

General comments on Exodus 1-14

Why does the Lord deal with Egypt and Israel in such a manner as He does in these chapters? Why is He striking Egypt with plagues, and working to get Israel out in such a circuitous manner. Why didn't He just do the last plague first and be done with it? And, why free Israel without imposing any conditions upon them at all? All through the Book of Mormon, the release from captivity is always presented as conditional upon their righteousness, what is different here?

First, why free Israel? Throughout these chapters the Lord doesn't require anything of Israel in exchange for their freedom. No conditions are imposed upon them at all. He never says, "If you are righteous and you worship Me, then I will set you free from Egypt" as is so common in the Book of Mormon. He simply goes about doing it. The reason He does it in this manner is because of the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. 3:17, 6:4-5). The Lord had already promised Abraham long before that He would deliver them from bondage (Gen. 15:13-14), so the Lord is simply keeping His word. It is not until they are in the wilderness at Sinai that God forces Israel into a covenant relationship where things become conditional. Up until that point, everything occurring is simply the Lord keeping his word to Abraham, and after that point everything becomes conditional.

Next, why is the Lord striking Egypt in such a manner? To answer this question a review of the Joseph in Egypt account is necessary. There the reader is informed the Egyptians are cultural elitists. They disdain foreigners in general as they are considered unclean, and Hebrews are particularly abhorrent (cf. Gen. 43:32). They are disgusted by shepherds in specific because they eat sheep, which the Egyptians considered taboo (cf. Gen. 46:34). The pride of Egypt is so infamous it becomes a rhetorical figure epitomizing human pride used extensively by the Prophets (cf. Isa. 19, Isa. 51:9-11, Ezek. 29-32). We also know from history the Egyptians considered Pharaoh to be a god (cp. 12:12), no mere mortal. We see this incredible arrogance manifested when Moses confronts Pharaoh for the first time and he spouts, "Who is the Lord that I should know him?" (cf. 5:2). What Pharaoh is saying is "Everyone knows who I am, but your god does not exist, so why should I bother with your request?" Everett Fox, in the Schocken Bible, offers a colloquial rendering of the phrase to mean "I care not one whit for YHWH!" In retaliation for this kind of defamation the Lord strikes this prideful nation to show that He is the true God (cf. 14:4, Ezek. 29:6) and Pharaoh is nothing but an arrogant fool. The repeated miracles are designed to overtly prove the Lord is God, and not Pharaoh, in the eyes of all of Israel as well as Egypt. The final plague is especially humbling because the firstborn of the

Egyptians is treated the same as the firstborn of the cattle, while the Israelites are spared altogether. This is a blatant attack on the Egyptian superiority complex.

Also, consider the whole slavery and rebellion issue revolves around bricks. The Israelites are commanded to build bricks for the Egyptians. What are bricks symbols of according to Gen. 11:1-9? They are symbols of man's hubris. And the Egyptians are even worse than the Babylonians because they are enslaving others to make their bricks and do their construction.

And finally, why these series of miracles and plagues culminating in the Passover? In 4:29-31 we see Moses working miracles in the eyes of the elders of Israel. They are initially impressed and have confidence in them, but their confidence wanes quickly enough when the going gets bad. Their belief in signs is transient, fleeting in the face of opposition. The same sort of thing happens with Pharaoh. He witnesses numerous miracles and is somewhat persuaded, but he refuses to grant Moses' complete request. Rather, he attempts to make incremental concessions, all of which Moses rejects. It is not until the Passover, a massive sign with broad lethal and humiliating effects, that both Pharaoh and the Egyptians in general are sufficiently humbled such that they permit the Israelites to depart.

The series of signs presented are designed to show mankind positive or relatively harmless signs are of no efficacy in promoting substantive faith. Only overwhelming and devastating signs are the kind that force people into humility and therefore to have any kind of lasting faith. Consider Alma 32, where the discussion suggests some few will have faith regardless of circumstances (i.e., signs or no), but some must be compelled to be humble (i.e., signs with serious adversity), and some even despite being compelled still neglect the belief growing in them when adversity ceases.

Comments on Exodus 1

For those who say the Bible is andro-centric and misogynistic, here is a story about women defeating Pharaoh. Their strength in begetting so many healthy children, their refusal to observe his command to execute the male children, and even his own daughter's rescuing a baby that ultimately becomes the undoing of the Egyptians is not only ironic it is plain old-fashioned feminism. It is the women who both literally and figuratively give birth to the rebellion that overthrows the king of Egypt. Additionally, we see women saving Moses life as a child and as an adult. Here he is rescued from the Nile, and later he is rescued from the anger of the Lord by his wife Zipporah for failing to circumcise his son.

1 NOW these [are] the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob. 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, 3 Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, 4 Dan, and Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. 5 And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt [already]. 6 And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7 And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.

v1-7 Israel had twelve sons (v. 1-4) and seventy people total in his family by the time they arrived in Egypt, not including Joseph (v. 5). This generation in Egypt is very prosperous and they have many children such that by the time the first generation of Hebrews all pass (v. 6) away the land of Egypt is filled with them (v. 7).

The realization of the promise the Lord made to Abraham and Jacob is at hand. However, this blessing from the Lord leads to antagonism among the native people.

v5 "seventy souls", cp. Gen. 46:8-27.

v7 The covenant made with Abraham concerning having much offspring is in part being fulfilled.

8 Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. 9 And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel [are] more and mightier than we: 10 Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and [so] get them up out of the land. 11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh

treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. 13 And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: 14 And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, [was] with rigour.

v8-14 The prosperity of the Israelites is so great the Egyptians get nervous about having a large population of foreigners among them in the event war breaks out (v. 8-10). They oppress and afflict them to keep them down (v. 11). Note the Egyptians never even consider intermarrying with them. This arm of flesh technique is useless as God prospers them anyway and the more they are afflicted the more they prosper (v. 12a-b). The result is the Egyptians really get to dreading them (v. 12c) and just increase the burdens with heavier and heavier labors (v. 13-14).

This affliction was predicted in Gen. 15:14.

v8 The new Pharaoh does not care what Joseph did for the Egyptians, he is living in the present and fearful of losing his power.

15 And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one [was] Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: 16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see [them] upon the stools; if it [be] a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it [be] a daughter, then she shall live. 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. 18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? 19 And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women [are] not as the Egyptian women; for they [are] lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them. 20 Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. 21 And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses. 22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

v15-22 The continuing prosperity of the Israelites becomes such a problem it causes Pharaoh to demand the Hebrew midwives kill all male babies (v. 15-16). The midwives fear God and not Pharaoh, so they refuse to do so (v. 17). Instead, they tell Pharaoh a "little white lie" (v. 18-19) and are protected from Pharaoh's anger (v. 20-21) as the Israelites continue to grow in number. Having no success among the midwives, Pharaoh issues a universal command to all the people that they will execute all

male babies (v. 22).

Why didn't Pharaoh just execute the midwives? Probably because the Egyptians have become the upper class elites of this society, with the Hebrews performing all of the menial labor and mundane services. This would include the midwives as v. 19 suggests they service both the Hebrews and the Egyptians. So, if Pharaoh were to execute the Hebrew midwives there wouldn't be anyone to assist the Egyptian women.

This kind of social scheme would explain why the Egyptians were disgusted with the Hebrews and found them repellent, but still wanted them around. The Egyptians had them doing all of their dirty work. It also explains why Pharaoh didn't just expel the Hebrews when they became a political and military threat to him. No, he would rather keep only the women around, whom he can easily subject to labors through physical coercion and who would not pose a serious internal military threat.

v21 This verse is obscure in meaning, but the context suggests they were blessed by the Lord as a result of doing the right thing. Exactly what they were blessed with is uncertain, perhaps well-established houses, meaning their family lines.

v22 This verse explains how it came about that Moses ended up floating down the Nile in the next chapter. It also shows how adamant and vicious Pharaoh was about getting rid of these Hebrew males that posed a military threat to him. And, it indicates how the Egyptians generally felt about the Hebrews.

The command may have also been something of a child sacrifice to the Nile as the Egyptians considered the great river to be something of a god.

Pharaoh's intent is probably for people to throw the sons directly into the Nile so they drown. The wicker basket arrangement is a way for the mother to cleverly obey Pharaoh's command while disobeying it, hopefully preserving her son's life.

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