

Exodus – Lesson 2

Israel Sojourning in Egypt

Read Exodus 1:1-7

- (a) From the Introduction to Exodus lesson provided last week, during what *historical Age* do the events of this book occur? Why is that significant?

The events of Exodus probably occur during the Late Bronze Age, dated from c. 1550-1200BC. This is significant because it represents a specific time in the history of Egypt where the politics of the nation were such that the Hebrews would be enslaved by an empire rising in power, and enough time would have elapsed from the Early Bronze Age for them to have grown into a nation of people ready to be taken by God back to Palestine.

- (b) How long is the *gap* (in years) between the end of Genesis and the beginning of this book? How long does *Paul* understand it to be in Galatians 3:17?

Although the actual length of the gap is not mentioned here, we assume its length based on two factors: 1) the prophecy made to Abraham in Genesis 15:31 says that the people will remain in Egypt for 400 years, and 2) the length of this stay is repeated elsewhere at about the same length of time. In Galatians 3, for example, Paul pegs this length more specifically at 430 years. This “difference” is not significant, for Hebrews treated numbers in their written documents more as approximations rather than specific lengths. The length of the captivity was probably not *exactly* 400 years anyway (that would not have been God’s intention in giving the number to Abraham).

- (a) From these verses, list the *brothers* of Joseph that went to Egypt. How many are in the list?

The brothers include: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. The total is 11; Joseph is already in Egypt (to make 12). The list, however, does *not* define the 12 tribes of Israel as the land is eventually split up. The sons of Levi do not receive a specific inheritance of land, and neither does Joseph. Instead, the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, would become the two who would head up tribes settling in Canaan to replace Levi and represent Joseph.

- (b) How many *total* people went with Jacob to Egypt? Who made up this list (in general)?

70 people went in to Egypt with the family of Jacob. This included the direct descendants of Jacob along with their entire households; their wives, their children, and their servants. In Egypt, God multiplied this family so that by the time of the exodus ~430 years later, at least 1 million people left (see Exodus 12:37; 600,000 men plus women and children).

- (c) According to Genesis 41:56-57, *why* did the family of Jacob move to Egypt? How is this an act of a *sovereign* God?

God had ordained a famine to strike the entire world, including the land of Canaan. Jacob and his family, in order to avoid starvation, had gone to Egypt previously to buy grain. Joseph, the viceroy in Egypt during a seven-year period of plenty, had stored up grain in anticipation of this famine, and was now selling grain to anyone who needed it. Joseph, through the sovereign plan of God (see Genesis 50:20), had been sent to Egypt for just this purpose. In the end, the entire family of Jacob was forced into Egypt because the God-ordained famine had made it necessary; the family of Jacob would be protected in Egypt.

3. (a) Read Genesis 15:12-16. Why do you think that God *ordained* this family to move away from the land they were given through Abraham?

The move into Egypt was only temporary; God had purposed that the descendants of Abraham would possess this land, but he had also prophesied (in Genesis 15:13-14) that he would place these descendants into Egypt for a period of time to protect them *while they grew into a nation of people* and were ready to possess the land *fully*. Abraham (in Genesis 12) had entered into Egypt previously because of a famine, but this was *not* what God had ordered Abraham to do. In this case, however, the sojourning of Israel in Egypt was *directly* ordained by God in a place where they would be able to become a nation without being intertwined with other peoples or cultures. Since the Egyptians hated shepherds (see Genesis 46:31-34), the Israelites were allowed to live separated from the Egyptians preventing their culture from polluting the family of Jacob.

- (b) Cite a *New Testament* example of God protecting someone in this way.

In Matthew 2:13-15, Jesus' family fled with him to Egypt to protect him from Herod's anger. The sovereign plan of God for Jesus, as with the Hebrews, required Jesus to sojourn in Egypt for a period of time in order to protect him from evil forces. In the case of Jesus, the evil force was Herod, who desired to maintain his throne through force by killing anyone who aspired to it. In the case of the Hebrews, the sovereign plan of God was for the family of Jacob to reside there until they had matured into a nation of people and to be protected from the cultural influences of the Canaanites (and from the Egyptians).

- (c) Why does Moses include this summary, as a retelling of the events of Genesis 41, at the *beginning* of this book?

Since Exodus is a completely different book (scroll) than Genesis, the inclusion of this retelling is simply to place some context around the statement in v. 8. Someone picking up this book would need to understand how the Hebrews got to this place. But, it is also a way of reminding the *original readers* that they belong to a "history" that goes back to Jacob himself, and (of course) to his father and grandfather (Abraham and Isaac). Thus, the Israelites heading for the Promised Land are (once again) being reminded of their place in the plans of God, and they should be careful to obey what God commands, since he is sovereign over their direction.

4. (a) What is the significance of 1:6 to the *overall* story (compare it to 1:8)?

There are several significances to this verse as it applies to the overall story: 1) the death of Joseph and that *entire* generation reminds us of the fact that the family of Jacob did not immediately return to Canaan after the famine was over, but remained in Egypt. The reasons for this are not revealed in the story, although it can be deduced that God "kept" them there in order for the events of this book to unfold; 2) the rise of a "*new king*" (i.e. a dynastic Pharaoh, probably Ahmose I) who does not have direct access to Joseph and is unconcerned about his position in Egypt paves the way for the enslavement of the Hebrews and their eventual exodus from Egypt; 3) the death of Joseph and his brothers reminds us that God was more concerned about the *national* identity of the Hebrews rather than the specific individuals who started it. Although God consistently calls himself the God "*of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*" (see Exodus 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5) the term is most often used to define the specific *people* (i.e. nation) that comes from that lineage and who God is most concerned with. The death of the first generation ends the period of the patriarchs, and God now turns his attention to the people he has formed in Egypt.

(b) If the people were so populous and “strong” (v. 7), why is it that they were eventually oppressed under slavery?

The story seems to imply that the Egyptians got the upper-hand with them because they had the militaristic might to do so. Clearly, the Egyptians were afraid of the numerousness of the Hebrews and were forced to do something with them so that they wouldn’t turn and fight against the Egyptians (see v. 10), so they “conquered” them and turned them into slaves. The historical evidence seems to bear this out: the XVIII Dynasty of Egypt is well-known for its militaristic might, bringing it to the pinnacle of power in the ancient world. It is during this time that the Hebrews were enslaved, so it seems to make sense that the Egyptians were able to conquer them with military power. However, the *real* reason that the Hebrews were enslaved is because it was God’s plan for this to be so (see Genesis 15) because it would *force the Hebrews to cry out to God!* A people living in comfort in Egypt would have *no* compelling reason to want to leave; a people living in slavery would seek a way of escape. Since it was God’s intention for the Hebrews to return to Canaan once they were fully numbered as a nation, this enslavement would be the perfect way to cause them to cry out to him for deliverance. As strange as this seems, it argues perfectly for the fact that God will often use difficulties and tribulations to mold his people and to force them to rely on him *alone* for their redemption (see Hebrews 12:3-11).

5. (a) Compare 1:6 to 3:13-15. What *happened* to the people after this initial generation died?

It would appear, from the question that Moses asks God, that the people had lost any sort of *direct* relationship with God and had come to the point of being unfamiliar with who he was. They had not lost their belief in God or their fear of him (see 1:17, 20), but they were no longer in a *direct* relationship with him in the way that Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob had enjoyed. None of the patriarchs ever needed to ask a question of God related to his *identity*; they knew him and had personal contact with him through a number of *theophanies* (see Genesis 15, 18,32). But, once they were gone, direct and personal contact with God was no longer available, and over 400 years the people began to lose their understanding of who this God was. Other evidence of this is revealed by how the people responded to the exodus when things got tough; in each case the Hebrews complained *against Moses* and failed to recognize the work of God on their behalf.

- (b) How would you describe the *spiritual* condition of the descendants of Jacob at this point?

Given the answer to 5a above, it seems reasonable that the Hebrews had formed a *syncretistic* form of religion and spirituality, “borrowing” some of the pagan Egyptian practices and polytheism to form a hybrid version of Yahweh worship. This is evidenced by the fact that they so quickly reverted to these practices in the Golden Calf event (see Exodus 32) when Moses was delayed coming down from Sinai with a new law governing all matters of faith and practice in Israel. Certainly God allowed this to be so while the people were in Egypt, but once they had been freed, he immediately establishes his law over them to force out this pagan worship practice and focus the attention of the people solely on himself.