



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Exodus

Lesson 2: Exodus 1-2

As we prepare to dive into the text of Exodus chapters 1-18, it is important to remember the context of the world in which this incredible historical account occurs. There is a great fascination in our world with ancient Egyptian mythology. We love to read about it and watch movies about it, yet if we aren't careful this will hinder our approach to the text. The word "mythology" refers to a collection of myths or fables, stories that are fabricated and categorically untrue. As a result, when we approach ancient Egyptian mythology, I believe it is almost automatic to distance ourselves mentally and emotionally from what is transpiring. To our 21st century American minds, this belief system is so outlandish and unfounded it is comparable to believing in fantasies such as The Lord of the Rings.

That being said, to truly understand what is happening we must keep in mind that these were real people who truly believed in their gods with the same passion and fervor that we believe in Yahweh. We need to take a step back from the term "mythology," and be intentional to consider what these events would have meant to the individuals that experienced them. Along these lines, it is also important to consider the symbolism with which the ancient Egyptians viewed the world; everything from the Nile River to the sun had special meaning.

Before you begin: While it is with good reason that Exodus is full of accounts we focus on in our children's Bible classes and Vacation Bible Schools, take time to consider how these Bible classes and the term mythology may have tinted your perspective on the Exodus account.

Read Exodus 1:1-5

This text lists the descendants of Jacob that traveled to Egypt. While Exodus 1:5 says that 70 family members made the move, Acts 7:14 says 75. It has been suggested that this may be because Joseph's family was included in Stephen's recounting, or that both numbers are an average rather than an exact count.

Read Exodus 1:6-7

Joseph has died, but God has brought his people into the land of Egypt where they have been able to be fruitful and multiply. In the Truth for Today commentary on Exodus, brother Coy Roper postulates that God specifically brought His people into Egypt to allow them to be prosper and multiply. He points out that the nomadic lifestyle of shepherding that the fathers had lived would not have been conducive to fulfilling God's promise of raising a great nation from Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:1-3).

Read Exodus 1:8-14

Verse 8 sets the stage for the entire rest of the Exodus account. "There arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." God's people have been fruitful and multiplied for generations, but now Joseph and the wonders the Almighty did through him in saving the people through the drought have been forgotten.

It is often said that we are only one generation away from apostasy. One generation who doesn't remember is all it will take for our congregations, for our families, to wither and fade. We must be intentional to teach our children, our grandchildren, our nieces and



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nephews not only that we do believe in God, but *why* we believe in Him.

Think About It: In what ways are you being intentional to pass down what God has done for you to future generations?

Verses 9-14 have long baffled me for a few different reasons:

#1. It has never made sense to me why Pharaoh would think that the best way to ensure the Israelites wouldn't side with his enemies was to be horrible to them and turn them into slaves. It seems to me that perhaps Pharaoh did not think his plan through very thoroughly.

#2. I never understood why Pharaoh was so incredibly paranoid. The Israelites have lived peacefully among the Egyptians for generations, what reason did he have to think they might revolt against Egypt's leadership?

This is where we devolve into a bit of a history lesson. First of all, there is quite a bit of debate over the date of the Exodus account. Some scholars date the Exodus at approximately 1290 B.C., while others date it quite a bit earlier at approximately 1450 B.C.. If the later date is correct, then the Pharaoh Moses flees from was likely Seti I, and the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Ramses II. If the earlier date of 1450 is correct, then the Pharaoh Moses flees from was likely Thutmose III, and the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Amenhotep II.

Understanding the dates of the Exodus account can also help us understand why Pharaoh was so paranoid about immigrants gaining power. Egyptians were not always in power over Egypt. From approximately 1670-1550 B.C. Egypt was actually ruled by the Hyksos. The Hyksos were Asians who migrated into Egypt and multiplied. Early historians believed the

Hyksos to be barbarians who ravaged and pillaged their way onto the throne, however more modern archaeological finds have led some modern historians to believe that it was actually a slow take-over, where the Hyksos slowly assimilated into the Egyptian culture until they became prominent enough to seize power. Interestingly, it was actually the Hyksos, not the Egyptians, who created horse-drawn chariot, and ushered in a new era of bronze work that led to more efficient tools, weapons and irrigation.

If we accept the later date of the Exodus, it was only been 260 years since a foreign people actually did infiltrate and take over Egypt. If we accept the earlier date, it has only been 100 years. With this understanding, Pharaoh's concern and paranoia make a lot more sense. (For more information on the Hyksos see Britannica or the American Research Center in Egypt).

Think About It: How does understanding the history of the Hyksos aid in your understanding of the Exodus account?

Think About It: Pharaoh acted out of fear and not faith, and as we will see in the end it will cost him everything. Consider times you may have acted out of fear instead of faith, what was the end result? How can you be more intentional to focus on faith over fear in the future?

Read Exodus 1:15-22

It is interesting to note that we can only speculate regarding the identity of the Pharaoh, yet the names of Shiphrah and Puah are preserved throughout all eternity. There is quite a bit of disagreement over the nationalities of these two women. One camp



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maintains that they were the Egyptian midwives to the Hebrews, while others maintain that the midwives themselves were Hebrews. While it is difficult to say for sure, it seems very unlikely that Egyptians would lower themselves to the point of delivering slave babies.

It is also interesting to note that verse 15 is the first time we see the term “Hebrew” in Scripture. This term literally means, “one from the other side.” It is intriguing to wonder if this is a name that God gave His people, or if it was a descriptor given to them by the Egyptians. Additionally, verse 17 is the first time we see the name of God in this text.

Then Pharaoh gives the awful command, “kill the baby boys.” I cannot imagine how these two women felt in that moment. It is also a sign that, once again, Pharaoh isn’t thinking clearly. While certainly the boys would be the ones most likely to take up arms, if population control was his ultimate goal letting the girls live doesn’t make a lot of sense practically speaking.

As we come to verse 19, this (along with the story of Rahab) is one of the most hotly debated texts in Scripture. Does this text affirm that there are times lying is the right thing to do? Interestingly, there are some who posit that this was in fact not a lie and believe that the midwives intentionally delayed their arrival until the babies were born, because they were unwilling to kill the babies and knew that Pharaoh would ask them about it (Roper 29).

Regardless, focusing on this question misses the point of the text, which is found in verse 21, “And because the midwives feared God...” These women weren’t blessed because they lied, they were blessed because when they came face-to-face with Pharaoh, a man revered by his people as a god in his own right, they feared Yahweh. Because of the incredible faith of these two women countless babies were saved.

Yet, Pharaoh would not let it rest. When his plan to have the midwives kill the baby boys failed, he commanded his own people to commit infanticide. Imagine learning that you were pregnant during this time, and living in fear that you would have a boy. Imagine being the mother who knew at any moment your precious baby boy could be ripped out of your arms and thrown into the Nile to drown.

It’s also hard to imagine being the Egyptian citizen who was just commanded to murder infants. What do you do in that situation? Do you try to avoid areas where you might run into a Mama with a baby? Do you pretend not to see? Do you embrace the command, believing it to be the right thing to do?

When we consider the belief system of the ancient Egyptians, the Nile River was extremely meaningful. Not only did it provide life-giving water and fertile soil to an area that would have been desolate otherwise, it was also the heart of many of their religious beliefs. For the ancient Egyptians, the Nile River was considered to be the manifestation of the god Hapi, known as the “Father of Life.” It also had significant ties to the goddesses Ma’at, Hathor, Isis and Osiris. Finally, Knum was said to be the god of the source of the Nile. Knum is particularly important, as he was said to be the god of rebirth and creation (The Nile and Egyptian Religion, Florida State College at Jacksonville).

Think About It: For a civilization that believed deities tied to rebirth, creation and life were manifested in the Nile River, what symbolic importance might have been tied to offering their enemies’ children as a sacrifice to this god? Particularly at the behest of Pharaoh whom they also viewed as a god?



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Proverbs 6:17 tells us plainly that God hates hands that shed innocent blood. Imagine what it did to God’s heart to watch such an atrocity be done, especially to His chosen people. Eventually we will come to the 10th plague, where God will kill the firstborn of the land of Egypt. It is interesting to consider that perhaps this was two-fold in purpose: not only did this firmly establish God’s power over Pharaoh, it may also have been retribution for the innocent blood the Egyptians had shed.

Exodus 2

As we approach chapter two, we will be introduced to Moses. Moses’ life can be broken down into three 40 year periods:

1. The first 40 years living as royalty in Egypt (2:1-15)
2. The next 40 years living as a shepherd in Midian (2:16-4:17)
3. The last 40 years as the leader of the Israelites (Exodus 4:18-Deut. 34:8)

Read Exodus 2:1-3

This is where we are introduced to Moses, however God did not see fit to share the name of his parents here. However, we know from 6:20 that his father’s name was Amram, & his mother’s name was Jochebed. We do, however, learn that both of Moses’ parents were Levites. Amram and Jochebed are not only the parents of Moses, but as we will see later their descendants will also be the Levitical priests that will serve in the temple.

Read Exodus 2:3-4

The word for “basket of bulrushes” is the same Hebrew word as “ark” in Genesis 6-9. These are actually the only two instances in Scripture where this word is found (Roper), so it appears that the intent was for the reader to think of another life-saving vessel when reading about Moses’ life being preserved.

It’s also very ironic when you consider that Pharaoh had ordered that the babies be thrown into the Nile to murder them, yet Moses’ mother put him in the Nile to save him (Roper).

Think About It: Before you move on, stop and consider the similarities between Moses’ birth and Jesus’ birth.

Read Exodus 2:5-10

Keep in mind that Pharaoh’s own daughter is ignoring the edict to kill the Hebrew baby boys. While it is possible that she was comfortable doing so because she was a lesser princess who would likely go unnoticed, it is more likely that she was a favored princess who could get away with defying the king. This is most likely because, as we will see shortly, Pharaoh clearly knows about Moses yet there is no indication that the princess was punished for her defiance.

It is also doubtful that Jochebed just happened to place Moses in an area where the princess bathed. It is more likely that this was a calculated and intentional move on her part, and that the princess regularly bathed in the same area. It was also wise to leave Miriam to watch over her baby brother. We talk about Jochebed and Amram’s faith in hiding Moses, but Miriam and Aaron were part of the household as well. They were all willing to risk everything to try to keep him safe.

Not only was Miriam willing to help hide her baby brother for three months, but as a result of her quick thinking, love of her brother and desire to keep him safe, she paves the way for Jochebed to get paid for raising her own child. It is fascinating to consider the logistics here: the princess is paying Jochebed to nurse this baby. This means that she knows Jochebed has given birth and has milk to feed him. It is interesting



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to consider if the princess believed it was a mercy to allow a Hebrew, whom she had assumed had just had her own child taken from her and thrown into the river, nurse this infant.

As 21st century Americans, most babies are weaned around the age of one when it is safe for them to begin consuming cow milk. In the ancient world children were weaned when they were much older. For instance, Samuel is described as a “young child” (1 Samuel 1:22-24) when he is weaned and brought to Eli. My understanding is that, during this time, children were not weaned until they were three to five years old. Being older when he went to live with the princess would make sense, as we are about to see, Moses had a clear understanding of his identity as an Israelite.

In verse 10 the baby is brought to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she names him “Moses” because she drew him out of the water. While it is widely accepted that his name is Hebrew in origin, there is still much debate about his name: Did the princess give him an Egyptian name that Moses dropped when he fled to Midian? Did she allow Amram & Jochebed to name him as he was being nursed? Did she know enough Hebrew to give him a Hebrew name in order to acknowledge his ancestry? Did she ask Jochebed how to say, “drawn out of” in Hebrew? While questions abound, all we know for sure is that Moses’ name represents the amazing story of how he was divinely protected and brought to Pharaoh’s daughter.

Think About It: Moses’ origin story is fascinating. It is so easy to see God’s hand from beginning to end, ensuring that Moses would be born into a family brave enough to keep him safe, that he would be found and protected by Pharaoh’s daughter and raised and educated as a prince. All of this uniquely enabled Moses to lead God’s people.

While your origin story may not be written and preserved for millennia, it is no less providential. What

had to transpire for your parents to meet and fall in love? Then for the exact chromosomal combination to create you in all your unique beauty. For you to have had life experiences that led you to studying a book to deepen your knowledge of the Bible as opposed to being in a country where Christianity is outlawed.

We may not be destined to lead God’s people in a mighty, triumphant exodus, yet Ephesians 2:10 tells us that, “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Just like Moses, God planned good works for us before we were even born. What good works are you currently doing to glorify Him? If you can’t think of anything specific, let this be a challenge to accept the works God has given you the opportunity for and get busy serving Him.

Read Exodus 2:11-12

This is absolutely premeditated murder. Moses looks around for witnesses, and when he thinks he can get away without being seen kills this Egyptian in cold blood. However, notice the personal pronouns. In verse 11 we see the phrase, “his people” twice. Moses knew that he was a Hebrew, and clearly struggled with watching his people suffer day in and day out. It appears that in his mind this violent act was the result of righteous indignation, defending his people from the oppressor.

Think About It: Many people struggle with guilt and shame from their past even after they put Christ on in baptism. Moses is without doubt the greatest leader in Scripture other than Jesus. Numbers 12:3 tells us that he was the most humble man who ever lived. In Matthew 17:3 he is one of only two men throughout all history who appears with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Yet he was also a murderer. If Moses



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can overcome his past to become one of the greatest of God’s servants in all of history, what is there that you can’t overcome?

Read Exodus 2:13-15

Here we actually learn more from the New Testament than Exodus. We learn:

1. Moses was about 40 at the time (Acts 7:23)
2. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians and was a man of power in words and deeds (Acts 7:22). (Of interest is that this is NOT how he viewed himself. Sometimes we are better off to listen to what others believe our gifts and talents are.)
3. Moses consciously chose to cast his lot with Israel rather than continuing to enjoy the life of an Egyptian prince (Heb. 11:24-26).
4. Moses specifically saw himself as Israel’s deliverer (Acts 7:23-25).
5. Moses was not afraid of the Egyptian King’s wrath (Hebrews 11:27). Of note, Exodus 2:14 says that he was afraid when it was his own life. It appears that the difference is when Moses was on his own and serving his own interests and when was working on the Lord’s behalf and knew that the Lord was with him.

In this encounter, one man was clearly in the wrong and Moses knew it, which implies that Moses saw more than is recorded for us. This section is also full of irony. First of all, when the Israelite addresses Moses he says, “as you killed the Egyptian.” He doesn’t say, “the *other* Egyptian,” which implies even the slaves knew Moses’ history. There’s also a level of scoffing here: in Egypt Moses was a prince with all the power and authority that entailed, but this Hebrew is

basically saying, “You might be a prince to them, but you’re no prince to us.”

Hebrews 11:27 implies that at this point in time Moses expected to lead a glorious uprising and rescue his people, but the end result was Moses fleeing for his life. I believe there are two reasons for this: #1. At this point his people viewed him as a traitor, so there was no way they would follow him. #2. At this point it was about Moses and not about God. Yahweh would eventually use Moses to liberate His people, but only in a way that would demonstrate in a resounding way throughout all history that there is only one God, and when He speaks you had better listen.

As we come to verse 15, Moses is fleeing for his life. It seems that either Moses didn’t look, “this way and that” as closely as he thought he did, or one of the Israelites told Pharaoh what had happened. What a way to earn favor with the king, by ratting out his adopted son as having betrayed Egypt. Regardless, Moses ends up over 300 miles away in the land of Midian. Ironically, Moses had to cross the entire land of Sinai to go from Egypt to Midian. There he sits down by a well.

Think About It: How many pivotal moments in Scripture can you think of that happened by a well?

Read Exodus 2:16-22

In the Truth for Today commentary on Exodus, Brother Roper points out that Moses clearly had a heart for the oppressed, as this is the third time in a short span of time that he has tried to come to the aid of someone being mistreated:

1. The Egyptian beating the Israelite
2. The Israelite beating his countryman
3. The daughters of the priest of Midian



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Moses protects the daughters of the priest of Midian and is thanked by marrying one of his daughters. Note that Scripture describes him as “the” priest of Midian. Midian was quite a large territory, so it is interesting to consider if he was truly the only priest, or if he was perhaps their version of a high priest. It is also interesting that Moses’ brother would be the origin of God’s priesthood, and Moses marries the daughter of a priest as well.

There is some confusion regarding the name of Moses’ father-in-law, as here he is named Reuel, and later Jethro. Through Exodus 3:1, 4:18, 18:1 and Numbers 10:29 it appears that the names are interchangeable. What is most important, however, is that 18:9 makes it clear that this man was a believer in Yahweh. Whether he was a priest serving the Lord from the beginning similar to Melchizedek, or someone who came to believe in God as he saw the might works God was doing is impossible to know, but Moses and Jethro appeared to have a very close relationship in which Jethro supported Moses in his ministry.

When we come to verse 19 Moses has been through it. He has committed cold-blooded murder and fled over 300 miles to stay alive. This wasn’t exactly a planned trip, so he didn’t have time to pack an extra set of clothes, some comfy shoes to change into, plenty of food and water. There is no telling what kind of shape Moses was in at this point in time, yet he rallied enough to protect Reuel’s daughters, and in some way was still immediately recognizable as an Egyptian. It could be that even after his long travels Moses still had very short hair, as Egyptians did not like hair (Genesis 41:14).

We also gain insight into Moses’ life when he names his oldest son Gershom, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.” Poor Moses, in his first 40 years of life he never had anywhere he fit or was fully accepted. He

was a sojourner, perhaps even a fraud in the eyes of some, as an Israelite being raised in Pharaoh’s palace. Now he’s a sojourner in the land of Midian.

Think About It: Can you relate to Moses here? Have you felt like a sojourner, like you just didn’t fit? As we continue on in Exodus, we will have a front-row seat as Moses finds his identity in serving God and being with His people. Where is your identity? Is there something you could do to help you become more plugged in, and more of a servant with God’s people?

Read Exodus 2:23-25

As we look at this section there are four important things to note:

1. God heard (2:24)
2. God remembered (2:24)
3. God saw (2:25)
4. God knew (2:25)

In this text we have a pivotal turning point in the Exodus account; the king of Egypt has died. This is the man who was seeking to kill Moses, who ordered all the male Israelite babies to be murdered. But he is also the man who allowed Moses to be sheltered in his palace, and likely the closest person to a father figure in Moses’ life once he moved into the palace. A new king will arise, but we must remember that this Pharaoh would, by all accounts, be Moses’ brother by adoption. What transpires next is not only a divine showdown, but a familial showdown as well, as we will see Moses, Aaron (his brother by birth) and the Almighty God take on Pharaoh (Moses’ brother by adoption) and the gods of Egypt.



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