

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 1

EXODUS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Name

The Pentateuch consists of the first five books of Scripture. Exodus is the second book. The name Exodus is derived from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It fits only the first part of the book (1:1-15:21) which narrates the going out of the Israelites from Egypt. In the Hebrew Masoretic text, the name is *Shermo*, which means "Names". It is taken from the first two words of the book, *ve-elleh shermot* – "And these are the names". This phrase links the book with Genesis. It tells of God's plan and promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their descendants. In fact, the first six words of Exodus is an exact quotation from the first six words of Genesis 46:8. The Hebrew text of Exodus begins with the conjunction "and" (*vav*) which is translated "now" in the KJV¹ version.

¹ The conjunction is omitted by the NIV translators – "These are the names of." This omission can mislead one to deny the Mosaic authorship of the book and view it as a separate document.

Theme

The book has two main parts. Part (1) describes the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (C1: 1- C15:21). Part (2) describes the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (C19:1 - C40:38). The intervening section (C15:22 - C18:27) relates the journey of the Israelites to Mount Sinai.

Exodus gives a historical account of the beginning of Israel as a nation. Since the first feast of the Passover, the Israelites have faithfully celebrated the Passover on *Yom-Kippur* Day commemorating their deliverance from bondage to freedom as the people of God. At Mount Sinai, God gave Israel the Law, which teaches them how to worship Him and have fellowship with Him.

The historical account presents a graphic picture of a Christian's former spiritual state, his deliverance from the bondage of sin and Satan, to the freedom of a new life in close fellowship with God. The theological value of Exodus is no less important. It speaks contemporaneously to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Theology

The Divine account of the book offers immeasurable theological and practical values. Truth concerning the nature and character of God is revealed in His relationship with the nation of Israel, and the other nations. And because of the authoritative stamp of

God, its spiritual and practical value to those who diligently dig His Word is life transforming and priceless.

Authorship

The strongest evidence to the authorship of the book is the Scriptural text itself. In many places, it is asserted that Moses wrote the book:

Exodus 17:14 And **the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book**, and rehearse *it* in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

Exodus 24:4 **And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD**, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Exodus 34:27 And **the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words:** for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.

Our Lord Jesus Christ when talking about God's conversation with Moses at the burning bush referred to the book as "the book of Moses".² Moses' mental capacity and literary skill is unquestionable for he "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and

² KJV Mark 12:26 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not **read in the book of Moses**, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? (See also Luke 20:37).

was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22).

Dating

According to 1 Kings 6:1, the exodus from Egypt took place 480 years before the fourth year of the reign of King Solomon.³ The date of the fourth year of Solomon's reign is 965/6 BC. The exodus took place in the year 1445/6 BC (480 plus 965/6). A second biblical source for dating the book is Judges 11:26,

While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that *be* along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover *them* within that time?

The judge who ruled Israel at that time was Jephthah. He placed 300 years between Israel's dwelling in Heshbon (Numbers 21:23-26) and the second year of his judgeship.⁴ If we add 38

³ KJV 1 Kings 6:1 And it came to pass in the **four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel**, in the month Zif, which *is* the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

⁴ KJV Numbers 21:23 And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 24 And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon *was* strong. 25 And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in **Heshbon**, and in all the villages thereof. 26 For Heshbon *was* the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of

years (the time of the wanderings of the Israelites from Egypt until they took Heshbon) to 144 years (the period from Jephthah to the fourth year of Solomon's reign), the total number of years between the exodus and the fourth year of Solomon's reign would be 482 years! This agrees with 1 Kings 6:1 and serves as a confirmation of the correct dating.

At that time, the Pharaoh of Egypt was Thutmose III (1501-1447 BC) but he was too young to rule. So, Queen Hatshepsut (1501-1479 BC) seized the throne and ruled Egypt for about twenty years. It is the consensus of many bible scholars that she was the woman who cared for Moses in his early years. Then, Thutmose regained his rule over Egypt. He was most likely the Pharaoh who oppressed the Hebrews. However, he died before the exodus and was succeeded by his son Amenhotep II, who ruled for twenty-six years. He was the king of the exodus and the one who lost his firstborn in the final judgement of God (Exodus 12).⁵

OUTLINE

A. THE NAME OF THE SONS OF JACOB WHO CAME TO EGYPT (1:1-5)

1. The sons by Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun (vv. 1-3a)
2. The son by Rachel: Benjamin (3b).
3. The sons by Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid: Dan and Naphtali (4a)
4. The sons by Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad and Asher (4b)
5. They were seventy and Joseph was already in Egypt (5)

B. THE DEATH OF JACOB'S SONS AND VAST INCREASE OF THEIR DESCENDANTS (1:6-7)

1. Joseph and all his brothers died (v.6)
2. Their descendants increased in population and wealth (v.7)

C. A NEW PHARAOH ATTEMPTED TO CUT DOWN ISRAEL (1:8-11)

1. This new king did not appreciate the good deeds of Joseph (8)
2. The king expressed his fear of Israel becoming strong (v.9)
3. The king decided craftily to stop the growth of the Israelites (v.10)
4. The king enslaved the Israelites (v.11)

D. ISRAEL BECAME STRONGER (1:12-14)

1. The more the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites, the more they multiplied (v.12)

Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon.

⁵ Consult John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (pp. 33-37), and W.H. Gispen, *The Bible Student's Commentary – Exodus* (pp.21-24) for more details of the history of the Pharaohs in that period.

2. The Egyptians sentenced the Israelites to hard labour in the field (v.13-14)

E. THE PHARAOH RESORTED TO PAEDO-GENOCIDE (1:15-22)

1. Pharaoh charged the midwives to kill the newborn males of the Hebrew women (v.15-16)
2. The midwives feared God and chose to disobey Pharaoh (v.17)
3. The midwives explained that they had no chance to kill the babies (v.18-19)
4. God approved of the midwives and blessed them (v.20-21)
5. Pharaoh openly commanded that all newborn male infants be drowned (v.22)

COMMENTARY

The Lord God Remembers His Promises

The opening words connect the book with Genesis. Moses recalled that the “children of Israel” (that is, children of Jacob) all came to Egypt. The names of Jacob’s sons were listed in the order of his wives; first, Leah followed by Rachel and the handmaids. Joseph was mentioned separately because he was already in Egypt. The family of Joseph numbered “seventy souls”.

Then Moses wrote that Joseph and all his brethren and the generations that followed died. This verse indicates that a long period of time, no less than

four hundred years, had passed (Genesis 15:13).⁶ God had already predicted to Abraham that his descendants would temporarily sojourn in “a strange land”.

The children of Israel had multiplied and were increasingly fruitful (v.7). Five verbs describe the extraordinary blessings of the Israelites: “were fruitful” (*parah*), “increased abundantly” (*sharetz*), “multiplied” (*rabah*), “exceeding mighty” (*atzam*), and “filled” (*mala*). Although the name of God is not mentioned, it is clear that God had kept His covenant promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:5; 17:6).⁷ Israel had grown from a family to a nation. The Israelites numbered more than two million.⁸ God had fulfilled His covenant promises to Abraham. What does this tell us? God is faithful. He keeps His promises.

⁶ KJV Genesis 15:13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them **four hundred years**.

⁷ Genesis 15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, **So shall thy seed be.**

Genesis 17:6 And **I will make thee exceeding fruitful**, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

⁸ Numbers 1:46 gives the number of fighting men to be 603,550 fighting men. If the number of fighting men represents a quarter of the total population, which included the women and children, they would number over 2,000,000.

God's Blessing upon His People Invites Opposition

A “new king” ascended the throne of Egypt. His name is not mentioned. He “knew not” Joseph (vv.1-7). The word “knew” does not mean acquainted or being informed. It denotes an intimate relationship characterised by commitment and concern for the parties involved. So this new king did not appreciate what Joseph had contributed to Egypt in the past. Instead, he was jealous, fearful and suspicious of the Hebrews.

He devised ways of suppressing and oppressing the Hebrews. He wanted to curtail the population growth of the Hebrews. First, he put the Hebrews to hard labour building the storehouses of Pharaoh, namely, Pithom and Raamses. Ironically, the more Pharaoh afflicted the Hebrews, the more they increased and grew. It was the reverse of his expectation. Pharaoh's cunning and craftiness backfired.

Frustration and anger filled his heart. Then he increased the workload of the Hebrew slaves. They not only had to make bricks but they also had to work in the open hot fields, planting and irrigating the land. He made them work with “rigour”. Twice “rigour” (*perek*) is mentioned (v.13, 14). It stresses the harshness and cruelty of the Egyptians' treatment of the Hebrew slaves. The objective was to break their social and cultural heritage and destroy any political aspirations. In short, Pharaoh

required them to serve him instead of the LORD their God. This is not God's plan and purpose for His people. God's purpose for all men is that they might know Him, worship and serve Him! The enslavement of man by his fellow man robs him of the freedom to worship His Creator God.

God Blesses People Who Fear and Honour Him

Pharaoh, driven by his attempt to curtail the population growth of the Hebrews, then plotted to kill the newborn male babies of the Hebrews. He called two midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah. They were to kill the male infants when they “see them upon the stools” (v.16). The stools were birth stools on which the women crouched to give birth.⁹ The identity of these two midwives is the subject of controversy among bible scholars. Some hold the view that they were Egyptian midwives and not Hebrews. Others hold the view that they were Hebrew midwives.¹⁰ Shiphrah and Puah

⁹ In Mesopotamia, Egypt, and among the Hebrews, women often crouched down in childbirth upon a pair of stones or on a birth stool of similar pattern.

The Egyptian Papyrus Westcar, written in the Hyksos period, records how three goddesses delivered a priest's wife of three sons: one each took a child on her arms, they cut the umbilical cords, washed the children, and put them on a cloth on a little brick bench, then went to announce the births to the waiting husband. The Hebrew word for “stools” in verse 16 meaning two stones undoubtedly refers to the procedure described above (Davis, 50).

¹⁰ Read the commentaries by George Bush, Gispén, and Fretheim for their arguments.

could be the chief midwives of all the midwives serving the Hebrews. Pharaoh's secret command made his plan unobtrusive.

But Pharaoh's plan was unsuccessful again. When summoned by Pharaoh for an explanation, the midwives explained that they could not carry out his order because it was impossible. Hebrew women were not like the Egyptian women. They were "lively"; that is, they were quick and strong in child bearing for they had natural vigour and a robust constitution. They "delivered" their babies like the "wild beasts" in that they gave birth to their babies after the manner of the beasts of the forest without any obstetrical aid!

The midwives were motivated by their fear of God (v.17). The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, knowledge and understanding! They understood the sacredness and value of human life. The answer the midwives gave to Pharaoh was good. There is no reason to doubt that what they said was true. On the other hand, they may have held back part of the truth. There is nothing morally wrong in withholding part of the truth in order to save the innocent. It was not necessary for them to tell the wicked and cruel Pharaoh everything. It is interesting and surprising that Pharaoh readily accepted their explanation. It is ironical that the more he sought to curtail the population growth of the Hebrews, the more they grew. No one can beat God. The enemy is doomed to

failure. In his zeal to diminish the strength of the Israelites, Pharaoh failed to realise that killing the male infants would eventually reduce his labour force, and that the daughters could also be a force to be reckoned with. They could also sabotage his schemes as seen from the example of the midwives.

God blessed the midwives because they feared and honoured Him. He "made them houses" (v.21). These are not material houses. The Scriptural idiom of "a house" is "a family". The LORD spoke to David that He would make him a house,

And as since the time that I commanded judges *to be* over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies.

Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house (2 Samuel 7:11).

The house that God would build for David is his dynasty, his posterity. So echoed Solomon who succeeded his father David,

Now therefore, as the LORD liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day (1 Kings 2:24).

SUMMARY

God was true to His Word. The appointed time had arrived to lead His people back to Canaan, the Promised

Land. It was the hope of Jacob and Joseph on their dying beds. Joseph had made the children of Israel swear that they would take his bones and bury them in Canaan.

God had blessed His people greatly. The land of Goshen could no longer accommodate them. As a nation of more than two million, they now needed a land of their own, a land that God had promised them. Pharaoh's oppression of the Hebrews actually worked towards the fulfilment of God's plan and purpose. The more Pharaoh oppressed them, the more they would desire to get out of Egypt and return to Canaan! Of course, Pharaoh did not know that he was aiding God's plan. How marvellous is the Lord our God, who can turn the evil and wicked schemes against His people for good. We need to know this and walk upright before Him like Shiprah and Puah.

This chapter teaches us that it is better to serve God than to serve man. With God, there is freedom and with man, enslavement.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Exodus 1:1-7; Genesis 15:3-7, 13-14; 17:5, 6; 2 Corinthians 1:20

TUESDAY: Exodus 1:8-11; Psalm 76:1-10; Romans 8:31

WEDNESDAY: Exodus 1:12-14; Proverbs 21:30-31; Hebrews 6:10-20

THURSDAY: Exodus 1:15-22; Psalm 33:17-19; Proverbs 9:10; 22:4

FRIDAY: Psalm 105:1-25; Hebrews 12:6-11

Discussion Questions

1. How was God's prediction in Genesis 15:13 fulfilled in Exodus Chapter 1?

2. How were God's promises in Genesis 15:5, Genesis 17:6 and Genesis 22:17 fulfilled?

3. What do the Hebrews really need now that they had over-populated Goshen? How does the cruelty of Pharaoh fit into God's plan?

4. What does the phrase that the king "knew not Joseph" mean?

5. Why did the Egyptians want to oppress and enslave the Hebrews?

6. What were the steps taken by Pharaoh to curtail the Hebrew population? Were they successful?

7. Describe the afflictions endured by the Hebrew slaves. How do you think they felt?

8. Where was God in the midst of the Hebrews' afflictions?

9. In what ways would Pharaoh's plan to kill the male infants backfire?

10. What was Pharaoh's objective in getting the Hebrew midwives to do the job of killing the male babies?

11. What motivated the midwives' actions?

12. Did the midwives tell "white lies"? Why did God reward them?

13. Name one thing that you have learned about

(a) God

(b) man

(c) afflictions in life?

14. What would be an appropriate title for this chapter?
