



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Exodus

Lesson 1: Introduction to Exodus

Second only to Jesus’ total domination over the powers of Satan in His resurrection, the most incredible supernatural showdown in the history of mankind is found in the first 18 chapters of Exodus. God Almighty, Creator of the Universe, versus the many gods of the Egyptians. Exodus 12:12 states, “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord.”

While it is good to ensure to teach such important historical accounts to our kiddos in Bible class, the danger with such well-known and well-loved accounts as “The 10 Plagues” and “Jonah and the Great Fish” or “The Great Flood,” is that we often sanitize them to the point that we miss what God is doing and why He’s doing it. We create cute little songs to help us remember the facts (please don’t get me wrong, I’m all about using songs to help us memorize) but often we leave out why those facts are important. Without realizing it, we take a rear-view mirror approach to these historical accounts and keep ourselves mentally and emotionally detached from the event God has preserved for us, which in turn almost inevitably keeps us from fully experiencing the impact of God’s tremendous power.

The goal of this study is to dive into this well-known and well-loved text in a way that perhaps we haven’t before. To notice amazing nuggets and facts that God included for us, which perhaps we miss in our Bible class overviews of this account. And finally, to really consider what it would have been like to live through these events. Specifically, we will see how the Israelites, the Egyptians, Moses and Aaron, and Pharaoh in particular each respond to God at different

points in the account. I believe that many of us, if we are transparently honest, would say that we have been able to identify with each of these approaches at one point in our life or another. Join us as we dive into the first 15 chapters of Exodus and observe the incredible ways God demonstrates both His provision and His prominence.

Before You Begin: Take some time to consider how you currently view the first 18 chapters of Exodus. Has that mostly been informed through childhood Bible classes?

Think About It: What are some ways we can make historical accounts more realistic in our Bible classes, while also keeping them age-appropriate?

Basic Information

Exodus is the second book of the Pentateuch, which is composed of the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. “Pentateuch” means “Five Scrolls,” and is frequently referred to as “The Law” or “Torah” (Roper 2). It is commonly accepted that Moses is the human author of all five books, as seen in texts such as Numbers 33:1-2 and Deuteronomy 1:1. Also, in passages such as John 7:19, Jesus equates Moses and the giving of the law, which is an emphasis in these five books. It is widely accepted that the book of Exodus was written at approximately the time it occurred, which was around 1290 B.C. (Roper 4).



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There is some discrepancy among scholars regarding the date of authorship, however the two main camps are 1290 B.C., or 1445 B.C. (Roper 4).

Interestingly, in the Hebrew the text of what we refer to as Exodus begins with, “now these,” this implies a continuous story from what has just been written in Genesis. Indeed, when Genesis concludes in Chapter 50 Joseph has risen to become the second most powerful man in Egypt, he has a tearful reunion with his father, Jacob, his entire family moves to Egypt, and at the ripe old age of 110 Joseph passes away. Exodus then begins in 1:1 with the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, continuing this narrative.

Exodus is an integral transitional period from the patriarchal age in Genesis, to the Mosaic age, with the giving of the law beginning in Exodus 19. In Genesis we see God beginning to fulfill his promise to Abraham from Genesis 15:4-5, “And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” By the time Joseph’s family meets him in Egypt there are 70 of them, and they continued to multiply from there.

Now, God will begin to fulfill His promise from Genesis 12:1-2, “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.’” They entered Egypt as a family, they will leave Egypt as a mighty nation, set apart from all others by Jehovah.

The story of Exodus is a beautiful type/antitype depiction of God’s relationship with His people. Exodus begins with:

- God’s people in bondage

- God demonstrates His power over the Egyptian gods
- God’s people are protected by using a hyssop branch to spread the blood of the lamb on their doorpost
- The firstborn of every house dies
- God’s people are called out of the land of Egypt, and saved through water by crossing the Red Sea, leaving a divider between them and the world they left behind
- God’s spirit guides them through the new land

In the New Testament we see:

- We were in bondage to sin and Satan (Romans 6:17)
- Jesus demonstrated His power over demons (Mark 5:9-16)
- Jesus spills His blood and drinks from a hyssop branch before giving up His Spirit as the sacrificial lamb (John 19:29)
- God’s first born dies (John 19:30)
- We are called out of the world and saved by water through baptism, forever being separated from the world around us (1 Peter 3:21)
- The Holy Spirit guides us (Acts 2:38)

Think About It: As we dive into this study of God’s mighty deliverance of His people, think about the parallels with what He has done for us as Christians.



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Think About it: As we begin this study and we see how the Jews respond to both Moses and to God, consider what ways we may be similar and need to make some changes.

Outline of the Book

A simple outline of Exodus breaks the text down into two parts:

- I. The Deliverance (1-18)
- II. The Covenant (19-40)

However I prefer Warren W. Wiersbe's outline:

- I. The Deliverance (1-18)
- II. Covenant (19-24)
- III. Worship (25-40)

Pre-Study

Fifteen separate times throughout these fifteen chapters we will see a reference to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. In six of these instances the text simply states that Pharaoh's heart was hard (7:13, 7:14, 7:22, 8:19, 9:7, 9:35). In three instances the text states that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15, 8:32, 9:34). Yet six times Scripture states that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart (9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:8). Did Pharaoh harden his heart, or was it God? What does it even mean that his heart was hardened? This is an important concept to understand before jumping into the text.

First of all, it's important to note the cultural context in which this account is occurring. According to the ancient Egyptian belief system, upon one's death the god Anubis would lead them to stand before the god Osiris, at which point their heart would be weighed against a feather. If their heart was good, soft and lighter than a feather they would be allowed into an afterlife of peace, comfort and joy. However, if their heart was hard and heavier than a feather they would be taken to torment.

Interestingly, just this summer I had the incredible opportunity to visit the British Museum of History. While standing in a room full of mummies and relics we began to notice scarab beetles everywhere. I had known they were symbolic in the ancient Egyptian belief system, however I had not quite understood their significance or prominence. As we began to read and observe, we learned that these "Heart Scarabs" were used to protect a hard heart from Osiris' judgment. The scarabs would have a special "spell" engraved upon them that would prevent the heart from testifying against the individual, thereby ensuring their entrance to the afterlife. For the Egyptians, the concept of a "hard heart" would imply judgment and condemnation, which is exactly what God stated He would do in Exodus 12:12. God was warning the people that no "spell" and no "scarab" could protect a hard heart from His judgment because He already knew the state of their hearts.

With that cultural understanding, we also need to realize that there are references all throughout both the Old and the Testament to individuals with a hard heart:

"Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had dealt severely with them, did they not send the people away, and they departed?" 1 Samuel 6:6.



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“For it was the Lord’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the Lord commanded Moses,” (Joshua 11:20).

“They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts,” Zechariah 7:12.

“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened,” (Mark 6:51-52).

“But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed,” (Romans 2:5).

While we tend to focus on the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, this concept is not absent in the rest of Scripture. Nor is this concept only applied to Pharaoh. For example 1 Samuel 6:6 refers to the hardening of the Egyptian’s hearts, and this is even applied to the Israelites in Psalm 95:8.

We also need to keep in mind passages such as Acts 16:14, “One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her hear to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” If God forced Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened, then he also forced Lydia’s heart to be open, meaning that neither had any say in their eternal destination.

Finally, as in the instance of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 5:18-21, and I believe with Pharaoh as well, a hard heart is correlated with pride. In situations such as these an individual believes that they are powerful and strong enough that they have no need for God. In both of these situations God demonstrated His power,

yet it was still up to the individual to determine how they would respond to Him. Nebuchadnezzar chose to humble himself before the Almighty while Pharaoh chose to dig in his heels in rebellion.

One last area of consideration is that of the language used. I am certainly no Hebrew scholar, however this study led me to do quite a bit of research, during which I learned about the hiphil-form. In the original language, the hiphil-form (which is found in the instances of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart) can mean both “to cause” or to “allow.” We see examples of this in the translation of other texts. For instance there is a hiphil form of the Hebrew word, “abar” which means, “to cross.”

- Joshua 7:7 - God brought the people across the Jordan
- Numbers 32:5 - The people ask God not to make them cross
- Joshua 4:3 - They carry the stones across
- Deuteronomy 2:30 - Heshbon would not allow the people to cross

In these examples we see the same verbal form conveying: allowing the people to cross, preventing the people from crossing, and the physical act of carrying something else across (Jonathan Crowell’s sermon, “Who Hardened Pharaoh’s Heart”).

When all of this is taken into account, it becomes clear that Pharaoh alone was responsible for his actions. Did God know how Pharaoh would respond to the circumstances he was faced with? Absolutely. Did he allow those circumstances to transpire anyway, knowing that Pharaoh would become obstinately angry and dig in his heels? Certainly. Yet, if Pharaoh had chosen to yield to the Almighty, would God have accepted his repentance? Without a doubt.



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The same is certainly true for us today. We often hear the analogy that the same water that hardens the egg softens the potato. Without a doubt the most painful experience on earth is the death of a child. Sadly, I have known several couples who have walked this terrible path. Through this experience, some have hardened their hearts toward God and walked away from Him, furious, hurt and confused that He would allow such a horrible thing to happen. Others, however, have grown closer to God than ever before, softening their hearts in the hope only He provides, confident in the knowledge that His faithful will be reunited in eternity and they will see their child again.

We will each have trials, struggles and sorrows during our time on this earth. While some of our experiences may be similar, each situation is unique, and we will each be held accountable for how we respond to our heartbreaks. In addition, we will all have blessings poured out, some of them unexpected and more than we could ask or imagine. Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world, and he allowed that power, that blessing, to make him hard and arrogant. However, there will also be those like Joseph, who view their power as an opportunity, indeed an obligation, to provide for and protect others.

Think About It: Where are you at in your life? Blessings or heartaches, how have you responded? Have you allowed life to harden you to the God who loves you, or have you responded in humility and service?

Think About It: How does this understanding of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart affect the way you view Exodus and the 10 plagues?

Take Action: Are there things in your life, attitudes, or even people, that Satan is trying to use to harden your heart against your Savior? If so, what are some steps you can begin taking to soften your heart and humble yourself before the Lord?

References:

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Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Delivered* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1998), 8.