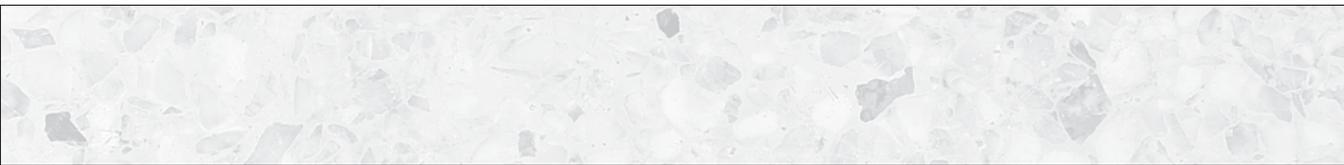




Exodus

Part One



Exodus

Part One

Exodus 1–15

Stephen J. Binz

with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



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Wrap-up lectures are available for each lesson at no charge. The link to these free lectures is LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/ExodusPartOne.

Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

Exodus, Part One **Exodus 1–15**

The resource you hold in your hands is divided into five lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book *and* the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet five times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- The text of Exodus, chapters 1–15, using the New American Bible, Revised Edition as the translation.

- Commentary by Stephen J. Binz, which has also been published separately as *The God of Freedom and Life: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Liturgical Press).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting elements of the chapters of Exodus being studied. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the audio or video lectures online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is: LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/ExodusPartOne. Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

Prepare in advance

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.
- Read the assigned material in the printed book for Lesson One (pages 12–13) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session. You may do this assignment by reading a portion over a period of several days (effective and manageable) or by preparing all at once (more challenging).
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 24–26.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 26 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

Meet with your small group

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer found on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. This lecture provides a common focus for the group and reinforces insights from each lesson. You may view the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

Above all, be aware that the Holy Spirit is moving within and among you.

Exodus

Part One

LESSON ONE

Introduction and Exodus 1–3

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

Prayer

God of freedom and life, fill our minds and hearts with your liberating presence as we read, study, and live your saving word.

Read the Introduction on pages 12–14 and the Bible text of Exodus 1–3 found in the outside columns of pages 15–22, highlighting what stands out to you.

Read the accompanying commentary to add to your understanding.

Respond to the questions on pages 24–26, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 26 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Exodus

The Exodus event is ancient, yet always new. It is the foundational event in which Israel came to know YHWH (the LORD) and to know themselves as a people. It is the experience from which we continue to know who God is and what it means to be God's people. The passage from bondage to freedom, from death to life, is the story of all the people of God.

The revelation of God as the personal and mysterious divine presence acting in history to bring people to freedom and life is the very heart of Jewish and Christian faith. The Exodus was the crucial event. In that generation of forty years, Israel came to know YHWH as the God of freedom and life. Indeed, the Exodus narratives are a proclamation of Israel's faith, for Israel's creed was the recital of God's saving deeds in history.

Israel's liberation from bondage and its establishment as a people was the decisive and definitive event of God's self-disclosure to ancient Israel. Though God continued to be revealed in subsequent history, further understandings and actions of God were always seen in light of this primary event of revelation. From that time on, Israel would see everything in its national history from the perspective of that foundational event. The prophets continually called Israel back to faith in YHWH (the LORD), "who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Exod 32:4). The Exodus became the paradigm for describing God's activity in human history.

The recital of the Exodus narratives is always a call to new hope. Because God had heard Israel's cries and acted in the past, Israel could be certain that God would continue to remember the past and act in the present. God, who had rescued Israel from bondage and death, would continue to rescue and save. In Israel's ever-new experiences of delivery, Israel would come to know God more fully and in new ways. At the time in which the Exodus narratives were put in their present form, the people of Israel were experiencing a "new

exodus," a new experience of liberation from the captivity of Babylon and an opportunity to begin their life again. In every age, Israel knew that its future would take shape according to the same patterns with which their past had been formed.

For Israel the Exodus was never just a memory of the past; it was a living reality for every generation. By retelling the story and especially through celebrating the covenant in Israel's liturgy, the events of the past became present. When the people of Israel went up to the temple to celebrate the covenant renewal, they were not just recalling Mount Sinai but they were standing with Moses and their ancestors as that event became alive for them. Reciting the narrative in ritual ceremony was not just a telling about the past; it was also a description of the present moment. The saving presence of God, the God of freedom and life, was reestablished for every generation. Israel remains always the people of the Exodus.

This foundational revelation underlies every other aspect of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The whole complex of affirmations about God found in the law, the prophets, the psalms, and the gospels is rooted in the Exodus event. God is not abstract, static, and impartial; the God revealed in Exodus liberates, enlivens, redeems, calls, negotiates, forgives, challenges, and journeys. God is revealed in the real, human events of history.

Formation of the Exodus Narrative

The book of Exodus was not intended as an eyewitness account of events as they happened. It is rather a testament of the faith of generations expressing the meaning of the historical events experienced by their ancestors. While Exodus is rooted in historical events, it was expressed by later generations who had remembered and celebrated those events for hundreds of years. The story was told and retold in such a way that the experience of past generations and the faith of contemporary generations merged with one another.

Though the historical event of Exodus occurred around 1250 BC, the narrative was not

put in its final form until the fifth or sixth century BC. The rich and varied history of Israel lay between. The nucleus of Israel's tradition, originating with Moses, was continually combined with new experiences and new understandings of God. The narrative of Israel's Passover is influenced not only by the first Passover but also by Israel's long history of deliverance from distress. The narrative depicting the entire law of Israel as having been revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai is the result of seven hundred years of Israel's discernment of God's will in its legal tradition. The narrative of Israel's construction of the sanctuary is told from the perspective of generations of liturgical worship in Israel. Moses transmitted to Israel the formative experience and the insights of faith from which the national identity and accompanying institutions evolved. Moses was the framer of the founding tradition, but God continued to reveal the divine nature and will to Israel through the ages.

The book of Exodus is a rich tapestry of different traditions from various periods of Israel's life. Storytellers, poets, lawyers, and temple priests all contributed to its final form. Changes in literary styles, repetitions, insertions, and occasional inconsistencies in the text give us clues to the complex literary history of the work. The final redaction of the book of Exodus contains at least three different versions of salvation history that seem to have been woven together. These independent versions, written in different periods of Israel's history, are the principal literary sources of Exodus. A few words about each of these will be helpful.

The earliest source is the Yahwist tradition, written in Judea around the time of King Solomon (ca. 950 BC). Scholars have named this the Yahwist tradition because of its consistent reference to God by the proper name YHWH . This source is characterized by its colorful and popular language, often portraying God in terms that stress the divine closeness with humanity. It forms the basic narrative of Exodus.

Another source is the Elohist tradition, written in the prophetic circles of the northern kingdom in the ninth century BC. It is charac-

terized by its use of the noun for God, *Elohim*, rather than the personal name. It describes God as more distant from humanity, using mediators and messengers to convey the divine presence. It expresses a more critical attitude toward Israel and emphasizes the breaking of the covenant.

The latest source is the Priestly tradition, edited in the priestly circles of the Jerusalem temple at the time of the exile in the sixth century BC. It is the easiest to recognize within the fabric of the book. Emphasizing the majestic transcendence of God, its concern is with the liturgical and legal aspects of Israel's life. It told the story of the Exodus from the context of the exile and is thus concerned with those parts of the narrative that formed the foundation of Israel's life of worship. It was the Priestly editors who joined their own tradition with the two older narratives, the Yahwist and the Elohist.

The seams and discrepancies in the work are often an attempt by the final editors to preserve elements of differing traditions. Often the same story seems to be told in different ways, occasionally details seem to be contradictory, and there are disjointed elements throughout. Rather than trying to harmonize inconsistencies in the text, the editors sought to be faithful to the memories of the traditions they had received. No one tradition could claim an exclusive right to tell the whole story.

Yet the final redaction is a masterful work of literature. Attention to its seams and inconsistencies must not obscure the singleness and continuity of the narrative. The present form of the canonical text is a deliberate arrangement of material intended to form Israel's normative understanding of God and of its relationship to God. The many traditions contained in Exodus, dating from the time of Moses all the way down to the exile, express Israel's timeless faith in the God who was, who is, and who always will be.

Exodus and the Human Journey

Israel's encounter with the God of freedom and life has provided a hopeful context in which countless other communities and

peoples have understood their own experiences. African-American people have expressed their struggles from the period of slavery through the civil rights movement with the language of Exodus. People imbued with a new spirit of Moses have called on new Pharaohs to “let my people go.” The Jewish people in the twentieth century expressed their persecutions and hopes, from the Shoah to the declaration of a national homeland in Israel, within the context of faith provided by Exodus. The marginalized people of developing nations have reread Exodus in light of their own experiences of bondage and deliverance and have developed a theology and spirituality to express their new self-understanding. The paradigmatic narrative of liberation continually inflames the hopes and passions of oppressed people. New prophets, in the spirit of Moses, arise in every age to challenge people and societies to the demanding task of working for genuine human liberation from the bondage of sin, slavery, and death.

When we hear the words of the Exodus text within the depths of our own lives, we discover God’s alternative vision of freedom and life

and allow it to offer direction for our own journey. Israel’s experience becomes our story and reveals to us the human drive and destiny to be free and fully alive. Readers of the Exodus text are invited to join Israel in the hunger for freedom, to stand with Moses at the burning bush and on the mountaintop, to experience the awesome and fascinating attractiveness of the divine presence.

The God of Exodus continues to intervene, rescuing us in desperate times and directing us to new understandings and new goals. We find within our lives new Pharaohs and new Egypts, people and situations that enslave and destroy life. We discover new prophets like Moses, new deserts, new Sinais, and new promised lands. We locate people and experiences that reveal God to us, dangerous places of divine encounter, situations that liberate us and renew our lives. Like Israel, we fear the unknown; yet following God’s initiative we leave what is secure and strike out on the journey. The experience of Exodus enables us to trust, to know that God who has been faithful in the past will be with us along the journey and will lead us to the fullness of life.



1:1-7 Jacob's Descendants in Egypt

The opening verses link the Exodus story with the ancestral narratives of Genesis. These traditions revealed a God who brought forth and fostered life for Abraham and his descendants. The narratives of Genesis 37–50 describe how Joseph, who had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, rose to prominence in Egypt. Later when the life of his family was threatened by a famine in Canaan, Joseph provided for his father Jacob and his brothers when they came seeking food in Egypt. Though he had been enslaved and his life threatened by his brothers, Joseph saved their lives and allowed them to remain in Egypt.

Verse 6 indicates the passage to a new era. The twelve sons of Jacob (Israel) had died. Through the passage of several generations, that family had become the people of Israel. Five Hebrew verbs in verse 7 describe an extraordinary increase in the number of God's people. God's intentions for humanity at creation, to be fruitful and multiply, and God's promises to Abraham, to make his descendants a great nation, were being fulfilled. The focus of Exodus is the formation of this multitude into the people of God.

I. Introduction: The Oppression of the Israelites in Egypt

CHAPTER 1

Jacob's Descendants in Egypt

¹These are the names of the sons of Israel who, accompanied by their households, entered into Egypt with Jacob: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; ³Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; ⁴Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. ⁵The total number of Jacob's direct descendants was seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt.

⁶Now Joseph and all his brothers and that whole generation died. ⁷But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific. They multiplied and became so very numerous that the land was filled with them.

The Oppression

⁸Then a new king, who knew nothing of Joseph, rose to power in Egypt. ⁹He said to his people, "See! The Israelite people have multiplied and become more numerous than we are! ¹⁰Come, let us deal shrewdly with them to stop their increase; otherwise, in time of war they too may join our enemies to fight against us, and so leave the land."

¹¹Accordingly, they set supervisors over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor. Thus they had to build for Pharaoh the garrison cities of Pithom and Raamses. ¹²Yet the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians began to loathe the Israelites. ¹³So the Egyptians reduced the Israelites to cruel slavery, ¹⁴making life bitter for them with hard labor, at mortar and brick and all kinds of field work—cruelly oppressed in all their labor.

continue

1:8-14 The Oppression

"Pharaoh" was the title for the kings of Egypt. The new Pharaoh, who had no appreciation of the accomplishments of Joseph, caused the situation to change for the Israelites.