

## Outline

- I. Israel's Prosperity and Persecution in Egypt (1)
- II. Moses is Protected and Prepared for Ministry (2)
- III. The LORD appears to Moses and Calls Him Back to Egypt (3-4)
- IV. Moses Returns and Israel's Oppression Worsens (5)

## Observations

The Lord sent Jacob's family to Egypt to isolate, multiply, and prepare them for their role as the covenant nation. Then He sent them into the wilderness to meet with Him, receive the covenant law, and learn to trust His wondrous power. Similarly, the Lord uses Egypt and the wilderness to prepare Moses for his role. This pattern begins in Genesis and will be seen repeatedly over the course of biblical history in the lives of God's people.

The early chapters of Exodus remind us that God's sovereign plan includes suffering. The Lord did not send the people to Egypt only to later discover they would be enslaved. God is not responding to human wickedness after the fact, attempting to work around events He neither foresaw nor could control. On the contrary, the Lord uses human wickedness and temporal suffering to accomplish His ultimate plan and both to sanctify and save His people (John 16:1-4; Acts 14:21-22; Ro. 8:18, 28-30; 1Pet. 4:12-19; 5:10; Rev. 13:5-10).

Moses is an interesting case example in studying the relationship of the covenant community and the larger culture. On the one hand, Moses is educated and engaged in Egyptian society at the highest levels of government. On the other hand, "when he was grown up, [he] refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:24-25). There is no indication his participation in Egyptian society was sinful, but at some point he had to make a choice as to his identity and ultimate commitments. He was unable to enjoy the privileges of an elite status while his kinsmen suffered and were oppressed. The Hebrews writer understand this to be "seeing the invisible" and an example of Christocentric faith (Heb. 11:26-27). Such is the key to taking a stand against culture and choosing to be identified with the oppressed and outcast rather than to be an outsider to the covenant. God's promises exist *within* the covenant community, not outside of it (1Cor. 12:13; Php. 3:20-21).

Moses' violence against the Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew may seem heroic, but it is cast in the story as a failure. Stephen says Moses "defended the oppressed men and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian" (Acts 7:24). Moses though his kinsmen would recognize him as the deliverer (Acts 7:25), but instead he was rejected by his own people, in jeopardy for his crime among his adopted people, and was forced to flee. It is a dramatic illustration of the folly of human wisdom in seeking to preempt God's timing and plan (Jer. 10:23), the impropriety of vengeful violence in the name of justice (De. 32:35), and the need to wait upon God (Ps. 27).

Moses' 120 years divides into three major periods. God prepared him for forty years in Egypt, humbled him for forty years in the desert, and then used him for forty years in the wilderness. The Lord used the first two-thirds of Moses' life to prepare him for his life's work in the last one-third. Moses was a prince and a shepherd for 80 years, but all the while God was preparing him to be prince of the shepherds and lead a stubborn nation through the wilderness to the promised land.

Moses protests five times and offers excuses for why he cannot return to Egypt and stand before Pharaoh as the Lord commanded. "Who am I?" (3:11) "What shall I say?" (3:13) "They won't believe me." (4:1) "I am not a speaker." (4:10) "Please send someone else!" (4:13) His questions become statements of inability and finally an implicit refusal to go. Do these excuses sound familiar? Have we sometimes justified unbelief and fear in similar ways? God's anger was kindled against Moses for his lack of faith and reluctance to obey (4:14). Moses would have been surprised to hear modern preachers say the Lord is never angry with His children!

Things get worse for Israel before they get better. When Moses first presents himself and God's demand to Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler mocks Yahweh, refuses to accede to His demand, accuses Moses and Aaron of interference, and exacerbates the conditions and demands under which the Israelites labor (5:1-19). Pharaoh likely hoped to create strife between Moses and the Israelites, lest the slaves began to have notion of liberation. He succeeded. These episodes should remind us that just because God calls us to serve or commands our obedience does not guaranteed things will go smoothly or be quickly and easily accomplished.

### **Questions**

Was the explanation given to Pharaoh by the Hebrew midwives, Shiprah and Puah, definitely false (1:17-21)? How might this story and Samuel's divinely directed deception (1Sa. 16:1-3) help us articulate a biblical ethic that upholds both truth-telling and the value of human life? What other passages might also be helpful? Rahab's lie is often used as a counter-example to justify lying to preserve life (Jos. 2:1-6). What differences can you identify between context, characters, and behavior in the three stories in Exodus 1, 1 Samuel 16, and Joshua 2?

List some of the preachers and leaders in the Bible God sent into the wilderness to prepare for service.

What does the near-death experience of Moses at the beginning of his journey back to Egypt teach us about the relative importance of covenant signs and of personal obedience in the context of divine service (4:24-26)?

### **Application**

The Sovereignty of God in Ordaining Suffering and Struggle as a Means of Preparing His Servants

The Necessity of Trusting God's Timing and Justice in the Face of Evil

The Assurance That When God Calls us to a Task He will Supply What is Needed to Accomplish It

### **Further Observations on the Book as a Whole**

The Book of Exodus is not only about deliverance from Egypt and the Law. It is about the Lord's preparing Israel for the coming of His presence among them. Suffering, deliverance, covenant, and law are all part of that.

The Book of Exodus can be outlined in a number of ways. The book can be divided into historical (1-18) and doctrinal sections (19-40). It can be outlined geographically: In Egypt (1-12), en route (13-18), and at Sinai (19-40). It can even be organized thematically: confrontation with God's power (1-19), consecration by God's precepts (20-24), and construction for God's presence (25-40). Each student should memorize an outline that makes sense of the book's contents and is easy to remember. The purpose of the outline is not for recitation but to aid the student in grasping the content of the book as a whole, at which point, the outline is less important.

The name of the Book is **וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת** (*these are the names*) or simply the first noun **שְׁמוֹת** (*shemoth – names*). Our English versions follow the Greek and Latin versions of the Old Testament in calling the book *exodus* (ἐξοδος). This same Greek word is used in Luke 9:31 at the transfiguration to describe the discussion of Jesus' death. The Book of Exodus has fewer chapters and verses than Genesis, but it has a slightly greater number of words (in Hebrew) making it the sixth largest book in the Old Testament.

Dating events in the early history of the Old Testament is notoriously controversial. Liberal and critical scholars have universally adopted a late date for the exodus around 1275 B.C. Even many modern conservative scholars have embraced this date as well, largely on archaeological grounds and critical presuppositions. Traditionally conservative scholarship has affirmed a much earlier date for the exodus around 1446/7 B.C. largely on the basis of internal biblical evidence (Jdg. 11:26; 1Kg. 6:1). (Remember, B.C. counts *down* meaning the earlier the date the larger the number.) If the early date is accepted, the chronology of the Book of Exodus is roughly as follows: Ch. 1: 350 years, Ch. 2-6: 80 years, Ch. 7-12: ~1 year, Ch. 13-18: 45 days, Ch. 19-34: ~80 days, Ch. 35-40: ~7 months. If we assume an early date for the exodus, Jacob's journey to Egypt would have taken place ~1877 B.C. (~430 years before the exodus, cf. Gen. 15:13), and Moses' birth would have been ~1527/5 B.C.