

EXODUS

Lesson 1 - Introduction

Today, we start what I think you will find to be an exciting, eye-opening, and (I hope) spirit-filled adventure into the 2nd book of the Torah.....Exodus. And, to set the table for what it is we'll study, and where it will take us, I would like to spend a little time giving you an overview of Exodus, and talking a little about the conditions Israel lived under during the time between Joseph's death, and the first mention of Moses.

The Hebrew name for the section of the Torah that we call "Exodus", is Sh'mot. Sh'mot means "names", and certainly comes from the fact that the first words of the book begin with "These are the names of the sons of Israel....."

Just as a quick refresher, the first five books of the Bible are called in Hebrew, Torah. It means teaching. It does NOT mean Law. And, the Torah, consisting of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, consists of traditions handed down orally from generation to generation as well as what God gave to Moses on the Holy Mountain that we call Mt. Sinai.

Genesis is often called the Book of Beginnings.....that's "beginnings" ending in an "s"....plural.....several beginnings. In Genesis it is my opinion that we were not really so much told of the beginning of the universe (that is, that time when an incalculably vast nothing became something) but rather it seems to me that the start of Genesis is about God creating the conditions for life. In other words the Creation account begins by stating that it was God who created everything and then explains that the earth was formless and void (meaning that it had been created and had been sitting there for some unspecified period without life as with the rest of the universe). Then we're told that darkness was over the surface of the deep (so there already WAS a "deep"); and lastly that the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. So what we see is that the Creation story is about the beginning of the physical environment that could support life was but it was only the first of several "beginnings" that we would be told about in Genesis.

Exodus, Sh'mot, is, in many ways, another book of beginnings. And, it is the book of beginnings of a nation of people who God elected, and separated from all other people on planet Earth: the Israelites. And Yehoveh established the set-apart nation on political, civil, and religious levels. In other words, although the earth, and stars, and animals, and plants, and mankind were all created in the earliest part of the Creation story, God had not yet finished developing His divine work with these infants of Creation; He didn't create and then just let everything evolve on its own without His further molding and shaping.

Exodus is entirely God centered; and Exodus establishes several important understandings about the nature of the Lord, most of which we are expected to already have digested as a prelude to studying the New Testament. In Exodus we learn that there is but ONE God, and His name is Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh. That he is the same God that appeared to the Patriarchs as El Shaddai. He is the Creator of all things, but He is also above and *not* organically part of the things He created. He is present, and He is near but His being is not the same substance of any created thing.....except, in small part, for Mankind. This God of Abraham is different than any of the pagan Mystery Babylon gods. His area of dominion is infinite, He is without boundaries and limitations, his powers are infinite, and yet, He constantly interacts with mere men. In other words, the God of Israel is deeply involved in human affairs, and in fact, uses human affairs to achieve a much grander purpose. And, His grand plan involves the establishment of a nation of people that He will rescue, redeem, teach, nurture, and discipline: Israel.

So, although Israel (as created in Genesis) was a separate and identifiable people group, it was, at the time of the last words written in the book of Genesis, still in a fairly primitive form. God had done little, yet, to create that peculiar order of society that would make Israel separate and distinct from all others. About the only thing that made them different from the Egyptians was race and vocation: they were mainly Semite shepherds while the Egyptians were cattle ranchers and brick makers from the line of Ham. Exodus is the place in the Bible where we see another division, election and separation: Israel advances from infancy to adolescence and is founded as a NATION of people, maturing from just a group of people. A nation with its own culture and laws, well defined morals and ethics..... its own history, its own land, and its own God who establishes the unchangeable morals and ethics and justice system that Israel is to live their lives by.

We will, early in Exodus, be introduced to the principal of Passover. And, the first Passover was that great and dreadful night when God sent the final plague upon Egypt that caused Pharaoh to loosen his grip on God's people; and it was that plague that resulted in the death of every firstborn child all throughout Egypt. However, for those who followed God's instruction to paint the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a lamb, death passed by. That is, all of Egypt was placed under a death penalty for their rebellion against God. But, God made provision for those alone who trusted Him. And, that provision was by means of the blood that was spilled from an innocent lamb; by that blood alone would they would be saved. Here, in Exodus, we could not have a more perfect picture in the entire Bible for the purpose of the future Messiah, Yeshua, Jesus the Christ.

And, in Exodus, we will also be introduced to a new covenant. If you were paying attention to what I just said, your ears probably perked up, and you're thinking "What? What did he just say? Exodus, a new covenant?" You see terminology has an enormous impact on the way we perceive new information. We have typically been taught that the Bible is based on two main divisions called the O.T. and the N.T. Most everything in Christianity is based on the premise

that there was an original set of rules and laws handed down to mankind by God, which was eventually replaced by a new and better set called the N.T. And for gentile EVANGELICAL Christians it has been heavily implied that there is little point to knowing more about the Bible than we can find in the N.T, so the O.T. is seen more as simply ancient history, or as a curiosity, fit only for scholars and academics.....or perhaps interesting Sunday School stories for children....and for people with lots of time on their hands.

Those of you who graduated from dissecting the book of Genesis hopefully are beginning to appreciate that most of the spiritual principles that we tend to ascribe as originating in the N.T. were already in operation, and we have already found them, right there in the oldest book of the Old Testament.

The point is this: we really need to relegate the terms O.T. and N.T. to the waste bin of our vocabulary. What we have is the Bible: ONE **unified** Word of God. And, just as God is one, **echad**, so are our Holy Scriptures. Take away the O.T., and we only have half a Bible. Take away the N.T, and we only have half a Bible; half the Word of God. And, when we take away EITHER HALF, its not that we lose half the understanding, it's that most, if not all, of what we think we know is actually quite incomplete and skewed.

Let me also make the point that the New Covenant, and the New Testament, are not the same things. The New Covenant is proclaimed in the Old Testament (in Jeremiah 31). The New Covenant is a prophecy of yet another in a series of covenants that God would make with men; each covenant is necessary and important.....and each covenant is still valid. The New **Testament** simply records that the New Covenant as foretold in Jeremiah came about, and that Yeshua Ben Yosef, Jesus son of Joseph, is the Messiah who brings in the New Covenant by means of spilling His atoning blood for our sakes.

Indeed, we will see that God also gives Moses a new covenant; not the same covenant as what we call **The** New Covenant; but it was, for Moses, the latest of a series of covenants that the Lord established to bring about His will. The covenant given on Mt. Sinai is that which Christians typically call the 10 Commandments, or The Law; yet it consists, as we will see in the weeks ahead, of far more than 10 basic laws of God.

What we will also be introduced to in this newest covenant given to Moses is a new TYPE of covenant; a **CONDITIONAL** covenant; a covenant that is bilateral; a covenant that is based on Man, as well as God, each doing his part. A covenant that is mutual between God and Man. This is entirely different than the covenant God made with Abraham some 600 years earlier. For that covenant, which led to the establishment of what the Bible calls the "line of covenant promise", was **Unconditional**. The covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was unilateral. It was one-way.....NOT mutual. It all depended on God. Nothing Man could do would cause God to pull back from that covenant, nor to change it. In other words, the earlier covenants were but

promises from Yehoveh to Abraham.

This new covenant given to Moses on Mt. Sinai in no way replaced the different and older covenant given to Abraham. It was not a newer and better model, with all the latest bells and whistles, designed to replace an older and outdated one. It was simply another covenant, entirely distinct in purpose and in nature from the one given to Abraham. Yet, just as the first half of the Bible is the foundation of the second, so is Abraham's covenant the foundation for the new one given to Moses. Therefore the covenants of Abraham and Moses are very different but tightly connected, as are chapters in a book.

Exodus is a saga; it's a wide canvas painted with broad strokes. Yet, we must not think of it like a secular history lesson. Only events and mental pictures that illustrate and demonstrate divine principles and purposes are recorded for our study. Therefore, Exodus doesn't give us a lot of detail on happenings, and places, and people, and cultures. It doesn't describe the magnificent and advanced society of Egypt, nor tell much of Israel's time there. It doesn't give us precise information on the route of the Exodus. It doesn't tell us much about the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Except for explicit instructions on the building of the Wilderness Tabernacle and the accompanying rituals, details are in short supply in Exodus.

From the time of the close of the last chapter of Genesis to the beginning of the book of Exodus, about 350 years have passed...silently, as though it doesn't really suit God to even bother to tell us much about what went on in Egypt. Or, it's as though God just forgot about poor Israel, languishing away in the heat and forced labor that had become their lot. And, no doubt, the majority of those Hebrews must have felt that, indeed, God had abandoned them.

What I think you will come to see, however, is that what God did with Israel was to metaphorically make a cake. God carefully selected the ingredients to make Israel; then He mixed them until properly blended, and next set the mixture in an oven to be baked. He set His heavenly timer for exactly the amount of time He knew was needed for this Hebrew cake to congeal and to rise and to become usable....400 years.....and He waited. Although He undoubtedly monitored the baking process, in general, there was no need for substantial intervention on His part. The cake would remain in the oven until the timer went off, and it was finished baking. Well, when God opened the oven, out popped Israel. And, apparently there was little point in His telling us the details of what went on during the time Israel was baking in the oven of Egypt. So, the Bible contains almost nothing of those years.

The Torah presents us, essentially, with a pair of bookends (with the volumes in between those bookends missing) concerning what was apparently one of the most, if not THE most, important purpose for God's determination that Israel would, indeed, spend a long time in Egypt. The first bookend is Gen. 46:3, where God tells Jacob, "**Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will THERE make of thee a great nation**". And, that one bookend stands alone

until the next one occurs shortly after the opening verses of Exodus: **“and the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.”** God prophesied Israel’s expansive population group, declared it would be so, and it happened. How if all happened may be of interest to man, but God’s only mission was to ensure that His divine purposes be fulfilled, not that posterity should have a blow-by-blow account of it.

Perhaps some of the Israelites remembered that God told their forefather, Abraham, and later Jacob, that Egypt was their destiny for a time. And, perhaps, they reckoned that just as the prediction of their sojourn in Egypt and their population explosion had come true, so it would happen at God’s appointed time that, as promised in Gen. 46:4, “I will surely bring you back up again”. Yet, after 3 ½ centuries in Egypt, with apparently very little input from God, how much would those Hebrews actually have remembered about those precious and reassuring promises, given their condition as slave laborers? And, more importantly, how much would they still **trust** in the One who had MADE those now-distant promises; trust Him during a time while they lived amidst a culture that deified and worshipped beasts, men, and the sun, moon, and stars? A culture that was completely preoccupied with life after death..... and knew nothing of God.

This death culture of Egypt was probably one of the reasons that we see such a reticence on the part of the Torah to even discuss death and afterlife. The OT never introduces a concept of dying and going to Heaven; in fact, what happens after death is barely touched upon in the OT, and it gives us the haziest of pictures. Egypt’s religion was one of magnificent monuments and god images, and one that focused on death. The Pyramids were but elaborate burial chambers and self-contained kingdoms for living the afterlife. Therefore, Israel’s religion became an imageless one, and the only authorized monument we’ll find in Exodus was a modest tent structure built for God to dwell with His people. And the subject of death was simply dealt with as a mysterious fact.

Unfortunately for us, Exodus opens by immediately cutting to the chase, and telling us only in the broadest terms the condition of the Hebrews in Egypt. In shorthand fashion the verses of Chapter 1 set the stage for God’s upcoming battle with Pharaoh, through Moses. But, there are other sources of information of historical importance that exist about the Israelites’ time in Egypt.....that is, sources other than the Bible; and we will explore several items of interest that makes use of this information, including the elusive route of the Exodus, the location of Mt. Sinai, the site of the Red Sea crossing, and more.

To best understand the book of Exodus, and to comprehend not just what it says, but what it MEANS in relation to the overall Scriptural picture, we need to be able to stand back, and look at it from a structural standpoint: for there are themes and patterns and logical divisions that emerge that all work together to give us a good understanding of the formation and maturing of Israel as a nation. And, understanding the contents of Exodus is key to understanding

everything that will follow in the Bible.

The noted Bible scholar, Everett Fox, sees 6 divisions within the book of Exodus. Now, let me state from the outset, that just as the standard Biblical divisions of OT and NT, the 66 named books, and all the numbered chapters and verses are entirely manmade and of no Spiritual importance, so is the concept of 6 divisions within the book of Exodus. It's all somewhat arbitrary. The purpose of all of these divisions is only to give our finite little brains a way to deal with the sheer volume of Holy Scripture (what is it they say about how you eat an Elephant.....one bite at a time?), and a more efficient way to communicate amongst ourselves concerning specific Biblical passages, as we study and discuss and search out God's Word to us.

So, according to Everett Fox's method, he sees Exodus' opening division, the first of six, as what he calls the Deliverance Narrative. That is, God redeems His chosen people, Israel. These first few chapters will review the circumstances and the methods that God used, primarily through Moses and Pharaoh, to allow the now enormous nation of the Hebrews to leave Egypt.....at a time when that's the last thing Pharaoh wanted to see occur, because Pharaoh well knew that Israel's leaving Egypt would be a devastating blow to his nation.

Division 2 he calls the Wilderness Experience. It deals with the experiences of Israel as a displaced hoard of refugees, trekking across a barren wasteland, immediately following their escape from Egypt. The beginning period when God would show Israel who He is, that He is trustworthy, that He is Holy, and that He is just and not to be trifled with. And, it would end with Him showing them who THEY are in His sight, as they march away from who they used to be in Egypt.

This leads to Division 3, Covenant and Law.....(but what is more correctly called Torah), whereby God starts to deal with the structure of Israel itself; particularly societal and religious structure. In Egypt, Israel was but an appendage OF Egypt; now, however, they experience that first great Governing Dynamic of God that we discussed about a year ago: division, separation, and election. Israel was in process of being divided and separated and molded into a nation built in God's image, and for service to Him. And, by means of God giving Moses the Torah, He also effectively gave Israel a manual for living; a manual for living for a **redeemed** people; a manual for living in harmony with God. No guesswork was needed.

Following along with the Biblical theme of "structure", Division 4 moves on to instructions, blueprints if you would, for the building of a structure and the setting up of a priesthood for service in that structure, so that God would tabernacle, dwell, among His chosen people; and that building structure is what we call the Wilderness Tabernacle. Since the Wilderness Tabernacle is but a physical model of a spiritual and heavenly place, that would be followed hundreds of years later with the first Temple, we will be spending quite some time exploring the

design of the Tabernacle, and the symbolism behind the God-ordained rituals that the priests would perform there. For both the design and the rituals are prophetic as well as symbolic learning devices, and it will help us to understand much that is hidden from us in the N.T. if we don't first understand the meaning of the Tabernacle and its services, particularly as it applies to the book of Revelation.

Next, after God has put forth His divinely ordered structure, Division 5 shows man respond by implementing their OWN structure just the way one would expect a fallen race's concept of structure might proceed: they construct a Golden Calf. In so doing, they are trying to return to their old and familiar ways of Egypt. And, what follows is the terrible consequences when man rebels against God's system of order, engages in idolatry, and how God provides a much needed pathway for reconciliation when man sins, rebels, against such a just God. This division of Exodus Mr. Fox calls, appropriately enough, Infidelity and Reconciliation.

The 6th and final division of Exodus concerns the actual construction of the Wilderness Tabernacle, and then God's inhabitation of the divine structure.

I don't think Everett Fox intended to make any analogies by means of the way he, appropriately I believe, divided up Exodus. But, it does give us an interesting tool to look at how God works, and it helps us to visualize patterns that God develops and uses throughout the Bible. And, we see this same God-pattern emerge in our own lives as Believers: deliverance, wilderness experience, receiving the covenant and law (Torah, the Living Word), preparing the tabernacle (us) that God (the Holy Spirit) might dwell with us, our inevitable infidelity against God due to the evil inclinations that are still part of who we are, and His gracious provision for reconciliation, and finally the completion and perfection of the tabernacle that is yet future.

But, beyond this structure of Exodus, there are also certain words that God uses which give a beautiful unity to it all. Sadly, most of our modern English Bibles mask this unity to various degrees because these words are of Hebrew origin, and the WAY Hebrew words are used is quite different from English. We will find, throughout Exodus, the recurrence of the words **see**, **glory**, **serve**, and **know**. English can make this a little harder to observe, and I want you to be aware and prepared as we move through Exodus to discover these word patterns, so let me give you an example of what I'm talking about.

Let's take the recurring root-word "serve"; it will change form and emphasis as we roll through Exodus. We'll see the Hebrews move from serv-itude to Pharaoh, to serv-ice to God. When the Hebrews are given the Torah, they are also warned against serv-ing other gods. The Torah also specifies how the Israelites, as children of God, are to treat "serv-ants", how they are to conduct the "serv-ice" in the Tabernacle, and how God is to be "serv-ed".

Now this example is neither contrived nor is it allegorical or just a slick literary style..... it is typical. I'm taking you on this momentary detour to explain the significance of the unique and meaningful word structure of Biblical Hebrew that takes a root word, like "serve", and then molds it and shapes it within the scripture in a way that particularly is helpful for listening to it as a spoken word; absorbing it through hearing, and then memorizing it. These Hebrew word patterns are also most useful in helping us to connect the dots.....that is, we can follow thought patterns as God weaves and develops His creation in such an organic and intricate way, far beyond human ability to ever conceive and carry out. One concept linked to the next, and then the next, and the next, forming a chain; each tiny step necessary, no matter how painfully long and drawn out it all might seem to us. And all this is done in the ONLY way it can be done, in order for God to bring mankind from Creation to the place of re-Creation and of perfect unity with Him that He desires and He WILL do. And, the foundation and structure of this divine plan, and this unchanging pattern, is fully laid out in Exodus.

Well, let's move on. I don't expect you to remember all that, only to make mental note of it, so that the light might come on from time-to-time as we spend the next 6 months or so, in Exodus.

Since the Bible doesn't give us much information about the 350 years that pass from the time of the Israelites entering Egypt, until God starts preparing Moses to bring them OUT of Egypt, I want to spend a few minutes painting as accurate a setting as possible for the opening scenes of Exodus. And, this information comes from archeological finds, as well as Egyptian, Greek and Roman historical records.

The first one to two centuries that the Israelites spent in Egypt had been prosperous for them. All indications are that they lived comfortably and peacefully. They had been allotted, by Pharaoh, thanks to Joseph, what was intended to be a permanent territory perfectly suitable to their shepherd lifestyle, in the Land of Goshen. Goshen was in an area of Egypt called Lower Egypt, though it lay in the northernmost area of Egypt. Noph was the capital city of Lower Egypt, and likely that is where Joseph was when he first dealt with his brothers, who had come down to Egypt to acquire grain on account of the worldwide famine.

But, new evidence, gathered by people who expected anything but what they discovered, is that Joseph also had a palace in the city where so many of the Israelites would live: Avaris. And, this would seem most natural, as Joseph would have wanted to be close to his father and brothers and his Hebrew family members.

As might be imagined, not every Hebrew remained a shepherd. Many took up building trades, learned (no doubt) from the Egyptians who excelled in architecture. Others became merchants and some even cattle ranchers and farmers. Again, they would have learned these occupations from some combination of the Egyptian nationals and the many foreigners they would have come in contact with, since they lived in the very area that many foreigners from

the area we now call the Middle East would have had to pass through on their way to Egypt proper.

The Bible texts, and the scores and scores of Egyptian monuments, give every indication that the Hebrews were not restricted to only the Land of Goshen, nor were they shy about moving into other areas of Egypt. Over time, many became expert at growing crops, using the tremendous resources of the Nile to their advantage.

More, they assimilated into Egyptian culture, to varying degrees. Through everyday dealings with native Egyptians, and through intermarriage, Israel and Egypt fashioned quite a connection. And, along with accepting Egyptian culture, they began to adopt many Egyptian religious views and rites.

Sometime around the halfway mark of their sojourn in Egypt, a sea change occurred and it forever altered the lives of the Israelites. Beginning just a few decades before Joseph's arrival as a slave in Egypt, the so called Hyksos rulers had established their dominance over most of Egypt: primarily Lower Egypt. The Hyksos were from somewhere in the Middle East. They were Semites, cousins of Israel. Regardless of where they were from, they were NOT Egyptians.....they were foreigners, and the Egyptians detested being ruled by these "Shepherd Kings" as they were known. Their dominance ebbed and flowed, at time making gains into Upper Egypt (to the south), and the territory that lay between Upper and Lower Egypt.....and inevitably losing ground as well. Eventually, an Egyptian general in the capital of Upper Egypt, a city called Thebes (now known as Luxor) gathered an army of Egyptian nationals and defeated the hated Hyksos rulers once and for all. The Israelites would now become the focal point of nearly 2 centuries of bitterness built up by the Egyptian people that no doubt began with the Hebrew Joseph accepting their servitude in exchange for food during that famous 7 year period of extreme famine.

The first job of the new King of Egypt was to dismantle any foreign influence that could threaten Egypt. And, that meant gaining control over the Israelites whose numbers had grown into menacing proportions. Undoubtedly the Israelites were the majority people in the Nile delta areas. But, they had spread out and established themselves in other areas of Egypt as well. So, the solution was a straightforward and simple one: subjugate them; make the Israelites into forced laborers.

For all practical purposes, we could say there was a complete, and nearly overnight, reversal of fortunes. The Israelites, who had become wealthy, numerous, and attained political clout in Egypt, were dispossessed and became the lower class. The Egyptians, who had been relegated to a lesser status than the Israelites for so long, were now in charge.

While the idea of slavery is detestable to us that does not necessarily mean (other than for a complete loss of freedom) that the slaves were poorly treated. In fact, most evidence is that, except for their last few years in Egypt, the Hebrews were treated decently. We should not think of the Egyptians as inherently cruel and uncouth. They were a high-minded people, with deeply ingrained and refined morals and ethics; educated, intelligent, and forward-looking. Besides, what use was a maimed or a dead slave?

Despite what Cecil B. DeMille told the world in his famous remake of the 10 Commandments, the Israelites did NOT build pyramids. In fact, by the time of Jacob's arrival in Egypt, the Pyramid building era was over. The Hebrews were not used as human lubricant under the rollers of 30-ton stone building blocks. Their work was as makers of mud brick, digging and restoration of waterways and canals, and as builders of great cities. The Israelites are most identified as the builders of the two great "stores –cities" Pithom and Raamses, up in the area of Goshen. And, that of course, is where the great Hebrew enclave of Avaris had been in existence beginning from a few years after the time of Joseph. A "stores-city" simply meant it was a regional supply depot and distribution center. In this case, these cities served both the civilian population and the Egyptian military, and were strategically located in Goshen because it was nearest their eastern border and because that was a food-growing region.

Thanks to the brilliance of Egyptian science, culture and art, and the tremendous skill and work ethic of the Israelites (even though it was forced work), Egypt became a world-class society. We could talk for days on end, and examine the amazing civil engineering accomplishments of Egypt, but that doesn't really fit the purpose of this class. Suffice it to say that the grandeur of Egypt at its peak has not been surpassed to this very day, in my estimation. The backward and poor society that is Egypt, today, bears no resemblance to the Egypt in the time of Moses.

It is also good as a foundation for our study to understand that Egypt was the breadbasket of the world. And, what an irony that is, considering their annual rainfall is almost non-existent. Rather, it is the function of the Nile that made Egypt such an incredible food machine. The Nile would overflow annually, and deposit rich, fertile silt on the fields surrounding its banks. Irrigation systems were built since time immemorial to water these fields. Later, yet even before the time of the Israelites, canals were built, such that THEIR banks would overflow along with the Niles. It was a way to expand the fields well beyond the Nile River, and still take advantage of all of its benefits.

Sometime late in Joseph's career as Vizier of Egypt, several artificial lakes were built for water storage.....for use in agriculture, the watering of the growing herds of cattle (which Egyptians much preferred over sheep), and for household use for the expanding population. In fact, there are waterways named after Joseph, still in use today, and still with Joseph's name attached.

Let me end this introduction to Exodus by saying that at the time of the Israelites in Egypt, it

was a land of plenty and of beauty and art. It was a land to be envied. When, in Exodus, we will find the Israelites complaining of their discomfort out in the Wilderness of Sinai, we will also hear them longing for their life back in Egypt. Not the forced labor part, of course, but the certainty of food, shelter, and being part of a magnificent and familiar culture.