

From Pasture to Brickyard

Exodus 1:1-22

Introduction

If we were to take a survey today, and ask you to jot down the books of the Bible that you have been reading for your own study or devotional time, I have a feeling that Exodus would not make the list. We consider this stuffy Old Testament book, written thirty-five centuries ago, not very appropriate to today. However, I think, as we study this book in our continuing study through the entire Bible, you will discover with me, that this book is as fresh and living and appropriate to our times as if it had been written this past week.

I hope you will come to learn, as I have, to love all of the Bible, including this book that we know so little about. Other than learning something of Moses or reading where the Old Testament Ten Commandments were first given, we seldom turn to the book of Exodus. I hope you will learn to love it as much as I.

Exodus – Changes Among the Israelites

The book of Exodus is really a sequel to the book of Genesis, which we have just completed studying. However, between the last verse of Genesis, chapter 50, and the first verse of Exodus, chapter 1, three hundred years of events have taken place and a number of things have changed.

Blessing: The covenant is becoming more evident

1. One thing that has changed is that the covenant is becoming more evident among the Hebrews.

Verses 6a and 7 of Exodus, tells us,

Joseph died . . . But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

We have previously studied the Abrahamic covenant, which was three-fold. God promised to Abraham, and to all the Israelites, three things, as His covenant people:

- seed; that is, they would multiply and literally, fill the earth;
- blessing; that is, they would multiply in their financial resources, in their herds, and in all that material things could give them;
- land; a promise that was not yet fulfilled.

The Israelites are now in Egypt, as they have been since Joseph and the seventy member tribe of Jacob had come there to live. You may remember that they came in order to survive the famine in the land. So for three hundred years, the Hebrew people have been living in another land. They have been prospering and their seed has been multiplying, but they still do not have Canaan; they do not have the promised land yet. Exodus is the Old Testament book that tells us the story of the way God will bring the Israelite back to the land.

Now, we get the name Exodus from the Greek translators of the Old Testament. In fact, it is a Greek word that when transliterated into our language, gives us the word “exit”. You might want to write into the margin of your Bible by the name of Exodus, the words “departure,” or “the way out,” or “going out”. This book is a story of how the Israelites exited Egypt and entered the promised land.

Exodus is also a book about the redemption from God because, as the Israelites are held in bondage to the Egyptian taskmasters, God prepares a redeemer, “Mosheh,” or Moses, to bring them out. Thus, the illustration is given that in our own lives, we, being in bondage to sin, have been given the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and have entered the promised position of being in Him.

Bondage: The King of Egypt is new

2. The second change that has occurred over these three hundred or more years is given to us in verse 8, which says,

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

This king was perhaps, Thutmose III. He was one of the kings, or Pharaohs, in a new dynasty. We are

told that he did not “know,” which is the Hebrew word “yada,” and means that he did not have any association with Joseph.

To this young ruler, Joseph was just a compilation of stories – some so exaggerated and so outrageous that surely, they must be fiction. He did not know anyone who had been associated with Joseph. No king was now living who could give him firsthand stories of this amazing man. So, he felt no obligation to Joseph or to the tribe that once numbered seventy people, but is now nearly three million.

As a result of this Pharaoh not knowing Joseph, some other things transpire. Look at verses 9 and 10.

He said to his people, “Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely [outsmart] them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us . . .”

Now, during Joseph’s reign as prime minister, several instruments had been introduced into Egypt – the chariot, the lance, and other materials of warfare. Until this time, Egypt had had no desire to engage in battle. Now, however, these elements had been introduced and in the eastern horizon, there was a cloud of war that seemed imminent from enemies of Egypt.

The Egyptians were afraid that this two to three million band of people would align themselves with the enemy, and thus, overthrow Egypt. So the Pharaoh says, “We need to do something. We’ve got to outsmart them somehow.”

Pharaoh’s three-fold plan against the Israelites

The Pharaoh then, inaugurates a three-fold plan; an extermination agenda to handle the Israelites.

Plan A - Discourage

- The first part of the Pharaoh’s plan was intended to discourage the Israelites.

Notice verse 11.

So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses.

Pithom and Raamses are cities that have been unearthed by archaeologists. They were storage

cities. Egypt, being so wealthy, had fleets of ships floating by on the Nile that would deposit their treasures. They needed somewhere to hold or house these treasures prior to selling them, so they built huge, elaborate cities. We know that these cities, Pithom and Raamses, were built by the Hebrew slaves not only from scripture, but from murals that have been discovered.

Archaeologists, in fact, have been helpful in introducing us to this entire legacy of taskmasters. One obelisk or pillar was discovered and unearthed that has a mural. The mural shows two men holding whips and before them, people bowing to the ground in the work of making bricks. The inscription below the mural is readable, so they have translated it from old Egyptian, or hieroglyphics. The taskmasters, holding their whips, are saying, “Work without fainting.” This is perhaps a mural of the time that the Israelites were making bricks to build these cities of Pithom and Raamses.

Now note verse 12 – the plan was not working very well. The Egyptians had hoped to discourage the Israelites into thinking that it would be better to die than to propagate their line in this land.

But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel.

So the more the Egyptians discouraged these Israelites; the more they beat them; the more they forced them into labor camps and out into the fields, taking them away from family and friends; the more they tried, the more this tribe multiplied.

We are told in this verse that the Egyptians, “were in dread of the sons of Israel.” The word “dread,” is a word that refers to someone being sick or nauseated over. The Egyptians looked at this multiplying band of Hebrew aliens and it nauseated them. They were in dread; they were sick, so that every time they saw them, they thought, “Oh, they will multiply and ultimately, overthrow us.”

The Egyptians are losing sleep over these people. They had no idea that the Israelites were not a warring people – at least, not at this point. These Hebrew slaves had no desire to conquer Egypt. They simply desired to get along with themselves and do what they believed their leaders, under God’s covenant, commanded them to do.

So plan A was to discourage the Israelites so that they would throw up their hands and say, “There’s no need of developing a family. Who cares? We’re going to die under these taskmasters.”

Plan B – Deceive

- The first plan did not work, so the new Pharaoh inaugurates plan B. He tells the Israelite midwives to kill the newborn sons.

Notice what happens in verse 15.

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah, and the other was named Puah;

These names, respectively, are interpreted “beauty” and “splendor”. I think it is ironic that God chose women with these names, who were evidently, the leaders of the midwives.

We know the Israelites are multiplying at a very fast rate, so there must have been twenty or thirty, or perhaps even more midwives busily at work. In that day, this was an occupation that was taken up by Hebrew women who had never married. These Hebrew women midwives were continually in demand now.

Shiphrah and Puah probably represented that group of midwives and that occupation of midwifery. Pharaoh calls these two women in, hoping to intimidate them and perhaps, to impress them with the glory of Egypt. Verse 16 gives us the dogma he hands down to them.

And he said, “When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death . . .

In other words, when you are delivering into this world one of those Hebrew children, the moment it is arriving, or upon the birthstool, “if it is a son, then you shall put him to death”.

It would only take slight pressure on the throat for a minute or so to snuff out life. The midwives could then tell these Hebrew mothers that the child was stillborn. It seemed like a clever plot. Pharaoh could get on with his business and no one would really know. However, the character of these Hebrew women would be compromised. Pharaoh was hoping for turncoats; for someone to betray their own people. He said, therefore, “take their lives.”

Note verse 17 and underline what it says about these midwives. It is repeated in verse 21.

But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.

This is an interesting construction. It is talking about a midwife not simply allowing the boy to be born, but it uses an aggressive verb that literally means they redoubled their efforts. They were there at the birthing stool and they would say to each other, “Hey, it’s a boy. Let’s make sure it lives.”

At some point, the news got back that the mortality rate among Hebrew boys was improving. The plan was not working very well because these midwives had great conviction. They were willing to say to an authority, “No.” That is a word that is sadly missing in the English vocabulary.

Now, when we get to a passage like this, people start fidgeting. This is one of those tough passages of scripture that is hard to interpret and much harder to apply. However, if we approach it, as we always do, literally and apply it literally, I think we can come up with a great application.

These women said, “No,” to an authority because they believed in a higher authority – that being God. The local authority told them to disobey the moral law; the command of God. The law or the commands of God had not yet been written, by the way, that occurs a few chapters later. However, they, knowing God and having been made in His image, would know that life has value and that they are not to take life. So, risking their own lives, they said, “No.”

Ladies and gentlemen, you may or may not recognize the fact that the reason you hold in your hand the Bible translated into English, is because someone like William Tyndale, said to the established church, “No.”

Tyndale said, “I desire to put the Bible into the language of the plow boy; the common person. It doesn’t need to be chained to the pulpits, written in Latin. Let’s get it out among the people.”

William Tyndale said, “No,” and lost his life.

The reason we are sitting in a church like this; that is, Protestant, with the root word being “protest,” is because there were men like a monk named Martin Luther. Luther dared to say, “No,” to papal decree.

Martin Luther said, “Salvation is by grace through faith alone.”

Because of Luther's character, we now worship the way we do.

You may have an authority over you – perhaps an employer who says, “Manipulate the financial reports. Let's show an increase, not a loss, this quarter.”

What do you say?

When you are offered something from a peer – some substance – and they say, “Look, everybody's involved in this. Take this. Do this.”

What do you say? No?

Our government legalizes things that violate the authority and the character of God; such as, legalized abortion. Do we say, “No”? They will legalize prostitution and homosexuality. Do we have the courage and the character to say, “No”?

For those of you who are growing up in the public school system, you will be told that this abortion is a viable option. Yet, I trust you will learn from these midwives that there is value in life and that to disobey God would be to disobey the highest authority anywhere – and you would say, “No.”

So, this plan did not work. The Pharaoh thought he was getting two midwives and instead, he got two evangelists who went around making sure that all the Hebrew boys lived.

Plan C – Destroy

- So, the Pharaoh inaugurates his third and most horrible plan. He commands all of the newborn Hebrew sons to be thrown into the Nile River.

Look at verse 22.

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every [Hebrew] son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive.

Now, understand something that is underneath what is written. It is in the context of what we understand to have taken place in Egypt. The highest god to the Egyptians was the Nile god. Pharaoh knew that he would have perhaps, mutiny on his hands if he suggested something this overt, so hidden in these words is a suggestion to do something religious. He basically said, “Let's see if the Nile god will allow these children to live.”

We have records of temples in Egypt. One of the most gruesome, that sends chills up and down my

spine, is the temple of thieves. I have a picture of it in a book in my study. The temple of thieves was built along the river Nile. The Nile was, at this time, infested by the servants of the god Nile – crocodiles. This temple was given to child sacrifice. It had stairs leading down the embankment right into the waters of the Nile. There they would practice their religious practice of child sacrifice. The priests would hurl babies into the air and out into the waters as sacrifices to their Nile god.

The Pharaoh is saying, “We have these aliens in the land and they don't worship our gods. They don't worship the Nile god, so let's offer to him an appeasement and see if his servants will allow the children to live.”

I doubt there was a very high rate of non-acceptance from the servants.

Note that this will take place and it will last for eighty years. This introduces a horrible moment in the history of Israel. I can imagine that the fathers are building underground rooms where their newborn sons can hide. I can imagine that attics are built or sheds are used as infant nurseries to keep the Egyptians from finding out that a boy was born into the family. If the Egyptians found out, the boy would be snatched from the home, taken to the Nile, and offered as a religious sacrifice to the Nile god. This would continue until Moses leads the people out.

I have mentioned abortion and I am not quite finished with that. One of the reasons that I fear that movement is because it will take our country to the next logical step, which is, infanticide, euthanasia, and many other such horrible things. The woman who founded Planned Parenthood, or Margaret Sanger, is heralded as a saint today. Let me read something that she wrote. Listen carefully.

Abortion appeals to the advanced radical because it is calculated to undermine the authority of the Christian church. I look forward to seeing humanity free someday from the tyranny of Christianity.

The Planned Parenthood movement has nothing to do with free choice. It has nothing to do with the right of a woman. It has everything to do with rebellion against the value of life that has been given to us from God. It is a value that is adopted by these Hebrews in Exodus, chapter 1.

There was a man who recently died, who wrote of what would become the next step. His name was Francis Crick, and he wrote,

No newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment. If it fails these tests, it forfeits the right to live. If a child were not declared alive until three days after birth, then all parents could be allowed the choice only a few are given under the present system. The doctor could allow the child to die, if the parents so chose, and save a lot of misery and suffering. I believe this view is the only rational, compassionate attitude to have.

Did you catch this? Let's not declare children alive until three days after birth.

This movement has nothing to do with compassion; nothing to do with rationale; nothing to do with freedom of choice. It has everything to do with violating the values of a God who says human life is precious, so protect it; it has everything to do with violating the authority and character of the God of this Bible.

Sanger, Crick, and others like them are people who place themselves as little gods and declare who will live and who will die. The tragedy is, our country is on the way to being like Exodus, chapter 1. The Egyptians did it in the name of religion; Americans do it in the name of civil liberty. Are we willing – should they coerce us – to say, “No”? I trust you will.

Applications

In this first chapter of Exodus, there are applications for the this century. I have hinted at some, but let me give you two more.

In this chapter, I observed the Hebrews under cruel circumstances and opposition. They are afraid for the lives of their sons, as we will observe more closely in our next discussion through one family who had a little boy that they named Moses. I came up with a couple of thoughts that I think might encourage you. Let me give these two timeless truths.

While affliction seems unfair, it is often necessary

1. First, while affliction seems unfair, it is often necessary.

Satan has his scheme, and that is to exterminate the chosen nation from which Jesus Christ will come. That is his thought; that is his plan, “Let’s

exterminate the Jew; let’s get rid of the Hebrew, the line from which Jesus Christ, the Messiah, will come.

While Satan is inaugurating his plan, God is, in His sovereignty, designing another. It is this affliction, this opposition of the Hebrews in Egypt, whereby He stirs the pot and makes their lives very uncomfortable. As a result, they are willing to risk the bold exodus.

It has been very easy for the Hebrews. In fact, it has been very easy for them to be at home in Egypt. So God is using this affliction to make these people desirous of leaving all of the luxury, all of that which they have in Goshen for a rocky region known as Canaan. Why would four million, at that time, go there? God is using this to refocus, to redirect, to remind them that they have been given a promised land.

Look back at Genesis, chapter 15. God knew what He was doing. In fact, He had already told Abraham that this would happen. Notice verse 13.

God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.”

Note that the Israelites were in Egypt four hundred years to the day. God knew exactly how long they would be there. He said, in verse 14,

But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve [Egypt], and afterward they will come out [the same Greek word, “exodus”] with many possessions.

God knew how long it would last. It must have seemed unfair to the Israelites and they were probably wondering what God had intended when He told Abraham that they would be a nation that would multiply, when now they are being slaughtered and their sons are being thrown into the Nile. Yet, God knew that the trial would not be permanent.

While God seems absent, He is always at work.

2. The second thought is that while God seems absent, He is *always* at work.

Look at verse 7 of Exodus, chapter 3. God came to that little baby boy Moses, who had now grown into manhood and who would be the redeemer.

The Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of

their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.”

I love that. In other words, “They think I’m gone; they think I’m absent; they think I don’t see. Yet, I have seen; I have observed; I know everything that has transpired.”

In our lives, ladies and gentlemen, afflictions may come, although probably not this drastic. You may be facing the possibility of losing a position if you do not go along with unbiblical ethics. You may fear losing a job, losing a reputation, losing a friend because you say, “No.” Perhaps you are threatened right now with the thought that God is absent and not at work and that would be a demise in your spiritual relationship as well.

God is at work. With the Israelites, even though their situation was horrible, He had kneaded it through His sovereign hand and knew how long it would last – not a day over four hundred years. He was preparing for them to return to the promised land.

I read a story this past week, of a little boy who was in a grocery store with his dad. He was carrying a basket and walking down the aisles beside his dad. His dad would take an item off the shelf and put it in his basket. As more items were added, the little boy’s basket appeared to be getting rather heavy. Another customer noticed and felt sympathetic toward the boy. She said to him, “That basket is getting awfully heavy, isn’t it?”

The little boy stuck his chest out and replied, “Oh, don’t worry, my daddy knows how much I can carry.”

So does your heavenly Father.