

Exodus 1

The theme of the Bible is: The salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. Before the Word can become flesh (John 1:1, 14), He needs a human mother, who will be part of a nation, which lives within specified borders, under a law. Thus, we see the need for: Israel, Canaan, and the Law of Moses. When Genesis concluded, Abraham's descendants were in Egypt (50:26). The book of Exodus describes the *exodus* of Abraham's descendants out of Egypt, their assembly at Mount Sinai where God gives them the Law through Moses, and makes plans for them to live in Canaan, which He promised them through Abraham (Gen. 15:18).

God does not have a strong active role in this first chapter. His role does not really begin until the end of chapter 2. However, throughout the book of Exodus, "God" is only missing in chapters 37-38 (which talk about the tabernacle) and God speaks in every chapter except 1-2, 18 and 35-39. So, God is very much at work in the book, as He reveals Himself and His nature both to the Egyptians and to Israel.

TRANSLATION - 1:1-6:

1 And these [are] the names of the sons of Israel, those coming to Egypt with Jacob, a man and his sons came. **2** Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. **3** Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin. **4** Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Assher. **5** And this was each soul leaving the thigh of Jacob, seventy souls and Joseph was in Egypt. **6** And Joseph died and all his brothers and all that generation.

HEBREW WORDS:

"Names" (ver. 1) is used 864 times in the OT.¹ The word is used 113 times in Genesis, 43 times in Exodus. "Sons of Israel" is used 652 times in the OT. It is used 7 times in Genesis, specifically referring to the descendants of Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel; Gen. 32:24-32). The designation is used 122 times in Exodus as it becomes the typical designation for God's people, the family of Abraham. "Soul" (ver. 5) is used 757 times in the OT. Moses used the word 43 times in Genesis; see 1:20-21, 24, 30. He will use the word only 17 times in Exodus. It means "soul, life, person, neck, or throat". "Thigh" is used 34 times in the OT, earlier at Genesis 24:2, 9. It can mean "thigh, loin, or side." In reference to someone coming from a female, it would be said they came from her "womb." In reference to a man, it is said the child came from his "thigh."

"Generation" (ver. 6) is used 167 times in the OT, 19 times in Exodus. It is most frequently used in Psalms (59 times).

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

The list of Jacob's sons is repeated from texts in Genesis, such as 35:23-26 and 46:8, 26-27.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

"Egypt" (ver. 1) is used 682 times in the OT, making it the most significant nation in the OT, aside from Israel. It is found 88 times in Genesis, 175 times in Exodus.

COMMENTARY:

We observe that the book of Exodus begins with "and," which shows that it is grammatically connected with Genesis. It is also chronologically connected, thematically connected, and theologically connected. Perhaps writing on a separate scroll than Genesis, Moses summarizes in this first paragraph what had transpired to bring Abraham's family into Egypt. Noting that there were 70 who came into Egypt sets the stage for the exponential

¹ Word counts come from Van Pelt & Pratico, *The Vocabulary Guide to Biblical Hebrew*.

growth that Moses will emphasize beginning in verse 7. That generation, which was alive at the end of Genesis, had died by the time Moses begins the story in Exodus. This point sets the stage for Moses' comment at verse 8.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - In Deuteronomy 10:22, Moses refers again to the "70" members of Jacob's family, this time to the next generation. In that text, Moses will state that God made them as "numerous as the stars of heaven."

NT writers - Stephen, rehearsing the history of Israel (Acts 7:14), states there were 75 (rather than 70) members of Jacob's family who entered Egypt. Stephen is using the LXX; see comments on Genesis 46:27.

TRANSLATION - 1:7-14:

7 And the sons of Israel were fruitful and they were innumerable and became many and they were becoming mighty very very much and the land was filling with them.

8 And a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. **9** And he said to his nation, "Behold, the nation of the sons of Israel are becoming many and are becoming mightier than us. **10** Come, let us be shrewd over them lest they become many and it will be if war happens that it will join even it to our enemies and it will fight against us and will escape from the land."

11 So they put over it leaders of forced labor in order it to humble by forced labor and it built the cities for storage for Pharaoh: Pithom and Rameses. **12** And just as they humbled it, thus they became many and thus it broke out; they grieved before the face of the sons of Israel. **13** And the Egyptians made the sons of Israel serve rigorously. **14** And they made their lives bitter in the difficult service in clay and brick in all the service in the field and all their service which they served among them rigorously.

HEBREW WORDS:

"Fruitful" (ver. 7) was used in Genesis 1:22, 28. It is used 29 times in the OT. In Exodus, it is used only here and 23:30. "To be innumerable" is used 14 times in the OT. It usually refers to insects which "swarm" or "teem." It was used at Gen. 1:20-21. In Exodus, it is used here and 8:3. "To become many" is used 229 times in the OT. It was also used in Genesis 1:22, 28. In Exodus, the verb is used at: 1:7, 10, 12, 20; 7:3; 11:9; 30:15; 32:13; 36:5. "To become mighty" is used 17 times, in Genesis only at 26:16. In Exodus, the verb is used only here and 1:20. The verb can mean "to be vast, mighty, powerful, or numerous."

"King" (ver. 8) is used 2,530 times in the OT, reflecting the fact that nations were monarchies in the ancient near east. "Queen" is used 35 times. "To rule as king" is used 350 times. "Kingdom" is used 117 times. "King" is used 41 times in Genesis, but only 14 times in Exodus. The ruler of Egypt is more commonly called "pharaoh" (1:11). "New" is used 53 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. The verb "to know" can mean "to understand, notice, observe, have sexual relationship with." It is used 956 times in the OT. It is a key verb in Exodus, used 47 times. One should highlight each verb as it appears in Exodus.

"Behold" or "Look!" (ver. 9) is used 1,061 times, 42 times in Exodus. "To be shrewd" (ver. 10) is used 28 times in the OT; it is the word "to be wise." This is its only use in Exodus. The verb is a hithpael so we translate it with a negative connotation. "War" is used 319 times in the OT, five times in Exodus: here; 13:17; 15:3; 17:16; 32:17. "Enemies" is a participle of the verb "to hate," used 148 times. It is used in Exodus here; 18:21; 20:5, 23:5. "To fight" is used 171 times in the OT, six times in Exodus: here; 14:14, 25; 17:8-10. "To escape" is used 894 times in the OT. It is more often translated "to go up, ascend, offer (a sacrifice)." Here, it refers to "going up" from Egypt, or "escaping." It is used 62 times in Exodus.

"Chiefs" (ver. 11) is used 421 times, often translated "prince." In Exodus, it is used at 1:11; 2:14; 18:21, 25. "Forced labor" is used 23 times. Genesis 49:15 is its only use in that book; here is its only use in Exodus. "To humble" is used 79 times. It can mean "to be afflicted,

humiliate, or violate.” In Genesis, it was used at 15:13; 16:6, 9; 31:50; 34:2. In Exodus, it is used at 1:11-12; 10:3; 22:21-23. The second “forced labor” is a different word. This one is used 12 times in the OT; in Exodus at 1:11; 2:11; 5:4-5; 6:6-7. “To build” is used 377 times in the OT; in Exodus, it is used at 1:11; 17:15; 20:25; 24:4; 32:5. “Storage” is used 7 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “Pharaoh” is the unique designation for the leader or king of Egypt. The word is used 274 times in the OT. It was used 94 times in Genesis and 115 times in Exodus.

“To break out” (ver. 12) or “spread out, burst open” is used 46 times in the OT. The concept is illustrated in the birth of Perez (Gen. 38:29), whose name is based on the Hebrew verb. It is used in Exodus here; 19:22, 24. “To be grieved” is only used 9 times. It was used at Genesis 27:46. This is its only use in Exodus. “To serve” (ver. 13) is another key word in Exodus. The verb means “to work, toil, cultivate.” It is used in the OT 289 times, in Exodus 31 times. This verb should be highlighted as one studies through the book. “Rigorously” is used only 6 times in the OT: Exo. 1:13-14; Lev. 25:43, 46, 53; Ezek. 34:4.

“To make bitter” (ver. 14) is used 16 times in the OT. It is used in Exodus here and 23:21. “Service” or “work” is the related noun to the verb used in the previous verse. The noun is used 145 times; it can be translated as “worship” in narrow contexts. It is used 23 times in Exodus. “Difficult” is used 36 times, in Exodus at: 1:14; 6:9; 18:26; 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9. “Clay” is found 17 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “Brick” is found 12 times, most of them in Exodus (it is used at Genesis 11:3): 1:14; 5:7-8, 16, 18-19; 24:10.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

The description of Israel’s phenomenal growth in Egypt (1:7) repeats descriptions of God’s promises to the patriarchs in Genesis 1:28; 9:1, 7; 17:2; 18:18; 28:14; 48:4. Jacob believed he would return to the land of the fathers (Gen. 48:21). Joseph also believed he would be carried back to Canaan, after his death (Gen. 50:24-25). One might see an allusion in verse 7 to Genesis 35:11.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The location of Pithom and Rameses have not been identified. Two locations have been strongly proposed: Tanis and Qantas. However, neither has been definitively identified. The city of Rameses was known for its beauty in Egyptian poetry. The reference to Rameses (as in Gen. 47:11) has been used to argue that the exodus occurred during the reign of Pharaoh Rameses, who built this city (1290 B. C.). However, this argument is not definitive since the name of the city could have been updated by someone later than Moses, or the pharaoh could have *rebuilt* the city which had been built (or even modified or enlarged) by the Israelites in our text. There are simply too many questions which cannot be answered definitively in reference to the date of the exodus.

“Pharaoh” means “big house” in Egyptian. Originally, the word described the royal palace. By Moses’ time, the word referred to the king of Egypt. It would be another six centuries before the word would be attached to the proper name. After another century, it would be used as a name for the ruler. Pharaoh is mentioned in Genesis 12:15, 17-18, 20; 37:36; 39:1; and then extensively throughout Genesis 40-41, 45-47. He is last mentioned in Genesis at 50:4, 6-7.

The process of making bricks would be hard, physically exhausting work, in the hot sun, in the midst of extremely dusty conditions. It would not be a pleasant task at all.

COMMENTS:

Verse 7 points out that God is blessing Israel, just as He had promised Abraham as early as Genesis 12:1-3. Count how many times and how many ways Moses emphasizes the growth of the nation. The word translated “innumerable” is used of frogs in Exodus 8:3. The “land” was filling with Israelites. We presume “land” refers to the land of Goshen. Ironically, the Hebrew word is the same word used in Gen. 1:28 (which Exo. 1:7 repeats): “be fruitful and multiply and fill the *earth*.” Verse 7 appears to be the last time “sons of Israel” refers to the

descendants of Jacob. Beginning in verse 9 through the remainder of the Bible, the designation invariably refers to the nation of Israel.

A new king arose into power in Egypt who did not know Joseph. We do not know why he did not know Joseph. We do not know how many pharaohs reigned between the last one found in Genesis and this one. It is possible that he had heard of Joseph and what he did for Egypt but, because Joseph was a foreigner, chose not to be grateful for Joseph's service and thus "did not know Joseph." This ignorance led the pharaoh to be fearful.

Pharaoh, perhaps not realizing he was working against Jehovah God, tries to undo the blessing mentioned in 1:7. His oppression of Israel recalls the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 15:13. In verse 9, Pharaoh notes that Israel was growing numerically. In verse 10, he suggests the Egyptians need to be "shrewd" or "wise" toward them. The reason is because Pharaoh fears if some war happens, perhaps instigated by a neighboring country, Israel will join the anti-Egypt alliance and fight against Egypt and so escape.

Observe in verses 11-14 how difficult Pharaoh made the lives of the Israelites. He set leaders of forced labor over them, to humble them through forced labor, and made them build cities for storage, namely Pithom and Rameses. However, his efforts have the opposite effect (verse 12), which suggests his "shrewd / wise" behavior backfired! The more he persecuted, the more Israel grew, and the more Egypt grieved!

Verse 13 notes Pharaoh made Israel serve "rigorously." In verse 14, Moses notes the Egyptians made Israel's life bitter with difficult service as they made bricks for their building projects. Again, Moses notes they worked "rigorously." The pharaoh will later change the ingredients presented to the Israelites for making the bricks (5:7-8).

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - The stay in Egypt will be identified as a "house of slavery" later in Exodus (13:3, 14; 20:2) and especially forty years later, in Deuteronomy (5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10). Pharaoh's fear, expressed in verse 10, will be realized, verbatim, in Exodus 13:18. Moses will also remind Israel that they had been "slaves in Egypt" (Deut. 16:12; 24:18).

Later Jewish writers - Joshua (24:17) refers to the stay in Egypt as a "house of bondage." The author of Judges calls it a "house of slavery" (6:8). Jeremiah (34:13) will use the same phrase as Joshua. Micah (6:4) will use "house of slavery." Egypt is mentioned in Psalms 14 times. In Psalm 87:4, Egypt is usually viewed under the designation of "Rahab." Psalm 105:23-24 speaks of Israel's fruitfulness in Egypt. Egypt is mentioned 44 times in Isaiah; 62 times in Jeremiah; 51 times in Ezekiel, especially chapters 29-32. In Ezekiel 29:3, Egypt is rebuked by God for her pride (see also 32:31-32). However, Isaiah 19:23-25 portrays a time when Egypt will worship along with Israel and will also be considered God's people, in addition to Israel.

New Testament writers - Stephen reviews the history of Israel in Acts 7 and specifically refers to this text in Acts 7:17-18. Pharaoh was, arguably, ungrateful for what Joseph had done for Egypt. It is still a sin to be ungrateful (Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:15; 1 Thess. 5:18; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13; Hebrews 13:15). Rabbi Gamaliel warned his fellow Jews that if they persecute Christians, they may find themselves "fighting against God" (Acts 5:39). It is good for us to remember our sinful past because it can help us appreciate the grace of God (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

TRANSLATION - 1:15-22:

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, which the name of the one [was] Shiphrah and the name of the second [was] Puah, **16** and he said, "When the Hebrews give birth and you see on the stones if a son, then put him to death, but if a daughter then she may live." **17** But the midwives feared God and did not do just as the king of Egypt spoke to them but they allowed the babies to live. **18** And the king of Egypt called to the midwives and said to them, "Why did you do this and you allowed to live the babies?"

19 And the midwives said to Pharaoh that "Not like the Egyptian women [are] the Hebrews because lively they [are] before comes to them the midwives and they give birth." **20**

So God treated well the midwives and the nation became great and became very mighty. **21** Now it was that the midwives feared God and He made for them houses. **22** Then Pharaoh commanded all his nation saying, “Every boy born, into the Nile throw him and every daughter, allow to live.”

HEBREW WORDS:

“Midwives” (ver. 15) is a participle form of the verb “to give birth,” the verb appearing 499 times. “Hebrew” refers to one being descended from “Eber” (Gen. 10:21-24); the word is used 34 times. It designates Abraham in 14:13. It is used 14 times in Exodus. The word “stones” (ver. 16) is a literal translation. It is generally translated here as “birth stool.” It is used only again at Jeremiah 18:3. “Son” is used 233 times in Exodus. “Daughter” is used 53 times in Exodus. The Hebrew word for “God” (*elohim*) is used 65 times in Exodus. “To fear” is used 317 times in the OT, in Exodus 13 times. The adverb “lively” (ver. 19) is only used here in the OT; it is related to the verb “to be alive.” “To give birth” is used 499 times in the OT. It is only used in Exodus at: 1:16, 19; 2:2, 22; 6:20, 23, 25; 21:4.

“To treat well” (ver. 20) is used 44 times in the OT; it is related to the adjective “good.” It is used in Exodus here and 30:7. “House” (ver. 21) is used 2,047 times in the OT. It is used in Genesis 109 times while in Exodus, 59 times. “To command” (ver. 22) is used 496 times in the OT. Its use in Exodus is scattered over the book, used 54 times. “Nile” can be translated more generally as “stream, river.” The word comes from the Egyptian language and is used 64 times in the OT. It is found in Genesis extensively in chapter 41: 41:1-3, 17-18. In Exodus, it is found 23 times, concentrated in chapter 7 (14 times). “To throw” is found 125 times in the OT; in Exodus, it is found at 1:22; 4:3; 7:9-10, 12; 15:25; 22:30; 32:19, 24.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

Abraham did not believe there was any “fear of God” in Gerar (Gen. 20:11). The servitude of the family of Abraham toward a foreign nation was predicted by God in Genesis 15:13-14. This passage fulfills that anticipation.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The so-called “birth stool” is literally a couple of stones. Perhaps these were bricks on which the pregnant women squatted as they delivered their babies. The midwives would catch the baby as it exited the womb. As noted above, the word is only used once more in the OT: Jeremiah 18:3. Some scholars suggest it refers to a boy’s testicles, but there is no reason to believe that is the meaning here. The midwives were to see “on” the stones; the preposition does not denote an object of the verb.

The word “Nile” (ver. 22) is a word borrowed from the Egyptian language. It was such an important part of the Egyptian economy, providing transportation, water, and nourishment for crops, animals, and humans that the Egyptians worshipped it as a god, which they called “Hapy.”

COMMENTS:

The phrase “Hebrew midwives” might also be translated “midwives of the Hebrews” such that it denotes Egyptians who served the Hebrews. Their names, however, are Semitic names. Isn’t it remarkable that in God’s word, the pharaoh is nameless but the two women who saved God’s children are named?! In fact, “Shiphrah” is still a popular girls’ name among the Jews. Since only two midwives are named, many suggest, perhaps correctly, that these two women were leaders among groups of women who performed this service for the Hebrew women. When Israel left Egypt, there were 600,000 men (12:37); we might presume there were that many, or more, women.

Pharaoh ordered these midwives, when the baby was a boy, to kill him and allow the girls to live. Boys would grow to be men, leaders, and soldiers. However, verse 17 notes that the midwives feared God and disobeyed the command of the king. In verse 18, the pharaoh is

surprised by their disobedience. When he asked why they allowed the boys to live, they respond by saying that the Hebrew women give birth too quickly for them to kill the boys. It seems the midwives are saying that the moms give birth and are too alert for the midwives to kill the boys without the moms knowing what is happening. Many scholars state that the midwives were lying, but without knowing more of the facts and their intentions, we cannot be sure. Perhaps through the blessing of God, the Hebrew women did give birth before the midwives arrived.

But, the growth of Israel has been emphasized in this chapter, in verses 7, 12, and 20. No one cannot stop God from fulfilling His plans and promises! Pharaoh thought the men (boys) would be a threat to his rule but it is the women who keep the boys, especially Moses (chapter 2), alive! Verse 17 is the first verse in Exodus to mention God. The midwives feared God (ver. 17, 21), did not kill the Hebrews, and so God “treated them well” (ver. 20). The way He treated them well was to “make for them houses” (ver. 21). We do not know what image the midwives had of Jehovah God. We presume, as we emphasized in our commentary on Genesis, that they had access to some sort of revelation from God, either an inspired oral account or (more likely) some written form of the history of the patriarchs, what we know as Genesis. However, when God tells Moses at the burning bush to return to Egypt (after fleeing 40 years earlier), Moses was concerned that no one would know Who God is (Exo. 3:13).

In the last verse, Pharaoh commands the whole Egyptian nation to throw the newborn boys into the Nile River and allow the girls to live. This plan, too, will be thwarted. When we have the opportunity, we point out where the Bible presents an unexpected picture of women. That is, modern feminists like to say the Bible is misogynistic, or at least its writers were. However, as Moses did in Genesis, here he shows women as the “heroes” of the scene. If the Bible was misogynistic, men would be the heroes, including Moses’ father (and brother) in the next chapter, rather than Moses’ mother (and sister).

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - When Israel had prisoners of war, they would kill the males and take the females as their wives: Num. 31:1-18; Deut. 20:14; 21:10-14 (see also Judges 5:30; 21:11-14; 1 Kings 11:15).

Later Jewish writers - David praises the king who rules with “fear of God” (2 Sam. 23:3). Nehemiah lived in the “fear of God” (Neh. 5:15). Eliphaz asks Job if he has “fear of God” (Job 4:6). The ungodly have no “fear of God” (Psa. 36:1).

NT writers - Paul quotes Psalm 36:1 to the effect that the wicked have no fear of God (Rom. 3:18). In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul calls on Christians to perfect their holiness “in the fear of God.” The murder of the boys is reflected in Herod’s murder of the boys at the birth of Jesus described in Matthew 2. The apostle John, in Revelation 12:15-16, will allude to Pharaoh’s effort to kill the baby boys here in Egypt as he makes reference to the Roman Empire trying to kill God’s “children,” Christians. While it is possible that Shiprah and Puah lied to Pharaoh, God does not approve of their lying. Under the New Testament, the covenant of Jesus Christ, all lying is forbidden (Rev. 21:8). “God fearer” became a common designation in NT times for a Gentile who believed in the God of the Jews (Luke 7:1-10; Acts 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26).