

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY
WEEK 16: EXODUS 1-2 – The Birth of Moses

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

I. Departure from Egypt & Journey to Sinai – Exodus 1-18

- A. Exodus 1-6 Prelude
- B. Exodus 7-12 Plagues
- C. Exodus 13-15 Departure and Crossing the Red Sea
- D. Exodus 16-18 Journey to Sinai

II. Mount Sinai: The Law & The Tabernacle – Exodus 19-40

- A. Exodus 19-20 Ten Commandments
- B. Exodus 21-24 The Book of the Covenant
- C. Exodus 25-31 Instructions for the Tabernacle and Priesthood
- D. Exodus 32-34 Rebellion, Forgiveness, and Renewed Presence
- E. Exodus 35-40 Building the Tabernacle

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 1

Pharaoh's Solution to a "Growing" Problem

I. Reasons for Persecution – Exodus 1:1-10

- A. Fruitfulness (Exodus 1:1-7)
- B. Fear (Exodus 1:8-10)

II. The Resulting Persecution – Exodus 1:11-22

- A. Pharaoh's Building Decree (Exodus 1:11-14)
- B. Pharaoh's Bloody Decree (Exodus 1:15-22)

Exodus 1 (NRSV)

¹ These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: ² Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³ Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴ Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵ The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶ Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. ⁷ But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

⁸ Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."

¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³ The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.

¹⁸ So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

EXODUS 1:1-7 – THE FIRST WORDS – וְאֵלֶּה

What is the first word of the book of Exodus? If you turn to the NRSV, you might say “These”. But, that’s not the case in the Hebrew. If you look at the Hebrew word above, you see two words. First, you see the Hebrew letter *waw*. This is the particle or conjunction “and” (sometimes translated “now”) and then you have the word “these” (Hebrew *ēlle*). Translating the Hebrew, you would say, “And these are the names of the sons of Israel...”

Why is this important? It connects us to what came before. It reminds us that this is a continuation of the story from Genesis. God chose a people for God’s self and brought them down into Egypt. These people are not there by accident. It’s not by chance, but rather, is part of God’s work in the world.

In the Hebrew, the first six words of Exodus 1:1 are an exact copy or repetition of Genesis 46:8. Compare below:

Exodus 1:1 (NRSV): ¹ *These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt* וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם ¹
Genesis 46:8 (NRSV): ⁸ *Now these are the names of the Israelites who came to Egypt* וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם ⁸

And what follows both lines are the genealogies of Jacob, though listed in different orders by their mothers.

The word “These” is extremely important in the structure of the book of Genesis. The book of Genesis can be broken down into ten sections. And each section begins with the words “These are the generations/descendants of...”

Genesis 2:4	⁴ <i>These are the generations of the heavens and the earth</i>	אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ
Genesis 5:1	¹ <i>This is the list of the descendants of Adam</i>	זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֵי אָדָם
Genesis 6:9	⁹ <i>These are the descendants of Noah</i>	אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי נֹחַ
Genesis 10:1	¹ <i>These are the descendants of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth</i>	וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי בְנֵי־נֹחַ שֵׁם חָם וַיֶּפֶת
Genesis 11:10	¹⁰ <i>These are the descendants of Shem</i>	אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי שֵׁם
Genesis 11:27	²⁷ <i>Now these are the descendants of Terah</i>	וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי תְרָח
Genesis 25:12	¹² <i>These are the descendants of Ishmael</i>	וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל
Genesis 25:19	¹⁹ <i>These are the descendants of Isaac</i>	וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי יִצְחָק
Genesis 36:1	¹ <i>These are the descendants of Esau</i>	וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי עֵשָׂו
Genesis 37:2	² <i>This is the story of the family of Jacob</i>	אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי יַעֲקֹב

In Hebrew, the word for generations/descendants is תּוֹלְדוֹת *tōlēdōt*.

So, for the book of Exodus to begin “And these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt,” this shows a strong connection to the book of Genesis. But there’s more. Notice what it says in Exodus 1:7:

⁷ *But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.*

Compare this verse to one of the themes we hear echoed again and again in the book of Genesis:

²⁸ *God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (1:28)*

² *I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (12:2)*

⁵ *He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” (15:5)*

² *And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” (17:2)*

In the first seven verses of the book of Exodus, we see that God is behind what is happening in Egypt, blessing God’s people and helping them to be fruitful and multiply. God’s plan for humanity is working. But then, “Houston, we have a problem.” There is a new Pharaoh. Notice that Pharaoh doesn’t get named. We don’t know which one. We don’t know which generation. We don’t know how much time has passed. We only know that Joseph and all his brothers (his whole generation) have passed away. And so, there is a new generation of leadership in Egypt and a new generation of Israelites. When they left Canaan, they numbered 70. Now they number are more numerous than the Egyptians. And this stokes Pharaoh’s fears.

EXODUS 1:8-10 – PHARAOH’S FEARS

Pharaoh sees how numerous and powerful the Israelites are among them and he is fearful (fears a loss of control). And so, he decides that he is going to take some harsh measures against these immigrants. Egypt is going to become a dangerous and hostile place. He wants to deal “shrewdly” (wisely) with them so that they cannot “join our enemies, fight against us (military threats), and escape from the land (economic threat).” The very thing that God had decreed (“be fruitful and multiply”) is now a problem for Pharaoh. He fears a loss of control, a loss of power, and a loss of workers. And so, a battle begins. This is not a battle between Israel and Pharaoh, or even Moses and Pharaoh, but between God and Pharaoh.

EXODUS 1:11-20 – PHARAOH’S DECREES

Pharaoh thinks he has the solution. He tries to control the situation by making several decrees:

Solution 1: Forced Labor and Oppression. His first solution is forced labor and harsh taskmasters. Hard, bitter work with bricks and fields and building cities. But, Pharaoh’s solution doesn’t seem to work. The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. Hmm... I wonder why...

Solution 2: In Labor. His next solution is to solicit the help of the Hebrew midwives who are instructed to kill all Israelite male children at birth (an attempt to counter the military threat). But the midwives disobey because they fear God. Their excuse: The Hebrew women are too “vigorous” and quick (unlike the Egyptians). They give birth before we get there.

How does God respond? God blesses the midwives and gives them families. And the Israelite multiplied even more.

Notice that the two midwives are named in our story. They are Shiphrah (from Hebrew root word meaning “pleasing to the eye”) and Puah (from Hebrew root word meaning “beautiful”). In the story, it’s not clear whether these women are Egyptians or Hebrews. But they have names and Pharaoh doesn’t. What does this tell us? What does this say about who is important to God? Clearly, Pharaoh is meant to be seen as an archetype; the epitome of human evil. Pharaoh and his empire are the Babylon of Genesis 11 on steroids.

Solution 3: In the Water. His final solution is to murder all male infants by throwing them into the Nile to drown. Ahh the irony of his final solution. I wonder what will eventually happen to his army?

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 2 A Savior is Born and Flees

I. The Baby in the Basket – A Savior is Born – Exodus 2:1-10

- A. Moses and his Parents (Exodus 2:1-4)
- B. Moses and the Princess (Exodus 2:5-10)
 - 1. Rescuing Moses (Exodus 2:5-6)
 - 2. Raising Moses (Exodus 2:7-10)

II. The Man in the Middle – Moses Finds a New Home – Exodus 2:11-25

- A. The Helpless Slave (Exodus 2:11-12)
- B. The Hostile Slave (Exodus 2:13-15)
- C. The Helpful Man (Exodus 2:16-22)
 - 1. He assists a Midianite girl at a well (Exodus 2:16-20)
 - 2. He accepts a Midianite girl as his wife (Exodus 2:21-22)
- E. King Dies and Israel Cries (Exodus 2:23-25)

Exodus 2 (NRSV)

¹ Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said.

⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” ⁸ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

¹¹ One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. ¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

¹³ When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, “Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?” ¹⁴ He answered, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” ¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.

¹⁶ The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. ¹⁷ But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. ¹⁸ When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come back so soon today?” ¹⁹ They said, “An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.” ²⁰ He said to his daughters, “Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.”

²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. ²² She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, “I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.”

²³ After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

EXODUS 2:1-4 – MOSES AND HIS PARENTS

Notice how the marriage announcement to a Levite woman interrupts the broadcast. A child is to be born to this Levite family. What do we know about the Levites? They are the tribe that was set apart to serve as priests for the people.

¹ *The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no allotment or inheritance within Israel. They may eat the sacrifices that are the Lord’s portion* ² *but they shall have no inheritance among the other members of the community; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them.* (Deuteronomy 18:1–2; NRSV)

So, Moses is born a Levite. And when he is born, he is hidden for three months, then placed in an ark, and cast upon the waters (the word for basket in Hebrew is תִּבְיָהּ *tēbâh* which is the same word used in Genesis 6 for Noah’s ark). The use of this word and the mention of bitumen and pitch should remind us of the other Ark story. Moses, passing safely through the waters of the Nile, should point us backward to the story of Noah and forwards to the story of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea. Oh, and by the way, Moses has an older sister (we won’t learn her name until chapter 15).

EXODUS 2:5-10 – MOSES AND THE PRINCESS

Pharaoh’s daughter comes down to bathe, sees the ark, has a servant fetch it, opens it up and sees a crying baby. She takes pity on the baby. And quickly surmises that it is one of the Hebrew’s children. At this, the baby’s sister speaks up and says, “Would you like me to go and get a Hebrew to nurse it for you?” Pharaoh’s daughter says, “Yes” and so Miriam goes and gets Moses’ mother to take care of him *until he grew up*. Was this until age 13?

Regardless, with the birth of Moses we have the birth of a savior for the Israelites. Through Moses, the people will receive a new beginning. Their slavery will end. And God will use Moses to bring them safely to the Promised Land.

Similarity to other Ancient Near Eastern Stories

One thing to note is that scholars recognize this story resembles at least 72 other birth stories of the ancient Near East. Is it “history”? Or is it “story”? That’s a good question. Remember, ancient writers were not as concerned with facts as modern audiences are but were certainly interested in truth. The most important question we can ask of this story is not whether it is “fact” but rather what “truth” it is telling.

The story that this birth story most closely resembles is The Legend of Sargon of Akkad, an Akkadian emperor who ruled a number of Sumerian city-states around 2300 BCE, around 800 years before Moses. In the story, Sargon the Great was born the illegitimate son of a temple priestess of the goddess Inanna who could not reveal her pregnancy or keep the child, and so she placed him in a basket which she then let go on the Euphrates River. She had sealed the basket with tar, and the water carried him safely to where he was later found by a man named Akki who was a gardener for Ur-Zababa, the king of the Sumerian city of Kish.

Moses is then presented back to Pharaoh’s daughter who takes him as a son. And she names him Moses, because she “drew him out of the water.” The name Moses is pronounced *MO-sheh* in Hebrew. In Egyptian it means “son” but in Hebrew it comes from a Hebrew verb which means “to pull out” or “to draw out.” Clearly, Moses is going to live into that name in more ways than one.

EXODUS 2:11-12 – THE HELPLESS SLAVE

Moses becomes a murderer. He hides the body in the sand. Why did he do it? He saw an Egyptian beating one of his kinsfolks. So, he made sure no one was looking and killed the taskmaster.

EXODUS 2:13-15 – THE HOSTILE SLAVE

The next day, Moses sees two Hebrews fighting and he steps in to correct the one who was in the wrong. Apparently that man knew what had happened the day before and uses it against Moses, saying “Are you going to kill me too?” “Who made you a ruler and judge over us?” That’s an important question. Who indeed? Who is behind all of this? Although not named or given the credit early on in Exodus, the implication is that God is behind all of this, working to counteract the evil and turn it into good.

Anyhow, Moses is scared that he will be found out. Of course, Pharaoh hears of it and now wants to kill Moses. So, Moses flees out of Egypt and heads to Midian. And when he arrives, he sits down at a well.

EXODUS 2:16-22 – MOSES SAVES THE DAY

The daughters of Reuel (or is his name Jethro, see Exodus 4:18; or Hobab, see Judges 1:16 and 4:11), the priest of Midian, go to get water for their father’s flock but some shepherds drive them away. Moses steps up and defends them and then waters their flock. Out of gratitude, Reuel makes his daughters fetch Moses and invite him to dinner. Moses comes and shares some bread. And as a parting gift, he gets one of the daughters (Zipporah) for a bride. And they have a son together, and name him Gershom, meaning “sojourner there”. (see also Judges 18:30).

EXODUS 2:23-25 – PHARAOH DIES & ISRAEL CRIES

After a long time, the King of Egypt dies. The Israelites cry out to God and God hears their cries. God remembers God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God checks out and notices what is happening to the Israelites. It’s as if God steps out from behind the curtain and says, “I’m here!”

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE STORY OF MOSES’ BIRTH TO THE STORY OF JESUS’ BIRTH

- Israel is under oppression
- Tyrant is fearful of losing control
- Attempts to use others to stop the births
- Orders the death of male children
- Both children escape and find safety in Egypt
- Both tyrants deal “wisely” with the problem
- Both grow up to be a savior
- Both placed in a crib of stalks of grass
- Both able to stay afloat on water
- Both called prophets and princes

NEXT WEEK: Read Exodus 3 & 4 – The Burning Bush