
Opening the Book

Exodus 1:1-22

Introduction The fabled glories of Egypt have dazzled for centuries. The brooding presence of the Sphinx crouches in the desert sands. The mysterious stone edifices of the pyramids rise from hidden bases laced with tunnels and rooms. The stories of the Bible and the artifacts coming to the surface through diligent archeological digs give small glimpses into the ancient wonders there.

Those pieces of the past unearthed have also uncovered a culture of both amazing vitality and awful depravity. On the one hand, bodies were buried with such skill that they are preserved to this day. One of those bodies evidenced multiple brain surgeries – initial skull openings had sealed over. On the other hand, some of the most vile practices of human slavery and sacrifice were woven into the fabric of their religion and culture.

Egypt's knowledge and intellectual pursuits included the foundations of modern geometry. Their astronomical data included charts of most of the visible stars and accurate predictions of moon positions. Yet their pantheon of gods ruled their lives with incredible detail and disastrous effect.

But the story of Exodus is not about mighty Egypt. It is about God's mighty acts for a lowly nomadic clan of tribes who lived in the shadows in the splendor of Egypt.

The Facts about the Book

As we open a book, it is good to establish its authorship, historical period covered and, if possible, the date of writing. I do this, not to turn a sermon into some kind of history lesson, but rather to declare that we believe God's Word. Much liberal scholarship, sometimes followed by modern evangelicals, has questioned the authorship of books of the Bible and dated many of them later than the Bible claims. Doing so has the effect of undermining later references to the book's author and history. Trying to determine what Moses' possible sources were is speculative at best and has little or no bearing on our understanding or our profiting from the book.

Authorship – Moses

Moses wrote Exodus, in addition to the other 4 books of the Pentateuch. While liberals challenge the authorship of Moses, it is well attested to throughout the Old and New Testaments. He had the education to do so (Acts 7:22). Exodus itself explicitly says so (17:14; 24:4). The books are attributed to his authorship by Jesus (Mark 7:10; 12:26). The various theories postulating a variety authors with editors compiling the book are simply an attempt to undermine the veracity of the Word of God and its Divine authority.

Historical Period – 1446-47BC

The book of Exodus itself gives us neither the date nor the name of the pharaoh over Egypt when the events of the book took place. 1 Kings 6:1 dates the fourth

year of King Solomon, when construction of the temple began, as being 480 years after the exodus from Egypt. Since Solomon's fourth year is unquestionably dated to 966-967 B.C., then adding 480 years places Exodus at 1446-1447 B.C. Moses would have grown up under Thutmose III whose wife Hatshepsut is well known. These were years of great prosperity and power. When Thutmose III died, he was succeeded by Amenhotep II who ruled from 1450–1425 B.C. This would be the Pharaoh of the exodus itself. Interestingly, Amenhotep II, in his later years, is portrayed by Egyptian historians as weak and unable to hold the power granted him.

The book's initial chapters cover about 80 years from the birth of Moses to his call. The bulk of the book covers the time from the initial confrontation with the Pharaoh to the camping at Mt. Sinai where the book was written and completed or about 4-5 months.

Our Approach to the Book

Treating the Word of God with respect and Spirit-dependent scholarship shapes our approach to the book of Exodus. The Spirit is to the Word like breath is to speaking. Without one you do not have the other. Where one is, the other is. Moses' intention and God's aim and trajectory in the book is informed and interpreted by the rest of the Scriptures. Thus, we read the Bible in both directions. We read Exodus forward towards the New Covenant. And, now living in the New Covenant, we read and interpret Exodus like Jesus teaches us to and the Apostles modeled for us.

Textual

Our approach will be textual. We must pay careful attention to the text itself. We are, in reading the Bible, reading the very Word of God. The Word of God is in the words, sentences, paragraphs and units in the books we have. Through the normative reading of the text we learn what God teaches. What God teaches us is in the truths the texts convey. The truths God wants us to learn are a massive tapestry with threads woven through all the Bible.

Exodus is largely narrative telling us the true story of God's acts in time, space and history. The texts themselves give us real history and God's interpretation. It is not raw facts (there is no such thing). It is not just Moses' interpretation. It is not a myth to unite the Israelites. It is God's interpretation of what happened. This does not invalidate its truth. It makes it the truth it is.

The Holy Spirit bore Moses along so that what he wrote, in his own words, are the very Word of God. The words here are carefully chosen to communicate the immediate meanings and the larger connections to the threads and themes of the Bible. God through Moses uses ordinary language and literary devices that would have significance to the original hearer and reader. These images, metaphors and analogies would gain even greater significance as later authors began to use them, interpret and apply them.

Therefore, we will pay close attention to the text so that we are hearing God's voice and will see God's Son.

Theological

Our approach will be theological. By faith, we will see God at every turn in the book.

Exodus is about God; it is about His holy character. It is about God who must be approached with holiness. He declares and demands His holiness. This is a book drenched in the blood of sacrifices. The holiness of God and the sinfulness of man make the sacrifices necessary.

Exodus is about God; it is about His mighty acts. It is about God delivering His people and dwelling with His people. From slavery to worship, God brings His people up and comes down to meet them. The Hebrew word for *to serve as a slave* is the same one for *to worship as a supplicant*.

Therefore we will see God's person and power throughout the book.

Doxological

Our approach will be doxological. We will see the glory of God throughout the book in such a way as to stir us to praise such a glorious God.

Exodus is about the primacy of the glory of God. God will get glory over the defeat of His enemies (14:4, 17, 18). He shows His glory to His people (16:7-10). The glory of God as a bright and shining cloud at the center of the camp whose movement and direction was to be followed at all times. Westerners generally think of the primary person as being at the head of a group or leading in front. But the Hebrew language and thought makes the center the primary place. So the glory of God was in the center of the camp and in the heart of the tabernacle.

Exodus is about the presence of the glory of God. It is striking all through the book how the glory of God is a major theme, so much so, Philip Ryken took as his theme for the book, "Saved for God's glory." God appeared in glory in the camp and on the mountain (24:16-17). He sanctified His people by His glory (29:43). He finally descended in glory to dwell with His people (40:34).

Exodus is about the pursuit of the glory of God. God set His glory before His people as beautiful (28:2, 40). Moses desired to see the glory of God (33:18) and was shown His glory in the shadow of the rock (33:22).

Therefore we will track the glory of God as it delivers and dwells with His people.

Christological

Our approach will be Christ-centered. Following Jesus' own hermeneutic, we will teach Exodus showing you all the things about Christ that are here.

Exodus is about the provision of Christ who delivers His people (Jude 6). Jude asserts two things: Jesus was the deliverer of Exodus and it was common knowledge among believers. The whole book of Exodus is the story of redemption. Jesus is the redeemer and deliverer at the center of that story.

Exodus is about the person of Christ who is among His people (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Does this mean that Jesus Himself was there? Yes, both in type and in person. He was there in the types like Moses, the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the

priesthood. He was there in person, as the glory, the rock, the Presence behind the curtain.

Exodus is about the prefiguring of Christ who follows the pattern of the Exodus in His own life as the new Israel, God's Son (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:13-15). God brought Israel up out of Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea, into the wilderness testing and finally into the promised land. This prefigured, according to Matthew, the life and ministry of Jesus, God's Son, the new Israel.

Therefore, we will pray and preach with the declaration and display of Christ as a central aim.

Practical

Our approach will be practical. It will be filled with your identity and your imperatives in Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 along with Romans 15:4 tells us how to handle and what to see in the Old Testament. The Old Testament narratives are written with us in view. What was recorded was not only to them but also for us.

As illustrations, God ordered their lives and events so that we would have examples for our living (v. 6). The Old Testament narratives have within them heart oriented imperatives. The sins of the Old Testament saints have a "not like this" purpose. The heart idolatries and sin issues with their consequences are framed as commands to us. This is an important use of the Old Testament, particularly, Exodus.

In images, God interpreted their lives and events as types (analogies, metaphors) pointing forward to greater realities (v. 11a). The word here as in verse six comes from a Greek word meaning an impression, a pattern, a seal, a stamp, or an inlaid image. We use the word "type" to refer to this use of the Old Testament. Types are not just limited to things, but also include events and people as evident from the context here (v.1-6). A type is an intentional representation of a greater physical or spiritual reality whose contours correspond to the reality.

For instruction, God recorded their lives and events to teach us about Christ and all God has made Him to be for us and to us (v. 11b). We must read the Old Testament in a way that highlights the Lord Jesus Christ. These are not just stories about what happened to people. They are orchestrated by God's sovereign providence and recorded by God's superintending power to teach us about the redeeming and transforming work of Christ.

Therefore, we will humble ourselves under the practical application of this great book so that we do not sin in the way they did.

The Oppression of God's People Exodus 1

Moses begins the book of Exodus connecting it to Genesis. In Genesis, we have the beginning of all things. Israel begins as a single clan of twelve tribes. During the 400 years of captivity, God formed them to become a people. In the Exodus, God is making them into a nation.

The Situation of the Nation in Egypt (v.1-7)

Israel is living now as a people in a foreign land. They are not in the Promised Land. They are in Egypt.

Their Presence in Egypt (v.1-6)

Moses connects Exodus to Genesis in two ways: through the family lineage and through Joseph. They came to Egypt and remained separate from the Egyptians and retained their tribal identity. These 11 sons came down into Egypt with their father. The 12th son, Joseph, was already there. He came down as a slave. They came down and would become slaves.

They came as a clan of seventy persons. While they certainly had many more servants in their families, there seventy persons in the 12 tribes at the time they arrived in Egypt. But that generation had all died. There is more intimated here than just a physical reality. In their death and in the passing centuries and generations, something was distinctly lost.

Their Prosperity in Egypt (v7)

Moses also connects the people of Israel with the promises to Abraham. God had promised him innumerable descendents, as vast as the sands of the sea. This promise was now being fulfilled, even in a foreign land. Moses emphasizes their prosperity by repetition. They were fruitful and had many children. They were great in their number and in their power. They filled the land that was allocated to them. They were a vibrant, bustling, successful people.

The Slavery of the People in Egypt (v.8-14)

A new king arose over Egypt. Acts 7:18 says that he was a different king from those before him. He had a different heart than those who came before and was unfamiliar with the history of the Israelites. He did not know the prominent place Joseph held in Egyptian history 400 years ago. He surveyed this great immigrant population and saw a threat.

Out of Fear of their Greatness (v.8-11)

He was fearful of their greatness. He said, "They are too mighty and too many." In his view, the Israelites posed a threat to the prosperity, peace and power of Egypt. He was particularly fearful that they would form an alliance with an enemy. Egypt would then be faced with war in its interior and on its borders. However, he did not want them to "escape from the land." He saw them as a necessary ingredient to Egypt's prosperity. So, he decided to turn them into a nation of slave laborers. By the sweat of their brow, he would build massive cities and

monuments. He began to move to enslave them. He set task masters over them. He would weaken them by subjugating them.

In the Harshness of their Labor

(v.12-14)

But it didn't work. Even in growing harshness and hardness, they continued to multiply and increase in numbers. They began to spread throughout Egypt. The more he oppressed them, the more they spread. The people themselves began to fear the Israelites. With the typical folly of tyrants, he increased the pressure. He made life more miserable.

In two sentences both painful and powerful, Moses sums up the terribleness of slavery. "So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves" (v.13-14). The slavery imposed by the Pharaoh was not just to get the work done. It was intended to break down the spiritual and physical strength and vitality of the people. It was ruthless and ruinous.

Egypt in the Scriptures is a type of the world and sin. While it has its delicacies and delights, it also has its slavery and its suffering. Both are intended by the vile master of this world to destroy you. Down, down you will sink as sins coil wrap tighter around your soul. Hard, hard will life become in tiresome and troubling slavery.

The Slaughter of the Sons in Egypt

(v.15-22)

From slavery to slaughter this terrible tyrant descends. If he cannot destroy them with hard work, he will cut off a whole generation of their males.

The Worthiness of the Midwives

(v.15-21)

Pharaoh summoned the leaders of the mid-wives. He ordered them to begin killing the new born males. He intended to destroy a whole generation. He is attacking the vitality of the nation. As a pagan worshipping the Egyptian idols, his orders make religious if not logical sense. But in the long trajectory there is the shadow here of dark days around Bethlehem when the Redeemer came and all throughout the land, boys 2 years old and younger were also slaughtered in a vain hunt for the newly born Messiah.

But at the heart of this paragraph was the godly disobedience by the midwives rooted in the fear of God (v.17). Pharaoh acted out of fear of Israel's prosperity. The midwives acted out of the fear of the Lord. They spared the infant boys because they have a deep reverence for the greatness of God in their hearts. Fearing God casts out fearing man.

The Pharaoh confronted them about their disobedience. Why have they done this? In a sarcastic comment on the Egyptian women, the midwives tout the strength and vigor of the Jewish women. Unlike the wilting and weak Egyptian women, the lively Jewish women gave birth before the midwives even get there.

Now, the response of the midwives has caused lots of consternation by commentators. Most have seen it as the sin of lying. They simply were misleading the Pharaoh even if their words were the bare truth. They clearly meant for the Phar-

pharaoh to think that they had no opportunity to kill the babies. So what do we make of this? Do we like Calvin say that God used the sinful lies to accomplish His ends? Does God use sin to accomplish what He purposes? Yes, that is true. But I do not believe that what the midwives said here is sin.

Notice verses 20 and 21. “So God dealt well with the midwives. The people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, He gave them families.” In their culture there is no greater commendation God could have given them. Moses says God was good to the midwives. He multiplied the people and He gave them families of their own. Just so we don’t miss it, Moses records again that they feared God. Now, you have to work out in your own mind what this means. But on several occasions in the Old Testament, “lying” to the enemies of God and His people is not sin. To have either obeyed the Pharaoh or to have told him the truth would have aided and abetted his evil. In reverence for God, they stood for life and resisted infanticide.

The Wickedness of the Egyptians (v.22)

In a final decree of gross depravity, the Pharaoh ordered every Egyptian to throw Hebrew infant boys into the Nile. This ensured that his order will be carried out. The Egyptian people were afraid of the Hebrews. They had every selfish reason to do what the Pharaoh decreed. So he has enlisted the general population in genocide.

These were dreadful days for God’s people. They had lost their status, their freedom, their labor and now their little boys. Egypt was becoming a dark place. They were groaning under the weight of their slavery and grieving over the loss of their children. Where is God in the midst of such suffering? Who will deliver them?

The lessons of Exodus Moses intended for the people of Israel are the lessons we need to learn as well. **Conclusion**

God's purposes for our lives will often place in us in difficult places and dark hours. There will sudden and surprising reversals. New bosses at work. A sudden change in family life. Unexpected closing of school. Distressing discovery from a medical exam. In all of these God is at work. He is carrying out His sovereign plan. These are not catching Him by surprise. They are being skillfully, wisely and lovingly allowed to do the work He intends. Believing that this is so will strengthen our hearts to keep doing well.

Egypt in the Bible is a type of the fallen world and sin. Sin can be a terrible task master. Its grip progressive and painful. It brings grinding hardship to our lives. Even its pleasure soon becomes illusive and unattainable. Many of you know this to be true. While it should not master you, it does. You have yielded to it so much that now its chains hold you tight.

Being delivered from our sin requires a deliverer. Jesus has not only delivered us from the penalty of our sin, but also from its power. You do not need to be enslaved to it. The message of Exodus then is for you. From slavery to worship, may God do that for each of us through this study.

The fear of God conforms our hearts to the greatness and holiness of God. The midwives risked everything to preserve life and protect people. They do so, not just as an affirmation of life, but in the fear of God. This is not a craven fear like the fear of man or guilty fear over sin. Rather, we need the Spirit to instill in our hearts a reverential fear of Him that causes us to walk with courage and calmness. Through Exodus, may God be pleased to fill our hearts with an awe of Him in who He is and what He will do.

As Jude wrote long ago but still fresh on the pages of our Bibles and on the flesh of our hearts:

Now, I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved (delivered) a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." [Jude 6, ESV]

Here is Jesus to you: He will deliver you out of your sin. If you do not believe in Him, He will one day stand to destroy you because of your sin. Repent today. Cast yourself on His very great mercies. Bow to Him as your deliverer. Call on Him and He will save you.