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September 21st, 2008

An Introduction to Exodus

- I. Why are we studying Exodus?
- A. This year, we will be studying the book of Exodus. My goal is to walk through the text so that we finish sometime before the end of this school year. We will find as we study the book that Exodus is part of a larger collection called the Pentateuch. The rest of the Bible refers to this collection as simply, The Law. So, why are we only going to study Exodus?
- B. There are several reasons:
1. First, the Law is too long. I don't think I could cover the whole thing with any degree of clarity in one school year. I am trying to reduce the amount of material we cover each week to allow more discussion.
 2. Second, Exodus, like Genesis, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, is a book that can stand on its own with its own unique contribution to the canon. Exodus is intimately connected with the other books, overlapping in themes and history, but it can be studied on its own.
 3. Third, Exodus contains some of the most theologically important elements of the Old Testament. The rest of the Old Testament must be read under the umbrella of the Exodus and the Law given at Mount Sinai, both recorded in Exodus. The whole New Testament understands Jesus to be the fulfillment of much of what Exodus is concerned with. For this reason, Exodus especially can give us great insight into the significance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 4. Fourth, Exodus itself contains a book called, The Book of the Covenant, which includes the Ten Commandments and other Laws that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. These laws are crucial to understanding the faith of Israel. I also believe these Laws are binding to us today, although they are binding in a New Covenant way (more on this later). What I mean is that the Law has a lot to teach us about how we are to live today and what justice, mercy, and love look like in action.
 5. Fifth and finally, Exodus is part of the Bible and a part that many people do not study due to its length and difficulty. So, in order to help us all remember that every part of the bible is important and profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness, and in order to help us understand the history of redemption and its fulfillment in Christ, I want us to study this often neglected book.
- II. How should we study Exodus?
- A. Philip Ryken gives three complementary approaches needed for studying Exodus properly. He says that our approach must be biblical, historical, and theological.¹ I want to examine all three of these areas before we get in to the text.
- B. Biblical:
1. Ryken argues that to be biblical, we must actually examine the text of Exodus as it stands as a literary whole. This has been heavily debated for 250 years by scholars

¹ Ryken, Philip. Exodus: Saved for God's Glory. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005, pg. 18-24.

who divide Exodus into numerous sources and forms, completely eradicating the unity of the book.

- a. Documentary Hypothesis: Over the past 250 years, scholars have put forth several differing hypotheses concerning the authorship and compilation of the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy). Historically, the Church understood Moses to have written the Pentateuch from start to finish, but that was called into question in 1753 by the French medical professor Jean Astruc. He argued that Moses compiled Genesis from older documents. This led to the debate that continues today over how the Pentateuch was compiled/authored.²
- b. Source Criticism: This method of studying the Pentateuch assumes that it is made up of numerous literary sources written at different time periods. Source critic scholars propose that four distinctive sources, documents, were combined over hundreds of years to produce the Pentateuch as we know it. Wellhausen is the most famous of these scholars because he proposed the JEDP theory that was almost universally accepted by the academic community in the late 1800s.
- c. Form Criticism: This method of studying the Pentateuch focuses on the oral transmission of history that lies behind the sources assumed in source criticism. Hermann Gunkel in the early 1900s organized the material of the Pentateuch into different literary categories which he believed reflected the situation in life for which the source was written in the first place. In other words, he argued that different literary forms were used to communicate in different life situations. This method assumes that Genesis especially was made up of numerous individual stories that were composed early on for different situations but later combined into four source documents that later made up the Pentateuch as we know it today.
- d. Tradition-historical Criticism: This method of studying the Pentateuch attempts to describe how the oral traditions were combined to make up the four sources which source critics believe make up the Pentateuch. Gerhard von Rad and Martin North are the two most well know scholars who have taken this approach.
- e. Today many scholars combine these three methods in order to try and explain the Pentateuch as we have it today. To review, here is how they relate to one another.
 - i. First, people tell stories of their history which are passed down orally from generation to generation. These stories take on a certain form depending on the situation in which they stories are typically told. This is what Form Critics focus on.
 - ii. Second, through some process, these stories are written down on four different documents. This is what Traditio-Historical critics focus on.
 - iii. Third, through another process, these four documents where combined and brought together to create the Pentateuch as we know it today. This is what Source Critics focus on.
- f. Literary Criticism: Recently, another method has arisen that focuses on the final form of the Pentateuch. Ironically, this is really a return to the historical approach to studying the Bible, that is, to study it as we have it today. This approach is synchronic (at the same time) rather than diachronic (through time). It looks at

² The points summarizing the different schools of biblical criticism are taken from T.D. Alexander's book From Paradise to Promise Land, 2nd Ed., published by Baker Academic in 2002 from chapters 1-2.

the text as it stands now rather than interpreting it as a compilation of many unrelated documents over time. This approach understands that the Pentateuch as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

- g. Important points:
 - i. We should be able to glean from all four of these approaches. The first three give us some indication of how the Pentateuch was formed while the last approach (literary criticism) helps us to focus on the final form.
 - ii. It is probably true that the Pentateuch was not written at one single time. But, Moses does seem to be credited with authorship both in the Pentateuch itself and by other parts of Scripture. This should not surprise us that Moses could write since he was raised in Pharaoh's house.
 - iii. This does not imply that Moses did not use sources to write Genesis and even parts of Exodus-Deuteronomy. Certainly, Moses would have needed information about the Patriarchs and creation, and he probably gathered it from Israelites who had kept the history orally or at some point, by writing them down.
 - iv. Some parts of Exodus may have been written down by someone else, since there are parts where Moses is spoken of in the third person, but this does not imply that Moses was not the final editor/redactor/author of the book.
- h. **Conclusions concerning the composition of the Pentateuch:**
 - i. Moses essentially wrote and arranged the Pentateuch.
 - ii. There are parts that might have been written by someone else while Moses was alive.
 - iii. There was a limited amount of scribal editing and updating that took place over time until the canon of the Old Testament was closed. (see Gen. 14:14 and Judges 18:27-29)
 - iv. Moses did use sources which he most likely adapted and edited for theological and literary purposes for the writing of Genesis since he was not an eyewitness to those historical events.
 - v. That Moses used sources does not mean we must doubt the historicity of the events of Genesis since it has been shown that it is typical for tribal history to be passed down through genealogies which are the structural pillars of Genesis.
 - vi. Moses wrote from a priestly perspective since he was a Levite and the one who ordained the high priests of Israel. This is significant since one of the main source documents hypothesized by critical scholars is P (priest).
 - vii. The difference in perspective and even vocabulary found in Genesis that has led critical scholars to hypothesize a P (priest) source and J (Yahwist) Source can best be explained by the fact that Moses used sources that he himself edited.
 - viii. Summary: Moses received patriarchal traditions, both oral and written genealogies and historical narratives, which he then organized and edited and combined with his own writing as the leader of the nation of Israel as a Levite Priest.³

³ These conclusions are drawn from class notes from Dr. Richard Averbeck for OT 716 Pentateuch and Historical Books at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School from the Fall of 2006.

2. To approach Exodus biblically we must also read Exodus as part of a larger story.
 - a. As the second book of the Pentateuch, we must realize that there is a unity to the Pentateuch in which Exodus plays a vital part. In Genesis, we see God's promises to Abraham that are to restore a people to what was lost in Eden. Exodus shows how God created a people for Himself. Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy records the Laws and worship of Israel, their need for a mediator, and the charge to obey the Law of God.
 - b. Exodus also plays a vital role in the Old Testament, recording the greatest event in Israel's history. It also contains the most basic commandments Israel is to live by as well as the book of the Covenant. All of these things serve as the backdrop against which the rest of Israel's history unfolds.
 - c. But beyond the Old Testament, we must read Exodus as part of a larger story that looks forward to Christ as the fulfillment of the promise of salvation. Exodus provides the pattern of redemption which Christ perfectly fulfills. Israel was in slavery to a foreign power, but God delivered them out of slavery with mighty signs of power along side of the slaying of a Passover Lamb which delivers Israel from judgment. Christ delivered sinners who were in slavery to the power and penalty of sin by becoming a Passover Lamb for us, dying in our place on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, so that we might be reconciled to God and made into a covenant people who join God's kingdom.

B. Historical:

1. One of the major events recorded in the book of Exodus is the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. This event is depicted as a historical event. The rest of the Bible interprets it as a historical event. But, of course, there have been many objections raised about whether the Exodus ever really happened. Certainly the miraculous signs performed by God against Egypt cause many to doubt that this story is anything more than a myth.
2. Objections to the historicity of the Exodus:
 - a. Outside the bible, there is no explicit mention of an exodus of slaves from Egypt.
 - b. Outside the bible, there is no absolutely certain mention of slaves in Egypt at the proposed dates.
 - c. There is no physical archeological data in the Nile region where the Israelites were living before the Exodus.
 - d. There is no physical archeological data in the wilderness where Israel sojourned for 40 years.
3. Response to the objections:
 - a. We should not expect Egypt, known as the most powerful nation in the known world at the time, to record an event that devastated them and shamed them. Egyptian records are well known for being dominated by propaganda.
 - b. There is a Papyrus document that records instructions to distribute grain rations to some slaves who were building a great pylon. The slaves are called 'Apiru (*hapiru*) which some scholars recognize to be very similar to the word 'Ibri, meaning Hebrew. At the very least this confirms that a Semitic people were enslaved by Pharaohs within the expected time frame of the Exodus. Also, we know that there were Israelites living in Canaan at the end of the 13th century because of inscriptions on artifacts we have found referring to them.

- c. The Nile is a very wet region where very little archeological data would be able to be preserved, so we should not expect there to be evidence there.
 - d. Since Israel traveled in tents and moved all their possessions, we should not expect to find archeological evidence in the wilderness even though it is a dry climate.
4. Dating the Exodus: There are 4 conservative views, only two of which have broad support.
- 1. 1446 B.C. –
 - a. In 853 B.C., the Assyrians attacked Qarqar, a fortress north of Palestine, where a coalition of 12 kings, including king Ahab of Israel, stopped the Assyrians from advancing. Because of Assyrian records, we can date this battle within one year.
 - b. We can line up biblical chronology by an inscription on what is called The Black Obelisk where the Assyrian monarch Shalmaneser III records being paid tribute by the Israelite king Jehu in 841 B.C. Since the reign of Ahab and the reign of Jehu is separated by 12-13 years in the bible, it follows that Ahab's final year was the year of the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. and Jehu's first year was 841 B.C.
 - c. Now that the chronology of Israel has a fixed reference point, we can date the reign of Solomon to 971-931 B.C.
 - d. Solomon began building the temple in his fourth year, about 966 B.C.
 - e. The Exodus is said to have taken place 480 years before Solomon began to build the temple (see I Kings 6:1)
 - f. Israel was in Egypt from 1876-1446 B.C. since Exodus 12:40-41 says that Israel was in Egypt 430 years, possibly even to the day. See also Genesis 15:13 that gives an approximate 400 year stay in Egypt.
 - g. Jacob was born 2006 B.C. since he was 130 when he brought his family to Egypt (Gen. 47:9).
 - f. Isaac was born 266 since he was 60 years old when Jacob was born (Gen. 25:26).
 - h. Abraham was born ca. 2166 since he was 100 years old when Isaac was born (Gen. 21:5).
 - i. This means that when the Exodus occurred, Thutmose III was Pharaoh of Egypt (1490-1436 B.C.). Exodus 14 does not say that Pharaoh himself entered into the sea to pursue Israel. His army did pursue. Psalm 136:15 records that God swept Pharaoh and his army into the sea. This could be a figure of speech, hendiadys, where two expressions stand for one thing or it could be that Pharaoh's army represents him and so it could be said that the sea swept him away even though he himself was not in the sea.
 - 2. 1230 B.C. –
 - a. This view suggests that the number 480 stands for 12 generations of 40 years. In other words, it was a symbolic way of saying 12 generations.
 - b. It is suggested that Seti I (1303-1290 B.C.) was the Pharaoh who enslaved the Hebrews.

- c. During Seti I's reign, the capitol was moved to the lower Nile to the delta. This move required building projects in Goshen where the Israelites lived. Seti I was succeeded by Rameses II (1290-1224 B.C.) who completed the move to the delta region and used more slaves to complete building projects, including the building of the city Rameses, probably named after the Pharaoh himself.
 - d. Exodus 1:11 says that the Israelites built Pithom and Rameses which have been identified as modern day Tell el-Maskhouta and Tanis. These cities show no evidence of Israelites slave laborers in the 15th century B.C. Plus, Rameses seems to be named after a 13th century Pharaoh.
 - e. They argue that archeological evidence shows that Israel entered Canaan to conquer it early in the 12th century, say around 1190 B.C. rather than around 1406 B.C.
 - f. Response:
 - i. It is an odd argument to say that 480 stands for 12 generations of 40 years when in fact the generations add up to more like 300 years when you take the actual length of a generation at that time which was about 25 years.
 - ii. It is likely that archeologists have falsely identified Pithom and Rameses with Tell el-Maskhouta and Tanis. Some archeologists are now suggesting that modern day Qantir was formerly Pi-Ra'messe which does show evidence of occupation in the 15th century. Pithom was probably modern day Heliopolis or Tell er-Retebah.
 - iii. It is likely that our text records the city as Rameses because someone updated the name of the city when it was later changed, like when a city is called Dan in Genesis 14:14.
5. The Biblical account fits the historical context we know:
- a. While there is still debate about the internal witness of Scripture on chronology, I believe there has been conclusive arguments set forth supporting an 'early' Exodus in 1446 B.C.
 - b. This is certainly possible considering what we know of Egyptian history and what we have found archeologically.
 - c. Thutmose III also engaged in building projects in Goshen which makes Israelites slavery during his reign probable.
 - d. Judges 11:26 states that at the time of Jephthah the judge, 300 years had passed since the conquest of Canaan. This supports an early date.
 - e. Paul posits 450 years between the flight from Egypt and the capture of Jerusalem, which supports an early date.
 - f. We know that there were Semitic people in Egypt as early as 1730 B.C. since, for the first time in Egyptian history, a foreign power ruled over Egypt in Egypt. The Hyksos dynasty ruled from 1730-1580 B.C. The Hyksos were a Semitic people, meaning, they had a common ancestor, Shem, and a common linguistic background with the Hebrews. They probably also came from Canaan like the Hebrews. It is possible that these Semitic rulers were the ones who enslaved the Hebrews in the first place (Exodus 1:8). However, it is probably more likely that after these Semites ruled, when the Egyptians regained control, the new Pharaoh

enslaved the Hebrews because of their common origin with the former foreign rulers. Either way, there were Semites in Egypt as early as 1730 B.C. apart from Jacob and his family.

- g. Finally, there is a document called “The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage” that describes a series of disasters in Egypt that could be identified with the signs God performed in Egypt to deliver Israel.
 - h. The biblical account cannot be proven apart from the biblical evidence, however, the biblical account fits the archeological evidence we have as well as the history of Egypt and Canaan whether we take the early or late date.
- C. Theological: The book of Exodus is primarily about God. To study Exodus is to study who God is.
- 1. Sometimes it is hard to read the Old Testament because its events seem so extraordinary and its culture is so different. It is hard for us to understand and hard to see its relevance. The result is that most people attempt to mimic or copy key figures as moral examples in order to apply the passage. This reduces the Old Testament to a bunch of moral stories that are meant for me. The story becomes about us.
 - 2. If we are going to study Exodus, we must listen to its agenda and try to find out the purpose of the book for its readers and for Israel.
 - 3. Also, since Exodus is part of the bible, we must understand how it relates to Christ. The whole Old Testament finds its ultimate meaning and final interpretation in Jesus Christ, and so we must understand how Exodus fits into the history of redemption if we are to understand it rightly.
 - 4. However, that we first focus on what Exodus tells us about God in Christ does not imply that the book is not practical. Exodus tells us many things that can, should, and must be applied to us today.

III. The Structure of Exodus:

- A. There is some disagreement concerning the structure of Exodus. Some see 3 major sections based on the geographic location of Israel, while some see 3 sections based on content differences. Others see two sections that deal with knowing God personally and knowing God as a covenant community.
- B. I think it is most likely that the book is structured with three major divisions:
 - 1. Exodus 1.1-18.27 – God is faithful to His promises in delivering Israel from Egypt
 - 2. Exodus 19.1-24.18 – God establishes His Covenant with Israel
 - 3. Exodus 25.1-40.38 – God provides parameters for worship and promises His presence

V. The Genre of Exodus:

- A. Exodus is made up of several genres:
 - 1. Narrative
 - 2. Poetic songs
 - 3. Laws

- B. Exodus is best understood as prophetic history. This means that it records historical events with a theological concern.
 - 1. History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders accounts of itself of its past. All history is told from a perspective. No one is completely objective when witnessing to an objective event. Israel's history is a true reflection of what happened, but it is told and organized in such a way so as to provide a theological message.
 - 2. Historicity is the actual events or circumstances witnessed to by the history texts.
 - 3. Historiography is the study of the techniques of historical research and writing, or, the methods of major historians.

VI. The Purpose of Exodus

- A. To remind Israel of God's saving power which shapes their identity as the covenant people of God.
- B. To teach them how to live faithfully in the covenant both morally as individuals and corporately as a worshipping community.
- C. To show God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises to the Patriarchs.

VII. The Message of Exodus

- A. Because God has graciously delivered Israel from slavery, Israel can and must know the Lord their God by obediently following the covenant which outlines how they are to live and worship.
- B. Remember that God has delivered you for a relationship of love which is structured on His terms.
- C. The sovereign God has graciously set you free in accordance with His promises so that you will live in covenant with Him as priests to the world.

VIII. The Major Themes of Exodus

- A. Promise – Fulfillment
- B. Sovereignty and Power
- C. Knowing God
- D. Freedom
- E. Remembering
- F. Grace brings obligation
- G. Worship
- H. Law

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