

The Pentateuch

Lesson 11

An Overview of Exodus

Forum



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Lesson Eleven: An Overview of Exodus

Forum

With

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Question 1:

When was the book of Exodus written?

Prof. Thomas Egger

We don't know precisely when the book of Exodus was written, but if it was written by Moses, as it most likely was in its bulk, then it was written during Moses's lifetime. It obviously wasn't written before all of the events that delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, so it was written sometime in the wilderness between the exodus from Egypt and the death of Moses at the end of the book of Deuteronomy.

Dr. Erika Moore

When was the book of Exodus written? Well, that's hard to say. We don't know for sure. Moses had his hand in writing the Pentateuch. I talk about the "essential Mosaic authorship" of the Pentateuch. When did he write it? Well, again, it seems that Moses would have left something to the Israelites, on the plains of Moab, before he died and went to be with the Lord. So, it seems that along the journey we see that he was commanded to write by the Lord, so it makes sense that during the 40-year wilderness wanderings, Moses is writing things down and then bequeathing that to the Israelites.

Question 2:

What is the literary purpose of the book of Exodus?

Prof. Thomas Egger

The literary purpose of the book of Exodus, when you turn to the book of Exodus and begin to read, becomes clear from the very beginning. The book begins by saying, "These are the names of the sons of Israel that went down to Egypt." And, in fact, in Hebrew, the book of Exodus is oftentimes called "*Shemot*," — "Names" —and it is all about the identity of the people of God, Israel, and even more importantly about the identity and the character of their God, Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord who comes

and visits them in Egypt in fulfillment of his promises, leads them out with a mighty hand and then shows them his great compassion and provision and righteousness in the wilderness, making a covenant with them and leading them as his own people. So, it really, at its heart, answers the question, who is God? And it answers the question, who is Israel? Who are the people of God?

Dr. Dorian G. Coover-Cox

If you want to understand the literary purpose of the book of Exodus, a good way to start would be to think about its structure as a whole. What does it contain? What do you think about the book of Exodus? Well, I suppose most people think, Oh, that's the book that's about how God brought the Israelites out of Egypt. It's about the exodus, right? Yeah, it is, but it contains stories about their travel after they were brought out of Egypt, time in the wilderness where, hmm, why is that there? And then it has all these laws and then instructions about how to build the tabernacle. Well, why wouldn't you have all the instructions for the tabernacle in the book of Leviticus? Wouldn't that make sense? Leviticus has all the instructions about offering sacrifices, and so on. So the tabernacle instructions would go there quite nicely, and, well, all the laws about how to live, those could be in there too, right, in Leviticus, instructions about how to live. And what the Israelites did in the wilderness after they got out of Egypt, well, that would go nicely in the book of Numbers, wouldn't it? But it's all in the book of Exodus. Why? Because the book of Exodus is not strictly primarily about how God got the Israelites out of Egypt. Repeatedly in the book you have statements that the Lord makes, things like, "I'm going to do thus and such so that the Israelites would know." Actually, he says, "so that *you* would know" when he's talking to Moses, or to the Israelites — "so that you'll know that I am the Lord." And he'll say things like, "I'm going to do this so that Pharaoh, or so that the Egyptians, or so that the nations will know that I am the Lord." So, throughout the book you have this refrain coming up. And finally, the last time that this shows up, something is going to be done that will show people who the Lord is, but then it will be what the Israelites do that show, and that will be... So, all of these parts of the book — getting out of Egypt, surviving in the desert, becoming a nation with laws, and a place to worship the Lord — all those parts are tied together with this refrain, this motif you could call it, this theme of action leading to knowledge of who the Lord is. But is it really so very important to know who the Lord is? Why does this matter? Well, it matters enormously, and it becomes foundational to understanding God in the rest of the Bible, so that allusions to the book of Exodus show up throughout the Bible; themes, ideas, concepts are prevalent from Exodus all the way to the end of the book of Revelation. You can find echoes of what happened in the book of Exodus because it's terribly important to know who the Lord is, not because he *needs* to be known, but because it's good for us to know who he is, in order to understand who we are. And that's what was going on in Exodus.

Dr. Erika Moore

I think the literary purpose of the book of Exodus entails three things. First of all, redemption. The first part of the book shows us that God redeemed his people from Israel, and the exodus then becomes the paradigmatic salvation event in the rest of the

Old Testament. It's referred to over and over again. And then, in the Prophets, we see they use it to show how, because Israel itself becomes "Canaanized" in the land, they then, themselves, need to be expelled from the land, during the exile, but a second exodus will happen when God brings the people back into the land, a chastened people. So, one of the purposes is redemption. Another is law. What we have is the first nineteen chapters show us Israel coming out of Egypt, and then Exodus 19:1, we're told three months after leaving Egypt they end up on Mount Sinai. And what happens there is we have a redeemed people that is then given the law, not to become saved, they're already saved; they're already redeemed. And what happens at Mount Sinai is that the Lord tells his people, "This is how my redeemed people reflect who I am." So we get to see the heart of God, another purpose of the book. And then finally, worship. It's very interesting. In Exodus 25–40, why all these chapters devoted to the tabernacle? Except for the golden calf incident in chapters 32–34, you have 25–31 where the Lord tells Moses, build this tabernacle, and he gives all these details. And then you have chapters 35–40 where we're told the Israelites built this tabernacle. Why? Because it shows us the importance of worship.

Question 3:

What are some practical ways we can apply the stories in Exodus to our lives today?

Dr. David T. Lamb

The book of Exodus has so much to offer us. I mean, practical ways, things we can apply. A couple of lessons that come to mind right away for me: When Moses goes back and tells Pharaoh to let his people go, Pharaoh's not too excited about this idea. He likes his slaves. They're getting a lot of work done, they're building a lot of construction projects, and he basically says, "Okay, you guys are making bricks; you've got to make bricks now without straw." It gets worse before it gets better. And this continues for a while. I think one of the things we experience, God calls us in our ministries to something, something dramatic — to a new church, a new ministry, a new context — and we expect, well, if God called me here, we expect God to work it out and things to be smooth sailing. Well, that was not the case for Moses in the book of Exodus. Things got worse before they got better, and I think that there's profound lessons we can learn as we have to wait on God and to persist. Moses had a lot of opportunities when the people were complaining to just give up. In fact, in Exodus 32, God told Moses, "Look, they've built a golden calf; let's just start over with you." And if I were Moses I would have thought, "That sounds like a good idea. All these people do is complain." But Moses persisted, and he said, no. He advocated for his people to God — an amazing story in Exodus 32. And so, I think, as leaders, we've got to realize it's not always smooth sailing. Things get worse before they get better. People are going to complain. And what helps me is to know ahead of time that those things should be expected. They happened to Jesus. They happened to Moses. We shouldn't be surprised when these things happen in our ministries.

Dr. Brian D. Russell

Well, the book of Exodus is a story about liberation. It's the liberation of God's people from Egypt. But one of the key things we want to remember, the book teaches us about a liberation *from* Egypt, but just as importantly, and a lot of the book, is about a liberation *for*. Because the book of Exodus, at its core, is about becoming the people that God created all humans to be, but in particular, the people of Israel who are going to be God's missional people for the sake of the whole world. And so, early on, some practical takeaways is we see that God, the God of the Scriptures, the God who'd created, the God that called Abraham, and now the God who releases Israel, demonstrates that he's powerfully present with his people, and he's come to deliver them. And not only come to deliver them, but deliver an oppressed people from the superpower at the time, to demonstrate that there's no one like God. So, Exodus reminds us in the most difficult and challenging times that the God of Scripture is for us, even when the "us" is the "little guy" — or the oppressed, or the hurting — against the powerful. This is a God who isn't necessarily against powerful people, but God can reverse any kind of *status quo* and bring about deliverance and liberation apart from any human means. So that's good news for us.

Now, as we move through the book some other practical takeaways is a lot of times we talk about being saved, and we can talk about what we're saved *from*, but that's not the whole Christian life. We've got to talk about what we're saved *for*... God delivers us for a purpose, and Exodus talks about that. God has delivered Israel to be his missional people, to ultimately usher in the Messiah. In Exodus 19, you'll see a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That gives their vocation, but what's it mean to be holy? Well, Exodus helps us with that. We have the Ten Commandments, which, in their essence, are going to call us to love God and love neighbor, not as our means of gaining access to God but as our response. Ultimately, our deliverance that God gives to us, that he gives to his people Israel, is grace. It's about grace. And then what's the response to grace? Our response to grace is to love God, love people, live as his hands, his feet, his mouthpieces in the world, be his kingdom of priests, which exist again to extend his mission, to extend his name, to live for God in the world today.

Now, another practical takeaway is right at the end of the book of Exodus we have this long section on the tabernacle, which is difficult to read because it's very detailed, but right in the middle of the tabernacle, splitting up the narrative, we have the story of the golden calf, which stands in that context to serve as a warning to God's people, because what's the greatest threat to God's mission? It's when God's people forget who God is and practice idolatry. And that's going to be a lesson throughout the whole Old Testament. The Old Testament is nothing if not completely honest about the difficulties of living as God's people in the nations surrounded by other gods. And right here in the heart of Exodus, right after God himself spoke the Ten Commandments verbally to God's people, Moses goes back up Mount Sinai to receive more of the Torah, or God's law, and while he's gone, God's people forget,

they make a golden calf, and they severely jeopardize the mission, and in fact, breach the covenant days after they had agreed to it. And that stands as a warning for us. God delivers us from oppression, from sin, from all the things that really suffocate and squeeze our humanity, and he calls us to this great purpose, but we have to respond faithfully. And one of the chief threats to that is going to be the temptation of idolatry.

And, I could say, the last big takeaway from Exodus is, again, that the purpose of Exodus isn't again just liberation. It isn't even just our response to God's grace. The ultimate purpose of Exodus — and this is an important takeaway for us — last chapter, God's glory comes and abides with his people. And at the end of the day, that's the picture. It's almost like God's people become a sacrament to the rest of the nations. The tabernacle is in their midst, right in the middle of them. When you read the book of Numbers, Israel encamps right around the tabernacle. So here it is, right in the center of the community. The world surrounds Israel on all sides, and here's God's people with God's real presence in their midst, and they function essentially as God's priests to the rest of the nations. And so that's our ultimate takeaway. It's about mission. And then God rises up from the tabernacle, leads his people to the Promised Land as a good witness for us, where the gospel comes to us on its way to someone else, and Exodus reminds us of that.

Rev. Dr. Cyprian K. Guchienda

The stories of Exodus are very, very practical for us every, every day because we read in Exodus where God comes through for people. He blesses them, you know, he rescues them from bondage, and they start complaining. They come back and say, "Oh, you're not treating us right." They start rebelling against one who rescues them. God parts the waters, and they cross the water, and they start complaining again. So, it's a reflection of who we are as human beings. We don't remember the miracles of yesterday and relive them today. But we are called to know that even in the midst of problems or challenges that come on our way, like the children of Israel found themselves in Exodus, God is right there. God has not left us. He is with us in challenges and in good times. He is always thus. And he wants to accomplish good things for us, but he wants to refine us, and he wants us to walk out of it with a testimony that we saw God during those times of challenges.

Question 4:

What is the literary structure of the book of Exodus?

Dr. Brian D. Russell

The book of Exodus breaks up nicely into, really, three pieces. You have the most well-known section, which would be Exodus 1–15, which describes the deliverance from Egypt, God's deliverance of God's people from the land of Egypt. And when most people think about Exodus, they think about that piece. But one of the interesting things is when you read Exodus, you just kind of blow through that, that

first fifteen chapters where you see God calling Moses through a burning bush, his people are oppressed in Egypt, and then in rapid succession you have the series of plagues where God shows a supremacy over the gods of Egypt and demonstrates who the Lord really is to Pharaoh, who says in chapter 5, “Who is the Lord that I should listen to him?” Well, the first fifteen chapters of Exodus show Pharaoh and the whole world who God is, and we see Israel delivered from Egypt in spectacular fashion that climaxes with the crossing of the Red Sea. The second part, which is a little smaller, essentially describes Israel’s journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai, and it’s 15:22 all the way through chapter 18, where Israel’s in the wilderness. And there we see just a couple of things. We see God’s grace because God cares for his people. He gives them food. He gives them water. He protects them against their enemies. And at the same time, we get the first introduction to God’s people grumbling a little bit about their circumstances after they’re delivered. That theme gets picked up heavily in the book of Numbers, but we get it, we’re introduced to it in the book of Exodus.

The third section of the book of Exodus is chapters 19–40, and what needs to strike you as the reader of that is that this 19–40 is more than half the book. And if we think about it in the popular imagination, we usually think about the actual deliverance from Exodus. That’s just chapters 1–15. You have that little piece in the wilderness, but then the bulk of the book deals with what does it mean to be God’s newly redeemed, delivered people? What does that look like? And chapters 19–40 deal with that by introducing us to the Sinai covenant. God delivers Israel from Egypt, brings them to Sinai and offers them this special vocation to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And the key piece is their response to that is to agree to be faithful, listen to God’s voice, and keep his covenant. Now, what’s covenant? Well, these next chapters detail that. We see the covenant is God’s offer of relationship to Israel, and that comes with some formal details. We have the Ten Commandments as a general expression of what it means to “keep covenant,” and then chapters 21–23, then, fill that out as, that’s called the “book of the covenant,” and they have specific laws. In chapter 24 Moses and some of the elders go up Mount Sinai and they formalize that covenant. So 19–24 give us specifics on what the covenant looks like, and then we see a greater purpose of covenant, which is ultimately going to be relationship. God wants Israel to be able to take his real presence with them wherever they go and, in a sense, take Mount Sinai with them wherever they go. In the ancient world, gods and goddesses were thought to live up on mountains. They had holy mountains, and Sinai was God’s mountain, but unlike other gods, God goes with his people, and he isn’t going to be bound to some geographic location. But the issue is, how do human beings abide with a holy God? Or maybe a better way to say that, how does a holy God abide with humans? And so, God gives them the gift of the tabernacle, which is told in two pieces, chapters 25–31, which are the specific instructions on how to build a tabernacle. And then, chapters 35–40 is Moses and God’s people implementing exactly and precisely those instructions and constructing the tabernacle. And that ends then in 40:34–38 with God’s real presence, his glory coming to abide with his people, and that’s the climax. Now, there’s one other piece in Exodus, and that’s the golden calf story, 32–34. That stands there in contrast to Israel’s obedience in building the tabernacle and serves as a warning about the danger of idolatry and disobedience to

the mission that God has for his people.

Dr. Dorian G. Coover-Cox

One way to understand the structure of Exodus is to think about chapter 18 and its function in the book as a whole. In chapter 18, Jethro comes to visit Moses after the Israelites have come out of Egypt, and in the process Moses describes to him how the Lord has brought the Israelites out of Egypt and how God has preserved them in the wilderness. So, it basically gives a chance to remember, review, so to speak, Moses' thinking through what has happened, and as a result of hearing all of this, Jethro says, "Oh, now I see exactly what you're talking about..." — paraphrasing a bit — "The Lord is greater than all the gods," and they worship the Lord, which is precisely what the Lord said would happen on the mountain after he had brought the Israelites out of Egypt. So things are kind of tied together there, but then Jethro notices Moses judging the Israelites and dealing with a multitude of problems, and he recognizes, this can't work going forward; you need some help, the need for having leaders, judges. And so, looking forward to the future of Israel and how they will proceed as a nation prepares for the rest of the book — the giving of the Law, the covenant, and building a tabernacle. So, these future events are, in a sense, prepared for. Another thing that happens in chapter 18 is that we tie together some of the issues having to do with the identity of Moses. Early in the book when Moses went out to see his kinfolk, he killed an Egyptian, and later that became known. Actually, it was probably known right away, but he came out again and was accused of this, and one of his fellow Israelites said to him, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you going to kill me like you killed the Egyptian?" And Moses was terrified, figured it was time to get out of Egypt for him, and left the country. He didn't look much like a leader for his people at that point. But by the time we get to chapter 18, Moses is so much the prince and the judge over Israel that he's the one God puts in charge of appointing new princes and judges. Aha, okay. So the identity of Moses is being clarified here. And then, in the remainder of the book, who the people of Israel are will become much clearer.

Question 5:

How does Moses employ chiasm in his storytelling in the book of Exodus?

Dr. Gordon H. Johnston

So, in the Pentateuch, whether the Jacob story in the book of Genesis, or in the book of Exodus, we find symmetrical structure: A-B-C-D-C-B-A. We could talk about that as a chiasm. I, myself, I prefer to talk about it just as a symmetrical narrative plot... So, you have a prologue. The prologue introduces characters and the setting. The epilogue talks about the character, how the characters change now and where he's at. So, that's your A and your A'. B, you've got the problem. The problem is introduced; B', the problem is solved. You have rising action, you've got falling action, and then

you've got a turning point. So that prologue, problem, rising action, turning point, falling action, resolution, and epilogue: A-B-C-D-C-B-A. This is how we tell stories. This is universal. If I were to come home during the day and tell my wife something happened, I would have a beginning. I would say, "I was here" — character, setting — "This problem arose, I prayed. God intervened. This is how it happened. The problem was solved, and here I am, happy to be home to tell you all about it." So, we tend to just tell stories symmetrically.

Prof. Thomas Egger

One very common literary device in the Old Testament is chiasm, where the elements of a story are unfolded, and then you come to, kind of, a middle turning point, and then the events follow or speech follows, picking up those same elements in reverse order. It can be as simple as A-B-B-A or A-B-C-B-A. Or sometimes commentators will propose that there are actually very complex and extravagant structures to different narratives or different speeches in the Old Testament. In the book of Exodus, I think that it's actually more helpful to think about the chiasmic structure as being on a macro-level. There may well be individual readings within the book, individual scenes or episodes that are chiasmic in structure ... but I find it remarkable the way that the book as a whole introduces so many themes near its beginning that then find they are inverse towards the end of the book. And so, you have things like the house of Jacob going down into Egypt at the beginning of the book: "These are the names of the sons of Israel who went down to Egypt, each with his house." And there they live then, through the narrative, in Egypt; "the house of slaves" it's called at Mount Sinai when they're brought out. "I'm the Lord your God who brought you up from the land of Egypt, out from the house of slaves," and then the book ends with this reference to the people who have been called "the sons of Israel," or the "congregation of the sons of Israel" all through the book. It refers to them in the very closing scene of the book as "the house of Israel." It talks about, "the glory of Yahweh was on the tabernacle day and night in the sight of the house of Israel." So, you have this movement from the *households* that go down, their time in the *house* of slaves, and then they become the *house* of Israel. There are a number of other dimensions of chiasm from beginning to end in the book of Exodus. You have the people laboring to build in Egypt. They are Pharaoh's slaves, and they are building the building projects of Pharaoh. At the end of the book, you have this beautiful picture of obedient Israel, having rebelled against God with the golden calf and having been forgiven, now tasked with this beautiful labor of building the house of God, the tabernacle where God will dwell in their midst. That work is referred to in the beginning part of Exodus as "*abodah qasah*" — "hard labor." In the end of the book of Exodus, all of the regulations about the worship and the priesthood and the tabernacle are referred to as "the *abodah* of the people," their work, but also it's a word that can mean their worship. So, their labor, used at the beginning of the book, is paired with all of the dimensions of their worship at the end of the book. In that bitter labor at the beginning of the book, they are already groaning because of their oppression. But then, after Moses and Aaron speak to Pharaoh, Pharaoh takes away the straw that was provided to them, and they do not have enough. This is the complaint of the Israelite foremen who come to Pharaoh and say, "We do not have

enough. We do not have the sufficiency to do the work which you're demanding of us." At the end of the book when they go to build the tabernacle, they have a free-will offering from the people of gold and silver and other precious things for the building, and they receive so much that they have more than enough, and they have to cut things off, so they're oversupplied by the end of the book. There are all of these ways, then, that the beginning of the book and the end of the book pair up, but it's a beautiful picture at the end where all of the oppressive elements are transformed by the redemption of God to the life of his blessed people.

Question 6:

How is the book of the covenant similar to and different from other legal codes of the ancient Near East, like the Code of Hammurabi?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

There are a number of ancient Near Eastern collections of laws, say from Egypt, from Babylon, those kinds of places, that do have significance as we try to interpret the book of the covenant in the book of Exodus. But by far the most important of those is the Code of Hammurabi. This is a well-known collection. It's dated around, usually, around 1772 or so BC, and this collection of laws coming from the great Babylonian King Hammurabi is magnificent in the ways that it gives us insights into the book of the covenant that Moses gave to Israel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Now, there are just as many differences as there are similarities between these two collections, the book of the covenant and the Code of Hammurabi. So, we mustn't act as if somehow Moses got these from Hammurabi or something like that, because while Hammurabi does predate Moses by centuries, the reality is that there are differences as well... First, that when you read the Code of Hammurabi, apart from the preface, the prologue and the epilogue of the code, it seems very disorganized. I mean, it seems like he jumps from one thing to another, to another, to another, this policy to that policy, this policy to that policy. And this is helpful because, when interpreters of the Bible look at the book of the covenant, they usually want to push very hard to find some kind of rationale for the order of all the laws that are in the book of the covenant. But in reality, when you look at the book of the covenant in Exodus and compare it to Hammurabi's law code, you can see that it's just about as *ad hoc* as the book of Hammurabi is as well. Moses goes through this, then he goes through this, this, this, this. There are only very loose associations, so there's no tight outline that can be justified for the book of the covenant in the book of Exodus. There's a second thing, however, and that is a contrast, a great contrast. When you contrast the punishments that are given in the book of Hammurabi, you find that violations for different classes of people, violations *against* different classes of people had different levels of payment or punishment given to them. Moses' book of the covenant is much more egalitarian; it's much more having to do with your offending God, and no matter what kind of person you're offending or hurting, this is the requirement; this is what's necessary: eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, do what is just,

not treat the upper class better than you treat the lower class. But even beyond that, there's a third thing that I think that we'd have to say about this, and that is we learn from the book of Hammurabi's laws the function of this collection. The function was for Hammurabi to provide for local judges in various cities around his nation a standard, a set of precedents for judgments that they were to render out there in their various locations. You see, it was impossible for everyone to come to Hammurabi, everyone to come to him and get judgments directly from him, so his central court established these policies. But also, it was impossible for Hammurabi to write down every possible scenario that a local judge might face... And so, the Code of Hammurabi was written, not to give direction for every single kind of case, but rather to give precedents for judges to apply with wisdom, and that, of course, is exactly what the book of the covenant was. As Moses was setting up the legal system of Israel, he provided them, the judges in local communities, with precedents, not with every single possible situation that might come up. It was the job of the judge to interpolate, to use wisdom that they gained from experience to figure out how "I have this law. I have this law. Now how do I deal with this particular situation that sort of falls between those?" And that helps us a great deal. So, there's a great deal of benefit to comparing the Code of Hammurabi with the code that we find in the book of the covenant.

Dr. Gordon H. Johnston

We often refer to the end of Exodus 20 or even Exodus 21–23 as the book of the covenant. It's different than the Decalogue, which is "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." The book of the covenant consists of what we call "case law": if this happens, you do this; when this happens, you do that. These case laws that we have in the end of Exodus 20, or going to Exodus 21–23, are very similar in form and content to other ancient Near Eastern legal collections, for example, the Law of Hammurabi, Eshnuna, Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Eshtar. They're similar in the form in the sense that they both have this contextualized formula, but they're also similar in the content. For example, one of the most famous examples is the so-called law of the goring ox. In Eshnuna, which dated to about, let's see, 1800-1850 BC, and then Hammurabi, 1792 BC, they both feature laws dealing with goring ox. This was a problem in the ancient Near East. People had ox, and ox would gore. The book of the covenant deals with law of the goring ox. And it's not just that we have the same topic, we have some of almost the same formulations. One, if an ox owned by one man gores the ox of another man and that ox kills this ox, you divide the meat of the dead ox and you sell the live ox, and the owners split it. On the other hand, if an ox is known to gore, and the authorities have forewarned the owner, and he didn't blunt its horns or pen him in, and then he gores a man, then there's a penalty. The book of the covenant deals with the very same situation. There are differences because in Exodus the goring ox is told... the owner of the goring ox is put to death. On the other hand, in Hammurabi there is the financial penalty. So, the book of the covenant reflects a higher value on human life. And yet you've got some of the very same topics, which shouldn't surprise us because in the ancient Near Eastern world they had a very traditional culture, a lot of the same issues came up, and just common sense would tell you that if one ox gores another ox, what are you gonna do? Well, divide the meat of the dead ox; sell the live

ox; split it. That would be fair. But they're dealing with the same type of situation, same type of mentality.

Sometimes some people are troubled by the idea that the biblical case laws, the book of the covenant, Exodus 21–23, or in the case laws in Deuteronomy 12–26, sometimes some Christians are troubled that these case laws look so similar to ancient Near Eastern law codes. Shouldn't the Bible be a lot different than what the pagans had? ... Some non-conservatives sometimes suggest that the similarities between the Mosaic case laws in the ancient Near East suggest that this is not a matter of a product of divine revelation but that the biblical law has been plagiarized or borrowed from ancient Near Eastern material, and therefore, Yahweh didn't give it to Moses, or this is not from the time of Moses. I think that over-simplifies the issues. In the ancient Near East you had a very common similar culture all throughout the ancient Near East. Listen, the ancient Near East was not that much bigger than Texas, and if you've got a similar culture for a couple thousand years, there were a lot of traditional practices that arose, there was a tradition, there was a common legal tradition that was informed by human conscience, and I take human conscience as being informed by common grace, the general revelation, God working on the human heart. There's a common sense of justice all throughout the world when we talk about God working on the heart. And so, I'm not troubled by the fact that we've got similar situations and similar solutions to the problems. If you will, Yahweh, God, wrote his law on the heart of Hammurabi and Eshnuna, these ancient Near Eastern kings, and they were getting it right. And then he wrote his law on stone at Sinai, so I take this as all from the same God.

Question 7:

What significance did Old Testament festivals, Sabbaths, prayers, sacrifices, and other ceremonies have in the lives of Old Testament believers?

Dr. Steve Blakemore

In the lives of Old Testament believers, the various festivals, the Sabbath observances, sacrificial offerings that were made, they played a very important role. First of all, they were to remind Israel that its life as the people of God was a gift to them. For instance, the Passover was meant to remind them that they were once slaves in Egypt, and God and God alone has set them free. But not just to remind them that they were set free, because they were set free from Egypt to be taken to Sinai where God would establish his covenant with them. So the festival life of Israel was meant to be a reminder to them that God and God alone has called them to be his people, to remember the mighty works of God to save them. The Sabbaths were meant to remind them of two things, that the world is Yahweh's and that they didn't create themselves, and they didn't free themselves from slavery. In Exodus, Moses says, "Keep the Sabbath, for on the Sabbath day God rests." In the book of

Deuteronomy, Moses says, “Keep the Sabbath because, not only did God rest on the Sabbath day, but remember that you were once slaves in Egypt.” So, all of these festivals were meant to remind them of what God has done to redeem them and to remind them that they are, alone, the people of God because of God’s gracious goodness toward them, and out of those practices have their lives shaped, their self-understanding shaped, so that they would begin and continue to respond faithfully to God in lives of obedience, trust, love and service.

Dr. Riad Kassis

There were many special occasions in the Old Testament, in Old Testament times, like festivals, the Sabbath and other occasions. And I think there were two aspects of these special occasions. There was the religious aspect. These were occasions where people celebrated God’s goodness, God’s grace. But there was also another social aspect. I think in these special occasions people came together to strengthen their relationships, to enjoy their life as a community, something which is very much needed in our own days, in addition to that religious aspect. Sabbath was a day for worship, but it was also a day of rest. It was a day to enjoy God’s creation and to enjoy fellowship with other fellow men and women.

Question 8:

How does the book of Exodus demonstrate that God is always faithful to his covenant?

Dr. Timothy E. Saleska

God demonstrates that he’s faithful to his covenant not only by continually giving us his promises, but also, as we read the narrative in a marvelous way, you can see how he begins to fulfill the promises he’s made in the actual events and in his working with God’s people, with his people Israel. I want to call your attention to the last part, first of all, of the book of Genesis... So remember, on his deathbed Joseph recalls the covenant that God had made with his forefathers, which included the promise to bring them out into the land that he had promised them. When we get to the book of Exodus, right at the beginning of the book, in the first chapter, notice what Moses writes in verse 7:

But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied, and grew exceedingly mighty, and the land was filled with them (Exodus 1:7, NKJV).

So, notice how Moses there echoes the promise that God had made to the patriarchs back in the book of Genesis, that they would become a great nation, as many as the sand that’s on the seashore, stars in the sky, promised them the land, as Joseph remembered on his deathbed. So, here in Exodus we see that God had already worked to begin fulfilling that promise to his people, except that they were in the wrong

place. But already then, at the beginning of the book, if Moses wants you to remember the promise, remember the covenant that God made, we are already kind of alerted to the fact that now Yahweh was going to act on behalf of his people. As we read in the first part of Exodus then, the people, because they were so numerous, became slaves of the Egyptians, and their work was arduous and hard, and they cried to Yahweh. And when we get to the end of chapter 2, Moses writes this:

So God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them (Exodus 2:24-25, NKJV).

And so, here we see God starting to move on behalf of his people on the basis of the promise that he had made to them. And of course, in the rest of the first part of that book then, we see how God began to move by choosing Moses, his servant, and Aaron, his brother, to lead his people out, and he did it with mighty acts, working through Moses as the leader of his people. And it was always in view of the promises that he had made to bring them out of Egypt to the land that he had promised them.

Prof. Thomas Egger

One of the major themes in the book of Exodus is God's faithfulness to his promises, his faithfulness to the covenant that he's made with the people. The book of Genesis ends with a setup for the book of Exodus with Joseph saying to his brothers that God will visit them in Egypt and will bring them up. And this confidence among the people that God would fulfill this promise, this promise to bring them back to the land of Canaan, the land that he had promised to their forefathers, and that he would plant them there, and they would be his people, and he would be their God. That has to happen as we go through the book of Exodus. That has to happen because God has promised it, and the God who has promised it is faithful. But, there are so many things that get in the way of that all through the book of Exodus. The people are enslaved by a ruthless king, one of the most powerful figures in the world of his day, the pharaoh of Egypt. And it seems impossible that God's people will emerge from that situation and go to the land that God has promised to their forefathers. Yet, in miraculous, mighty ways, God reaches in, and he shows his faithfulness. He brings about that deliverance so that he can fulfill the promise that he made to their fathers. Having taken them out of Egypt, led them even through the sea, they encounter the Amalekites in the wilderness; they have to do battle there. The Lord shows his strength, he brings them through. But their biggest foe in the wilderness will become themselves, and this is, perhaps, the greatest demonstration of the Lord's faithfulness. This Hebrew word, the "*chesed*" of the Lord, his lovingkindness, his persistent, merciful faithfulness to his people, that even when they show themselves to be in every way just like Pharaoh, just as deserving of God's judgment as Pharaoh. "Stiff-necked," God calls them, and he uses the same word root there that was used for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, one of the words used for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Just as Pharaoh was hard of heart, the people are hard of neck. They are rebellious; they are sinful. But God's mercy finds a way, and through the atoning

blood, through the mediation of Moses, through expressing his great mercy and compassion and forgiveness, he finds a way to go with the people and to lead them and continue to lead them towards that Land of Promise.

Dr. Erika Moore

One of the things that the book of Exodus demonstrates for us is God's faithfulness to his covenant. So, the book starts out with the Israelites in bondage in Egypt, and yet the Lord hears the cry of his people. So he raises up Moses as a deliverer, and he frees the people from slavery ... and the time period is the three months between leaving Egypt and entering, or landing on Mount Sinai. We know that because Exodus 15 is the poetic account of the crossing of the Red Sea. And then we get to chapters 16, 17 and 18. In 19, we're told it's three months out of Egypt, and they're at Mount Sinai. So, even right at the get-go, God frees them from slavery, and what happens? Well, what the people do is they start grumbling and complaining. And what does the Lord do? He hears their grumbling and complaining, and what does he do? He gives them manna and quail. Then, he also gives them water. And then what we have in Exodus 20, he brings them to Mount Sinai, chapter 19, and even though they have been complaining and grumbling, what does he do? He says, "I've carried you on eagles' wings, I've brought you here; you are my people," and he continues to be in covenant relationship with them in the giving of the law. And then, in chapter 25, he says to Moses — this is an amazing passage — he tells Moses:

[Tell the Israelites to] make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them (Exodus 25:8).

The Emmanuel principle — God wants to be with his people. So, all these chapters then are giving, describing all the details of the tabernacle, and then we have the golden calf incident that's sandwiched around proper worship. And yet, after the golden calf incident, there's this conversation between Moses and Yahweh, and Yahweh continues to be with his people so that at the end of the book we see his great covenant faithfulness. The tabernacle is built, and we're told that the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. So, God has come to be with his people, he remains faithful to the covenant despite Israel's unfaithfulness.

Question 9:
What does the word Yahweh mean?

Dr. Scott Redd

The question of the meaning of the word Yahweh has been a topic, obviously, of a lot of dialogue and discussion over the course of biblical interpretation. It's clearly and closely connected with the inauguration, the initiation of God's relationship with Moses and the people of Israel through the Mosaic covenant in both Exodus 3 and Exodus 6, and it's clearly tied to this new arrangement that God has made with his people. It marks a new kind of relationship that he's entering into with his people that

even Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not experienced or been able to understand in a unique way. So, the term, or the title “Yahweh” is usually covenantal. It’s usually used in focusing on God’s covenant relationship with his people and the way in which he goes about both caring for them and drawing their worship to him... But the word is closely connected with the Mosaic covenant, not meaning that it wasn’t used in previous years or in previous arrangements, but not used in that way. In other words, it marks a change that’s taking place when God enters into his relationship with Moses. Now, there are a variety of theories as to why we should vocalize it “Yahweh” and not something else, or why we should pronounce it as the word “Yahweh.” One prevailing one that I find to be pretty convincing is the idea that Yahweh Sabaoth, which is often translated “Lord of Hosts” or “Lord of heavenly armies” is actually the fuller version of the name Yahweh, and that if we read Yahweh as being a verb form referring to something like, God’s causing something to be, or in this case, causing the heavenly armies, the heavenly hosts to be, then it shows that God’s role, or Yahweh’s role, is one of creation, but not *merely* creation. It’s creation as a warrior king. He’s creating the heavenly hosts to go about bringing his will in the cosmos.

Dr. Don Collett

The word “Yahweh” is derived from four Hebrew consonants, and we call that the “tetragrammaton” — “*tetra*” referring to “four,” four consonants. We don’t really know how those four consonants were vocalized, which is to say what vowels were attached to those consonants so that we could name them. Part of the reason we don’t know is because the Jewish tradition had a practice of not pronouncing what, the word we now call Yahweh. However, what they would say in its place was “*Adonai*,” or in the Septuagint, “*Kurios*,” both of which mean “Lord.” Since the word Yahweh occurs most often in covenantal context where God’s redemptive purposes are in view, and since the tradition, both Jewish and the Greek translation of the Old Testament have rendered it with words that mean Lord, I would say Yahweh means “the covenant Lord of Israel.”

Dr. Michael D. Williams

Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa* took the name Yahweh as a statement of being. God is saying to Moses and through Moses to the Israelites, “I am the God who exists over against the gods who do not exist.” The problem with that is, one, it comes from a kind of “philosophy of being” approach to reading the text. But it’s also kind of a trivialization, if I can put it that way. It doesn’t fit the context at all. It’s as if Moses has walked up the mountain, he’s going to see this great light. He comes onto this bush; it’s on fire, but it’s not being consumed, and then it speaks. And Moses says, “Who shall I tell them sent me?” and God says, “I exist.” And I can just imagine Moses going, “Uhh, yeah, I got that, but what’s your name? Who are you, really?” ... But the context here is that God is giving his name to his people. He wants them to call upon him. I remember Willem Van Gemeren saying God’s name, Yahweh, is like on his business card, on the front of it, it says “Elohim, Creator of all things.” And then he writes Yahweh and his personal phone number on the back and he gives it to his people — “You can get me. You can make contact with me 24/7. I’m always available to you.” And what’s interesting is the covenant name; it appears throughout

the Old Testament in the context of God entering into covenant relationship... So what does Yahweh mean? Yahweh means I am the one who's always faithful. I'm the one who keeps promise. I'm the one who's here for you. I'm your God.

Question 10:

How does the book of Exodus present God as a warrior-king who fights on behalf of his people?

Dr. Scott Redd

One of the most significant depictions of the Lord in the Old Testament is God's role as king, and as a king, he would have multiple duties just like any other ancient Near Eastern king, multiple duties and functions that give light to his office as king. One of those functions would have been a warrior function. You see, in the ancient Near East, the king was considered the leader of the hosts, the leader of the armies of his nation, and as such, he was also the greatest warrior. So God, or the Lord, being a warrior throughout the Old Testament depicts God as a king who is a warrior-king. He goes out and defends, he fights for, he delivers, and he protects his own people... So when we look at the story of Exodus, God going down and sending plagues against Pharaoh and his house, and indeed the whole nation of Egypt, is not just God showing random or arbitrary power in Egypt, but rather, he's addressing through each individual plague what were perceived to be the strengths and the domains of the Egyptian gods. So Yahweh is, in fact, even in Exodus, a delivering warrior. He comes in and he delivers his people from the Egyptian household, from the Egyptian pantheon of gods, and delivers them unto himself. Likewise, in the conquest of the Promised Land, God's people are shown to be going into war, and yet the victory is never for them. The victory is always for the Lord... God's role as a warrior-king is a cause for consolation and comfort, but also a cause for confidence. As we go out into the world around us, God's people can be sure that their God is a warrior and that he goes out and fights for them, and he protects them, and he defends them, and the victory will be his.

Rev. Dr. Paul R. Raabe

Just as Exodus 15 speaks of Yahweh as king, so it also speaks of Yahweh as a warrior. And so again, the context is Israel was in bondage in Egypt and they were under the thumb, under the total control of Pharaoh. And so, they were in bondage to Pharaoh, they were slaves to him. And Yahweh, the God of Israel, intervened and dealt with Pharaoh with his ten plagues, kind of pummeled him ten times and delivered Israel from bondage, and in that sense, you might say that Yahweh, the God of Israel, went to war against Pharaoh, the kind of the "god-king," the "incarnate" king of Egypt. And so, Yahweh went to war against Pharaoh and defeated him and thereby delivered his people from bondage. So there had to be a battle in order for there to be freedom for God's people. And so Exodus 15, Moses sings to Yahweh:

For he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. [Yahweh] is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him...

And then Moses says:

[Yahweh] is a man of war; [Yahweh] is his name (Exodus 15:1-3, ESV).

And so,

Your right hand, O [Yahweh], glorious in power, your right hand, O [Yahweh], shatters the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries (Exodus 15:6-7, ESV).

So, it picks up on that that Yahweh, like a warrior, defeated the enemy and freed his people.

Rev. Dr. Cyprian K. Guchienda

The book of Exodus demonstrates very, very clearly that God is a victorious warrior because the children of Israel were untrained militarily, and they had to face opposition, opposition from within themselves and from outside. And most of the time that they wanted to give up, God would come through and fight a battle for them, fight a battle within themselves — their rebelliousness... their not remembering that God called them out of a nation that had oppressed them — and God leading them into a place they did not know, creating a path that they did not know. They did not have a compass that would give them directions. But God knew; he foreknew where he was taking them, and he knew the path that they would take. So, God provided, and God fought for them.

Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

In the book of Exodus, God appears as a mighty warrior-king, a typical ancient Near Eastern style. Of course, many have pointed out that through the plagues God defeats various deities of Egypt, but I think this really culminates at the Red Sea and the song of victory in chapter 15 where God is called an "*ish milhamah*," a "man of war," an idiom that means "a warrior." So, he's specifically called this. And of course, at the Red Sea he defeats the chariots of Egypt. This powerful warrior-king, if you go with the early dating of the exodus, it would be Amenhotep II; if you go with the later dating of the exodus it would be Ramses II. Either way, you have a mighty pharaoh with his chariot force, and the Lord annihilates this force, ironically, using the sea, because often in the ancient Near East, the sea is a symbol of chaos and opposition to the warrior-king. But Yahweh is such a powerful warrior, he can use the sea as his instrument to defeat the mighty Egyptian force.

Question 11:

In what ways do the Ten Commandments reveal the grace of God?

Rev. Dr. Cyprian K. Guchienda

The Ten Commandments reveal the grace of God in that God has divided the Ten Commandments in two parts. The four first commandments it's about our relationship with him. He wants us to know. He's so graceful, he does not let us guess, so he puts it before us so that we can know and know him and establish a relationship with him. The second part of it is six that relate with us and other human beings, and God wants us to have a great relationship as human beings because he created us as a family, and he wants us to love one another. He wants us to forgive. He wants us not to take from one another. He wants us to help one another. So, all these two draw us closer to God, when we look up to him vertically and horizontally when we relate to one another in a right way.

Dr. Brian D. Russell

The Ten Commandments are a powerful witness to God's grace. A lot of times when we think about the Old Testament and the laws, we think about them just being about obedience, about earning God's favor, but when we look carefully at the Ten Commandments, we can actually see that, in a sense, they're showing us God's grace by God graciously showing us how to respond to his grace. And that's really the key piece. The Ten Commandments start with this statement by God. This is a place where God identifies who he is. We saw that earlier in the book of Exodus where to Moses he said, "I am who I am." Well, in Exodus 20:2, that kind of cryptic, "I am who I am" gets a little clearer. It says, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." So, that is a dramatic statement about God's grace. Before God gives any laws to his people, God reminds them of his grace: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." And what that does is it sets up the rest of the Ten Commandments, not as laws to become God's people, but gives God's people an *ethos*, or a way of life, that allows them to respond to God's grace. In fact, in the synagogue, Jewish persons actually take that statement as the first commandment — "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt" — as a way of reminding themselves about grace. But then as you move through the rest of the Ten Commandments, how do we respond to God's grace? How do we live as people that have been delivered? Well, the Ten Commandments basically have two sections that are connected by the Sabbath commandment. In the first commands we have essentially, how do you love God? And you love God by having no other gods before the Lord, by not making graven images or images of God, and by not taking the Lord's name in vain. So, we love God by not practicing idolatry, essentially. So that's the one piece. We have this vertical relationship with God, and we see God wants us to respond to his grace by being fully in allegiance to him. Then the second half of the Ten Commandments, starting with "Honor your father and mother," is we have a series of laws that give us standards for

interacting with other people, because the God of the Scriptures is not just a personal spirituality; there's a communal piece to this. It's not enough to simply love God. That's the critical piece, but then that has to then be expressed in the way that we live and love other people, and that's the second part of the Ten Commandments. Then right in the middle we see this other piece of God's grace. It reminds us to keep the Sabbath: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," or "by keeping it holy." And right there we see in a microcosm the ethic that God wants. God's created us ultimately, not for work but for rest, to abide in God's presence, and on Sabbath, God combines, really, that vertical relationship of loving him with how we treat other people by carving into the fabric of creation this one day in which we do nothing; we remember God's grace. And so, it's the one day that our main action is inaction, and that includes extending inaction to everyone. As you read the Ten Commandments, the longest one is the Sabbath command, and there's a list of pieces there. So, I can't keep a Sabbath and then make my kids do all the work for me, or I can't keep a Sabbath and send my donkey out to work for me. Everything closes down that day as we remember and practice the love for God and the love for our neighbors. And so, we see God's grace in action throughout those commands.

Question 12:

How would the description of the tabernacle in the book of Exodus have comforted its readers that God's kingly presence is with his people?

Dr. James M. Hamilton

God's presence in the tabernacle and the temple is significant because the tabernacle and the temple are the universe in miniature. They are microcosms of what the world is, and so God's presence there really represents his presence in the world. The world is the temple that he made in which he would commune with his people. And then, when Adam rebelled, God chose this one line of people that eventually becomes the nation of Israel, and he takes up residence among them, and where he dwells among them is in this miniature replica of what the universe was, and his presence there is unique because that's where Israel goes to be in the presence of God, to the tabernacle, and later the temple, and it's also something of a foretaste of what God is going to do in the whole world. When God fills the tabernacle at its consecration, when it's completed at the end of Exodus, and later when he fills the temple when it's completed in 1 Kings 8, we're really getting a preview of what's going to happen in the universe when the glory of God is fully known.

Dr. Brian D. Russell

The book of Exodus describes the Lord as the true King. And that's an absolutely critical piece for us as God's people, because that question, "Who is the King?" affects so many things. When we get to the New Testament, we're going to be talking about the kingdom of God and what does it look like to live for God's kingdom over against the kingdoms of the earth or whatever empire we may find ourselves in at any

kind of given moment because God's kingdom is the one that's going to ultimately last forever... But this is a different kind of king, and this is what's the key piece. In the ancient world, most spirituality, most religious beliefs essentially propped up the powerful and kept down the people at the bottom. The Lord's a different kind of king because God reverses all that in the book of Exodus. He brings down the powerful and lifts up his people who had been oppressed. And so that would have been a powerful reminder that God is truly for everyone, not just the people that are already connected politically and with wealth. And so God, as a king, comforts his people because he's a different kind of king who comes and actually serves God's people. And then, unlike kings who live far away, who you may only encounter through their face on a coin, or in the modern world, their picture on TV or in the newspapers, Israel's God, the Lord, the true King, invites God's people to come and be with him on his holy mountain, Sinai, and then even more profoundly makes a means, the tabernacle, where God can literally come down and abide in the midst of his people forever. Now, when we get to the New Testament, the tabernacle was used to foreshadow Jesus, the Word's going to become flesh and make its dwelling among us, "tabernacle" among us. And so, Jesus is going to put a human face on this God that they've met in Egypt. But all the way back in the book of Exodus, we have this kingly presence of a king who wants to abide with his people. That king's ultimately going to be Jesus, and the New Testament is going to tell us about him.

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