Synopsis of Exodus

“The book is in two main parts, strikingly depicted in its own words. First, Yahweh delivers Israel from Egypt: ‘You have seen what I did to Egypt and how I bore you upon eagles' wings and brought you to myself’ (19:4). Second, Yahweh gives torah, a moral and ritual constitution for Israel to enable them to realize their unique vocation: ‘So now, if you truly obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special treasure among all peoples. Although the whole earth is mine, you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation’ (19:5-6).’ – Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 438

“The theme of the book is the commencement of Israel as a covenant nation. It relates how God fulfilled His ancient promise to Abraham by multiplying his descendants into a great nation, redeeming them from the land of bondage, and renewing the covenant of grace with them on a national basis. At the foot of the holy mountain, He bestows on them the promises of the covenant and provides them with a rule of conduct by which they may lead a holy life, and also with a sanctuary in which they may make offerings for sin and renew fellowship with Him on the basis of forgiving grace.” – A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Pg 235

“Chapters 1–4 describe the circumstances of Moses’ birth and calling. Chapters 5–15 chronicle Moses’ confrontation with Pharaoh, the plagues, and the Exodus itself. Chapters 16–18 tell about the three-month journey to Mount Sinai. Chapters 19–23 detail the initial covenant making at Mount Sinai when the Ten Commandments are given. Chapters 24–31 are about Moses’ forty days on Mount Sinai and the instructions God gives him about the tabernacle. Chapter 32 describes the horrible golden calf incident. Chapters 33–34 present the aftermath of that incident and the renewal of the covenant. And chapters 35–40 conclude with the people’s punctilious obedience to God’s instructions as they build the tabernacle.” – The Message of the Old Testament, Location 1849

Author: Moses (based on tradition)
Time of the Exodus: 1445 B.C.

“Chapter 1 of Exodus covers the span of several centuries. Chapter 2 covers about eighty years. And the rest of the book—chapters 3–40—transpires over a little more than one year.” – The Message of the Old Testament, Location 1629

Exodus 19-40 – God Leads His People, Establishes His Law, & Dwells Among His People

I. The Mountain of God & The Ten Commandments (19-20)

In Chapters 19-20 God calls his people to encampment around the Mt. Sinai where God interacts directly with Moses and the Israelites are presented to God. God establishes
his Law, the Ten Commandments, that will guide His people for all generations and will serve as a tutor pointing to Christ.

a. Key Verses
   i. **A People Like None Other** – Exodus 19:3–6 (ESV) — 3 while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”
   
   ii. **Famous Last Words** – Exodus 19:8 (ESV) — 8 All the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.
   
   iii. **God and His People** – Exodus 19:17 (ESV) — 17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.
   
   iv. **Ten Commandments**
      1. Exodus 20:3 (ESV) — 3 “You shall have no other gods before me.
      2. Exodus 20:4 (ESV) — 4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved 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.
      3. Exodus 20:7 (ESV) — 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.
      4. Exodus 20:8 (ESV) — 8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
      5. Exodus 20:12 (ESV) — 12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
      10. Exodus 20:17 (ESV) — 17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”
   
   v. **Reason for the Ten Commandments** – Exodus 20:20 (ESV) — 20 Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”
“Moses interprets the giving of the commandments in a key verse, 20:20: they are to test Israel, so as to bring about the fear of God and diminish sin.”
– Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 502

II. Practical Applications of the Ten Commandments - Various Laws (21-23)

After God establishes his moral law, He gives laws that are outflows of the Ten Commandments and give guidance for very practical moments in life. These chapters conclude with the reiteration of God’s promise to bring His people into the land He promised centuries earlier to Abraham. God has special plans for His people, but is a jealous God who wants His people to follow and worship Him and Him alone.

“The detailed laws of Exod. 21-23 are, by contextual implication, out-workings in everyday, mundane situations of the fundamental concerns of the Ten Commandments.” – Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 505

Exodus 21-23 presents a series of laws dealing with everything from worshipping false gods to instructions on what to do if you see your enemy’s donkey has escaped. While many of these seem random, they all either directly relate to one of the Ten Commandments or indirectly relate through association with God’s, who is solely to be worshipped, character and purposes.

a. Examples
   i. Honor Your Father and Your Mother – Exodus 21:15 (ESV) — 15 Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.
   ii. You Shall Not Murder – Exodus 21:20 (ESV) — 20 When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged.
   iii. You Shall Not Steal – Exodus 22:1 (ESV) — 1 If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.

“While some laws of that time valued property above people and made the punishment for stealing greater than that for murder, Israel’s Law always places the value of people above that of mere property, for only people, of all God’s creations, have been fashioned in his own image.” – The Drama of Scripture, Pg. 68
All of these laws set apart this people from the surrounding nations because the Israelites are instructed to walk in a manner different than the rest of the world. These not only points to a special people, but the fulfillment of possession of a particular land.

Exodus 23:20–22 (ESV) — 20 “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. 21 Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. 22 “But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

III. God Reveals His Plan for His Presence Among His People (24-31)

These chapters open with Moses relating to the Israelites all of the laws spoken to Him by God, Moses writing down these laws, and the promise from the Israelites to always follow Him. The Elders of Israel get to meet God followed by Moses going back onto the mountain to hear from God again. On his next visit with God, Moses is given very specific instructions on the construction of the Tabernacle that will hold the presence of God, and the specifications for the garments and consecration of the priests. The revelation of this information takes place over 40 days and 40 nights.

a. Key Verses
   i. Famous Last Words Again – Exodus 24:3 (ESV) — 3 Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.”
   
   ii. God Reveals Himself to Israel’s Leaders – Exodus 24:9–11 (ESV) — 9 Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, 10 and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. 11 And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.
   
   iii. God’s Presence on the Mercy Seat – Exodus 25:22 (ESV) — 22 There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.
   
   iv. God’s Presence Visible Among God’s People – Exodus 25:8 (ESV) — 8 And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.
   
   v. The Spoken Law is Written by God Himself – Exodus 31:18 (ESV) — 18 And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.
IV. The Grave Sin of Rejecting God (32)

Chapter 32 of Exodus recounts the darkest day during the history of the nation of Israel. By this time, they had seen the wonders in Egypt, walked across on dry ground through the Red Sea, received water from a rock, manna from Heaven, met God at Mount Sinai, and now reject Him after only 40 days when they were physically nearer to God than they had ever been. Just as Moses is bringing down the Ten Commandments written by the very hand of God, the Israelites have obliterated their allegiance to the first two commandments.

a. Key Verses

i. Lack of Faith and Patience Leads to Rejection of God — Exodus 32:1 (ESV) — 1 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

“Israel's impatient making of the golden calf is presented as, in effect, a breaking of the first two commandments, and this while Israel is still at the mountain of God; it is rather like committing adultery on one’s wedding night.” – Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 516

ii. Spiritual Leaders Bowing to the Wishes of the Sinful Hearts — Exodus 32:4 (ESV) — 4 And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

While each man is accountable for his own sins, the leaders God places over His people have a higher accountability to God for their leadership. Hebrews 13:17 (ESV) says, “17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” Later on in Exodus 32:25 the sin of the people is laid squarely on the shoulders of Aaron. The text says, “And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies).”

iii. Moses Pleads for God’s Mercy — Exodus 32:11–14 (ESV) — 11 But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With
evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.' 14 And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

**Excurses on the Seemingly Problematic “Repentance” of God**

Exodus 32:14 along with Genesis 6:6 present readers with difficulty when reconciling them with other passages that speak to God’s inability to lie or regret (e.g. Numbers 23:19 & 1 Samuel 15:29). Therefore, certain interpretative principles must be applied to gain insight into what the text is communicating. When interpreting Scripture, a reader should use the most clear and straightforward passages of Scripture to understand more difficult passages of Scripture. The typical position on Exodus 32:14 & Genesis 6:6 is that the text is utilizing anthropomorphism when the words such are “revert” or “repent” are used in association with the actions of God.

An example of another place where this is employed is in relation to Exodus 31:18 and John 4:24. The Exodus passage references the Ten Commandments being written by the finger of God. However, the John passage states that God is spirit. Therefore, Jesus teaches us in John that God does not have a body. Therefore, we interpret the Exodus passage as anthropomorphic.

“The Church theologians supported their anthropomorphic interpretation of the divine repentance by analyzing the conditions that are sufficient to produce a change of mind and then noted that none of these conditions can obtain in God. Calvin’s treatment of the divine repentance illustrates this well. He proposed that a change of mind can occur when anyone of three conditions is present (or any combination thereof): when one is "ignorant of what is going to happen, or cannot escape it, or hastily and rashly rushes into a decision of which he immediately has to repent." Essentially, then, a true change of mind can occur when one learns something of which one was ignorant, or when one lacks the power to do as first planned, or when one gains a fresh insight or a new perspective on a situation leading to a reconsideration of one’s former perspective. But how can it rightly be said of the God of the Bible that he lacks either knowledge, power, or wisdom? Clearly it cannot. God’s knowledge is boundless (Ps 147:5; Isa 40:13-14; Rom 11:33-
34), his wisdom is flawless (Job 38-39; Ps 104:24; Jer 51:15; 1 Tim 1:17), and
his power is inexhaustible (Num 11:34; Deut 3:24; Ps 115:3). Thus, it is here
affirmed with the long tradition of Church history that since the conditions
involved in a true change of mind cannot be present in God, the Scriptural
assertions of God’s repentance may best be understood as anthropomorphic
expressions for his changed action.” – Bruce Ware, An Evangelical
Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God, JETS, Pg. 442

iv. While Annihilation Did Not Come...Discipline Was Exacted – Exodus 32:33–
35 (ESV) — 33 But the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I
will blot out of my book. 34 But now go, lead the people to the place about
which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you.
Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.” 35 Then
the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one
that Aaron made.

V. The Mercy of God and His Dwelling Among His People (33-40)

The mercy of God was shown by the fact that He did not forsake His people despite their
sin. While discipline was exacted, the plan to give His people the possession of the land
continued towards fulfillment. Most amazing is God’s steadfast love through
establishing His visible presence with His people in the Tabernacle.

“Of course, the most special thing that distinguishes the people of Israel from all other
peoples on earth—the very heart of what it means to be God’s people—is his special
presence with them.” – The Message of the Old Testament, Location 1817

One should note that thirteen of the forty chapters of Exodus are dedicated to the
detailed instructions and meticulous construction of the Tabernacle. Why would such
detail be given?

“These exhaustive details make and important point: such a residence cannot be taken
lightly. God himself is coming to live among his people, and it is worth pausing to look
over the shape and nature of his official residence.” – The Drama of Scripture, Pg. 71

a. Key Verses

i. Reiteration of God’s Character and Showing of His Glory to Moses – Exodus
34:6–7 (ESV) — 6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the
Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast
love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving
iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty,
visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

“Despite its intrinsic importance for the character of God, 34:6-7 has received less attention in Christian theology than 3:14. By contrast Jewish theology has given prime weight to 34:6-7, even designating it as a revelation of "the thirteen attributes" of God. Together the two passages are complementary in a foundational way for the OT understanding of Yahweh.”

– Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 527

ii. God’s Promise Restated – Exodus 34:10 (ESV) — 10 And he said, “Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

iii. A People Finally With an Attitude of Service to God – Exodus 36:2–7 (ESV) — 2 And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. 3 And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, 4 so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, 5 and said to Moses, “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.” 6 So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, “Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary.” So the people were restrained from bringing, 7 for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

iv. God’s Presence Among His People – Exodus 40:34–38 (ESV) — 34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 36 Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. 37 But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. 38 For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

“The purpose of the tabernacle is to mediate the presence of Yahweh, so that as Israel moves on from Sinai, the divine presence that came upon Sinai can continue to accompany Israel in this ‘sacramental’ shrine.” – Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament, Location 510
“As the story of Exodus reaches its end, considerable progress has been made toward the formation of God’s people. They are established in a formal covenant relationship with God, and they have both the law and the tabernacle. Their life has been given both and ethical shape and a liturgical shape. What they need now is a place of their own.” – *The Drama of Scripture*, Pg. 72-73

**Seeking Christ in the Old Testament** – Aaron was a High Priest who led the people away from God at the bottom of Mt. Sinai, but Christ is the perfect High Priest that is our only way to God. The tabernacle was only temporary and the sacrifices offered therein could never justify someone before God. In contrast, Hebrews 9:11-12 says, “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”

**Works Cited**


Appendix A

The Decalogue and Deuteronomy

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<td>God should be our top priority</td>
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<td>and final authority. We owe Him</td>
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*Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament, Pg. 24*