

Exodus 1-3

Our time in Genesis came to an end yesterday. And with a new month comes a new book. Exodus, the second book of the Bible, is also the second of five books written by Moses. Since Moses does a good job of bringing us up to speed in terms of where God's people are and how they got there in the opening verses of the book, there's no need for a lengthy introduction here.

1:1-7

Moses brings us up to speed in terms of where God's people are and how they got there. What struck me as I read this passage this time around was in the last verse, where Moses uses those loaded words: fruitful, increased greatly, multiplied, and land-was-filled. If you'll remember back to the first 11 chapters of Genesis, God's favorite command (by virtue of its frequency and how he dealt with Babel when they did not obey it) was to be fruitful, multiply, increase and fill the earth. We are told that the Israelites did this... and did it well. (We also saw in God's promises to Abraham this command being kept, as God promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.)

1:8-14

We are not told how long a period of time passed from when Joseph died to when this new king arose who dealt harshly with the Israelites. But notice the reason why they were dealt harshly with: they had grown numerous. The sheer size of the Israelites nation-within-a-nation was threatening to the Egyptian Superpower. Hundreds and thousands of years later, the strategic advantage of a people to increase and multiply has largely been lost (with the possible exception of India and China); in Moses' day, it was an essential ingredient to becoming a force to be reckoned with, and was therefore clearly seen as a blessing from God.

1:15-22

It's as if Moses is reading from Luke's playbook: the high become low and the low become high. Here, Pharaoh (very, very high) does what is evil and is resisted by Hebrew midwives (very, very low) who do God's will. (Notice that

God takes the side of life.) Also notice that God treats the midwives well. We are not told what this means, but that it contrasts well with how God will treat Pharaoh and the Egyptians several chapters later.

As it serves the bigger story Moses is telling in Exodus: the Egyptians are evil, the Hebrews are better and can even occasionally be faithful to the Lord; they have not forgotten the God of their Fathers.

2:1-10

The significance of Moses' lineage as a Levite will be demonstrated down the road. Keep is Levite heritage in the back of your mind.

It bears noting that, if it had not been for the pro-life disobedience Moses' mother practiced, the salvation story of God's people would look very, very different. Even the smallest act of obedience can have a dramatic ripple effect. The consequences for doing the right thing are better before God than any punishment those actions could incur before evil men.

Moses doesn't say this, but the reader can glean from how the events take place that this is all part of a bigger plan. It just so happens that Pharaoh's daughter sees Moses in the basket and just happens to ask for a nurse and just happens to call Moses' mother to be that nurse? Uh huh. Not a coincidence; a coincigod.

2:11-15

We are not told that if what Moses did (killing the harsh Egyptian) was a good thing or a bad thing. Notice how relatively non-judgmental Moses' writing has been up to this point. Lots of things happen that we are quick to label "good" or "bad." Occasionally (the flood, city of Babel, Sodom) we are told that something is good or bad, but oftentimes judgment is reserved. Why is this? Because the story of salvation is more important than being able to identify every little sin or mistake that people make. Were Moses to focus on the morality of all that he writes about, we would lose the thrust and momentum of the story he is telling.

Moses is 40 years old when this takes place. In the prime of his life, he has to uproot himself and go to a strange land, homeless and poor. The high have become low indeed.

2:16-22

Moses acts bravely, as he did in killing the Egyptian, protecting the women who had come to water their flocks. Reuel behaves hospitably toward Moses and he is welcomed into his house. Not only that, but Moses is allowed to marry one of Reuel's (aka Jethro) daughters.

2:23-24

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the Israelites continue to suffer at the hand of the Egyptians. Notice it is in answer to prayer that God decides to act. God will remain faithful to his word.

While God does call some to be in positions of authority (Romans 13), he is not impressed by the authority he gives; rather, he holds those in authority to use the authority given to them in just and righteous ways. This is why most people should not desire to be in positions of authority.

3:1-6

Horeb is also called Sinai (in the same way that Jethro is also Reuel). Moses meets with God on the same mountain he would lead the Israelites to and on which he would be given the Torah.

The question I'm asking myself at the beginning of this passage is with whether or not we are supposed to think that Moses has a good life or a tough life. Sure, he's not living in Pharaoh's house anymore. And the flocks aren't his. But he's got a job, he has a wife, and he gets to work for family. Moses is 80 years old when he meets with God on the mountain. Like Abraham and Noah before him, Moses was an old man before God chose to come to him.

3:7-12

God has decided to come to the aid of the Israelites. He will take them from Egypt and lead them to a land already occupied by people whose ancestors we met back in Genesis. Moses is reluctant to be used to lead such a large group of people. God reassures him that he will succeed because he will be with him. A sign of God's successful deliverance of the people will be that they will be led to worship God where Moses stands. (So when this happens in 19 and following, you'll know God's plan worked out just as he had planned.)

3:13-22

God gives his name to Moses. This is a big deal for several reasons: we learn about the character of God through his name; God is being "relational" with Moses... in other words, he is revealing himself to him. He is becoming less hidden.

So who does God reveal himself to be? "I AM WHO I AM"? This is one of the most discussed and analyzed phrases in the Old Testament. First, there is the task of figuring out what is being said. Then there is the task of figuring out what that means. In the Hebrew, we get the "stative" verb "to be" with the word usually translated "that" in the middle. Literally: "I am that I am." However, this phrase can also be translated/ interpreted:

- I am that I am.
- I am who I am.
- I will be what I will be.
- I am the one who is.
- I am the one who exists.
- I am the one who is.
- I am the one who is existence.

Not being a brilliant Hebrew scholar, I think that the best option for translating this phrase is the second to last option: "I am the one who exists." There's not enough space here to get into the possibilities as to what this implies. It will be enough to say that, if God wants to be known as the one who EXISTS, then to believe he does not exist is the antithesis of what he desires of us.

God goes on to tell Moses that he will perform a series of "wonders" that will result in the Israelites being allowed to leave the land; to allowing the Israelites to go free. There are a couple of things I'd like to comment on about the setting-free of the Israelites (even before we get to that story).

- Since they were held in captivity, the Israelites could not do what God repeatedly told people to do in Genesis: fill the earth.
- God would rather people be free than slaves. Think about the implications of this when it comes to the political landscape of our country!