

# John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Exodus

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## Bible Introductions – Exodus

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### Title

The Greek Septuagint (LXX)<sup>1</sup> and the Latin Vulgate versions of the OT assigned the title “Exodus” to this second book of Moses, because the departure of Israel from Egypt is the dominant historical fact in the book ([19:1](#)). In the Hebrew Bible, the opening words, “And (or Now) these are the names,” served as the title of the book. The opening “And” or “Now” in the Hebrew title suggests that this book was to be accepted as the obvious sequel to Genesis, the first book of Moses. [Hebrews 11:22](#) commends the faith of Joseph who, while on his deathbed (ca. 1804 B.C.), spoke of the “departure” or the “exiting” of the sons of Israel, looking ahead over 350 years to the Exodus (ca. 1445 B.C.).

### Author and Date

Mosaic authorship of Exodus is unhesitatingly affirmed. Moses followed God’s instructions and “wrote all the words of the LORD” ([24:4](#)), which included at the least the record of the battle with Amalek ([17:14](#)), the Ten Commandments ([34:4](#), [27–29](#)), and the Book of the Covenant ([20:22–23:33](#)). Similar assertions of Mosaic writing occur elsewhere in the Pentateuch: Moses is identified as the one who recorded the “starting points of their journeys” ([Deut. 31:9](#)).

The OT corroborates Mosaic authorship of the portions mentioned above (see [Josh. 1:7](#), [8](#); [8:31](#), [32](#); [1 Kin. 2:3](#); [2 Kin. 14:6](#); [Neh. 13:1](#); [Dan. 9:11–13](#); and [Mal. 4:4](#)). The NT concurs by citing [Ex. 3:6](#) as part of “the book of Moses” ([Mark. 12:26](#)), by assigning [Ex. 13:2](#) to “the law of Moses,” which is also referred to as “the law of the Lord” ([Luke 2:22](#), [23](#)), by ascribing [Ex. 20:12](#) and [21:17](#) to Moses ([Mark 7:10](#)), by attributing the law to Moses ([John 7:19](#); [Rom. 10:5](#)), and by Jesus’ specifically declaring that Moses had written of Him ([John 5:46](#), [47](#)).

At some time during his 40-year tenure as Israel's leader, beginning at 80 years of age and ending at 120 ([7:7](#); [Deut. 34:7](#)), Moses wrote down this second of his 5 books. More specifically, it would have been after the Exodus and obviously before his death on Mt. Nebo in the plains of Moab. The date of the Exodus (ca. 1445 B.C.) dictates the date of the writing in the 15th century B.C.

Scripture dates Solomon's fourth year of reign, when he began to build the temple (ca. 966/65 B.C.), as being 480 years after the Exodus ([1 Kin. 6:1](#)), establishing the early date of 1445 B.C. Jephthah noted that, by his day, Israel had possessed Heshbon for 300 years ([Judg. 11:26](#)). Calculating backward and forward from Jephthah, and taking into account different periods of foreign oppression, judgeships and kingships, the wilderness wanderings, and the initial entry and conquest of Canaan under Joshua, this early date is confirmed and amounts to 480 years.

Scripture also dates the entry of Jacob and his extended family into Egypt (ca. 1875 B.C.) as being 430 years before the Exodus ([12:40](#)), thus placing Joseph in what archeologists have designated as the 12th Dynasty, the Middle Kingdom period of Egyptian history, and placing Moses and Israel's final years of residence and slavery in what archeologists have designated as the 18th Dynasty, or New Kingdom period. Further, Joseph's stint as vizier over all of Egypt ([Gen. 45:8](#)) precludes his having served under the Hyksos (ca. 1730–1570 B.C.), the foreign invaders who ruled during a period of confusion in Egypt and who never controlled all of the country. They were a mixed Semitic race who introduced the horse and chariot as well as the composite bow. These implements of war made possible their expulsion from Egypt.

## Background and Setting

Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt, the setting for Israel's dramatic departure, was not a politically or economically weak and obscure period of Egyptian history. Thutmose III, for example, the Pharaoh of the Oppression has been called the "Napoleon of Ancient Egypt," the sovereign who expanded the boundaries of Egyptian influence far beyond natural borders. This was the dynasty which over a century before, under the leadership of Amose I, had expelled the Hyksos kings from the country and redirected the country's economic, military, and diplomatic growth. At the time of the Exodus, Egypt was strong, not weak.

Moses, born in 1525 B.C. (80 years old in 1445 B.C.), became "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" ([Acts 7:22](#)) while growing up in the courts of Pharaohs Thutmose I and II and Queen Hatshepsut for his first 40 years ([Acts 7:23](#)). He was in self-imposed, Midianite exile during the reign of Thutmose III for another 40 years ([Acts 7:30](#)), and returned at God's direction to be Israel's leader early in the reign of Amenhotep II, the pharaoh of the Exodus. God used both the educational system of Egypt and his exile in Midian to prepare Moses to represent his people before a powerful pharaoh and to guide his people through the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula during his final 40 years ([Acts 7:36](#)). Moses died on Mt. Nebo when he was 120 years old ([Deut. 34:1–6](#)), as God's judgment was on him for his anger and disrespect ([Num. 20:1–3](#)). While he looked on from afar, Moses never entered the Promised Land. Centuries later he appeared to the disciples on the Mt. of Transfiguration ([Matt. 17:3](#)).

## Historical and Theological Themes

In God's timing, the Exodus marked the end of a period of oppression for Abraham's descendants ([Gen. 15:13](#)), and constituted the beginning of the fulfillment of the covenant promise to Abraham that his descendants would not only reside in the Promised Land, but would also multiply and become a great nation ([Gen. 12:1–3, 7](#)). The purpose of the book may be expressed like this: To trace the rapid growth of Jacob's descendants from Egypt to the establishment of the theocratic nation in their Promised Land.

At appropriate times, on Mt. Sinai and in the plains of Moab, God also gave the Israelites that body of legislation, the law, which they needed for living properly in Israel as the theocratic people of God. By this, they were distinct from all other nations ([Deut. 4:7, 8](#); [Rom. 9:4, 5](#)).

By God's self-revelation, the Israelites were instructed in the sovereignty and majesty, the goodness and holiness, and the grace and mercy of their Lord, the one and only God of heaven and earth (see especially [Ex. 3, 6, 33, 34](#)). The account of the Exodus and the events that followed are also the subject of other major biblical revelation (cf. [Pss. 105:25–45; 106:6–27; Acts 7:17–44; 1 Cor. 10:1–13; Heb. 9:1–6; 11:23–29](#)).

## Interpretive Challenges

The absence of any Egyptian record of the devastation of Egypt by the 10 plagues and the major defeat of Pharaoh's elite army at the Red Sea should not give rise to speculation on whether the account is historically authentic. Egyptian historiography did not permit records of their pharaohs' embarrassments and ignominious defeats to be published. In recording the Conquest under Joshua, Scripture specifically notes the three cities which Israel destroyed and burned ([Josh. 6:24; 8:28; 11:11–13](#)). The Conquest, after all, was one of takeover and inhabitation of property virtually intact, not a war designed to destroy. The date of Israel's march into Canaan will not be confirmed, therefore, by examining extensive burn levels at city-sites of a later period.

Despite the absence of any extrabiblical, ancient Near Eastern records of the Hebrew bondage, the plagues, the Exodus, and the Conquest, archeological evidence corroborates the early date. All the pharaohs, for example, of the 15th century left evidence of interest in building enterprises in Lower Egypt. These projects were obviously accessible to Moses in the Delta region near Goshen.

The typological significance of the tabernacle has occasioned much reflection. Ingenuity in linking every item of furniture and every piece of building material to Christ may appear most intriguing, but if NT statements and allusions do not support such linkage and typology then hermeneutical caution must rule. The tabernacle's structure and ornamentation for efficiency and beauty are one thing, but finding hidden meaning and symbolism is unfounded. How the sacrificial and worship system of the tabernacle and its parts meaningfully typify the redeeming work of the coming Messiah must be left to those NT passages which treat the subject.

## Outline

1. Israel in Egypt ([1:1–12:36](#))
  - A. The Population Explosion ([1:1–7](#))
  - B. The Oppression Under the Pharaohs ([1:8–22](#))
  - C. The Maturation of a Deliverer ([2:1–4:31](#))
  - D. The Confrontation with Pharaoh ([5:1–11:10](#))
  - E. The Preparation for Departure ([12:1–36](#))
2. Israel on the Road to Sinai ([12:37–18:27](#))
  - A. Exiting Egypt and Panicking ([12:37–14:14](#))
  - B. Crossing the Red Sea and Rejoicing ([14:15–15:21](#))
  - C. Traveling to Sinai and Grumbling ([15:22–17:16](#))
  - D. Meeting with Jethro and Learning ([18:1–27](#))
3. Israel Encamped at Sinai ([19:1–40:38](#))
  - A. The Law of God Prescribed ([19:1–24:18](#))
  - B. The Tabernacle of God Described ([25:1–31:18](#))
  - C. The Worship of God Defiled ([32:1–35](#))
  - D. The Presence of God Confirmed ([33:1–34:35](#))
  - E. The Tabernacle of God Constructed ([35:1–40:38](#))

## Footnotes

1. LXX Septuagint: an ancient translation of the Old Testament into Greek.

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