

I am fascinated by history—I have been for as long as I can remember. During the first month of my sabbatical, I read more than ten works of historical fiction—some spanning the medieval period in England, others more focussed on WWI and WWII. Perhaps history appeals to me because of my own roots as a second generation Canadian.

My ancestors lived in Germany in the 1700's and identified themselves as Protestant Mennonites. But when the Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great, offered free land to Europeans, these Mennonites left Germany to work this land, enjoying the freedom to worship, and the freedom to educate their children.

These Germans were hard-working, intelligent, and capable organizers—it wasn't long before their numbers began to grow, and their farms began to flourish. This expanding population led to the acquisition of more land, which led to greater prosperity for the German immigrants—before long these Mennonites became a stench in the nostrils of Russia. There were too many of them, doing too well—the privileges they enjoyed were slowly rescinded.

At the time of the first World War, many of the large agricultural estates were run by German Mennonites—they were among Russia's wealthiest citizens. My grandfather, John Peters, and his family, were a part of this successful agricultural movement—he was born in Russia, spoke Russian, but was German through and through; on the screen behind me is a picture of my grandfather with some of his German friends.

After WWI, for many reasons, including the rise of Communism, reforms swept through Russia. Many of these German immigrants

lost everything and ran for their lives. In the early 1920's, my grandfather and his siblings left Russia and came to Canada. He didn't have two nickels to rub together, and didn't speak a word of English, but he began to make a life himself as an immigrant in this new land. The picture behind me shows my grandparents along with their children—my dad is the good looking one with the always-in-fashion bow tie.

History isn't just something that happened a long time ago, in a far off place—history includes your story and mine. History books tell the stories of individuals, people groups, and countries—and for the Christian, history also tells the story of God's presence and providence in giving shape to all that has been, all that is, and all that will be.

Beginning today, and over the following 10 weeks, we are going to be studying the story of an immigrant people, descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They began as a large family who immigrated to Egypt, but within 400 years this family had become a nation within a nation.

This immigrant nation, Israel, became a stench in Egypt's nostrils. Pharaoh's fear of these immigrants led him to adopt state policies of persecution, ethnic cleansing, and finally genocide. Exodus tells the story of God rescuing Israel, leading them out of Egypt, and towards a land of promise.

Introducing the Book of Exodus (and our series)

Before we take a look at our text for today, I want to introduce the Book of Exodus by way of the following question: *what is this book's*

purpose?

The majority of this book comes to us in the form of narrative—Exodus tells a story. This story has the elements common to all good narratives—a dynamic plot line, a protagonist and antagonist, conflict, irony, and much more—but it's not a work of fiction; this is real history. Exodus it is written in the form of history, but without question it is a theological history, in other words, it intends to ***reveal the nature of God through His active participation in the world.***

Theological history has a greater aim than simply stating what happened, instead, it seeks to reveal what happened in a way that highlights God's presence, power, and provision. Exodus tells the story of a God who is in relationship with people, a God who is good, a God who loves, a God who initiates and intervenes in history. Exodus does tell us about the history of Israel, but more specifically, it tells the history of Israel's relationship with the One True God.¹

There is a question I want to pose to you as we begin. Why, thousands of years after the fact, do we study such theological history? What are we meant to gain from it? Are we seeking to find points of similarity between their story and ours? They were an immigrant people, enslaved and oppressed—for nearly every one in this room, our story and experience is very different.

Perhaps we study theological history in order to discover generic truths and principles that we can then apply to our own lives? Let me

suggest a third way. When we study the history of God's relationship to Israel—or for that matter, His relationship to the world—we find a God who does not change like the shifting shadows.²

Our situation might be radically different from these ancient Hebrews, but their history reveals a God who is good and loving, a God who initiates and intervenes in history. This is the God who seeks to commune with us. As we reflect on Him, we find Someone we can trust our lives with.

As we begin, I want to invite you to open your Bibles with me to Exodus 1:1-7; if you are using the Blue Bible in front of you, you can find our text on page _____. If you have a smart phone with you this morning, feel free to open your Bible App and follow along.

1. Why are we here?

Exodus 1 begins with an account of how Israel came to live in Egypt. *“These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; 3 Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; 4 Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. 5 The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt. 6 Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, 7 but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.”*

¹ Tremper Longman III, *How To Read Exodus*, 20.

² James 1:17.

The first five books of the Bible are meant to be read in sequence—Exodus follows Genesis, picking up where the story left off. For those who don't know the story, let me offer a brief recap. The nation of Israel began when God called a particular man, Abram—later to be called Abraham. God called Abraham saying, *“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*³

Later, God confirmed these promises with a covenant; God voluntarily bound Himself to Abraham, promising to bless him with descendants, influence, and land. In Genesis 17:8 God said, *“The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”*

During the time of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, famine came over the land for seven years, but in the Lord's sovereignty and kindness, He had already placed Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, within Pharaoh's court. God spoke to Joseph, he listened, and then he told Pharaoh how to save Egypt and the surrounding peoples from starvation. Pharaoh was so impressed, he made Joseph second in command.

When the famine got really bad, Jacob and his family came to join Joseph in Egypt. God spoke to Jacob saying, *“I am God, the God of*

*your father;” ... “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again.”*⁴

The last chapter of Genesis closes with Joseph offering strange, but faith-filled instructions. *“Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am 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 Israelites swear an oath and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”*

Why were the Israelites in Egypt? They were in Egypt by divine command, under divine promise—one day they would be led out, but as we shall soon see, they were in desperate need of divine intervention.⁵ Let's pick up the story in Exodus 1:8-14; I've entitled this section: *Where are you God? What about your Promises?*

2. Where are you God? What about your promises?

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. 9 “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. 10 Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.” 11 So they

³ Genesis 12:1-3.

⁴ Genesis 46:3-4.

⁵ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 27-28.

put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites 13 and worked them ruthlessly. 14 They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

The word “oppress” means to “bring low,” or, “to beat down;” it’s an apt descriptor of what happened under Pharaoh’s leadership. But oppression escalated into ethnic cleansing, and then to genocide. In vs. 15 and following, Pharaoh instructed the head Israeli midwives to seize and kill every Israeli boy upon birth. Vs. 17, *“The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.”* Vs. 22, *“Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: ‘Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.’”*

There’s bad, and then there’s horrific—this is horrific. *How could God let this happen?* If only we could put God on the witness stand, and get Him to explain Himself—there so much that we, that these Israelites, would ask Him. ***Where are you God? What about your promises? Why aren’t you acting?***

The questions they were asking were met with the silence of heaven—perhaps you have experienced this same silence. They were in Egypt by divine command, under divine promise, and in desperate need of divine intervention. Nowhere does the Scripture tell us that God was punishing Israel for their sin; no reason is ever given for

their years of pain and suffering. Instead, we see a story of God working out His purposes for Israel in a way and time that was beyond them, and us. God acted on their behalf, and ultimately gave them reasons to turn to Him in faith and hope.

3. Heroic Faith. Let’s now turn our attention to Exodus 2. As Pharaoh attempted to crush Israel, we see the first glimmers of God’s intervention through the heroic faith of women.

There is a delicious irony running throughout these first 2 chapters of Exodus; here we have a brilliant example of theological history. Remember, theological history tells us about events but the details are meant to reveal God’s relationship with people, His action in the world, and what is most important to Him. There’s a small detail in our text that is easy to overlook but it is theologically charged—in chapter 1, Pharaoh remains unnamed. The most powerful man in the world, the King of Egypt, doesn’t even get named, but two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, are named and celebrated.

These two women, at threat to their own lives, honoured God and refused to be a part of Pharaoh’s genocide—we’re told that God was kind to these women and He blessed them with families of their own. Shiphrah and Puah are named while Pharaoh is not. Our secular history book take care to name all the “great ones”—those who were important, those who shaped the course of history. Theological history is no different, these women were great in God’s sight, and their heroic faith continues to speak to us today.

Before we meet Moses, we are introduced to his mother and sister—

Jochebed and Miriam.⁶ Jochebed gave birth to a baby boy, but rather than kill him, she risked her life, hiding him for three months. Pharaoh's mandate was to drown baby boys in the Nile, but in an act of defiance, Jochebed preserved his life, coating a basket with tar and pitch so that her boy could float safely on top of the Nile.

And then there's Miriam—everyone needs a sister like Miriam: brilliant, audacious, and creative. Pharaoh's daughter, Egypt's Princess, went down to the Nile to bathe, and there, floating among the reeds, she found a beautiful, Hebrew, baby boy. The Princess knew her father's policy—kill them all—but when she saw the boy crying, her heart was filled with love.

And that's when Miriam acted—she offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for the Princess, and when the Princess agreed she took her baby brother back to the arms of her mother. With a handful of Miriam's, you could rule the world! What heroic faith!

And then there's the tender-hearted Princess—her father was a murderer, but she was not. When the boy was weaned, he was adopted by the Princess—apparently Pharaoh couldn't say no to his daughter because policy or no policy, this Hebrew boy, Moses, grew up in Pharaoh's royal house. Her compassion was used by God to rescue the boy who would one day lead Israel out of Egypt.

The weak and the powerless can stand firm in the face of the strong and mighty—these women are shining examples. If we were to search ancient Egyptian history books, these women would not be named; they would not qualify as “great ones.” But the way God

reads history, these women are the “great ones” and Pharaoh is not. You don't have to be rich, powerful, or famous to be included among God's great ones, but when we dare to trust Him, to stand for Him, we make His list—the only list that counts.

In the final 10 minutes, I want to summarize and apply Exodus 1 and 2 under the following heading—**Sovereignty, Promise, and Providence**.

When it comes to God, there is so much we don't understand, but that makes sense doesn't it? How could limited human beings hope to fully understand an Unlimited God? It's an impossibility. But then, we don't need to fully understand someone in order to know them, love them, or trust them. I've been married for nearly 18 years, and I don't fully understand my wife—I can't read her mind, I can't perceive the movements of her heart, but I know her, love her, and trust her completely. So it is with God.

God is **Sovereign**—He doesn't always explain Himself. His ways and thoughts don't always align with our thoughts. He isn't compelled to act on our demands or live up to our expectations. God doesn't always explain Himself but He always reveals Himself. He is a God who is good, a God who loves, a God who initiates and intervenes in history.

Remember God's **Promise** to Jacob? “*Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again.*” When we find ourselves in trouble, pain, or suffering, we are tempted to think

⁶ Jochebed is not named in Exodus 2, that comes later in Exodus 6:20.

that God has abandoned us, or that He is punishing us for some misdeed. I suspect more than a few Israelites were thinking these very thoughts. But it's in times of trouble, when we are at the height of pain, that we need to look up and remember God.

What does Jesus **promise**? John 16:33, "*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" Matthew 28:20, "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" Hebrews 10:37 says, "*In just a little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay.*" Revelation 21:5 **promises** that on that day, every tear will be wiped away—death, mourning, and pain will be no more.

In the mean time, God supplies us with strength, wisdom, love, healing, and transformation—He has **promised** all of this and more.

Sovereignty, Promise, and Providence—all is not lost, God is not absent, and this world is not out of control. Providence is a word that speaks to God's compassionate care—His love for us prompts Him to act.

Pharaoh attempted to crush Israel but Exodus 1:12 says, "*the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.*" Tell me, how does something like that happen? Pharaoh had the power and the means to implement a systematic, nation-wide, genocide—but Israel flourished and expanded? It wasn't blind luck, it was **Divine Providence**. Shiphrah and Puah, Jochebed, Miriam, and the Princess—all of them were raised up by God to rescue and preserve His people.

There are times in our lives when we cannot see, hear, or feel God, and at those times we are tempted to believe that God is absent or uncaring. Exodus 1 and 2 reminds us that God is always present and working, whether we sense Him or not.

So in light of this revelation, how shall we live? We are to make our way through life convinced of His kindness, grounded in His goodness, and hemmed in by His love—in other words, we are to walk by faith.

One author says the following about faith—biblical faith is a **trusting** faith, and **expectant** faith, and a **patient** faith.⁷

Our **trust** rests in the knowledge that God's sovereignty superintends every aspect of our world. God's providence is at work in every situation—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Romans 8:28 reminds us that God is at work in *all things*, **in every situation** to bring about His good purposes—in us, and in His world.

Our faith is **expectant** because God is always at work through unexpected people, in unexpected way. Midwives, Mothers, Big Sisters, and Princesses have this in common—each can be used as God's agent. Many of you are being faithful, and God is using you as His agent—you may not see how your life is fulfilling God's purposes, but God's sees you, and He names you as one of His "great ones."

And finally, our faith is to be **patient**. Lamentations 3:19 and following says, "*I remember my affliction and my wandering, the*

⁷ Motyer, 36.

bitterness and the gall... Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

The Lord's Supper: Are you convinced of the Lord's kindness? Are you convinced that He is present in your circumstances? Are you convinced that you are hemmed in by His love—before and behind, above, below, beside, and within?

1 John 3:16 says, *"This is how we know what love is—Jesus Christ laid down His life for us."* God the Son was born of the virgin Mary—flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone and yet very God of very God. God the Son came as a man, that we might know the Triune God of Grace, that we might participate in the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

How can an unholy people commune with a holy God? Jesus is the One who bridged the gap. His entire life was a sacrifice to God—His obedience, His faithfulness, His worship—His whole life was a sinless, and acceptable offering to God. When Jesus submitted to death on the cross, He didn't die for His own crimes—He died bearing the weight of our sin, failure, and shame. When He died, sin's penalty was satisfied, but when He rose, sin's power was broken.

What He did, He did for us; what He achieved, He achieved for us. And where He now sits—at the Father's right hand—we are now welcome. Jesus is present here this morning by the Spirit; He is the Host of this holy meal.

There is more going on in this meal than the simple act of remembrance—Jesus is really present and we've been invited to commune with Him. Through this Table we are invited to taste and see that the Lord is good. This morning, He comes to us—as we come to Him—and offers us love, mercy, wisdom, and strength. His resources are infinite, they never run dry—He is for you not against you.

On the night Jesus died, while seated around a table, Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, *"Take and eat; this is my body."* In the same way, He took a cup *"and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant—there's that word again, Covenant, God's promise; Jesus shed blood is the demonstration of God's promise to be merciful and compassionate—This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"*

As you come to eat and drink this morning, look to the One who has invited us—the Lord Jesus Christ. He is Faithful and True; He is Present and Powerful; He is at work in all of your circumstances; His compassionate care will lead you through.

Invite Servers to come forward

Worship

Benediction