



(8) THE ANCIENT STORY: EXODUS 3-15

Focus Idea: Under the leadership of Moses, God rescues a group of slaves from bondage in Egypt and transforms them into a new nation.

The Context: Exodus, the second book of the Bible, gets its name from the Latin word for “exit.” It details the deliverance of the Hebrew slaves and their initial journey toward their promised home in Canaan. While the second half of the book reveals how God shaped the nation through laws and principles, chapters 3-15 focus on the miraculous signs that God used to free the slaves from captivity.

The Characters: The primary carriers of action here are Pharaoh, the Egyptian king (historians aren’t sure which Pharaoh was on the throne at this time), and Moses, the leader of the Hebrew slaves. Moses, born in a time when Hebrew boys were subject to infanticide, was rescued by the king’s own daughter and raised in the palace. But after he slaughtered an Egyptian slave-driver, Moses was forced to flee into the wilderness, ultimately spending forty years living as a shepherd. As this week’s text opens, Moses is a man of eighty.

The Core: It is not an exaggeration to say that the exodus from Egypt is the most important story in the Old Testament. The rescue of the Hebrew people becomes central to their identity and theology. Their God, Yahweh, refers to himself repeatedly as the one who “brought you up out of Egypt.”

Their bondage to the Pharaohs began some 400 years earlier, after Abraham’s great-grandson Joseph – a prime minister in the house of the Egyptian king – died. True to God’s promises, Abraham’s family had multiplied and filled the land. The Egyptians, nervous about their rising political and military power, eventually forced them into slavery.

Moses, an adopted-royal-grandson-turned-runaway, was God’s instrument to rescue the people from their chains. God had seen and heard their misery (3:7) and was preparing their deliverance. Moses would be the emissary of the one whose name was “I AM WHO I AM” (3:14).

Chapter 7 begins the account of the Ten Plagues, mighty signs that God used to reveal his authority to Pharaoh. Though the King became increasingly impressed by God’s power, his heart was hardened each time and he refused to allow the slaves to leave the country. Only after the tenth plague cut down the firstborn in every Egyptian home did the king relent. Because the Hebrews’ doorframes were marked with the blood of an innocent lamb, God spared their children from the plague.

Devastated at the deaths of their firstborns, the Egyptians urged the Hebrews to leave the land. So eager were they to see Moses and the slaves depart that they actually paid them to leave (12:36). This amazing evening, *Passover*, became for the people of Israel what Independence Day is for Americans.

Shortly after the long column of slaves left the land, Pharaoh changed his mind once more, sending his army after the Hebrews. They found themselves in dire straits, trapped between the oncoming troops and a vast body of water. But in an unmistakable sign of his solidarity with the refugees, God parted the sea, allowing them to cross before closing the waters back on their Egyptian pursuers (14:28). Safely on the far side of the sea, the freed captives had become a new nation, ready to journey toward the land promised to Abraham and his descendants.