

**UNIT 1 - INTRODUCING THE OLD TESTAMENT****LESSON 4****THE EXODUS**

One of the central events of the Old Testament is Israel's exodus from Egypt, described in the book which bears the name of Exodus. In later days, Israel constantly looked back to this event as evidence of the might of their God (Yahweh), and His favour to His chosen people, Israel.

The end of Genesis saw the Hebrew family of Jacob settled in Egypt. Exodus takes up the narrative from that point, telling the reader that an indefinite period of residence in Egypt followed, during which "the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7). The Egyptians forced the Hebrews into slavery, employing them on the building of cities.

**MOSES**

Deliverance from slavery was accomplished through the leadership of Moses. His preparation for the task is described in chapter two. God worked to give Moses the right preparation for his job:

1. Exodus 2:9 - his early childhood was spent with his own family and Hebrews. His basic values were formed in infancy.
2. Exodus 2:10 - he has his formal education in the palace and was brought up as Pharaoh's son. He was taught all the knowledge and skills available.
3. Exodus 2:15ff - he learned to live in the desert, where he would later be leading the Israelites.

It took 80 years to prepare Moses for his task of leadership. Chapters 2 and 4 tell of Moses' call to leadership of the Hebrews, and further preparation for the task. To Moses, God reveals Himself by the divine name Yahweh (often rendered into English as Jehovah ... but Yahweh is a more accurate rendition). This is God's personal name, and in this special revelation, Yahweh tells Moses that He is the God whom the Patriarchs worshipped (3:6,15,16; 4:5; 6:3-8).

The approach to Pharaoh by Moses and his brother Aaron, seeking leave for Israel to hold a feast in the wilderness was rejected and resulted in further oppression of the Hebrews.

**THE TEN PLAGUES**

The plagues are a type of contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh. This was necessary for 3 reasons:

1. Pharaoh had refused to let the people go (5:2-6) and he was arrogant as well. Pharaoh regarded himself as divine. God had to show His supremacy in Pharaoh's eyes.
2. Pharaoh and the Egyptians regarded their gods as superior to any of the Hebrew's (7:5,11; 12:12), so God had to prove them wrong.



3. It had to be proved to the Israelites that God was a supreme God. They had lived for hundreds of years in Egypt as slaves and God was little more to them than a name and a myth (6:6,7; 8:22; 10:1,2). In each case the power of Yahweh triumphs, and later Israel could look back on these incidents as evidence of the power of the one who had brought them from Egypt "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deuteronomy 5:15).

The plagues have their basis in natural phenomena, but they are intensified and have a set time for starting and finishing. Their severity increases, until the climax is reached with the tenth plague, when Pharaoh finally acknowledges himself defeated by the power of Yahweh. The plagues are as follows:

- 1) Nile turned to blood: 7:14-25. The Nile itself was an object of worship to Egyptians and their life and economy was based around it.
- 2) Plague of frogs: 8:1-15. Frogs were a symbol of fertility and the priests were unable to get rid of them.
- 3) Plague of gnats: 8:16-19. These included gnats, sandflies and lice, which breed in the earth. The soil was worshipped by Egyptians.
- 4) Plague of flies: 8:20-32. This was probably a type of beetle which was used as an emblem of the sun god. So it was sacred.
- 5) Plague of the death of cattle: 9:1-7. This was not an uncommon disease, but it happened at the word of Yahweh, and it did not happen to the Israelites cattle. The cow was a sacred beast and there was a goddess of cows.
- 6) Plague of boils: 9:8-12. The priests were unable to control this plague and they were affected by it too.
- 7) Plague of hail: 9:13-35. In Egypt the sky was the home of the goddess "Nut", and at the word of God, hail came from her home. Nut's priests were unable to stop it.
- 8) Plague of locusts: 10:1-20. They wore locusts on amulets to protect themselves from the ravages of locusts.
- 9) Plague of darkness: 10:21-27. Their god, the sun, was changed. It was dark, even at noon.
- 10) Death of the firstborn: 12:29-32. With the last plague, we find the origins of the Passover Feast, commemorating the great event in Israel's history. Note that death comes to every house, but that in the houses of the Israelites, a substitute - the Passover lamb - dies (cf. Hebrews 11:26; 1 Corinthians 5:7). This ceremony is still important in Jewish families.



## **FROM EGYPT TO SINAI**

The Exodus began from Rameses (12:37). There was a recurring complaining from the people. First it was because of bitter water (15:22), then hunger (16:2) and then no water (17:2, 3). They murmured against Moses, rather than against God, because they still didn't realise that God was their leader.

Despite their murmuring, the emphasis in this section is on the work of God. Note that:

1. He guides - pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (13:12-22).
2. He protects - the crossing of the Red Sea. There has been much debate over whether this was in fact the Red Sea. Many scholars prefer to translate the Hebrew as the Sea of Reeds, regarding it as a smaller sea. However, the point is that God protected Israel again (chapter 14).
3. He provides - (15:22-27; 16:1-36; 17:1-7)
4. He governs - through His servants (18:1-27)

## **THE GIVING OF THE LAW**

Moses was told by God to ascend Mount Sinai, and there he received the ten commandments (20:1-17). These tell the people of:

1. Their duty to God (20:1-11).
2. Their duty to their fellow men (20:12-17).

In Exodus 20:18-21, Moses became the mediator of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. God gave it to Moses, who then explained it to the people. It appears that God was willing to deal directly with the people, but they were fearful.

Various laws follow in the remaining chapters of this book, but we will not attempt a detailed study of them. However, read them and see God's provision of guidance for His people.

In Exodus 25 - 40, there are two main themes:

1. The giving of plans for a tabernacle and the following through of the plans.
2. How the covenant was broken (by the building and worship of a golden calf) and then renewed. The Ark of the Covenant would be the symbol of God's presence among them, while the tabernacle was their place of worship. The readiness of Israel to break their covenant should be observed (chapter 32).



## **QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1:**

How was Moses prepared for his role as leader of the Exodus?

### **Question 2:**

What was the significance of the Plagues to the Egyptians and to the Israelites?

### **Question 3:**

Why was the tenth Plague finally successful in enabling the Israelites to escape (12:29-32)? What is its importance to Jews, even today?

### **Question 4:**

What do we learn about God in the journey from Egypt to Sinai (chapters 12-18)?

### **Question 5:**

How does Jesus summarise the 10 commandments in Mark 12:28-34?

### **QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

Read Exodus 11-12:36.

What aspects of the first Passover have a parallel with Christians being saved by Jesus?