

GOD SAVES A PEOPLE
THE EXODUS
May 22, 2019

Pope Damasus requested Jerome to revise the Latin translation of the *Four Gospels*.
Jerome did not give a new translation but revised the Latin text in accordance with Greek MSS.
In 383 Jerome also revised the *Psalter* according to the Septuagint.
In 387 Jerome became interested in the *Hexapla* of Origen.
He revised the Latin text of the Old Testament according to the *Hexaplarian Septuagint*.
In 390 he translated the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew (took sixteen years).

Modern Vulgate is composed of the following parts –
Gospels were revised according to the original Greek.
Other books of the Old Testament were probably revised but no clear documentation about it.
Proto-canonical books (except the Psalter) were directly from the Hebrew.
Deutero-canonical books –
Tobias and Judith were from the Aramaic.
Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and Maccabees I and II remained from the Septuagint.
Additions in Daniel were from Theodotion and those of Esther were from the Septuagint.

Four major theological themes in Exodus

- 1) Liberation (Exodus 1-15)
Social transformation occurs through the intentionality of a *new God*.
- 2) Law (Exodus 19-23)
Announcement of the will of God affects all aspects of their personal and public life.
God who liberates does not limit himself to religious matters.
Ten Commandments come directly from the mouth of God.
All the rest of the laws in Exodus are given by Moses (designated mediator).
Israel devises a stable arrangement to follow the will of God and his purpose.
- 3) New Covenant (Exodus 32-34)
Proclamation of the Law leads to the making of a new or renewed covenant.
A covenant rooted in fidelity must struggle with the reality of infidelity.
Interactions with God allow for the tension between judgment and hope.
- 4) Presence (Exodus 25-40)
It develops a structure that will ensure (in institutional form) the continued presence of God.
Tabernacle makes possible both the abiding presence of God and his assurance as they travel.

Israel is a community like none that had yet existed.
Israel is the recipient of God's liberating power that lives under the Law of God.
Israel is a partner in an on-going covenant with God and the host of his presence.

Book of Exodus reached its present and final form during the sixth-century exile or soon after.

Context: Exilic (post-exilic) community had to practice its faith in an acute crisis.

Israelites who primarily proclaimed the centrality of Jerusalem were all gone.

Foreign powers (Babylon and Persia) now governed.

Book of Exodus was to be understood as a literary, pastoral, liturgical, and theological response.

Text concerned with 13th century BC matters were heard in a 6th to 4th century BC crisis.

- 1) Liberation now concerned the freedom (given in faith) in an imperial context of Babylon.
- 2) Law concerned a counter-ethic in an empire that wanted to command all of life.
- 3) Covenant was an alternative to bowing to the empire.
- 4) Presence became a sense of energy, courage and divine accompaniment.

Exodus story continued to offer new possibilities for the future of those oppressed.

Hebrew tradition assigned names to each of the books of Torah based on first significant word.

Book is called *Shemot* which means *Names*.

English tradition follows the Greek practice which is to use topical names (Exodus).

Exodus 1

Chapter 1 describes the makeup of the slave community for the story that follows.

Narrator connects deliberately this community of slaves to the Genesis story.

Promise made to the ancestors is still operative and decisive for this community.

Continuing power of an enduring promise is placed alongside current social helplessness.

Tension is between a past promise and the present struggle.

People about to be liberated have a memory and a genealogy.

More than that, they have a remembered promise from the *God of the ancestors*.

People regarded by the empire as nameless slaves have a powerful history already.

Past carries power and potential that the empire does not recognize and cannot contain.

Joseph is not mentioned in the listing of the sons in vs. 2-4.

Seventy – At the threshold of liberation this family is a substantial clan.

Family in Genesis was in every generation small in number, vulnerable and fragile.

Name of Joseph (vs. 5) speaks of power and authority.

His name (yāsap) means one who adds and who expands and accumulates.

Because of the promise of God the Israelites were to be fruitful and so they multiplied.

But there is a new king with a short memory.

Fact that Israel is fruitful and powerful makes them a threat to the empire.

Out of his anxiety, the new king generated a fresh policy of forced labor.

Forced labor was to build royal storehouses in the royal cities of Pithom and Rameses.

Archaeological remains show evidence that Egypt did undertake such ambitious projects.

But power of blessings from God was still at work and the empire could not stop it.

It escalated the harshness of policies and escalated the anxiety.

In vs. 15-22 the Israelites are not at all mentioned but the term *Hebrew* is used.

In Near East it referred to any group of marginalized people who had no social standing.

Such people owned no land and who disrupted society (low-class people).

Exodus 2

In the birth story of an unnamed son the mother made a waterproof basket of bitumen and pitch. Hebrew word for basket (tēvah) was same word used in the flood narrative as *ark*.

Author: Unnamed baby reenacts the flood narrative in Genesis.

Basket is placed in the reeds (sup) at the edge of the Nile.

Same term is used in the story to name the waters through which Israel came to liberation.

Baby is at the edge of the waters of freedom!

Unnamed daughter of Pharaoh comes to the river to bathe and she finds the baby.

She had pity (hāmal) but the Hebrew word is stronger than our understanding of that word.

She spared the baby, entered into an alliance with him, and prepared to be his protector.

In this narrative, Moses is the first person named and the name is Egyptian.

Name means *son* and it is unusual since it is not preceded by the name of an Egyptian god.

Examples: Rameses is son of Ra (sun) and Thutmose is son of Thoth (wisdom).

Moses is therefore the *son of nobody* or the self-made man (term used in Papyrus Harris).

There is a leap of time as Moses grows up and becomes an adult.

Narrative is divided into two locations, Egypt and Midian.

In Egypt, Moses sees the forced labor and intervenes to kill an abusive Egyptian.

Narrator uses the same word for kill (nākā) that was used for the actions of the Egyptians (beat).

So Moses does to the Egyptian what the Egyptian is doing to the slave.

Slaves are grateful for his intervention but in the next scene it is used against Moses as a threat.

Pharaoh intends to kill (hārag) Moses.

So we see the progression: At first the Egyptians *strike* and at the end Pharaoh seeks to *kill*.

In between Moses *strikes* and he is accused of murder.

Narrator emphasizes that Egyptians kill and the Hebrews are driven into brutality.

Moses flees to Midian (free of the threats and abuses of the Egyptian empire).

His passion for the well-being of the Hebrews made him a hunted, unwanted man (fugitive).

At the moment of the death of the king, Israel finds its voice (vs. 23).

There has been no mention of Israel since 1:13 (subject of the narrative has been the Hebrews).

Cry is neither God-induced nor God-directed.

At this point God takes a critical role in the narrative.

God heard. God remembered. God saw. God knew.

Exodus 3

Narrative features an angel (messenger), a bush, and the voice of God.

God calls Moses in a double summons and his response is *Here am I*.

First hint that life of Moses has a theological dimension (until now it has been political).

And for God: I have seen. I have heard. I have known. I have come down.

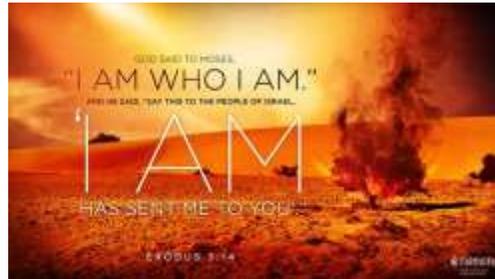
God knows the present situation and is prepared to counter it decisively.

And it is Moses who will do what God says.

It is Moses who will run the risks that God seems ready to take.

Moses is being asked to return to the dangerous arena of Egypt.

3:14 – I am who I am (ehyeh asher ehyeh) (absolute existence)
Septuagint translates it into Greek (ego eimi ho on) – I am the one who is
Theodotion translates it into Greek (esomai hos esomai) – I will be who I will be (temporal)
Vulgate corresponds closely to the Septuagint and the absolute existence of God.
Modern English would say it as – I am He who endures.



Exodus 4

Later in the chapter Moses is given instructions by God.
He is to do wonders (mōpetim) and that is a term first used in Exodus.
Wonders were extraordinary deeds that intruded upon settled and controlled lives.
They also generated new possibilities.
Mention of wonders suggests the first mention of God's resolve to harden the heart of Pharaoh.
Wonders were on behalf of Israel against Egypt.
Hardening was against Egypt and (indirectly) on behalf of Israel.
God did wonders to shatter the present reality.
God also caused resistance to the newness on behalf of the status quo.
Response of the resistance tended to be proportionate to the threat of the wonder.
Narrator was willing to entertain the idea that God operated negatively to heighten the drama.
 God needed Pharaoh to be recalcitrant in order to humiliate the power of Egypt.
 But Pharaoh was already callous and arrogant and resistant to the instructions of others.
 God was not so much creating the hardening of the heart.
 God was allowing the pharaoh to persist in his harsh behaviors.

Moses is instructed on what to say.
There were no limits to how far God would go on behalf of his people.
Vs. 24-26 does not seem to be related to its context.
It is similar to the meeting of Jacob at Bethel and Penuel.
Best we can do is let the story bear witness to the deep, untamed holiness of God.
No hint that God is testing Moses but only that God operates in undisciplined freedom.

Narrative invites the people to be with Moses and Aaron in a high-risk venture.
They were to trust in the God who gave signs, revealed a name, and threatened Pharaoh.
God even assaulted Moses which proved trust was no casual undertaking.
People were to start from a different point toward a different possibility.

Exodus 5

We are back in Egypt and in the court of Pharaoh.

It is the last episode in which Pharaoh will be unchallenged in his own policies.

God of the Hebrews appears nowhere in this narrative.

He is spoken about by the other characters but God is noticeably absent and ineffective.

Moses and Aaron are left on their own with Pharaoh.

At the end of the chapter the accusation is that God has been absent from this confrontation.

God promised to be the decisive player but Moses and Aaron were dangerously exposed.

Moses' protest accused God of having offered false words with no follow-through action.

Pharaoh seemed to prevail.

Back in 4:21 God said he would harden the heart of Pharaoh so he would not let the people go.

It is exactly what has happened in Chapter 5.

Heart of Pharaoh was made harder and more resistant.

Inhumane strategy by Pharaoh became the visible sign of the hidden hardening of his heart.

It was a necessary step in creating a situation so laden with pressure that he blew up with rage.

God may have been invisible in the narrative but God was not absent.

Liberation was slow and hard work.

God placed Pharaoh to become engaged in the mighty work of liberation.

Exodus 6

Chapter is part of the Priestly tradition so it does not flow from the rest of the story.

- 1) Covenant is unilaterally imposed by God.
- 2) Name for God is *El Shaddai*.
- 3) It has a preoccupation with priestly genealogy.
- 4) Aaron is highlighted in the genealogy.

Priestly texts were commonly dated either to the exile or soon afterward.

It sought to construct for the exiles a sense of structured, stable reality.

It wanted to give coherence, order, and legitimacy to communal life.

Exodus 7-10

First wonder was transforming a staff into a snake (not the garden-variety).

Hebrew for snake (*tannin*) is a large threatening reptile or a great sea monster.

God was unleashing chaos in the midst of a well-ordered realm.

First plague was water turned to blood (the single source of life is turned to blood).

Second plague was frogs with their filth, repulsiveness, disease, and smell.

Third plague was gnats that covered the earth and humankind and animals.

Fourth plague was flies (in this case God spoke and acted without Moses or Aaron).

Fifth plague was on livestock from a contagious disease that was out of control.

Sixth plague was boils caused by soot.

Seventh plague was thunder and hail.

Eighth plague was locusts.

Ninth plague was darkness in which no message and no demand was sent to Pharaoh.

The Plagues and the Gods of Egypt

PLAGUE	REFERENCE	POSSIBLE EGYPTIAN DEITY DIRECTED AGAINST
NILE TURNED TO BLOOD	7:14-25	1. Khnum: guardian of the Nile 2. Hapi: spirit of the Nile 3. Osiris: Nile was bloodstream
FROGS	8:1-15	Heqt: form of frog; god of resurrection
LICE	8:16-19	Uncertain; perhaps attack on Egyptian priests
FLIES	8:20-32	Uatchit: a god who manifested himself as a fly
MURRAIN (DISEASE ON THE CATTLE)	9:1-7	1. Hathor: mother-goddess; form of cow 2. Apis: bull of god Ptah; symbol of fertility 3. Mnevis: sacred bull of Heliopolis
BOILS	9:8-12	Imhotep: god of medicine
HAIL	9:13-35	1. Nut: sky goddess 2. Isis: goddess of life 3. Seth: protector of crops
LOCUSTS	10:1-20	1. Isis: goddess of life 2. Seth: protector of crops
DARKNESS	10:21-29	Re, Aten, Atum, Horus: all sun gods of sorts
DEATH OF FIRST BORN	11:1-12:36	The deity of Pharaoh: Osiris, the giver of life

Exodus 11

Encounter went on long enough to establish the power of God.
 God informed Moses that this was the last plague and the one that would bring sure results.
 Pharaoh would drive out the people of Israel forcibly.
 Verb in Hebrew (*gāras*) is stated with an infinitive absolute.
 Pharaoh would become an adamant advocate for the departure of these people.

Vs. 2-3 reflect the *year of release* as outlined in Deuteronomy 15:1-11.
 Hebrew slaves who are set free from bondage were furnished liberally with economic wealth.
 Authority of Moses (and of God) was now visible and powerful.

Response to the slaughter of the firstborn in Egypt will be a cry like there has never been before.
 It is a complete and intentional counterpart to the cry of Israel reported in 2:23-24 and 3:7.
 God will not be mocked.
 As Moses' speech ends he goes out in hot anger.
 He enacts his own exodus from Pharaoh by using the same verb for his exit.
 But God allows even now that Pharaoh will not listen.

Exodus 12-15

Section completes the liberation narrative.
 Specific regulations are established for cultic remembrance and reenactment of the exodus.
 Regulations are set in the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread.
 Historic event is cast as a liturgical act.
 Central concern is that the liberation is for now and the coming generations.

It is meant to redefine and reshape the present social reality.
Crossing of the sea is part of the larger picture of God governing the unruly waters of chaos.
In the last chapter we have a great liturgical conclusion to the liberation story.
Section narrates the complete triumph of God and the massive defeat of Pharaoh.

Egyptian Religion

In a very real sense the Israelites were a people that were deeply influenced by Egyptian culture.
Egyptian religion was one of priests, temples and rituals.
For the most part they did not have a reflective theological thought along with its practices.
The gods permeated the life of the Egyptians which made it very idolatrous.
It was also a religion of magic.

They had a passionate belief in the world to come as seen in their pyramids and burial chambers.
Immortality was only for the kings.
They did have some idea of a divinity that was mighty, good, pure, omniscient, and omnipotent.
Similar belief to the Hindus in that God is manifest through many images.
However, religion was still polytheistic and idolatrous.

Exodus 12:12 suggests that the real contest was between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt.
It was a contest between the Lord of the slaves and the gods of the mighty Pharaoh.
First great conflict in history between a belief in the one true God and a great nation.

Exodus 15:11 suggests the gods in this context were the Egyptian gods.
Exodus 3:14 suggests God is known by the revelation he makes to the Israelites.
God is known by the way he participates in their history.
Israelites will understand the meaning of *Yahweh* in their experiences with him.



Other Exodus Stories

Elephantine Stele and the Great Harris Papyrus describe Pharaoh Setnakhte's war in 1186 BCE. Another war is described by an Egyptian priest named Manetho from the 3rd century BCE.

Later it was not considered a historical account (but a number of verses in Exodus are similar).

- 1) Moses is described as an important and respected man in Egypt.
- 2) Fear of the Egyptians towards the Israelites in the end.
- 3) Israelites left with gold and silver.
- 4) Key part of the Exodus story is the slaughter of the rams which were sacred to the Egyptian gods Amun and Khnum.

However, any story about escaped slaves has no clear parallel in Egyptian sources.

War of Irsu and Setnakhte was traumatic and each group remembered it in different ways.

References

The Hebrew Bible (A Translation with Commentary) by Robert Alter

Exodus: The History Behind the Story by Professor Israel Knohl (thetorah.com)

The Theology of the Book of Exodus by Bernard Ramm (Southwestern Journal of Theology)

Assignment for May 29

God Saves a People

The Exodus (Deliverance After the Exodus)

Handout