

Exodus 1-2

Study Outline

Launching question

What one or two historical events most shape our UK national self-identity?
What national outlook and attitudes are the product of this history?

Read 1:1-7

From memory try to draw a family tree of the story of Genesis (- include Abraham, Joseph, Jacob, Isaac; how many wives can you remember?! etc)

Read Genesis 12:1-3 (and 7)

What does God promise Abraham? (make a list separating out each bit)

How are these promises fulfilled by Exodus 1:1-7 (and cf 12:27)?

What do 2:23-25 tell us about what God is like?

Why start the book of *Exodus* like this?

Read 1:8-22

How does Pharaoh react to God fulfilling his promises? Why?

How successful is Pharaoh in his plans? Why shouldn't this surprise us?

Why do the midwives act as they do? (*more than one answer*)

Read Gen 12:1-3. How do God's promises affect Pharaoh / the midwives?

Read 2:1-22

There is lots of irony in the story of 2:1-10 ... how does it mock Pharaoh?

Divide the whole of 2:1-22 into four or five stories.

In each story, who needs to be rescued, and why are they rescued?

If people are able to rescue the needy, how much more God: read on!

Read 2:23-25

In ch 2, there are 2 stories about people 'crying': what happens in each case?

What is God's reaction to his needy people?

What does this chapter lead us to expect that he will now do?

Why will he act to rescue? (*link this back to the promises in Gen 12:1-3*)

What do 2:23-25 tell us about what God is like?

Thinking it through

What event shapes Israel's self-identity (according to these chapters)?

Why is it so important for Israel to remember what God has promised?

Why is it important for Christians to remember what God has promised?

How will this shape our self-identity as Christians?

Does this chapter lead us to expect God will rescue us from hard situations?

Why / why not?

In what ways do we doubt that God will do what he's promised us?

What response is appropriate to the God who always keeps his promises?

What makes it hard for us to trust God about the future?

... and how does this story help us with those feelings?

Exodus 1-2

Study 1

THE GOD WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Summary

Exodus is the story of God showing us what he is like: he is the God who rescues his people. He does this in faithfulness to his promises, for his own glory, and out of sheer mercy and kindness to those he has chosen. We should expect to know our God better through reading this book.

The story so far

Exodus 1:1-4 links back to the story with which the book of Genesis ends.

Genesis 1-11 tells of the 'beginning' (= what 'Genesis' means) of God's world and of its descent into sin and death: the good world of 1:31 became utterly spoilt by 'every inclination of the thoughts of man's heart' (6:5-7). God's act of creation is undone by humanity's rebellious act of 'de-creation'.

God initiates his solution to this situation by promising Abram in 12:1-3:

- a land (the boundaries of which are defined in subsequent chapters);
- innumerable progeny (so that he will become a great nation);
- blessing (and through him, blessing for all the world).

Of these three, Genesis focuses particularly on the promise of children: against all the odds, a barren, very elderly couple give birth to Isaac, who in turn fathers Jacob (= Israel), who in turn fathers 12 sons. By Ex 1:5, this family numbers 70. By 1:7, they are 'exceedingly numerous', even threatening their hosts (1:12). By 12:27, there are 600,000 (plus women and children)! 1:7 echoes Genesis 1:28 reinforcing the point that God's promise to Abram is reversing the effects of the Fall. (The books of Exodus to Deuteronomy focus on the fulfilment of the promise of land [cf Ex 3:8].)

God introduces himself as the God of these promises (3:6), and everything he will do in *Exodus* is driven by these promises made via this family (2:24).

Theme Sentence

God always does whatever he promises.

Ideas for application

- confidence in God: he will do for us everything he has promised and, as this story shows, nothing can stand in the way of him doing that.
- expectation because of God's faithfulness. Nothing will change him from his pre-published intended action, and this is very reassuring for our future: we know he'll stay committed to his promises to the end.
- trust in God's trustworthiness/reliability, especially in an age of spin.

Commentary

- 1-7 These 2 chapters are framed by statements about God's covenant: here it's implicit in the reference to Israel's sons, and in 2:24-25 it will be made explicit. So, the story of the exodus will be about God being faithful to his covenant promises. This will be the first lesson about God: what he says he will do, he does. This point is all the more emphasised by the events through which Israel's family arrived in Egypt: despite all the hostility and betrayal within their family (Gen 37-50), God has faithfully preserved and prospered his people, so they are now the 'great nation' he had promised.
- 9-10 Ironically, the very sign of God's faithfulness to his promises (ie Israel's growing population) is what challenges Pharaoh, so that he feels his power base threatened. This is an early indication of what the Exodus will be about: who is stronger? who will be victorious? can the promise of God survive the might of a world superpower? what happens when the most powerful empire on the face of the earth sets itself against the God of all the world? This theme can be traced throughout the Bible from the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:28-30), to the killing of Jesus (Acts 4:27-28). But as Psalm 2:1-6 says, God laughs at it all!
- 11-14 Stage One of Pharaoh's plan is hard labour. Historically, the pyramids and the Nile canals bear testimony to the effectiveness of this as a means of great industry, but not of birth control!
- 15-22 Stage Two is genocide. First the midwives (15), then the general population (22) are required to assist the totalitarian tyrant.
- 12, 20 In the midst of such dark times, God continues to work out his promise: the worst that Pharaoh can imagine is, ironically, only serving to 'multiply' the people still further.
- 17-21 We don't know if the midwives were lying in 19, but it's clear that the reason why they act as they do, even courageously defying the king's command, is because they 'feared God'. And for this fear of him, shown in their commitment to serve him rather than Pharaoh, they are blessed, again in fulfilment of God's promise that he would bless those who bless Abraham's descendants (Gen 12:3). So here is yet another instance of God doing what he said he would.
- The corollary of this is that God also promised to curse those who cursed his people (Gen 12:3): what then will God do about Pharaoh?
- 1-10 The introduction of Moses takes the story to its next stage. There are many parallels between Moses and Israel. As with Israel, Moses lives as an alien in a foreign land (2:22). As with Israel, Moses meets with God at Mount Horeb (3:12). As with Israel, Moses is

rescued from Pharaoh (2:1-10), through water with reeds (2:3). As with Israel, the Egyptians give Moses' family gifts (2:9).

But perhaps the clearest parallel is in the way the chapter opens (with Moses crying 6) and ends (with Israel crying 23). The chapter poses a question and raises an expectation: given that God rescues a crying Moses from certain death, what will he do about a crying Israel to whom he has pledged himself in covenant love?

- 7-9 The rescue of Moses is a mockery of all that Pharaoh seeks to do: Pharaoh's family pays Moses' own mother to raise the person who will be used by God to achieve the very thing Pharaoh was trying to stop! It is a wonderful story to illustrate how futile, foolish and utterly laughable it is that anyone should think they can prevent God being faithful to his covenant. No wonder the New Testament speaks of the cross making a mockery and public spectacle of the forces of evil: this is the way God works, using humanity's evil plotting to achieve his salvation purposes (cf Col 2:15).
- 11-15 The whole of ch 2 is structured to give us stories of people who are disadvantaged or needy, and how they are rescued. It's not just Moses rescued by the princess, but also Hebrews rescued by Moses, Reuel's daughters rescued by Moses, and Moses rescued by Reuel. This is all to lead up to 23-25: if humans can rescue other humans who need help, how much more will the God full of compassion and mercy, who has established a covenant with his people (as Genesis has shown) rescue them?
- 16-22
- 23-25 Four verbs describe God's attitude towards his covenant people: he *heard*, he *remembered*, he *saw*, he *knew* (2:24-25). 'Remembering' the covenant is a phrase used several times in Genesis, and particularly it is in the midst of his judgment that God remembers (eg Gen 8:1, 19:29). God remembering is always to do with God going to the next phase of his plan to save someone. The scene is now set to see exactly how God will go to the next phase of his plan to save his people from Pharaoh. We expect action.

The faithfulness of God to his covenant promises is a much bigger theme than just this chapter or this story, dramatic though it is.

Galatians 3:16 makes the (rather surprising) point that the promises made to Abram are all about Jesus: since the 'offspring' in Gen 12:7 was not plural, but singular, God always had Christ in mind. Romans 4:16 explains that all 'who share the faith of Abraham' (and that means all Christians) are included as his offspring. Hebrews 11:8-16 tells us that the land in Abram's mind was 'a better country, a heavenly one', not just Palestine. Etc.

So, this entire story about God's covenant promises is looking forward to Jesus, and through him to us, and beyond us to heaven. That God was stirred to save here in Exodus is great reassurance for us and all the world.