

EXODUS

Lesson 2 - Chapter 1

Last week we discussed that the noted Hebrew Bible scholar, Everett Fox, chose a method to look at Exodus that involved dividing it into 6 divisions.

Today, we enter the first of the divisions that he calls the “Deliverance Narrative”. It starts at 1:1, and continues through Chapter 15. So, for the next month or so we’ll be looking at all that God did to gain His chosen people’s release from Pharaoh; beginning with rescue of the infant Moses from the Nile, and ending just after the parting of the Red Sea which completes their escape from the hand of Pharaoh.

Just for you note takers, the second division “Wilderness” starts at the end of 15 and continues through 18. Part 3, Covenant and Law, starts at 19 and goes through 24. Part 4, The Plan of the Wilderness Tabernacle, begins at 25 and continues through 31; the 5th division, Infidelity and Reconciliation, starts in Chapter 32 and concludes with Chapter 34, and finally, The Building of the Tabernacle starts with 35 and runs to the end of Exodus.

Let’s read Exodus 1.

READ EXODUS 1 all

Time gets gobbled up, here. Between the last verse of Genesis, and the opening verse of Exodus, a period of about 350 years has passed. The first few verses of Exodus are kind of a bridge between Genesis and Exodus. The thing is, Genesis is not the end of one story and Exodus the start of a new one.....they are linked..... one flows into the next.... Exodus is a continuation and progression of what had begun in Genesis. So, we are reminded that Jacob and all 11 of his sons that lived with him in Canaan, along with all their family members, came to live in Egypt, but Joseph was already there. The total, were 70.

Here’s the thing: we’re going to get many symbolic numbers in the Torah, and the Bible as a whole. 70 is a symbolic number. Now, on the one hand, Genesis 46, which lists all the MALE descendants of Jacob by means of both his legal wives and concubines, gives us the count of 70. However, as we discussed back when we studied that chapter, the number presents problems because it includes 2 of Judah’s sons who died at the hand of God, in Canaan, as well as Joseph and his 2 sons who were born in Egypt. So, 70 males of Jacob’s family could well be accurate. But, on the other hand, 70 is such a round number, and such a symbolic number that indicates totality, or something that is fully comprehensive, that we have to likely view this number of 70 as symbolic that ALL of Israel went to Egypt, with no one left behind.

Consider this: we know from Genesis 34 that when the sons of Jacob killed all the males of Shechem in retribution for the rape of their sister Dinah, they took all the women and children as slaves and concubines. Understand that from an ancient Middle Eastern perspective, these women and children became part of Israel.

Further, this number of 70 counts ONLY males. There were at least as many females, and usually there were significantly more females than males in ancient populations because the men were killed in battle or injured in their jobs.

Therefore, the actual total number of people who went down to Egypt.....those who would be reasonably labeled as Israelites.....was probably around 200 or so. In later studies I'll show you why it's important to recognize that.

The bulk of the Israelites still lived now, some 350 years after their arrival, in the same general area that they did when Joseph called for them: Goshen, in the Nile delta area. The central city they lived in was called Avaris, and Joseph appears to have had a palace there for he and his immediate family. This city has been found, and there can be no doubt as to its identity. In archaeological terms, this place is now called Tel ed-da'aba. It is huge and it would have supported hundreds of thousands of people. And, it was Hebrew and Canaanite in architecture.

Further, more archaeological finds have confirmed that it was in the land of Goshen.....also called Lower Egypt....where the Hyksos rulers of Egypt set up their capital city.....and not surprisingly, it was this same Avaris.

A common refrain from non-Christians and University professors is that the Bible is simply a book full of legends and myths. And, that the people and places in the scriptures, for the most part, never existed. We are told that they've never found a place in Egypt where all those Hebrews might have lived. We're told they've never found record of Solomon or King David, nor of most of the Biblical cities. Nonsense. They **have** found these sites, and they **have** these records, and when push comes to shove, it's admitted. The only reason that many archaeologists and Egyptologists will argue against the conclusion that Tel ed-da'aba is the city of the Exodus, is because they **date** Avaris to an earlier **time** than when Bible chronology says the Hebrews should have lived there. And, it's the matter of placing these archeological sites in relation to time that is the issue.

The current system of dating ancient places and people and events, established in the 1800's, is called the Regnal Dating System, and it is based on the supposed times of the reigns of certain Egyptian Pharaohs. It is a system that is full of huge time gaps, pure speculation, and educated guesses. But, more, some of the foundational pillars of Regnal Dating have, through modern research, proven to be false. A new dating system, called the New Chronology, is gaining mainstream academic support slowly but surely. And, when the New Chronology is applied to the finds at Avaris and to hundreds and hundreds of other Biblical sites, the Biblical timeline falls almost perfectly into place.

As anyone that has spent any time in our advanced Educational system knows, the Bible is

anathema to these folks. So, any system of dating that seems to verify Biblical truth (even though the system was NOT devised with that goal) is very difficult to establish. By the way, Christian or Biblical scholars did NOT devise this New Chronology. It was begun by a fellow named David Rohl, an Oxford academic, who is an agnostic. Since the academic world of archaeology had some time ago determined a better dating system was needed, he took the tact that while he doesn't acknowledge the spiritual element of the Bible, that there is no reason to assume that the historical accounts written in the Bible are inherently false or inaccurate (and this assumption HAS, and continues, to be the foundational principle among these scholars and scientists).

I detour a little to tell you this, because I want you to know that when we're reading Exodus, these people and places actually existed, and the events happened. Many proofs have been found, and more are constantly being unearthed.

We're told in V6 that Joseph died, and along with him all that generation; that is, all his brothers and sisters; we need to picture that generation as the immigrant generation. Think for a moment just what that means: practically every one of us in this room are natural born Americans. However, our parents or grandparents were probably immigrants. They came here from someplace else to start a new life. And, their experience in America as immigrants who just got off of the boat was quite different than for those of us whom they produced. We knew nothing of the foreign country our immigrant ancestors knew. We have only known America, and American culture. That 2nd and 3rd generation of Israelites was quite different from those who had journeyed down from Canaan. Those who had come to survive the great famine thought of their stay as "just for a while". The next generation had little to no thought of going to Canaan..... after all, Egypt was the only home they ever knew, and so were quite comfortable in Egypt.

What God, through Joseph, had begun, Joseph's death did not end. V7 says that even after Joseph died, the Israelites continued to prosper, and grow in number, and spread out..... EXCEEDINGLY. Yet, it was this very purpose of God, this amazing fruitfulness, that was going to lead Israel into a confrontation with a future Pharaoh....an increasingly paranoid Pharaoh.

The Hyksos rulers, those Semites from somewhere in the Middle East, who were the rulers of Egypt during the time a little **before**, contemporary with, and then for about a century **after** Joseph, continued to favor the Israelites. After all, they were cousins. While this enviable status of the Hebrews allowed them to grow and prosper, it was also creating a festering jealousy and hatred of them by the Egyptians. The end of V7 marks the end of life in Egypt, as the Israelites had known it. The end of V7 is the end Israel's Golden era in Egypt.

Now, before we move on into the next era of the Hebrews' time in Egypt, this might be a good time to take out our magnifying glass and look at how Israel was currently structured from a human society standpoint. Because, beginning now, in Exodus, and running throughout the remainder of the O.T., it is **assumed** that we understand ancient Hebrew societal structure. If we don't we're going to get lost. So, with apologies to you that may already know, for everyone else we're going to take a few minutes to learn about the titles for leadership positions, and names for the various subdivisions of Hebrew people that came from this

population explosion. And, if we can learn what they are each referring to, we'll glean some extra understanding each time these terms are used in our studies.

Let us remember that the nation of Israel was founded by and named after, Jacob, who God renamed Israel. In those days, the name of a new nation (which is nothing more than a new people group) was taken from its founder. Jacob went on to have 12 sons, who formed the first subdivision of Israel. Each of these sons would eventually establish their own tribe, their own branch, of Israel; and, of course, each son would be the ruler of that branch....that tribe. These 12 tribes then each produced children who were the next subdivision; and that next subdivision is what the Bible generally refers to as "clans" or "families". And, as each of these clans or families went on to produce children, those children would mature and produce the next generation, or subdivision, that the Bible calls "households".

In more familiar Western terminology, Jacob was the father, the 12 sons the children, their children the grandchildren, and THEIR children the great grandchildren. But, the Bible uses different terms for each of these generations. So, Israel was the "**nation**", the 12 sons were the 12 **tribes** that formed that nation. The sons of the 12 tribal leaders each formed their own **clan or family**. While the Bible translators tend to use clan and family interchangeably, most accurately for our 21st century Western way of thinking, it would be best to think of these clans and families, as just clans, and use the word "family" for another category I'll show you in just a moment. In any case, the offspring of these **clans** then formed separate **households**.

Out of these "households", which we could best equate in our traditional thinking as EXTENDED FAMILIES, came what the Bible sometimes calls "**Man-by-man**". This is not talking about eligible bachelors. Rather, this would be the equivalent of our modern day nuclear family.....the smallest family unit. That is, mother, father, and young children as a unit. Often the Bible translators will call the Man-by-man subdivision a "family". But, this must not be confused with when these SAME Bible translators will also call a "clan" a "family".

So, the structure of Israel is: Nation (all of Israel), Tribe (12 of them), Clan, Household, Man-by-man (family).

The Bible calls the leader of a household the "head" (though sometimes he's referred to as chief). The leader of each clan is the "chief". The leader of a Tribe is called a "prince". So, each of the 12 tribes of Israel had a "prince"..... as long as there still existed 12 tribes, there were 12 princes.

Now, these princes were the rulers over ALL the people of their tribe, every subdivision. Every clan, household, and family was ultimately beholden to the tribal prince. His word was law. Let's keep in mind a trait of these tribal princes that, though obvious on the surface, is nonetheless important: these princes INHERITED their positions. Their heredity was what counted. While an outsider (whether from another of the Israelite tribes OR a foreigner, a non-Hebrew) could, at times, be accepted as a **member** of a tribe, this outsider would NEVER be allowed to be a prince, because absolute proper genealogy, traceable not just back to Jacob, but to the proper original son of Jacob.....that is, the proper tribe.... was required.

So, the order of prince, chief, head, formed a **hereditary aristocracy**, if you would. That is, when it came to authority, it was as that old TV series was called.....its ALL IN THE FAMILY. Now, interestingly, operating in parallel was another class or category of leadership and authority.... a sort of **elected or appointed class** of leaders. And, this class of leaders were representatives of the COMMON PEOPLE of the clans and families and households...and, they were called “elders” and “officers”. Often, a word substituted for “officer” is “Scribe”.

Now, this class of appointed or elected leaders operated under the authority of the tribal leaders. There is absolutely no way, for instance, that you would ever remove a prince or a chief from his position, except, perhaps, through assassination.... Because HIS position was given to him as a birthright, and therefore it was unchangeable and permanent. But, elders and officers, or scribes, COULD be removed legitimately from their position if there was enough displeasure on the part of the people for whom they were selected to serve, or if they upset the tribal leadership sufficiently.

And, of course, elders and officers and scribes, developed their own pecking order; they were further subdivided by their exact duties and a simple management hierarchy like we’re all used to seeing at wherever it is we work...you know....little fish reporting to big fish, and big fish reporting to BIGGER fish.

Keep this handy as we go forward. These titles and understanding structure and pecking order was important to the decisions that went on in Israelite culture. When the Bible uses terms like “prince” or “chief”, tribe or clan, these represent something specific. They are not just interchangeable words or synonymous.

Anyway, let’s continue in Exodus.

As I mentioned earlier, V7 ends and V8 begins a new and far less happy era for the Israelites in Egypt. We’re told that a new king.....that is, a new Pharaoh..... arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. Simply, this meant that the new king had no intentions of honoring the deals that the previous kings, Pharaohs, had with the Israelites.....and this for one very good reason: this new king was an Egyptian; the first Egyptian ruler of Egypt in a VERY long time.

This new Egyptian Pharaoh promptly announces that the Israelites, who had been honorable and worthy citizens of Egypt for nearing 200 years, are suddenly a **danger** to Egypt. And, they’re a danger because “they are many more than we”. In other words, the Pharaoh played the “race” card. Since those hated Hyksos rulers were Middle Eastern Semites.....and seen as cousins of essentially the same stock as the Hebrews.....they were all lumped together in one big pot. Now that the Hyksos rulers were defeated, those who supported those rulers, and probably looked a lot like those rulers.....the Israelites.....became persona non grata. And, they would bear the brunt of Egypt’s newfound nationalism and paranoia.

So, are we to take it that the Hebrews at this point actually outnumbered the Egyptians, which the Pharaoh says they did in V9? Or, was Pharaoh exaggerating? Well.... Yes and yes. While the Israelites were numerous, and lived throughout Egypt, they were highly concentrated in Goshen, and would have well outnumbered the Egyptian nationals there. But, when

considering Egypt overall, best estimates are that the Israelites would not have represented more than about 25% of the entire population of Egypt....but that's still pretty substantial.

Is it not ironic, and completely indicative of the ongoing battle between God and Satan, that what God counted as blessing.....the incredible fruitfulness of Israel.....Pharaoh counted as a curse.

And, so the confrontation between good and evil begins. Pharaoh's in a bind; he hates the Israelites, and he fears the Israelites, but he NEEDS the Israelites. He needs them as a workforce..... they are the key to the Egyptian economy, and the hoped return of Egypt to a position of being a regional power. The solution? Subjugation. Control them, use them for what they're good at, keep their population in check, and don't let them leave.

Now, don't get the idea that the Egyptian population began taking Hebrews as house slaves. Rather, it was that the Egyptian government conscripted the Israelite males as work gangs for their building projects. It was rather like being drafted into the Army, except there was no pay. And, in fact, what Egypt did was to conscript Egyptian males in order to create a loyal, nationalist military to protect the nation from invasion; at the same time it was conscripting the bothersome Hebrew males as the nation's civilian labor force. Interestingly, there is no evidence that Israelite women were included in this slave labor scheme. Because, the work that was required was male work; making mud bricks, then constructing houses and buildings; also constructing and maintaining a vast network of canals and water reservoirs. Building new roads and military fortresses. The Hebrews became the primary group of construction labor in Egypt, and their lives became miserable as a result.

And, to a degree, the new King of Egypt's plan worked. The construction projects brought the country back to glory, and the enslavement of the Israelites controlled their movement. But, another aspect of his plan failed; rather than reducing the Israelite population, the more the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites, the more children these Hebrews produced. And, the more children the Israelites produced, the more paranoid it made Pharaoh and his cohorts. And, here we see one of the God-patterns emerge that will continue until Jesus comes again: **the more you persecute God's people, the more fruitful they will become.** Israel never grew more and faster, and the Church never grew more and faster, than when under the worst persecutions. If Israel had just given up and decided to fully assimilate into the Egyptian society, they may have avoided persecution, but they would have forgone fruitfulness. As long as the Church continues to take the easy road, to look more and more like the world so we avoid persecution for our identity with Yeshua, the less fruitful we will be. So it has been, and so it will forever be. It's simply the way God's economy works, and we have no ability to alter it.

So worried and frustrated was this unnamed Pharaoh that he did something desperate; something that in some ways would be counter to his grand purposes: he ordered those who the Bible calls "the midwives of the Hebrews", to cull the Israelite stock. The plan was that if the infant they assisted into the world was a boy, they were to immediately kill it. Yet, had Pharaoh actually succeeded in this infanticide, he would only have reduced the available work force available for his aggressive construction aspirations.

His plan didn't work; these midwives who knew and feared the Hebrew God didn't obey the Pharaoh. What we essentially have here is the first recorded instance in the Bible of civil disobedience in order to obey God's morals and ethics, which often are in opposition to men's morals and ethics. And, this rather brave defiance was conducted by women. Now, two women are named here as the midwives: Shifra and Pu'a. Without doubt, they must have been something like the senior midwives, in charge of many more midwives, because two would have never been enough to handle the hundreds of daily births taking place among the Israelites, all over Egypt.

Being a midwife was one of the few professions open to women in that era. It was respected and valued, as much as it was needed. A midwife primarily was there to assist the woman in her labor, to cut the umbilical cord, to wash the newborn and rub it down with salt, and in the case of twins it was the midwife who would testify as to which one was born first. Naturally, which of a set of male twins came out first was most important, because that one would usually receive the Firstborn Blessing, while the second to arrive did not. So, midwives were held in high esteem and their function was vital. Midwifery was also quite organized and the midwives were paid by those whom they served; there was a midwife guild, and probably Shifra and Pu'a were the head of the guild (which is why Pharaoh specifically summoned those two).

As an interesting aside, many Bible scholars doubt that these midwives were Hebrews. The Hebrew wording of the sentence is a little ambiguous in that regard, because the words can be taken to mean "Hebrew midwives", or "midwives of the Hebrews". But, this conclusion is drawn for a couple of reasons: first, it is unimaginable that the Pharaoh would have been so dumb as to honestly expect Hebrew midwives to kill their fellow Hebrew newborns. Second, these women, in V19, obviously know something about how Egyptian women experience the birthing process, as they comment that Hebrew women give birth faster than Egyptian women. Since Egyptians, at this time, wanted nothing to do with these Hebrews, it's hard to imagine a Hebrew woman being the midwives employed to help an Egyptian mother give birth. Very probably Shifra and Pu'a were Semite women, but not Hebrews. In fact, their names are of obvious Semite origin, but they were not Hebrew names.

We should also take note here that in spite of the distinctly male-oriented world of tribal society (and I'm sure many of you ladies would say not much has changed in 3000 years!), the Torah makes these 2 women into honored heroines; we will see OFTEN in the Bible how women are painted as "used of God", and venerated by the people. In fact, as we approach the story of Moses, women will become some of the main characters.

Well, having failed, still unable to stem the Hebrew population increase, Pharaoh turns to the Egyptian populace and tells **them** to monitor the situation. That is, when they see a Hebrew woman about to give birth, it is THEIR responsibility to do something about it. For sure the average Egyptian didn't take this infant from its mother and destroy it, any more than the average German in WWII would have wandered around killing Jews. Rather, they would have reported it to government authorities that had people assigned to come and take the newborn, if a male, and throw it to its death into the waters of the Great Nile River. This is irrational fear at its worst; for there is no record of Israel ever trying to take over the government of Egypt, or rebelling, or even conniving with a state enemy. Actually, Pharaoh's actions could do nothing

but harm Egypt's ability to carry through with its ambitions. But, it won't be the last time Israel is, in some bizarre way, blamed for a nation's problems and pays an enormous price in blood for that paranoia. In fact, this behavior toward the Jewish people will become a pattern throughout history, and right up to our day.

Now, one more thing and we'll end the 1st chapter of Exodus. Remember I told you about Hebrew word patterns, and I named 4 words that recurred in various forms throughout Exodus. Well, we run into one of them right here in Exodus 1; and that word is "serve". However, our English translations mask this recurrence by translating the same basic Hebrew word several different ways. Look at Vs 13 & 14. Most of our Bibles will say something to the effect of "making the Israelites do hard labor...work imposed on them.....rigorous labors." Usually, the English word chosen in this section of Exodus is "labor". Well, the original Hebrew root-word is "**abad**". Various forms of "abad" are used 5 times in Vs 13 and 14. So, if we took these verses in their most literal HEBREW sense, bringing with it the Hebrew word style **and intent** to make a point by the repetitive use of the Hebrew word "abad", it would read like this:

"So they, Egypt, made the Children of Israel subSERVient with crushing labor; they embittered their lives with hard SERVitude in brick and mortar and with all kinds of SERVitude in the field.....all their SERVICE in which they made them subSERVient with crushing labor."

When this Hebrew word pattern is uncovered we can see an important Spiritual principle emerge that is otherwise obscured, and it is this: WHOM you **serve** determines the nature of that service. Did you catch that?

When we serve God, all of our SERVICE is voluntary to Him; it is positive, good, lovely, and has an eternal quality of truth and light. When we serve Satan...in this case through Pharaoh, but more often it's serving ourselves and our own desires..... what we are participating in is SERVitude.....forced....., negative, evil, unfruitful, and whatever is produced from it will burn-up right along with everything else about this world at the end of days.

At this point, Vs 13 & 14, in Exodus we only see the NEGATIVE side of SERVE. A little later we will see the POSITIVE side of SERVE. But, it's much harder to even pick up this much intentional word play with the English translations, isn't it?

Next week, we'll begin Chapter 2.