

Exodus | The Rise of a Liberator

A New King, A New Situation

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9-14-14

Exodus 1; Luke 9:30-31

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 persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶ 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.

⁸ Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. ¹⁰ "Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land." ¹¹ So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹² But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. ¹³ The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; ¹⁴ 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 rigorously imposed on them.

¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." ²⁰ So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. ²¹ Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. ²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."

^{Luke 9} And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His exodus which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Today, we begin a series we hope to work on right into the Christmas Season. This is the second book of the Bible, the rise of a Liberator, *The Book of Exodus*.

The opening scene of the book is threatening and ominous. A people are facing tremendous peril and political oppression and the onset of genocide. *It sets up an epic story of conflict* – two kings and two kingdoms in mortal combat: “Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl.”

There’s a feeling that what was once *a good and promising situation* is now jeopardized and there’s no going back. It’s all become dire/dangerous. “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

A recent poll by the Wall Street Journal and NBC News asked “if life for our children’s generation will be better than it has been for us,” and fully 76 percent said *they do NOT have such confidence*. Only 21 percent did. That was the worst ever recorded in the poll... (Washington Post, Aug. 12, 2014).

In some ways there are parallels. In ancient Egypt it was a kind of “frog in the kettle” situation. The water was comfortable, and then got warmer, and warmer and before long...without much notice, the water was boiling and the frog was cooked! *“There arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph.”*

Maybe YOU feel the earth moving under our feet, your family, your neighborhood, our region (South Florida), the nation, the world... The world is once again ON FIRE... a lot of threatening, ominous stuff on the horizon: climate change (in the news) and economic concerns and social mores and huge tectonic shifts – things we never thought we’d see... and Syria, Iraq, Iran, Russia/Ukraine, Ebola... And personally: there may be changes in your life, health and family... you never saw them coming.

Today we set the stage for our consideration of the book and we also see that though it all took place about 3500 years ago – it may not be so different today. People get trapped and need liberation.

Let’s look at #1 – Background and Beginnings #2 – What we’re supposed to notice (but may NOT)

This book is right there with Genesis so important to the rest of the Bible, so foundational. It records that huge saving act of God; so many memorable/famous scenes. The rest of the Bible, the Psalms and Prophets and the NT also will look back to this moment when God made Israel a nation and then set her free from slavery. No wonder this book was so

important to the Civil Rights movement in this nation... so many songs of freedom based in Exodus.

Luke uses the word to describe what Jesus Christ would accomplish in Jerusalem – a new Exodus (9.30) a clear reference to this book of LIBERATION.

The first word in the Hebrew text is usually translated into English as “and” as if the author is writing a sequel to Genesis – doesn’t miss a beat.

The three paragraphs in this first chapter tell of the family of Jacob that once came to Egypt and what happened to that family; AND the new king and the new situation some 400 years later and (third) three extreme measures unleashed against this people.

Let’s zoom in on this opening scene – then try to isolate what the writer WANTS to be the focus, the themes we’re NOT supposed to miss.

In the first paragraph we’re reminded of this really messed up family we got to know last year – the Patriarch Jacob and his rascal sons. It was a family marked by deceit and incest and escapism and favoritism and deceit and kidnapping and violence and cowardice and deceit and deceit...other than that they were really nice people!

But this was also...the family God had chosen as His megaphone to the world. This was the family of Abraham (the Babylonian idolater) whom God had promised to use for the redemption of the world and had promised, promised and promised to BLESS.

Read the last 15 chapters of Genesis to get the whole story or get the sermons from last year to get the details but suffice it to say (for now) “AND...they went down to Egypt looking for food...Joseph was already there...and they MULTIPLIED so that the whole land was filled with them.

But then...this 400 years of comfortable living in the best neighborhood comes to an end...A new king (whose name is NOT given – scholars have proposed a couple of the pharaohs) a new king arose and he was not acquainted with the former treaties and agreements...he had no sense of intimacy/appreciation for the roots of this people... “he knew not Joseph.”

And suddenly the water has gotten VERY hot and Jacob’s ancestors are suddenly in deep trouble. The king, the Pharaoh (whose name we don’t know) is afraid...is like Herod in the NT...is paranoid and looks always over his shoulder, insecure...The new King notices how they’ve multiplied...like ...vermin...like bugs...like gnats...like flies...like locusts (little

foreshadowing!) and worries (he always WORRIES) that they might ally with Egypt's enemies...and decides to DOMINATE them...

He appoints masters over them and he ruthlessly forces them to obey and to build his cities...but the more he mistreats them, the more they seem to flourish. And now he's really insecure and begins to despise them (like gnats and flies and locusts!) and he tightens the screws... makes their lives bitter and miserable.

Then he devises an ingenious scheme – enlists these two servants, insignificant, no-name, unimportant maids – (interestingly we don't know the king's name but we know their names – Shifra and Puah) and tries to get these midwives to kill the infant boys as soon as they're born... but Shifra and Puah see that this is war and they beat the (un-named) king at his own game!

Then Pharaoh What's-His-Name sort of freaks out (and he'll do a lot of that as the story unfolds) and just calls all his people (all the king's horses and all the king's men!) to just get rid of all the Hebrew boys and throw them in the Nile... and that's the ominous note on which this opening chapter ends... (Let us pray!)

It ends on that NOTE but is that ALL? Obviously not, there are 39 more chapters but what are we supposed to see here...what features does the writer want to claim our attention?

Well for one thing we ARE supposed to feel the sense of LOSS and desperation and LONGING FOR LIBERATION. Like a Rembrandt painting that just wouldn't grab the viewer except for the very dark backdrop all around the main subject of the work. We have to feel the dark and the oppression and the evil of oppression and slavery.

In fact, the writer is NOT finished with this theme and we'll see lots more of it personified in this paranoid no-name dictator, the New and Insecure King.

What's more this is giving us a kind of vocabulary that will thread through the whole Bible – slavery, and liberation and bondage and freedom and ransom and redemption and rescue. These dark themes introduced here and they inform the spiritual outlook of God's people right to the end. Sin is a kind of master and makes us do what we don't want to do... The world-system ensnares us until the day when the final note of triumph is sounded in Revelation 11:15, "there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

Augustin said that God has wired us this way – we never really LIVE until we have tasted death. We never really love life until we have faced LOSS. That impulse is in our souls...it's

part of the image of God in us... the Shepherd who goes after His lost coin, His lost sheep His lost children (Luke 15).

We are meant to feel the absence of God here. He appears to have forgotten His people and they will only NOW begin to long for God and His Kingdom and His salvation. If this chapter ends on a dismal note it's because LIFE without God IS dismal.

But while it's really hard to see the bigger picture when you're in a dismal, apparently hopeless situation THERE STILL IS A BIG PICTURE. God is quiet in this chapter...He is hiding (as it were). But He is very much at work...HE HAS KEPT His people. He is keeping His promises (to make them a great Nation that will bless all the nations) and even when the New King unleashes all his strategies to stop God... verse 12 says it "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out"

And the one time God is said to ACT in this dismal chapter is in the way He blesses these believing women, the midwives, Shifra and Puah. He establishes households for them. They're maids. The king was above them and to him they were TOOLS. But here we are 3, 500 years later and we don't even know his name... but Shifra and Puah we know... because God used them and God made sure they were NOTED in His Book and God... even when He seems absent and even when it's very dark...the God of the Promises IS VERY PRESENT to those who believe Him.

The New King is insecure and nervous ... but there is an Old King... the Ancient of Days...the Everlasting God and He is always and ONLY unruffled and perfectly HAPPY and BLESSED and SECURE... Quiet, He carries out His Mission...

"AND" it turns out the God of Genesis, the Creator-God is ALSO the God of Exodus, the Savior God... Creator and Savior. And at last He will come Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ, the God-Man to bring about the final Exodus.

Outside of Jerusalem on a trash-heap the Creator and Savior will fulfill all the PROMISES made to Abraham's crooked family...and Jacob's messed up sons...In Jesus Christ, God will step out of the shadows, out of the dark backdrop of human sin and evil all those famous scenes from Exodus will be REPLAYED (in one concentrated Life) and realized in Him – He is the Son called out of Egypt (Hos. 11.1, Mat 2.15); He will be driven into the wilderness for 40 days. He will be the new Moses giving a new law from the mountain, the Sermon on the Mount...and He will be baptized in the waters of death. He will be the Final Passover Lamb. Exodus is about Him!

Jesus Christ, the Creator and Savior – we meet Him in Genesis and Exodus and we learn the patterns of His ways and that’s how we recognize Him when He comes – He fulfills the Exodus Pattern. He steps into our boiling kettle and He liberates.

And the question is: do we identify with Him? There’s an implied question in this boring list of names at the start of this chapter, a question for YOU the reader: Are these YOUR people? Are you the people of Abraham who believe the promises?

Are you the idolaters called out of darkness by the God of the Covenant?

Are you the rascal sons of Jacob, the deceitful and the twisted, the victimized and the victimizers who can only be saved by grace?

Are you sinners longing for liberation, oppressed by the world, the flesh and the devil... and are you the people of faith to whom God has made great and precious promises (2 Pet 1.4)? The people whose names are recorded and not forgotten? Are you the people of grace for whom the Secure King lived and died? Are you the people who rest in the nail scarred hands of the Creator/Savior who revealed Himself on the Cross and liberates us by His resurrection?

If you identify with this people and this King then you may be pessimistic about the state of things, about the prospects of peace in Iraq, about a return to civility and respect and moral sanity in our own society – you may believe that Western Culture will continue it’s free-fall that kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall... And You may even look at your own personal difficulties and be bracing yourself for real loss...outwardly we are wasting away... (2 Cor 4.16)

But the Christian has every reason to be infinitely hopeful in the Big Picture, even when God seems absent. Those who come to Him, who rest in His New Exodus, have an identity that is not affected by the economy, by our health, by terrorists. We belong to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is and will always be the most important thing about me and it completely overshadows my background, my ethnicity, my income, my education, my successes and my failures.

Exodus is inviting us to join this family and to rest in this identity. It’s an invitation that transcends our current pessimism and invites us into the Security of the Everlasting God.