

God Has a Plan

Exodus 1-2

We are starting a new sermon series on the book of Exodus this morning. After going through 1 Corinthians this past year I wanted to change things up and go to the Old Testament to help us see a bigger picture of who God is and what he's doing in human history. And I chose the book of Exodus because in recent years I preached through most of Genesis and want to keep somewhat of a chronological order going. Exodus is a very significant book because it records the beginning of the people of Israel and God's relationship with them. Through it we will see important aspects of God's character and what he is doing to restore fallen humanity to himself. There are many themes that are relevant to our lives as we seek to become more like Christ and carry out his ongoing mission of redemption and restoration here on earth. So I'm excited to preach through it this spring.

The first five books of the Bible were written by a historian named Moses and contain the history of the Israelite people from their beginning to the point in which they were ready to enter the land of Canaan, which is actually where they live today. People try to say the Old Testament is a bunch of fables, but there's a major problem with that. The Jewish people actually exist and they don't like it when people try to erase their history, just like we don't like it if people tried to erase ours. What we're going to be studying is one of the history books of an actual group of people that exists today. Exodus is the second book and records some of the most significant events in the history of the people of Israel. In order for us to understand how these fit in to the overall story I want to give a brief summary of what happened leading up to this book.

The first 11 chapters in Genesis reveal the huge foundational truths about where we come from, why we exist, and what's happened with the human race. In the beginning was God, and God created mankind in his image and likeness to find joy and fulfillment in him on earth. But instead of thriving within that plan and purpose, Adam and Eve decided to go their own way and disobey God. When they did that, they brought the curse of sin and death into the whole human race. From that time on, humans continued to live in sin. People worshipped all kinds of different demon gods and very few worshipped God himself. The Bible doesn't record many details of how bad things got, but there are enough to show that it was awful and remained that way for a long time. At one point things were so bad

that God destroyed the human race and started over with just one family. But as generations came after that, things kept going the same way.

Then, in about 2,000B.C., God started to carry out a plan of redeeming and restoring mankind to himself. It started out very small with only one man named Abraham and his wife Sarah. Through them and their descendants God would reveal himself to the world – he would be their God and they would be his people. And ultimately, it was through them that God himself would come to earth and become a man to take upon himself the sins of the world, die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, raise to life again, and empower his people, the church, to spread the message of salvation throughout the world. God's plan of redemption has been like a mustard seed – it started very small and has grown very slow, but after 4,000 years it's getting very big, and that's where we're at today. But it all started back with Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12.

They were actually idol worshippers, but God revealed himself to them and they listened. He brought them to the land of Canaan and made a covenant with them through which he blessed them as they walked in faithfulness and obedience to him. God promised to bless Abraham and make him into a great nation, and to bless all the nations of earth through him and his offspring, who we now know is Jesus. That covenant was continued through their son Isaac, and his son Jacob, who were nomadic herders. God blessed them abundantly and promised he would give them the land they were living in.

But during Jacob's lifetime, there was a major famine in the world and his family was running out of food and in trouble. Through a miraculous series of events, which we studied in Genesis 37-50, one of his sons, Joseph, who was presumed to be dead, had actually become the most powerful man in Egypt besides Pharaoh, and he brought Jacob's family to Egypt where they had all the food they needed to survive.

That's where the book of Genesis ends and Exodus begins. Exodus records the details of what happened to Jacob's descendants in Egypt for the next 400 years and how they moved on from there to begin their return to the land of Canaan that God promised to give them.

This morning we are going to look at the first two chapters which give us the setting for what happens in the rest of the book.

Read Exodus 1:1-7.

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: ² Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³ Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴ Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵ All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶ Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. ⁷ But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

So this is what happened to Jacob's family right away in Egypt. It also shows how God was being faithful to fulfill his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After God brought Abraham into the land of Canaan, he said in Genesis 13:16: "I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted." That's what was beginning to happen in Egypt. Things were going very well. The family of Jacob survived the famine and was increasing in numbers very quickly, much faster than the people of Egypt. And the land was filled with them. But that actually led to a major turn of events and a long period of suffering for the people of Israel.

Read Exodus 1:8-14.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." ¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. ¹³ So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

God had blessed them so much that they became a threat to Pharaoh and he forced them into slavery. Quite a turn of events. Things were going so well and

now they were going in the opposite direction. They were slaves in Egypt for about 400 years. Genesis 15:16 says there were four generations that lived in Egypt, so three generations of Israelites were born and died as slaves. Decade after decade, slavery was all they knew. And the Bible doesn't record much about what happened during that time other than they continued to multiply and they built cities for Pharaoh.

But when the fourth generation came around, things started to get worse. If you continue reading in chapter 1, you see that because the people of Israel were so numerous, Pharaoh made various attempts to curb the population growth. The first was to command the Israelite midwives to kill every boy that was born. But they wouldn't do it and God protected them and blessed them because of it and the people continued to multiply. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people that whenever an Israelite baby boy was born they were to take him and throw him in the Nile River to die. So it became a very desperate situation. God had blessed the Israelites – and even when they were slaves he protected them and continued to bless them, but now they were facing a level of danger and suffering that would be unbearable.

If you go back to Genesis 15, you'll see that none of this was a surprise to God. It was actually part of his plan. He had a plan for the people of Israel and he was carrying out that plan, even using something as terrible as slavery to do so. God had revealed that plan to Abraham long before any of these things took place. It says this in Genesis 15:13-14: *“Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.”*

So God had a plan and it included bringing Jacob's family to Egypt so they would survive the famine. It included them multiplying like crazy while they were there. It even included several generations of slavery. But his plan didn't end with them in slavery. God told Abraham that he would actually use their slavery to bring judgment on Egypt and richly bless the Israelites as they began their journey back to Canaan. Miraculous things were about to happen that would bless the people and bring glory to God.

So when the order came from Pharaoh to kill the baby boys, God started to move forward with the next part of his plan. And we see that begin to happen in Ex. 2.

Read Exodus 2:1-10.

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. ⁴ And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. ⁵ Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" ⁸ And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹ And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

So God's plan included this Israelite family, a daughter of Pharaoh, and a little baby named Moses who was miraculously spared by being taken into Pharaoh's own house to grow up. God had a plan. Moses would play a significant role in what God was going to do with Egypt and the people of Israel.

But before he stepped into that role, several things happened that are recorded in chapter 2. When Moses grew up, he had to flee from Egypt because he ended up murdering an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a slave. He fled to the region of Midian where he ended up getting married, becoming a shepherd and having children. And that brings us to the end of chapter 2.

Read Exodus 2:23-25.

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his

covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ *God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.*

God knew... That's a term that describes an intimate knowledge. God knew exactly what was going on with the people of Israel. He knew because he had a plan for the redemption of mankind and he was carrying out a significant part of that plan with the people of Israel. The way this is written can come across as if he had kind of forgotten about Israel until he heard their cries for help, but that's not at all what was going on. God had never forgotten. He knew all about their slavery, he knew that things were getting worse, and he remembered all the promises he made about them with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God knew, and he was about to carry out the greatest rescue that's ever happened in world history. And we'll begin to see that unfold next week.

God had a plan. And the primary thing I want us to see today is that God still has a plan that he's carrying out today and it includes you and me. It's actually part of the same plan that the Israelites were part of, we're just further down the road. God is redeeming fallen humanity to himself through Christ and restoring us to our original purpose and glory. He is building a kingdom of faithful followers that we're part of and he's using us to do it.

He's called us to partner with him in spreading the good news of salvation in Jesus and making disciples. And as followers of Christ, we each have a part in that plan, whether you're a teacher, a nurse, a mom or dad, a kid – whatever it is, God wants to use you. In the two chapters we looked at today we saw how God used a farmer, a government official, a couple of midwives, a mom and dad, a sister, a young man, and a priest to carry out his plan – ordinary people like you and me who trusted God and were faithful and humble before him. God used them and he will use you and me.

The way we do that is by living the kind of lives that Jesus shows us to live. Lives that aren't consumed with ourselves and living for the fleeting things of this world, but focused on Christ and what he wants us to do. God's desire and plan is that we grow to become more like Jesus and we use our lives, right where God has us, to make a difference among the people we relate to. As you grow in Christ, God wants you to be a light to your friends, coworkers and family. He

wants us to spread the good news of salvation and help people grow as his disciples. God can use you. You are part of his plan.

And that's what we're trying to do together as a church. We come together to get refocused, to encourage one another, to grow, and to work together to influence people in our community. It happens Sunday mornings, it happens Wednesday evenings, it happens in homes throughout the week. We are part of God's plan and we're in this together. So let's be encouraged to dig in deeper this week, to seek Christ, and look for opportunities to grow and where he can use us to help other people.