

# EXODUS

## THEME

Exodus is the book of redemption. Exodus begins with these words, “These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob . . .” for redemption ever has to do with names—names written by grace into the book of God.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the overarching theme of Exodus is the fulfillment of God’s promises to the patriarchs that he would make their descendants a great nation. This is carried out despite the opposition of the greatest superpower in the ancient world of the time, Egypt, and despite the unbelief and disobedience of the people themselves.

Furthermore, Exodus shows that the success of the exodus must be ascribed first to the power and character of God, who remembers His promises, punishes sin, and forgives the penitent. Second, it highlights both the faithfulness of Moses, who follows divine instructions exactly, and his prayerfulness. It is his prayer, e.g., that leads to victory over Amalek and his intercession that persuades God to pardon the people after they had begun worshiping the golden calf.<sup>2</sup>

### **Key Themes:**<sup>3</sup>

The events and instructions narrated in the book of Exodus are explicitly framed as the Lord remembering His covenant promises to Abraham (2:24; 3:6, 14–17; 6:2–8). The promises include land, numerous offspring, and blessing for both Abraham’s descendants and the nations (Gen. 12:1–3), which are rooted in the covenant relationship with the Lord: “I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you . . . and I will be their God” (Gen. 17:7–8).

It should be remembered that the covenant promises in Genesis were made with Abraham and reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob. Exodus highlights the role that Moses fills as the covenant mediator through whom the Lord reveals His purposes to His people and sustains the covenant relationship. Each of these aspects will be described briefly in relation to key themes in Exodus.

1. *Offspring.* As was noted above, the Lord promised Abraham that he would have innumerable offspring (Gen. 15:5) who would also be afflicted for 400 years in a foreign land and come out with great possessions (Gen. 15:13). Through Joseph, the

Lord brings 70 individuals into the land of Egypt (Ex. 1:1–6) who became numerous (1:7) even amid affliction (1:8–12) and were brought out of Egypt as a large multitude (12:37–38). Exodus also focuses on how the people of Israel are shown to be Abraham’s offspring, both in the faithful actions of some of its members (the midwives fear God not Pharaoh, 1:15–22) and particularly by the fact that the Lord repeatedly refers to them as “my people” in his words to Israel (3:7) and before Pharaoh (5:1). The Lord is indicating both to Pharaoh and to the people that, although they have been enslaved in Egypt for a long time, it is his covenant promise to them as Abraham’s offspring that truly governs their identity.

2. *Land.* The entrance into the land of Canaan is not realized within the events narrated in Exodus, but the promise of the land is held before Israel as *a place of provision* that is “flowing with milk and honey” (3:17) and also as *a place they will inherit* and where they will live as the Lord’s people (6:7–8). The promise of the land is significant for what Israel’s response in certain situations reveals about their understanding of both the Lord’s presence and his promise to bring them to Canaan. When the people are hungry after coming out of Egypt and wish they were back in slavery by the “meat pots” (16:3), the contrast between where they are headed and what they long for in Egypt shows that they have not yet taken to heart what the Lord’s deliverance is to signify for them. Their prospects in Canaan are declared to depend on their fidelity in serving the Lord alone (23:23–32), which the Israelites also have not taken fully to heart, as demonstrated by the incident of the golden calf before they ever set foot in Canaan (32:1–6).
3. *Blessing.* The Lord’s promise to bless all nations through Abraham looks forward to how Israel’s life is to mediate the presence of the Lord to the nations around them (they are to be “a kingdom of priests,” “a holy nation,” 19:6). Israel is to live before God in the world, obeying the covenant instructions that he will reveal to them (see Deut. 4:6–8). The events of the plagues and exodus present the opportunity for people back in Egypt and the surrounding nations to join the Lord’s people in response to what they have either experienced (thus Israel goes out a “mixed multitude,” Ex. 12:38) or what they have heard (e.g., Josh. 2:10). The “recognition formula” (see note on Ex. 7:5) includes the expectation that the Egyptians will know that Israel’s God is the true God (7:5; 14:4, 18).
4. *Covenant mediator.* A key theme of Exodus is that Moses is the one who is called by God to mediate between the Lord and his people. A key indicator of whether Israel will desire to live as the Lord’s people is seen in how they respond to Moses as the one who speaks on the Lord’s behalf. The story of Moses begins with his preservation at birth (2:1–10) and in Midian (2:11–22) but is highlighted through the Lord’s presence and speech in his call at the burning bush (3:1–4:17) and then in the

fact that the Lord speaks to Moses alone in Egypt (e.g., 7:1), calls Moses alone up to Mount Sinai (19:20; 24:2), listens to Moses' intercession on behalf of the people (32:11-14), speaks with Moses "face to face" (34:29-35), and has Moses oversee the assembling of the tabernacle (40:16-33) and the consecration of both it and the priests who will serve in it (40:9-15).

5. *Covenant presence*. The presence of the Lord is highlighted throughout the book of Exodus: he appears to Moses in the burning bush (3:1-4:17); he comes down on Mount Sinai in the sight of the people (19:16-20); he reveals himself to the leaders of Israel (24:9-11); he shows Moses his glory and declares his covenant character (34:1-10). Furthermore, a large part of the second half of the book focuses on the instructions for (25:1-31:17) and assembling of the tabernacle (35:1-40:33), in which the Lord promises to dwell among his people (29:43-46; 40:34-38). Just as the ground on which Moses stood at the burning bush was holy because of the Lord's presence, so it is also his presence among his people that will make them holy. And in light of the covenant breach with the golden calf (32:1-6), Exodus ends with the lingering question of just how a sinful people will live with a holy God in her midst, which is a question that the instruction recorded in Leviticus will begin to address.

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips, J. (1970). *Exploring the Scriptures*, 20. Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Study Notes on Exodus. In *ESV Study Bible*, 140. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Study Notes on Exodus. In *ESV Study Bible*, 141-142. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008.