

The Exodus and Law Codes in the Torah

I. Introduction: The Book of Exodus as Introduction to the Mosaic Covenant

The title “Exodus”, based on the Septuagint title for this book, means “the way out”—that is, out of slavery in Egypt. In Hebrew the book is called “These are the names.” This title is derived from the first few words of the book, “These are the names of sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household.” Neither title fully describes the contents of the book. Exodus does tell the story of the departure from Egypt, but it continues in chapter 19 with the covenant God established with the Hebrew people at Mount Sinai/Horeb. This sequence forms a smooth transition from the narrative of the ancestors in Genesis to the detailed account of Israel’s covenant traditions in Leviticus through Deuteronomy. In this sense we can say that the book of Exodus serves as the introduction to the Mosaic Covenant.

A. Exodus and the Torah’s Treatment of the Promise

The central theme of Exodus—Deuteronomy remains God’s **fulfillment of the promises** to the ancestors. Woven together with this theme is that of the **covenant** which God establishes with the people of Israel.

The **three main parts of the promise**—progeny, protection (blessing), and land—come into focus at different points in the narrative.

1. **Progeny** was the focus of the later part of Genesis, and God’s promise of numerous descendants is nearing completion at the beginning of Exodus.
2. As the people are delivered from slavery in Egypt and wander in the wilderness, the promise of **land** becomes central.

3. In the covenant given at Sinai and in the speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy, God's **blessing** and **protection** of the nation becomes the focus of the story.

B. Organization of the Book of Exodus

Exodus itself focuses on the blessing and the promise of land. The narrative may be easily divided into two sections: Chapters 1—18 relate the story of the escape from Egypt and the journey to Sinai. Chapters 19—40 relate the giving of the covenant at Mount Sinai/Horeb. We may outline the book as follows:

The Exodus (1—18)

Reversal of Fortune for Israel's Descendants (Chapter 1)

The Early Moses (2—4)

Plagues (5—11)

Passover (12:1—13:16)

Exodus from Egypt (13:17—15:21)

Wilderness Journey (15:22—18:27)

At Sinai/Horeb (19—40)

Theophany at Sinai (19)

Law and Covenant (20—23/24)

Ethical Decalogue (20:1—17)

Book of the Covenant (20:18—23:33)

(Covenant Code)

Covenant Confirmation (24:1—15)

Tabernacle I (25—31)

Breaking and Remaking of the Covenant (32—34)

Tabernacle II (35—40)

II. Exodus 1 — 18: The Exodus from Egypt

A. What does the text say?

Exodus 1 — 18 recounts the story of Israel from the enslavement of the people in Egypt to their miraculous crossing of the Sea. The story includes the following elements:

1. The descendants of Jacob are enslaved in Egypt (Exodus 1).
2. Moses is born, begins his early career, and receives his commission from God (Exodus 2).
3. God sends Moses and Aaron to demand that Pharaoh let the people go (Exodus 3:1 — 7:7).
4. God sends ten plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7:8 — 12:32).
5. The Hebrew people leave Egypt (12:33 — 39).
6. Passover and Consecration of the Firstborn are established as memorials of the Exodus event (12:40 — 13:16).
7. The people are delivered at the Sea (Exodus 14).
8. Moses leads a celebration of deliverance, now called the “Song of Moses” (Exodus 15:1 — 18).
9. Miriam sings a song in celebration of the deliverance, now called the “Song of Miriam” (Exodus 15:20 — 21). *Miriam’s song may be the oldest text in the Bible.*
10. The Hebrew people receive bread from Heaven (Exodus 16).
11. God provides water from a rock (Exodus 17:1 — 7). (Compare Numbers 20:2 — 13.)
12. Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, convinces him to delegate some responsibilities and a rudimentary government is established (Exodus 18).

B. Historical Questions Raised by the Text

1. What was the route of the Exodus?

A good case can be made for any of at least **three different routes** for the Exodus and for either of two main proposals for the location of Mount Sinai. The biblical accounts can be reconciled with any of them.

Two problems stand in the way of a definitive identification of the route. First, there is no agreement on which of several peaks in the Sinai wilderness might be **the mountain** called Sinai in the J material and Horeb in the E and D material. If we could identify the location of Mount Sinai, the route of the Exodus would be easier. Equally problematic is the identification of **the body of water** at which the Hebrew people are delivered from the armies of Egypt. The Hebrew text refers to this body of water as *yam suf*, which the Septuagint (LXX) translated as τὴν ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν (“Red Sea,” 13:18). This translation was adopted in the Latin Vulgate as well, and most English translations have continued to use “Red Sea,” even though this is clearly not the meaning of the Hebrew text. In Hebrew the phrase *yam suf* can mean either “Sea of Reeds” or perhaps “Sea of the End” (“Distant Sea”). The term *suf* means “reed” (See Exodus 2:3–5). Despite considerable effort on the part of archaeologists and historians, however, this sea remains unidentified.

The map on page 139 of Harris’ book shows his reconstruction of the route of the Exodus. There is significant scholarly debate on this topic, though. Other routes are possible. The traditional route of the Exodus goes south through the southern Arabian Peninsula (like Harris’ route) while a more recently proposed route goes farther north across the central part of the peninsula.

Map 2 at the back of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* shows both the traditional route and the most popular alternate route very clearly. The map on page 103 of the *Harper Collins Study Bible* shows the geographical region of the Exodus story, but does not indicate the route of the exodus. It does show the location of the three most likely sites of Mount Sinai (Jebel Musa [the traditional site], Jebel Helal, and Jebel Harun.

2. When did the Exodus take place?

The date of the Exodus is also seriously debated. Some scholars support the traditional **15th century BCE** date. Others, however, propose a date as much as two centuries later. It is difficult to give a precise date because of the lack of certain dates in other parts of Israel's early history. It is not until the rise of the Monarchy that fixed dates may be correlated confidently with our modern calendar.

Note that Harris gives the Exodus a date of 1250 BCE in the chronology on page 45, a date that would place it during the reign of Ramses II as a number of scholars have proposed.

Archaeological data, including (1) destruction layers in several cities referred to in the Joshua narratives, (2) evidence of the emergence of new villages in Canaan, and (3) changes in pottery styles in Canaan, seem to indicate an early **13th century** date. The earlier dates (14th, 15th centuries) can be argued plausibly, but many recent scholars see the evidence as stronger for the later date.

For the purposes of our class, you should know that the Exodus probably took place somewhere between the 15th and 13th centuries BCE.

C. The Exodus as Defining Story

The events of the exodus became the defining story for Israel and were appropriated even by those who joined Israel later and had no ancestors who walked the journey out of Egypt. The story speaks of God's deliverance of the people and would help Israel to understand its plight in future years.

III. Exodus 19—50, and Law Codes in the Torah

In the second half of Exodus narrative gives way to collections of traditional legal materials. These collections continue through most of the rest of the Torah. The narrative setting for this material is the establishment of the covenant at Sinai.

A. What is a Covenant?

A covenant is a treaty or agreement which obligates the person or persons involved to certain actions, or to refrain from certain actions. It is like a contract, yet different in some respects in that a covenant is normally based on a personal relationship between the parties involved.

The covenant at Sinai differs somewhat from God's earlier promises (which are also called 'covenants') to Noah (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11—17), Abraham (Gen. 15:18; 17:2, 4, 7—11, 13, 19, 21), and their descendants (Ex. 6:3—5). While these earlier promises were *unconditional*, the blessing which the Sinai covenant promises is presented as dependant on allegiance to the LORD and faithfulness to the covenant.

The account of the covenant given through Moses at Mount Sinai/Horeb begins in **Exodus 20** and continues till **Numbers 10**, and much of the same material is presented again in **Deuteronomy**. **Much of this material may date from a later period** and may be included at this point because it was understood as growing out of the experience at Mount Sinai.

Torah is much broader than the historical experience of the Hebrew people under the leadership of Moses. It comes to be seen as the instruction delivered by God to form the basis for ordering human existence. While this instruction is *rooted in* the story of Moses at Sinai, it is clearly *not limited to* that experience.

B. Types of Laws found in the Torah

There are **two basic types of laws** in the Sinai narratives. (1) *Apodictic* Law is law which states an unconditional command or prohibition, such as "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). (2) *Casuistic* Law states a conditional command or prohibition, such as *If* you lend money to my people. . .

you shall not exact interest from them” (Exodus 22:25) or “When you come upon your enemy’s ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back” (Exodus 23:4). *In the event that X happens, you must do Y.*

A *talion* is a law (usually casuistic) which demands *restitution in kind*. “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:24) is the most widely recognized example. Such laws were often stated to *limit* revenge (restitution).¹

Laws are often elaborated in ways that make them more specific or state the motive for the law. For example:

You shall not make for yourself an idol,
whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on
the earth beneath.
You shall not bow down to them or worship them;
for I the LORD your God am a jealous God. . . (Exodus 20:4).

C. Law Codes in the Torah

There are several identifiable law codes, or collections of laws, in the Torah. Some of these may predate the writing of the Torah considerably, or they could be further developments (redactions) of earlier law codes.

1. **The Decalogue:** Ex. 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21

The *Decalogue* (*Ten Commandments*) is the most basic. It is the first such code (Ex. 20:1-17) and is repeated in Deuteronomy 5:1-21. To distinguish it from a different set of laws presented later, this set is sometimes called the *Ethical Decalogue*.

These ten *apodictic* laws are divided into **two groups**. The **first four** deal with the people’s **relationship with God**. The **last six** address the **relationship of the people to one another**.

¹ To help you remember the meaning of *talion*, think of the English word “retaliation.”

| Text: | Exodus 20:1 — 17 | Deuteronomy 5:1 — 2 |
|---------|---|---|
| Setting | 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying, | 5:1 ¶ And Moses summoned all Israel, and said to them, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I speak in your hearing this day, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. 5:2 The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. 5:3 Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day. 5:4 The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, 5:5 while I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain. He said: |
| 1 | 20:2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me. | 5:6 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 5:7 ““You shall have no other gods before me. |
| 2 | 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 20:5 you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 20:6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. | 5:8 ““You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5:9 you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 5:10 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. |
| 3 | 20:7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. | 5:11 ““You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. |

| | | |
|----|--|---|
| 4 | <p>20:8 “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.</p> <p>20:9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work;</p> <p>20:10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates;</p> <p>20:11 for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.</p> | <p>5:12 ¶ ““Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.</p> <p>5:13 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work;</p> <p>5:14 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your manservant, or your maidservant, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.</p> <p>5:15 You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.</p> |
| 5 | <p>20:12 ¶ “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.</p> | <p>5:16 ¶ ““Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you; that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you, in the land which the LORD your God gives you.</p> |
| 6 | 20:13 ¶ “You shall not kill. | 5:17 ¶ ““You shall not kill. |
| 7 | 20:14 ¶ “You shall not commit adultery. | 5:18 ¶ ““Neither shall you commit adultery. |
| 8 | 20:15 ¶ “You shall not steal. | 5:19 ¶ ““Neither shall you steal. |
| 9 | 20:16 ¶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. | 5:20 ¶ ““Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor. |
| 10 | 20:17 ¶ “You shall not covet your neighbor's house ; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife , or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbors.” | 5:21 ¶ ““Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife ; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field , or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbors.’ |

2. The Covenant Code (Book of the Covenant): Ex. 20:23—23:33

The Decalogue is followed by a collection of mostly *casuistic* laws called the *Covenant Code* or the *Book of the Covenant* (See 24:7). Many of these laws elaborate on the Decalogue or provide for its interpretation in specific contexts.

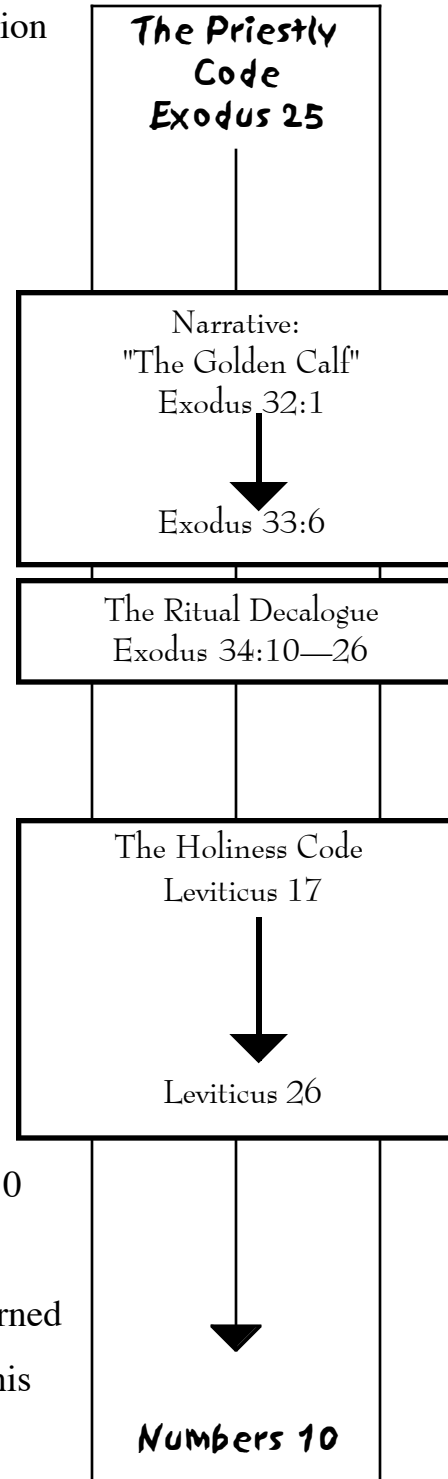
21:1—11, which establishes the **rights of slaves**, and 23:10—19, which establishes a **ritual calendar** including the Sabbath, a sabbath year, and three annual festivals (Unleavened Bread, First Fruits [Feast of weeks, Pentecost], and Ingathering [Feast of Booths]), along with several other sections of the Covenant code, appear to many scholars to assume a settled, agrarian style of life which the Israelites would not have had until they entered Canaan. Exodus 24:4 claims Moses wrote down “all the words of the Lord,” which in the present narrative context would indicate these very sections.

3. Sealing of the Covenant and Reading of the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 24:1—18)

The first 18 verses of chapter 24 interrupt the flow of legal material, providing a narrative that anchors the Covenant Code in the story of the Sinai experience.

4. Priestly Code: Exodus 25—Numbers 10

Often called the *Priestly Code*, Exodus 25—Numbers 10 forms a long collection of laws concerned mainly with matters of **worship** and **the priesthood**. This section is interrupted by a narrative section in Exodus 32:1—33:6 (the Golden Calf story), the *Ritual Code* in Exodus 34:10—26, and



possibly a separate *Holiness Code* in Leviticus 17—26.

5. **The Ritual Decalogue:** Exodus 34:10—26

After the covenant has been violated in the incident with the golden calf (32:1—33:6), and God has shown his “back” to Moses (33:7—23), he tells Moses to “cut two tablets of stone like the former ones” (34:1). God renews the covenant. But this time the laws are a different set from the ones presented in the Ethical Decalogue. These are focused on *ritual*, and look forward to the taking of the land of Canaan. Many scholars see this Ritual Decalogue as having existed before the Torah was compiled into its present form.

6. **The Holiness Code:** Leviticus 17—26

The first 16 chapters of Leviticus (part of the Priestly Code mentioned above) concentrate on the sacrificial system. Much of the rest of the book (chapters 17—26) is concerned with ‘holiness.’ The people are to be “holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). These later chapters are often called the *Holiness Code*. They give evidence of having existed as a separate legal code long before the Torah was compiled into its final form. This collection begins with sacrificial law in chapter 17 (a natural transition from chapters 1—16), continues with moral and ethical instruction (18—22), holy days and other holy occasions (23, 25), and ends with a section of blessings and curses in chapter 26. A brief narrative section in chapter 24 interrupts this flow of legal material focused on holiness.

Most modern religious communities ignore a great deal of this material, treating it as a reflection of the ancient religious context of Israel, but not relevant to the modern world. Some parts of the Holiness Code, though, have had much more lasting influence. The general distinction between *clean* and *unclean*, which receives heavy emphasis here, would remain central to some forms of Judaism but

would be either rejected or severely modified by the early Christian movement.

7. **The Deuteronomic Code:** Deuteronomy 12—26

The book of Deuteronomy contains a great deal of material that may also have existed as a separate legal code before the compilation of the Torah. In its present form this material appears as a series of speeches by Moses.

D. **Law codes in the ancient near East**

The law codes of Israel were not developed in isolation. The people of Israel had surely heard of the law codes of their neighbors. In fact, several law codes much older than those of Israel have been discovered. The most famous is the code of the Babylonian emperor **Hammurabi** (1728-1686 BCE). Even older are the codes of **Ur-Nammu** from Sumer (c. 2050 BCE), King Bilalama of Eshnunna (c. 1920 BCE), and Lipit-Ishtar of Isin (c. 1875? BCE).

These older law codes have much in common with the law codes of Israel, but lack the clear focus on one God found in Israel's legal material. They also show less concern for many of the social justice issues that figure prominently in Israel's law.

IV. Deuteronomy: Moses' Farewell and the View toward the Promised Land

B. **Contents of the Book:** What's in the text?

1. **Moses' Farewell** (Deuteronomy 1—31)

Chapters 1—30 of Deuteronomy are structured as a set of farewell speeches of Moses. The people are ready to cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan. Moses reviews their history and gives guidance for their continued success. This section of the book is divided into three subsections by three separate introductions (1:1-5; 5:1; and 29:1).

In **chapter 31**, when the farewell speeches end, Moses passes on the mantle to Joshua (**31:7—8**). He then writes down “**this law**” and gives it to the priests. The reference of “this law” is not clear. Does this mean only the last speech (chapters 29—30), or is it intended to mean the whole collection of speeches? At the very most it could refer to the contents of all the speeches. It does not constitute a claim that Moses wrote the entire book, since the story continues after this point.

2. **Two Poems** (Deuteronomy 32—33)

Chapters 32 and 33 present two poems, one a song that Moses and Joshua sing to the people encouraging faithfulness to the covenant (See 32:44—47), and one an elaborate blessing that Moses pronounces on the nation that he is about to leave (See 33:1).

3. **Conclusion: The Death of Moses** (Deuteronomy 34)

The final chapter narrates the death of Moses on Mount Nebo (in Moab). There we are told, Moses climbed to the top of Pisgah from whose height he viewed the whole Promised Land across the Jordan River. The book ends with the final editor’s praise for Moses, including the comment:

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Yahweh knew face to face (34:10).

C. Literary Structure and Style of Deuteronomy

There are several different ways to view the literary structure of the book of Deuteronomy. The farewell speeches, for example, may be structured so as to parallel, at least in rough terms, several sections of the book of Exodus.

| Exodus | | Deuteronomy | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Exodus 1—18 | Trip from Egypt to Sinai | Deuteronomy 1:1—4:43 | Trip from Sinai to Moab |
| Exodus 19:1—20:21 | Giving of the Covenant, the Decalogue | Deuteronomy 4:44—5:22 | Giving of the Covenant, the Decalogue |
| Exodus 20:22—23:33 | The Covenant Code | Deuteronomy 12—26 | The Deuteronomic Code |

| | | | |
|-----------|--|-------------------|---|
| Exodus 24 | Ceremony with Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy Elders on the Mountain | Deuteronomy 27—28 | Ceremony in which Moses and the Elders charge the people to keep the commandment that Moses is giving |
|-----------|--|-------------------|---|

Another way to look at the structure, though, is to see Deuteronomy as paralleling the structure of a *suzerainty treaty* (a treaty between a *suzerain*, or principal nation, and one of its vassal states). Notice the parallels in the table below.

| Components of a Typical Suzerainty Treaty | Deuteronomy |
|--|---|
| Preamble (naming the suzerain and the vassal) Historical prologue recounting the suzerain's role as protector and the vassal's indebtedness | Deuteronomy 1—4 present an historical prologue. |
| General Principles of the Treaty | Deuteronomy 5—11 lays out general principles governing the Hebrew people's expected behavior much like the general principles of a suzerainty treaty. |
| Specific obligations imposed by the suzerain on the vassal | Deuteronomy 12—26 (the Deuteronomic Code) gives specific obligations imposed on Israel by Yahweh |
| Instructions governing publication of the treaty (Where will it be kept? When will it be read publicly?) | Deuteronomy 27—30 gives a list of curse s against those who disobey the covenant and blissings on those who are faithful to it. While this list of curses and blessings is very important in Deuteronomy, the information on publication (chapters 31—34) has the final place, upsetting the order of the typical suzerainty treaty. |
| Lists of witnesses (a list of gods) | In conformity with the rising monotheism in Israel, this section has no parallel in Deuteronomy. |
| Curses and Blessings | Deuteronomy 31—34 give comments about the publication of the "law" (it is written down, given to the priests, and must be read). This section is located at the end of Deuteronomy, elevating its importance. |

However we might view the pattern of the speeches or the book as a whole, it is clear that Deuteronomy is written with a ceremonial style more like a sermon or political speech than like the other books of the Torah. This difference has suggested to many scholars that the book was written during the eighth to seventh centuries BCE reflecting the polished rhetorical style of Judah's professional scribes.

D. Movement toward a More Egalitarian Society

While all of the books of the Torah reflect an outlook that seems more egalitarian and humanitarian than what is represented in much of the literature from the ancient world, Deuteronomy stands out more than the others in this regard. For example, Exodus 21:2—11 demands the release of **male** slaves after seven years of service, but Deuteronomy 15:12—18 extends this blessing to include **female** slaves also. Deuteronomy 17:14—20 places limits on the activities of Israel's kings, offering the people some protection from abuse.

Still, Deuteronomy reflects the values of its time and does not present an entirely egalitarian society. Slavery is still condoned. Women are still treated as property. Nonetheless, Deuteronomy represents a movement away from such gross inequality.

E. The “Book of the Law” found in the Temple and Josiah’s Reform

2 Kings 22 tells of a time during the reign of **Josiah (621 BCE)**, only a few generations before the deportation into Babylon, when a “Book of the Law” was found by the priest **Hilkiah** during some repairs of the Jerusalem temple. This book, which had been lost apparently for many years, was read to King Josiah, who tore his clothes (a sign of mourning and distress) and instituted a series of dramatic reforms based on the teaching of the book.²

² The “book of the law of Moses” is also mentioned in **2 Kings 14:6** when discussing the reign of Amaziah of Judah, but it is mentioned there in a comment by the narrator, not necessarily implying that it was known to the characters in the story. This citation even includes a quote from the “book of the law of Moses.”

Josiah (1) had all the local religious shrines closed and **(2)** restricted all sacrificial worship to the temple in Jerusalem. **(3)** The temple was cleansed of all signs of pagan religious influence.

The nature of Josiah's reforms suggests that the book which was found in the temple may have been some form of the book of Deuteronomy, a book very concerned with centralized worship, cleansing the nation of pagan religious influences, and incorporating the provincial priests into one centralized worship system.

The exact nature of the relationship between this "Book of the Law" and Deuteronomy, or whether there even is a relationship, is a matter of continued debate among Hebrew Bible scholars.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Josiah's reform (at least in general terms) must have occurred. Excavations at **Arad** (± 30 miles south of Jerusalem) have revealed that during the reign of Josiah a wall was built through the nave of the shrine there, rendering the location unsuitable for worship. The alter had earlier been closed by Hezekiah, supporting the biblical claims that his son Manasseh overturned his reforms, leading to Josiah's more radical move.

V. Summary and Conclusions

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy all relate directly to God's deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, their wandering for forty years in the wilderness, and the covenant established between them and God. The story is heavily influenced by the giving of the Law to guide the people in their observance of that covenant.

Exodus 1—18 narrates the story from slavery in Egypt through the crossing of the sea to the development of a rudimentary government among those delivered. **The rest of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers** lays out in detail the implications of the covenant in the setting of the people's experience at Sinai. **Deuteronomy** restates that covenant in the form of Moses' farewell speeches.

The story related in these books has some connections with what we can determine on the basis of archaeology and other documents from the ancient world.

The exodus itself probably took place some time **between the 15th and 13th centuries BCE**, with destruction layers in several Cananite towns suggesting the later date. The laws given in Torah parallel the form and subject matter of the laws of other peoples from the same period, but bear the mark of a distinctly **monotheistic outlook**, include **apodictic** (absolute) **laws**, and reflect a movement toward an **egalitarian focus**, all of which are rare for the time at which this material was compiled.

Archaeological evidence also provides general support for the biblical claims about **Josiah's reform**, during which many of the concerns of the book of Deuteronomy resurfaced.

The exodus and the covenant that followed **became foundational themes** in the later biblical narratives. They **also** became **defining stories** for the people of Israel and later for the Christian communities that grew out of early Judaism. In fact, differences over the appropriate use of Torah would be at the heart of the separation between later Judaism and Christianity.