

Reformation Fellowship Notes • October 11, 2015
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Handout #1
Introduction to Exodus

I. Introduction to Introduction to Exodus

- A. What I hope to accomplish today:
1. Characterize Exodus
 2. Set Exodus, as best I can, in the historical setting
 3. Describe the events that set the stage for the beginning of Exodus, as presented in Genesis
 4. Explain why the study of Exodus is worth our time

II. What Kind of a Book is Exodus?

- A. Exodus is a historical account that picks up where Genesis left off.
1. Like Genesis, Exodus is not just a historical account.
 - a) It is a literary work.
 - b) It is carefully crafted.
 - c) It is minimalism with respect to descriptions.
 - (1) Listener is expected to fill in the appropriate blanks.
 - (a) Based on knowledge of people
 - (b) Based on knowledge of culture and history
 - d) It incorporates literary devices of the time.
 - (1) I will draw attention to some of these.

III. The Historical Setting of Exodus

- A. The cultural and historical setting of Exodus is Egyptian.
1. The activity of the first third of the book takes place in Egypt.
 2. The Israelites and Moses were steeped in Egyptian culture.
 3. The entire book reflects this cultural background.
- B. Brief overview of Egyptian history:
1. Became a developed civilization early (2800 BC)
 - a) Blessed with five remarkable features
 - (1) Lots of water in the desert
 - (2) Long growing season (2 or 3 crops per year)
 - (3) Gentle annual flooding
 - (4) Easy transportation
 - (5) Protected by deserts all around
 2. Old Kingdom (2700-2200 BC)
 - a) Two kingdoms developed in Egypt (Upper and Lower Egypt).
 - (1) They were unified early (3100 BC).
 - b) Old Kingdom grew out of this union.
 - (1) Period of the great pyramids

- c) Distinctive beliefs
 - (1) Polytheistic
 - (2) King was a god.
 - (3) Egyptian society was permeated with religion.

“Religion, so woven into the fabric of the Egyptian state, is difficult to isolate. Significantly, the Egyptian language lacks a word for religion, for the concept is unthinkable in Egyptian terms.”
(*The Ancient Near East*, Hallo, p. 216-7)

- d) Became a world power
 - (1) Cultural influence found everywhere in Ancient Near East.
 - e) Smoothly functioning centralized government
 - (1) Highly taxed
 - (2) But high spending brought instability.
 - f) Period ended in a huge social upheaval.
 - (1) Poor took possession of the property of the wealthy.
 - (2) About a century of chaos
3. Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 BC)
- a) Egypt reemerged.
 - (1) Again, became a world power
 - (2) Aggressive foreign policy
 - (a) Conquered Nubia
 - (b) Developed political and economic ties with Canaan and Syria
 - b) Recommenced the building of pyramids and tombs
 - c) Unrest developed starting in 1790 BC.
4. Hyksos invasion (1650-1550 BC)
- a) Invaders from the north (Canaan)
 - b) Conquered and controlled Lower Egypt for a century
 - c) Settled in the eastern Delta
 - d) After they were driven out of Egypt they disappeared.
5. New Kingdom (1550-1070 BC)
- a) Time of instability
 - b) Expeditions to Canaan and Nubia
 - c) Akhenaton introduced monotheism (1379-1362 BC).
 - d) By 1200 BC, Egypt had ceased to be a world power.

C. When did the Exodus happen?

- 1. Majority of scholars would say it did not happen as described in the OT.
 - a) No solid archaeological evidence for the Exodus.
 - b) It has a folk tale quality (Alter).
 - (1) Some make this claim with respect to the first 10 chapters of Genesis.
 - c) These scholars tend to have little regard for the Bible as a historical document.
 - (1) Minimalists

- d) Other things that were doubted by the Minimalists have been subsequently shown to be true.
 - (1) This kings' lists
 - (2) David and Solomon
- 2. Early date—15th century BC (in 1400s)
 - a) Proponents—David Rohl, Bryant Wood
 - b) Takes biblical numbers at face value
 - (1) Temple was built about 966 BC.
 - (a) This was 480 years after Exodus (1 Kings 6:1).
 - (b) This means Exodus occurred in 1446 BC.
 - (2) They arrived in Egypt in 1876 BC.
 - (a) They were in Egypt 430 years (Exodus 12:41, Acts 7:6).
 - (3) Early Date Summary:
 - (a) Jacob goes to Egypt 1876 BC
 - (b) Exodus 1446 BC
 - c) It creates nice chronological symmetry.
 - (a) Puts the first temple half way between Exodus and the second temple
 - d) Problems
 - (1) It does not fit all the biblical data.
 - (a) Hoffmeier argues that there are at least three “biblical” chronologies.

“I reject Wood’s view that there is a single authoritative “biblical” chronology.” (Hoffmeier, “Response to Bryant Wood,” p. 226)

- (i) 1 Kings 1:6 says 480 years from exodus to temple.
- (ii) List of Judges totals at least 633 years from exodus to temple.
- (iii) LXX numbers are different from MT and would produce another number.
- (2) It does not fit the archaeological data very well.
 - (a) Rameses and Pithom in Exodus 1:11 did not exist until 1200s.
 - (b) Cities Israelites conquered in Israel do not have burn layers at the 1400 BC levels.
- 3. Late date—13th century BC (in the 1200s)
 - a) Proponents—Kenneth Kitchen, James Hoffmeier, R. K. Harrison, Alan Millard
 - (1) These take the number in 1 Kings 6:1 as symbolic.
 - (a) 40 signifies a generation; $480 \div 40 = 12$ generations.
 - (b) But a generation is more accurately about 20 years.
 - (c) So the time from the exodus to the temple was closer to 240 years.
 - (i) This puts the Exodus in the mid 1200s BC.
 - (d) This fits the archaeology better.
 - (i) Rameses and Pithom was built by slave labor and was only used for about 150 years (1270-1120).
 - (ii) A lot of construction under Rameses II (1290-1224 BC) in east Delta using bricks.

- (2) Late Date Summary:
 - (a) Jacob went to Egypt 1640 BC.
 - (b) Exodus 1210 BC.
- (3) The bottom limit is 1206 BC (Merneptah stele).
 - (a) By this time the Israelites lived in Canaan as a distinct ethnic group.
 - (b) This is acknowledged by all scholars.
- D. Israelites were just part of a larger historical phenomenon.
 - 1. Western Semites settled in east Delta starting in 1800 BC (YouTube video of lecture by Manfred Bietak www.biblicalarchaeology.org/.../video-on-the-historicity-of-the-exodus).
 - a) Lived in many cities along the east branch of Nile
 - b) Remained there into Hellenistic times
 - c) Population in this area was overwhelmingly Semitic.
 - (1) Most Egyptians live along Nile south of the Delta.
 - 2. Who were the Habiru?
 - a) Thought to be related to the word Hebrew
 - b) Foreigners
 - c) Often slaves
 - d) Like Gypsies
 - e) Bigger phenomenon than just the descendants of Abraham
 - 3. Semites living in the east Delta benefited from being on the fringes of Egypt
 - a) Wealth
 - b) Culture
 - c) Security
- E. Main themes of Exodus (from Nahum Sarna):
 - 1. God controls nature.
 - 2. God controls history.
 - 3. History is purposeful.
 - 4. God is a redeemer from injustice and oppression.
 - 5. Exodus is a historical metaphor for spiritual salvation.
 - 6. Jewish religious calendar is built around Exodus.
 - 7. History is a source and motive force behind ethical values.
- F. What background does Exodus expect the reader to have in mind?
 - 1. Genesis (especially creation account and promises to patriarchs)
 - 2. Egyptian culture

IV. Where Are We Picking up the Story?

- A. God created the world and mankind.
 - 1. Mankind was rebellious.
 - 2. Issue: How can mankind be fixed?

- a) Man was not fixed by warnings or judgment.
- b) Man was not fixed by a reset (Flood).

B. God picks an individual (Abraham).

- a) God blessed him and took him through experiences that taught him obedience.
- b) God made a promise to Abraham.

“He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them’. Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’. Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. He also said to him, ‘I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it’.” (Genesis 15:5-7)

- c) God led him to Canaan.
 - (1) God tells Abraham about the upcoming slavery in Egypt.

“Then the LORD said to him, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure’.” (Genesis 15:13-16)

- d) Abraham had a son, Isaac.

C. Isaac became Abraham’s heir.

1. God made a promise to Isaac.

“Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws” (Genesis 26:3-5).

- a) Isaac had two sons—Esau and Jacob.
- b) Jacob inherited the promises.

D. Jacob became Isaac’s heir.

- a) God repeated his promise to Jacob.

“After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, ‘Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel’. So he named him Israel. And God said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you’. Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him. Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.” (Genesis 35:9-15)

- b) Jacob had twelve sons by two wives and their two maids.
 - (1) Jacob’s last two sons were by his favorite wife, Rachel.

- (a) Joseph was his favorite son.
 - (2) The older sons kidnapped Joseph and sold him into slavery.
 - (a) They told Jacob that he was killed by an animal.
 - (3) Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt.
 - (a) He eventually became known to the Pharaoh.
 - (b) He was made Pharaoh's right-hand man.
 - (c) He prepared Egypt for a terrible drought.
 - (d) When the drought came, Egypt was the only country with food.
 - (e) Jacob and sons went to Egypt to get food.
 - (f) Joseph was reunited with his father and reconciled with brothers.
 - (4) Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt and lived in East Delta region.
- E. We are picking up the action about 400 years later.

V. Why is Exodus Worthy of Our Attention?

- A. Why study Exodus?
- 1. It is foundational (part of the Torah).
 - a) Everything in the Bible sends the reader back to the Torah.
 - 2. It describes a time when God acted overtly in human history.
 - a) It is God's proof that he is in control of history.
 - 3. The Exodus is the Bible's paradigm of salvation.
- B. My personal project is to make sense of history.
- 1. If history is like God's novel, what is he saying?
 - 2. We have more of the story in hand than in any other time in history.
 - 3. The book of Exodus describes an important episode in that history.

VI. What I hope to accomplish

- A. Some teachers try to show how all of the Old Testament points to Jesus.
- 1. I do not disagree with this.
 - 2. But I believe we will understand what God is doing in the Bible and in history if we first have a sound understanding of the Torah on its own terms.
- B. I am not very applicational.
- 1. I don't think that is how the Bible works.
 - a) The Bible is focused on who God is and who we are, not what we should do.
 - (1) I think this is even true of the descriptions of the law.
 - (2) Bible helps us create a sound worldview.
 - (a) Only a full-orbed worldview makes good application possible.
 - b) To tell people how they should apply passages is often misleading and always less helpful.
 - 2. But it is highly relevant for our time.

- a) First several chapters describe a time when God's people were afflicted by a foreign culture and government.
- b) It is not hard to find parallels.

C. What I am going to do:

1. My goal is to help you understand the text of Exodus.
 - a) I hope to be a guide.

“So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it’.

“Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” (Acts 8:27-31)

- b) What it is saying?
 - c) How it is saying that?
 - d) Spell out some of the implications.
2. I am convinced that the key to understanding biblical, historical narrative is to live in it.
 - a) Hot medium—requires a lot of activity on the part of the reader
 - b) Ask as many questions as you can think of.
 - (1) Some can be answered.
 - (2) Some can't.
 - (3) Let the text determine.
 - (4) Get used to hanging a lot on little evidence.
3. I have an enormous amount to learn.
 - a) I benefit more from teaching than those I teach.
 - b) My study of Isaiah was revolutionary in my thinking about the Bible.
 - (1) It convinced me that I need to be more attentive to the details of the Old Testament texts than I have been up to now.
 - (2) I need to build a much more complete understanding of the entire milieu of the Old Testament.
 - (a) Festivals
 - (b) Sacrifices
 - (c) Symbolism
 - (d) Language
 - (e) Thought patterns
 - (f) Looking at the Bible Tanakhically