

Exodus Chapter 1

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[0 : 0 0] Please turn in your Bibles to Exodus and chapter 1. What I hope to begin this morning is a series in Exodus, working our way through this most eventful book in the Bible.

And we'll take a break, of course, over Christmas and things like that, then come back to it. But we'll make a start this month and into December as well. And then, God willing, carry on.

So Exodus and chapter 1, we're going to read the whole of the chapter together from verses 1 to 22. These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

The descendants of Jacob numbered 70 in all. Joseph was already in Egypt. Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died.

But the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous so that the land was filled with them. Then a new king who did not know about Joseph came to power in Egypt.

[1 : 2 4] Look, he said to his people, the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous.

And if war breaks out, we'll join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country. So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor.

And they built Python and Ramesses as storehouses, sorry, store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.

So the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and work them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar, with all kinds of work in the fields.

In all their hard labor, the Egyptians used them ruthlessly. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shifra and Poir, when you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him.

[2 : 3 1] If it is a girl, let her live. The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do. They let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, why have you done this?

Why have you let the boys live? The midwives answered Pharaoh, the Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women. They are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.

So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people, every boy that is born, you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.

Please do sit down. If you turn to the very end of Genesis, that's the chapter 50, that's the book before Exodus, which we're going to look at, we're going to read briefly from verse 15, Genesis and chapter 50, verse 15, so that we can put in the right setting our entrance into Exodus.

Exodus. Genesis chapter 50 then, beginning from verse 15. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, what if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?

[4 : 03] So they sent word to Joseph saying, your father left these instructions before he died. This is what you're to say to Joseph. I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.

Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father. When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him.

We are your slaves, they said. But Joseph said to them, don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

So then don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. They reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Joseph stayed in Egypt along with all his father's family.

He lived 110 years and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children, also the children of Machir, son of Manasseh, were placed at birth on Joseph's knees.

[5 : 07] Then Joseph said to his brothers, I'm about to die, but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up from this place. So Joseph died at the age of 110 and after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Then turn the page to Exodus and chapter 1, which we read just a little while ago. In each one of our lives, there are milestones, markers, special events along the way.

Times when we look back, occasions when the course of our lives was altered, redirected, changed in some way. Those markers, those milestones may well have been a joyful occasion, exciting new challenges, starting our first job or going off to university, perhaps even getting married or something like that.

But there will also be events and markers in our lives which are sad. Things that happen to us that we still bear the scars of. Redundancy, perhaps.

[6 : 29] Illness. Maybe separation. Maybe even death. These and many more life-changing episodes have shaped our lives and made us the people that we are today.

But of course, if we are Christians this morning, the greatest event that has taken place, the most transforming event is when God broke into our lives.

When by His grace, He brought us into that living relationship with Himself. Gave us eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ. It was such a radical alteration in our lives that when the Bible talks about it, it talks about being born again or being a new creation, raised from death to life, being delivered from slavery to liberty.

That's what God has always done in the lives of those He sets His love upon. Throughout the age of the church, since the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, ever since then, God has been transforming lives, changing lives, bringing people to faith in Himself.

And will continue to do so until Christ comes again. But wonderfully, this God also changed and transformed lives long before as well the Lord Jesus came into the world.

[7 : 50] Even here, in this book of Exodus, probably which records events three and a half thousand years ago, we see that God was at work. And certainly, what Exodus records is one of the greatest and most influential changes in the life of God's people, the Israelites.

It was the most important milestone in their history. We find that, again and again, the events of Exodus, the deliverance from Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, all those things are spoken of in the Psalms in praise and wonder of what God has done and throughout the Bible as well.

It's a reference point that they keep on turning to and looking to as a time when God delivered and saved His people. And so, when we come to Exodus, we are coming to the same God who is working in a similar way to bring salvation and grace to His people.

And so, there is much for us to learn here. If this is the same God working in a similar way, then we have much to learn about how He deals with us, how He works in our lives too.

But also, though these events were written three and a half thousand years ago, I hope that as you were reading through Exodus 1, you see how up to date and relevant this passage of God's Word is for the 21st century.

[9 : 16] Did you see how the problem of immigration was on the minds of the people? Isn't that in the news all the time? Fear about immigrants taking over the country.

three and a half thousand years ago. We see there the contemporary issues of abortion, euthanasia. We see ethnic cleansing.

We see a despotic leader ruling over and oppressing people. All these things which have happened all the way through history and are happening today are spoken of here.

So again, we recognize that God's Word is timeless. That's why we turn to the Bible. That's why we go to it again and again because it speaks of principles and truths which are timeless because God Himself is timeless.

What He says is of relevance and usefulness to every generation including our own and including us. And we see again, of course, that the great problem for humanity has always been the same problem.

[10 : 22] sinful rebellion against God. The biggest problem in our world is not hunger. It's not Ebola. It's not tyrants and dictators.

It's not ISIS. The greatest problem is the human heart because all those things that we speak of flow out from sin. Yes, people wore different clothes then and they called themselves by different names and they lived in different countries and cultures.

But when you scratch the surface, you see that under the same, it's the same, under the surface, it's the same people with the same problem needing the same Savior, the living God.

Moses almost certainly is the author of Exodus and here in chapter 1 he lays out for us as it were the setting of the stage. telling us what's happened, giving us, in one sense, a recap from Genesis chapter 50 and he begins, of course, by introducing the players and the action.

When you watch a TV series, Downton has finished. What are we going to do on a Sunday night after church now? Downton has finished. But every time, it's, I don't know, previously, previously, it shows us the characters and what happened and preparing us for what is about to happen, what about to take place.

[11 : 48] So let's just do that this morning. We're going to remind ourselves of the characters, the cast, as it were, of this great event, this exodus, this deliverance, this salvation, this mighty work of God.

Well, first of all, of course, we're introduced to the sons of Israel and their families. We're told in verse 5 that there were 70 of them in all, just 70 people.

But notice that they are described at the beginning as the sons of Israel. And that tells us much more than who their father was. He was, of course, Jacob. And its name is used interchangeably here, the sons of Israel and their father, the descendants of Jacob.

But it tells us more than that. It tells us who their God is and was. Israel was the name that God gave to Jacob. It was the new name he gave to him to reflect a new relationship.

Back in Genesis chapter 35, we read of what happened. After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him.

[13 : 01] God said to him, Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob. Your name will be Israel. So he named him Israel.

Now, as you know, the name Jacob means him who grasped the heel. Jacob was a rather unpleasant sort of character. He was a liar. He was a cheat.

He was somebody who went around conning people and deceiving people and stealing from people. He was not a very good person.

Yet God met with him and changed him and dealt with him and so gave him that new name, Israel, the one who wrestles with God to reflect upon his experience of meeting with God sometime earlier on.

And so Israel is, the children of Israel are those who were, those who were brought into relationship with the living God.

[14 : 05] These are God's people. This small group are the community of God's people, of believers in the world. And that's going to make all the difference in the world.

That's why this story, this event, these episodes are relevant to us. That's why it matters. That's why it's not just a bit of history about the Romans or the Greeks or the Normans, whoever it may be.

This matters to us because we too are God's people. The New Testament makes it clear we too are descendants of Israel.

That we are those who belong to the covenant community and people of God. Here's Peter as he writes his letter to the Christians and reminds them who they are.

This is true of us as well, just of these believers. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

[15 : 08] A wonderful thing it is to be God's people. We have a direct line by faith to these people. They will be with us, some of them, in heaven as well because they look forward to and put their trust in the living God who would put and send his son into the world.

And what do we know about these people? Well, we know that they are in Egypt. How did they get there? It's not their homeland. Their homeland was Canaan. That's where they were living in and around that area of what is now present-day Israel.

But how did they get to be in Egypt? Well, we know and we're told that Joseph was already there in Egypt at the end of verse 5. How did he come to be there?

Well, if you know the story, then you'll know that it was through the terrible behavior of his brothers. That's why we read from Genesis 50 where they were worried because they'd done terrible things to him.

What had they done? When he was just a young man in his teens, they had decided they were going to kill him. But deciding to change their minds, they sold him as a slave to some Midianite travelers who took him down to Egypt where he was sold as a slave as a young man.

[16 : 24] They went through all sorts of adventures. You can read about them and I'd encourage you to read about them. But in them all, God had his hand upon him. Ultimately, Joseph became the prime minister of the country and through God's dealing with him was the savior of that country and of his own family as well.

Yes, it had been his brother's jealousy and cruelty that had sent him there but the real reason that he had been sent to Egypt was that God's plan was to send him there. God had a purpose in it.

There's that wonderful verse, one of the most wonderful verses really that we have in Genesis 50, verse 20. You intended to harm me but God intended it for good.

It's wonderful. The sinful, wicked actions of his brothers reflecting perhaps the genes it inherited from their father. Yet God is bigger and greater than even the wicked and so brings good out of their disobedience and evil.

And so through that, through Joseph being there, through a famine taking place which again was the means by which Joseph was able to save the nation, the people, his family, his father and all of them are brought down to Egypt.

[17 : 49] It was God's doing. He wanted to bring them there. In fact, he told Jacob many years before that was what would happen that he would take them all the way into Egypt and there he would care for them.

In Genesis chapter 46, God says this, Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt. I will make you into a great nation there.

I will go down to Egypt with you. I will surely bring you back again. So it was God's plan. They were there where they were meant to be in Egypt because it was God's plan.

Again, this is a wonderful truth. When we are God's people, our lives do not run according to fate or chance or accident. Even where we live is because God has planned, purposed, directed us.

We are here in Whitby because God wants us here in Whitby. Our confidence is in a God who rules over all things for the good of his people.

[18 : 56] A God who leads his people, who guides his people, who directs his people, who places his people where he wants them to be because he has a plan for them. Do you know that?

Do you have that confidence for yourself? Do you believe that? It's a wonderful comfort to know. Now what's happened to the family of Israel, Joseph and his brothers, since they've been in Egypt?

Well, verses 6 to 7 tells us that Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous and filled the land.

They prospered. They were immigrants who were prospering in a new land. God was blessing them, giving them increase, just as again, as he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they would grow in number.

Remember Abraham having that promise when he was still a man without any children. You shall have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

[20 : 10] That's 70 that had come down into the land, just a few, just a handful, three score and ten. But here they're growing and multiplying and increasing because God promised that they would.

God's purpose is always to cause his people to increase. 1 Corinthians 3 verse 6 tells us this, God gives the increase.

The church is always growing. Here was all of God's people in the world at that time, 70. If we were to try and count all of God's people in the world today, we'd be getting on for a billion.

Increase and growth. But it's not just the church that God causes to grow. It's the Christian that he causes to grow. It's the Christian that he prospers. It's the Christian that he makes more fruitful.

Not always materially. It's the very foolish and false teacher who tells believers that things will always be easy for you and that you will always have what you want if you follow Jesus.

- [21 : 19] No, you won't. God promises to bless us with spiritual blessings, heavenly riches, which are a far greater usefulness and joy than any physical things.

God has brought them there to bless them. Let me say this to you, dear friends. God has brought you here to bless you, to cause you to grow, because he wants you to be fruitful, because he wants to do you good.

But then, also, things happen. We're told that Joseph and his brothers die, that generation. Now, we know that Joseph lived to 110. Genesis had told us that, chapter 50.

So, we're talking about some time later on, probably a couple of hundred years after that first coming into Egypt by Joseph and his brothers. When they first got there, he was probably in his 30s, maybe his 40s, so 70 years, and then some time after that.

But things are looking good, aren't they? Things are looking great. To start our story, it's a joyful story. We like stories with a happy ending, but we like stories with a happy beginning as well, don't we?

- [22 : 39] It's looking good, but it's not going to last. It doesn't take too much longer before we have the entrance of the baddie, the villain.

Every story has a villain, someone that we can boo at and hiss at, a nasty, unpleasant sort of a character that the hero of the story has to face and overcome.

And here he is, a new king, did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. This new king, or pharaoh as his proper title is.

We don't know exactly who he is. Many historians believe that he was a pharaoh called Amos, the first who founded a new dynasty of Egyptian pharaohs that lasted for 300 years.

A new dynasty. That's why he was a new king. He wasn't one who'd, as it were, been the son of the previous king, who'd been the son of the previous king, but a new king.

- [23 : 46] So he would have not been concerned about the old dynasty, the past, what had happened then. Rather, this was a new reign, and there were new challenges.

And we see that this new king was a man who was led by fear. Look, he said to his people, the Israelites have become much too numerous for us.

Come, we must deal shrewdly with them, or they will become even more numerous. And if war breaks out, we'll join our enemies and fight against us and leave the country.

He stirs up the people's fears, and through those fears, he stirs up hatred and loathing to these immigrants who had come amongst them, though they'd been there for 200 years or so.

And he chooses to make them his slaves. So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced slaves. We don't know how they did that, but in some way, the people who once were free and enjoying the land and God's blessing are now oppressed.

- [25 : 02] They're captured, they're enslaved, saved, and they're put to menial and destructive tasks. Just as God blesses his people and prospers his people, so we can be sure that in this world in which we live, as God's people, there will be difficulty and opposition and trial.

Jesus said to his disciples in John 16, in this world you will have, A.V. puts it, tribulation, trouble, distress. If the world hated me, he said, it will hate you.

We're to expect that. We're not to be surprised by that, that as believers in the living God, the world in which we live, which is opposed to God, just as we once were, will be opposed to us.

But perhaps the Israelites must maybe thought, and perhaps we think, when these things happen, well, where is God now? What's gone wrong? Has this God who brought us into Egypt been caught off guard, or by surprise, by the actions of this king?

Of course not. Of course not. In fact, we find that this oppression of God's people by the king has the opposite effect that he'd hoped for.

[26 : 28] Verse 12, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. Isn't that amazing? How can that happen? How can that be? Well, there's only one answer, isn't there? God did it.

Humanly speaking, it couldn't be done. If they were oppressed and hard-worked and treated so badly, yet God blessed them and they grew and they flourished. Again, this is another principle that we find in scriptures.

Not only that God leads and guides his people and causes them to grow and increase, not only that in this world they face opposition and trial and difficulty, but in the midst of that, God causes his people through suffering to flourish.

A famous early church historian called Tertullian said, the seed of the church is the blood of the saints. The seed of the church is the blood of the saints.

When God's people suffer, they actually flourish because of the grace and the work that he does in their hearts. Here's Paul as he writes about his own struggles and the struggles of Christians.

[27 : 31] He says, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character and character, hope.

And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit he's given us. Often when there has been persecution and opposition to the church, that's when the church has grown the greatest and been the strongest.

Most obvious example of that is China. I've shared with you that book that I read just recently about the power of the gospel, power of Christ in China. Amazing. Under the terrible, terrible opposition that they received under Chairman Mao and the Cultural Revolution in the 50s and onwards, 60s and 70s, the church increased by probably tenfold.

100 million Christians in China at least at the moment. Yet they were sorely oppressed. But again that's true of us. Dear friends, often as Christians, often as natural thinking people we think, well, difficulty and trouble in my life, I don't want it, I can't bear it.

Why does God allow it? Why must I be ill in this way? Why must this thing happen in my relationship with my family? Why must this happen or that happen? Why this redundancy?

[28 : 55] Why this sorrow and suffering? This loss? This grief? But isn't it the case, and don't we know it truly by experience, that the more in trouble we are, the more we draw on God's grace?

The more we cry and pray, the more we look to him. Isn't it true that when things are comfortable and easy and well and going along fine, that our spiritual life dwindles and it's compromised?

You see, the wonderful truth is this, that God is at work in the bad and the good. Romans 8, 28 is one of those great promises that we hold to and remind ourselves of.

For we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose. God was blessing and flourishing the church of his people here in Exodus under the greatest suffering.

Dear friends, maybe the suffering and the difficulty that you are under is because God wants to draw you closer to himself. He wants you to grow in perseverance or in patience, in love, in faith.

[30 : 10] Don't despise what has happened or is happening. Ask him, Lord, cause me to be fruitful in this. Cause me to increase.

So, Pharaoh's first plan to destroy the people by oppressing them with slavery fails. Fails dismally. So he thinks of an even more heinous crime.

Look at what he does in verse 15. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives whose names were Shiprah and Poir, when you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him.

Isn't that awful? Isn't that awful? He wants them, as it were, at the moment of birth to somehow smother or kill or strangle or in some way destroy baby boys that are being born.

You see, if the boys all die out in that generation, what will the girls do? The girls will have to marry Egyptians and then the race will die out, won't they?

[31 : 20] The Hebrew race, the Israelite race, God's people will die out. They'll be destroyed. And again and again, we see that in history too. That nation upon nation has sought to destroy and to blot out and to kill the church of God but has always failed.

What's God going to do now? He's going to raise up God-fearing women to save the day. God is not sexist, dear friends, and neither is the church of Jesus Christ.

God has always used God- fearing women as well as God-fearing men. And he raises them up, doesn't he? The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do.

They let the boys live. They knew that God's will had to be done rather than the king's will. They knew that what God wanted was right. No matter what the king said, no matter what the government said, they took a stand, which was to act in a way that pleased God.

And the reason that they did so, as we saw there, was because they feared God. As I said before, fear is not trembling, horror, and terror.

[32 : 45] It is faith in an awesome, mighty, wonderful, faithful God. And what happens?

Well, God is faithful to them, isn't he? Once again, God's people are kept, the boys live, and those who served him are blessed. Look at the end of verse 21. Because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

As they were faithful to him, he was faithful to them. As they trusted him, he entrusted to them blessing upon blessing. There's no better way, dear friends, to enjoy the blessing of God than to serve him with fear.

There's no better way to enjoy God's grace and goodness in our lives than to live before him without compromise, with trust, with obedience.

We are where God wants us to be. He has a plan and a purpose for us.

[33 : 49] And part of that purpose is that we serve him with fear where we are. That we do what he has called us to do where we are. The midwives just carried on doing their job.

They didn't do anything supernatural, if I can put it that way. They didn't do something which was extraordinary in one sense or that was out in the public for everybody to see. They didn't sort of rise up and cause a riot and a commotion against Pharaoh.

They just did their job fearing God. The everyday, ordinary washing up of the dishes theology. But through it, God saved a nation.

Through them, God blessed and built up his people and prepared the way for what he had yet in store. Do not think, dear friends, that you are unimportant in the scheme and purpose of God for his church in this day and generation.

For such a time as this, you and I have been brought to Whitby, to this fellowship, to that workplace, to that street, to that family, to that neighborhood, and so on.

[35 : 05] And if we will determine to declare to God, I will fear you and do your will, Lord, then he will use us to bring about the blessing of others.

Compromise and fear destroys. Fear the Lord delivers from all fear. We sang that hymn and I chose it for that very reason, that lovely verse at the end.

Fear him, you saints, and you will have nothing else to fear. Make you his service, your delight. Your wants shall be his care. Fear the Lord.

Fear the Lord. So the enemy, the king, has determined to destroy God's people, but he's in a fight he cannot win.

But now he's got another plan, verse 22, and that's where we're going to stop, on the cliffhanger. Good series stop on cliffhangers, don't they?

[36 : 10] What will happen next week? A cliffhanger. Every boy born must be thrown into the Nile. Well, what's God going to do now? How is he going to sort this out?

Perhaps you're in a cliffhanger in your life. Things are on the edge. Go one way or the other. Perhaps you're on the edge of a cliffhanger about whether you should follow and trust in Christ.

Perhaps you've been on that cliff for a little while, teetering. Will I jump and put my faith in Christ and trust him as my savior? Or will I keep on hanging on, hoping that I'll be okay?

Hoping that I can get through without repenting of my sins. Hoping I'm good enough. Perhaps you're in a cliffhanger because of work or family or something else.

Dear friends, let me encourage you. Fear the Lord. Trust him. Let him prove himself faithful to you.

[37 : 13] No one who trusts in him will be put to shame. Take that leap. Put your hope and trust.

Turn to him now that he might receive you and bless you and give you the increase. Let's sing together, dear.

Let's sing together.