

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 1:1-7

To understand more about how the Exodus began.

A Sequel

In 1980, science fiction fans across the world were treated to the sequel they had longed to see: *The Empire Strikes Back*. Set three years after the destruction of the Death Star, the Imperial fleet, led by Darth Vader, attempts to track down the young man responsible for thwarting the Empire: Luke Skywalker. While a few years have passed, *The Empire Strikes Back* picks up more or less where *A New Hope* left off. All of the original characters make their reprisals with the addition of a few new characters as well. The Skywalker saga continues from planet to planet while revealing some major details along the way (including one of the most iconic and often misquoted lines of all time) before culminating in a shocking ending that paves the way for the final installment of the original trilogy, *Return of the Jedi*.¹

Not all books of the Bible are intended to be read as sequels in the same way that movies like Star Wars are to be viewed. Although they all are a part of the same meta-narrative, some books of the Bible deal with different characters that never had contact with one another, and some books of the Bible follow decades after the previous installment. In this instance, however, Exodus does follow Genesis like a sequel. Many of the same characters are mentioned in the opening sequence, and the same story is being continued and developed. This makes sense because, if you recall from the introduction to this study, Moses was the author not only Exodus, but the *Torah*, or, the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Moses, throughout these five books, is weaving together an important history for the Israelites. These books not only chronicle the beginnings of creation, but the beginnings of their nation, their laws, and why they live and worship the way they do. For as important as Genesis is, Exodus is perhaps even more important, at least practically speaking. While Genesis unveils the foundations of the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2-3), Exodus unveils the origins of the Passover (Ex. 12:1-32), the giving of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17) as well as the construction of the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25) and the tabernacle (Ex. 26). The whole story, however, is linked together with Genesis by beginning with the families present who came into Egypt at the end of the Genesis account.

A Roll Call

The Exodus account begins by listing “the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household.” These names are very similar to the ones listed and blessed by Jacob at the end of Genesis with the notable subtraction of Ephraim and Manasseh. However, their exclusion is explained by the phrase “who to came to Egypt with Jacob” (Ex. 1:1). Ephraim and Manasseh were the progeny of Joseph

¹ According to one survey, “Luke, I am your father” is one of the most misquoted lines in cinema history. In actuality, Vader says, “No, I am your father.”

while he was already in Egypt, and therefore did not arrive in Egypt with Jacob. These tribes will eventually inherit lands within Canaan and form pivotal alliances with one another to defeat foreign armies. Understanding who they are is therefore important for the reader of Exodus. Below is a brief outline of each of them as described in Genesis 49.

REUBEN

Reuben is seen as the strongest and most preeminent of the sons because he is the firstborn (Gen. 49:3). However, he is also seen as “unstable water” (Gen. 49:4). This conveys the idea that he is unpredictable, rash, and makes bad decisions. One such decision is what ultimately costs him his birthright; the sexual interaction with this father Jacob’s concubine, Bilhah. Because Reuben committed such an act, it would have been improper for her to return to Jacob, thus ending her ability to produce sons for him. It might have also been seen as an attempt to wrestle away Jacob’s authority, as Absalom did to David when he took 10 of David’s concubines (2 Sam. 16:20-22). Either way, he is removed from the preeminent position, and the last historical moment his tribe is mentioned is during the Assyrian exile brought on by Tiglath-pileser (1 Chron. 5:6).

SIMEON AND LEVI

Simeon and Levi are coupled together in the Genesis 49 account, more than likely because of their violent revenge against Shechem for the rape of their sister Dinah (Gen. 34:25). That they were blood brothers to Dinah (all children of Leah) explains their outrage over the rest of the siblings. Jacob recognized their propensity towards violence in this act of revenge, in that they even killed the cattle in Shechem (Gen. 49:6). Jacob’s curse to them is to, “scatter” them (Gen. 49:7). This is likely a nod to the reality that they will not inherit any land. The Levites are not apportioned any land but instead are spread out in all of the territories as the priestly tribe (Num. 35:1-8). Simeon likewise does not receive land, but does stay in land that was the inheritance of Judah (Josh. 19:1-9; Jdg. 1:3). The Levites will become increasingly important once the law is established and the tabernacle is built, and the book following *Exodus* in the Torah will be almost fully devoted to how the law is carried out for specifically them as priests in *Leviticus*.

JUDAH

Judah is one of the most blessed sons of Jacob, namely because of the implications of its political power as the bearer of the king’s scepter (Gen. 49:10). This eventually comes to pass after the kingdom is split and the new southern kingdom becomes known as the kingdom of Judah. Though small, it will be the treasured kingdom. The northern kingdom is eventually carried off into Assyrian exile in 722 BC, but the southern kingdom remains under the protection of Yahweh because of their occasional Godly kings. They suffer the same eventual fate, however, in Babylonian exile in 597 BC. This captivity came to an end in 538 BC after the Persian king, Cyrus, issued an edict allowing the Jews to go back to their land and rebuild their temple. The reference of Judah being a, “lion’s cub,” in verse 9 is later connected to Jesus in Revelation 5:5, where Jesus is recognized as, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” Judah is the tribe that eventually ushers in the Messiah, as demonstrated by the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:2-3).

ISSACHAR

Issachar is called, “a strong donkey” (Gen. 49:14) but this perhaps doesn’t quite capture the full image being conveyed. Literally, they are a, “rawboned beast.” The idea presented here is that of a lean, bony frame hardened by difficult labor. It does convey the idea of being strong because of the labor it is subjected to. An extra-biblical letter from the so-called *Amarna* texts (1400 BC) speaks of men working at forced labor in a town called Shunem within the territory of Issachar, further proving Jacob’s words to be true. Issachar is second only to Judah in their offering for the dedication of the tabernacle (Num. 7:18-23). They are also one of the tribes that bless the people of Israel on Mount Gerizim (Deut. 27:12).

ZEBULUN

Although Issachar preceded Zebulun in order of birth by Leah as her fifth and sixth sons, (Gen. 30:17-20), he is mentioned first in both the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:13) and in the blessing of Moses (Deut. 33:18). Zebulun's territory is a landlocked territory that is positioned up against the sea, hence Jacob's words: "Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships" (Gen. 49:13). Zebulun was also able to take on more of its designated territory because it was mostly comprised of virgin country with no major cities (Josh. 19:10-16). Though a smaller tribe, Zebulun proved itself worthy in battle against both the Canaanites and the Midianites (Jdg. 4:6, 6:35). Zebulun's territory becomes a point of interest again in the New Testament. After the death of John the Baptizer, Jesus withdrew from Galilee and settled in Capernaum, "which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali" (Matt. 4:13).

BENJAMIN

Benjamin is appropriately blessed last in Genesis 49 since he was the youngest son of Jacob. Benjamin ends up having considerable land in the settlement in Canaan, and becomes well-known for its skilled warriors, and is even noted for its slingers with their traditional left-handed action (Jdg. 3:15; 20:16; 1 Ch. 8:40). Some notable members of the tribe of Benjamin are Ehud, who delivered Israel from the Moabites, as well as Queen Esther (Est. 2:5). Perhaps the biggest name in the Old Testament that descended from Benjamin is King Saul (1 Sam. 9:1). By far, the biggest name in the New Testament that descended from Benjamin is Saul, later known as the Apostle Paul (Rom. 11:1). Being that he descended from the same tribe as the first king of Israel and that his parents were likely religious zealots, it makes a lot of sense why he was named after him.

DAN

Dan's name means, "judge," and so it is not surprising that Jacob says, "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel" (Gen. 49:16). When the Israelites first entered Canaan, Dan settled on the western coast, but could not fully control the territory due to the Philistines in the area. Eventually Dan migrated north and took the city of Laish, though it became known as Dan after their settlement (Jdg. 20:1). The most prominent people to come from the tribe of Dan were Samson and Oholiab (Ex. 31:6).

NAPHTALI

Naphtali becomes a blessed tribe. The book of Judges records several narratives emphasizing military and leadership capabilities of Naphtali. During the settlement process, Naphtali did not drive out all Canaanite inhabitants, but instead pressed some into forced labor (Jdg. 1:33). When Deborah led the Israelites against King Jabin of Canaan, the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun were summoned for military duty with Barak, a Naphtalite from Kedesh, as military commander (Jdg. 4:6-10). Gideon called Naphtali's forces against the Midianites and Amalekites (Jdg. 6:35; 7:23). One of the distinctive features of Naphtali in the giving of the tribal inheritances is the absence of a northern border specifically delineated. This unrestricted northern frontier may be why Jacob pictured them as, "a doe let loose" (Gen. 49:21).

GAD

Gad's name means, "good fortune," and yet his blessing seems like almost a reversal of what his name indicates. Raiders will raid Gad, likely because of where the tribe ends up. They, along with Reuben and half-Manasseh, end up in the Gilead regions, sandwiched between the Moabites to the south, the Ammonites to the east, and the Arameans to the northeast. Because of their constant subjugation to war, they became very skilled warriors (1 Chr. 5:18). That he will, "raid at their heels" indicates that those who raided Gad are reeling and retreating, being vulnerably attacked from behind.

ASHER

Asher had great fortune and was included in Moses' blessing as well (Deut. 33:24). They provided warriors for David (1 Ch. 12:36), and later formed part of an administrative district of Solomon (1 Kgs. 4:16). After the fall of the northern kingdom, some of Asher responded to Hezekiah's call to revive the Passover in Jerusalem (2 Ch. 30:11). The tribe of Asher makes an appearance in the New Testament in one of its descendants, the prophetess Anna, who rejoiced to see the infant Jesus (Lk. 2:36).

Continued Obedience to the Mandate

After giving an account of those present with Jacob in Egypt, we are told that "Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation" (Ex. 1:6). The Exodus account, therefore, takes place some time well after the end of Genesis. However, the continued obedience to the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 is acknowledged: "But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them." This sets the stage for the actual events of the Exodus to take place beginning in verse 8.

What About Now?

One takeaway is the harmony between Genesis and Exodus. The book of Exodus reads very much as a continuation of the story that began in Genesis with Jacob and his descendants entering Egypt under the rule of Pharaoh and Joseph. Another takeaway is the importance of continual obedience, generation after generation. The creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 is obeyed in the beginning, and it is continued after the flood (Gen. 9:1-7), and it is again continued in the land of Egypt (Ex. 1:7). Obedience can seem mundane after years and years, but it's evermore important with every new day that God grants to us.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 1:1. Which names are given here? What is their significance? Why are they being listed at the beginning of Exodus?

2. Read Exodus 1:2. Write the names listed in verse 2, and one detail about each of them.

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 1:3. Write the names listed in verse 3, and one detail about each of them.

2. Read Exodus 1:4. Write the names listed in verse 4, and one detail about each of them.

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 1:5. How many descendants of Jacob were there? Who was already in Egypt at this point?

2. Read 1:6. What does this verse indicate about the timeline of Exodus as it relates to Genesis?

Day Four

1. Read Exodus 1:7. What does this verse indicate about Israel in Egypt?

2. Read Exodus 1:7, Genesis 1:28, and Genesis 9:1-7. What do these verses all have in common?

Week 1 Discussion: Generational Blessing

The first seven verses of Exodus illustrate that the families who went with Jacob into Egypt at the end of Genesis remained faithful (for the most part) to obeying God, and were blessed: “But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them” (Ex. 1:7). Talk as a group about how you’ve seen either generational obedience or disobedience lead to either generational blessing or curses.

1. Icebreaker: Were you the recipient of generational blessings or curses? Explain.
2. How important is teaching generational obedience to the next generation? What are you doing to actively do your part?
3. How has your past sin impacted your present family?
4. How has your past obedience impacted your present family?
5. What do you need to do differently starting today to create generational blessing for your future and the future of your loved ones?
6. How can the church be a part of breaking generational curses?

Takeaways:

1. Exodus begins by highlighting the families who went with Jacob into Egypt at the end of Genesis.
2. Because of their continual obedience, they increased, multiplied, and filled the land.