

EXODUS 1 (1)

INTRODUCTION

As we start a new series on the book of Exodus we must understand that Exodus is a continuation of the story of Genesis.

1. EXODUS A CONTINUATION OF GENESIS (vs. 1-6)

In the opening phrase of verse 1 there is a very important word missing from our NIV translations. The word is “and.” It should read “and these are the names.” In fact the book, which we now call Exodus, is called by the title of the opening phrase in the original documents. Our title Exodus was given to it at a much later date in order to try and describe what the book is all about.

Exodus means going out and the book is about Israel going out of Egypt. But the title ‘and these are the names’ is attempting to tell us that this is a continuation of the story that started in the book of Genesis.

God took Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans and made a covenant with him and promised to make him into a great nation and give him many descendants so many that like the sand on the seashore they could not be numbered. Abram who became Abraham had a wife Sarai who became Sarah and she was barren. But God promised them a son in their old age. Eventually Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah. God renewed his covenant promise, which he made with Abraham to Isaac who married Rebekah. They had twin boys, Jacob and Esau and God renewed his covenant promise to Jacob. Jacob had many children (12 sons) but it was Joseph that God continued to fulfil his covenant commitments through.

Now it is a little while since we looked at the life of Joseph, but if you remember he was hated by his brothers and sold into slavery. Eventually Joseph served in Potiphar's house and God blessed Joseph greatly. However he was falsely accused of attempted rape and ended up in prison. Eventually because of his God given gift of interpreting dreams he is released from prison and becomes the Prime Minister of Egypt. He saved many lives from a severe famine including the lives of his own family. The book of Genesis ends with the death of Joseph at the age of 110.

Now Exodus opens by filling in the years from Joseph's death to what we find in the book of Exodus with the people of God in slavery. These opening verses are a bridge between the book of Genesis and the book of Exodus. The opening verses are a summary of where the book of Genesis ended, the 12 sons of Jacob and their families are dwelling in the land of Egypt. Verses 6-7 fill in the centuries between the ending of the book of Genesis and the story of Moses and the deliverance of the people of God from Egypt.

Joseph and his generation have died but the people of God have been prolific in bearing children. The story tells us that the Israelites have grown from one patriarchal family to a strong and numerous people. The people were fulfilling God's mandate given in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and fill the earth, but God was also fulfilling his promise to Abraham that God would multiply his descendants as the sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17 & Acts 7:17-18).

God is keeping his promise even though it was many centuries after the promise was first given. This is our first application God does his work according to his own timetable, but he always keeps his promises. One of the problems of living in such an instant society is that we have become accustomed to having everything now. As a result we expect God to act instantly, we have lost the art of being patient and when God does not do things according to our timetable then we can become very discouraged and even question God's desire or ability to fulfil his promises.

God does not act according to our timetable but according to his will purpose and plan. Abraham and Sarah doubted that God would be able to keep his word to them. But in his time, at a time that would bring him the most glory God gave them a son. Abraham learnt his lesson for when he was asked by God to sacrifice his only son he was willing to do it even though Abraham knew that it was through his son that God was going to fulfil his promise to make Abraham descendants into a great nation. But Abraham trusted God and God provided a ram instead. That is what God is looking for from us. He wants us to simply trust him.

No matter what our outward circumstances might be saying, even though that according to our timetable God might appear to be slow in keeping his promises, keep trusting Him for these opening verses teach us clearly that God fulfils his promises. God can be trusted. This is very important for when the tide turns as it does in the book of Exodus and it appears as if God is powerless and defeated it is important to remember that God keeps his promise no matter what outward circumstances may be saying.

Behind all that happens to us individually and collectively, God is keeping his promises to his people.

2. OPPOSITION ARISES AGAINST GOD'S PEOPLE (vs. 8-22)

Verse 7 appears to imply a considerable lapse of time, it is estimated that the children of Israel at the end of this period of time numbered somewhere in the region of 1 million people. After this long period of time a new king arose over Egypt who knew not Joseph (v 8). Now a new king does not necessarily mean the next ruler after the Pharaoh of the Joseph story for Israel were in Egypt for 430 years (Exodus 2:40).

This new king did not know Joseph that does not mean that he not heard of Joseph but that he had no personal and intimate knowledge or dealings with him.

It is also possible that this new king was a foreign invader who knew nothing of Joseph. What we are told is that a new situation has arisen, this new king saw the numerous Israelites as a threat to the Egyptian sovereignty in the land (v 9). The king was worried that should war break out these Israelites would join forces with the enemies of the Egyptians and as a consequence overthrow them. So the King has a plan, actually as we will see he has three plans.

a) Plan A. (vs. 11-14) - Pharaoh enslaves the Israelites and forces them to build store cities of Pithom and Rameses. He set slave masters over them to oppress the Israelites; this was a forced labour scheme, which was hated by the Israelites. But Pharaoh's plan failed because he was not opposing the Israelites so much as opposing God. God had made a covenant with these people and any attempt to harm them was an attempt to harm their God. The more the Israelites oppressed them the more God blessed them and the more they multiplied and spread (v 12). Now here is a profound scriptural principle displayed in many parts of biblical history especially seen during the development of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts.

The more the church was persecuted the more God blessed it. I have said it so many times but it is worth saying again that when you see a persecuted church you see a growing church. Matthew Henry in his commentary commented on this principle.

He said "Christianity spread most when it was persecuted: the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church." God in his infinite wisdom chooses to use the persecution of the church as the means for the promotion and extension of his church. In lands today where the church is persecuted then in those lands you will see church growth it may well be that we do not see it now for the persecution does not always allow us to see it but we can have confidence in God that when Satan is at work then God is also at work.

The response of the Egyptians to the blessing of God was to make the Israelites lives bitter with hard work they worked them ruthlessly. This is what the church can expect from the world today. We can expect the world to hate us and treat us shamefully. Peter told the early church that they were not to be surprised at the painful suffering they were facing, this was not something strange but something expected (1 Peter 4:12).

Persecution is the way that the unbelieving world treats the church. We must not be naïve in this matter because we experience so little in the way of open persecution. This is because of God's goodness to us in restraining the evil hand of the unbelieving world. But just because we in our land do not see any open persecution, the hatred is there festering below the surface and ready to pounce.

I often wonder when doing door to door work that if what was in people's hearts were expressed openly then what sort of things would I and others have to face. Underneath that polite front there is hatred towards Christ and towards his people. It is God who keeps it in check in our land we would be very foolish if we thought otherwise. So if you are facing hostility at work, or at home or in your community then do not be surprised such things are not abnormal but normal.

It is during such times of persecution that God reveals his gracious hand to us in blessing us in all sorts of ways. If it is not with church growth then perhaps it is with personal growth and devotion towards Christ. Perhaps his blessing of his presence is expressed during such times or simply his blessing of answering our prayers.

b) Plan B. (vs. 15-21) – Having seen his first plan fail Pharaoh puts his second plan into action an even more ruthless plan. Now Pharaoh orders male genocide; the plan was to wipe Israel from the face of the earth. Pharaoh commands the Hebrew midwives to destroy newborn Hebrew male children. Now why these two midwives alone are mentioned is not that clear it is probably that they were in charge of the all the other midwives.

It was only the boys that they were to kill because males would grow up and become soldiers and could fight against Egypt.

The Hebrew women could easily be assimilated into Egyptian society through intermarriage. Of course behind this plan as behind all plans against God's people is Satan. Satan knows that by killing all male children then the promise of a male redeemer given in Genesis 1:15 could be thwarted. Even at this stage we see Satan at work trying to stop God's plan of redemption from coming to fruition. Of course he was unsuccessful and Jesus was the fulfilment of the promised redeemer came lived died and conquered, sin Satan and death.

However Satan still has plans to stop people from coming to this redeemer. Perhaps you are not a Christian you have never yet been rescued by God through Jesus Christ. Then Satan is still at work in your life, blinding your eyes to the reality of your plight and convincing you that you do not need rescuing by God. He does this in a number of ways. Perhaps he tells you that you are a Christian already, after all you are not a bad person, you are religious and God is pleased with you.

Perhaps he tells you that you are not really a sinner and don't need rescuing from sin. Perhaps he tells us that this Christianity thing is all a crutch for those who cannot cope in life. Perhaps he tells you that you are basically good enough for God. Satan has all types of plans in order to stop you from coming to Jesus and receiving him as redeemer.

But plan two failed as well because the midwives feared God more than man (v 17). The command from Pharaoh was in direct contradiction to the ways of God. This reminds me of the Apostles stance when asked by the Sanhedrin not to preach about Jesus anymore. They knew the

possible consequences but notice their respond (Acts 5:28-29). They feared God more than man; therefore God must be obeyed rather than any government.

The idea behind the word “fear” is to have a reverence for God that leads to obedience. Time and time again throughout this book the Israelites are going to have to decide whom to obey, Pharaoh or God. The midwives were called to account by the King, God did not hide them they had to face the possible consequences for their actions. I don't think the midwives lied here to save their own skin, they were probably telling the truth, God had blessed the procreation of the Israelites, and perhaps God speeded up their deliveries in order to protect the midwives and his people.

Whatever was the case God was good to the midwives and blessed them by giving them families of their own, and Israel became even more numerous (vs. 20-21). Now the principle that comes from this part of Exodus is that the church today is obligated to obey God before men.

I think this is particularly true in the whole area of abortion. Abortion is an accepted fact in our land today, so few seem to speak up for the unborn, it is often presented in terms of the Mother's right. If ever the church needs to find its voice today and speak out against abortion it is today. The reason we must do so is because we must obey God rather than men. God says it is wrong, it is time that we as the church called it wrong, began to call it sin.

If the Government ever passed a law that made abortion mandatory, say to keep down the population, then we as Christians would have a duty to resist. We have a duty to resist perverted sex from being acceptable in our society, if again a law were passed tomorrow that made it mandatory for the church to accept practising homosexuals and lesbians into its membership then we would have to resist. If a law were passed that made us accept woman as Elders of the church then again we would have to resist.

But unless we are resisting such things now by speaking out against the clear sinful laws which have been passed in our land then we will in all likelihood not speak out if other laws making such sinful practises mandatory came into being. Our motivation for resisting such laws must be the fear of God rather than the fear of man.

c) Plan C (v 22) - Having failed with the first two plans Pharaoh now tries plan C. Having not been able to prevent the birth of Hebrew boys, he now turns to his own Egyptian people and orders them to throw every Israelite baby boy in the river Nile. He is ordering a direct holocaust. It is the same tactic used by King Herod in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus. Was Pharaoh successful in his plan? Well if you don't know the story then you can read on into chapter two or else you will have to wait until next week.

However I want to finish by reminding us that we need to be careful that we do not think that such savage attacks against God's people belong to a bygone age. Recent studies have demonstrated that more Christians were martyred in the 20th century than the previous 19 centuries combined. There are Christians in our world today who suffer brutal torture, arrest, imprisonment and even death for no other reason that they are Christians.

Christians are being persecuted and martyred in our modern world and our world sadly is so indifferent that nothing is even mentioned on our news. Even sadder is the fact that the church is so indifferent that it does not even know such things are going on. If the church does know about such things, it sadly stands by and does nothing in protest. We need to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters and we need to protest to the appropriate authorities and bring it to the attention of the silent majority.

Satan is alive and well in our modern world and is doing all he can to disrupt the work of God and to thwart the purposes of God.

However aren't we thankful that because of Christ and his work of the cross that Satan and all who side with him cannot and will not be successful in stopping God from doing his work of bringing many people to true faith in the Lord Jesus?

Amen