



DISCOVERY 5

The Exodus

The symbol for *The Exodus* is a burning flame set against the pyramids. God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. (Exodus 3:2)

The Story Continues

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" Exodus 3:13

What has happened? As the book of Genesis ends, the descendants of Abraham, having been rescued from famine in Canaan, are living in Egypt. Yet, as the book of Exodus begins, they are the oppressed slaves of the Pharaoh. How will God's promise be fulfilled now?

God remembers the promise. Speaking from a burning bush, God calls Moses to confront Pharaoh and announce God's intention to free the Israelites and lead them out of Egypt. But Moses questions God's call: "Who am I to do this? What if they don't believe me? Who are you?" God answers Moses' questions: "I will be with you; you will know me by what I do." Through a series of miraculous plagues, culminating in the death of Egypt's firstborn male children, God acts to fulfill the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God rescues the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and sets them free for their journey to the Promised Land. In the Exodus from Egypt the Israelites come to know the name of God, Yahweh, but more importantly, they come to know the nature of God. In experiencing God's mighty deliverance, the Israelites will forever know God as one who promises and fulfills, calls and guides, rescues and protects. The experience of the Exodus is central to the faith of Israel, enlightening all that has happened from the beginning and influencing all that will follow.

Preparing for the Search

Read about these key people, events, and places in *The Exodus* to prepare for your reading of the Scripture passages.

Aaron, Moses' older brother, became the spokesman for Moses upon the direction of God. As leader *in absentia* when Moses was on Mount Sinai, it was Aaron who gave in to the people's demand to make a golden calf. Under God's instructions to Moses, Aaron and his sons were anointed to the office of priest. (Exodus 4:14-17; 5:1 to 12:51)

Angel, from the Greek word "*angelos*," means "a messenger." Angels of God were sent to Abraham, Hagar, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Daniel, Mary, Jesus, Peter, and Paul, in addition to countless others. Angels are heavenly beings who serve God in heaven and on earth. (Exodus 3:2; 14:19)

Exodus, the second book of the Bible, is entitled "These are the names" in Hebrew. When the book was translated into Greek, the Greek word for departure (*exodus*) was substituted to refer to the central story in the book, Israel's dramatic exodus from Egypt.

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, is remembered both for her song of triumph after Israel crossed the Red Sea and as one who shared the leadership of the Hebrew people with her brothers. However, as a result of her words against Moses, she was stricken with leprosy. Moses interceded with God and she was healed. (Exodus 2:4, 7-8; 15:20-21; see also Numbers 12)

Moses, God's spokesman, leader, and statesman, could be considered the most important person in the Old Testament. Born a Hebrew yet raised an Egyptian, Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egyptian captivity at God's command. His leadership was crucial during the years in the wilderness when he helped form the new nation upon a powerful new understanding of God. (Exodus 2:1 to Deuteronomy 34:12)

BCE	c. 1900	1250	1210
	Patriarchs	Exodus	Conquest and Settlement
	Abraham	Moses	Joshua
	Isaac	Aaron	Judges
	Jacob	Miriam	Samuel
	Joseph		



Mount Sinai, or Mt. Horeb. The exact location is uncertain, but it is a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula where the Israelites camped following their exodus from Egypt. Three months after their arrival at Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Today a traditional site of Mount Sinai is called Jebel Musa (Mountain of Moses). (Exodus 19:1 to 33:1)

Passover was the final event in God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. God killed the firstborn children of the Egyptians but spared the firstborn of the Israelites, where blood had been sprinkled over the family doorways. The Passover meal, with ingredients symbolic of the entire Exodus event, celebrates God’s saving act in the Passover. (Exodus 12:1-30)

Red Sea. The body of water that Israel crossed during the exodus from Egypt is more accurately translated “Reed Sea” or “Sea of Reeds,” from the Hebrew words *Yam Suph*. (Exodus 13:18 to 14:31)

The Search Begins

Begin your search by reading the following passages in your Bible. Make notes that will help you retell the story of *The Exodus* during the session. Use these questions to guide your readings:

- ◆ *What happened in the Exodus?*
- ◆ *Who were the major leaders during this time?*
- ◆ *Why do you think the Exodus is one of the most important events in the Old Testament?*

Exodus 3:1-20, God Calls Moses

1030	922		722/721	587/586	538	333	63
Monarchy Founded	Divided Kingdom	Elijah Elisha	Fall of Samaria	Fall of Jerusalem	Return and Restoration	Greek Rule	Roman Rule
Saul	Jeroboam	Amos	Hoshea	Exile in Babylon	Ezra	Daniel	
David	Rehoboam	Hosea	Isaiah (1)	Zedekiah	Nehemiah		
Solomon	Ahab Jehu	Micah		Isaiah (2) Jeremiah Ezekiel	Isaiah (3) Haggai Zechariah Malachi		

Exodus 4:1-17, Moses Is Given Power

Exodus 5:22-6:13, God's Plan

Exodus 12:1-36, The Passover

Exodus 12:37-42; 13:17-22, The Departure from Egypt

Exodus 14:1-31, Crossing the Red Sea

Exodus 15:1-21, Song of Liberation

Exodus 19:1-8, Camped at Mount Sinai

The Search Continues

◆ *In these readings I have questions about...*

◆ *In these readings I discovered...*

Focusing the Search

In this discovery, as in the previous one, our focus is on the importance of names. Today, at least in many cultures, names do not hold the same power they did in ancient times. When Moses asked for God's "name," he was not expressing idle curiosity. He was not even trying to make certain that the God who was confronting him in the burning bush was the God of his ancestors. Moses believed that he would have power and perhaps some control if he could call God by name.

In Exodus 3:14 the name God reveals to Moses is translated in the *New Revised Standard Version* as I AM WHO I AM. The footnotes at the bottom of the page indicate that this same Hebrew word can be translated I AM WHAT I AM or I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE. Check the footnotes in your Bible to see what they say about God's name. One source indicates that it should probably be rendered, I CAUSE TO BE WHAT COMES INTO EXISTENCE.

The Hebrew letters for God's name in Exodus 3:14 are YHWH. Because the four letters are consonants, we do not know how this name of God was pronounced in Old Testament times. It wasn't until the early Christian era that Jewish editors of the Hebrew Scriptures, known as Masoretes, added "vowel points" to Hebrew words. Using these vowels, YHWH is translated in English as Yahweh. Even today, however, out of reverence and tradition, the name YHWH is not pronounced aloud by pious Jews. They substitute "Adonai" (adoh-ni') meaning "Lord." When you read "LORD" (all capitals) in an English translation, the Hebrew word behind it most likely is "Yahweh."

The Old Testament writers used a number of different names for God. Before the time of Moses the name El was used. Later it was often combined with other words to form new words. Therefore the city named Beth-el means “house of God.” Eli-ezer (“God is a helper”) is the name of Moses’ second son (Exodus 18:4).

Exodus 6:2-3 is an interesting passage because in it you will find three different names for God. Read it and then, using the information in the footnote and the information above, write the two verses, substituting the appropriate names for God.

Now use your Bible to complete the chart below. If you can check more than one translation, see what you can discover about the way different editors translate the Hebrew names for God into English.

THE NAMES OF GOD

Bible Reference	English/ Hebrew	Bible Dictionary Definition	Your Bible’s Translation
Genesis 1:1	Elohim (e-loh-heem’)	God	_____
Genesis 14:19	El Elyon (el el-yon)	God Most High	_____
Genesis 21:33	El Olam (el o-lam)	Everlasting God	_____
Exodus 6:2	Yahweh (yah’-way)	I Am Who I Am	_____
Exodus 6:3	El Shaddai (el shad’ i)	The Mountain One	_____

If you get interested in this subject, you will discover other names for God by checking the heading “Names of God” in a Bible dictionary such as the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*.

Putting it Together

One good way to get a “feel” for a passage of Scripture is to picture it in your mind. The very dramatic story of the Exodus provides our minds with many pictures as we are reading. Select one of the passages listed below.

- ◆ Exodus 3:1-6, God Calls Moses
- ◆ Exodus 4:1-9, Signs from God
- ◆ Exodus 12:37-42, The Exodus
- ◆ Exodus 13:17-22, God Leads
- ◆ Exodus 14:15-31, Crossing the Sea
- ◆ Exodus 15:20-21, Miriam’s Song

Look for clues that indicate the time of day, people involved, geographical setting, and action taking place. Using your imagination, visualize the scene. Then, using your ideas, do one of the following:

- a. Sketch the scene on paper as simply or as elaborately as you wish.
- b. Pretend you are writing a movie screenplay or the script for a television drama. Write a brief summary that also includes information for the design of the set.
- c. Put yourself in the dramatic scene. Write a first person account of what you saw and heard.
- d. Create a blog entry on your personal website to share the event with others on the internet.
- e. Generate your own idea in response to the story!

You may be asked to present what you have created when we share the summaries of the passages read for this session on *The Exodus*.

Reflection

1. Think about the thoughts and emotions of those who left Egypt to cross the desert. Many were apprehensive about an unknown future. Others welcomed the chance to start a new life. In what ways do your feelings and concerns about the future compare with those of the ancient Israelites? How does this story about the Exodus speak to you and give you hope?

2. Reflect upon the experiences of the Israelites who left Egypt knowing that God was directly guiding their departure. What experience in your life has convinced you of God's direction or perhaps intervention, to guide you or someone you know? In what ways does your experience give you an insight into Israel's responses to their delivery into freedom?