

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Exodus

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WEEK 1 READING



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The Stage is Set

¹ *These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household:* ² *Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah,* ³ *Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin,* ⁴ *Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.* ⁵ *All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt.* ⁶ *Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation.* ⁷ *But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.* – Exodus 1:1-7 ESV

Exodus is the second of five books that Moses wrote for the people of Israel as they made their way from Egypt to the land of Canaan. This five-book canon was known as the Pentateuch, which means “the five scrolls.” It came into usage sometime around 200 AD, but the combined books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy were most commonly referred to by the Jews as the Torah, which means “law.”

The original Hebrew name for this second book of the Pentateuch was *we’elleh shemot*, which is based on the first five words of the first verse: “*These are the names of...*”

“The Hebrew title of the Book of Exodus, therefore, was to remind us that Exodus is the sequel to Genesis and that one of its purposes is to continue the history of God’s people as well as elaborate further on the great themes so nobly introduced in Genesis.” – Ronald Youngblood, *Exodus*

In Hebrew, the first verse opens with the word, “now” or “and.” This is meant to link the first verse of Exodus with the last verse of Genesis.

So Joseph died at the age of 110. After they embalmed him, his body was placed in a coffin in Egypt. – Genesis 50:26 ESV

[Now] These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household... – Exodus 1:1 ESV

The closing chapters of Genesis chronicle the story of how Jacob (Israel) arrived in the land of Egypt with his sons, their wives, and all his grandchildren. Jacob had discovered that his long-lost son, Joseph, whom he thought was dead, was actually alive and well and living in Egypt. Through a divinely ordained chain of events, Joseph had risen to the second-highest position in the Egyptian government. He was second only to Pharaoh in terms of his power and authority.

A famine in the land of Canaan forced Jacob to send his sons to Egypt in a desperate search for food. When they arrived, they were shocked to be reunited with Joseph, their younger brother whom they had sold into slavery decades earlier. But rather than seek revenge on his brothers, Joseph welcomed them and offered them protection and provision in the land of Egypt. And

God spoke to Jacob, giving him permission to leave the land of promise and move his entire family to Egypt.

“I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.” – Genesis 46:3-4 ESV

And this relocation was in keeping with a prophecy that God had shared with Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, years earlier.

Then the LORD said to Abram, “You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. (As for you, you will die in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.) After four generations your descendants will return here to this land...” – Genesis 15:13-16 NLT

Jacob obeyed the word of God and took his family to Egypt.

They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. – Genesis 46:6-7 ESV

Because of his high position and close relationship with Pharaoh, Joseph was able to provide his family with land and plenty of food. He even arranged for his brothers to serve as shepherds for the flocks and herds that belonged to Pharaoh.

Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents. – Genesis 47:11-12 ESV

Exodus 1 picks up the story where Genesis left off. Moses reveals that, when Jacob and his family first arrived in Egypt, they were only about 70 in number.

All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all. And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy. – Genesis 46:26-27 ESV

But, in time, their numbers would increase greatly, in keeping with the promise that God had made to Abraham.

“I will make of you a great nation...” – Genesis 12:2 ESV

God's promise to provide Abraham with a multitude of descendants whose number would rival that of stars in heaven, would come about while they were living as relative slaves in Egypt for 400 years. That is the part of the story that the opening chapters of Exodus will reveal. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses will unpack the events that transpired between Jacob's arrival in the land of Egypt and the moment God ordered their "exodus" or departure. The modern title of the book is "Exodus," which is a transliteration of the Greek word *exodos* from the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible. Moses would be the one to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and to the land of Canaan, which had been promised to them as their inheritance.

But Moses wants his readers to understand what took place long before the ten plagues, the Passover, and the crossing of the Red Sea. He reiterates the fact that Jacob and his family were only 70 in number when they arrived. But time passed and their numbers grew.

Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. – Exodus 1:6-7 ESV

While His name is not mentioned, God is all throughout this passage. He was with them and He was blessing them. His sovereign will was being done on their behalf. But, as the story will reveal, even the blessings of God can be accompanied by difficulty. In fact, it will become readily apparent that their fruitfulness will produce conflict between them and the Egyptians.

The very next verse states, "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8 ESV). Things are about to take a change for the worse. Over the centuries, since their arrival in the land, the Israelites have been prolific, and "the land was filled with them."

They have enjoyed the blessings of God in the form of fruitfulness. Their numbers have increased greatly. They have their own land in Goshen and plenty of flocks and herds to meet all their needs. But it has been years since Jacob and Joseph have died. The peoples' connection to the patriarchs has grown weak. And, as the story of Exodus unfolds, it will become clear that the chosen people of God have been fruitful but have become unfaithful. After four centuries in the land of Egypt, they have become "Egyptianized" and have embraced the many false gods of their host nation. They have forgotten Yahweh, but He has not forgotten them.

They are about to discover that their idyllic situation in Egypt is going to come to an abrupt and surprising end. Their numbers have increased, but now it's their troubles that will expand, and virtually overnight.

They were content living in Egypt, but things were about to change. The situation was about to heat up because God had a plan for them. He had a promise He was going to fulfill. Chapter 1 sets up the great redemptive plan of God for the people of Israel. It is Act One in the divine drama that God has composed for His chosen people. In short order, things will take a dark turn. It will seem as if everything is going wrong for the people of Israel. But God will be there,

behind the scenes, orchestrating His divine will and slowly reintroducing Himself to the people who have long forgotten Him.