

Grounded: in the Body in Time & Place, in Scripture

# The Transformation of Israel's Social Identity in the Book of Exodus

Katy Davis

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## Meet the authors

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## Chapter overview

Within the narrative context of the Pentateuch, Exodus focuses upon the formation of Israel as a nation under the kingship of YHWH. YHWH's rescue of Israel from Egypt forms Israel into a nation and simultaneously transforms Israel's social identity. Israel's memory of rescue and redemption becomes the new reference point by which Israel is to define itself and the social group to which the individual Israelite belongs in the nation's present and future. Social order is maintained when the Israelites have a positive view of their transformed social identity, but disorder threatens this social order when Israel rejects a part, or the whole. Thus, the Book of Exodus was written for future generations so that this identity transforming memory can be preserved and so continue to shape who they are in the midst of the world's nations. The inherent warning for future generations is that if they reject the core beliefs at the center of their social identity – belonging solely to YHWH, being a holy priesthood, and a holy nation – then they jeopardize the presence of God that grounds their social identity as they reside in the land of promise.

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## General Study Questions

### Question 1

What groups do you belong to? How do you identify yourself in relationship with these groups (e.g. son, mother, employee, member, supporter)?

### Question 2

Can you give an example of what kind of values and behaviours bring cohesiveness and unity to each group that you belong to?

### Question 3

Read Exodus 1:1–7. What social groups are introduced and how are each described?

### Question 4

Read Exodus 1:8–22. How does the identity of the Israelites change within their context in Egypt?

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### Question 5

Read Exodus 2:1–22. There are two narratives; the first focusing upon the saving of Moses' life and the second focusing on why Moses fled from Egypt. How does Moses describe who he is? Why does he experience conflict?

### Question 6

Read Exodus 3:1–22 and 6:2–9.

- a. How is God's identity described?
- b. What is the nature of God's relationship with the Israelites and the Israelites relationship with God?
- c. How does this relationship of belonging shape what God will do for Israel?

### Question 7

Read Exodus 14:30–15:18.

- a. How do the Israelites understand how YHWH acted?
- b. How does YHWH's work shape how the Israelites understand who they are?
- c. What was Israel's response to YHWH's work?

### Question 8

Read Exodus 16.

- a. How does Israel's response in Exodus 16 contrast with what was observed in question 7 above?
- b. What was the cause of conflict in Exodus 16? How might this relate to Israel's understanding of who they are?

### Question 9

Read Exodus 19:1–6. How does 19:1–6 shape Israel's understanding of who they are?

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### Question 10

Read Exodus 20:1–17. What do we learn about Israel's identity and YHWH's identity? In light of your answer, what is the purpose of YHWH's commands and prohibitions?

### Question 11

Read Exodus 32:1–12. What does Israel reject? (Hint: there are more than two points of rejection. Read the whole text carefully). In light of your answer, what aspects of their identity as YHWH's covenant people are they rejecting? How does this relate to how YHWH responds?

### Question 12

Read Exodus 34:1–28. How is relational order restored? How is relational order to be maintained between YHWH and Israel?

### Question 13

Read Exodus 40:16–38. How does the completed tabernacle relate to Israel's identity?

### Question 14

Reflecting on your answers from questions 1–13, how is Israel's identity transformed within the Book of Exodus? What does cohesion and unity look like for Israel under God's kingship?

### Question 15

Read 1 Peter 1:1–2:12.

- a. Who are you? On what basis is your identity transformed?
- b. What is the basis of cohesive unity in God's people? What does this look like for the local church in Australia today?