

NOON BIBLE STUDY: EXODUS 1

Welcome to the book of Exodus. Exodus is the second book of the Bible and the second in the first 5 books of Moses or the "Torah". The word Exodus means "a mass departure" or "going out" and Exodus will tell the story of the children of Israel's time in Egypt, the nature of their departure from Egypt and their journey away from Egypt. Moses will be our central character and we will meet him in Exodus 2. It is a book of **history**, telling the continued story of God and His people and will eventually turn into a book of **law** as we begin to learn of the terms of God's covenant for this new generation.

Before we begin Exodus, we need to be reminded of where the story left off. The first book of the Bible, Genesis, began with God creating humanity and giving them the calling to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. Human rebellion disrupted that purpose, but beginning with Abraham, God chose a family through whom he would carry forward his purposes. He promised Abraham descendants, a nation, a land and that through him blessing would ultimately extend beyond his own family. Abraham had Isaac, Isaac had Jacob, and Jacob (whose name God changed to Israel) had twelve sons. Those sons became the beginnings of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Toward the end of Genesis, one of those sons, Joseph, was sold into slavery and taken to Egypt. Yet God was with Joseph and eventually raised him to a position of tremendous authority in Egypt. When famine came upon the region, Joseph was used by God not only to preserve Egypt, but also to preserve his own family. Jacob and his entire household eventually moved to Egypt, where Pharaoh welcomed them and gave them a place to live.

And that is where Genesis leaves us. Abraham's family is alive, blessed and multiplying, but they are living in Egypt rather than the land God promised them. Joseph dies expressing confidence that God will one day bring his people out of Egypt. So when Exodus begins, we aren't beginning a new story. We are continuing the story and promises that began in Genesis.

Quickly in Exodus, Abraham's family will become a people and a nation. As we journey through the book, we will learn a lot about Israel, and a lot about God. And with that, we begin.

Exodus 1:1-7 - Recap of Jacob's Sons Who Came To Egypt

Exodus picks up exactly where Genesis left off. These opening verses deliberately remind us of Jacob's sons who came into Egypt and connect the story we are about to read with everything God had already begun through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

But between verses 6 and 7, the story suddenly moves forward hundreds of years. What has been happening all this time? Verse 7.

Exodus 1:7 - But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

That verse contains some important buzzwords from Genesis, for Exodus, and in light of the entire Biblical and redemptive story. Do you see them? What is the family of Israel busy doing in Egypt these centuries, being “**fruitful**” and “**multiply(ing)**”. This was God's original invitation for humanity when he created Adam and Eve:

Genesis 1:28 - God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

God created humanity to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. Though human rebellion disrupted that calling, God repeated it to Noah (Genesis 9:1) and later called Abraham, promising that he too would be fruitful.

Genesis 17:5-6 - "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.

A chosen people, blessed, fruitful and multiplying has been part of God's purpose from creation. Hundreds of years have passed, but God's favor remains: Israel is multiplying and filling Egypt. Yet just as the serpent opposed God's purposes in Eden, Egypt's ruler will oppose them here.

Exodus 1:8-14 - New Pharaoh In Egypt, New Situation For Israel

God's blessing on someone often elicits responses from the outside world. Sometimes the world is drawn to Him through His favor His upon His people and sometimes

jealousy, anger and even fear is the result. The latter is what we see here with this new unnamed Pharaoh.

This new ruler did not know Joseph or remember how instrumental Joseph had been in preserving Egypt. Instead of gratitude, Pharaoh was afraid of Israel.

Exodus 1:9-10 (NLT) - He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. 10 We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country."

The Pharaoh during Joseph's day looked at Joseph and his family as a blessing to the land, this new Pharaoh looked at them as a threat. Fearing the "what if", he subjected them to himself as slaves. How ironic that one of the tasks listed was that the Israelite slaves built "storage cities." If only this new Pharaoh knew his history, he would have known of another significant time when Egypt needed storage - during the first seven years of abundance that Joseph predicted.

Yet even in this new relationship, God was with the people of Israel. As they worked, God blessed them with multiplication and growth that rivaled the level of their affliction. This only enrages Pharaoh more and his fear-inspired plan to afflict Israel unfolds with more work.

Exodus 1:15-21 - A New Plan To Stop Israel

Frustrated that slavery has not stopped Israel's growth, Pharaoh turns to a second plan: he orders the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill the male babies. The very women charged with helping children enter the world are being ordered to take their lives. A midwife assists a woman in childbirth, placing these women in the horrifying position of being expected to carry out Pharaoh's evil plan themselves.

But twice we are told that the midwives "feared God" and refused to do as the king commanded (1:17, 21). Even under Israel's enslavement, fear of God remained, and it governed their actions.

And this ought to bring to mind the Abrahamic covenant yet again. God said he would "bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you." God "established households" for them (Exodus 1:21) as a result of their care for the children of Abraham.

Exodus 1:22 - A Final Evil Attempt

When the midwives refuse to cooperate, Pharaoh escalates even further, commanding that every Israelite baby boy be thrown into the Nile. Other translations clarify that this command was given to the Egyptians regarding Israelite children.

Exodus 1:22 (ESV) - Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

This is a direct command from the king of the land! Can you even imagine! The children of Israel will have to come to terms with whether or not they obey and probably more realistically, how they will disobey and yet keep their sons alive. Any Egyptian who sees a baby boy would have been legally bound to throw that child in the Nile River. This is a land without the fear of God upon it and the sons of Israel are a people in need of the help of God.

"Exodus 1:22 forms a fitting climax to the chapter, in which the king continually seeks to destroy the Israelite strength. Finally, with this decree, he throws off any subtlety and commands the open extermination of Hebrew males." (**NET Bible Note, Exodus 1:22**)

Pharaoh's determination to stop Israel is fueled by fear, jealousy and anger. This is a dark time. This is an evil man. And it's with this backdrop that the stage is set for God to raise up a deliverer.

Before we close, notice that this shocking transition: from peaceful neighbors to enslaved and murderous enemies, was actually foretold centuries earlier. In Genesis 15, when God established his covenant with Abraham, Abraham experienced "terror and great darkness." Then God said:

Genesis 15:12-16 - Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. 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. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 "As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. 16 "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

We don't know if Abraham passed this information on to his children or not, but for us reading along, we should remember this. Though the circumstances of this story are sad

and cruel, we are afforded the bigger picture of *context*. Context allows us to see beyond the moment we're living in. Context reminds us of what has happened before and points us to what is happening next. It gets our attention off our present circumstances and onto God's promises (past) and hope (future).

Abraham was told ahead of time that his people would go through trouble, enslavement and oppression. But he was also told that in the end, God would deliver and bless them. While it seems unlikely that the generation of Exodus 1 knew this promise, **we do**. And we know other promises God has made and things he has said are sure to happen. We aren't facing their circumstances, but our lives have context too.

Our lives have a context beyond what we are living in now. When we forget that context, we get tricked into living in response to what is happening around us rather than according to God's word. We take matters into our own hands because we forget that God is watching and will bring justice. We hold grudges and bitterness because we forget that Jesus is coming back to stop evil. We adopt the practices of the world, gossip, jealousy, greed, selfishness, arrogance, grumbling and complaining - because we forget the context: this world is not our home, God has made promises, and we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. We may believe that on paper, but our daily practices reveal whether those beliefs are actually affecting our lives.

Context. God has told us the end from the beginning. *Context.* God has told us what is going to happen in our lives. *Context.* God has told us what we should do in the meantime.

Pharaoh lost the context of how God had saved Egypt through Joseph. He forgot what God had done in the past, and his lack of context led to evil and self-serving actions. In strong contrast, the midwives feared the LORD. **That was their context.** As a result, their actions were dictated by their faith, even when their circumstances were hard.

What a contrast: a mighty king and lowly midwives. Yet the contrast that matters most has little to do with their status, but with their faith. *Whose example will you and I follow?*