

A (VERY) BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE TORAH

Torah (תורה) is Hebrew for “law.” This word is often used to refer to the first five books of the Bible, which are also called the Pentateuch. They tell the story of the creation and fall, God’s call of Abraham, Israel’s captivity in Egypt, God’s rescue of Israel, and Israel’s time in the wilderness before entering the promised land.

- 1) **Genesis:** God creates the world, humanity sins, and God calls Abraham’s family to be God’s means of blessing the world.
- 2) **Exodus:** God saves Israel from Egypt and makes a covenant with them, so that they might be a nation of priests in their pagan world.
- 3) **Leviticus:** God gives more laws at Sinai, answering the question: “How can a holy God dwell with a sinful and unclean people?”
- 4) **Numbers:** Israel departs Sinai for the promised land, fails to enter it because of faithless disobedience, and wanders in the wilderness for 40 years.
- 5) **Deuteronomy:** As Israel is about to enter the promised land, Moses recounts the law to Israel (deuteros = second; nomos = law).

DOWN TO EGYPT

Abraham and Sarah are parents of Isaac, the promised child (Genesis 21).
God’s promises and blessing to Abraham are reiterated to Isaac (Genesis 26:1–6).
Isaac marries Rebekah, and they are parents of Jacob (Genesis 25:19–34).
Jacob wrestles with God, and God blesses him and renames him Israel (Genesis 32:22–32).

Jacob’s son Joseph is sold as a slave into Egypt by his brothers, but he rises to prominence and saves the land from a famine (Genesis 37–47).
Joseph brings the rest of his family to Egypt with him (Genesis 45:1–11).

EXODUS

Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” (Genesis 15:13–14)

As God promised Abraham, Israel is afflicted as foreigners in Egypt. Jacob’s family becomes a large group of people in Egypt, and out of fear the Pharaoh enslaves them (Exodus 1:8–14) and kills any son born to them (1:15–22). But Moses is kept safe and raised by the Egyptians (2:1–10).

God calls Moses and promises to bring Israel out of their affliction through him (Exodus 3). After a series of plagues, God brings Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 14). The rest of the book

describes God making a covenant with Israel at Sinai, which Israel breaks (Exodus 32) but God restores (Exodus 33–34).

An Outline of Exodus¹

1. Exodus of Israel from Egypt (1:1–18:27)
 - a. Israel afflicted in Egypt (1:1–2:25)
 - b. Call of Moses (3:1–4:31)
 - c. Moses and Aaron’s initial request (5:1–7:7)
 - d. Plagues and exodus (7:8–15:21)
 - e. Journey to Sinai (15:22–18:27)
2. Covenant at Sinai (19:1–40:38)
 - a. Israel at Mt. Sinai (19:1–25)
 - b. Covenant words and rules (20:1–23:33)
 - c. Covenant confirmed (24:1–18)
 - d. Instructions for the Tabernacle (25:1–31:17)
 - e. Covenant breach, intercession, and renewal (32:1–34:35)
 - f. Constructing the Tabernacle (35:1–40:38)

What does the Exodus show us about the life of faith?

- Just as God saved Israel from slavery in Egypt, God saves us from a kind of slavery to sin and death.
 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:34–36).
 - “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, [the Son] himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14–15).
- Just as God saved Israel apart from anything they did beforehand, God saves us irrespective of what we’ve done.
 - “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).
- Just as God gave Israel his law at Mt. Sinai after saving them, God gives us direction on how to live and expects our obedience.
 - “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).
 - Jesus: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast our demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21–23).

¹ Outline adapted from the *ESV Study Bible*.

- Just as God forgave Israel and restored his covenant with them after they worshiped the golden calf, God forgives our sins and restores our relationship with him when we genuinely turn back to him.
 - “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8–10).

WILDERNESS

Having saved Israel from Egypt and established a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai, God now leads Israel to the land he promised to Abraham so long before. It’s only an 11 day journey from Mt. Sinai to the edge of the land God had promised to Abraham (Deuteronomy 1:2). But it takes Israel 40 years to get there because of their disobedience.

Israel’s time in the wilderness is characterized by faithless disobedience. They grumble about a lack of food and water (Exodus 16–17; Numbers 11; 20:2–13; 21:4–9) and about the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16). While Moses is with God on Mt. Sinai, the rest of Israel is worshipping a golden calf (Exodus 32), and later they worship the pagan god Baal (Numbers 25).

Most strikingly, Israel refuses to enter the land when God first brings them to it. This story is told in Numbers 13–14.

- God tells Moses to send men to investigate the land of Canaan, which God promised to give to Israel (13:1–24). They are told to “be of good courage” (13:20).
- The spies report that the land is exceedingly fruitful, but that its inhabitants are too strong for them to drive out (13:25–29).
- Despite the strength of the land’s inhabitants, Caleb is confident that God is able to do what he promised and give them the land (13:30).
- But the people of Israel aren’t convinced, crying out in distress, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword?” (14:2–3)
- God becomes angry at their disobedience. Though God forgives them because of Moses’ intercession (14:11–20), Israel is to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until the whole disobedient generation dies (14:21–35).

What does Israel’s time in the wilderness show us about the life of faith?

- “*Be of good courage.*” Are we making our decisions based on fear or based on faith in what God has promised us in Scripture? Israel’s disobedience emerges from fear. What are you afraid of in life? How might your fears be causing rebellion against God? What does God say about what you fear?
- “*We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.*” We need to interpret ourselves and our circumstances based on who God shows himself to be in Scripture – not the other way around.
 - In fear, Israel saw themselves as mere grasshoppers and projected that sense of self onto others (Numbers 13:33). But the inhabitants of the land were actually fearful of Israel because of who Israel’s God is (Joshua 2:11)!

- Only Joshua and Caleb understood the situation accurately, because they interpreted their situation based on God's promises (Numbers 14:8–9).
- Is your sense of self shaped by God's words? Or is it overly-inflated or -deflated because of pride?
- *"What you have said in my hearing I will do to you."* Ultimately, God gives us what we really want: either God, or not-God.
 - Upon hearing the spies' report, Israel cries out, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness!" (Numbers 14:2), and in response God lets them die in the wilderness (14:28–31).
 - See the refrain of "God gave them up" in Romans 1. "[They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity" (Romans 1:23–24).
 - This week will we choose to live for God or for lesser things? Either way, God will give us what we choose. As C. S. Lewis puts it, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'"
 - Though Numbers 13–14 shows us a challenging and tragic aspect of this truth, take heart: God gives his Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:9–13)!
- God will accomplish his purposes for the Church, just as he brought Israel into the promised land. But just as an entire generation of Israelites disqualified themselves from God's purposes and from resting in the land, so also we can disqualify and exclude ourselves through faithless disobedience.
 - Hebrews 3:7–4:13 takes Psalm 95 and the wilderness disobedience and applies it to Christians by connecting Israel's rest in the promised land to the Christian's heavenly rest.
 - God is doing amazing things today; the gospel is "bearing fruit and increasing in the whole world" (Colossians 1:6) – even more today than when Paul wrote those words! Just as God graciously invited Israel to be part of his plan to give them the land, so also God invites us today to "lift up our eyes and see" what he is doing today (John 4:35).