

OT / COMMENTARY

AUTHOR **Tony Merida**

SERIES EDITORS **David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida**

C H R I S T - C E N T E R E D

# Exposition

E X A L T I N G J E S U S I N

EXODUS



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Exodus

© Copyright 2014 by Tony Merida

B&H Publishing Group

All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-8054-9744-1

Dewey Decimal Classification: 220.7

Subject Heading: BIBLE. O.T. EXODUS—COMMENTARIES \ JESUS  
CHRIST

Unless otherwise stated all Scripture citations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® Copyright 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the Holy Bible, King James Version.

Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 • 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SB

## SERIES DEDICATION

Dedicated to Adrian Rogers and John Piper. They have taught us to love the gospel of Jesus Christ, to preach the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, to pastor the Church for which our Savior died, and to have a passion to see all nations gladly worship the Lamb.

—David Platt, Tony Merida, and Danny Akin  
March 2013

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Series Introduction	ix
Acknowledgments	xi

## Exodus

Introduction to Exodus		3
Redemption and Mission	1–2	7
I AM Has Sent Me	3–4	21
Fighting Discouragement with Gospel Promises	5:1–7:5	34
That They May Know That I Am Yahweh	7:6–11:10	50
The Passover	12:1–13:16	66
Who Is Like You, O Lord?	13:17–15:21	78
Wilderness University	15:22–17:7	93
Essentials for a Healthy Community of Faith	17:8–18:27	106
The Ten Words	19:1–20:21	118
Loving God and Neighbor	20:22–23:19	134
Conquest and Covenant	23:20–24:18	154
He Tabernacled Among Us	25–27 & 35–40	164
Holy Work and Holy Rest	28–31 & 39	178
Idol Factory	32	191
Forward	33–40	206
Works Cited		222
Scripture Index		225

## SERIES INTRODUCTION

Augustine said, “Where Scripture speaks, God speaks.” The editors of the Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary series believe that where God speaks, the pastor must speak. God speaks through His written Word. We must speak from that Word. We believe the Bible is God breathed, authoritative, inerrant, sufficient, understandable, necessary, and timeless. We also affirm that the Bible is a Christ-centered book; that is, it contains a unified story of redemptive history of which Jesus is the hero. Because of this Christ-centered trajectory that runs from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22, we believe the Bible has a corresponding global-missions thrust. From beginning to end, we see God’s mission as one of making worshipers of Christ from every tribe and tongue worked out through this redemptive drama in Scripture. To that end we must preach the Word.

In addition to these distinct convictions, the Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary series has some distinguishing characteristics. First, this series seeks to display exegetical accuracy. What the Bible says is what we want to say. While not every volume in the series will be a verse-by-verse commentary, we nevertheless desire to handle the text carefully and explain it rightly. Those who teach and preach bear the heavy responsibility of saying what God has said in His Word and declaring what God has done in Christ. We desire to handle God’s Word faithfully, knowing that we must give an account for how we have fulfilled this holy calling (Jas 3:1).

Second, the Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary series has pastors in view. While we hope others will read this series, such as parents, teachers, small-group leaders, and student ministers, we desire to provide a commentary busy pastors will use for weekly preparation of biblically faithful and gospel-saturated sermons. This series is not academic in nature. Our aim is to present a readable and pastoral style of commentaries. We believe this aim will serve the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, we want the Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary series to be known for the inclusion of helpful illustrations and theologically driven applications. Many commentaries offer no help in illustrations, and few offer any kind of help in application. Often those that do offer illustrative material and application unfortunately give little serious attention to the text. While giving ourselves primarily to explanation, we also hope to serve readers by providing inspiring and illuminating illustrations coupled with timely and timeless application.

Finally, as the name suggests, the editors seek to exalt Jesus from every book of the Bible. In saying this, we are not commending wild allegory or fanciful typology. We certainly believe we must be constrained to the meaning intended by the divine Author Himself, the Holy Spirit of God. However, we also believe the Bible has a messianic focus, and our hope is that the individual authors will exalt Christ from particular texts. Luke 24:25-27,44-47; and John 5:39,46 inform both our hermeneutics and our homiletics. Not every author will do this the same way or have the same degree of Christ-centered emphasis. That is fine with us. We believe faithful exposition that is Christ centered is not monolithic. We do believe, however, that we must read the whole Bible as Christian Scripture. Therefore, our aim is both to honor the historical particularity of each biblical passage and to highlight its intrinsic connection to the Redeemer.

The editors are indebted to the contributors of each volume. The reader will detect a unique style from each writer, and we celebrate these unique gifts and traits. While distinctive in approach, the authors share a common characteristic in that they are pastoral theologians. They love the church, and they regularly preach and teach God's Word to God's people. Further, many of these contributors are younger voices. We think these new, fresh voices can serve the church well, especially among a rising generation that has the task of proclaiming the Word of Christ and the Christ of the Word to the lost world.

We hope and pray this series will serve the body of Christ well in these ways until our Savior returns in glory. If it does, we will have succeeded in our assignment.

David Platt  
Daniel L. Akin  
Tony Merida  
*Series Editors*  
February 2013

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**B**efore saying thank you to some important individuals and my local church, I must recognize my bride, Kimberly, who is (in the words of Jonathan Edwards) “my dear companion.” She is involved in all my endeavors in some way. She not only supports and encourages me, but also challenges me by her own respected ministry, particularly with her work of seeking justice, correcting oppression, bringing justice to the fatherless, and pleading the widows’ cause (Isa 1:17). In addition to being my beloved bride, best friend, and ministry partner, she is also an incredible mother to our five adopted children (James, Joshua, Angela, Victoria, and Jana). I am grateful to God for blessing us with this wonderful mini-van full of kids and for sustaining us through the challenges of parenthood. To my children, I praise God for you all. I love to watch you sit on the front row taking notes, and I love having our table talks at dinner (where my weekly sermons get preached first!). I pray that you will know, delight in, and glorify our Redeemer faithfully.

I also want to acknowledge Imago Dei Church. Your love for the gospel motivates me to expound the Christ-centered Scriptures passionately. As we read the Scriptures weekly, and as you respond by saying “Thanks be to God,” I feel enormous gratitude to God for giving me the privilege of shepherding you. Our study through the book of Exodus provided the heart and soul of this commentary, and I dedicate this book to you.

Along with this acknowledgement, I want to say thank you to the other elders at Imago Dei, who share in the shepherding and teaching ministry with me. The unity we share is evidence of God’s grace. I am grateful for your friendship and partnership in the gospel.

Next, I also want to say thank you to Aaron Lumpkin, my diligent and intelligent student assistant. I am indebted to you for your research and thoughtful feedback on this commentary.

I want to also acknowledge Dr. Danny Akin. He not only invited me to serve on the faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary,

but also invited me to be part of the Christ-Centered Exposition series. I am out of my league with both of these responsibilities. Regarding this particular project, I must say that I feel more comfortable on a baseball diamond or on a basketball court than with writing commentaries, but I am grateful for the opportunity to take a rip (or shot).

For the reader, I recommend that you always read more than one commentary on a book of the Bible that you are studying. Be sure to do this regarding Exodus. I am glad you picked up this commentary, but I should point you to some others who helped me along the journey. I am especially indebted to Douglas Stuart for his Exodus commentary; to Philip Ryken for his Christological emphasis in the *Exodus* volume of the Preaching the Word series; to Christopher J. H. Wright, for his powerful work *The Mission of God*; and to Russell Moore whose “Exit Strategy” study provided a wonderful example both of how to expound Exodus Christocentrically and of how one might expound large portions of Exodus at a time. Other biblical theologies, such as *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment* by James Hamilton and *Kingdom through Covenant* by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, were very helpful as well.

I want to say thanks to Jeremy Howard and the B&H team for agreeing to publish this work. What a joy to serve with folks who desire to get Word-saturated resources into the hands of others—for the good of the nations, the edification of the church, and to the glory of King Jesus.

Tony Merida



---

---

# Exodus

---

---

## Introduction to Exodus

**E**xodus” means “a going out,” or “departure” (taken from the Septuagint and the Greek noun *exodos*). A true masterpiece, the book of Exodus provides the historical account of God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt’s cruel slavery. The narrative captivates and challenges us. We should not see it as a tale from the distant past but as an eternally important and relevant story for our lives.

You may not think about Egypt that much in your everyday life (although the country has been in the news at the time I write this). Some of us grew up with that memorable song “Walk like an Egyptian” by the Bangles from 1986. It was not a song that took Egypt seriously.

My wife and I visited Egypt recently on a layover. We took a quick, eight-hour tour of Cairo. We saw the Great Pyramid of Giza, which is the only one of the Seven Wonders of the World still standing. It was the tallest man-made structure for 3,800 years. It is as tall as a 50-story skyscraper, though built around 2560 BC. We enjoyed seeing the pyramids and the museum with King Tut’s property. Egypt continues to be a fascinating place to visit for historical reflection, but it is not a great superpower.

In the period of Exodus, however, Egypt was a serious superpower. People feared Egypt. Egypt had mighty Pharaohs, they built great projects such as the pyramids, and they were in touch with dark power. While scholars debate different aspects of the historical situation, there is evidence (in addition to the Bible) that Egypt was enslaving a Semitic people in the decades leading up to the exodus, as noted in Papyrus 348, which dates back to Ramses II. This document speaks of using the “Apiru (*hapiru*) to drag stones to the great pylon.” Some think there may be a connection between the word “Apiru” and *Ibri*, the word from which we get the word *Hebrew* (Ryken, *Exodus*, 21).

Traditionally, Moses is viewed as the main author of the *Pentateuch* (the first five books of the Bible, also called “The Five Books of Moses”), though he might not have written everything (e.g., Deut 34). When Jesus quoted from Exodus (Mark 7:10; 12:26), He attributed such verses to Moses. We therefore should hold to Moses as the primary author, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit (2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

The historical events seem to occur during the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BC; Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 40). More specifically, the exodus event probably took place in 1446 BC (Kaiser, “Exodus,” 287–93). Evangelical scholars usually hold to either a later date, 1260 BC, or an earlier date, 1446 BC. The earlier date seems best given the internal evidence in 1 Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26.

As we will see, chapters 1–18 provide the story of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and chapters 19–40 show us the glory of God at Sinai.

### Why Exodus?

Why would you want to study this book? Let me mention four reasons.

*First, we need to know God better.* We meet the living God in Exodus! Think of Psalm 66:5-7:

*Come and see the wonders of God;  
His acts for humanity are awe-inspiring.  
He turned the sea into dry land,  
and they crossed the river on foot.  
There we rejoiced in Him.  
He rules forever by His might;  
He keeps His eye on the nations.  
The rebellious should not exalt themselves.*

Come and see! We will see that God wills to be known and glorified. We will see a God who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exod 34:6 ESV). In encountering this holy God we should, like Moses, bow down and worship (34:8).

*Second, we need to understand God’s redemption better.* Exodus is a picture of the Gospel, and we will seek to understand Exodus in relation to Jesus. There are a number of reasons for this. In Luke 24 Jesus explained the Old Testament “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets . . . concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (v. 27). “Moses” here is short for the Pentateuch, which includes Exodus! Earlier, in Luke 9:31, when Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration and Luke says that Jesus spoke about His “death,” (lit. His “departure,”) the word there is *exodos*, the Greek word for “exodus.” Jesus’ triumphant death and resurrection was the greater exodus. Jesus would pass through the waters of death in order to deliver His people from bondage to their sin and take them to the new heavens and new earth. In the New Testament,

Jesus is also referred to as “our Passover Lamb,” using terminology from Exodus (1 Cor 5:7).

Also realize there are more than just a few verses that invite us to read Exodus with Christ-centered lenses. The gospel appears everywhere in pattern, type, theme development, and foreshadowing. Through these and many other features, Exodus shows us redemption (cf. Col 1:13-14; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Jude 5). Christopher J. H. Wright in *The Mission of God* reminds us of God’s model of redemption:

How big is our gospel? If our gospel is the good news about God’s redemption, then the question moves on to, How big is our understanding of redemption? Mission clearly has to do with the redemptive work of God and our participation in making it known and leading people into the experience of it. If, as I am seeking to argue throughout this book, mission is fundamentally God’s before it is ours, what is God’s idea of redemption? The scope of our mission must reflect the scope of God’s mission, which in turn will match the scale of God’s redemptive work. Where do we turn in the Bible for our understanding of redemption? Already it will be clear enough that in my view it will simply not do to turn first to the New Testament. If you had asked a devout Israelite in the Old Testament period, “Are you redeemed?” the answer would have been a most definite yes. And if you had asked “How do you know?” you would be taken aside to sit down somewhere while your friend recounted a long and exciting story—the story of exodus.

For indeed *it is the exodus that provided the primary model of God’s idea of redemption*, not just in the Old Testament but even in the New, where it is used as one of the keys to understanding the meaning of the cross of Christ (Wright, *Mission*, 265; emphasis added).

As Wright says, Exodus provides the primary model of redemption in the Old Testament and New Testament, and it stands as one of the keys for understanding the cross and salvation. Notice some of the similarities between Israel and believers today:

- Like Israel, we are saved from something (from slavery to sin) for something (to witness and to worship). This idea of being

delivered “out of Egypt” gets recorded many times in the Bible (Exod 3:10; 3:17; 20:2; Ps 81:10; Matt 2:15; Jude 5).

- Like Israel, we are saved by the blood of a lamb (Exod 12; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Rev 5).
- Like Israel, we have been saved, and we are now sojourners and a holy priesthood, seeking to glorify God in word and deed until we reach the promised land (1 Pet 2:4-12).

With this in mind, we can say that, in a sense, the exodus story is our story.

*Third, we need to understand God’s mission (and ours) better.* The mission of the church does not begin in the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20). It begins well before this important text, in the Old Testament. Here we see God concerned about physical injustice as well as spiritual deliverance. We need to be a people who care about the enslaved, both physically and spiritually. Wright says it well: “*Exodus-shaped redemption demands exodus-shaped mission*” (Wright, *Mission of God*, 275; emphasis in original). The exodus gives us not just a model of redemption, but also a model of mission.

*Finally, we need to draw lessons for living out our faith on a daily basis.* We have examples to avoid and examples to follow in Exodus (1 Cor 10:11). A number of practical topics should interest us:

- Taking care of the unborn
- Racism and murder
- How God can use weak, ordinary people
- The importance of singing praise
- The nature of true community
- How to rely on God’s presence daily
- Delegation and the need to take counsel from others
- Obeying God’s word
- The issue of idolatry and true worship

As we journey through this amazing book, we will seek to understand and apply the exodus story historically, theologically, Christologically, missiologically, and practically. Let the journey begin!

# Redemption and Mission

## EXODUS 1–2

**Main Idea:** God’s determination to free Israel from oppression so that they could worship Him calls us to practice a similarly integrative model of mission.

---

### **I. The Need for Redemption (1:8-22)**

- A. Political slavery (1:8-10)
- B. Economic slavery (1:11-14)
- C. Social slavery (1:15-22)
- D. Spiritual slavery (1:8–2:25; 9:1)

### **II. The Mediator and Redemption (2:1-22)**

- A. The birth of a Moses (2:1-10)
- B. The growth of Moses (2:11-15)
- C. The flight of Moses (2:15-22)

### **III. God’s Motive of Redemption (2:23-25)**

### **IV. The Mission of the Redeemed**

- A. Let us care for urgent physical needs.
  - B. Let us care for urgent spiritual needs.
- 

**T**he opening verses of Exodus connect the book directly to Genesis, which ended with the death of Joseph around 1805 BC. The first half of the book focuses on Israel’s departure from Egypt: the historical setting (1:1–2:25); Moses’s leadership (3:1–6:30); miraculous signs and judgment (7:1–15:21); and Israel’s journey (15:22–18:27). The second half covers the events at Mount Sinai: the Ten Words and the laws (19:1–23:19); instructions for entering the land (23:20-33); the confirmation of the covenant (24:1-18); instructions for, and later the execution of, building the tabernacle (25:1–31:18; 35:1–40:38); and the breach of the covenant, Moses’ intercession, and the renewal of the covenant (32:1–34:35).

In Genesis 12:2-3 God made His covenant with Abraham, promising to make him into a great nation, that through this people all nations on earth might be blessed. Exodus continues talking about God’s relationship with this people and this grand covenantal purpose.

Further, Exodus fits within the context of the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) and should be read in light of this context. From

this context, one can broaden out and observe how Exodus fits beautifully into the bigger story of the Bible. Many foundational promises, themes, and truths emerge from this book of Holy Scripture.

One might reasonably ask, “Why were the Israelites in Egypt?” Consider two related reasons. First, Joseph, Jacob’s son, was taken to Egypt because his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He gained favor in the eyes of Pharaoh and ended up helping to save lives by stockpiling food. In the ensuing famine, all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain (Gen 41:57). Second, during this famine, his family went to Egypt, and Joseph provided food for them (Gen 42). The family ended up resettling in the Nile Delta. Seventy entered Egypt (see Gen 46:3-27), and from there they grew and grew!

In verse 7 we see the Israelites following the command God had given in the garden to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). God had later told Jacob, “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, indeed an assembly of nations, will come from you, and kings will descend from you” (Gen 35:11). Eventually, the Israelites filled Egypt (Exod 1:7,20). In Exodus 12:37 we read that their number expanded to six hundred thousand men, plus women and children!

“Redemption” is one of the greatest themes in Scripture. Later, we will see the meaning of this term more fully (*ga’al*, Exod 6:6; 15:13). As the Redeemer, God came to Israel’s rescue, protected them, and restored them.

## The Need for Redemption

### EXODUS 1:8-22

In verses 8-22 we find four reasons Israel needed redemption.

#### *Political Slavery (1:8-10)*

In Egypt, the Israelites were immigrants. They came to Egypt as refugees. Things started out favorably, but as the text says, the new ruler in Egypt “had not known Joseph” (v. 8). Now the Israelites lived in fear because they were discriminated against. Pharaoh said, “Let us deal shrewdly with them” (v. 10). As a result of discrimination, God’s people had no political freedom. Because of the rising Israelite population, they were perceived as a threat to Pharaoh, and this prompted his evil actions. Pharaoh’s harsh treatment would soon come to an end, however, and God would eventually make Israel into a great nation.

*Economic Slavery (1:11-14)*

Pharaoh used Israel for slave labor. Notice the language: “heavy burdens” (v. 11 ESV), “oppressed” (v. 12), “worked the Israelites ruthlessly” (v. 13), “bitter with difficult labor,” and “They ruthlessly imposed all this work on them” (v. 14). These phrases describe their enslavement. The Egyptians used the Israelites for construction projects (e.g., building Pithom and Raamses) and for agricultural projects. In comparison to the Nazi regime, we see that Pharaoh does not go as far as Hitler. Why? He knows that he needs them—but not all of them.

The injustice we read about here bears some resemblance to our day. People of power continue to abuse the weak for their own devilish reasons. Some report upwards of thirty million slaves in the world today (NotForSaleCampaign.org). Tragically, human trafficking is now the second largest organized crime in the world. What motivates this atrocity? Two of the main roots of this evil include sexual perversion and financial greed. Despite the existence of injustice like this, we believe that God remains a God of justice standing on the side of the oppressed. God’s people should also aim to glorify Him by imitating His character. The Scriptures describe God and His justice in many ways:

*The mighty King loves justice. (Ps 99:4)*

*The LORD executes acts of righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. (Ps 103:6)*

*[He is] executing justice for the exploited  
and giving food to the hungry.*

*The LORD frees prisoners.*

*The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.*

*The LORD raises up those who are oppressed.*

*The LORD loves the righteous.*

*The LORD protects foreigners*

*and helps the fatherless and the widow,*

*but He frustrates the ways of the wicked. (Ps 146:7-9)*

Later, God instructed His people to act for others the same way He acted on their behalf:

*He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner, giving him food and clothing. You also must love the foreigner, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. (Deut 10:18-19)*



*Learn to do what is good. Seek justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause. (Isa 1:17)*

*Isn't the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and not to ignore your own flesh and blood? (Isa 58:6-7)*

One of the roles of the Redeemer (*go'el*) in the Old Testament was to restore economic stability to a family member, and God acts in this way. God ultimately gave Israel a land for themselves (Exod 6:8).

### *Social Slavery (1:15-22)*

As the story goes on, we see how the Egyptians acted brutally and violently against the Israelites. This began with Pharaoh's evil decision in verses 15-16. He initiated a state-sponsored genocide that demanded the killing of all the male Hebrew babies. This reminds us of the Deliverer who survived the ruthlessness of another dictator. Just as Moses lived in spite of the genocide, so Jesus lived through the baby-killing leadership of Herod (Matt 2:16).

Then Pharaoh told the midwives, or birthing nurses, Shiphrah and Puah, that when they saw a child on the "birthstool" (ESV) and it was a boy, to kill him. "Birthstool" is a difficult word to translate. Some say it means a "stone"—meaning they would give birth on a stone. Some say it means "a basin," where they would wash the baby off, implying that one would drown the baby. Another option is that the "stones" represent "what you look for to see if it is a boy" (Russ Moore, "Exit Strategy"). Whatever it means, the command is clear: kill the boys. But why did Pharaoh do this? It seems that he attempted to slow the growth of the Israelites and to make them fear him.

Now they lived in constant terror. Think about it. Nine months of dread. Remember, ultrasounds did not exist. On delivery day, the "It's a boy" report devastated parents.

However, God would deliver them out of this eventually. The final, most devastating act of judgment that God would inflict on Egypt was the death of firstborn sons (Exod 4:23). The Passover would forever remind God's people of God's redemption. And later, when Israel would become a new society, one of the things that they would emphasize was social justice and the sanctity of human life—the latter being something our culture still does not embrace.

After Pharaoh's decision, look at the two midwives' decision (1:17-22). These two women heroically did not listen to the king. Instead, they "feared God" (vv. 17,21). While they did fear the king, they feared the King even more! Pharaoh realized what they had done and called them in for questioning: "Why have you done this?" (v. 18). They told him the Hebrew women were "vigorous." Essentially, the Hebrew women gave birth before the midwives could even say, "Push!" They just kept having babies in the most remarkable way. Now, some argue that they lied, and God was not pleased with them. But did they lie? We do not have their entire statement recorded, but what we do have is factual: they said, "These women are vigorous." Even if they did not give complete testimony in Pharaoh's court, I think this is an example of "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). The text is honoring these women, who lived up to their names (Shiphrah—"beautiful one," and Puah—"splendid one"). Pharaoh was overstepping his bounds.

Next observe God's decision regarding the midwives. We read in Exodus 1:20, "God was good to the midwives." To what extent did God deal well with the midwives? He blessed them with families (v. 21).

We should remember that these women did something for us. Because they rescued the babies, we will be raised from the dead! How so? If you do not have these women, you do not have Moses, the exodus, David, Mary, or Jesus. The women are so important that Moses even mentioned them by name, yet you do not see the name of Pharaoh anywhere in this text. ("Pharaoh" means "Great House," just as "White House" personifies the US president.) Pharaohs wanted their names remembered. They built pyramids to be remembered. Yet the only names remembered are those who feared God and protected life.

In hearing the midwives' response, Pharaoh became infuriated. He demanded that all boys born to Hebrew women were to be thrown into the river. He likely chose the river for two reasons. First, it was convenient. Everyone lived on the Nile, and the clean up would have been easy. The Nile was a source of water and a conveyance for sewage, for the mighty current took away waste. Second, the Nile was viewed as a god, so this shifted the blame. Egyptians viewed the Nile as a giver and taker of life; thus, they might have thought they were doing the will of the gods.

In seeing this, we should recognize a biblical pattern: God takes a place of death and turns it into a place of life and salvation. Think about Noah and the flood; Jonah and the sea/fish; the Red Sea and God's people; and how Jesus' tomb became the place of life. All of these stories point to God's divine power to take death and bring life.

*Spiritual Slavery (1:8–2:25; 9:1)*

Pharaoh appears in archaeological records with the snake on his crown. It makes us think of the promise in Genesis 3:15, where we read of the enmity between the triumphant seed of the woman over the opposing seed of the serpent. Pharaoh lived out the serpent role by killing boys. Egypt was the enemy of God, and God must deliver Israel so that “they may worship [Him]” (Exod 9:1). This story shows us a cosmic, spiritual battle, not just a battle between Moses and Pharaoh.

God’s goal, then, included more than simply getting His people out of Egypt. He wanted to get Egypt out of His people. Luke underscored this truth in Acts 7:39. Stephen, in recounting the exodus and the events thereafter, said, “In their hearts [the Israelites] turned back to Egypt.” Even after leaving Egypt, Israel faced the temptation of turning their backs on God. In Exodus 4:22-23 we read of this spiritual purpose: “Let My son go so that he may *worship* Me” (emphasis added). Pharaoh blocked this purpose by oppressing the Israelites. Despite Moses’ repeated request for Pharaoh to allow Israel to make a journey into the wilderness “that we may sacrifice to [worship] the LORD our God” (3:18 ESV; 5:8), he denied it, and Israel’s suffering continued.

God’s desire extended beyond liberating Israel from political, economic, and social slavery. He desired worshipers. He wanted Israel (like Adam) to know and worship Him. Further, He wanted to use Israel to make worshipers from all nations. Therefore, God responded to all of the dimensions of Israel’s slavery. He did not just free them from social-economic-political oppression and let them worship any god. Neither did He just free them spiritually without changing their awful situation.

God continues to be concerned for physical freedom, and especially spiritual freedom. Wright says, “Although Exodus stands as a unique and unrepeatably event in the history of Israel, it also stands as a paradigmatic and highly repeatable way God wishes to act in the world, and ultimately will act for the whole creation” (Wright, *Mission*, 275).

Some of us have not experienced the enslavement of these first three forms (political, social, and economical); but everyone understands this last form (spiritual slavery). We need spiritual deliverance. But some around the world, victims of human trafficking for example, are enslaved in all four ways. We must seek to deliver them in every way. One of the things I love about ministries like International Justice Mission is that they have related powerful stories of rescuing enslaved children physically and spiritually.

## The Mediator and Redemption

### EXODUS 2:1-22

In order to free people to worship Him, God raised up a mediator, a deliverer, a savior, named Moses. Let us take a look at Moses.

#### *The Birth of a Moses (2:1-10)*

Despite the circumstances, a Levite woman bore her son and kept him for three months. When it became too dangerous to hide him, she placed him in a basket and set him afloat in the Nile. The “basket” in this instance is the same word in Hebrew (*tebah*) used to describe Noah’s ark (Gen 6–9), the only other place it is found in the Bible. The basket was probably a covered papyrus box, maybe with air holes. She for some reason put him in a little boat, like Noah, that was sealed with pitch. Every Hebrew would have caught the significance of this word. Just as God’s hand of grace was on Noah, a deliverer, bringing salvation, so it was with the deliverer Moses.

Imagine this scene: Moses floats down the dangerous Nile! God sovereignly cares for this little boy. God keeps Moses from crocodiles, starvation, and drowning. When the daughter of Pharaoh finds him, she takes “pity on him.” Perhaps she says something like “aww,” the way others react when they see a little one. God used the nurturing instinct in her life to take care of Moses. And by God’s grace, Moses was nourished and taught by an Israelite—his mother, it seems—as an infant (vv. 7-9). God raised up a deliverer, right under Pharaoh’s nose!

This brings us to an important principle. We may think that things are falling apart sometimes, but remember God’s mysterious providence. God works out His perfect will in amazing ways. Trust in Him.

The daughter of Pharaoh gave the child the name Moses, “to draw out,” thinking “I drew him out of the water” (v. 10). What a perfect name, given the fact that God would use Moses to draw His people out of Egypt!

#### *The Growth of Moses (2:11-15)*

Notice the time that passes between verses 10 and 11. Moses grew up. A number of similarities exist between Moses and the greater Savior, Jesus. Let me point out a few:

- Like Moses, Jesus was born to be a Savior and was rescued from an evil ruler at birth (Matt 2:16).

- Like Moses, He sojourned in Egypt: “Out of Egypt I called my Son” (Matt 2:15).
- Like Moses, “silent years” occurred before His public ministry.
- Like Moses and the Israelites who wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11).
- Jesus went to a high mountain and gave “the law,” His sermon (Matt 5–7), much like Moses did on Sinai.

Of course, Jesus transcends Moses. Jesus is without sin, and Jesus is fully God. Thus, it should not surprise us when we see Moses fail for all the mediators in the Old Testament failed at some level. But Jesus did not.

As the Story continues, we find that when Moses “had grown up,” he witnessed the brutal assault on one of his people, the Hebrews. Luke told us that this was when Moses was 40 years old (Acts 7:23). Seeing this, “he struck the Egyptian dead” (Exod 2:12). While some may say that Moses had the right to kill him as a son of Pharaoh, his own conscience reveals to us that he knew it was wrong for before he acted, he looked around, and after he acted, he “hid [the Egyptian] in the sand.” This act reveals that Moses still had a lot to learn before he would be ready to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

It was not only wrong for Moses to kill the man, but it was wrong for him to attempt to begin leading the people out of Egypt without God’s instruction. In Acts 7:25 Stephen tells us that Moses assumed that “his brothers would understand that God would give them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.” This attempt led to the rejection of his leadership (Exod 2:13-14). Moses should have waited for God’s instructions.

On a more positive note, Moses’ act revealed that he desired to be associated with the people of God rather than the Egyptians. Hebrews 11:23-26 says this:

*By faith, after Moses was born, he was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn’t fear the king’s edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the short-lived pleasure of sin. For he considered the reproach because of the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since his attention was on the reward.*

Ryken notes that the same word used to describe the exodus event is used here to tell of Moses’ going “out to his own people” (v. 11).

Essentially, “before Israel could go out of Egypt, Moses needed to go out of Egypt, emotionally if not yet physically” (Ryken, *Exodus*, 60).

### *The Flight of Moses (2:15-22)*

Moses became an outlaw on the run! As he fled, he ended up in Midian (v. 15). The Midianites’ name came from the fourth son of Abraham by his second wife, Keturah (Gen 25:2). Some of the teachings of Abraham possibly continued with the Midianites. Josephus tells us that the Midianites lived around the Gulf of Aqabah, which is at the north end of the Red Sea, about 120 miles south-southwest of the Dead Sea in the wilderness.

While Moses was at a well in Midian, the daughters of the priest of Midian came to get water. During their visit, some shepherds came and “drove them away” (v. 17). Moses acted to combat this injustice. But this time he did not kill anyone. Instead, he acted only to drive them away—a contrast to the previous episode in Egypt. We begin to see Moses act as a righteous deliverer. He not only rescued them but also “watered their flock” (v. 17). Moses began displaying servant leadership. This act of service got him rewarded with not only bread but also with marriage! So Moses married Zipporah and had a son, Gershom.

The book of Acts explains that Moses spent 40 years in Midian. Someone said, “Moses was 40 years in Egypt learning something; 40 years in the desert learning to be nothing; and 40 years in the wilderness proving God to be everything” (in James Boyce, *Ordinary Men*, 59). Think about that. He spent two years of preparation for every one year of ministry. By living in the wilderness, he learned to rely on God. By having a family, he learned to lead, guide, and discipline those he loved. By working with the Midianites, most likely as a shepherd, he developed skills to help him lead the Israelites out of their enslavement.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, I do not want to imply that God selected Moses because he was so gifted and talented (see the next two chapters!). Moses depended on God’s power and grace for victory. But these experiences in the wilderness did have a shaping effect on his life. Remember, God wastes nothing. He often prepares us for the next chapter of life with the present chapter’s experiences.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, we understand that God led the flock: “You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Ps 77:20; cf. Ps 78:52).

## God's Motive of Redemption

### EXODUS 2:23-25

Verse 23 begins with an important fact: “the king of Egypt died.” This meant Moses could return to Egypt as a prophet and not as a fugitive (see 4:19). Despite the change in government, the slavery remained severe. We read, “their cry for help ascended to God.” Picture the intense grief, distress, and agony here in these cries (cf. Ps 130:1-2; Lam 2:18; Rom 8:26). The verbs in this section show us God’s motive for acting on their behalf.

First, consider God’s knowledge of the oppressed. When the people cried out, He *heard* their cry. Not only did He hear it, He also *saw* or looked at their oppression, and He *took notice*, meaning He knew or was concerned (vv. 24-25). God heard. God saw. God knew. God’s ability to see and to hear appears throughout Scripture. Think of Psalm 34:15: “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry for help.” God’s exhaustive knowledge or omniscience also appears often in Scripture. When the Scripture says that God “knew,” it means that He knew all about them. God was intimately aware of their agony. And because God knows, He acts.

Second, “He remembered His covenant with Abraham” (v. 24). God’s covenantal memory gets underlined here. God remembers His unbreakable promise of salvation. To “remember” something means to bring it to the front burner and act on it. The term “covenant” appears for the first time in Exodus here. It appears 25 times in Genesis. The best definition of “covenant” may be in *The Jesus Story Book Bible*: “a never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love” (Sally Lloyd-Jones, *Story Book*, 36).

As mentioned above, Exodus and Genesis go together. In Genesis, God declared His intention to bless Israel and to fulfill His covenant to Abraham. Later in Exodus, Moses will appeal to God’s covenant as he intercedes for Israel (chs. 32–34). At the right time, God remembered His covenant to make a people from all nations and sent Jesus. If you belong to God through Jesus Christ, you belong to His eternal covenant, “his never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love.” These motives, as Wright suggests, perpetually motivate God throughout the Bible. God’s purpose of redemption and mission given to Abraham continues in Exodus. This same God continues on the same mission of reclaiming worshipers today.

## The Mission of the Redeemed

I believe Wright points us in the right direction for applying Exodus when he says, “*Exodus-shaped redemption demands exodus-shaped mission*. And that means that our commitment to mission must demonstrate the same broad totality of concern for human need that God demonstrated in what he did for Israel. . . . [*O*]ur mission must be derived from *God’s mission*” (*Mission*, 275–76; emphasis in original). We mentioned under the first point that God would deliver His people from (1) social-political-economic slavery and (2) spiritual slavery. I contend that we too must share these same concerns. We must respond to urgent physical and spiritual needs around the world.

### *Let Us Care for Urgent Physical Needs*

As we think about applying the mission in Exodus, allow me to draw on some of the insights of Wright again. One should avoid having spiritualized application *only* in Exodus, meaning *evangelism with no social action*—that is, so emphasizing the spiritual freedom in Exodus that we neglect real physical needs. We cannot allow ourselves to miss the social-political-economic dimension in Exodus. Do not forget, these were real people being enslaved by a real ruler, and they could not worship when they were lugging mud all day, seven days a week.

Today, millions of young girls are enslaved and are raped multiple times a day for profit to satisfy the cravings of wicked people. This reality is sickening and maddening, and it demands a response from God’s people.

While *proclamation* remains the most important task of the church, this does not mean that kingdom citizens should neglect practical acts of mercy and justice. Plus, in some cases people cannot hear our message until they are liberated from physical injustice. Let me ask you, can girls who are being sexually abused multiple times a day hear the good news? Tragically, they cannot. Should we not fight to free them (and other victims of injustice) so that they may hear our message?

I believe the impulse that drives people to go to unreached peoples to share the gospel is the same impulse that calls them to care for victims of injustice: love. Justice is love going public. If we really love people, we will tell them the gospel while we care for their physical needs. Further, often the darkest places of injustice are the same places that have little gospel witness. If we lovingly go to the dark places, we will have opportunity to bring freedom—both physical and spiritual freedom.



Five issues help us remember to keep an emphasis on justice and mercy ministry here in Exodus.

*First, Israel needed freedom not because of “their sin” but because of “Egypt’s sin.”* To be clear, Israel was sinful—dreadfully sinful. But the exodus and the later exile of Israel have differences. God sent Israel into exile in Babylon because of their sin. “But there is no hint whatsoever that Israel’s suffering in Egypt was God’s judgment on sin” (Wright, *Mission*, 278). In Exodus an outside force oppressed them. Therefore, being delivered out of slavery to our sin is not exactly the same thing as Israel getting delivered from their slavery. We should make this application, but it is not the only application for us to make. The exodus shows God’s victory over outside powers of injustice, violence, and death. We cannot miss this.

*Second, the New Testament does not replace the physical aspects of the exodus with the spiritual aspects of it.* It extends the physical aspects and the spiritual aspects. The Greatest Command and the Great Commission encompasses both emphases—word and deed ministry.

*Third, God has not changed.* We should not make the mistake of thinking that God was concerned about real injustice then, but not now. Think of how many laws were given related to justice and how many Psalms speak of it. Remember that in His teaching, Jesus railed on the Pharisees who had their religious sacrifices but denied the “more important matters” of mercy and justice (Matt 23:23; cf. Matt 25:35-36; Jas 1:27). Further, the love and justice of God were on full display at the cross (Rom 3:21-26). The justice of God will also be magnified in the end of all things (Rev 20:11-15). God is just, and His people are to imitate Him.

*Fourth, it is wrong to think that what God did for Israel is not what God wants or will do for other people.* To think, “Yeah, God freed Israel from oppression, but that was Israel,” is to miss God’s purpose for choosing Israel in the first place: to be a blessing to the nations. And He chose them and acted on behalf of them *so that people might know what He is like.* While God did not free everyone in the Near East, this does not mean that He did not know about them or that He was not concerned about oppression elsewhere. God always opposes violent oppressors. For us, Israel stands as a model as to how God works in the world.

Further, the Old Testament shows that God acts for those who cry out under oppression. Psalm 33 goes from the “exodus” character of God to the universal claim of His love (v. 5) and on to the fact that all of human life is under His gaze (vv. 13-15). Psalm 145 says something similar: “His compassion rests on all He has made” (v. 9). Amazingly, in

Isaiah 19 even Egypt itself is scheduled for a redemptive blessing: “When they cry out to the LORD because of their oppressors, He will send them a savior and leader, and he will rescue them. . . . Egypt will know the LORD on that day. . . . He will hear their prayers and heal them” (Isa 19:20-22). So Israel stands distinct, but God’s liberation of Israel is not limited to them. Instead, Israel serves as an example of God’s mercy and justice for all to see.

*A final reason we should not miss the call to social action is that the midwives are honored for their act.* They serve as examples for us to follow in protecting the weak and vulnerable. We need an army of people like these ladies to care for orphans, widows, the unborn, and victims of injustice.

### *Let Us Care for Urgent Spiritual Needs*

The second mistake to avoid in applying Exodus is the view that is limited to the social-political-economic situation *only*, meaning *social action with no evangelism*—that is, being so focused on these social dimensions that the spiritual dimension gets lost. Some forms of liberation theology take this view. They are solely devoted to the issue of freeing those in oppression.<sup>2</sup>

This socialized approach is the opposite problem of the spiritualized approach. The socialized approach ignores the spiritual purpose of Exodus and disregards the New Testament connection of the exodus to the cross and the saving work of Jesus.

Remember, God wanted to free Israel that they might worship Him! As a royal priesthood, they were formed, like Adam (the garden priest), to worship God. A spiritual freedom was at the heart of their physical release. Israel’s deepest problem involved “Egypt inside of them”—a persistent tendency to return to their previous wretched condition. After Israel went free, they fell into sin in their hearts—idolatry—and got sent into exile. So, we should want to free people from physical oppression, but ultimately we should work to free them spiritually.

Therefore, we need *an integrative model of mission*. That is, a balanced, fully biblical, missional model. The integrative model takes into account the same broad totality of concern that God has for people. Let us do *evangelism* to see people saved from bondage to sin and death.

---

<sup>2</sup> Many times, it is debatable whether what they call oppression is really oppression.

Let us also *care for the oppressed* by fighting for justice for the physically enslaved and showing mercy to those in need.

To summarize, you could say that Christians should care about alleviating both types of human suffering: temporal suffering and eternal suffering—and especially eternal suffering!

Welcome to Exodus. May God help us to understand our redemption better, and may He help us to understand our mission better.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. What are some examples of economic slavery today that are comparable to Pharaoh's exploitation of Israel? What can a Christian do about these things?
2. What are ways that fear is used in some cultures to control populations? How does the gospel address fear?
3. How does this account of God's providence in protecting baby Moses encourage you?
4. How has Moses' experience growing up as a Hebrew in Pharaoh's palace been portrayed in the movies? What do you think it might have been like?
5. Why did Moses' first attempt to help the Hebrews fail? What were the practical, social, and spiritual reasons?
6. How has God prepared you for ministry? Have you learned your most valuable lessons in a "palace" or a "desert" or a "wilderness"?
7. In what way is God's gracious mission in Jesus Christ also seen in the book of Exodus?
8. Of the ministries you support, which ones focus on social action and which ones on spiritual action? Does each ministry have the proper balance?
9. What did Jesus say and do about social, political, and economic oppression in His day?
10. Why is the social mission sometimes a necessary precondition to the spiritual mission? How does Matthew 11:5 express an integrative model of missions?