

Part 3: Let My People Go



Temple to Egyptian god Amon-Ra and Rameses II



Background Notes

PURPOSE: To recount the most important event in Israel's history: the exodus from Egypt. Israel becomes God's chosen people and the Levite, Moses, his prophet. Moses is presented as the great lawgiver, and the core of the Law lays down the conditions of the covenant between God and Israel.

AUTHOR: JEDP (See Part 1).

DATE: The departure from Egypt took place around 1250 BC. Israel enters world history as a nation.

STYLE: The Yahwistic and Elohist stories of the Exodus raised to a national epic (with the plagues and miracle of the Red Sea) simplifying the Exodus as the departure of one large group. The Book of the Covenant contains elements in common with imperative-style Egyptian wisdom texts and conditional-style Mesopotamian codes.



Opening Quotes

“I have heard their cry.” Ex 3:7

“If you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.” Ex 19:5

“I, the Lord, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation.” Ex 20:5

“You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once alien yourselves in the land of Egypt..” Ex 22:20

“This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his.” Ex 24:8

“Continued the Lord to Moses, ‘Let me alone, then, that my wrath may blaze up against them.’” Ex 32:9

“This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins, and receive us as your own.” Ex 34:9

the BIG PICTURE		LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		key covenants in our Father's plan
12 Periods	Plot	Other books related to period		stories in each period
BC	THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah's ark, Tower of Babel
1850	THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek
1250	EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus
1200	JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua
1100	THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Samuel
1030	KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple
1000	THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov, Ecc, Songs	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile
721 587	BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, "major" prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to Exiles)
538	THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job	Cyrus, 2nd temple, 2nd Law, "minor" prophets, new writings
163 63	THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)
AD	JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection
33 70	APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ



The Story of Part 3: Let My People Go



There were at first only 70 Israelites in Egypt, but they became so numerous that a **pharaoh** who had never heard of Joseph decided to control the Israelites via forced labor. Even though the Israelites were enslaved, they continued growing. The pharaoh even resorted to ordering the newborn Israelite males to be killed. At this, a Levite woman hid her baby boy in a basket and placed it in the river. He ended up floating into the hands of the Pharaoh's daughter! But she took pity on him, named him **Moses** (short for Tutmoses!), and raised him as her own son. But when he was older, he killed an Egyptian who was attacking one of his fellow Hebrews. Fleeing into the desert, God called him in the form of a burning bush, telling Moses that he was to go back to Egypt and tell the pharaoh to let his people go. God then revealed his name **Yahweh** ("I Am Who Am"), and that he was the God of his Hebrew ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God granted Moses miraculous powers to help persuade the pharaoh. Since Moses was not a good speaker, God appointed his brother **Aaron** to be his spokesperson, and then warned Moses that the pharaoh would be very stubborn.

Moses brought about a plague each time the pharaoh refused to let Yahweh's people go, but the Pharaoh's stubbornness only grew with each scourge. Moses finally warned the pharaoh of the last plague, the worst of all: all the firstborn males would die if he did not let God's people go. God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites to smear the blood of a lamb over their door-posts. This way when the Angel of Death would sweep through Egypt that night, it would pass over the houses that had the blood on the door posts (hence the name *Passover*). The Egyptians (including the Pharaoh) awoke to find their firstborn sons dead. At this the Israelites were ordered to leave Egypt. With no time to waste, the Israelites ate unleavened bread and Moses led them into the desert. The pharaoh changed his mind and had his forces pursue the Israelites. Through God's power Moses raised his staff and divided the Sea of Reeds so that the Israelites could pass through on dry land. When the Egyptians pursued, Moses lowered his arms and the waters returned and drowned all the Egyptians.

And so the Israelites were led by Moses into the desert, where they could offer sacrifices to God and make their way back to their promised land of Canaan, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had lived. But it wasn't going to be a quick and easy trip. The people complained of hunger, thirst, and the threat of war from other people, so Moses spoke to Yahweh on their behalf, bluntly reminding him of his promises! God responded by providing them with manna from the sky, a whole flock of quails to eat, fresh water to drink at Meribah, and victory against the Amalekites.

At **Mt. Sinai**, Moses received the **10 commandments**:

1. Worship no other god but Yahweh.
2. Do not worship idols.
3. Do not use the Lord's name in vain.
4. Keep holy the Lord's day.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. Do not kill.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. Do not covet your neighbor's wife or belongings.

(Keep in mind that the Bible does not number them, so you may see different numberings.) This was a covenant made with the whole nation, and unlike the covenant made with Abraham, it was conditional on Israel's behavior (obeying the laws). In fact, on his way down from the mountain, Moses already found the Israelites sinning, worshipping a golden calf! Yahweh was ready to destroy the people and start a whole new nation beginning with Moses, but Moses pleaded with Yahweh, reminding Him of His original covenant with Israel, so Yahweh reconsidered! God "changing his mind" in response to Moses does not impinge on his omnipotence or omniscience. It is apparently his way of expressing his free choice of Moses as his chosen mediator between himself and his people. God also chose the Levites (and descendants of Aaron in particular) as his priests. His choices were not to be questioned. In fact, after the incident with the golden calf, the Levites were instructed to go through the whole camp and slaughter the men who were not on their side. In this way they were consecrated to the Lord.

As violent as this sounds, the same God who teaches us the dignity of every human life was teaching the people of Israel their dignity in terms they could understand. And if it seems unfair that God would prefer one people over another, we must recognize in hindsight his providential plan to raise from a chosen people a Messiah who would save all peoples. In preparation for this ultimate redemption, Israel was to be a priestly people, with priests offering sacrifices, and with one mediator to God on their behalf. Who cannot see the preparation God had for his people in choosing Moses to teach them his laws, and curb God's wrath whenever they broke them, or in choosing the Levites to offer sacrifices on their behalf in atonement for their sins? And just as his people were led from slavery to freedom by following Moses, "the friend of God", so are we led from the slavery of sin into the freedom of salvation by following Jesus, the Son of God.



Defending the Faith: Do Miracles Happen?

“The miracles in the Bible are obviously made up myths used to teach some moral of the story. What evidence is there that miracles really happen at all?”

The plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the quails and the manna from the sky, and the fiery presence of God on Mt. Sinai, all resemble natural phenomena known in Egypt and Palestine: a reddened Nile, over-abundant frogs, dust-laden desert winds, locusts, hail, a solar eclipse, the drying of the Sea of Reeds by an infrequent, strong easterly wind, the secretion of insects living on tamarisk trees, the landing of quails in the northern part of the Sinai peninsula tired from their flight over the Mediterranean, and an eruptive volcano. Raised to legendary status, the sheer timing of these events, like the wind which allowed them to cross the Red Sea as they fled their enemies, clearly shows God’s providence, unless of course they were fabricated or pure coincidence. So were these really miracles? Do miracles happen at all?

Before we answer the question “Do miracles happen” we must first ask “Can miracles happen?” If they cannot, we’re wasting our time looking at the evidence, since any purported miracle would be a myth, an illusion, or a natural phenomenon. But are there any *supernatural* phenomena? Is there something that cannot be explained

within the bounds of the physical universe? Yes – thoughts.

What are *thoughts* made of? A mere naturalist considers a thought to be nothing more than a pattern of atoms lined up just the right way to make the brain (itself just another pattern of atoms) perceive a “thought”. Sound reasonable? The problem is that this explanation is also just a thought, just another “pattern of atoms”, so how can you believe it? Unless, of course, thoughts are *not just* physical, not just a pattern of atoms, but something outside the physical realm, even if perceived through the physical, like hearing a speaker through a set of “speakers”. Is every thought a miracle, then? Albert Einstein once said that there are those who believe that there are no miracles, and those who believe that everything is a miracle. What do you think?

Once it is admitted that thoughts cannot be adequately explained within the bounds of the physical universe, it is perfectly reasonable to believe in miraculous interventions by something (Someone!) outside the universe.

All it takes is a little *thought* to see this!



Expressing the Faith: When You Believe

A popular song from “Prince of Egypt”, an animated film depicting the story of Moses from his birth to the giving of the Ten Commandments.

*Many nights we've prayed
With no proof anyone could hear
In our hearts a hopeful song
We barely understood
Now we are not afraid
Although we know there's much to fear
We were moving mountains
Long before we knew we could*

***There can be miracles
When you believe
Though hope is frail
It's hard to kill
Who knows what miracles
You can achieve
When you believe
Somehow you will
You will when you believe***

*In this time of fear
When prayer so often proved in vain
Hope seemed like the summer birds
Too swiftly flown away
Yet now I'm standing here
With heart so full I can't explain
Seeking faith and speaking words
I never thought I'd say*

(chorus)

*They don't always happen when you ask
and it's easy to give in to your fear
But when you're blinded by your pain
Can't see your way safe through the rain
Thought of a still resilient voice
says love is very near*

(chorus)

↗ **Next time: “Rules in the Sand”** ↖