

Parashah Forty-Six

Exodus 1:1–2:25; Isaiah 27:6–13; Romans 6:1–2; Hebrews 11:23

Notes by Tim Hegg

Whom the Father Loves, He Chastens

Shemot begins the story of the slavery of Jacob and his family under the oppressive hands of their enemies. Interestingly, the midrash begins its discussion on *Shemot* by quoting Prov. 13:24,

“He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.”

The question lingering in the minds of the Sages is prompted by how this book begins—with a *vav*, וַאֲלֵה שְׁמוֹת, “and these are the names.” That means that it is directly connected with *B’reishit* (Genesis) and in fact in Gen 46:8 these exact words are written: “and these are the names of the sons of Israel who came from Egypt . . .” But there the travelling to Egypt is seen as a blessing in that a welcomed reception awaited Jacob and his sons, the best of the land was given to them, and their lives were maintained under the gracious hand of Joseph. Here, however, the words open the narrative of how the sons of Israel, coming to Egypt, are oppressed, their lives taken, and they are forced to live under the tyranny of the Egyptians. Why the change? Why blessing on one hand and apparent cursing on the other? Thus, “whom the Father loves He chastens.” The slavery of Egypt was the chastening of the Lord to bring His beloved first born to the full realization of what redemption is, and what it costs.

Our parashah links more than the literary units of *B’reishit* and *Shemot* (Genesis and Exodus). It also begins the necessary connection between the covenant made with Abraham and the one made with the nation at Sinai—the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants. At the end of this section we read:

“So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.”

(2:25-26)

The covenant terms “remember” and “know” are conspicuously present here. The final phrase in the Hebrew is just two words: וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים, “and God knew.” The modern translations “and God took notice of them” is an attempt to interpret the word “know” in the context. But it should be understood as a covenant term paired with “remember,” with its meaning “to be loyal to the covenant” and emphasizing the relationship that the covenant produces. If we understand these final words of our section to be “and God knew (them, i.e., Israel),” it paints the picture of a faithful husband expressing fidelity to the covenant of marriage, demonstrated through loving and intimate relationship.

In fact, the first act of the Egyptians noted in the book is that the Pharaoh who arose “did not know Joseph” (וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ-הַמִּצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יֹסֵף). In context, this must mean that the Pharaoh was unwilling to maintain the covenant that the former Pharaohs had made with Joseph and his family. To “not know Joseph” does not mean he was unaware of Joseph—Egyptians were big on history! It means that the current Pharaoh did not intend to honor the covenants made with Joseph

and his family.

This sets the stage, then, for the whole book: God as Israel's husband will demonstrate His faithfulness to the covenant and will redeem her at great cost in order to restore her to Himself, and to maintain the faithful relations of marriage that the covenant demands.

In fact, the very first issue raised in the Exodus narrative is that of children—offspring, the gift of marital relations. Moses, the baby, is the prime example of thousands of other babies who become the focus of the opening story. Like the creation narrative in which the earth teams with life, Israel is described as

“But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.” (1:7)

What this English translation hides is that “increased greatly” is the Hebrew וַיִּשְׁרַצוּ, the same word used in Genesis 1:20, “and let the waters *swarm*” Like the life that filled the earth at creation, so Israel has increased to fill Egypt. God has been faithful to bless Israel, and the proof is that He has given her many, many children.

In contrast, the desire of Egypt, (God's enemy in this story) is to find a way to destroy the children by whom Israel is blessed. Interestingly, Egypt follows the same strategy as modern America. First, go to the medical people and instruct them to kill the children. When this failed, they commanded the people themselves to kill the children (throwing them in the Nile). When both of these measures failed, there was nothing left but to attempt to kill them through slavery and finally militarily (though by the time Pharaoh gives this final command the Israelites are already on their way out of Egypt.) Unfortunately, in America the first two measures have “worked.” Currently, 1.37 million children are murdered each year in the United States at the hands of doctors with the consent of mothers or fathers. If ever there will be a return to God in America, this is a sin of which there will need to be genuine repentance. Of course, there has already been genuine repentance in the hearts of some individuals, and this has brought God's healing mercies into their lives. But as a nation this horrific sin continues to hang over us as a plague ravaging our spiritual life and leaving our society almost entirely depleted of a moral foundation.

It is most interesting to note once again in our parashah that the value of children is first maintained by the “health care professionals” of the story. The midwives are the first major heroes in the story. But they are so because of their focus. Indeed, the Hebrew text sets this up nicely in the narrative by a possible play on the words “see” and “fear.” In 1:16 Pharaoh proclaims to the midwives,

“When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them (וַרְאִיתֶן) upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.”

The very next phrase has “but the midwives feared God” In Hebrew, “see” (רָאָה) and “fear” (יָרָא) often look alike in their various forms. Indeed, the MT writes the word “fear” here without the normal final ה so that it looks even more like the word “see.”

The point is this: a great deal rests upon our focus—what we look at—Whom we fear. Pharaoh wanted the mid-wives to concentrate upon the birth itself. In contrast the midwives focused upon God. It is interesting to me to note historically how often God has used women to affect significant

revivals and spiritual awakenings as well as to maintain morality and stability within His people. Throughout the history of Israel women have played a significant (even if at times a somewhat unapplauded) role in both the physical as well as the spiritual maintenance of the nation. The same has been true in our own country. And one can point to pivotal events in the life of God's people in which women have played the key roles. It is not surprising, then, that in the Torah movement of our day the women are often ahead of the men in pursuing God with a willingness to obey the Torah and teach their children to do the same. But as is always the case, unless obedience to God is the priority of the men as well, the Torah movement in our times will languish and ultimately have less than a full impact.

Some have suggested that the midwives were less than honest in their report to Pharaoh. Of course, in the matter of saving life it is permitted to hide the truth, and even to speak a falsehood, for the saving of life takes precedence. But there is another way to understand 1:19: the midwives simply did not make an effort to attend the births at the early stages of labor. God was merciful to the Israelite women and caused their births to come quickly and easily (after all, the text does state that God was the One who caused the number of Israel to multiply). By the time the midwives arrived, the child had been born. Pharaoh's plan was that the midwives would kill the child and make it appear that the death was the result of the birthing process.

The manner in which Pharaoh made life miserable for Israel is also interesting and has historical as well a modern parallels. Goshen had been given to Joseph and his family. Thus, the first thing Pharaoh does is remove ownership of property which brings poverty. Without ownership of property, the Israelites became servants to the Egyptians upon whom they were dependent for food and life's necessities. The second step in Pharaoh's plan was economic: he required more work for the same benefits. Finally, he made it impossible to obtain the necessary things for life because he required of the Israelites more work than they could perform (making bricks as well as gathering the raw materials to make them). As such, he diminished them to indentured slaves.

But all of this only sets up the story to bring us to the conclusion of our parashah: the purposes and activities of God. While we may glean many important lessons from the story of Israel's enslavement in Egypt, the overarching emphasis of the narrative is God's activity in redeeming His people. This in itself is a reminder to us that in the midst of all of life's events, the person and work of God Himself is to be our primary focus.

2:24-25 contain four verbs that highlight God's activity at the beginning of our story. But the Hebrew is very interesting in its emphasis upon these four verbs, because it adds אָלֵהִים to each of the verbs, where we might normally expect it only at the beginning of the phrases. "God heard . . . God remembered . . . God saw . . . God knew." What might we learn from these?

God heard – The word "to hear" has become a well known word in the Torah community because we so often recite the *Shema*, "Hear O Israel . . ." We have become well aware of the fact that the Hebrew idiom "to hear the voice" (שָׁמַע בְּקוֹל) means "to obey." When we therefore see the verb "hear" applied to God it arrests our attention. What does it mean that God "heard their groaning"? It means much more than merely "paying attention." It means first that God is attentive to the needs of His people. How often it is easy to presume that somehow our cares and troubles are so insignificant when compared to God's greatness that He cannot be bothered with them. But the fact is that He is always attentive to the needs of His people. He is fully aware of our groanings and our calling out to Him. In fact, one of the often repeated motifs throughout the Psalms is the "cry/answer" one. When the weak cry out to God, He answers them. When the Psalmists cries to

God for help, He answers him. Granted, the answers are not always what is expected, but they are always what is best. So do not be afraid to call out to God, to express to Him the deepest cares and woes of your soul. He hears.

God remembered – God remembered the promises—the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is a covenant keeping God, and He never goes back on any of His promises. This you can count on. More often than not, when we have become despondent and are becoming weaker and weaker in our faith it is because we have failed to focus on *and rehearse* the promises of God.

By focusing on the promises of God I mean to emphasize the need to know them. All too often the people of God languish in weak faith because they are not aware of God’s promises—they have never studied and understood the rich promises of the Scriptures, given to God’s people for their safety and security.

But secondly, we often fail to rehearse His promises. Musicians know that rehearsals are important, and if one intends to perform to close perfection, then rehearsals are essential. It is not the purpose of rehearsals to learn the instrument: this must be done in advance. Rehearsals rather have as their goal *the owning of the music by the musician*. Rehearsals take the notes from the page and make them the possession of the musician. The music becomes one’s own, so that one might express through the music the inner thoughts and emotions of the individual performer. Of course, in ensemble each individual collectively adds his or her musical expression to the whole, so that the group collectively expresses in the music even more than the composer could have ever written.

The same is true of rehearsing the promises: one needs to make them his own. Take the promises of God and realize that they are for you—they belong to you. And then find in them the expression of your own love to God and to your neighbor.

God saw – Nothing is more evident in this verb than God’s on-going, careful and kind providence for His children. “God saw the children of Israel”—what does this mean but that He was attentive to their needs and their future. He had a plan for them, a plan He intended to accomplish. The same is true of His children today—the Father’s eye is upon us. He has plans for good and for blessing. We must trust Him for that.

God knew – This final activity of God in response to His chosen ones is, of course, the goal to which the others move: intimate relationship with those He redeems. In the course of our studies and lives; in the day to day out-working of our various tasks and efforts, it is easy to forget that the ultimate goal of the ages is that God should have close and enduring communion with His people. God wants that with each of us, but He draws us by the welcoming fragrance of His love, and the delights of His smile. May we find in Him the companion Who defines the essence of friendship at every level.

As we enter into this second book of Moses, we rehearse, once again, the great Torah lesson of God’s faithfulness and His intention to redeem His people. All of subsequent Scripture will use the exodus story as the paradigm for God’s method of redemption. As we study through this great story, may we revel in the accomplished redemption won for us in our own exodus from slavery.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness,
and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13–14

The Pharaohs of Egypt and Exodus

This list is an attempt to correlate the Pharaohs of Egypt with the events of Exodus. Obviously, some of the dates are speculative, while others, though founded on more precise information, may still be inaccurate 5 - 10 years.

The following items are noteworthy:

1. Joseph was 17 years old when he was taken to Egypt, and worked for Potifer for 11 years before being put into prison. He was 30 years old when he was officially appointed to the court of Pharaoh, another interesting parallel between Joseph and Yeshua, who likewise was 30 years old when He began His public ministry of salvation.
2. Joseph entered Egypt while the 12th Dynasty ruled. Semusert III was probably the Pharaoh who had the dream, and the one who appointed Joseph to the position of second in the kingdom (Gen 41:40).
3. Jacob and his family came to Egypt after the first two years of the famine (Gen 45:6) during the last two years of Semusert III's reign (1879-1843). Three remaining Pharaohs of this dynasty (Amenemhet III, Amenemhet IV, Sebeknefrure) ruled before a change in dynasties.
4. The 13th & 14th Dynasties are not well documented, but it is clear that these Dynasties were primarily ruling over Upper Egypt, though initially they reigned apparently over the whole land of Egypt.
5. The Hyksos invaded Lower Egypt and expelled the ruling family, setting up their rule in Lower Egypt. The families of the 13th & 14th Dynasties retained their control of Upper Egypt for 106 years. Eventually, however, the Hyksos were able to subdue the entire land of Egypt, both Upper and Lower.
6. Joseph died while the 13th Dynasty was ruling. The 14th Dynasty that followed was most probably sympathetic to the 13th Dynasty, and upheld contracts made under that Dynasty. It is most probable, then, that the "king who did not know (=recognize a covenant with) Joseph" was the Hyksos Dynasty. Being foreigners, and not Egyptians, it is most likely that they refused to honor contracts of the former Egyptian Dynasties.
7. Amosis is the first ruler of Dynasty 18, the Dynasty which expelled the Hyksos from Egypt and returned the rule of the land to Egyptians. Hatshepsut, the daughter of Thutmose II, was most likely the queen (princess) who found Moses in the water. She had a co-regency with her son, Thutmose III, ruling as de facto ruler while Thutmose III was a boy. Upon gaining manhood, Thutmose III took control, and after the death of his mother, he did all in his power to eradicate her memory from the land. He is the only Pharaoh of this period to have a rule extending more than 40 years, and therefore fits as the Pharaoh of the oppression, who died while Moses was in Midian (Ex. 2:15, 23).