

**The God Who Makes Himself Known:
An Overview of Exodus
September 21, 2025**

I always feel *unequal* to the task, but today that is quite clearly the case. How does one overview a forty-chapter book written over 3000 years ago, detailing paradigm-shifting events not *only* in the history of the world, but in the revelation of God Himself?

So, with that insufficiency acknowledged—right at the top—maybe we’d *begin* by thinking about where we’re going. I recently read this, “In a flight from Boston a few degrees at the beginning can make a difference between landing in Seattle or Los Angeles.”¹ So, if we’re going to overview, that’d be *one* reason why—to set something of a trajectory.

And since we’re talking on that plane, another rationale for doing an overview is to get the 30,000-foot view. The trajectory matters. And to get the trajectory, we can’t just look 10 miles ahead. We need to zoom out. We don’t *merely* want to see an acre, nor a chapter, we want to see something of the entire thing *so* that we might interpret this or that chapter rightly, in light of the whole.

Said another way, to understand a body of work—and maybe *especially* a large one—keeping the author’s theme front and center is imperative. One writer uses the analogy of scenes in a film. Maybe you’ve walked into a room before and something is on—it’s 30 minutes in already—and you have *no* idea what’s going on. You don’t know what’s preceded that moment, don’t know who these characters are, why there’s tension, etc. Because of that, when a frame is isolated like that, we’re confused. The scene has no life of its own outside the film as a whole.²

The same can be said for a piece of music. Beethoven’s Fifth has a motif, a melodic line, that is the center of the entire symphony. There are variations on that theme that run throughout the other movements, but if you want to understand the other parts *rightly*, and the work itself, you must see those variations in relationship to the theme.

Literature does the same thing. I mentioned Waterloo last week. You won’t understand Hugo’s digression in *Les Mis* unless you know what’s central, where he’s headed.

The same is true with the Bible—both in its entirety *and* in each of its books. Sometimes the books make explicit the theme, such as John 20:31: **these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.** The introduction to Luke gives us his purpose clearly (Luke 1:1–4). We could name other examples where the theme is explicitly stated. But other times, it’s not. So, again, we have to look—not at one verse—but at the big picture, the 30,000-foot view to see what the aim of the book is.

And what happens if we miss the theme? What happens if we set the wrong trajectory? We very well might misunderstand *each* of the subthemes and then end up landing in the wrong place.

So, with all *that* in mind, what’s the message of Exodus? Is it the Passover? Is it the crossing of the Red Sea? Is it the Law? Is it the Tabernacle? Is it even Israel’s liberation? Are any of *those* events the *main* thing the author wants us to note?

My hope today, and in the weeks and months ahead, is for us to see that *all* of those awe-inspiring moments, even the riveting details, actually serve a more primary aim, that is, God in mercy making Himself known. And more specifically, making Himself known to Israel, so that through Israel He might be made known to the other nations.

One man wrote, “Exodus itself is about knowing God, knowing God for who He has made Himself known to be, rather than for who we might think He is, imagine Him to be or wish Him to

¹ W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, NSBT, 35.

² Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 199.

be.”³ In the second point, the aim is to show you how that theme unfolds, but first—to get there—we need to consider the background to this book.

1. What is the background to Exodus?

In this case, there’s an easy one-word answer: Genesis. We’ll dive a little deeper into this *next* week when we consider the first seven verses, but it’s vital that we point out today that the second book of the Bible continues the story that began in the first book of the Bible.⁴

So, what’s happened? Well, *primarily*, humanity has fallen from creation’s ideal. Genesis 1–2 pictures that ideal—with humanity rightly related to God, to one another, and to creation itself. But by Genesis 3 that is all undone. To put it simply, God dwells *with* humanity—among them in Eden (Gen. 3:8); and then a few verses later man and woman are cast out to the east, prevented from entering the Lord’s presence again by cherubim and sword (Gen. 3:24). In one sense, long before those in the book we consider, Adam and Eve are exiled. And, then, Genesis 4–11 records the spiral downward. It’s swift and unrelenting, from Cain to Nephilim to Noah to Babel.

And *all* that—something of a societal and theological nadir—ought to inform how we read Genesis 12:1: **Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing.** What’s happening there? In one sense, in order to reverse humanity’s exile, its downward spiral, God calls the pagan Abram out from among them.⁵

That’s Genesis 12. It ought to inform how we think about Exodus. There are no people to deliver if God doesn’t call Abram out. A few chapters later, Genesis 15 is connected to the Exodus even more explicitly. Do you remember this? In the middle of a covenant ceremony with Abram, God tells him this: **Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve** (Gen. 15:13). Kids, this is theological foreshadowing. But because it’s theological, God not only *knows* it’s going to happen, He has purposes for it. Again, there’s a reason the Israelites end up where they do, enslaved in Exodus 1. And there’s a reason they end up in Exodus 14 where they do, on the other side of the sea, delivered.

It’s with Genesis 15 in mind that we can better understand what’s happening with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, and even with Jacob’s son Joseph.⁶ You know the story. Joseph is sold by his brothers (Gen. 37:28). Those that bought Joseph bring him into Egypt, where he eventually becomes the property of Potiphar, *Pharaoh’s* officer (Gen. 39:1). There, in that role, in that place—Egypt—Joseph became quite successful (Gen. 39:2). Yet, Potiphar’s wife wrongly accuses him, which lands Joseph in chains.

But, then, after interpreting some dreams, Joseph is raised to a position of prominence, placed there by the *Pharaoh* himself (Gen. 41:40). Because of a famine, Joseph’s brothers come to *Egypt* (Gen. 42–43), of course not knowing Joseph is there. He shows kindness to his brothers (Gen. 45), and then thereafter reveals himself to them. So that their father Jacob is brought to Egypt (Gen. 46) and all their families settle in Goshen, near the Nile. And the final sentence in the book of Genesis speaks of Joseph’s death at the age of 110, and his burial **in a coffin in Egypt** (Gen. 50:26).

³ Blackburn, 23.

⁴ Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, AOTC, 4.

⁵ Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 15.

⁶ I sat in my office for a little while on Friday wondering why we didn’t do four or five weeks on Joseph to set up Exodus.

So, God's people are in a foreign land, as He told Abraham they would be. That's the background to the book.

2. What does Exodus say?

As mentioned in the introduction, some books take a verse or two to tell you, precisely, what the theme of the book is. And, then, on the other hand, some books do *not*. Exodus is one of the latter. So, how might one arrive at the conclusion noted earlier, that Exodus is *chiefly* about God making Himself known?

Exodus 1 and 2 set the scene for the narrative ahead, introducing us to Egypt, to Moses, to Pharaoh, and to the Israelites' long oppression. And it's worth being reminded that the people of God's exile *from* God, and the years and years and generations that had passed, led to humanity's *increasing* ignorance of the God revealed to the patriarchs in Genesis.⁷ To put it simply, it'd been a *long* time since Joseph.

And, at least to some degree, this included Moses. Because in Exodus 3 when God speaks to him for the first time, in order to send him out, Moses asks, **I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you." Now they may say to me, "What is His name?" What shall I say to them?** (Ex. 3:13).

You can hear his lack of knowledge. That is, if he *knew* the name of the Lord, he wouldn't be asking this question.⁸ So, God answers him. And He does so in three stages. The first is in verse 14: **God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."** Now, if you read that and think there's a little ambiguity, you're hearing it rightly.

The second stage of the answer contains a *little* more information. As verse 14 continues: **Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."** At this point, if Moses passes *this* along, the sons of Israel would know that Moses was sent by God to tell them this. But again, "I AM" begs the question, "you are . . . *what?*?" What is your *Name*?

The third stage gives more revelation, both concerning the connection to Israel's past, and to answer to Moses's question concerning the name: **"Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD (Yahweh), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations** (Ex. 3:15). Though the word is certainly *used* earlier in the Scriptures, this is the *first* time God declares Yahweh as His name. So, Moses asked the question. God answers it.

And yet, even though Moses knows *more* than he did, he *still* doesn't fully know the meaning—the interpretation—of the name.¹⁰ How do we know that? We skip a few chapters ahead. At this point Moses has gone to the people of Israel. As you might recall, Aaron had to speak *for* him. But at this point he's gone to Pharaoh and said for the first time, **Let my people go** (Ex. 5:1).

Now, let's imagine the book of Exodus were to then skip from 5:1 to chapter 14. As if Moses confronted Pharaoh, told him to let Israel go, and then in the *next* verse we read Exodus 14:30: **Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians.** Could that have happened? Yes. Did it? No. Why?

Back to Exodus 6. After Moses tells Pharaoh to let the people go, and Pharaoh refuses, the Lord says *this* to Moses, in Exodus 6:3: **I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God**

⁷ Morales, 39.

⁸ Blackburn, 31.

⁹ Blackburn, 37, 39.

¹⁰ Blackburn, 39.

Almighty (El-Shaddai) but by My name, LORD (Yahweh) I did not make Myself known to them.

What does He mean by *that*? What will *be* revealed about God to Israel that was *not* made known fully to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?¹¹ Exodus 6:6 answers: **“Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’”**

This is *some* of why Exodus doesn’t skip from chapter 5 to chapter 14, why God doesn’t release Israel immediately.¹² Because what He’s *about* to do—the signs and wonders that lead to the Exodus itself—would unveil the being and attributes of God as no other event thus far.¹³ In other words, God tells Moses what He’s *about* to do; and He tells him *why*. In the chapters ahead He aims to make Himself—His name—known.

Exodus 3 and 6 are fairly clear on this. But do we conclude this *only* because of Exodus 3 and 6? No, listen to Exodus 7:5, when God *continues* speaking to Moses: **The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.** Now skip a few verses down to Exodus 7:17: **Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile . . . and it will be turned to blood.”**

Now, I’m not going to read *all* the verses that advance this theme. But you could read Exodus 8:10, or 8:22 in regard to the plague of flies, or 9:14, or 9:16 that reads, again to Pharaoh: **But indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.** We could read 9:29, or 10:1-2, or 11:7, or go all the way to chapter 14, when Pharaoh’s in pursuit, and the people of God stand stopped on the shores of the Red Sea. There, the Lord said to Moses, **the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen** (Ex. 14:18). Moments later, *after* they walk through the sea on dry land, the people of God **feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD** (Ex. 14:31).

What God says to Moses in Exodus 3 and 6 points us to the theme of the book. And, in case we’re slow to grasp it, God then says it *repeatedly* as the revelation is unfolding.

As you know, Israel then goes into the wilderness. There the Lord tests His people in order to train them. Manna shows up. Meat shows up. Both have the same intention we’ve already outlined. Exodus 16:12 reads: **At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.**

We could go through nearly every chapter of this book, making the same argument. And we *will*. But not *today*. However, if we skipped a few chapters we’d get to the Ten Commandments, followed by the other aspects of the Law, that reveal to us God’s character, and begin with the words: **I am the LORD your God** (Ex. 20:2).

We could then go to the tabernacle, to the priests, and to the sacrifices. And because we’ve studied Hebrews we know these aren’t merely rituals. They’re shadows, pointing us to the clearest revelation of God Himself.

And speaking of that *kind* of self-revelation—God making Himself known—we might skip all the way to one of the pivotal texts in all the Bible, and certainly in this book: Exodus 34. There

¹¹ Blackburn, 45.

¹² Morales, 43.

¹³ Morales, 40.

we read about the revelation of God's name in a deeper way than we have before,¹⁴ in the aftermath of the incident with the golden calf. As you know, the people of God fail to obey what God commanded them earlier. And yet, Moses pleads for them. He—like a priest—represents the people before God, asking repeatedly that they might be spared. And, in line with this theme, He does so on the basis of what God had already revealed about Himself (Ex. 32:13), and about His commitment to His people (Ex. 33:13).

And, in one sense, it's a theological dilemma. Should He destroy His people, forever, He would break His promises to the patriarchs. And yet, if Yahweh does *not* judge them, then He's *also* violating His character. If He spares them, is He unjust? And if He destroys them, is He unfaithful?

He *must* judge them. And He *can't* judge them, at least fully. At least, not *yet*.¹⁵ And it's on that basis that Moses pleads for them. And after doing so, he asks the Lord to reveal Himself further. And the Lord does so in Exodus 34: **Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."**

The LORD not only tells Moses His name, here He reveals *who* He is—His attributes and His character. In that pivotal verse, we see that His judgments serve to make Himself known. And we see that His *mercy* does as well. So, to know the Lord—to know His name—is to know Him not only as Deliverer, but as the One that does so because He is compassionate and gracious.

But maybe we'd ask, how will He be *that*, and yet not clear the guilty? Exodus doesn't tell us, at least not fully.¹⁶ The New Testament does. In fact, the moment when God is most fully known—revealed most clearly—is the moment when both judgment falls on His Son and mercy is extended to His people.¹⁷

What's Exodus about? God making Himself known.

3. Why should we read/study Exodus?

The theme already told us why. Because it reveals God to us.

It reveals Him as the One ruling over all creation—sovereign over flies and hail to blood and to the Red Sea. And it's not *just* magnitude—as in, walls of water—that Exodus puts on display. When we get to those signs and wonders, we'll be staggered by His control of the *precise* extent of this or that particular plague.¹⁸ Exodus reveals Him as Lord over *all*, over every aspect of creation.¹⁹

And because He rules over every aspect of the created order, He's able to do what Exodus describes—revealing Him not *only* as Sovereign, but as the Sovereign Deliverer. Throughout history, God's people have been a people that rehearse this *religiously*. In fact, the Old Testament references "out of Egypt" 114 times,²⁰ in Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Haggai, and I'm sure I missed one or two. That sentence *almost* sounded like I was just doing the OT books of the Bible in front of you. But I list them in that order to remind us that the story of the Exodus is one of the

¹⁴ Blackburn, 154.

¹⁵ Chris Spano pointed this out in his Exodus overview.

¹⁶ Blackburn, 192.

¹⁷ Blackburn, 194.

¹⁸ Blackburn, 42.

¹⁹ And it reveals Him as Sovereign over the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12; 18:11-12), Morales, 45.

²⁰ Alexander, 6.

central stories in all the Old Testament; some would say *the* central one. It's the *only* story the Torah instructs the people of Israel to retell. It's absolutely central to their identity as God's people.²¹

And it becomes a paradigm for what He would do in the future. Maybe you recall this from Luke 9, when Elijah and *Moses* are on the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke says those men appeared in glory, and **were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem** (Luke 9:31). Why bring this up? Not merely because Moses is there. But because the word for “departure” in Luke 9 is the word *exodus*. Moses, Elijah and Jesus were talking about what Christ was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. And they called it the exodus.

So, why study this book? To know God as Sovereign, as the Deliverer of His people, and to know Him in Christ. In Exodus we read about the Law. It points us to its Author, *and* to the One that fulfilled it on our behalf. In Exodus we read about priests that represent a people, pointing us to a Priest that intercedes forever. In Exodus we read about a tabernacle, about a covenant, about blood on a doorpost, shadows intended to show us substance. So that when we read about the Passover in Exodus 12, we might know the One who is our Passover, the One whose blood was shed that we might live (1 Cor. 5:7).

We read Exodus to know *Him*—as Sovereign, as Deliverer, to know Him in Christ, and to know He is *with* us. Exodus will make clear, repeatedly, that the Lord's holiness is unapproachable, at a bush, at Sinai, in the cleft of a rock. Adam and Eve had been cast out—to the east. God's people remained under that judgment. And, yet, Exodus will *also* tell us about the presence of the Lord *among* His people. How is that possible? Exodus will show us, while previewing better news to come. In part this book is about how the God who is unapproachable in holiness makes a way to dwell with His people.

And the Author of the book of Exodus wants us to know He's with us *so that* He might use us. The revelation of God in the Exodus was not for Israel's sake only.²² God separates a people *from* the world for the good *of* the world. As we noted in Genesis 12, God has long had in mind the nations—nations He aimed to bless.

Conclusion

So, when we open Exodus, we're not just reading Israel's history. What happens in the book of Exodus is one of the reasons why *we* know Him at *all*.

I read earlier that “Exodus is about knowing God, knowing God for who He has made Himself known to be, rather than for who we might think He is, imagine Him to be or wish Him to be.”²³ One of the glories of this book is that He's not *merely* what we might imagine Him to be, or even *wish*. He's far better than that.

²¹ Alexander, 6.

²² Morales, 43.

²³ Blackburn, 23.