

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Intro. to Exodus 1-4

Session 11, 6-min. Video Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, today we are diving deep into one of the most important stories in the entire Old Testament. It's a story about slavery, a miraculous rescue, and a display of divine power that has literally shaped history—the Exodus. But, you know, just how important is it? Let me start with a question for you.

If you had to pick just one event—the single most defining moment in the Old Testament—what would you choose? Maybe creation? The Great Flood? David and Goliath, maybe? Well, I think the answer for many is actually the Exodus. So let's put it this way. In the New Testament, the absolute center of the story—the main event—is the cross and resurrection of Jesus, right? It's the ultimate act of redemption.

Well, the Old Testament has its own parallel event of that same massive scale, and that event is the Exodus. It's the moment God saved his people from slavery in Egypt, and it becomes the great redemptive act that pretty defines everything that comes after it. Now, to really understand the rescue, we have to first understand the danger they were in.

The story kicks off centuries after Joseph, with the people of Israel living in Egypt, and a foundational promise God had made to them is now under serious threat. This slide really just lays out this central conflict perfectly. On one side, you have God's original promise—be fruitful and multiply—and his people were doing exactly that.

But on the other side, there's a new Pharaoh on the throne, and he sees this growing population not as a blessing, but as a direct political threat. His fear—that the Israelites have become too numerous—sets him on a collision course with God's own plan. And Pharaoh's fear leads to this absolutely terrifying escalation.

First, he tries to crush their spirit with brutal forced labor. The idea was to work them so hard they'd just stop having kids. But it backfires.

The more they're oppressed, the more they multiply. So he switches to his secret plan. He orders the Hebrew midwives to kill all the baby boys at birth.

When they refuse, he drops all pretense and makes his genocidal plan public—a decree that every single newborn Hebrew boy must be thrown into the Nile River. So in the face of this overwhelming evil, the story pivots. Hope doesn't come from a mighty army or a political leader.

It shows up in the most unexpected places, revealing this incredible sense of irony and divine providence, woven into the fabric of the story. And this right here is one of the most powerful, subtle points in the whole narrative. The text goes out of its way to give us the names of two heroic enslaved women, Shiphrah and Puah, who defied the king.

But the king himself? The most powerful man on the planet? He's left completely anonymous. He's just Pharaoh. The story is already flipping our expectations of who has real power and who is truly significant.

This brings us to the horrifying climax of Pharaoh's plan. He decides to weaponize the Nile River—the very source of life, fertility, and prosperity for all of Egypt—and turn it into an instrument of death. But in one of the greatest reversals you'll ever read, God takes the very thing Pharaoh meant for evil and turns it into a vehicle for salvation.

That same river becomes a vessel of life, carrying a baby in a basket to the one place in all of Egypt he would be safe, right into the hands of Pharaoh's own family. And the name Pharaoh's daughter gives him, Moshe, which we know as Moses, literally means drawn out. His entire identity, right from the start, is tied to this miraculous rescue from the waters of death.

It's a little hint of the much greater rescue he would one day lead. Okay, so let's fast forward a few decades. Moses has fled Egypt.

He's now a shepherd out in the middle of the wilderness. And it's here, in the middle of nowhere, that the story takes its next huge turn. He gets one of the most famous divine calls in history.

But as we're about to see, he is anything but a willing hero. But before we even get to Moses's reaction, you have to hear God's reason for all this. This whole epic story isn't just some random display of power.

It's a direct response to suffering. God says, I have seen the misery. I have heard them crying out.

So I have come down to rescue them. The entire Exodus is set in motion by the prayers of an oppressed people. So does Moses hear this and say, I'm in, let's do it? No way.

He pushes back, not once, but five separate times. First, it's an identity crisis. Who am I to do something like this? Then a theological problem.

Who were you? What's your name? Then comes the practical doubt. What if they don't believe me? That's followed by a personal insecurity. I'm not a good speaker.

And finally, it's just a flat-out refusal. Please, just send someone else. It's so relatable and so profoundly human.

But that second question Moses asks: what is your name? It prompts one of the single most important theological moments in the entire Bible. This isn't just about what to call God. It's about who God fundamentally is.

God's answer is just incredible. I am who I am. In Hebrew, this phrase is the source of the personal name of God, Yahweh, a name so holy that for centuries, its pronunciation was carefully guarded.

He tells Moses, "Go to the people and tell them, I am has sent me to you. So what does that name even mean? Well, there are a few amazing layers to it. It can point to God being self-existent, meaning he just is.

He doesn't depend on anything or anyone for his existence. It can also imply his sovereignty. I will be what I will be, meaning his character will be shown through his actions.

But in the context of this story, many believe the main point is that God is the ultimate covenant keeper. He's basically saying, I am the one who keeps my promises. I remember my covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and now I'm here to fulfill it.

This event was so massive, so foundational, that it didn't just end when the Israelites were safe. It became a powerful pattern, a blueprint for salvation that echoes all the way through the rest of the biblical story. I mean, just look at this thematic timeline.

The Exodus is the original foundational event. Later on, the prophets are constantly looking back to it as the ultimate example of God's power to save. Then you get to the Gospels, and you see Jesus's own life is deliberately structured to mirror and fulfill the Exodus.

And all the way at the very end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, the imagery of judgment comes directly from the plagues of Egypt. The gospel of Matthew makes this connection so clear, it's impossible to miss. Just as Israel, God's son, was called out of Egypt, Jesus is also brought out of Egypt as a child.

Just as Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea, Jesus passes through the waters of baptism. And just as Israel was tested for 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus is tested for 40 days. Matthew is showing us that Jesus is the new Israel, the one who succeeds where the original nation had failed.

So we end on this thought. The story of the Exodus is this incredible account of liberation from physical chains. But as its echo rings through the rest of Scripture, it's clearly pointing towards something much deeper, which leads to the question: if this story is the pattern for salvation, what is the ultimate slavery that all of humanity needs a way out from? And what is the ultimate freedom that it promises?