

1 Nov. 2: Exodus 1-20 and 31.18-35.33; Numbers 20.1-
2 12; Deuteronomy 32.48-52 & 34;

3 >The story of Moses is a major example of how God can work through someone. Moses is taken
4 as God's spokesperson and leads the Israelites out of Egypt. It is common for God to make
5 people obstinate or endure certain things so that he can show others his greatness. God, as he
6 states on Mount Sinai, is a jealous God and he wants everyone to fear his wrath. With the
7 different plagues throughout Egypt, the sorcerers and magicians try to emulate them and
8 belittle God's power. Ultimately, the magicians could not keep up with God's portents. The
9 magicians even ask the Pharaoh to heed to the requests. The story of Moses, is all God
10 exhibiting his power and bringing his prophecies to past.

11 ¶Although the Israelites are freed from slavery, every now and again they say that they regret
12 following Moses because they do not have all of the food they would get in Egypt. Their
13 disobedience and unfaithfulness really upset God. God, knowing that he is Almighty does not
14 like to be tried, so there are punishments here and there. Although unnecessary, the Lord
15 proves himself time, and time again. Even for his closest servant, Moses, God feels betrayed by
16 him and so Moses is able to see the massive promised land but he is not allowed to enter it.

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19 >Comments from a Liberationist:
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21 ¶The killing of all the males in the beginning of Exodus makes sense—in eliminating males, the
22 Egyptians eliminate raw male power that could possibly band together to take back their
23 freedom, or join an enemy army as they fear. It also prevents the Israelites from passing on their
24 identity—if the Hebrew women eventually marry men of other ethnicities, the Israelites'
25 lineages would soon die out. However, as the midwives and Moses' mother prove, women are
26 crucial to the survival of Hebrew males, reflecting the very nature of men and women in
27 general (men need women to exist, even if they grow up to be above them).

28 ¶I never understood why God chooses Moses to rescue the Israelites, although his first attempt
29 at "rescue" doesn't go so well—maybe he's getting a second chance at helping his people.
30 Moses appears at first to feel sympathy for them and want to use the power he has for good, but
31 then he just escapes and presumably forgets about his people for many years in Midian. I think
32 God saw something in him and decided to use him and in this process show Moses that he does
33 "work through flawed vessels." In fact, working through the flawed speaker that Moses is
34 makes it God's work instead of his.

35 ¶The punishment of the Egyptians through the death of all the firstborn sons is related to
36 Abraham's testing of faith in nearly killing Isaac—Abraham, the father of this nation, passed the
37 test of faith, and now generations later the Israelites are in a sense reassured of the promise God
38 has with them. However, they do have to hold up their end of the deal by putting blood on the
39 doors. This institution of the Passover marks one of the first commands of the Lord for his

40 people, and is culminated in the giving of the law. The law is the culmination of the covenant
41 because it finally states what the Israelites' side of the deal is. God wants obedience and
42 devotion from them, and the law is how they will accomplish this. However, as later acts of
43 disobedience (i.e. the golden calf) show, the Israelites fall into sin and disobedience repeatedly,
44 setting the stage for the new covenant of the New Testament.

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46 >The more I read the Bible, the more I become uncertain of the divinity of God -- for example,
47 Pharaoh is made stubborn by God's will, and God himself says that His purpose is to "show
48 [them] His power" and His name to "be proclaimed in all the earth(Exodus 9:16)"; He is even
49 "jealous" (Exodus 20:5).

50 He seems more like a deified version of jealous, humanlike, but omnipotent(thereby imposing
51 the paradox of free will, especially in the case of Pharaoh) leader of patriarchal society --
52 especially agricultural one, since He curses and destroys the Egyptian "culture" by spreading
53 locusts, darkness, hail, etc., which have detrimental effects on agricultural life.

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55 >Why does Moses decide to kill the Egyptian? He could have remained as a prince and have
56 been treated better.

57 -Why Moses?

58 -Burning bush=remains the same, what does that symbolize?

59 -Are the people actually supposed to believe that "I AM" has sent Moses to talk to them?

60 -Circumcision=sign of covenant

61 -Rod turns into serpent

62 -Ten plagues, (land of Goshen was protected from all of them)

63 -Egyptian first born are killed, Pharaoh wants nothing to do with Moses and his people
64 anymore tells him to take cattle and leave.

65 - Creation and explanation of Passover, unleavened bread

66 -Long journey to Sinai

67 -Chased by Pharaoh and his men

68 -Moses divides the Red Sea

69 -Egyptians don't make it through

70 -People get frustrated with Moses

71 -Observation of Sabbath

72 -Mount Sinai

73 -people must get prepared to see God

74 -The Ten Commandments

75 -Moses proves Gods power throughout the journey. (makes water gush through rocks)

76 -God becomes very demanding and aggravated.

77 -Moses dies and God denies him stepping onto the Promised Land because Moses didn't
78 sanctify God in the midst of the children of Isreal.

79 -Moses' death is very sad. He was a "servant" to God yet he was denied his reward.

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82 >I have two brief points from the readings, but I would like to bring up other things in class
83 because I'm sure we will touch on them

84 1) When we spoke of snakes, regarding Adam and Eve, we noted that they have a negative
85 connotation. However, when Moses was to turn his staff into a snake I have to wonder if the
86 snake was placed into a negative "light" here. Yes, part of this action was to have the Egyptians,
87 especially Pharaoh, to fear the Lord as one may fear snakes, but because being a "God-fearer" is
88 a good thing I had to wonder if snakes carry the same connotation in this story.

89 2) I saw a connection with fear as a motivating force to do good within the Scriptures and the
90 Odyssey. People were told to do things by the deity(ies) all the time because they would not
91 know if they were being tested. God told the Israelites that he may destroy them, which was, I
92 think, a pretty good incentive to follow His rules. To the same extent Odysseus and other
93 Grecian men needed to be hospitable because they did not know if they were dealing with a
94 god.

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96 >I guess Exodus is one the first tales of liberation. It surprised me that the psychological state of
97 the Israelites is very similar to the psychological state of slaves throughout the eras. The
98 fighting Hebrews do not recognize the authority of Moses yet they recognize the authority of
99 the Egyptians. Fredrick Douglass described the hierarchy among the slaves in America and
100 their twisted authority for their Master. The Israelites did not recognize God as their escape
101 from slavery because slavery had caused them to reach "the depths of despair". The lack of
102 faith that the Israelites had at times was comparable to the Pharaoh which was also shocking to
103 me. I understand that God can act through an imperfect vessel such as Moses but why would
104 his chosen people err from God so much?

105 > I found the first interaction between Moses and the Lord to be interesting. "The Lord's main
106 thrust is clear: 'Moses, it's not about you.'" Throughout the entire interaction, however, Moses
107 continually asks for more, ranging from more power to prove the Lord's strength to the gift of
108 powerful speech. Could it be true that God has lowered his position to debate and accede with
109 Moses' wishes? Because the Lord is merciful, one should be able to understand this occurring. It
110 does not seem at all strange to me that God would work with anyone, including Moses and his
111 questioning ways.

112
113 >This particular reading was very interesting. Moses and the role of him and his brother
114 interesting. The fact that Moses was allowed to live after being defiant of God is a strange
115 concept. God seems to play with humans lives like we play with bugs. Then God gives Moses
116 the charge of taking the Israelites out of Egypt. He acts as God tells him, but the Pharaoh won't
117 listen. God increases the punishment until the first born male of every Egyptian household has
118 been killed. It is nice to also actually see where the text for Passover comes from. It was also
119 very interesting how God had the people who made another god for them to worship had them
120 completely massacred. I always thought that God was supposedly merciful, but that seems
121 extreme, especially for some that seemed to repent. Then right after God rewrites the
122 commandments that he gave before them. He also kills Moses and his brother for one mistake,

123 and tortures Moses by allowing him to see the promised land, but not actually able to join the
124 people he led there in life in the promised land.

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126 EXODUS:

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128 1. Page 63: I thought it was interesting that the Pharaoh had all first-born Hebrew boys killed.
129 Was this because they were considered more of a threat?

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131 2. Page 66 (very 1st line): This one came WAY out of left field: While on his way back to Egypt,
132 the Lord meets Moses and decides (without any clear motive) that he wants to kill him. In
133 response, Zipporah cuts off her son's foreskin and touches it to her husband's genitals -
134 prompting the Almighty to let things go. I'll sum up my thoughts as efficiently as possible:
135 What the hell?

136

137 3. Page 66: In 4:29, Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of Israel accompany them to their
138 meeting with the Pharaoh. However, in 5:1, only Moses and Aaron are mentioned. Wussies!

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140 4. Page 65 and 68: On page 65, the Lord sets up a simple 3-step routine to prove his existence to
141 the Pharaoh: Snakes, Disease, then Blood. However, in practice, he alters the order of these
142 steps. Is this an inconsistency in form worth addressing? The order implemented does seem
143 more natural, getting progressively more harmful, so why it was explained differently?

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145 5. Page 70: "But the Lord made Pharaoh obstinate". Seems rather inefficient, huh?

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147 6. Also on page 70: "I have let you live only to show you my power and to spread my fame all
148 over the world" <insert Miley Cyrus reference here>

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150 7. Page 75: In reference to the "phylactery on the forehead": Keeping in mind that I'm not the
151 most well-versed in the history of religion, does this have anything to do with the origins of the
152 Hindu 'Bindi'?

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154 8. Page 95: In reference to the death of the 3000 men for the worshiping of the false idol: I
155 suppose I can make the leap in saying that it was necessary, at least for the sake of Moses'
156 maintaining leadership - but why is Aaron so quick to get off the hook?

157

158 >Odysseus parallels God in many ways when looking at the Exodus. The two stories are
159 concerned with long journeys and deal greatly with suffering but also with deliverance and
160 retribution. God seems to be very concerned with his own glory much like Odysseus when he
161 claims that much of what he did was to inspire fear in the Egyptians for their enslavement of
162 the Israelites and to basically let everyone know how good he was and what he could do when
163 he delivered the plagues upon Egypt and allowed Moses to part the Red Sea.

164 >I have read the book of Exodus many times in my life and for that reason it was shocking to
165 me that I gained new insight into the story pertaining to the plagues of Egypt. I had always
166 thought of them in a very childish way and had looked at the Pharaoh with great disgust to see
167 him put his people through so much pain and torment, but this time I saw the Pharaoh with
168 eyes of pity. Despite his refusal to let the Israelites go and despite the intense turmoil he had
169 caused them, the punishment he received seems a bit horrible. All the plagues seem not so
170 harsh for awhile. No one dies and no one is too grievously injured. But, then God drops a bomb
171 on the Egyptian people by ending the lives of all of their first born sons. At a young age, I saw
172 this as simply the only remaining option. I took it on face value and nothing more, but now that
173 I have grown older it makes me question what kind of creator destroys his own creation and in
174 addition, why would such a creator choose to create someone who was destined to make the
175 decision that would end so many lives and hopelessly scare others. It is a remarkable concept
176 that I honestly have no answer to.

177

178 >Some food for thought: Why does god send serpents to kill Israelites after they curse Moses?
179 What might this do to the reader's perception of God in the old testament?

180 here are some of my thoughts:

181 On Numbers 21.6, God sends serpents to kill Israelites that talk bad of Moses. To speak bad of a
182 prophet is a sin in God's eyes, one so severe that it is justly punishable by death, and why is
183 this? Is it because God commanded Moses to lead them and so, by questioning Moses, they
184 question God's infallible judgement? Certainly. Yet to evoke such harsh of a punishment for
185 what, in the grand scheme of things, is a minor discrepancy gives the impression of God being
186 insecure. In what way insecure? Insecure in his position as an authority over humanity, so
187 much so that he cannot tolerate a moment's disobedience lest it mean considerable damage to
188 his role as the enforcer of the Israelite people. Furthermore, that God, in Deuteronomy 6.15,
189 admits his jealousy would also make God seem insecure- almost too insecure- of his role
190 because in merely the fulfillment of his jealousy he finds a significant offense. The Old
191 Testament's God seems petty and overly-sensitive- almost too human.

192 ¶Some food for thought: Where the midwives lying to the Pharaoh about not being present
193 during labor? Would this lie be necessary to their portrayal as God fearing persons?

194 Here are some of my thoughts:

195 On Exodus 1.17-18, the mid-wives are praised for being God-fearing persons. Their fear is
196 expressed in their conscious decision to let the male children live. They could have discovered
197 the child's gender while inspecting the child's physiognomies some time after birth and then
198 murder them soon afterwards. Therefore, whether or not they were present during labor has no
199 relevance to their portrayal as God fearing persons, only their conscious decision to not kill the
200 male Hebrew children afterwards.

201

202 > I would like to comment on your notes on the relationship between the Egyptian and Hebrew
203 women. It seems like they had a rather cordial relationship. I can compare it to Penelope and
204 Eurykleia. It was a relationship of master and slaves as well as that of friends. It seems like they
205 understood very well their standing or position in the society and respected it even though they

206 were friends. I find it interesting that the Egyptian women gave up their jewelery when the
207 Israelites were leaving. I also suppose that Pharaoh's daughter knew that Moses must have been
208 an Israelite because of the situation at that time (Israelite male children being killed). I looked up
209 on the internet the racial colour of the ancient Egyptians and it seems that there is a lot of
210 differences of opinion. I thought that would be clear proof that princess knew it was an Israelite
211 child.

212 I also found an interesting parallel between the episode of Pharaoh's heart being hardened
213 because God wanted to destroy him and show His glory and the heart of the suitors being
214 hardened because the gods were intent on having them killed. It is amazing the way Pharaoh
215 gets all these amazing signs and yet still insists on keeping the Israelites. At some point he
216 becomes really cunning but it ends up that that is God's trap for him. His doom was sealed.
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218 >I was a bit confused when reading this passage. What concerns me is why God keeps
219 intentionally making the Pharaoh so stubborn, nearly forcing him to go against Moses'
220 guidance, seemingly for the Lord's own benefit. Does he do this simply to prolong the
221 punishment of the Egyptians, wreaking havoc on them as a form of revenge? If so, I believe this
222 is extremely cruel and unnecessary. I mean, I realize that the Lord only wishes to protect his
223 people; it is his job, after all, to ensure that his worldly creation is a great one from the very
224 start. However, I believe free will must also remain a factor in the Pharaoh's decisions. Perhaps
225 the Pharaoh would have remained that obstinate regardless of God's influence, but this is not
226 made clear within the reading. If he is made to feel a certain way, because it appears the Bible, I
227 am going to assume that he is made by God to react that way.

228 ¶Still, it is a good story of liberation. Fight hard and constantly against the oppressors and the
229 road to freedom is as easy as walking through a waterless ocean. Simple, but cool passage.
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231
232 >The Hebrews were such an ungrateful bunch of liberated slaves. All of the other slaves have
233 been striving for freedom and would rather die free than live as a slave. The Hebrews are
234 always complaining and would rather remain as slaves than die in the wilderness. The Hebrews
235 are so ungrateful that it becomes ridiculous. They are persistent in disobeying tier God who is
236 trying to help and free them. They are so fickle that they are too impatient to wait for Moses so
237 they just go make a random god even though they have known the power of Yahweh. They are
238 always disobeying rules and not putting enough faith in God (like the manna). I know the old
239 testament teaches the rules to the Jews and strengthens their faith which explains God's
240 harshness, but the Hebrews come off as a little stupid occasionally. It makes sense that Moses
241 has to die because God can't play favorites while he is teaching the Hebrews how to live, but I
242 still think Aaron should have died for making the calf. It's amazing how after all the miracles
243 and power God displayed to the Hebrews, they are still have weak trust and little faith in God. I
244 would never imagine a freed slave could be so ungrateful.
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FAQs

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Where do the narrative inconsistencies come from?

The Torah (= Pentateuch = first five books of the Bible) is taken by most scholars to be a compilation from multiple sources. See “The Pentateuch” (*OSB p. 8-9).

The P source (or Priestly source) was composed after the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem in 587 BCE. The P source seems to have provided the first account of creation (Gen. 1), which is more philosophical than the earlier account of the garden and the serpent in Gen. 2-3. In Exodus, the P source emphasizes the tabernacle, the movable tent-sanctuary that the Israelites use in the wilderness (Exod. 25-31 and 35-40), and which the Lord enters at Exod. 40.33-38).

The older J and E sources are thought to have been written down during the times of Kings David and Solomon, around the year 1000 BCE. In Exodus, the J source does not refer to the role of Aaron, first high priest of the Hebrews.

Why does Exodus emphasize that the Lord is a jealous god? (Exod. 20.5, 34.14, Deut. 4.24, 5.9, 6.15)

Important: John H. Hayes, “Deity in the Biblical Communities and their Neighbors,” *OSB, pp. 141-53, esp. 148-53.

In Genesis and Exodus, nations have their own gods who protect them but also demand worship and obedience. The contest with the Egyptian magicians proves that the Hebrews’ god is mightier than the Egyptian gods. This conception of one god mightier than all other gods is called *monolatry* or *henotheism*; see *OSB, p. 151. We encounter *monotheism* in Second Isaiah.

For contrast, the Greek god of the *Odyssey* are national gods (i.e., there is just one set of gods everywhere). They can be wrathful if one transgresses against their offspring or priests, or invokes their names in vain (e.g., in oaths), but they do not care if someone worships other gods. They provide protection in exchange for sacrifice.

The jealousy of the Lord suggests his claims to exclusivity in the covenant that he offers: “If only you will now listen to me and keep my covenant, then out of all peoples you will become my special possession” (Exod. 19.5), but, “Take care that you do not forget the covenant which the Lord your God made with you; do not make for yourselves a carved image in any form; the Lord your God has forbidden it. For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God” (Deut. 4.23-24).

289 **What about death and the afterlife?**

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291 See *OSB, p. 149.

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293 The Christian conception that Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, and the
294 other patriarchs ended up in heaven, seems to start from the idea that Jesus descended into the
295 earth for three days after His crucifixion (Matt. 12.40), which Acts 2.27 declares to be a descent
296 to Hades. Matt. 27.51-52 also reports that when Jesus died on the cross the earth shook and
297 graves opened. Christian theology later developed the doctrine of the Harrowing of Hell,
298 during which Jesus went into the underworld to bring the patriarchs up to heaven.

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Icon of Jesus leading the righteous out of Hell.

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306 **While on his way back to Egypt, the Lord meets Moses and decides (without any clear**
307 **motive) that he wants to kill him. In response, Zipporah cuts off her son's foreskin and**
308 **touches it to her husband's genitals - prompting the Almighty to let things go. I'll sum up my**
309 **thoughts as efficiently as possible: What the hell?**

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311 This baffling episode seems to be a fragment of old traditions, perhaps an alternative
312 aetiology for the practice of circumcision¹. It's not clear from the text whether the Lord is trying
313 to kill Moses or his son. The incident asserts the Lord's rights over the firstborn (cf. the sacrifice
314 of Isaac, Passover). "The act of cutting the son's foreskin is described with the Hebrew word
315 *kārat* (literally, "to cut"), a word used to indicate covenant relationships (e.g., Gen. 15.18), rather
316 than the expected term *mūl*, "to circumcise." ... "If Moses is the object of Zipporah's action, the
317 story may represent the protection of Moses through the circumcision of his son. But it may also

¹ My source is Thomas B. Dozeman, Exodus (Grand Rapids and Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 154-56.

318 reflect an ancient understanding of circumcision as a rescue of the firstborn from the divine
319 claim upon his life." ... "Twice in Exodus Yahweh is presented as a destroyer. God seeks to kill
320 Moses or Gershom in 4.24-26, and "the destroyer" kills the Egyptian firstborn in chap. 12. The
321 two stories are related. Both explore Yahweh's claim on firstborn, introduced in 4.22. " ...
322 "Genesis 22 [Abraham and Isaac] is a polemical story against the practice in the Non-P [i.e., J, E,
323 and others] History. Exodus 13.1-2 states that Yahweh claims all firstborn animals and humans,
324 suggesting a possible tradition of child sacrifice. Rescue from the divine attack in both stories
325 requires special cultic rituals associated with blood. The blood of the Passover lamb protects the
326 Israelite firstborn from death in Exodus 12. The blood from the circumcision of Gershom
327 protects Moses or Gershom from attack by Yahweh." "The exact meaning of Zipporah's ritual
328 action is no longer clear. What stands out is that it is Zipporah, not Moses, who knows the
329 special rituals of protection and that in performing them she rescues Moses from the attack of
330 Yahweh. In this act she is the final female rescuer of Moses. Her rescue is not an escape from the
331 social tyranny of Pharaoh. Instead, her knowledge of religious ritual about Yahweh, associated
332 with Jethro the Midianite (Exodus 18), allows Moses to live safely in the wilderness with God,
333 his divine father (see 15.2).

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335 **What about Aaron and the golden calf?**

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337 Some sources promote the authority of the Aaronide priesthood (descended from
338 Aaron), others promote the Levite priesthood (e.g., at 32.28-29 the Levites kill the 3,000
339 idolatrous Israelites and are invested as priests by Moses).