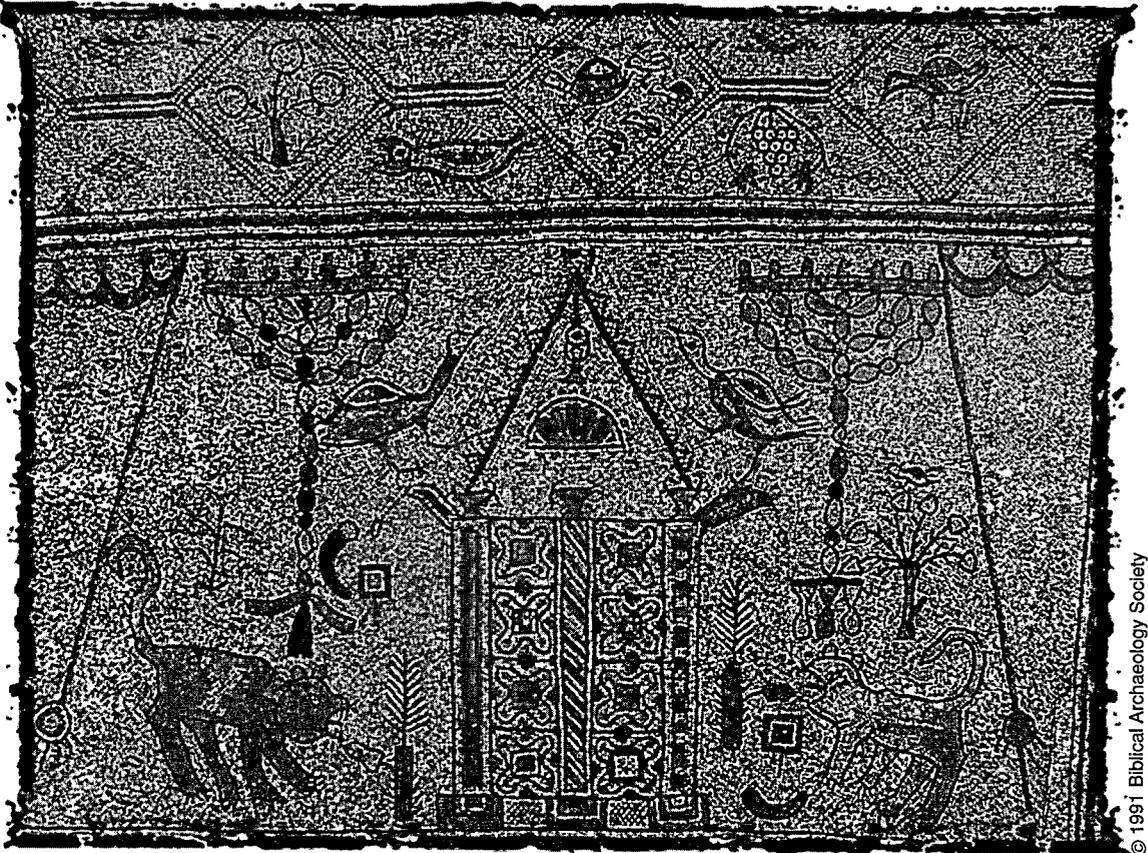


EXODUS LEVITICUS



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Sixth-century mosaic of the ark of the covenant

The story of Israel's ancestors, which began in the Book of Genesis, continues in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. The names of these two books tell their central themes. Exodus tells the story of the Hebrews' departure from Egypt, and Leviticus contains laws about priestly or levitical matters. The term *levitical* comes from the name *Levi*, the ancestor of the Hebrew priests.

Let's recall some of the last lesson. Genesis closed with stories about the deaths of Jacob and Joseph in Egypt. But in Genesis 47:10-12, we saw that Jacob's whole family moved to Egypt. At that time their total number was only seventy.

EXODUS 1

The Book of Exodus retells some of this earlier history, as it prepares to continue the story. Read Exodus 1:1-7.

Verse 7 suggests that the Hebrews stayed a long time in Egypt. The Bible says that they "were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them." Later, Exodus 12:40 tells us "the time that the people of Israel had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years."

This brief introduction of seven verses joins the story of Genesis with that of Exodus. The writer then skillfully sets the stage for the

Exodus from Egypt. The Exodus is God's great act of liberation and the Hebrews' great emancipation from slavery.

After Joseph dies and persons forget his fame, life takes a new turn for the Hebrews. The new king over Egypt sets taskmasters over them, afflicting them with heavy burdens. Exodus 1:8-22 tells how the Egyptians force the Hebrews to endure slavery and servitude. They make the Hebrews work on state construction projects and labor in the fields. Fearful that the numerous Hebrews might revolt, the Egyptians try to reduce the Hebrew population. Read Exodus 1:8-14.

Pharaoh instructs the midwives to kill all the male Hebrew babies. When they don't, the pharaoh orders his people to throw the newborn babies into the Nile River.

Three times in Chapter 1 the Book of Exodus mentions how the Israelites "multiplied." See verses 7, 12, and 20. What part of God's promise to Abraham did this Israelite population explosion fulfill? (See Genesis 15:5.)

EXODUS 2-4

During this time, a woman from the tribe of Levi gives birth to a son. Chapter 2 narrates the story of Moses' birth. Throughout the story of Moses, the writer points many times to divine providence that works in strange ways to produce unusual ends.

For example, in the birth story, Pharaoh's attempt to kill the Hebrews results in his raising a Hebrew in his own palace. After Moses' birth, his mother sets him afloat in the Nile, hoping to preserve him from slaughter. This well-known story reports how the pharaoh's own daughter rescues Moses and unknowingly secures the child's own mother to serve as a wet nurse. Pharaoh's daughter raises Moses in the court of Pharaoh, and later tradition says that Moses received the best education of his day.

As a grown man, Moses sees the humili-

ation of his people; and in a raging anger he kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew. He buries the body in the sand and then flees the country. He goes to Midian, a district near the land of Canaan. There he takes refuge with a priest, eventually marrying one of the priest's seven daughters.

Moses was hardly aware of God's providence in his life during the first eighty years. However, the experiences of Moses during that period prepared him for leading the Israelites through the desert. The training in the court of Pharaoh gave him administrative experience. So God prepared Moses for service even when Moses was unaware that he was in training.

In Midian at a sacred mountain, God appears to Moses, commissioning him to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. Exodus 3 and 4 report this episode. God's compassion for the people and God's aim of bringing them out of Egypt form the background for Moses' call. Verses 7 and 8 of Chapter 3 summarize these sentiments. Read Exodus 3:7-8.

God addresses Moses from a burning bush. When Moses hears of God's plan for him, Moses offers many excuses for not accepting the task. He complains that he has no special reputation as a leader. Above all, he argues that he has to know the name of the God who commissioned him. Only then can he convince his people that this God appeared to him.

God answers Moses by telling him to say to his people: "I AM has sent me to you." Here the text explains the Hebrew name for God, which is *Yahweh*. The word *Yahweh* relates to the Hebrew word meaning "to be." So Yahweh declares to Moses "I AM WHO I AM" or "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE." Moses then tries to refuse the task by saying he is not an eloquent speaker. To meet this need, God supplies Aaron.

We often call Moses the first prophet. One common characteristic of Old Testament prophets is their initial hesitation to answer God's call. When Moses hesitates and objects that his people will not believe him, God gives him three signs to support

the call. Read Exodus 4:1-9, and list the three signs.

- a.
- b.
- c.

EXODUS 5-12

Together, Moses and Aaron return to Egypt. There they begin the task of convincing the pharaoh to let the people go. Chapters 5 to 12 report the negotiations of Moses with Pharaoh. These chapters also tell of the ten plagues God sends upon the Egyptians.

The Hebrews leave Egypt only after the first-born babies and the first-born animals of the Egyptians die. Exodus 12 tells us that future generations will continue to celebrate the Passover, to commemorate the departure from Egypt. Exodus 12:25-27 states the understanding behind the Passover ritual. Read Exodus 12:25-27.

1. Exodus 12 records the establishment of the Passover and connects it with the last of the ten plagues. Name the three foods required by the feast (Exodus 12:8).

- a.
- b.
- c.



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Moses and the burning bush

2. Read Exodus 12:13, 23. Why was the blood of the lamb in the first Passover especially important?

EXODUS 13-17

Exodus 13 to 18 describes events that happen to the Hebrews after they leave Egypt but before they arrive at Mount Sinai. In Chapters 13 and 14, they miraculously escape the Egyptians by crossing the sea on dry land.

Most of Exodus 15 is a song celebrating the escape of the Hebrews and the destruction of the Egyptians. No doubt, later Israelites sang this song frequently to mark the Passover occasion.

1. Read Exodus 14:24-25. What was the reaction of the Egyptians when their chariot wheels clogged as they pursued the Israelites?



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Sculpted depiction of a wheeled ark, Capernaum synagogue

2. Read Exodus 14:31. What was the reaction of the Israelites when they saw what had happened to the Egyptians?

EXODUS 18-20

From the sea the Hebrews move toward the wilderness. The people begin to complain when the conditions become trying. This murmuring of the people is a common theme associated with the Hebrews' experience in the wilderness. To quiet their protests, God provides manna, quail, and water.

In Exodus 18 Moses and the Hebrews meet Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, in the desert. When Jethro sees how overworked Moses is, he suggests that Moses appoint judges to handle all matters, except for the most difficult cases. After following Jethro's advice, Moses lets his father-in-law depart, and Jethro returns to Midian.

At the beginning of Chapter 19 the Hebrews arrive at Mount Sinai. According to verse 1, they arrive there on the third new moon, that is, three months after leaving Egypt. Mount Sinai is the setting for the rest of the Book of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and much of the Book of Numbers. According to Numbers 10:11, the people leave Mount Sinai in the second month of the second year after leaving Egypt.

Most of the material in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers is legal in nature. In Exodus 19, Moses goes up the mountain and receives laws that he then proclaims to the people. Exodus 20 contains what we now call the Ten Commandments.

Read Exodus 20:1-17. Note that the first commandments describe a person's duty to God. Write out the first commandment that describes a person's duty to another human.

EXODUS 21-40

Chapters 21, 22, and 23 are a collection of laws on various topics. These topics range from the freeing of slaves, to cases involving capital punishment, to matters of civil law.

In Exodus 24 Moses goes up to the mountain again, first with seventy elders and then by himself. In Chapters 25 to 31, God gives Moses instructions about building the Tabernacle and supplying its furnishings. In these chapters we also find the regulations about the priests and their special functions and clothing.

In Exodus 32 and 33 we read the story of the golden calf. While the Hebrews wait for Moses to come down from the mountain, they make a golden calf and worship it. When Moses descends to the camp, he sees the calf and the dancing. He throws down the inscribed tablets and breaks them. The Lord punishes the people for their idolatry. The sons of Levi kill 3,000 men, and a plague falls on the others. Moses goes back up the mountain.

In Chapter 34 the Lord repeats the law previously given. This chapter, however, repeats only some of the laws in Exodus 20 to 23 and then not in the same terms. These similarities and differences in the Law suggest that Israel possessed various summaries of its laws, which have remained separate.

Exodus 35 to 40 tells how Moses assembles the people. Together they construct the Tabernacle and carry out the commandments recorded in Chapters 25 to 31.

1. God gave detailed instructions to Moses and the people for building the Tabernacle. What was the purpose of this tent? (Exodus 25:8)

2. When Moses had finished erecting the Tabernacle, how did he know that the Lord approved? (Exodus 40:34)

LEVITICUS

We now turn to Leviticus. The entire Book of Leviticus deals with laws given to Moses and Aaron for the people. These laws cover such topics as worship, clean and unclean food, and sacrifices.

Chapters 1 to 7 outline the various types of sacrifices and how to offer them. In Chapters 8 to 10, the laws concern the ordination of priests and their offering of sacrifices. Chapter 11 contains the regulations about clean and unclean food. Chapters 12 through 15 contain laws about various forms of disease and uncleanness. Much of this material discusses what is called *leprosy*. Leprosy in the Bible, however, is not what we call leprosy. Today leprosy is a very specific skin disease limited to humans. In the Bible, leprosy includes a wide range of skin diseases and is not limited to humans. Animals, clothes, and houses can have leprosy; and the laws assume that recovery is expected.

Chapter 16 relates the ritual of the scapegoat. The priests perform this ritual of sending a goat into the wilderness on the day of national repentance and atonement. Today we use the term *scapegoat* to mean a person who bears the blame for others. We base our present-day usage of the word on this ancient ritual.

Chapters 17 to 27 of Leviticus contain laws about many subjects. Many of these laws deal with matters of purity and cleanliness, proper sacrifices, and festivals. While stating the demands of God, the Bible continues to emphasize love. Leviticus 19:18 says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but

you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
Leviticus 19:34 says, “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; and you shall love the alien as yourself.”

1. All the sacrifices, rules, and regulations in Leviticus were intended for a purpose. Read Leviticus 17:11. What was the purpose of blood sacrifices?

2. Read Leviticus 20:7, 22-25. What was the purpose of the statutes and ordinances that God commanded the Israelites?

3. Read Leviticus 27:30-33. Why was an Israelite to practice tithing?

SUMMARY

Six major episodes in Israel's history are found in these books.

- (1) God's calling of Moses, the first prophet (Exodus 3-4)
- (2) The ten plagues on Pharaoh and the land of Egypt (Exodus 7-12)
- (3) God's miraculous deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea (Exodus 14)
- (4) God's giving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20)
- (5) The instructions for the building of the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31)
- (6) God's specific laws given to the people through Moses and Aaron (the whole Book of Leviticus)

As we saw in the Genesis lesson, God is responsible for all these events in the history of the Israelites.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. God promised Abraham that his descendants would be “like the dust of the earth.” They would be uncountable. They numbered only seventy when they entered Egypt. Four hundred thirty years later “the land was filled with them,” but they were slaves. What does this story reveal about the ways of God? How does the Exodus story affect your faith?

2. Divine providence was at work in Moses' life to produce unusual ends. Moses was forced to flee to Midian, for example. God was to use the desert experience of Moses later on to enable Moses to lead his people through that region. What does this story suggest about the role of divine providence in your life?

3. The Tabernacle represented God's presence among the Israelite people. How is God's presence realized among Christians today? When is God's presence evident in your life?

4. The Ten Commandments symbolize the covenant between God and the people of Israel. The people were obliged to keep the commandments, and God promised to be their God. They would be counted as God's own special possession among all the nations of the earth. As a Christian, how is your covenant with God different from the covenant with Israel described in Exodus 19-20?

DAILY READINGS FOR NUMBERS AND DEUTERONOMY

- Day 1: Numbers 10:1-16
Day 2: Numbers 13:25-33; 14:1-3
Day 3: Numbers 22:21-35
Day 4: Deuteronomy 4:1-24
Day 5: Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 6:1-9
Day 6: Deuteronomy 18:9-22
Day 7: Deuteronomy 34:1-12