

Exodus: Myth or History?

Two of the most significant events in Jewish history are narrated in the Book of Exodus: the nation is born of slaves delivered from bondage, and a covenant is formed between this new nation and its God. The story starts with the people enslaved and ends with the establishment of a new nation with its own leaders and symbols of freedom. Along the way, key components of the rest of Israel's history are introduced: law, prophecy, and the theme of the God of Israel becoming known to the rest of the world.

Increasingly, critical scholarship has been used for the purpose of casting doubt on the historicity of the central Exodus events. However, scholarship is a double-edged sword, and used honestly can go a long way to *illuminate* the text, providing historical, theological, and literary insights. This mini-course will examine some of the central ideas of the narrative using the tools of modern scholarship for a deeper appreciation of the literature and to try to reconstruct the history and understand the theology behind the story.

Lecture 1 Introduction: Exodus and Critical Scholarship

Biblical Scholarship vs Bible Study
Orientation in Space and Time
Genre criticism, text criticism, and source criticism

Lecture 2 Chapters 1-4: The Egyptian Setting

Egyptian history
Who Was Moses?
God's self-revelation: the burning bush

Lecture 3 Ch 5-12: God Makes Himself Known

Moses & Aaron's magic
Genesis covenant invoked
Source criticism
10 Plagues
What is *pesach*?

Lecture 4 Ch 13-19: The Great Escape - Miracles & Rebellion in the Wilderness

Geography: Where/what is the Red Sea?
Exodus 14 vs. Exodus 15
The birth of prophecy
What is the *kavod*? What is *manna*? What does it mean to be a *goy kadosh*?

Lecture 5 Ch 20-24: Sinai and the Ten Commandments

The "Ten Words"
Suzerainty treaties in the Ancient Near East
A kid in its mother's milk?
A feast with God

Lecture 6 Ch 25-28: The Tabernacle

Why all the details?
What did the Tabernacle look like?
What happened to it?
Priests and Levites
Sacrifice

Lecture 7 Ch 29-40: The Golden "Calf"

Why did Aaron do this? Source criticism & *pshat*
Moses the prophet
Breaking commandments
Moses sees God: or does he?

Another 10 commandments
Did Moses have horns?

Lecture 8

The Archaeology of the Exodus and the Emergence of Israel

Scholarship, history, and the reconstruction of what might have happened; and the questions of whether it should matter, to whom, and how much.