



ROSE GUIDE TO **EXODUS**

Egypt to the Promised Land



EXODUS
LEVITICUS
NUMBERS
DEUTERONOMY

ROSE GUIDE TO
EXODUS

Rose Guide to Exodus
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CHAPTER 1

Moses and the Exodus



About four hundred years before the exodus, Jacob with his sons and their families migrated from Canaan to Egypt to escape a famine. Jacob's son Joseph had become the most important ruler in Egypt after the pharaoh, and he made sure his family was well taken care of in Egypt.

Following Joseph's death, the descendants of Jacob (called Hebrews or Israelites) continued to thrive in Egypt. But eventually, Egypt's pharaohs forgot Joseph and enslaved the Hebrews. To prevent the Hebrews from further population growth, one pharaoh ordered that every newborn Hebrew boy was to be thrown into the Nile River!

It was during this time that a Hebrew named Moses was born. Drawn out of the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses grew up as a member of Pharaoh's household. But God had chosen Moses for something much greater than the Egyptian royal court. Years later, out of a burning bush on a mountainside, God called Moses to lead the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, far from Pharaoh's grip.

The exodus is the story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is an epic story with nightmarish plagues, amazing miracles, a face-off between divine powers, and a perilous journey through the wilderness. But at its heart, it is a story about a sovereign God who relentlessly protects and provides for those who trust in him and follow where he leads.

THE NAME MOSES

The Hebrew name Moses sounds similar to the Hebrew verb for "to draw out." Pharaoh's daughter named the child Moses because she "drew him out of the water" (Ex. 2:10).

But the name Moses has an Egyptian meaning as well and is found within other Egyptian names: Ramesses, Thutmose, and Ahmose. The first part of each of these three names is related to an Egyptian deity: Ra, Thut, and Ah. The second part of each name (*messes/mose*) means "boy" or "son."

WHO WAS MOSES?

Moses was perhaps the most important person in the Old Testament. His life was bound to the life of God's people and to God himself. In a special way, Moses represented the Israelites to God and God to the Israelites.

Moses was ...

- ✘ a baby in danger of death who became a liberator of slaves;
- ✘ a man who disliked the limelight but became a national leader;
- ✘ an eighty-year-old shepherd who left his home and went to face a mighty pharaoh;
- ✘ a man slow of speech who became a prophet of God; and
- ✘ a husband and father who became a priest to thousands.

The life of this man changed the life of a nation-to-be.

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

DEUTERONOMY 34:10–12



THE BIRTH OF MOSES

In that time when the Hebrew people suffered under the yoke of slavery and death, Moses was born. Although Pharaoh had intended to destroy the Hebrews and frustrate God's plans to bless them, God worked through the most unexpected people to save the child Moses.

Moses's mother set him in a basket in the Nile River in a place where he would be found; and he was, by Pharaoh's own daughter! Moses's sister (most likely Miriam) wisely talked Pharaoh's daughter into giving the baby back to his mother to nurse him. In contrast to Pharaoh's evil intentions, his own daughter's tender and compassionate heart became a tool for baby Moses's salvation.

The child Moses was born to a slave family, rescued by a noble person, nurtured by his own slave mother, and educated as a member of the Egyptian nobility.

As we read the story of Moses's birth and rescue, we understand that God was working behind the scenes. In fact, Moses's own infant story anticipates what was about to happen to all of God's people later in the story of the exodus.

MOSES	ISRAEL
Moses came out of the Nile River miraculously "reborn" (Ex. 2:10).	Israel miraculously came out of the Red Sea as a people with a new identity (Ex. 14:21-22).
Moses became aware of injustice and responded (Ex. 2:11-12).	God heard the suffering of his people, and he acted decisively (Ex. 3:7-10).
Moses had to flee from Pharaoh's anger into the wilderness (Ex. 2:15).	Israel had to flee from Pharaoh's army into the wilderness (Ex. 14:8-9).
Moses met God at the burning bush on Mount Sinai (Ex. 3:1).	Israel met God while camping around the base of Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:1-2).
Moses, an Egyptian, became the deliverer of some troubled shepherds (Ex. 2:16-19).	God chose Moses, the shepherd, to deliver his people from Egypt (Ex. 3:1, 10).

DIVINE APPOINTMENT

In a burst of anger, Moses killed an Egyptian whom he witnessed beating a Hebrew slave. At that moment his life changed radically. After being an Egyptian noble, Moses became a fugitive. He fled into the wilderness and began a new life. In Midian, he established a new home, a new clan, a new profession as a shepherd, and he married and had children.

Moses agreed to stay with the man [in Midian], who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land."

EXODUS 2:21–22

Meanwhile, back in Egypt, the pharaoh Moses had known had died, but another equally ruthless pharaoh took his place. Still in slavery, the Hebrew people cried out to God under their burdens. The book of Exodus notes that God entered the scene directly: he listened, remembered, and acted in favor of his people.

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

EXODUS 2:23–24

God called out to Moses from a burning bush on Mount Sinai. God identified himself as the God of Moses's forefathers. In reverence, Moses removed his sandals because God's presence made the ground holy. God announced that he had seen his people's misery and was sending Moses to bring them out of Egypt. When Moses protested that he was not the right person for the job, God offered signs that he would be with him:

- ✘ Israel would worship God on the same mountain (Ex. 3:12).
- ✘ God revealed his own name to Moses (Ex. 3:14).
- ✘ God would perform great wonders (Ex. 3:20).

- ✘ Israel would not leave Egypt empty-handed (Ex. 3:21).
- ✘ God showed his power by changing Moses's staff into a snake (Ex. 4:2-4).
- ✘ God made Moses's hand leprous and immediately restored it back to health (Ex. 4:6-7).

Moses's encounter with God at the burning bush revealed much about God, Moses, and the Israelites:

- ✘ God is faithful to his promises; he had not forgotten his covenant with Abraham.
- ✘ God chose and equipped Moses to be his special representative.
- ✘ Moses's role became defined as that of an intermediary between God and Israel. From this moment on, Moses spoke to God on behalf of the Israelites and to the Israelites on behalf of God.



Moses in front of the burning bush



THE “I AM”

When God revealed his identity to Moses, God used a form of the Hebrew verb for “to be,” calling himself “I Am Who I Am,” or “I Will Be Who I Will Be,” or simply “I Am.”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

EXODUS 3:14

This name—this “I Am”—consists of only four Hebrew letters, all consonants, and in English, they would be YHWH. Interestingly, the ancient Hebrew alphabet is composed entirely of consonants—no vowels. It would not be until about 3,000 years after the first Hebrew books of the Bible were written that vowel points—a system of dashes and dots—would be introduced into the written language to indicate the vowel sounds.

יהוה

To emphasize God’s holiness, when God’s people read the Hebrew Scriptures, they would substitute a different name for God rather than vocalize the personal name of YHWH. They would say “Adonai,” which means “Lord.” They did this because they held the person of God in such reverence that they dare not speak his name.

In fact, God’s name of YHWH is so holy and so much greater than every other name that the Jewish people did not even record the vowel sounds of the name just in case someone would accidentally correctly utter the name. Instead, Medieval rabbis substituted vowel sounds for the name Adonai. So, precisely how to pronounce the YHWH correctly is a little mysterious, because the name was not vocalized for centuries and the vowels in the written form were borrowed from another name for God. Because of this, for many years it was thought that the pronunciation of YHWH was “Jehovah,” but the most up-to-date research indicates the most likely pronunciation is closer to “Yahweh.”



CLASH OF THE GODS

When Moses returned to Egypt to see Pharaoh, he confronted a person whom the Egyptians considered a divinity. Pharaoh was seen as the “son of Ra” and a god of Egypt who was responsible for maintaining cosmic order and control on the earth. In the eyes of the Egyptians, it would seem that a foreign god of the Hebrews was challenging their own god, Pharaoh. A clash of the gods was the natural result.



Moses confronts Pharaoh

Since Moses grew up in the Egyptian royal court, his initial fear and hesitancy to confront Pharaoh make sense. Moses, an eighty-year-old shepherd, was challenging an Egyptian deity! On the surface, Moses along with his brother Aaron were facing off against Pharaoh and his magicians; yet it was really the God of Moses, the Creator of heaven and earth, facing off against the false gods of Egypt.

When confronted, Pharaoh stubbornly refused to allow his Hebrew slaves to leave the country.

He also worsened their conditions by denying them the straw needed to make bricks, causing it to be much more difficult to meet their quotas.

The Scriptures tell us that God was also behind Pharaoh’s hardened heart. Pharaoh’s obstinacy happened so that Moses and the Israelites would know that the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was the real and only God.

I have raised you [Pharaoh] up for this very purpose,
that I might show you my power and that my name might be
proclaimed in all the earth.

EXODUS 9:16

The Ten Plagues

As God performed signs and wonders across the land, the Egyptians, Moses, and the Hebrews witnessed God's power over all things. God revealed his sovereignty and ignited his people's faith by showing that he is the God ultimately in control.

When the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

EXODUS 14:31

Exodus 12:12 states that God's judgment through the tenth plague came upon "all the gods of Egypt" (also Num. 33:4). Archaeologists are not certain about which particular deities were being worshiped in Egypt during the time of the exodus. Much of the information about Egyptian gods actually comes from a different time period and location in Egyptian history. Despite this uncertainty, it is still beneficial to consider possible connections between the ten plagues and Egyptian deities.

PLAGUE	DESCRIPTION	EGYPTIAN GODS
<p>Water into Blood Ex. 7:14-25</p> 	<p>The Nile River was turned into blood. This was the primary source of water in the land and the heart of Egyptian life.</p>	<p>Hapi: god of the annual flooding of the Nile</p> <p>Khnum: god of the source of the Nile</p>
<p>Frogs Ex. 8:1-15</p> 	<p>Frogs invaded everything, eventually dying and unleashing foul smells throughout the land.</p>	<p>Heqet: goddess of fertility and childbirth, represented as a frog</p>

PLAGUE	DESCRIPTION	EGYPTIAN GODS
<p>Gnats/Lice Ex. 8:16-19</p> 	<p>Dust turned into small insects, possibly gnats or lice. The Egyptian priests could not duplicate this plague.</p>	<p>Geb: god of the earth; gnats came from the "dust of the earth."</p>
<p>Flies/Mosquitoes Ex. 8:20-32</p> 	<p>The precise identity of these flying insects is unclear. Psalm 78:45 suggests that the insects fed on the Egyptians.</p>	<p>Khepri: god of the rising sun, represented with the head of a fly or scarab beetle</p> 
<p>Death of Livestock Ex. 9:1-7</p> 	<p>A plague was sent on the Egyptian livestock in the fields. The Israelites' livestock was unharmed.</p>	<p>Hathor: mother and sky goddess, represented by a cow Apis: pictured as a bull sacrificed and reborn</p>
<p>Boils Ex. 9:8-12</p> 	<p>Boils appeared on both the Egyptians and their animals. Egyptian priests/healers could do nothing to help.</p>	<p>Imhotep: god of healing and medicine Sekhmet: goddess of healing</p> 

PLAGUE	DESCRIPTION	EGYPTIAN GODS
<p>Hail Ex. 9:13-35</p> 	<p>A massive hailstorm struck Egyptian lands. Some of Pharaoh's officials sided with Moses after this plague.</p>	<p>Seth: god of storms and disorder Nut: goddess of the sky</p> 
<p>Locusts Ex. 10:1-20</p> 	<p>Locusts ate every plant not destroyed in the hailstorm. Egyptian officials pleaded with Pharaoh to listen to Moses.</p>	<p>Serapia: god with the head of a locust who protected against locusts</p>
<p>Darkness Ex. 10:21-29</p> 	<p>Intense darkness descended upon the land for three days; so dark that it was described as if it could be touched.</p>	<p>Ra, Amon-ra, Atum, Horus: gods associated with the sun</p> 
<p>Death of Firstborn Sons Ex. 11:1-12:30</p> 	<p>God struck dead all firstborn males, including Pharaoh's son. But those with lamb's blood on their doorframes were spared (Passover).</p>	<p>This plague was an attack on the lineage and deity of Pharaoh himself.</p>

Signs and Wonders or Natural Events?

Some people try to connect the cause of the plagues to natural events rather than supernatural occurrences. The turning of the water into blood has been linked to the Nile River becoming high during the months of July and August and turning “bloodlike” because of the red earth stirred up from the basins of the Blue Nile and Atbara. The result of this unusually high and muddy river could have caused the migration of frogs out of the river, leading to gnats and flies, which in turn led to disease and cattle deaths, and possibly even boils on humans. Other plagues have been tied to a weather disaster that could have resulted in what is described as a hailstorm and the swarming of locust, which was followed by a dust storm that caused the sun to be blocked out. While some of these explanations sound plausible, they cannot explain everything, like the water turning into blood in other water sources (Ex. 4:9; 7:19). Also, there is no explanation given for the death of firstborn sons.

A NEW PEOPLE

The Lord said that in the tenth plague the firstborn males of every household would die unless the doorframe of that house was covered with the blood of a perfect lamb. On the night of the plague, the Lord “passed over” the homes with lamb’s blood on the doorframes. This was the first Passover. The Passover was to be commemorated annually throughout the generations of Israel as a memorial forever. It was a new time of remembrance for a new nation, starting in Nisan (Aviv), the first month of their new religious calendar (Lev. 23:4–5).

After the death of his son, Pharaoh was a broken man and finally allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt. As God had promised, they left with an abundance of Egyptian silver, gold, and clothing (Ex. 3:21–22; 12:35–36).

But Pharaoh quickly changed his mind.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him.

EXODUS 14:5–6

With a column of fire separating them, Pharaoh's troops trapped Israel against the Red Sea. Moses took charge in the midst of the people's doubts and fears. God promised to fight for them. As they crossed the sea in a mighty miracle of deliverance, a new people was born: God's people, a nation in formation.

Just as baptism symbolizes a new beginning in the life of a Christian, the crossing of the sea was a new beginning for Israel (see 1 Cor. 10:1-2). Pharaoh's army disappeared as the waters closed in on them. God's deliverance was complete.



The destruction of Pharaoh's army



A NEW RELATIONSHIP

Through the exodus experience, God created a people for himself. In time, he started a relationship with this people that would define the rest of God's involvement with humanity. Christ's work on the cross is the miracle that brings salvation and defines believers as a new people. The writer of the book of Hebrews explains: "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" (Heb. 2:3-4).



DIVINE PRESENCE IN THE WILDERNESS

As God’s people moved away from the sea toward Sinai, they rejoiced for their liberation, but also grumbled and complained against Moses and Aaron, and then they disobeyed God’s instructions.

They asked for the basics for life: food and water. God provided these in miraculous ways. For food, God gave them manna and quail. As for the water, God instructed Moses to strike a rock to give water to the Israelites. Even after seeing God’s providence over and over, the Israelites doubted and asked the question that highlights a central issue in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy: “Is the LORD among us or not?” (Ex. 17:7).

God’s revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai (both in Exodus 3 and 19) established that God’s presence was indeed with Moses. The battle against the Amalekites in Exodus 17 also shows that God’s presence with Moses represented God’s presence with the Israelites. When Moses held his staff above his head, the Israelites defeated the Amalekites. When Moses lowered his arms to rest them, the fate of the battle turned against Israel. This event illustrated Moses’s intercession in favor of Israel and God’s response to him.

When the Israelites arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, God made it clear that his demonstration of power—the thunder, lightning, and the thick cloud—had a specific purpose: “So that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you” (Ex. 19:9). Moses

Sinai mountains



represented God to the people of Israel. God's presence with Moses was a sign for the people to know that God was with them as well. Moses's authority and guidance represented God's own authority and guidance.

God's presence with Moses remained the sign of divine presence until the tabernacle was built. The tabernacle, a portable "tent of meeting," became the visual representation of God's presence in the midst of his people. The Lord instructed Moses:

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

EXODUS 25:8–9

In a late Jewish tradition, the term *shekinah* became associated with God's presence. *Shekinah* is derived from a Hebrew word that means "dwelling." God's presence, the *shekinah*, in the wilderness was represented by a cloud during the day and the column of fire at night.

THE COVENANT AT SINAI

In Scripture, the wilderness is a symbol of the chaos and lifeless forces that oppose God. For the Israelites, it became a training ground for learning what it meant to be a people of God living in his presence.

God is holy, whereas the Israelites (and all humanity) lived with many impurities and sin. How could people live in the presence of a holy God? For the purpose of teaching Israel how to live as God's people in his presence and in the promised land, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. These ten laws can be seen as a summary of the agreement (covenant) that God made with Israel at Sinai. Israel agreed to keep (obey) the terms of their agreement (stipulations of the covenant) and God agreed to be their God and King to bless, protect, and provide for them.

The covenant at Sinai became the basis for God's relationship with Israel. Moses was a kind of mediator of this covenant. When he climbed the mountain, he was representing the Israelites before God. When he descended the mountain, Moses was representing God to the people.

Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

EXODUS 19:7–8

In the Mosaic covenant, God inscribed the words of the covenant on stone. Israel was to treasure them and keep them close to their hearts and minds forever. Their entire life should have been determined by these words. But humans are forgetful and rebellious. The Israelites broke the terms of the agreement on repeated occasions. For that reason, God had promised to instead inscribe his law in people’s hearts (Deut. 30:6). He would send a perfect mediator of a new covenant, the Messiah (Heb. 9:15).



JESUS AS THE MEDIATOR

Sin separates humans from God. In Old Testament times, people related to God indirectly, through covenants, sacrifices, and human intercessors, such as priests and prophets. In the New Testament, Jesus as the perfect priest and prophet became the only mediator needed. As a prophet, he communicated God’s will through his teachings and ministry (Heb. 1:1–2). As a priest, he offered the only perfect sacrifice that could bring people back to God (Heb. 10:10–14). The letter to the Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is a mediator like Moses but superior to him: “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Heb. 9:15). Paul explains that “there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

