

Old Testament Literature

Exodus: Passover, Plagues, and the Tabernacle

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt explores key textual, historical, and theological themes in the book of Exodus. It addresses the JEDP source-critical theory and offers a covenantal resolution to the revelation of the divine name Yahweh, alongside analysis of the enigmatic bloody-bridegroom passage and debates surrounding the date and population numbers of the Exodus. The presentation further examines the theological purpose of the ten Egyptian plagues, the institution of the Passover as a precursor to the Lord's Supper, and the symbolic architecture of the Tabernacle where God dwells among His people.

Outline

I. Introduction and Exam Review

- A. Class logistical announcements and upcoming exam structure
- B. Exam format: multiple choice, memory verses, and integrative three-point essay structure
- C. Opening prayer regarding God's redemption, Wilderness guidance, and Christ as the Passover Lamb

II. Divine Names: Yahweh and El Shaddai (Exodus 6:3)

- A. Textual tension between Exodus 6:3 (Yahweh not known to Patriarchs) and Genesis (Patriarchs using Yahweh)
- B. Source Critical Theory (JEDP)
 - 1. J (Jahwist, ca. 850 BC): Favors Yahweh name
 - 2. E (Elohist, ca. 750 BC): Favors Elohim name
 - 3. D (Deuteronomist, ca. 620 BC): Associated with Josiah's reforms
 - 4. P (Priestly, ca. 500 BC): Ritual and sacrificial focus, compiled ca. 450 BC
 - 5. Critique: Julius Wellhausen's 19th-century evolutionary framework lacks manuscript evidence
- C. Proposed Solution to Exodus 6:3
 - 1. Name Yahweh known earlier (e.g., Ebla texts 400 years prior)
 - 2. Patriarchs knew God as El Shaddai (the Promise Maker)

3. Moses and Israel know God as Yahweh (the Covenant Keeper who fulfills promises)

III. The Enigmatic "Bloody-Bridegroom" Passage (Exodus 4:24–26)

- A. Narrative details and ambiguity surrounding the divine attack on the way to Egypt
- B. Biblical parallels of divine opposition after a call (Balaam, Jacob at Peniel)
- C. Three scholarly interpretations:
 1. Brevard Childs: Etiological tale explaining the origin of Jewish circumcision
 2. Walter Kaiser: Divine call for Moses' obedience prior to leading Israel and preparing his son for Passover
 3. Allen Ross: Cultural clash between adolescent circumcision (Midianite practice) and neonate circumcision, explaining Zipporah's anger and departure

IV. Historical Debate on the Date of the Exodus

- A. Early Date View (ca. 1445 BC)
 1. 1 Kings 6:1 (480 years before Solomon's 4th year)
 2. Judges 11:26 (Jephthah's claim of 300-year occupation)
 3. Merneptah Stele (ca. 1200 BC) attesting Israel's presence in Canaan
 4. Amarna Letters (ca. 1400 BC) describing Habiru disruptions in Canaan
- B. Late Date View (ca. 1260 BC)
 1. Exodus 1:11 reference to building store cities Pithom and Rameses (Rameses II)
 2. Archaeological burn levels at Lachish and other Palestinian cities (ca. 1200 BC)
 3. Reinterpretation of 480 years as 12 symbolic generations of 20 years (240 actual years)

V. The Logistical Problem of Exodus Numbers

- A. Biblical figures: 600,000 men aged 20+ yielding an estimated total population of ~2.4 million
- B. Logistical challenges in the desert:
 1. Water requirements (gallons needed daily; dehydration risks as illustrated by Sinai experience)
 2. Food logistics (massive quantities of manna needed daily)
 3. Spatial distribution in narrow granite wadis
 4. Midwife capacity (Shiphrah and Puah) and military proportions relative to Canaanite populations
- C. Proposed solutions and limitations:
 1. Translation of *eleph* as "clans" or "military units" (~72,000 total)
 2. Differing ancient numerical base systems or cultural hyperbole
 3. Recognition of an unresolved cross-cultural numerical misunderstanding

VI. The Ten Plagues of Egypt

- A. Three primary theological purposes:
 1. Divine judgment on the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12)

- 2. Divine self-revelation ("that they may know that I am Yahweh")
- 3. Lex talionis (law of retaliation for Pharaoh's oppression of God's firstborn)
- B. Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart: Dual agency of divine judgment and human free-willed rebellion
- C. Four key representative plagues highlighted:
 - 1. Snake (overpowering Pharaoh's cobra symbol)
 - 2. Blood (judgment on the Nile)
 - 3. Darkness (judgment on Ra/Re, the sun god)
 - 4. Firstborn (judgment on Pharaoh's household)
- D. Pattern of the plague cycles: Instruction, duplication/failure by magicians, Pharaoh's plea, relief, re-hardening
- E. The role of Egyptian magicians as a literary foil ("finger of God") and divine protection in Goshen

VII. The Institution of Passover and its New Testament Connection

- A. Three central elements of the Passover meal:
 - 1. The sacrificial lamb (blood on doorposts/lintel; roasted and eaten)
 - 2. Bitter herbs (horseradish as a tangible reminder of slavery)
 - 3. Unleavened bread (Feast of Unleavened Bread lasting 7 days, signifying hasty departure)
- B. Family structure: Active participation and questioning by children
- C. Typological fulfillment: Jesus as the Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7), unbroken bones, deliverance from sin

VIII. Crossing the Sea of Reeds (Yam Suph) and God as Warrior

- A. Linguistic designation: Yam Suph ("Sea of Reeds" vs. traditional "Red Sea")
- B. Proposed crossing locations: Bitter Lakes/Lake Timsah, Northern Gulf of Suez, or Gulf of Aqaba
- C. Location of Mount Sinai: Over twenty proposed sites (including St. Catherine's Monastery)
- D. Theological theme: God as a Warrior (Exodus 15:3) fighting for His people, integrated with just war theology

IX. The Sabbath Principle

- A. The Sabbath as a foundational base for life
- B. Core principles: Remembrance, natural daily/weekly rhythms, renunciation of work as master, refreshment, and divine role modeling
- C. New Testament perspective: Freedom in observance (Romans 14)

X. The Architecture and Theology of the Tabernacle

- A. Core purpose: God dwelling (Immanuel) among His tent-dwelling people in the wilderness
- B. Dimensions and layout: 150 ft x 75 ft courtyard; 45 ft x 15 ft inner sanctuary entered from the east
- C. Courtyard and Holy Place furnishings:
 - 1. Altar of Burnt Offering and Laver (washing basin)

2. Menorah (seven-branched lampstand)
3. Table of Showbread (12 loaves representing the 12 tribes)
4. Altar of Incense (symbolic fragrant divine presence)

D. The Holy of Holies and the Ark of the Covenant:

1. Cherubim mercy seat receiving blood on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)
2. Contents of the Ark: Ten Commandments, Aaron's budding rod, and a pot of Manna ("what is it?")