

The Book of Exodus

The book of Exodus covers a span of approximately 360 years from the death of Joseph (Ex. 1:6) to the erecting of the tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai (Ex. 40:1ff). Genesis ends with the Jews in good standing with Egypt; however, Exodus opens with a new Pharaoh over Egypt “*who knew not Joseph*” (Ex. 1:8). This new Pharaoh makes slaves of the Hebrews who were quickly multiplying. Four hundred years pass in Egypt while the people of God develop into the great nation God had promised they would become (Gen. 12:2; 15:12-14). God sends Moses to deliver the Hebrews from their Egyptian bondage. The name “*Exodus*” means “a going out, a marching out, military expedition... a way out, outlet” (LS 275). The book of Exodus records the mass exodus out of Egypt by the Hebrews (i.e., descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The Hebrews come to Mount Sinai, by the aid of God, and receive the law and instructions for tabernacle worship. The book ends with the construction of the tabernacle.

Exodus illustrates God’s mercy. The Lord desired to save Israel through the promise that He had made to Abraham (cf. Ex. 32:13). Throughout the history of man, never has a group of people seen such miracles with their eyes and experienced the presence of God with such regularity as did the Hebrews who came out of Egypt. God showed the world His great might as He crippled Egypt with plagues. God traveled with Israel visibly day and night through a cloud and pillar of fire. God fought for Israel defeating Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea. God fed the people with manna and quail and provided water in the desert places. God cared for Israel spiritually by giving them laws to follow and telling them of the deadly consequences of not keeping His covenant. Israel was truly beloved and cared for by God.

We may find it perplexing to note that Israel so quickly murmured and complained against the ever powerful and present God. Our puzzled minds are soon filled with clarity when we look to the attitude of Pharaoh. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart by giving him commands to follow; i.e., “*let my people go that they may sacrifice and worship...*” (cf. Ex. 5:1). Pharaoh states clearly that he will not adhere to Jehovah’s command (Ex. 5:2). Pharaoh is charged with stubbornness in that he does not heed God’s commands (Ex. 7:16). After a few plagues, Pharaoh agrees to follow God’s commands, yet by his own ways and stipulations (cf. Ex. 8:27-28). God’s response is given through Moses at Exodus 10:3, “*And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me...*” Interestingly, we read, “*But Jehovah hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go*” (Ex. 10:20). It becomes apparent, through a study of Exodus, that God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart came in the form of a command; i.e., “Let my people go.” Pharaoh did not want to do this. The king of Egypt had other plans for the Hebrews.

Why did Pharaoh reject God’s commands even after seeing the power of God? Why did the Hebrews murmur and complain though they saw God’s mighty works? God had born them “*on eagles’ wings*” caring for them each step of the way (cf. Ex. 19:4), and He only asked that they keep His commandments (Ex. 19:5). Why all the disobedience? The answer to man’s greatest problem is found herein. Sin is an event that occurs in my life when I do what I want rather than what God wants. My heart is hardened against God at times when my will is set above His will (I Jn. 3:4). The grand theme of Exodus is found in that man sins when doing his will rather than God’s.

Though I sin against God, He continues to love me and provide means for my forgiveness. The tabernacle erected in the wilderness is proof of this to both Jew of the Old Testament and modern day man today. God commanded Moses to erect the tabernacle, its furnishings, and court yard at Exodus 40. The author of Hebrews tells us that this system was only a shadow or copy of the original blueprint of the church (Heb. 8:1ff). God intended man to see his need for forgiveness through the Old Testament tabernacle system (cf. Gal. 3:21ff). The Mosaic Law identified sin (Rom. 7:7). It reminded man of their sins (Heb. 10:1ff) yet could do nothing to remove even one sin (Heb. 7:18-19). Through time the Hebrews would understand this and long to see the Messiah who would deliver man from the bondage of sin. The book of Exodus moves man to see his sinfulness and God's provisions for those sins. The direction of life I take lies in my hands. God's will is that I would keep his commandments. The author of Hebrews states, "*but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*" (Heb. 3:13).