

# Moses and the Exodus: Introduction

Context: Old Testament summary of history – see the timeline

1. Sometime prior to 1550 BCE Abraham left Ur on his journey of faith through Canaan.
2. His descendants (Isaac and Jacob) continued their nomadic existence until Joseph joined the Egyptian court and Jacob and all related families joined him.
3. According to the Old Testament, they remained there until about 1250 BCE when Moses led the tribes out of Egypt ('The Exodus') back to Canaan.
4. After settling in the 'Promised Land' the 'Judges' were appointed and governed for about 200 years until Saul, David and Solomon were anointed as kings.
5. About 922 BCE the land was split into two kingdoms: Israel in the North and Judah in the south.
6.
  - a. Around 721 BCE the northern kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians and the kingdom dispersed.
  - b. The southern kingdom survived alone until about 587 BCE when the Babylonians invaded, destroyed the Temple and took many of the inhabitants into exile as slaves.
7. The Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire and the Persian king (Cyrus) allowed the Jews to return to Judah and the Temple was rebuilt.

The problem – did the Exodus ever take place?

- Exodus (together with Genesis, Deuteronomy, Numbers and Leviticus) appears to have been compiled around 500 BCE after the return from exile.
- There is no archaeological evidence to back up the account.
- At the time of the Exodus, Canaan was under Egyptian rule.
- Many of the place names used in Exodus did not exist until 200/300 years later.
- There is no evidence of a large-scale exodus from Egypt at that time.
- There is some doubt as to whether the Hebrews (Joseph, Jacob etc) ever settled in Egypt as described in Genesis (no historical mention in Egyptian documents).
- If Moses wrote Exodus (as was maintained), how did he describe his own birth and death?
- Exodus appears to have been compiled from at least two sources and contains stories that appear in histories of other contemporary civilisations.
- At the beginning of Exodus, God is referred to as 'El' (eg 'El-Shaddai': 'God Most High'), later as 'Yahweh' ('God Revealed'), similar to a term used by a contemporary nomadic tribe. Did the two groups merge during the migration.

Other points

- Moses and Aaron and Joshua do appear to be Egyptian names.
- There are contemporary accounts of rebellions by administrative groups under Egyptian rule – but not by slaves, possibly in Canaan rather than Egypt.

Some of the conclusions that scholars have arrived at

- If the Exodus did take place it may have been in waves of migration on a smaller scale.
- Many scholars think that the Israelites emerged largely from tribal groups resident in Canaan, possibly reinforced by exiles from Egypt.
- However, Exodus does have *some* historical content.
- Exodus (and the Torah) was probably written to provide a basis for national identity after the return from exile
- There may have been an intention to compare the escape from slavery in Egypt to the redemption from slavery and exile under Nebuchadnezzar.

# The birth and upbringing of Moses: Exodus chapters 1-2

## Chapter 1 – oppression of the Hebrews

How realistic do the events in this chapter seem to you?

- Hebrews outnumbering the Egyptians.
- Enslaving the Hebrews.
- The midwives disobeying orders.
- Identifying the Hebrews as a separate race.

Why do you think this story of oppression is included in the account?

What does this tell you about the Israelite/Jewish attitude towards the Egyptians?

What do you understand by ‘the midwives feared God . . .’?

Do you think it has any consequences for the distant future?

## Chapter 2:1-10 – The birth of Moses

Can you think of other biblical references to rescue in/from water?

How does this part of the story present the attitudes of the Egyptian women?

## Chapter 2:11-25 – Moses flees to Midian

How do verses 11-16 present the character of Moses?

How does verse 17 present his character?

Moses married a Midianite woman. How much intermarriage do you think had previously taken place between Hebrews and Egyptians?

What does verse 24 suggest about the Jewish (ca 500 BCE) concept of God?