



PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

EXODUS 1 - 20

Getting to Know God





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BY BRYSON SMITH



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Pathway Bible Guides: Exodus 1-20
© Matthias Media 2006

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ISBN 1 921068 23 X

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Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design Pty Ltd.

CONTENTS

Before you begin	5
1: The God who keeps his promises (Exodus 1-2)	7
2: The God who is personal (Exodus 3-4:17)	11
3: The God who is determined (Exodus 4:18-7:7)	15
4: The God who is boss (Exodus 7:8-10:29)	19
5: The God who saves (Exodus 11-12)	23
6: The God who triumphs (Exodus 13-15)	27
7: The God who provides (Exodus 16-18)	31
8: The God who is holy (Exodus 19-20)	35
For the leader	39

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Have you ever noticed the uncomfortable challenge in these famous words of Paul?

... and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:15-17)

I'm not talking about the challenge to read our Bibles, and to sit under the teaching, rebuking, correcting work of the Scriptures. I'm not even talking about the challenge to get out there and do good works, having been thoroughly equipped for them by God's word. The challenge we often miss in these verses is that the 'Scripture' Paul speaks of is primarily the *Old Testament*.

The books of the Old Testament were the "sacred writings" that Timothy had known since childhood (v. 15). These were the God-breathed words that were so profitable, and that were able to equip the man of God for every good work.

The uncomfortable challenge for us is: Would we ever describe the Old Testament like this? Do we see it as a rich source of teaching, cor-

rection and practical training in righteousness? Do we mine it regularly to learn about God and his ways? Or do we regard the Old Testament as a foreign country, and its God as somehow more distant and scary than the loving Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?

In this Pathway Bible Guide, we're going to study the first 20 chapters of Exodus and, as we do so, we'll find that Paul's words about the ancient Hebrew Scriptures are stunningly true. The God we meet in these momentous chapters is the true and living God who makes and keeps promises, who judges and saves and triumphs, who provides for his people and teaches them his holy ways. In Exodus 1-20, we'll get to know this God afresh, and experience for ourselves the truth of 2 Timothy 3—that this is the God who has saved us through Jesus Christ, who teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains us through the powerful words which he breathes out.

Bryson Smith
January 2006

1. THE GOD WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Exodus 1-2



Getting started

Starting to read Exodus can be a bit like starting to watch a movie when it's already halfway through. Certain things have already happened and, if we aren't aware of them, we may not be able to make full sense of what's going on in Exodus. In particular, we need to be aware of some promises that God made to a person named Abram.

Read Genesis 12:1-9.

What sorts of things did God promise Abram? (Later on in Genesis God gives Abram the name Abraham.)

How do you think Abram would have felt about these promises?



Light from the Word

Read Exodus 1:1-7.

1. What do these verses tell us about Abraham's descendants? (The 'Israel' mentioned in Exodus 1:1 is the grandson of Abraham.)

2. Why shouldn't Exodus 1:7 surprise us, in light of what we discovered in our 'Getting started' question?

Read Exodus 1:8-22.

3. Why does Pharaoh become concerned about the Israelites (Exod 1:10)?

4. How does Pharaoh try to stop the Israelites from increasing (Exod 1:11, 15-16, 22)?

5. How successful is Pharaoh in his plans (Exod 1:12, 17, 20-21)?

6. Why shouldn't the previous answer surprise us, in light of what we discovered in our 'Getting started' question?

7. In what ways are the midwives a good example for us?

Read Exodus 2:1-25.

8. In what way does the rescue of Moses show that Pharaoh can't possibly stop God from keeping his promises to Abraham?

9. Given what happens to Moses when he was 'crying' (2:6), what do you think might be going to happen to Israel (Exod 2:23-25)?



To finish

Pick one characteristic of God that you've learnt from these verses. In what ways do you see this characteristic of God also revealed in Jesus? (The New Testament tells us that Jesus is the fullest revelation of God.) In what ways should this characteristic of God shape the way we live?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his never-failing faithfulness. Thank him also for the times when you have especially noticed his reliability and faithfulness in your life.
- Pray that you would trust this faithful God in everything. Pray also that your life would reflect his character.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. THE GOD WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Exodus 1-2

► Remember: 60/40/20



Getting started

Genesis begins with God's creation of a good world (Gen 1). Tragically sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's proud and foolish rejection of God's good rule. Against this terrible background, God graciously promises Abraham that he will use his family to restore the world and remove the curse of sin. As such, Genesis 12 forms the framework around which the entire Old Testament takes place. The driving force behind all the events in Exodus (indeed every event in the remainder of the Old Testament) is God's commitment to restore the world by keeping his covenant with Abraham.

This question should pick up the key elements of God's covenant to Abraham as being:

- 1) that Abraham would give rise to a numerous people;
- 2) that these people would be blessed and in turn be a blessing to the entire world;
- 3) that Abraham's descendants would be given their own special place to live.

The remainder of Genesis mainly describes the way in which God begins to deliver on the first of these aspects. Although they are a barren elderly couple Abraham and Sarah give birth to Isaac who in turn fathers Jacob (Israel) who in turn fathers 12 sons.

In discussing how Abram would have felt about these promises, there may be scope to discuss the radical generosity of God's covenant—that through these promises God was committing himself to use Abram's family to restore the

world back to its pre-Fall condition; that just as Adam and Eve were God's special people in God's special place living under God's blessing, now Abram's descendants will be God's special people in God's special place living under God's blessing.

Studying the passage

Exodus opens with a strong emphasis on how numerous Abraham's descendants have become. The particular mention of Joseph reminds us that Abraham's descendants arrived in Egypt because of hostility and betrayal within the family (Gen 37-50). Despite these unsavoury events, God has faithfully preserved and prospered them, and now they are the 'great nation' that God had promised.

At the very beginning of Exodus, therefore, God is portrayed as a promise-keeper. Indeed verse 7 has clear echoes of words which God had said to Adam and Eve (Gen 1:28). This reinforces the lesson that God's intention is to use his covenant with Abraham to reverse the effects of the Fall.

As Exodus 1 unfolds, however, we find that the very thing which is a sign of God's faithfulness to his promises (i.e. Israel's growing population) is in fact the exact same thing over which Pharaoh becomes concerned (question 3). Pharaoh is worried about his grip on power. This is a continuation of the theme first seen at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11). Worldly powers, kingdoms and authorities are frequently opposed to the plans of God.

Pharaoh's strategy is twofold. Firstly, he attempts to suppress Israel through labour camps. Egypt was historically characterized by these—the pyramids and Nile canals bearing testimony to the effectiveness of the method. On an historical note, Pithom and Raamses (1:11) were both built during the reign of Rameses II. This would date these events during the period 1290-1224 BC.

Secondly, Pharaoh uses genocide to further restrict the growth of the Hebrew population. At first this terrible command is only given to the Hebrew midwives (1:15). However, it is soon given to the general population (1:22). This escalation reflects Pharaoh's growing desperation to suppress the Hebrews.

All the same, Pharaoh's plans fail, and the Hebrews continue to become more numerous (question 5). The human reason for this is described in the case of the midwives. They feared God and did not do what Pharaoh asked of them (1:17). They are blessed for this courageous act, in fulfilment of God's promise that he would bless those who bless Abraham's descendants (Gen 12:3). This

also raises a question in the narrative, since God also promised to curse those who cursed his people (Gen 12:3). What then is God going to do about Pharaoh?

None of this should surprise us, given what we have already seen in the chapter about God's faithfulness to his promises. What he says he will do, he does. And this sets up the tension that will dominate the first half of the book. Will Pharaoh be able to stop God keeping his word? What happens when the most powerful empire on the face of the earth sets itself against the God of all the earth?

In question 7, we pause to consider the actions of the midwives. It's worth noting that we are not specifically told whether the midwives were lying in their excuse for not taking part in Pharaoh's genocide program. But even they did lie, their blessing from God is not because of their deceit, but because of their fear of God and their commitment to serve him rather than Pharaoh. It is in this respect that the midwives are a good example.

The introduction of Moses in chapter 2 brings the narrative to its next important stage. Moses is to become the human instrument through which God will save his people from the bondage of their slavery.

In the early life of Moses, strong parallels are set up between Moses and Israel. As with Israel, Moses lives as an alien in a foreign land (2:22). As with Israel, Moses meets with God at Mt Horeb (3:1). And as with Israel, Moses is rescued from Pharaoh (2:1-10).

The rescue of Moses makes a deliberate mockery of Pharaoh's attempts to stop God's plans. There is wonderful irony in the fact that Pharaoh's own family pays Moses' own mother to raise the very person who will eventually be used by God to achieve the very thing which Pharaoh is seeking to stop! We are meant to see the complete futility and foolishness of trying to stop God's hand. It is laughable to think that anyone can prevent God being faithful to his covenant. (By way of parallel, we see the same pattern in God's great saving work through Jesus. God is so supremely in control that he uses the schemes and evil plans of his enemies to achieve his own plans [see Acts 2:23]. No wonder the New Testament speaks of the cross as making a mockery and public spectacle of the forces of evil [Col 2:15].)

The final question in the study (question 9) aims to draw out these expectations that God will indeed triumph over Pharaoh in rescuing Israel. The chapter opens with the baby Moses crying and closes with Israel crying out. In the case of Moses, his crying is heard, and he is marvellously saved and nurtured. This raises the expectation of what is in store for Israel.

This expectation is reinforced through the reference that God “remembered” his covenant with Abraham (2:24). This is a characteristic phrase already used several times throughout Genesis (Gen 8:1, 19:29). God ‘remembering’ is always to do with God going to the next phase of his plan to save someone. The scene is now set to see exactly how God will save his people from Pharaoh.



To finish

All seven studies have this same finishing question. Hopefully this will not become tediously repetitive for the study group, but rather a helpful reinforcement of the fact that Jesus is the exact representation of the Father. The great value of the Old Testament is that it builds anticipation for Jesus as well as helping us fully understand him.

This study has emphasized that God is unrelentingly faithful to his word. Despite all of Pharaoh’s efforts, God is keeping his commitment to Abraham’s descendants—that he will multiply and increase them. Furthermore, chapter 2 sets up the very strong expectation that God intends to save Israel from their current predicament, hence fulfilling his commitment to bless them and give them their own special place to live.

The faithfulness of God to his covenant promises is most clearly seen in the coming of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul describes this in his letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 3:16, Paul points out that the promises God made to Abram are all about Jesus, and that when God said in Genesis 12:7, “to your offspring I will give this land”, God wasn’t thinking in the plural but in the singular. God quite specifically had Jesus in mind, and Jesus therefore is the fulfilment of the promises. God promised a special people who would be blessed by God and have their own special land. It is Jesus who is God’s special person, who is specially blessed by God and through whom the world is blessed, and who is given a special inheritance, the kingdom of God itself. The promises in Genesis 12 are ultimately about the coming of Jesus.

But it doesn’t end there because, although all the promises are fulfilled in Jesus, we also can share in them when we follow Jesus in repentance and faith (Gal 3:26-29). When we belong to Jesus, we also become heirs of the promises. We also become part of God’s special people. We also become blessed by God. We also gain a special land, the kingdom of God itself! Jesus is the fulfilment, but when we follow Christ we share in the promises as well.

The life implications of this are enormous. Jesus is everything. Without him, we have nothing. Our lives need to be shaped by and centred on Christ.

You might also like to explore the idea that since God is faithful to his word, then we as his people should also be characterized by faithfulness (2 Cor 1:15-22).



Give thanks and pray

Each study ends with two brief suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer. These are a guide only, to get you started. Don't feel limited by them. However, in adding to these suggestions or varying them, try to let your thanksgiving and prayers be shaped by what you have learnt from God's word.