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, “**Holy, belonging to Yahweh**.” 37 You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban.
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher
>
> קדש ליהוה

The high priest “bears the names” of the tribes, and the text uses the same phrase as in the name command. And he bears/carries the name of God on the medallion engraved “Holy, belonging to YHWH.”

Israel Bears YHWH’s Name

> **Deuteronomy 26:18-19** Instructor's Translation
>
> 18 And YHWH has had you declare yourselves this day to be his treasured people, just as he said to you, so you shall keep his commands, 19 and he shall set you high over all the nations that he has made, for praise, for fame, and for honor, and to be a people **holy, belonging to YHWH** your God, just as he said.

Moses describes how God set the Israelites apart using the same phrase, “holy, belonging to YHWH,” inscribed on the medallion of the high priest’s turban.

Theological Context of the Name Command

Israel bears YHWH's name and thereby represents YHWH among the nations. The point of the second command is the proper representation of YHWH by his people (e.g., “He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” Ps. 23:3).

The Covenant Formula

The covenant formula “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Exod. 6:7) is a summary of the first two commands.

- Command #1: Worship no other gods
- Command #2: Don’t misrepresent YHWH

See also Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 7:23, 11:4, 30:22; Ezekiel 36:28.

Reflection Question

What would it look like for people to bear God’s name in a manner that is not in vain?

Session 19: Resting in God's Provision

Key Takeaways

- The Sabbath command is a blessing of God's rest for every person and animal in the nation.
- Heads of the household are responsible for ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to rest.
- God himself rests on the seventh day of creation. He also destroys the oppression that forces humans into endless slave labor, and both of these realities become reasons for the Sabbath command.

The Sabbath Command

> **Exodus 20:8-11** NIV
>
> 8 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Pay close attention how this command is phrased. What is the Sabbath for? It's a day of rest and stopping. Who is the Sabbath for? It is for everyone in the community—rich or poor, native-born or foreigner, male or female, human or animal. Everyone gets a rest.

Finally, why should we keep the Sabbath? It's because God set this pattern at creation when he finished his work and rested.

A Tale of Two Sabbaths

Notice that when this command is repeated in Deuteronomy the reason for keeping the Sabbath shifts focus.

Exodus 20:8-11	Deuteronomy 5:12-15
8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.	12 "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.

Comparing the Sabbath Commands. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

Exodus 20:8-11	Deuteronomy 5:12-15
9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.	13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor **your ox, your donkey or any of your animals**, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, **so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do**.
11 **For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day**. Therefore the LORD **blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy**.	15 **Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm**. Therefore the LORD **your God** **has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day**.
Comparing the Sabbath Commands. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).	

The Sabbath command is rooted in the pattern of creation, the memory of enslavement, and God's desire for humans to live free from oppression.

Reflection Question

In what ways does the command to "remember the Sabbath day" connect to the biblical story so far?

Session 20: “Slavery” Laws

Key Takeaways

- The goal of these slavery laws is to protect the vulnerable from exploitation by the powerful.
- The literary structure of the book connects labor laws, or laws regulating indentured servitude, to the Sabbath pattern, emphasizing necessary rest for humans and providing a check against exploitation.
- Considering the cultural backdrop, the laws of Exodus introduce restrictions and values that will make slavery untenable.

Objecting to the Old Testament

> “Slavery was bad for [the Israelites] to experience but acceptable for them to initiate and practice.”
>
> Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl (2016). “Let My People Go.” *Voices From the Margin* (edited by R.S. Sugirtharajah). Orbis Books.

The Case of the Male *ʿEbed*

> **Exodus 21:2-6** **Instructor's Translation**
>
> 2 If you hire a Hebrew *ʿebed*, six years he shall serve but in the seventh he may leave freely at no cost. 3 If he came alone, he shall leave alone. If he possessed a wife, his wife may leave with him. 4 If his master gave him a wife and she bore him sons or daughters, the woman and her offspring will belong to her master, and he must leave alone. 5 But if the servant insists, “I love my master, my wife, and my children. I will not go free!” 6 then his master shall bring him to God and he shall bring him to the door or to the doorframe so his master may pierce his ear with an awl and he shall serve him permanently.

Notice the characteristics of the *ʿebed* in these verses.

- Voluntary hired worker
- Limited term of service
- Free to leave and to marry
- Permanent service is voluntary

The goal of these laws was to protect the vulnerable from exploitation by the powerful.

The Case of the Female *ʾAmah*

> **Exodus 21:7-11** Instructor's Translation
>
> [7] But if a man sells his daughter as an *'amah*, she shall not leave as the male servants leave. [8] If she is troublesome in the eyes of her master who has claimed her for himself, then he must let her be ransomed. He is not allowed to sell her to foreign people because he broke the agreement with her. [9] But if he has claimed her for his son, he must treat her in accordance with daughters' rights. [10] If he takes another [wife] for himself, he may not reduce her food, clothing, or marital rights. [11] But if he does not give her these three, then she may leave without paying any money.

Notice the characteristics of the 'amah in these verses.

- An *'amah* marries into the household
- Fathers always arranged marriages for their daughters
- "Bride price" is expected for the bride's family

The goal of these laws was to guard against sexual exploitation.

Literary Structure of the Book of the Covenant

A Exod. 20:23-26: worship regulations		
	B Exod. 21:2-11: Sabbath patterns for servitude	
		C Exod. 21:12-23:9: neighbor laws (injuries, property, justice)
	B' Exod. 23:10-12: Sabbath patterns for land and work	
A' Exod. 23:13-19: worship regulations		

Literary Structure of the Book of the Covenant. Created by Carmen Imes for BibleProject Classroom: Exodus Overview (2021).

These laws are oriented toward freedom and Sabbath rather than slavery.

Attention to Genre and Context

Understanding these laws within the proper context helps us make sense of them as we read. The first thing to notice is the genre. These are casuistic laws ("if ... then ...") and are given to help regulate non-ideal situations.

Next, it is helpful to keep each of these individual laws fixed within the context of the broader system of protections created by other laws.

- YHWH brought them out of servitude (Exod. 20:2)

- Servants and foreigners get a Sabbath rest (Exod. 20:10)
- Kidnapping strictly prohibited (Exod. 21:16)
- Death penalty for killing a servant (Exod. 21:20-21)
- Release for permanently injured servants (Exod. 21:26-27)
- Accidental death of servant is taken seriously (Exod. 21:32)
- Mistreatment of foreigners prohibited (Exod. 22:21)
- Taking advantage of vulnerable prohibited (Exod. 22:22)
- No interest on loans to the needy (Exod. 22:25)
- No denying justice to the poor (Exod. 23:6)
- Unplowed (Sabbath) fields support the poor (Exod. 23:10-11)

The Case of the Injured Servant

> **Exodus 21:20-21** Instructor's Translation
>
> 20 If a man strikes his *ʿebed* or his *ʾamah* with a rod, and he dies under his hand, he shall surely be avenged.
> 21 However, if (after) a day or two days he stands up, he shall not be avenged, for it/he is his silver.

Notice the characteristics of the law in these verses.

- Death penalty for killing a servant
- Verses 18-19 are concerned with the loss of labor. The aggressor must pay the injured person for loss of work time. In the case of a hired servant, the master bears the loss of labor himself, since he is responsible for the injury. He cannot add to the debt of the servant.
- Hoffner: "It" refers to the fee, not the servant
- Alternative: No need to enact "eye for an eye" because the master has already borne the loss of his servant's labor as he recovered.

A Wider Vision on Old Testament Law

> "The Old Testament and later the New Testament create an imaginative world in which slavery becomes more and more untenable."
>
> McCaulley, Esau (2020). *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. IVP Academic. 142.

> "[The biblical slavery laws were] calculated to make readers uneasy about the ethics of slave-owning. These laws represent an early strategy for raising readers' conscience about the institution of slavery and (implicitly) calling it into question. Overall, their tactics reflect an ethic of concern for the vulnerable."
>
> Morrow, William (2017). *An Introduction to Biblical Law*. William B. Eerdmans. 98.

Reflection Question

How do the points discussed in this session help you grapple with these difficult laws? What questions do you still have?

Session 21: Defining the Conquest

Key Takeaways

- God is the one who drives out the enemy. He tasks Israel with destroying the places of worship and eliminating any room for other gods in the land.
- The conquest is not ethnic cleansing. Rather, its goal is exclusive worship of Yahweh.

Who Does What and Why

What does YHWH's messenger provide for the Israelites?

- Protection on their journey (Exod. 23:20)
- Guidance to the promised land (v. 20, 23)
- Ongoing instruction (v. 22)
- Leadership in battle (v. 23)

What will YHWH do for the people?

- Oppose Israel's enemies (v. 22)
- Wipe out Israel's enemies (v. 23)
- Throw nations into confusion (v. 27)
- Drive out the nations (v. 28-30)
- Establish Israel's borders (v. 31)
- Give the people into Israel's hands (v. 31)

What are the Israelites supposed to do?

- Do not bow down to or worship their gods (v. 24)
- Demolish the gods and their sacred stones (v. 24)
- Worship YHWH (v. 25)
- Drive out the people from before you (v. 31)
- Make no covenant with them or their gods (v. 32)
- Do not let them live in the land (v. 33)

Why Can't the Canaanites Live in the Land?

> **Exodus 23:33** NIV
>
> Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.

The command to drive the Canaanites from the land is not about ethnic cleansing. The concern is exclusive worship of YHWH (cf. Deut 7:1-6; 12:1-4).

Recommended Resource

Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God by Paul Copan

Reflection Question

According to the text, why must the Canaanites be barred from staying in the land alongside the Israelites?

Session 22: Covenant Ratified

Key Takeaways

- Ratifying the covenant, or making it an active reality, is a solemn ritual.
- The people of Israel enter into the covenant with Yahweh voluntarily and eagerly.
- The blood of the covenant marks people as members of the covenant community.

Covenant Ratification Ritual

Exodus 24:1-11 outlines the covenant ratification ritual. This list highlights key features of the ritual.

- Context of worship (v. 1-2, 9-11)
- Clear articulation of expectations (v. 3, 7)
- Verbal agreement from the people (v. 3, 7)
- Written record of expectations (v. 4)
- Stone pillars to represent all 12 tribes (v. 4)
- Ritual offerings (v. 4-5)
- Blood symbolism (v. 6, 8)

What Does the Sprinkled Blood Symbolize?

The priestly ordination ritual also applies blood to both altar and person (Lev. 8:23-24, 30). The sprinkling of blood marks the official entrance into the covenant and underscores Israel's role as a kingdom of priests.

Note: Leviticus 14:1-32 reinstates an unclean person to the covenant community with sprinkled blood, but that blood is not applied to the altar.

Recommended Resources

- Dr. Sandra L. Richter. *"Does God Really Command Women to Marry Their Rapists? A Study of Deuteronomic Law."* HebraicThought.org.
- Celina Durgin and Dru Johnson (editors). *The Biblical World of Gender: The Daily Lives of Ancient Men and Women*.

Reflection Question

Are there other laws from Exodus 20-24 that you still have questions about?



Module 4: Presence in the Tabernacle

SESSIONS 23-28

Will Israel's sin stop God's plan? Follow the themes of liberation, creation, participation, and presence through to their conclusion in the final chapters of Exodus.

Session 23: Tabernacle Furniture

Key Takeaways

- The tabernacle instructions are framed as a series of seven speeches by Yahweh.
- The tabernacle instructions echo the themes and narrative elements of the creation story in Genesis.
- The richness and splendor of the tabernacle increase as you approach the innermost holy place.

Time in the Tabernacle Texts

> **Exodus 24:15-18** NIV
>
> 15 When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, 16 and the glory of the LORD settled on
> Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to
> Moses from within the cloud. 17 To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top
> of the mountain. 18 Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the
> mountain forty days and forty nights.

We gain theological insight when we pay attention to the elapse of time on the mountain. During this time of testing in the wilderness (40 days/nights ≈ 40 years), God does a new work of creation (six days), and he invites his people into sabbath rest (seventh day) by which he lives among them again.

Creation Echoes in the Tabernacle Texts

The tabernacle instructions recall Genesis 1-3 imagery and themes.

- Culminates in consecration (Gen. 2:3; Exod. 40:9-13)
- Cherubim as guardians of sacred space (Gen. 3:24; Exod. 25:18, 26:1)
- Tree of life and the lampstand with seven branches (Gen. 2:9; Exod. 25:31-37)
- Gold and onyx stones (Gen. 2:12; Exod. 26:37, 28:5-6, 9, 17-20)
- "Evening" and then "morning" (Gen. 1:5; Exod. 27:21)
- Prescribed food and proscribed food (Gen. 2:16-17; Exod. 29:31-34)
- God's Spirit, knowledge, and skill in creation (Gen. 1:2; 2:2-3, 7, 17; Exod. 31:3)
- Seven-day process (Gen. 1; Exod. 29:30; Lev. 8:33)
- Clothing the "priests" (Gen. 3:21; Exod. 28:41)

Time in the Tabernacle Texts

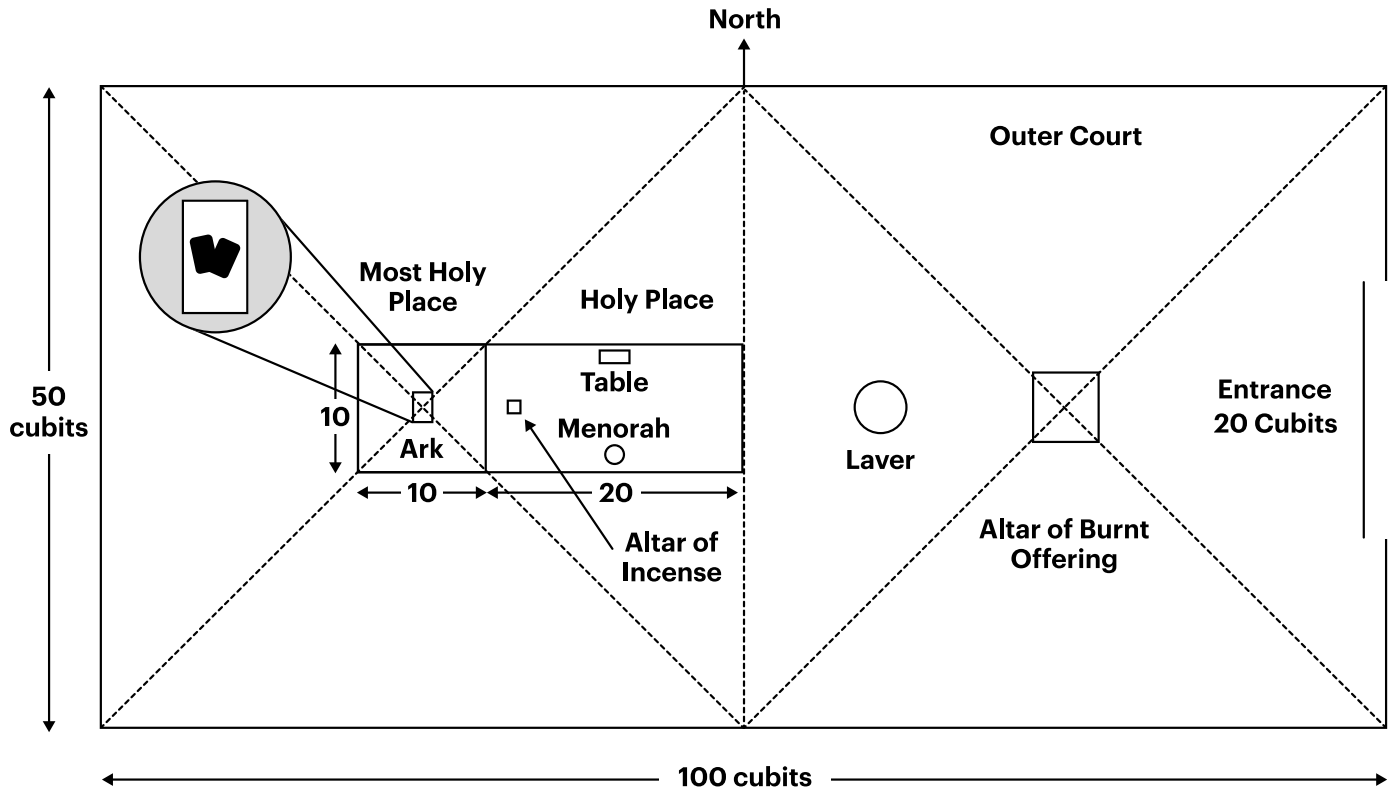
YHWH's instructions are presented as seven speeches (Exod. 25-31).

1. Tabernacle and furnishings (Exod. 25:1-30:10)
2. Atonement money (Exod. 30:11-16)
3. Wash basin (Exod. 30:17-21)
4. Anointing oil (Exod. 30:22-33)
5. Incense recipe (Exod. 30:34-38)
6. Appointing Bezalel and Oholiab (Exod. 31:1-11)
7. Sabbath (Exod. 31:12-17)

Narrative Space in the Tabernacle Texts

The two objects that take up the most narrative space, where the biblical author slows down to provide exquisite details, are the ark of the covenant and the breastplate of the high priest.

Sacred Space in the Tabernacle Texts



Tabernacle Dimensions and Layout. Diagram by Danny Imes. Imes, Carmen Joy (2018). *Bearing YHWH's Name at Sinai*. Eisenbrauns. 125.

The outside curtains are white, with the east-west axis using the most elaborate fabrics. The expense and beauty of materials increase as you approach the most holy place.

Reflection Question

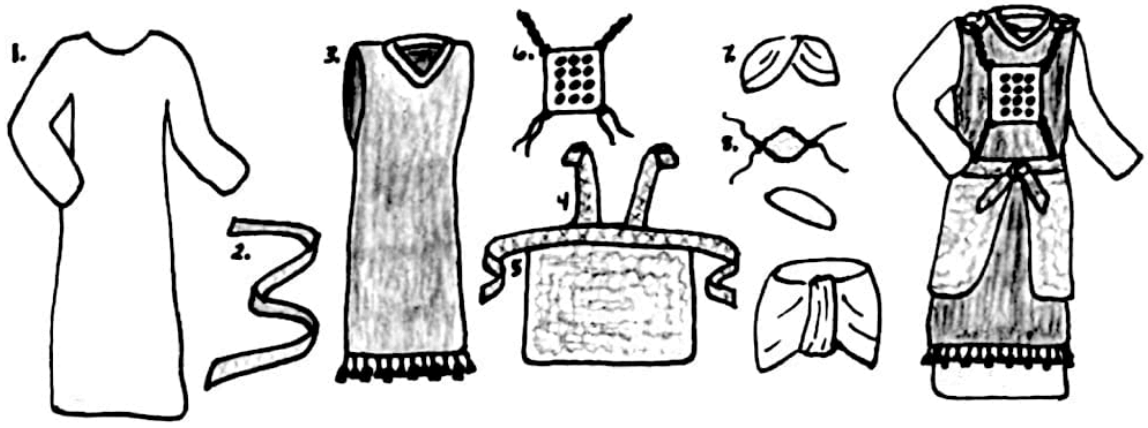
Reflect on the connection between the tabernacle and creation/garden imagery. What shared themes do you notice? What is the significance of this connection?

Session 24: Priestly Garments

Key Takeaways

- Aaron and his sons become integrally involved with every aspect of tabernacle worship.
- The high priest's garments function as an inside-out tabernacle.
- The special furniture, garments, and all of the rituals involved with tabernacle life work together to tell the story of God moving into the neighborhood.

Function of the Priestly Garments



Priestly Garments. Drawing by Carmen Imes. Imes, Carmen Joy (2018). *Bearing YHWH's Name at Sinai*. Eisenbrauns. 125.

The priestly garments include a tunic (1), sash (2), robe (3), ephod (4), band (5), breastplate (6), turban (7), and medallion (8).

- Aaron and his sons are part of the cultic apparatus.
- The garments are essential to (constitutive of) their role (Exod. 28:35).
- The garments imply sacred privilege and responsibility.
- Aaron alone wears colored fabrics (except for the priests' sash).
- Aaron is an "inside-out tabernacle" with his most elaborate garments visible [see Propp, William (2006). *Exodus 19-40*. 538.].
- Aaron becomes the authorized representative of YHWH and of all 12 tribes, who mediates between them (Exod. 28:12, 29).
- Urim and Thummim facilitate and centralize divine decision making (Exod. 28:30).
- Aaron bore sanctuary-related sin as the authorized representative (Exod. 28:38).

Symbolism of the Ordination Ceremony

The ordination ceremony involves all three of the defining marks of a rite of passage: separation, liminality, and reintegration.

- Moses is the primary actor (Aaron and sons are quite passive).
- Blood is an essential symbol of cleansing.
- Priests must first be cleansed before they can facilitate the cleansing of others.
- Sacrifices restore the holiness of the community.
- Blessing initiates the community's vocation as YHWH's representatives.

Reflection Question

How would you describe the role of the high priest? How are the priestly garments crucial to this role?

Session 25: Apostasy

Key Takeaways

- We become like what we worship. The Israelites worship a calf made of inflexible gold and, therefore, become a "stiff-necked people."
- God anticipates Israel's need for atonement, so he gives instructions about the atonement rituals before it becomes necessary.

Why a Calf Idol?



Imes, Carmen. *Calf Idols*. Israel Museum.

Aaron crafts an "idol in the shape of a calf" (Exod. 32:4) when the people demand it of him. This golden calf likely reflected other similar objects from the worship practices of the day. Above are two examples of calf idols. The one on the left is a 12th century B.C.E. bronze bull from Samaria, and the one on the right is a 16th century B.C.E. silver-plated bronze calf and its shrine from Ashkelon.

What Does Aaron Think He's Doing?

It's unclear from the text if Aaron thinks he's creating a visual representation of YHWH, a representation of YHWH's transport, or if he's introducing a new deity to Israel like Baal of Canaan.

The point of the exodus was to demonstrate YHWH's superiority over the gods. Crafting this idol is a direct contradiction to this, and it breaks the first command—have no other gods or make idols of them.

The Theological Function of the Gold Calf Incident

> "Since idolatry diminishes the glory of God, and since humans are made in the image of God, it follows that idolatry is also detrimental to the very essence of our humanity. ... Idolatry is radical self-harm. It is also radically, terribly ironic. In trying to be as God (in the original temptation and rebellion), we have ended up becoming less human. ... If you worship that which is not God, you reduce the image of God in yourself. If you worship that which is not even human, you reduce your humanity still further."
>
> Wright, Christopher J.H. (2020). *"Here Are Your Gods": Faithful Discipleship in Idolatrous Times*. IVP Academic. 43.

Idolatry betrays a desire to domesticate the divine and approach God on our terms.

As God's "image" (Hebrew: *tselem*), we are God's concrete representatives in the world. By worshiping idols, we abdicate our God-given role. Idolatry is the inverse of our creation purpose. Rather than subduing creation, we submit to it and are subdued.

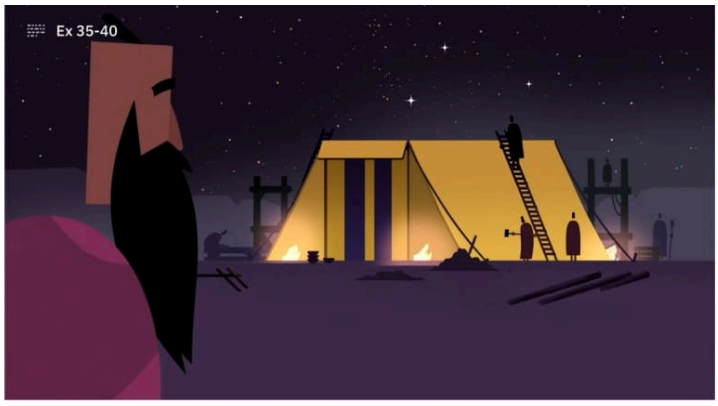
We become like what we worship (Ps. 115:1-8, 135:15-18). And Israel becomes "stiff-necked" just like the metal calf they worship (Exod. 32:9, 33:5).

The Literary Function of the Gold Calf Incident

The gold calf incident (Exod. 32-34) falls between when the tabernacle instructions are given (Exod. 25-31) and when those instructions are carried out in the construction of the tabernacle (Exod. 35-40).

YHWH anticipates the need for a sacrificial system that can deal with the effects of sin in the community. Before the incident occurs, he has already given Moses the tabernacle blueprints.





BibleProject (2020). *Visual Commentary: Exodus 34:6-7*.

Did Moses Have a Temper Tantrum?

While Moses smashing the tablets (Exod. 32:19-20) may seem like a rash act done in a fit of rage, Moses' burning anger is justified, and it mirrors God's anger (Exod. 32:10). Breaking the tablets demonstrates that the

people have broken the covenant stipulations.

Contrasting the Leadership of Aaron and Moses

The gold calf incident highlights differences in the leadership and actions of Aaron and Moses.

Aaron ...

- makes no attempt to correct the people.
- caves in to the people's desires.
- tries to redeem the event by dedicating the festival to YHWH.
- minimizes his own complicity.

Moses ...

- refuses YHWH's offer of special status.
- intercedes for God's mercy for the nation.
- shows concern for God's reputation.
- shares God's anger over the incident.
- brings consequences to the idolaters.
- binds his life with the lives of the people.

Moses put his own life on the line by interceding for the people and begging for God's mercy.

Reflection Question

How does the golden calf incident demonstrate the idea that people eventually become like the object of their worship?

Session 26: Presence

Key Takeaways

- The presence of God marks his favor toward Israel and becomes the sign of the people's distinctiveness.
- We may think of compassion as being the opposite of judgment, but God's character is holistic and non-contradictory.
- God's presence transforms Israel and, ultimately, everyone.

Eden Restored

The purpose of the tabernacle was the restoration of divine presence (Exod. 25:8). However, Israel's idolatry jeopardized this plan (Exod. 33:1-6).

The Most Important Thing

In the dialogue between God and Moses in Exodus 33:12-17, Moses identifies the presence of God as the one essential thing the people cannot move forward without.

God tells Moses, "My presence will go and I will give you (Moses) rest." But Moses responds, "If your presence doesn't go, do not send us up from here." The presence of God is the mark of his favor and the sign of Israel's distinctiveness.

YHWH's Self-Revelation

> **Exodus 34:6-7** NIV
>
> 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

This is arguably the most important passage in the Hebrew Bible—the passage most often quoted or alluded to in all of Scripture (20-plus times).

We may think of compassion and judgment as opposites, but YHWH's character is holistic and non-contradictory.

God's patience and justice are held in tension. If we neglect any of these attributes, we end up with a god we've made in our image.

See the Visual Commentary video for more on this.

The Radiance of Moses

Being in God's presence changes Moses, and his face becomes radiant.

> **2 Corinthians 3:18** NIV
>
> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

> "I am changed in the presence of a holy God."
>
> Altrogge, Mark (1998). "In the Presence."

Reflection Question

How would you describe the interplay between God's compassion and judgment in Exodus?

Session 27: Participation

Key Takeaways

- The construction of the tabernacle and its rituals call for exact obedience.
- The full community participates in the crafting of the tabernacle, its ritual objects, and the priestly garments.
- With the tabernacle built, Israel is poised to rectify a problem that has existed since humans were exiled from the garden of Eden.

Literary Function of Exodus 35-40

The final chapters of Exodus mark the fulfillment of YHWH's instructions to Moses in chapters 25-31. This section, together with the earlier chapters on the tabernacle instructions, frames the gold calf incident and leads up to the climax of the book—God's presence in the community.

Building a Tent for God

These chapters present three speeches from Moses to the community.

Sabbath Reminder (Exod. 35:1-3)

Moses begins by reminding the people about the centrality of the Sabbath, and that doing God's work does not cancel the Sabbath. God's work must be done in God's way.

Commands About Community Participation in Construction (Exod. 35:4-29)

The second speech centers on the call for the community to participate. The entire community responded to the call, and everyone who was willing participated.

Offerings were voluntary but specific (Exod. 25:1-9, 35:1-9), and both men and women responded (Exod. 35:22-24, 29). Leaders contributed gemstones and ingredients for oil and incense (Exod. 35:27-28), and the people gave more than enough (Exod. 36:3-7).

All who were skilled contributed, with the text specifically calling out the contribution of skilled women who spun yarn (Exod. 35:25-26).

Appointment of Bezalel and Oholiab to Design and Teach (Exod. 35:30-36:7)

The final speech of this section highlights the special appointment of Bazalel and Oholiab. They are filled with the Spirit of God for wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill in an expansive range of crafts: metalwork, engraving gemstones, woodworking, artistic crafts, embroidery, and weaving.

Obedience to God's Instructions at Sinai

> **Exodus 39:42-43** NIV
>
> 42 The Israelites had done all the work just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 43 Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the LORD had commanded. So Moses blessed them.

Theological Function of Exodus 35-40

The fulfillment of the tabernacle construction sets up a resolution to the alienation from God in Genesis 3. It marks Israel as the community where YHWH has chosen to dwell, and it ensures the success of Israel's future as long as they maintain proper worship and live in obedience to covenant stipulations.

Reflection Question

What can we learn from the example of full community participation in the construction of the tabernacle?

Session 28: Glory

Key Takeaways

- Much of the instruction Israel receives is about carving out a space for God's presence to live in their midst.
- God's presence brings reassurance, protection, and guidance, but at this point in the story, it also intensifies the severity of the consequences of rejecting his instruction.
- Exodus is a new creation story—the creation of a new people and a new way for those people to relate to each other and their neighbors.
- Moses' inability to enter the tabernacle introduces a problem, and Leviticus will provide the answer to that problem.

Creation Echoes in the Tabernacle Texts

The author of Exodus signals the creation of a new nation, echoing Genesis 1-2.

- Moses "finished" the work (Exod. 40:33; Exod. 31:18; cf. Gen. 1:31-2:1)
- Moses "saw" the work and approved (Exod. 39:43; Gen. 1:31)
- Moses gave a "blessing" (Exod. 39:43; cf. Gen. 1:28)
- Moses "consecrated" the result (Exod. 40:9; cf. Gen 2:3)

See Mann, Thomas W. (1988). *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Implications of God's Presence

Much of the instruction Israel receives is about carving out a space for God's presence to live in their midst.

God's presence brings reassurance, protection, and guidance in their travels, but at this point in the story, it also intensifies the severity of the consequences of rejecting his instruction.

Exodus as a Creation Story

The creation of a new nation reshapes the community. The arc of the story takes them from disorder to order, from oppression to love of neighbor, and from serving Pharaoh to serving YHWH.

Their new society is shaped by sacred time (a new calendar), sacred space (YHWH's presence in their midst), and obedience to the covenant stipulations.

Reflection Question

Why was Moses unable to enter after the glory of God filled the tabernacle?



Module 5: Reflecting on Exodus

SESSIONS 29-30

Reflect on insights learned in this class and explore potential ways to share them with others.

Session 29: Exodus Reflections

Key Takeaways

- Exodus is Israel's creation story. Just like the instruction God gave the humans in the garden, God's law (torah, instruction) is a guide to living in his life-giving presence.
- Moses' identity became clear as he was transformed in God's presence. Likewise, prayerfully meditating on the Bible shapes our lives and our identity.
- God calls his people to be his special possession. This is a gift, an honor, and a responsibility to bear his name in a manner that reflects his character to the rest of the world.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

Take some time to reflect on the insights you learned in this class.

Session 30: Exodus and Your Context

Key Takeaways

- Slow down and wrestle through difficult parts of the Bible, considering its historical, literary, and theological context.
- Instead of a list of outdated rules, God gives his people instruction so they can participate in his own character.
- Whether in our worship or in our daily lives, we have the opportunity to clearly show people what God is like.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

How would you share what you learned in this class with others in your context?