

Exodus Chapter 1 - John Karmelich

I'll open with a thought hopefully you can relate to: Ever read a book that's so good one's hooked from the start? Exodus is like that. It begins with one family that grew into a nation of about 2 million over a 400+ year time frame. We read that nation got forced into slavery! It's the kind of story that would get one curious as to what happened next. I am well aware "I'm preaching to the choir" as most of us know this story well. I doubt most of you realize when the United States began some of its leaders wanted as the official national seal, a picture of the Israelites leaving Egypt. A large group of people being free is a symbol most of us can relate to.

That leads to my favorite question: Why should I care or why should I study a story I know well? What would I get out of this? It isn't just about memorizing some facts that took place about 3,500 years ago or just reading a story we know well. It's to realize God wants us to learn these stories for a reason. It's to realize that there is hope for us who are "slaves" to our jobs, our family or our situation and there's a hope of our future no matter how bad the present situation make look at the moment. One has to realize we usually can't fix our situation instantly, but we can always change our attitude about how we see the situation. I firmly believe we should work hard to make our lives better and enjoy the time we have to live. At the same time we need to remind ourselves daily, that the greatest purpose of living is to make a difference for God. We must realize we've been freed from what the world considers important.

We were rescued not to go do whatever we want, but to use our lives for His glory. In effect Exodus is a model of living that way. To state the obvious, the book starts in effect with bad news: Being stuck in a horrible situation with no hope in sight. The only hope was that God promised the Israelites over 400 years earlier they would be rescued one day. That hope not only kept them going through horrid times, but it also kept them separate from the Egyptians after living among them for again over 400 years! So as we go through this chapter and this book, I ask that you don't think so much about the historical part as much as I want you to consider what we've been rescued from. We should ask every now and then if there are aspects of our lives where we are still in "bondage" to what the world desires and how we can trust God to be the type of person He wants us to be.

With that lofty speech out of my system, it's time to discuss Exodus Chapter 1. It's a short chapter, but it "packs a punch" as I stated it does a great job of hooking you in the story from just a short number of verses. To begin, one has to know a bit about the book of Genesis. In essence it's a book of beginnings as it described how the world began, how God separated one man to start a nation who were to be "His people" and ends with the death of the grandson of the man God called to start up that nation. Realize in the original Hebrew language, Exodus starts in effect with an "and" to connect the books to Genesis. Exodus opens with naming 11 of the 12 sons of Jacob, the guy who died at the end of Genesis. The 11 sons and their families move moving to Egypt to be with their brother Joseph who was the #2 guy who ran Egypt. In short, the story opens with the family moving there, even though Jacob, the father of the 12 boys knew this was going to be the beginning of a 400 year (plus) period of the family in Egypt!

A bit of bible trivia that actually affects us when we think about it, is the fact that the father of these 12 son's father is called both Jacob and Israel in Verse 1. In the bible, God often gives people new names. For example Abram became Abraham. In the New Testament, Peter was not his birth name, but a new name that Jesus gave him. There are plenty more examples, but my point is once a new name is given, it usually "sticks for life". An exception is Jacob. What scholars figure is when the name Jacob's used he's messing up in some way. When he's doing God's will the new name Israel is used. The reason we

get both names is the reminder that his sons were well, "messed up" (think us), but they're still used by God to be His witnesses despite what they did wrong.

The point is to remind us that in spite of all our faults, God still wants to use us to be His witnesses to a lost and dying world. These 70 people were the beginning of a nation! The reason all the sons are listed to start this book is to say in effect here's who we began with that lead to roughly two million people of exodus. The text mentions 70 people who made that trip. In the book of Acts a speech given where 75 people were listed (Acts Chapter 7). The difference is that the 12th brother, his wife and children were already there, which is the difference between the 75 versus the 70. OK that's that, back to the story!

One of the first commands that God gives in Genesis is to "be fruitful and multiply". It just means God wants us to have children so life can continue. If you wonder what the Israelites did for 400 plus years in Egypt (besides being slaves) is they had lots of kids. They grew from 75 people to about 2 million in that 400+ year span. If that isn't being fruitful and multiplying, I don't know what is. We tend to think of Godly obedience as lots of prayer and good works. Sometimes it just being a good witness as we're raising a family the best we can!

OK so much for the good news. Now comes the "rub": A little over 40 years before the Exodus itself, we are told a new Pharaoh (a title for an Egyptian dictator) came on the scene. History tells us he was the first of a new dynasty and not the descendant of a previous king. Therefore, He was worried about being overthrown! He feared the Israelites as they did not assimilate into the Egyptian culture but were distinct and separate. It's a reminder that God expect us to not act like those around us as a witness for Him, but to be distinct in some way as His witnesses to the world. Anyway, the Pharaoh feared if they would join his enemies, so out of fear, made them all into slaves! I'm sure the Israelites were not crazy about this, J but they also knew God promised them a big rescue was going to happen after 400 years. The point for us is God promises us eternity in His presence. Compare that with whatever problems we are dealing with at this time! Then we read the Israelites built two cities in Egypt as slaves. They dealt with the situation the best they could realizing it would not be forever.

Then the story switches to a meeting. The Pharaoh wanted to decrease the number of Israelite men as again, he feared an uprising. He summoned what I call, "The head women of the union of those nurses who helped the Israelite women give birth" to his office. He said in effect to these women when you're helping the Israelite women give birth to a boy kill it! If it's a girl, she can live. Those women knew it's a sin to murder. They probably lied to the Pharaoh by saying, "when we show up it's too late". We get the names of the two head nurses in the text and the fact they're rewarded with families. Yet we do not get the Pharaoh named by name! These women took a stand for God! Realize they could have died for saying what they did!

The final part of the chapter says in effect the Pharaoh was now more desperate, because he still feared the Israelites joining his enemies. He ordered that all male babies were to be drowned in the Nile! One can see the thread of trying to eliminate the Messianic line from being born even at this time. Chapter 2 deals with the birth of Moses. He was miraculously saved even though he was supposed to be one of the babies to be killed.

Obviously if this was the end of the story, it'd be tragic: Imagine living in a world where one's living as a slave and one's male babies are being killed. And you thought you have problems! Yes God brought this to an end in a miraculous way, but that same principal of trusting God applies to us! How bad will our problems be after living with God say for 10 million years? As I always preach we may not be able to control our circumstances but we can always control our attitude about them! Worrying doesn't help

the situation. God does for us what we can't do for ourselves. That's a big lesson underlying this book: That God separates us to be used for His glory. So "enjoy the ride" as we use our lives for His glory!

With that said, the rest of this lesson is a more detailed account that I wrote about twenty years ago. If you'd like you can read the rest or call it a week now. Either way, I'm grateful for you reading this. To read the rest of it, click on one of the two links below. Everything else below is links to questions that you may have. If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me.

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John