

# Week 1: Rulers and Rescuers - Exodus Ch 1 -2

## Pre-Work

- At the beginning of the Book of Exodus, the Israelites are subjected to horrific injustice in a foreign land: Egypt. Please watch the following video on how the concept of justice is dealt with by the biblical authors, not just in Exodus, but throughout the bible.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/justice/>

- Please Read Exodus Chapters 1-2 in the translation of your choice. What stands out to you in these chapters? What questions arise in your mind when you read them?

# Class Notes

- Reading like an ancient Israelite
- The Story so far
  - God fashions a Temple through the waters (disordered and deserted)- Gen 1
  - The failure of the priesthood, rescue through the waters, and the scattering - Gen 2-11
  - The rescue plan (Abraham and his seed) - Gen 12-25
  - The one who wrestles with God - Gen 26-36
  - The son who becomes a suffering servant and is raised to rule - Gen 37-50
- What ever becomes of the people of the “God-wrestler” in Egypt?

**1** Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came, each one with his household: **2** Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; **3** Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; **4** Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. **5** All the people who descended from Jacob were seventy people, but Joseph was *already* in Egypt. **6** And Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. **7** But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

- “Shemot”
- Genealogies - family tree / bringing order
- “Fruitful and multiplied” / bringing inhabitants

**8** Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. **9** And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. **10** Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, otherwise they will multiply, and in the event of war, they will also join those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.”

- Pharaoh not named. Role: the snake.
- Envious of God’s chosen
- “Deal shrewdly”

<sup>11</sup> So they appointed taskmasters over them to oppress them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses.

- The Snake-King imposes hard labor
- The descendants of the chosen one must build cities (compare Genesis 4)

<sup>12</sup> But the more they oppressed them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they dreaded the sons of Israel. <sup>13</sup> The Egyptians used violence to compel the sons of Israel to labor; <sup>14</sup> and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all *kinds* of labor in the field, all their labors which they violently had them perform as slaves.

- “Violence” - the oppression of the Israelites by Egypt similar to the violence that “ruined” the Earth in the times before Noah’s rescue. “The field”, realm of the snake, realm of violence between kin.
- The slave motif: Abraham and Sarah vs. Hagar leads to the Egyptians vs Joseph; Joseph vs the Egyptians leads to the Egyptians over the Israelites
- In spite of oppression, the descendants of the chosen one multiply and spread.

<sup>15</sup> Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah, and the other was named Puah; <sup>16</sup> and he said, “When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see *them* upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.”

- The snake-king enlists women to bring about suffering in bearing children.
- Shiphrah/beautiful...Puah/radiant

<sup>17</sup> But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.

- “Feared God” rather than listening to the snake
- Gen 3:16 “...in sorrow you shall bring them forth/ **yalad**” but the **yaladot** /midwives feared God and let the boys **chaya**/ live (whose name is this?)

<sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?” <sup>19</sup> 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 can get to them.”

- The women deceive the snake

<sup>20</sup> So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. <sup>21</sup> And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them

- Because the “children-bearers” did not do as the snake-king said, creation blessing was on all the people/ priestly intercession.
- Households - multi-generational blessing

. <sup>22</sup> Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every son who is born, you are to throw into the Nile, but every daughter, you are to keep alive.”

- Finding the Hebrew women unwilling partners in crime, the snake-king turns to his own people: drown/de-create

**2** Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. <sup>2</sup> And the woman conceived and gave birth to a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months.

- Descendants of Levi - Gen 49, “of the sword, violent, anger, will be scattered” - how is this prediction to be redeemed?
- “He was **tov**” - hid for 3 months (design pattern of 3)

<sup>3</sup> But when she could no longer hide him, she got him a papyrus basket and covered it with tar and pitch. Then she put the child in it and set *it* among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. <sup>4</sup> And his sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him.

- A **tebah** covered with tar and pitch - a look back to Genesis 7-9
- Reeds/ **suf** by the mighty waters - a look forward to Exodus 15

<sup>5</sup> Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her female attendants walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave woman, and she brought it *to her*. <sup>6</sup> When she opened *it*, she saw the child, and behold, *the* boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.”

- Pharaoh’s daughter as an “ezer”??
- Sent her “slave woman” - note that a servant of Pharaoh’s house is included in the deliverance narrative. Why this detail?
- She “saw” the child “crying” and had pity/compassion...

Exodus 3:7

*7 And the LORD said, "I have certainly **seen** the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their **outcry** because of their taskmasters, for I am **aware of their sufferings**."*

- The Moses writing team wants us to compare the heart of Pharaoh's daughter to the heart of Yahweh

*7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a woman for you who is nursing from the Hebrew women, so that she may nurse the child for you?" 8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go *ahead*." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give *you* your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, "Because I drew him out of the water."*

- Miriam speaks up and offers a rescue plan that involves letting the Israelite go
- Pharaoh's daughter lets God's people go
- The child becomes a blessing to Pharaoh's daughter, who calls him "drawn out"/new creation

So far: Child born into oppression - goes through the waters - is rescued to be a blessing to the nations

*11 Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his fellow Hebrews and looked at their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his fellow Hebrews. 12 So he looked this way and that, and when he saw that there was no one *around*, he struck and killed the Egyptian, and hid his body in the sand*

- Moses has his "Cain" moment - handles injustice with murder, "hides" the body
- Prediction of Levi's line: violence. Moses' repeated failure is anger/striking

*13 Now he went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, "Why are you striking your companion?" 14 But he said, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and said, "Surely the matter has become known!"*

- "Three Questions" - chance for the person asked to come clean
- Afraid that he has been found out/ compare to Adam

<sup>15</sup> When Pharaoh heard about this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.

- Moses flees/ imitation of Cain
- “Sat by a well” - romance scene

<sup>16</sup> Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. <sup>17</sup> Then the shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and helped them and watered their flock. <sup>18</sup> When they came to their father Reuel, he said, “Why have you come *back* so soon today?” <sup>19</sup> They said, “An Egyptian saved us from the shepherds, and what is more, he even drew water for us and watered the flock.”

- Seven daughters...why this detail?
- People are oppressing the 7 women, but Moses steps up to protect them (by a well)
- Note Moses “strikes” the Egyptian and then “delivers” 7 women/ literary pattern for what God will do for Israel
  - Moses delivers 7 women - this is a reflection of the 7 women who fulfill “deliverance roles” in the Moses origin story
    1. Shiphrah/ Midwife
    2. Puah/ Midwife
    3. Moses’ mother
    4. Moses’ sister
    5. Pharaoh’s daughter
    6. Pharaoh’s daughter’s servant
    7. Zipporah
- Why do they call him “An Egyptian?” What is Moses’ identity so far in the text?

<sup>20</sup> So he said to his daughters, “Where is he then? Why is it that you have left the man behind? Invite him to have something to eat.” <sup>21</sup> And Moses was willing to live with the man. And he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses. <sup>22</sup> Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land.”

- A Midianite becomes the means of Moses’ rescue (Midianites sold Joseph into slavery/ descended from Ishmael)
- Zipporah...same as a previous name...
- ‘I have been a **ger** in an alien land” -

<sup>23</sup> Now it came about in *the course of* those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of *their* bondage ascended to God. <sup>24</sup> So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>25</sup> And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice *of them*

- “Cried out” as Ishmael cried out
- “Remembered” - did God forget?

Who is Moses? Is he a Hebrew/Israelite? Is he an Egyptian? Is he a Midianite? Is he an immigrant/alien? Does Moses even know who he is?

“Now the hidden power of God is about to become manifest in the narrative; the silence of God is about to be broken. In their abject misery the people “cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.”The scene is set for the call to Moses.”

~Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel*

## Reflections