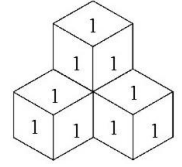


Module 1: The Old Covenant

1/3 – Freed for Service



Prosperity to Slavery

Abraham's descendants prospered and lived in Egypt for 430 years, becoming 'a great multitude', large enough to become a nation as God had promised Abraham (Genesis 15:12-15) – 600,000 men, plus women and children (They only counted the men in those days!). The Pharaoh became worried that as there was so many, and if Egypt was attacked, they might support the enemy, so he decided to suppress them by making them slaves (Exodus 1:1-14).

They were sent to tend the fields and build new cities, but the more they complained, the worse he treated them. First he instructed their midwives to kill all their boys at birth, but when that failed, he told everyone to throw the baby boys into the river Nile. (Ex 1:15-22).

- 'Exodus' is a Greek word that means 'Exit' or 'Departure'.
- The books from Exodus to Joshua describe a journey through the desert as the people moved to nationhood, but most importantly they describe the rules God gave us for living a life pleasing to him.
- Because of their oppression, in Egypt the people prayed to God to help them.



Moses is Born

An Israelite woman from the tribe of Levi gave birth to a boy child. Because Israelite boys were being killed, to save his life, she hid him in a waterproof basket among the reeds of the Nile (hence the name 'Moses Basket'). When the Pharaoh's daughter was bathing in the river, she found him and recognised him as an Israelite. Moses' sister had been keeping watch; so she came forward, offered to find an Israelite woman to act as a nurse – and went and brought their mother; consequently, Moses was bought up familiar with both Egyptian and Hebrew culture. (Exodus 2:1-10).

- The Pharaoh's daughter called him 'Moshe' (Moses). The name Moses is neither Egyptian nor Hebrew but a combination.
- In Egyptian the nearest is Thutmose and in Hebrew it's a play on 'Mashe' meaning to draw out (of water).



Moses Becomes an Outcast

When the adult Moses was out one day, he saw an Egyptian overseer cruelly abusing an Israelite slave. He forcibly restrained and killed him. This became known by others, so Moses had to flee as an outcast to Midian (on the east coast of the modern Gulf of Arabia). (Exodus 2:11-15).

- With his wife Zipporah, Moses had sons, the first he called Gershom, meaning 'a sojourner' – someone making a temporary stay – and the second he called Eliezer meaning 'Help of my God'.

In Midian, Moses intervened between some shepherds and the daughters of a local priest called Jethro, which enabled the daughters to get to a well to water their father's flock. Jethro was pleased and gave Moses one of his girls, Zipporah, in marriage. (Exodus 2:16-22).



God Intervenes – The Burning Bush

Moses was tending Jethro's flock when he saw a bush in the distance on fire, yet the bush was not burning away (some Bibles say 'not consumed'). As he approached to see what it was he heard a voice which said this was God. Moses was told to go to the Pharaoh and instruct him to let the Israelites leave Egypt. Moses objected – who was he to say that to the Pharaoh? Moses asked whom he should say had sent him. God replied he was the God of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, "I am who I am"; tell Pharaoh 'I am' sent you", and God gave Moses signs to take with him to prove it. (Exodus 3 – Exodus 4).

- In Hebrew, God is called 'Yahweh'; though devout Jews never say that but substitute names such as 'Lord'.
- 'Jehovah' is a translation of that name into Latin that was only derived in the middle-ages
- The signs included Moses' staff turning into a snake and back, giving his hand leprosy then healing again, and turning water into blood (Ex 4:1-9).



Not a Good Start

Moses returned to Egypt and was met by his brother Aaron. He told Aaron what had happened and together they went to the Israelite elders, showing them the signs Moses' had been given.

The elders agreed they should go before Pharaoh to deliver the ultimatum. Pharaoh of course was not persuaded and only made the Israelites work harder, so the Israelites complained about Moses (Exodus 4:18-5:21).

Moses reported this back to God who repeated his promise to free the Israelites, but Moses expressed his concern over his speech impediment (Exodus 5:22-6:12) so he was allowed to take his brother Aaron with him to speak for him (Exodus 7:1-2). They were told to return to Pharaoh where, as a demonstration, Aaron threw down the staff which became a snake – Pharaoh called his magicians who did the same, so he wasn't impressed.

➤ **The Israelites were punished by no longer being given straw to make bricks but having to collect it for themselves, whilst still producing the same number of bricks as before (Ex 5:1-8).**

➤ **Moses' speech impediment is thought to have been a stutter.**

(The Bible tells us he was 'slow of speech & tongue').

1. BLOOD	6. Boils
2. FROGS	7. HAIL
3. Lice	8. Locusts
4. Flies	9. DARKNESS
5. Pestilence	10. SLAYING OF THE FIRSTBORN

Ten Plagues

Ten times God instructed Moses to go back to Pharaoh again, each time predicting a worse plague if the Israelites weren't released. Each time the prediction came true, but still the Pharaoh wouldn't let them go (Exodus 7:14-11:10).

Scientists have shown the plagues could have happened. For instance, the river Nile water 'turning into blood' is likely when the level was low and the weather very hot, which would have allowed a red algae (known by our scientists today) to grow, making the water red and undrinkable.

Each time a plague occurred, the Israelites had been protected from it, but protection from the tenth plague was special and is still celebrated by all devout Jews to this day – it's called 'Passover'.

➤ **The Plagues were: Nile Water turned into blood, Frogs, lice, flies, dead livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, 1st born males die.**

➤ **Each plague on its own might not have been unusual, but the fact that they all occurred as predicted beforehand by Moses is a bit too much to be chance.**



The Passover

God instructed the Israelites to protect themselves from the last plague by killing and eating a lamb, then daubing its blood on the doorposts of their house. Where the doorposts were daubed, the plague 'passed over' and no-one in that house died, but the Egyptian's first-born son and first-born of all their animals died. Jews today still consecrate their first-born son to God to remember this event (Exodus 12:31-13:16).

➤ **After this last plague Pharaoh freed the Israelites... but then changed his mind and sent his army to get them back (Exodus 14:5-9).**

➤ **Jesus' crucifixion freed us from the slavery of sin at the time when the 'Passover' was being remembered (Mark 14:12).**



Exodus Through The Sea

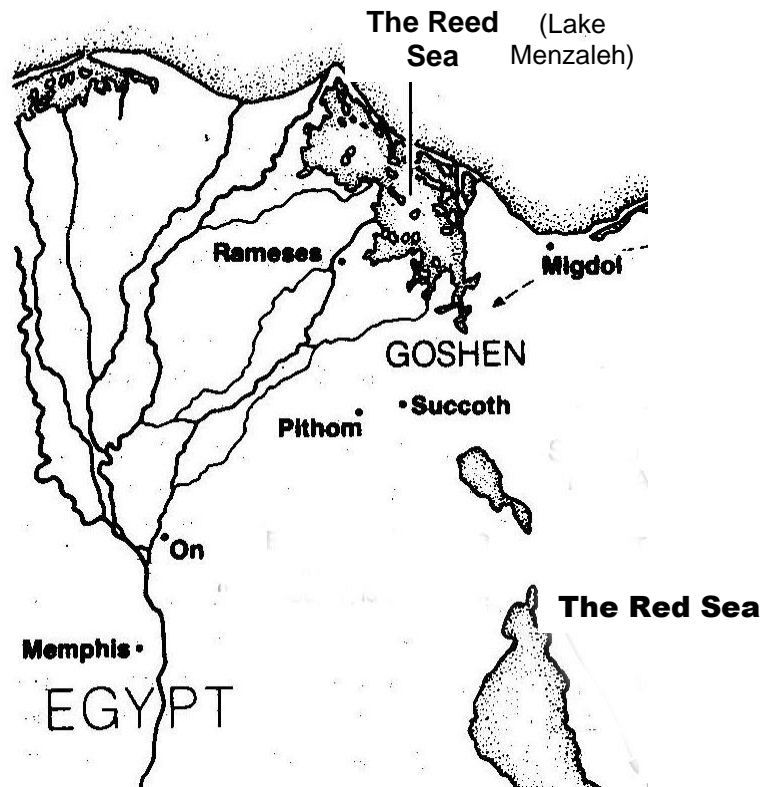
The Israelites left Egypt where they had been settled and started a trek to the land God had promised Abraham. As they came to the sea, the waters parted, so they crossed on dry land, but when the Egyptians followed after them the water returned and the Egyptian army was drowned (Ex 13:17-14:31).

Their route is uncertain. It's traditionally described as through the Red Sea, but could have been the shallow 'Reed Sea' which existed at that time in the Nile Delta, but which dried up when the Suez Canal was built, as that was much narrower and shallower.

➤ **This is a key point in the Exodus, when the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, and can be compared with the death of Jesus in the New Testament when we were freed from 'slavery' to death.**

➤ **The waters of the Reed Sea had been seen to be blown aside in a strong Wind.**

The Exodus From Egypt



What Do You think?

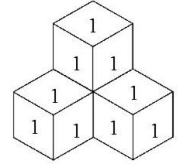
1. Was there anything from the reading that puzzled or surprised you?
2. Can you suggest a modern-day situation where people become slaves to something or someone? What would be needed to get them released?
3. Moses had a stutter and became an outcast from both the Hebrew and Egyptian communities. Saint Paul says it's when we're weak that God can use us (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Why might that be? Can you suggest any more recent examples of this?
4. God heard the Israelites' prayer and sent a solution, the man Moses who brought 'signs' that he was from God. How can we differentiate between someone genuine and a fraud?
5. Moses was 'called' for a specific purpose. How can we tell if we've been called?
6. Scientists have shown that the Ten Plagues each have a scientific basis. Since Moses predicted the plagues before-hand, was it more than co-incidence?
7. If we can accept that the plagues were more than co-incidence, then what does that say about the last plague 'passing-over' the Israelites?
8. Do you find the idea of doubt over which sea was 'parted', the deeper Red Sea or the shallower Reed Sea, is helpful in accepting the account?
9. How do these events help us to see how God works?
10. Is there anything else that's still puzzling or concerning you over this Module?

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen.

We suggest you discuss the issues raised in this Module among yourselves first, so everyone gets a chance to form their own opinion, before you hand out page 5 – the sample answers.

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1/3 – Freed for Service



Sample Answers to Questions

These aren't the only possible answers but may help give some explanation if you want it. There isn't a 'right' answer to many of the questions but it can be helpful to hear what other people think.

2. **Can you suggest a modern-day situation where people become slaves to something or someone? What would be needed to get them released?**
 - a. Whole nations can be considered to be enslaved by oppressive regimes, which is a difficult problem to solve as it needs a political solution, usually at national or international level. As individuals we can help by keeping up pressure on the authorities so the situation doesn't go unnoticed.
 - b. Individuals forced to work for very low wages (eg: in factories) can amount to slavery, whilst others (sometimes 'trafficked' into a country illegally) are forced to labour without pay and live in poor conditions, which is sometimes described as 'modern slavery'.
 - c. People can become 'slaves' to consumerism, drugs, etc and this too needs looking-out for and speaking against in order that appropriate action might be set-up to counter the problem.
 - d. Individuals in the past have worked to end slave-type conditions, eg: William Wilberforce and still today the organisation called 'Anti-Slavery'. All people of good faith need to be vigilant and not hesitate to speak out against 'slave' conditions, calling for action where appropriate.

3. **Moses had a stutter and became an outcast from both the Hebrew and Egyptian communities. Saint Paul says it's when we're weak that God can use us (2 Cor 12:7-10). Why might that be? Can you suggest any more recent examples of this?**
 - a. Some have suggested that when we're weak, we don't get in the way of what God wants to do, so he's able to work through us.
 - b. Hopefully some in your group will have one or more modern examples of such people. If not, you could quote various people down the ages who's gentle or passive resistance has brought about big changes, such as Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela.

4. **God heard the Israelites' prayer and sent a solution, the man Moses, who brought 'signs' that he was from God. How can we differentiate between someone genuine and a fraud?**
 - a. This can be difficult, especially where the person claiming to bring a solution is clever, even the Pharaoh was cautious; his magicians could turn a staff into something else, much as a modern stage magician can turn an apparent solid stick into a flexible rope and back. Moses was persistent and his signs became increasingly more difficult to ignore as being other than from a 'supernatural' source – God.
 - b. Less sophisticated peoples can be easily fooled on seeing modern devices for the first time, such as a radio or an aircraft and can think the bearer has supernatural powers. We need to test the person against tradition, scripture and reason and to seek the help of the Holy Spirit.

5. **Moses was 'called' for a specific purpose. How can we tell if we've been called?**
 - a. All Christians have been called by Jesus to follow him, fortunately most of us not in such a dramatic way as Moses. Some have been called for a specific task, the difficulty can be in determining whether it's a 'calling' or not. Ways of testing include: being confirmed by others who agree you have a 'gift', ignoring the call but finding that it won't go away, asking yourself if your motive is for profit or making yourself important or out of a genuine wish to serve others.
 - b. Like Moses, we may be concerned that we don't have the necessary qualifications, but if the call is from God he will always give us the skills we need.

6. **Scientists have shown that the Ten Plagues each have a scientific basis. Since Moses predicted the plagues before-hand, was it more than co-incidence?**
 - a. If you believe that all the Bible is literally true, then there should be no problem in accepting the plagues at their face value. If you believe that some parts are symbolic, then the plagues can still have been real events – plagues of lice and fleas are not unusual in hot countries, and water can 'turn to blood' because of the growth of algae which turns water red and makes it undrinkable.
 - b. Taken on their own, it might be possible to argue the plagues were co-incidence, but taken with all the others aspects of this and the other accounts in the Bible, it's more difficult to treat them that way.
7. **If we can accept that the plagues were more than co-incidence, then what does that say about the last plague 'passing-over' the Israelites?**
 - a. God's deeds as recorded in the Bible are often 'natural' events but caused 'supernaturally', eg: Jesus providing enough food to feed 5,000 people from 2 loaves and 5 fish is 'supernatural' but the food itself was normal (Matthew 14:13-21).
 - b. It seems fair to suggest that in this case the plagues were indeed a supernatural intervention by God but that some were immune to the effect. That could have been by natural immunity among the Israelite race compared to the Egyptians, or by supernatural intervention by God – it's a mystery that we have to accept 'in faith'.
8. **Do you find the idea of doubt over which sea was 'parted', the deeper Red Sea or the shallower Reed Sea, is helpful in accepting the account?**
 - a. This is personal. Some may find it helpful, especially if they're not sure whether it's myth or true, but others who take a more literal view of the Bible may feel there can be no doubt.
9. **How do these events help us to see how God works?**
 - a. God has a plan for us and uses people to make it work, but he doesn't force people to take part, we still have freewill which shows us the extent of God's love that he can trust us that far.
 - b. He gives us what we need to be able to do what he's called us to do in support of his plan.
 - c. He doesn't usually make 'unnatural' things happen but he uses nature in unusual but deliberate ways.