
INTRODUCTION TO *EXODUS*

A Letter To Exiles

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INTRODUCTION

Roughly 280 years have passed since Joseph's death around 1805 B.C., at the end of Genesis. The 70 descendants of Jacob (Israel), who went down into Egypt to escape the hardship of famine in their own land, have flourished and multiplied into an expatriate community nearly two million strong. Fearing what would happen if the children of Israel allied themselves with one of Egypt's enemies, the Pharaoh, newly risen to the throne begins to wage a campaign of genocide against the Jews.

All the good done for Egypt by Joseph, who saved the nation from being crippled by the drought and famine hundreds of years earlier, has long since been forgotten. Just as Herod will do hundreds of years later, Pharaoh decrees the death of helpless children as a way of maintaining his control and preserving his own security. Every male child born to the Jews is to be put to death.

Pharaoh's assault against God's people has a second stratagem: enslave them in harsh and oppressive conditions, so they are consumed with survival, and will have no hopeful thoughts of rescue. Thinking that an exhausted, and miserable populace is easiest to control, Pharaoh uses Jacob's children to build monuments and cities for the very culture that oppresses them. The irony is not lost on God's people who, themselves, are tempted to raise idols for gods that oppress them.

PARALLELS WITH OUR LIFE

Remember that the Old Testament reveals patterns and themes that reoccur throughout history. In it we can find the ways in which God moves and how He has arranged the worlds (both earthly and heavenly) to work. But as surely as we find God's foundational designs and determinations in Scripture, so we also observe the schemes and ploys of the evil one. He is the world ruler of this fallen age, and he also has set a counter-course for the world to follow (Ephesians 2:2).

While the New Testament is explicit in announcing the reality of the devil's opposition to the purposes of God, the stories and descriptions of the Old Testament give us the realization of how that opposition will sometimes play out in our own lives.

Two parallels come at us from early in the story of *Exodus*. To maintain personal supremacy and a *more than convenient* status quo, Pharaoh goes after babies. That is the same spirit that motivates abortion today—not necessarily that every woman who takes her child's life is consciously acting maliciously like Pharaoh was—but our whole culture has been prompted and influenced by ancient spiritual patterns laid out for it by the adversary of every soul.

The second parallel we can see between the early part of *Exodus*, and today, is the way the devil keeps God's people focused on the circumstances around them. He can afflict us with burdens as heavy as those in long ago Egypt by getting us to work for *mammon*, the god of material confidence. People “*work for*” all sorts of things; acceptance, security, causes, and they “*work at*” even more—diets, relationships, jobs, image, etc. It may surprise you to learn that the word for *worship* in Hebrew is the same as that for *work*; that for which we work is what we worship.

The taskmasters of today are psycho-spiritual compulsions, fears, longings and torments, as evidenced in our therapy-prone society. We devote our energies to the very world system that afflicts and oppresses us. The invisible power-patterns that distort the way God intended life to work are the very same ones that offer us therapies and philosophies to recover from or cope with those distortions. We build cities and monuments for the culture that enslaves us.

BEING TAKEN OUT, BEING DELIVERED

As the name implies, this book is all about departing, leaving. But we will miss its main point if we think of it in terms of a people just deciding one day that they had had enough, and leave. This isn't a story of resourceful people who take it upon themselves to better their condition. We're not talking about a group of overcomers who make the *best* of the worst life can throw at them. *Exodus* isn't about leaving, as much as about being *led out*—not going out, but being taken out. We don't see people being deliberate in their departure; we see them being delivered.

The real story is not about what the people of God do. It is about what God does. Whenever they are left to themselves or to their own devices, they do stupid things—like complaining when their deliverance is not as comfortable as their bondage; like voting to return to captivity; preferring the commands of taskmasters (who drive their beasts of burden) to the commands of a loving God (who shepherds His flock). They preferred worshipping an idol fabricated from gold earrings and nose rings.

As can be said about us, these are not a smart people—but they are God's people, His people of promise to their forefather Abraham. Though advanced in age beyond the years of having children,

Abraham received and accepted God's promise to make his descendants as numerous as the stars visible in the night sky. That was God's covenant with Abraham. The people we meet in *Exodus* are the beginnings of that promise being kept.

THE BOOK OF NAMES

That is why this book is actually called the *Book of Names*—taken from the first phrase in it, “Now these are the names...” *Exodus* is an English version of the old Greek translation, “The Septuagint, the title given to the book. However, this second section of the Torah was originally known as *Names*. In a sense it answers the question, “Whatever happened to those guys?” For the people, themselves, the great question of *Exodus* challenged their choice again and again: “Will you follow what God tells you, whether or not it makes sense to your way of thinking?”

God has His own way of doing things. He establishes His judgments (His calls) and rests the worlds on them. The cosmos is His arrangement. *Genesis*, the *Book of Beginnings* outlines the creative order and how that order was disrupted by the intrusion of sin. It also introduces the beginning patterns of the redemptive order. *Exodus* lays out many of the designs God employs in His mosaic of restoration: *after* we have done wrong, *after* we have gotten into bondage, *on our way* to the Promise Land, *before* we actually get back to where God wanted us all along... God follows particular patterns to do us good.

Exodus tells us about how God arranges things for His people—and about what happens when they follow the new patterns He gives them for deliverance, for life, and for worship. It isn't up to them to make their own ways. Their molten calf gods, their efforts at self-deliverance, their perspectives, their ideas about what it means to worship God, and their ability to feed themselves all come from one of the most powerful lies in life. That lie, spoken time after time by the father of lies, tells us that we can live life and approach God on our own terms. We cannot.

The Book of Exodus starts with God hearing His people's cry and seeing their affliction. It ends with Him speaking to Moses face to face, and leading His people throughout all their journeys with the cloud of His glory. Between these events, God overwhelms Egypt; it's gods, occult wizards and Pharaoh, with ten plagues. He delivers His people from death by telling them to spread the *blood of a lamb* over their doors.

After being delivered from Egypt, the people complain about everything—accusing God of not caring about what they're going through. He gives them meat and manna in the wilderness. The Ten Commandments (and the many others) lay out a pattern for living in a broken world. And all the details about the Ark, the Tabernacle, the anointing oil, and the priestly garments convey a final message: we must follow His guidance; it isn't up to us to do things any way we want

Exodus is the story of people upon whom the Lord has set His affection and to whom He has promised a future of blessing and hope. Despite His love and promise, however, these people find it hard to follow God in the *process* of their deliverance.