

Moses

Lesson 1 Article

The book of Exodus does not identify any of the Egyptian kings (Pharaohs) mentioned. In spite of their influential position they are portrayed as nobodies. This is in keeping with the contrast which Exodus draws between the Lord and the Egyptian kings. **11** *Pharaoh* is a royal title rather than a personal name. **19** In view of the remarkable increase of the Israelite population, Pharaoh may well have accepted the comment about the ability of the Hebrew women to give birth prior to the arrival of the midwives.¹

Why Egypt?

It seems strange, but God did lead the people He loved into slavery.

God had appeared to Abraham, and had given him great covenant promises. Abraham was to become a great nation. Through his offspring the entire race of man was to be blessed. And the chosen people were to enjoy God's favor and His protection. What's more, the family of Abraham was to inherit a land that, at that time, was particularly rich. Canaan was to be a Jewish homeland, a perpetual possession set aside for them.

But after just three generations, God led the 70 people of that family out of Canaan into Egypt. There, as God knew, they would rest and multiply—but would also become enslaved. God's leading of the people of Israel into Egypt was unquestionably leading them into bondage.

Yet there were reasons for the detour into Egypt. During the years that the Children of Israel lived there, the Promised Land was a battlefield. Invaders from the north, Hurrians and Hittites, had surged south. During the decades when Egypt's power was great, Egyptian armies had flowed north. Palestine, a bridge between the two areas, knew the continual march of foreign armies, and often the devastation that war brings.

The Jewish people could hardly have multiplied or have developed national strength in such a land.

But in Egypt the people grew. The Bible tells us they "multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7). Exodus 12:37 reports that when the Jewish people left Egypt, there were some 600,000 men, plus women and children; a total of at least 2 million people. Strikingly, when Israel left Egypt, both northern and southern world powers were weak. A power vacuum existed, which permitted time for the Jews to become established as a nation.

The geography of Palestine gives us another reason why the captivity was in God's plan for Israel. The land was divided by ranges of mountains and hills. In a similar land the Greeks developed a structure of independent and warring city-states. The Greeks had a common heritage. But they lived divided lives. This could not be allowed to happen to God's people. Tribal distinctions could be retained, but the people must see themselves as one nation, linked forever by their common heritage in Abraham's God.

A third and striking reason for the time spent in Egypt is found in Genesis 15:16. In making the promise to Abraham, God told him that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed in Egypt for some 400 years. Following that experience of slavery, they would return. And then this puzzling note is added: "For the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

The Amorites were the people who lived then in the land God had promised to Abraham and to Israel. Archeological research tells us much about them—particularly about their depravity. They were a people whose moral and religious decline was marked by cult prostitution, and even involved the sacrifice of babies, who were burned alive to their nature gods.

For 400 years God, in grace, held back His judgment and permitted His own people to suffer. Only when the iniquity of the Amorites was complete—when they had reached a point of no return—did God use Israel to judge and to destroy this depraved civilization.

And so for centuries Israel waited in Egypt. For centuries their suffering deepened. Only now, looking back, can we sense some of the reasons. Even in their agony God was at work, to do them—and to do others—good.²

¹ *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition*. 1994 (D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham, Ed.) (4th ed.) (Ex 1:7–2:10). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

² Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987). *The teacher's commentary* (75). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.