

Title: From Israel to Israel
Text: Exodus 1
Theme: God's not so hidden agenda
Series: Exodus #1
Prop Stmt. God's plan cannot be stopped.

What did you do about the sermon last week?

A guy called his girlfriend's cell phone and got her VM which said, "Hi, thanks for caring enough to call me, I'm making some changes right now, so please leave me a message. If I don't get back with you that means you are one of my changes."

Well, we are making some changes. We are going from studying the book of 1 Corinthians to studying through the book of Exodus and the book of Exodus itself is a book of enormous change. It is the story of how a man's family changes into a nation, and how that nation changes location, changes identity and changes other nations.

But Exodus is a book that is ultimately about Christ. It begins with Israel in Egypt and ends with Israel at Mt. Sinai. We could divide it up accordingly:

Israel in Egypt – 1-15
Israel at Sinai – 16-40

But, I think we ought to add one more division.

Israel in Egypt 1-15
Israel at Sinai – Law 16-24
Israel at Sinai – Tabernacle 25-40

Over 15 chapters of this book are given to the details of the materials and construction of the tabernacle. The tabernacle occupies an enormous place in this book because this is the place where God is going to live. And God is going to live right in the middle of His people. Now, when you start looking at all of the particulars regarding the construction of the tabernacle, it may initially seem to be a little too detailed and picky for our fast-paced, high-speed internet world, until we open the pages of the NT and we read in the first chapter of John that Jesus "tabernacled" on this earth and in the second chapter He refers to himself as a temple. Then when Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that your body is the temple of God, you begin to see that there is more to this story than what first meets the eye. The truth is, we are going to see the fingerprints of Christ all over this book. Rightfully interpreted and preached, the book of Exodus would never again be welcome in a synagogue because the hero of the story is Christ. He is the Passover Lamb, the Savior, the High Priest, the tabernacle, and the glory of God. This book is all about Him and His people. Yes, this book was God's Word to His people then, but it is still His Word to his people now. My task is not to bring Exodus into our world, it is already here. My task is to help you see how this book defines the world in which you live.

Exodus is a book of historical theology that is told as a story. In other words this book is historical. It is factual. But, the primary concern that Moses had when writing this book was not so much historical as it was theological. For example, we read in verse 8, “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” (ESV) and we want to know, who was that king? Was it simply a new king or perhaps a new dynasty? Was there a rebellion, a takeover plot, an assassination perhaps? Was this Amenhotep I or Thutmose I (which would explain where Moses got his name) or was this Hyskos? In the next chapter (2.23) we read that “during those days the king of Egypt died...” Again, which king? How did he die? How long did he reign, etc. The identification of the particular Pharaoh in view was not the point that Moses was trying to make. This is so good for us to keep in mind. History apart from God is meaningless. And yet, that is how it is generally taught. People can learn the facts of the past but they cannot tell you the significance of it. It is precisely because of that inability to know the true meaning of history is why there is such a bias against the Bible as historically authoritative. Contemporary historians always seem to be so surprised when the historical record of the Bible is demonstrated to be true. Why is the Bible consistently under attack? Why do people spend so much energy and passion attempting to find historical errors in the Scriptures? The reason is because people naturally want to reject the meaning that God gives to history. That is what sets the Bible apart from all other books. It tells history as His story. It demonstrates God’s Sovereign plan and purposes being carried out by His providential hand. This historical record carries a message, and the implications of the message are what natural man wants to hide his face from. Oh yes, this book is historically rich, but it is so much more. As we will see, it is a literary masterpiece. This book is full of drama that takes us from palace halls of the pre-eminent empire of the world to a deserted wilderness, from the waters of the Nile to the waves of the Red Sea from the backside of a desert to the footings of the pyramids. It is full of both promise and disappointment. The victories are grand and the defeats are dark. No sooner are the children of Israel delivered through the Red Sea, but they are collectively complaining. Their promise to obey is followed by their blatant disobedience. God feeds them from the sky and gives them water from a rock. And then they complain about the lack of variety in their meals. They say they want to know God, but when they encounter Him at Mt. Sinai they cry out to Moses and beg not to repeat the experience. This book is all this and more but it is so much more than intriguing literature. This book is God’s story about Himself and His people. In this book God gives to this insignificant nomadic group of people, His own name. He delivers them, guides them, establishes an everlasting covenant with them, teaches them how to worship and comes to live with them. He tells the story through His servant Moses because His people needed to know and remember these truths before they went into the land that He had promised to them. And what they needed to know – you must know.

The book of Exodus is part of the opening section of the 1st Testament of the Bible. This opening section (Genesis – Deuteronomy) is known as the Pentateuch. Exodus is the 2nd of those five books, and technically begins with the word “and” (Heb. *waw*), because this book continues the story that was started in the first book. These five books were written for the nation of Israel before they entered into their land because they needed to know the answer to this question: “What do God’s people look like and live like?” The answer

to that question is: Since God is unique; you have to believe and behave differently than your world. ***God made you to be a people for Himself through whom He will rule and with whom He will live.*** But, this book comes with a warning. Revelation demands a response. Ever since the day Moses was distracted by the unusual sight of a bush that was on fire but was not consumed, he became a man, called. It was a calling that would forever change his life and history for that matter. The calling of God upon a person is a wonderful and yet deeply frustrating tension. How do you convince people of the reality of God? How do you keep following this God when your world is screaming at you to shut-up and go the other way? Why do you keep believing God when it seems that every act of trust just makes things worse? Why would you ever follow God when He asks of you the impossible? It had to be extremely gratifying for Moses to look at the faces of the people who in closing verses of this same book saw the glory of God inhabit the tabernacle that was built in the middle of his people. Moses had answered the call. This book in that sense is like the burning bush, so I must warn you. If you come to hear the message, you will discover that you are standing on holy ground. Before, you thought of it only as dirt, rocks and plants. But, when you know His name you will see differently. In these pages you will hear His voice. In these stories you will see His hand and in this History you will see His plan. In this book He will call you and that calling to be part of the people through whom He will rule and with whom He will live is personally intense, extremely challenging, truly satisfying and collectively, nothing short of awesome.

1. **Sneaking a peek at the promises of God.** (1-7)

The book itself begins sounding a lot like the book of beginnings that precedes it. The book of Genesis is the story of God setting apart a people for Himself. That story line is seen in the repeated line about generations.

“This is the book of the generations of Adam.” (Genesis 5.1)

“These are the generations of Noah.” (Genesis 6.9)

“These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth.” (Genesis 10.1)

“These are the generations of Shem.” (Genesis 11.10)

“Now these are the generations of Terah.” (Genesis 11.27)

Read Genesis 12.1-3

From this point on, God’s promises to Abraham focus on two areas: people and land. In Genesis 12.7 we read, “The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ***“To your offspring I will give this land.”*** These two ideas continue to play out in the rest of the book.

“These are the generations of Isaac.” (Genesis 25.19)

“These are the generations of Jacob.” (Genesis 37.2)

“Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel...” (Genesis 46.8)

When Genesis ends, the people of promise had just survived a threat on their existence, but were now in another land. And, when the book of Genesis ends, this “great nation” that God promised to Abraham only numbered seventy people.

The first six words in the Hebrew text of Exodus 1.1 repeat the first six words of Genesis 46.8. There is more than historical and literary continuity here. There is a meaning that is given. God had promised to give to Abram a great people and a land. The book of Genesis ends with Jacob’s burial in Canaan and with Joseph’s desire to follow the same thing. In fact, his bones are kept in anticipation of that promised event. Every time the people of Israel went by the temporary grave of Joseph, they were reminded of the promise that God was going to give them their own land. A great people, and our own land; now, we begin to see the first part of that promise begin to unfold. Abram’s people begin to multiply. The names of the sons of Israel show a movement that is important to grasp. This listing and the story that follows shows that God’s plan goes from a man to a family, and now to a nation. And this nation is growing. Verse 7 slaps us in the face with this point. *“but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous so that the land was filled with them.”* Do you get the impression that the text is trying to tell you something? These people were multiplying all over the place. There are words in this verse that Moses used in Genesis to speak of the rapid multiplication in the animal kingdom. Fact is, that is the key word of the entire chapter. But, what about the land?

This is why I think there is something else that is going on. Up until this point in the story, we are not aware of anything that is keeping the children of Israel in Egypt. They are growing and apparently prosperous. Large families today look like a lot of mouths to feed and expensive car insurance premiums. Large families in those days meant prosperity. Their size and influence is perceived as a national threat in the next verse. Did they get comfortable in Egypt? Did they forget about the land that God had given to Abraham? Did the food and drink and ball teams and climate in Egypt become their own, and the only thing left to do was accept the religion? What may look like a tragedy on the surface, may have in reality been a gracious act of God to keep the children of Israel from being swallowed by the land and culture of Egypt. God had promised to make them a great nation and to give them their own land. It is fascinating to see how God carries this out.

2. Natural man hates the promises of God. (8-14)

The second section of 7 verses finds a new sheriff in town. I am not going to tell you all of the historical possibilities, only because if it really mattered to Moses, he would have told us. It is a matter of historical record that barely seventy years after the death of Joseph the former dynasty of Pharaoh’s was overthrown. This may be what Moses is referring to, but in verse 8, this guy is in full fledged panic mode.

Hey, Cairo, we’ve got problems! The problem is that the children of Israel are, in the mind of this new king, a growing threat in his own backyard. He thinks he has an immigration problem. So, he goes on a propaganda campaign that works. He tries to

convince the people that they ought to fear the Israelites, and by v. 12, they “dread” them. But, Pharaoh is a man of action, not just words. He puts a plan into action.

Plan #1 – Make them slaves.

Now, remember his problem: the children of Israel are multiplying too fast. His solution is to make them slaves. So, he does (v.11) and the result? (v.12) They grew even faster. Sounds like big government at its finest – doesn’t it? So, instead of saying, “wow, that didn’t work,” They went into second phase of the plan. If working them as slaves made them increase more, then why don’t we work them even more? Plan #2 – Make them work harder. The real goal starts to become apparent in the third section of 7 verses. Genocide! This will stop the promises of God won’t it?!

3. **No king can stop the promise of God!** (15-21)

I love this story. Shiphrah and Puah are two of my heroes. They are Hebrew midwives, who are either unmarried, or married and childless. They are in right in the middle of this enormous population explosion. Wives are getting pregnant all around them and babies are being born all of the time. They were probably two leaders of the midwives, and not the only ones, but Pharaoh either attempts to elicit their support or intimidate them. He tells them that when a baby is born, if it is a male child, kill it.

For the first time in the book, God is mentioned in v.17. He has been here all along, but now the drama is takes on a new dimension. This not too subtle plot plays out on a grand stage. Who are you going to fear – God or Pharaoh? Who is the LORD that I should obey Him? Who are you going to serve? Whose law will you follow? In this case, Pharaoh picked on the wrong girls. He picked on two girls who fear God. There is nothing that makes an ego-maniac more maniacal than when he cannot intimidate someone! He thinks he’s got a plan, but again his plan does not work. Back in v.10, oh wise-one said, “come we must deal with them shrewdly” only to have a couple of slave girls deal shrewdly with him. They flat out are not going to kill babies. Now, there has been much discussion that has arisen over the ethical dilemma that these girls were in and they are often used as an illustration of situational ethics. In other words, it was okay for them to lie to the Pharaoh (v.19) because they were trying to do a good thing. And God seemed to be okay with what they did (v.20) and rewarded them. First of all, I don’t think they lied.

Look at what they said – v.19. They simply pointed out that Pharaoh’s plan to make them tough through hard work was successful. These were tough women. They, had babies and got back to work. They were not like the Egyptian women who themselves were like babies. I believe that it is also very likely that because these women feared God that they in turn dealt shrewdly with the situation and possibly let the people know of the Pharaoh’s plan, so that they were called to the birth scenes a little too late in the process. At any rate, look at what happens. The two women who up until this point did not have families of their own, at the end of this chapter have joined in the party, and now, even

more children are being born. Pharaoh's plan is a complete and utter failure. No king, not even the mightiest ruler in the ANE can stop the promise of God.

4. **The stage is set.** (22)

Well now the stage is set. The gloves have come off. Pharaoh now tells the nation, kill every boy by throwing him into the Nile River. Use the water to drown your enemy! Do you not find that a little more than slightly ironic? Water is another, not so subtle plot. But, here we come to the end of the first chapter and our story teller has us on the edge of our seats. What is going to happen to these people? What is going to happen to God's promises?

What is the scene?

- born into bondage
- helpless to escape
- threatened with death and eventual extinction
- Only a miracle can save them now!

God has them, right where he wants them. These people need a Savior.

Friend, that is exactly the condition into which you and I are born.

What does this have to do with Christ?

What are you going to do about this?