

THE BOOK OF EXODUS INTRODUCTION

1) Exodus is the Easter event of the Old Testament.

a) By means of God's 'miraculous' power, people are empowered to be free from an evil which they have felt powerless to overcome for a long time.

b) As a result, those liberated enter into a new chapter in their relationship with God, a new covenant, and a new way of being, even as the old way of being will continue to haunt them.

c) In spite of continuing slippage in their faithfulness, God clings to the freshly covenanted community and a path to reconciliation and blessing continues to open up.

d) In their joyful acceptance of God's initiatives, the liberated people assume new understandings of the trust placed in them as God's covenanted people.

e) Just as the New Testament is written viewing Christ's resurrection as the defining moment in God's merciful dealing with the world, so the Old Testament often lifts the Exodus Event as the measure of God's redemptive presence in Israel's life.

2) Some of the most unforgettable stories in all of scripture are found in Exodus.

- Baby Moses floating in a basket among rushes of Nile, God's surprising challenge and call to Moses from a fiery shrub, The safe passage of the people of Israel across the Red Sea and the immediate drowning of Pharaoh's pursuing forces, God's gift of the tablets of the law, and the sinful worship of the golden calf.

- But beyond the individual stories there is the overriding story of a faithful God who engages people in their deepest need, and as God delivers them, the people are pointed to a new land as well as a new understanding of their freedom and responsibility as a covenant people.

3) The book of Exodus contains narrative, poetry and song, codes of law and language for worship.

- It is also clear that there are multiple hands in the writing of Exodus. This often leads to contradictory ideas (e.g. how only 2 midwives - chap 1 - serve a population that has become more numerous than the Egyptians (600,000 -12:37).

- But the diversity of sources only strengthens the overall richness of the story the way four gospel writers enrich the overall narrative of Jesus' story.

- Exodus is a central part of a larger narrative from the death of Joseph, to the people's encounter with God at Sinai, to God's coming to dwell in a newly completed Tabernacle (sacred space for worship and sacrifice).

- The larger chronicle - Exodus to Deuteronomy - carries the people of God to their loss of Moses on the eve of their entry into the promised land - Deuteronomy 34.

- Beyond this, the literary unit - Genesis to Deuteronomy - known as the Pentateuch (meaning: five) appeared as a single narrative unit as early as 400 BC. The Pentateuch, like the gospels, achieved sacred status as scripture first, and primary in authority over the writings (psalms, Proverbs, Job, etc) and Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc).

- Another name for the Pentateuch is the "Law" or "Torah" (Instruction or teaching).

4) An outline of Exodus:

- 1-2 Prologue; the Birth and Raising of Moses
- 3-6 The Call and Commissioning of Moses
- 7-11 The Plagues
- 12-15 Freedom from Pharaoh
- 16-18 Israel in the Sinai Desert
- 19-24 The Reformulation of the Covenant
- 25-31 Instructions for Worship
- 32-34 The People's Sinfulness and Restoration
- 35-40 The Establishment of Israel's Spiritual life

5) Exodus is Gospel of the Old Testament. It is a statement about God and God's saving presence in human life.

a) The God of Israel is the creator God who cares for the people and has chosen them as a special focus of divine providential love - for the purpose of redeeming all of creation 9:16.

b) Even though the Exodus deliverance is new, it is in continuity with God's gracious saving work in Israel's ancestors.

c) God's salvation of Israel involves a reciprocal, covenant relationship by which people express their acceptance of God's love by certain patterns of worship and interaction with one another, as well as ways of living and behaving.

1) CHAPTERS 1-2 - THE BABY IN THE BASKET

The brief story of Moses' birth (2:1-10) forms the climax of a chain of sinister events beginning in 1:8 – “A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” This new king repudiated the very man (namely: Joseph) who had saved both Israel (Jacob and his children) as well as Egypt, during a global famine - Genesis 37-50. The Hebrews now are seen as a threat to this new Pharaoh's sovereignty and he orders their enslavement under brutal and degrading conditions.

1) Pharaoh's plot - 1:8-14

- The only crime the Hebrews had committed was to prosper.
- Why were they a threat? If Egypt was invaded from outside or Pharaoh's rule was subjected to protest from within, the Hebrews could side with Pharaoh's enemies v.9-10
- Pharaoh tries to come up with shrewd plan - enslaving the Hebrews. But this only strengthens the Hebrews and enlarges their numbers. So numerous and strong are they that their taskmasters “fear” them, and this fear leads to greater brutality v.12-14.

How many of the world's despots draw attention away from their weaknesses by conjuring up some imagined threat to national security. A tyrant wants to generate fear and hatred toward a 3rd party so that perhaps his criminality can go unnoticed.

2) Two Midwives - 1:15-22 - The women have a central role to play in this story

- Pharaoh's plan B is a more serious program of ethnic cleansing. The two leading midwives are ordered to kill all male infants born to Hebrew women. They refuse to do it and amazingly, succeed in deceiving Pharaoh with their lie.
- Is lying ok under certain circumstances? This story suggests that “creative disobedience” in obedience to God's will may at times permit a lie.
- When Pharaoh's plan B goes sour, he goes to plan C: He orders all Egyptians to kill Hebrew infants.

3) Moses - 2:1-10.

- The story of a people under slavery suddenly zeros in to one individual family and one individual infant - Moses. The fact that Moses is named indicates the importance he is to play in this story. A few chapters later God too will be so named. The story of Exodus is the story about Moses and God. In their relationship the destiny of a whole people is held in the balance.
- Moses' credentials are also important. He is a descendent of the Levites (the priestly clan of the Hebrews). Moses' priestly lineage will be important later in Exodus, for he

will receive the tablets of the law (Chap.20ff) and he will preside over the construction of the tabernacle (Chap.35ff).

4) Moses' Mother

- What was Moses' mother's motivation in placing Moses in a basket? Did she know this spot was a favorite bathing spot of Pharaoh's daughter? Had she sized her up as being a compassionate, kind woman?

- It may also be that the writers of Exodus knew the popular legends of other great world rulers who were placed in little boats in rivers (Sargon - the great Akkadian King of 2500BC) or thrown into the river but miraculously survive (Romulus and Remus - the founders of Rome).

- The Hebrew word for "basket" is the same word used for Noah's Ark. The original ark was the divine means of rescuing the world and starting over again. Was this also to be the case with Moses and the Hebrews? The baby in the basket was the tiny means through which God would work a great deliverance to benefit the whole world.

5) Moses' Sister

- She is brave and courageous. She manages to get an excellent deal for her mother - Moses will be raised by his mom and she gets paid to do it.

6) Pharaoh's daughter

- She is presented as a kind and caring woman, who has pity for the child and treats him as one of her own, even though he is Hebrew. Clearly, the Exodus story is not about condemning the Egyptians as a race. It is about the wickedness of evil men possessed by false gods.

- The name Moses which she gives him can be taken either from the Hebrew "Mashah" which means "to draw out" (of the water) or it could be taken from the Egyptian word for "child" or "boy". The great emperor Thutmose III (**Son** of Thuth) ruled Egypt several generations before Moses.

- Later legends see Moses as having benefitted from the love of more than Pharaoh's daughter. Acts 7:22 suggests Moses gained his wisdom from Egyptian tutors.

7) Exodus deliverance vs modern day liberation movements

a) Even though Moses kills an Egyptian taskmaster and is confrontational in his negotiations with Pharaoh, The Hebrews do not fight (by violent revolution) their way to freedom. Rather, theirs is a deliverance won by God. God in them arouses the kind of faith and hope that will not give up or let up until freedom is won. God is working above and through them to empower them.

b) While there are important political and social elements in Exodus, Pharaoh is not alone the enemy of the Hebrews and their God. Rather, the real forces are the Egyptian gods of whom Pharaoh is a human incarnation (12:12,15:11,18:11). There is a cosmic dimension in Exodus, a battle of the gods.

c) Exodus is not a declaration of independence. At the Red Sea and Sinai, the Hebrews move from bondage to Pharaoh, to bonding with Yahweh – Israel's God. The language is that of covenant (like marriage vows). It's all about relationship.

8) God's Presence

- God is present in dramatic encounters and sudden interventions in Exodus. But in the first two chapters, God is also present indirectly. God's will is done through people who fear God (midwives), who are committed to saving their loved ones (Mother & Daughter), who care and love people (Pharaoh's daughter), and even in circumstances and events that are ominous and fearful.

- God's presence is symbolized in the basket. The basket is a symbol of creation and promise. But the basket in water is also vulnerable. There is a persistent threat to God's redemptive purposes because of human self-serving evil. But even though the creative energies of God and the sinful will of humans clash, God's steadfast, loving will, will not be defeated. The evidence of this victory is already visible in the bold actions of those who resist Pharaoh's will.

9) Moses and Jesus - the gospel writers did not miss the connection

- Pharaoh and Herod are both autocrats who threaten the lives of not only a single infant, but a whole generation. But both of them have their evil intents overturned by God. Love wins.

- Like Moses, Jesus is the one on whom all God's plans are pinned.

- Both Moses and Jesus are alone, repudiated and resisted by many, even those close to them.

- Both Moses and Jesus experience an exile in the wilderness (40 days or 40 years).

- both Moses and Jesus run into conflict with authorities and their gods.