

Reformation Fellowship Notes • October 25, 2015

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Handout #3

Exodus 1:15-2:10

I. Introduction

A. God blessed his people, and they increased in numbers from being a family to being a people.

1. Just as he had promised
2. But he had also promised them the land of Canaan as a possession.
 - a) The whole book of Exodus is a big step toward this.

B. A new king arose in Egypt.

1. King was insecure in his position.
 - a) Establishing his power and authority
 - b) The increase in numbers of the Israelites provided an opportunity.
 - (1) Playing on fears, the king took action against this threat.
 - (a) Putting Israelites in their place
 - (b) And benefitting from their labor
2. He has tried two things:
 - a) Enslavement
 - b) Bitter enslavement
 - (1) It is not clear how long this was in force before the strategy was tried.
 - c) Both of these only made matters worse.
 - (1) More Israelite children born

C. From a historical perspective, this is a moment in a grand spiritual conflict.

“Pharaoh’s strategy for claiming sovereignty over Israel was slavery. In the Egyptian temple of Edfu, there is an inscription from the time of Rameses depicting a god registering slaves for Pharaoh. The picture is a reminder that by enslaving the Israelites, Pharaoh was trying to make a theological point: the Hebrews would not serve their own God—they would work for him. They would not be free to go to the land of God’s promise—they would stay right where they were. In effect, Pharaoh was claiming to be the lord of Israel, and by doing so—perhaps without even realizing it—he became the tool of Satan. . . . The exodus, therefore, was not simply an epic struggle between Moses and Pharaoh, or between Israel and Egypt. Ultimately it was another skirmish in the great, ongoing war between God and Satan.” (Ryken, p. 34)

D. Now he will adopt a more aggressive strategy.

1. There is no indication of how much time passed.

II. Exodus 1:15-22 Revised Solution: kill the baby boys

A. Two notes about terminology:

1. The author is using “king of Egypt” so far, rather than Pharaoh.
 - a) Later he will switch to “Pharaoh.”
2. When the term “Pharaoh” is used, no name is attached.

- a) This fits the usage of the time period we are dealing with.
 - b) Later in Egyptian history, the name of the Pharaoh is included.
 - (1) Pharaoh Tutmoses
- B. King is increasingly concerned that his strategies are not working.
1. The numbers of Israelites are growing so fast that it will not be possible to apply enough force or intimidation.
 2. King is going to take action to directly limit the growth of numbers.
- C. King enlists the help of two Hebrew midwives (first attempt).
1. First time “Hebrews” is used in Exodus.
 - a) Used in interaction with king
 - b) “Hebrews” implies foreign slaves.
 - c) They are usually called “sons of Israel.”
 2. Two would have been very few for so many Hebrews.
 - a) Could have been the two top
 - b) Could have been representative of all the midwives
 3. Names are given
 - a) Names are Hebrew
 - (1) Shiphrah: “beauty”
 - (2) Puah: “fragrant blossom”
 4. King commands midwives to kill boys when they are born.
 - a) A huge power disparity
 - (1) No explicit threats of punishment
 - (a) But it had to be intimidating.
 - (2) I assume it was made in the form of an appeal.
 - (a) “It will be better for Hebrews if there are fewer born.”
 - (b) “Our goals can be met in a way that is most humane, least disruptive to society.”
 - b) Why does the king enlist the midwives to do this?
 - (1) He could just send his soldiers in and kill young boys.
 - (2) Having midwives kill the boys would be less inflammatory.
 - (a) They can kill boys clandestinely.
 - (b) Less of a chance of inciting a rebellion
 5. Why kill males only?
 - a) Females less of a concern; males are fighters.
 - b) Females can provide “safe” labor.
 - c) And save reproductive capability
 6. Notice that this can only be a long-term “solution.”
 - a) The impact on the problem the king wants to solve (internal threat) would only be felt after 20 years or so.
 7. Are we to see that this is a repetition of the experience of Abraham (Genesis 12:12)?

“The parallelism is apparently intended by Scripture in accordance with its principle that the experience of the fathers foreshadow those of the descendants.” (Cassuto, p. 14)

- D. The midwives did not do as commanded: they feared the Lord.
1. Memory of Yahweh had been kept alive.
 - a) There is evidence that the sons of Israel had not completely forgotten the God of their fathers.
 - (1) Example: “Jochebed” (mother of Moses) contains the name of God.
 - b) The promises
 - c) The values of God: respect for human life.
 - (1) Their action stemmed from their fear of God (presumably the God of the patriarchs)
 2. They risked the wrath of the king.
 - a) They did not have the law.
 - (1) They are recognizing a basic human value: innocent human lives should not be taken by other humans.
 - b) Very brave
 - c) God apparently spared them the king’s wrath.
 - (1) Why?
 - (a) Didn’t want it to become known what he had tried to do?
 - (b) They weren’t worth the trouble?
 - d) They “feared God” (repeated 2 times).

“In short, ‘fearing God’ is commonly in Scripture a virtual abbreviation for ‘believing in God, and therefore fearing the consequences of not pleasing him, thus being a person of moral conviction and righteous actions’—although in Hebrew it is surely not per se an abbreviation but an idiom.” (Stuart, p. 82)

3. Their excuse:
 - a) Implied criticism of the softness of Egyptian women
 - b) It is a lie.
 - (1) They give a reason that might contain some truth.
 - (a) But it is certainly not the whole truth.
 - (2) I will talk about this more later.
- E. Israelites multiplied and became mighty.
1. The king had taken this third measure to slow the growth of the Israelites.
 - a) It failed.
 2. God rewarded the midwives with households.
 - a) God was good to the midwives.
 - b) Midwives were typically childless. (Stuart, p. 82)
- F. This was a measure of desperation; clearly not a good solution.
1. If the midwives had killed the boys, this would have been discovered before long.
 2. Then people would have quit calling the midwives.
- G. King spoke to Egyptians (fourth attempt).
1. Now he is called Pharaoh.

- a) I don't know why.
 - (1) My guess:
 - (a) "King" suggests the powerful head of state.
 - (b) "Pharaoh" suggests the leader of Egypt.
- 2. He commands his people.
 - a) He is exasperated.
- 3. All Egyptians are to help in the effort.
 - a) Does not change who must be killed
 - b) Kill them by throwing them in the Nile.
 - (1) Why not strangle or stab?
 - (a) Most antiseptic form of killing
 - (b) Least traumatic

III. Exodus 2:1-10

- A. Moses was born during this stressful time.
 - 1. Not clear when he was born (time frame in this account is unclear).
 - 2. Maybe when midwives were supposed to kill boys
 - a) Maybe when Egyptians were supposed to kill boys
 - (1) This seems most probable.
 - 3. Parents were both Levites.
 - a) No dreams or prophecies before he was born
 - b) No communication from God that this baby was special
 - 4. His mother saw that he was "good."
 - a) Not just "healthy" or "beautiful"
 - b) She recognized that he was special.
 - (1) Acts 7:20—he was lovely (ἀστεῖος) in the sight of God.
 - (2) Hebrews 11:23—because they saw the child was (ἀστεῖος).
 - (3) LXX—and seeing that he was ἀστεῖος
 - (4) Sophisticated, charming, graceful (here: full of grace)
 - (a) "Echoing Genesis chapter 1?"
 - 5. Determined and encouraged to try to save him
 - a) They were able to keep him hidden for 3 months.
 - (1) Maybe it was after 3 months that Egyptians were called on to kill boys.
 - 6. What follows is often looked upon as folklore.
 - a) It seems highly improbable.
 - b) Everything goes just right for the child.
 - c) It is similar to other stories.
 - (1) Sargon

“Sargon, the mighty king, king of Agade, am I.
 My mother was a changeling, my father I knew not.
 The brother(s) of my father loved the hills.
 My city is Azuprianu, which is situated on the banks of the Euphrates.
 My mother, the high priestess conceived me, in secret she bore me.
 She set me in a basket of rushes, with bitumen she sealed my lid.
 She cast me into the river which rose not (over) me.” (Prichard, ANET, vol. 1, p. 119)

- (a) Sargon lived 2371-2316 BC.
 - (b) But the oldest text dates to 600-500 BC.
 - d) But the story of Moses does not have to be folklore.
7. The plan as it stands does not make much sense.
- a) Is she just putting her son adrift?
 - (1) Like putting a child on steps to a church.
 - b) Does she know that Pharaoh’s daughter bathes there?
 - (1) She was hoping what happened would happen.
 - c) But we don’t know all of the circumstances.
 - (1) We aren’t told everything our curiosity would like to know.
 - (a) It may have been clearer to immediate audience.
 - d) Could have been a temporary measure?
 - (1) When Egyptians came through, they hid put him in the river.
- B. What did they do?
- 1. Took a basket
 - 2. Made it water-tight
 - 3. Put a lid on it (more sound proof? protection from sun?)
 - 4. Put in river
 - 5. Sister put in position to watch
 - a) Sister was probably just a young girl (Miriam).
 - b) “To find out what would happen to him”
 - 6. Pharaoh’s daughter was going to the river to bathe.
 - a) Saw the ark
 - b) Sent her maid to get it

IV. Exodus 2:6-10

- A. Pharaoh’s daughter opened the basket.
- 1. At this point the text uses the word **נִנְיָר** .
 - 2. “behold a boy”
 - 3. Usually refers to an older boy
 - 4. But can be used as “a term of parental tenderness referring to a vulnerable child” (Alter, p. 313)

- B. She had pity on the child.
 - 1. Egyptians are not all bad.
 - 2. She sees he is a Hebrew.
 - a) Circumcision?
 - 3. Miriam gets her mother a job.
 - a) Miriam runs down and asks Pharaoh's daughter if she would like a wet nurse from among the Hebrews to feed the child.
 - 4. Pharaoh's daughter says yes.
 - 5. Miriam goes to get her mother.
 - a) Pharaoh's daughter hires Moses' mother to feed him.
 - (1) Pays her for this
 - (a) She is better off than she would have been.
 - b) Mother took her child away.
 - 6. Child grew until weaned.
 - a) Mother took child to Pharaoh's daughter.
 - (1) At 2? At 13?
 - b) He came to learn he was a Hebrew.
 - 7. Pharaoh's daughter named him Moses.
 - a) A common name for Egyptian royal family ("the one who is born")
 - b) She says "Because I drew him out of the water."
 - (1) Egyptian name sounds similar to the Hebrew "he who draws out."

V. Conclusion

- A. The lie of the midwives
 - 1. Commentators respond differently to the actions of the midwives.
 - a) Most condemn the women.
 - (1) Augustine, Calvin, etc.
 - b) Others argue that what they said was not really a lie.
 - c) I think they clearly lied.
 - 2. Does God approve of what they did?
 - a) Some say God did not approve of the lie but did approve of their respect for God.
 - b) I think we are to see their actions as a whole as heroic.
 - (1) He gave them households.
 - (2) The names were preserved in the text.
 - (a) Relatively few names are given in historical narrative.
 - (b) This is an honor.
 - 3. What is a lie?
 - a) It is different from bearing false witness.
 - (1) Misrepresenting the truth when justice is at stake

- b) Is it a lie to give an incomplete answer?
 - c) Is it a lie to give a diplomatic answer?
 - d) I am not aware of any commandment against lying.
- 4. Should we always give accurate, honest, complete answers?
 - a) We should be people devoted to truth.
 - (1) God values truth.
 - b) We should live in the real world.
 - (1) What will my interlocutor do with the information?
 - 5. What would be most helpful? What lies would be justifiable before God?
 - 6. For people devoted to the truth; the truth is always ultimately in our favor.
- B. The dilemma I experience**
- 1. We live in a time when traditional values are eroding away.
 - 2. There is pressure from the culture to capitulate and rationalize those values.
 - 3. So I find myself wanting to take a firm stand.
 - a) In part, just for the sake of taking a stand
 - 4. On further reflection, we can't do either.
 - a) We can't be cowardly in the face of social and political pressures.
 - (1) We need to face into those pressures even when the cost is great.
 - b) We can't just make a stand to be making a stand.
 - (1) We need to recognize that circumstances provide clarifying data that warrant making adjustments in our values.
 - c) We need to trust God to bring us through.
 - 5. If we understand the difficulty of walking this line, we will give one another a lot of room.
 - a) Things aren't black and white.
 - b) Reasonable, godly people could disagree as to what should be done.
 - c) Kim Davis
 - 6. Each of us do and will face unique situations.
 - a) We will have to decide what it means to stand firm and keep the faith.
 - b) We need the understanding and support of others.
- C. There are several unlikely heroes in this section (all women).**
- 1. Midwives
 - a) Midwives perform the first recorded instance of civil disobedience.
 - (1) Demands of God trump the demands of the state.
 - (2) God rewarded them for what they did.
 - b) They lied.
 - 2. Moses' mother
 - a) Took desperate action to save her son
 - b) Banked on a miracle
 - 3. Pharaoh's daughter

- a) Pharaoh is pure evil; but his daughter shows compassion.
 - (1) That act of compassion makes possible the salvation of Israel.
 - b) Violated the commands of her father and king
4. All took actions that could invite serious criticism.
- a) Ultimately we live our lives before God.
 - (1) He is the one to whom we will give account.
 - b) Do we care to do what he wants us to do?
- D. Pharaoh's escalation of activities to reduce the number of Israelites bears some similarity to Hitler's final solution.
- 1. No rebellious action by Jews precipitating the genocide
 - 2. Slow escalation
 - 3. Use of Jews to kill Jews
 - 4. Whole society is employed in the effort.
 - 5. No rebellion in reaction to the escalation
- E. Irony in the making

“All newborn males are to be drowned in the River Nile, a decree that is ultimately to turn out as tinged with irony, for the very agency of destruction that he has chosen—water—is eventually to become the instrument of his own punishment.” (Sarna, *Exploring*, p. 26)

- 1. Moses in the basket makes several connections (ironic, backward looking, forward looking).
 - a) Noah
 - b) Moses was supposed to be killed by being thrown into the river.
 - (1) He was saved by being placed in the river.
 - c) He was put among the reeds.
 - d) He will save his people by leading them through the sea of reeds.
 - e) God saves his people by saving Moses in an ark.
 - (1) Just as he preserved mankind in the ark of Noah