

## Exodus 1-4 Israel's Cry and God's Answer

Intro: Why Exodus matters

The best guess is that the events of Exodus happened between 1320 and 1280 BC. That's over 3000 years ago which is pretty ancient history.

Now most of us are probably not that knowledgeable or that interested in Australian history.

And many of us probably don't know a great deal about our own family history, where our grandparents and great grandparents came from and what they did.

We probably don't see it as that relevant for us and how we live today.

So why is it important for us to study a book as ancient as the book of Exodus?

What relevance does it have for us today as Christians?

Let me briefly give you three reasons why Exodus is relevant and important.

- 1) Exodus is part of our family history. The promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, have been fulfilled for us today in Jesus. So we are spiritual heirs of the promises God made to them.
- 2) The Exodus was the defining moment for the Israelites, just as the cross is the defining moment for us. Whenever the Israelites wanted to understand their history, they would look back to the events of the Exodus.
- 3) The God the Israelites worshipped is the very same God we worship today – the God who is unchanging in his character, his power, his love and his faithfulness to

his people. As we study this book, we too can learn what it means to worship this same God today. The Israelites are for us a model, example and warning on how to live and how not to live as the people of God (Rom 15:4, 1Cor 10:11).

This is why Exodus is relevant and important for us.

As we'll see today in today's talk, the God we worship is the one who comes to rescue a people caught in a desperate, hopeless situation, trapped as slaves in Egypt.

**Context:**

As we open up in Exodus chapter, we should realise that it's the continuation of the story of Abraham. It's not a new story or a new book, but rather a new chapter in the ongoing story of God's plan to bring salvation to the world.

Back in Gen 12, Abraham had received some fantastic promises.

Three key promises were these:

- 1) God promised to make him into a great nation. This was despite the fact that Abraham was 75 years old and his wife Sarah was barren.
- 2) God promised to give him the land of Canaan. This was despite the fact that he owned now land and was a wandering nomad.
- 3) God promised to bring blessing through him to all the peoples of the earth.

Three great promises: nation, land, blessing.

## 1) Israel grow under God's blessing 1:1-7

What we find here in the book of Exodus, God is starting to fulfil his first promise of building Abraham's descendants into a great nation.

The names listed in v1-5 are basically Abraham's grand children. They've moved to Egypt to escape the famine. They've settled there. And in v6 we find that their numbers are growing.

*<sup>6</sup> Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, <sup>7</sup> but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.*

Israel was multiplying and growing as God had promised. They were experiencing God's blessing of growing them into a great nation.

## 2. Pharaoh oppresses God's people v8-11

The problem is that in v8-11, as soon as a new king comes to power begins to oppress them. And from a nation of free residents, Pharaoh turns them into a nation of slaves. They might one day break ranks and join their enemies.

You see, Pharaoh saw Israel's population growth as a threat to national security.

And to remove this threat he turn them into a population of slaves.

So this is where Israel finds themselves at the beginning of the book of Exodus. They're **stuck in a helpless situation**.

Their path to prosperity and blessing has been cut short. Shipwrecked at the hands of an Egyptian king. And in this state they had every reason to wonder whether whether God had abandoned them.

Imagine you're working in the accounting firm or in an investment bank. You've been working there for the last 5 years. You know who you are and where you're going in life. Then one day, the Federal police turns up singles you out because you're of Chinese descent. They arrest you and take away every right that you have. The work and to travel. The right to own possessions. And you're carted off to work without pay at one of the mines in WA.

That's what it was like for the Egyptians.

They were carted like animals and worked ruthlessly on one of Pharaoh's building projects.

All they could look forward to each morning was to work on the next labour gang, day in and day out until they died of old age or of exhaustion.

Israel was caught in a hopeless and helpless situation.

### **3) Despite appearances, God is helping Israel v11-22**

What we'll find though, as we continue in v12-22, is that Israel's situation was not as hopeless as it seemed. **Despite appearances, there was an unseen power working on their behalf.**

Because what we'll find is that every attempt Pharaoh makes to control and subdue Israel is ultimately frustrated.

- 1) Pharaoh's first attempt was to control Israel was to put slave drivers over them and oppress them under hard labour. But v12 tells us that this seemed to have the opposite effect. Because

*'[But] the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites*

Instead of reducing this threat, Pharaoh's fear increases. Because the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied. They seemed to just breed like rabbits. What Pharaoh wanted to control is now out of control!

2) Pharaoh's second attempt was more severe. In v15 he instructs the Hebrew midwives to kill all of the newborn babies, but to only let the girls live.

What Pharaoh doesn't count on is that the midwives feared God more than king and didn't do what they were told. And when Pharaoh asked them why they let the boys live, the midwives made up this poor and very lame excuse: *'Israelite women give birth are lot faster*

*than normal. They always give birth before we even arrive'*. Now I wonder how Pharaoh would've reacted. Was he now talking to a bunch of four year-old liars? Somehow, under God's protection these midwives were not killed themselves.

Check it out in v20

*So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous.<sup>21</sup> And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.*

Eg. Pharaoh's plan basically backfires—it was like trying to control a rabbit population with a pesticide, only to find that it's a fertility pill. And to see them become bigger and more numerous than before, roaming all over the countryside.

Why does it all backfire? Why was Pharaoh's plan bound to fail? It was because God is on Israel's side. Pharaoh had unwittingly set himself up against the real superpower.

He thought he was up against a weak and oppressed group of slaves.

Unknown to him, his real opponent was the living and all power God!

This contest actually anticipates what we'll see in future chapters, in the ten plagues of Egypt, where Pharaoh sets himself up to do battle against God.

Here Pharaoh's final solution, in dealing with the slaves is given in v22. He commands his people to throw every Israelite newborn boy into the Nile River. He can no longer trust a bunch of Hebrew midwives.

We don't know the complete outcome of this plan.

But we know that Pharaoh's plan to kill one particular boy is frustrated. God rescues the baby Moses, through of all people Pharaoh's own daughter. She takes pity on Moses and adopts him into Pharaoh's household. Basically Pharaoh raises up in his own household the future leader of Israel. This is the irony the author wants us to see, how everything he launches against the Israelites backfires on him.

Pharaoh is unaware that he'd set himself up against a greater power, a power that was working on behalf of the Israelites. Israel too seems unaware that God was helping them. That even in their helplessness as slaves, God was fulfilling his promises to Abraham, multiplying their numbers, and building them into a great nation.

>Even in the most helpless situation, God is working for the good of his people.

Eg. China – One of the hardest times for the Christian churches in China was during the early years of communism. In the 1960's and 70's, during the cultural revolution, all the missionaries were kicked out.

Churches were shut down. Christians were imprisoned and persecuted. The church was forced underground. But despite the hardship, the church only grew stronger. We only see it in the aftermath. From an estimate of 3m Christians in the 1970's, within three decades, there were estimated to be over 100-130 million Christians. 30-40 times multiplication of the size of the church!

What we learn from history is that the church flourishes most under oppression.

The Christian life too matures most through suffering. Whether we see it or not, God's promise stands – that he sovereignly works all things for our good.

And we need to walk by faith and not by sight.

So what does this mean for us?

This means that God may not take away our suffering or our difficulty. We may remain long term unemployed. God may not heal our sickness. He may not give you the partner you are looking for. But God's promise is to be with you in your suffering. God promises to sovereignly work all things for the good of those who love him.

As it says in Rom 8:29, "*...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*"

For Israel God's purpose was to build them into a great nation.

For us today, God's great purpose is to make us more like Christ, to prepare us for heaven.

In good times and bad times, in our weakness and well as in our strength. Even in helplessness, God is powerfully working for your good, and for the good of his people.

#### **4) God cares for his people**

The book of Exodus also shows us this, God not only working for his people, God also cares for his people. He is the God who loves us.

*V23 During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.*

Despite the death of Pharaoh, their suffering continues and the people cry out to God.

And this is how God responds

V24-25:

*God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.*

>God has heard and remembered his promise to Abraham.

God has seen and was concerned.

That God remembered, does not mean that he had forgotten his promises ever existed. What it implies is that God was about to honour that promise. He was about to act in response to that remembrance. He was about to apply his covenant commitment through his servant Moses.

What we know is that God has already been acting on their behalf, in an unseen way. But here we're also given a glimpse into the heart and mind of God. The God of Israel is not a passive spectator. He's not an unemotional chess player moving the pieces around. He's not a poker-faced God. He is a Father who cares for his children. And he cares intensely and personally for us when we suffer.

Eg. When Jesus came to the tomb of his friend Lazarus.

Jesus saw his friends Mary, Martha and other weeping. John 11:33. It says, *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.* After he asked where Lazarus lay it says in V35: *Jesus wept.*

That's an incredible statement. That Jesus wept when he saw the suffering of his friends.

He loved them with the intensity of a brother and friend. In that sense he suffered with them. Just as he loves us when we suffer, with the intensity of a brother and a friend. Isn't that amazing!

Q: We might ask, if God cares this much, why doesn't he take away our suffering? Mary also asked Jesus why he didn't come earlier before her brother died.

A: The Bible's answer: God always has a greater purpose that is not inconsistent with his love.

Jesus' knew that he would raise Lazarus from the dead. His greater purpose was to reveal his power so that they would put their trust in him. So for a short while he let this family suffer that they might see his glory..

In Exodus, God's purpose was to reveal his saving power to Israel, that they might know him and put their trust in him.

But in the midst of their suffering, he cared for them, he heard then. He saw and he was concerned.

God's concern for Israel is reinforced in what he says to Moses.

*<sup>7</sup> The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. <sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> And now the cry of the Israelites has reached*

*me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. <sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."*

There's no one who cares more. There's no one understands your difficulty better than God. Whatever your struggle, he has seen your suffering and he has heard your prayers. And he cares for you. His plans are for your good.

IN ch 3-4 God finally reveals his plan to Moses.

God plans to bring Israel out into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

In 3:19-22 Egypt will be punished and Israel will be rewarded. When God takes Israel out, it will not be with a whimper. It will be with a honour and wealth, glory. Won't leave empty handed.

God's plans are for our ultimate good.

What we need believe is that God is working all things for our good, even in the most helpless of situations.

### **5) A Picture of the Gospel**

The final thing I want to say is that the events of the Exodus are really a picture of the gospel. Prior to being Christians, the Bible says that we were dead in our transgressions and sins.

We were slaves to sins. As we heard last Sunday in Romans 5:6:

‘You see, at just the right time, when we were still *powerless* (helpless to save ourselves), Christ died for the ungodly.

Caught in a cycle of sin, slaves to the devil Christ died for the ungodly, Christ died for *us* - to bring us to God.

That same love that dies for sinners is the same love that works for us today. It also says in Rom 8:32, if God did not

spare his own son, how will he not along with him graciously give us all things!

In a fallen broken world, there is no power greater than God's power.

There is no love deeper than God's own love for his people.

Israel was in the pit of slavery and despair. For decades they suffered extreme cruelty at the hands of the Egyptians. They were slaves and aliens in a foreign land.

They thought God wasn't with them.

But what they needed to see was, what was happening in v12, that the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied. God was blessing them even in their suffering.

God was with them, fulfilling his plan for them. He was about to send them Moses as the deliverer.

He had heard their prayer. He cared for them.

And if we are caught in a hopeless helpless situation today, we too need to commit our concerns to him. Bring your prayers to him. In 1Peter 5:7 it says, 'Cast your anxiety on him for he cares for you.' Know that God is both able, he cares and he is willing to help us.