

Church Growth

Exodus 1:1-7

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus, chapter 1. Exodus is Moses' sequel to the epic story of Genesis. When we studied Genesis we said that it provides us with the foundational doctrines of the faith. That is, without an understanding of Genesis, you can't adequately understand the New Testament. In fact, many of the themes in Genesis are developed in the New Testament itself. In the same way Exodus continues to lay that foundation for the New Testament faith. We'll see Paul make that statement precisely in just a few moments.

Exodus resumes Genesis' account, the story of God's sovereignty in the world before the patriarchs, the primeval world in Genesis 1 through 11 and the story of God's dealings with the patriarchs from Genesis 12 through 50. Moses clearly connects the subject matter of Genesis with Exodus by giving us that genealogy in this passage right before us in verses 1 through 5. He gives us the patriarchs in matrilineal order, thus connecting the story of Exodus with the story of the patriarchs in Genesis, but he also does it by mentioning Joseph's death, in verse 6, that had taken place in the very last verses of the book of Genesis. And so in a second way Moses connects Exodus' story with Genesis.

And then finally in verse 7 of Exodus, chapter 1 Moses connects the story of Exodus with the very creation ordinances that had been given at the beginning of the book of Genesis. Indeed Moses begins Exodus where Genesis left off, with Israel in Egypt, and he proceeds not only to tell the story of Israel's divine deliverance from oppression, the oppression of slavery, but to reveal for all believers in all times what it means to be redeemed by God, what it means to live with God and how we are to worship God.

Those three grand subjects, it seems to me upon reflecting upon this great book. Those three grand subjects dominate the story of Exodus. Exodus lays a foundational theology in which God reveals Himself in His name and in His attributes, His redemption, His law, how He is to be worshiped.

The narrative of Exodus is interesting. Sometimes it's a gripping saga like in the

first eighteen chapters where the story of God's deliverance of Israel out of the oppression of Egypt moves at a rapid pace. Then in the middle of the book from 19 to 24 you have the giving of the law. Some of the statutes in minute detail about how the law is to be observed in the life of Israel as a civil community.

And then, from chapter 25 to the end we again meet minute detail, but now not of laws for moral behavior of believers in the community of Israel, but now laws for worship. In fact, instructions on how the tabernacle is to be constructed and how it is to be used. And so we see interesting variations in the type of literature that we find in the book of Exodus.

The book, as I've already hinted at, divides into three parts. Part 1, chapters 1 through 18. That's the story of the Exodus itself. Part two, chapters 19 through 24. That section concentrates on the consecration of Israel as a people for God and gives us what is known as the Book of the Covenant in which God sets for His commands for the people of God. The third section of the book of Exodus, focuses on worship. How we are to glorify God from chapter 25 through 40.

Now the first part of the book which we're going to begin to study tonight itself subdivides into three parts. The first part you will find in Exodus 1 through 6. Those chapters speak of the trial and bondage of Israel in Egypt. But it's very interesting. Moses says very little about the oppression that Israel underwent in Egypt. Isn't it interesting that in the section where he would reveal the bondage of Israel, that he would say actually very few words about it. He is very sparing in his description of the nature of the oppression. He spends most of his time talking about the processes of God's liberation of the children of Israel from that oppression. Isn't that interesting? Had you been in oppression for 430 years, you would likely have spilled a lot of ink describing, but Moses focuses rather on what God did to bring the children of Israel out of that oppression. So we see that in chapters 1 through 6.

Then in chapters 7 through 12, we see the Lord's judgment against Egypt. Egypt had been the national instrument of oppression of the people of God. Now we see God's just judgment against Egypt displayed, especially in the plagues from chapter 7 to chapter 12.

And then finally in chapters 13 through 18 we have the account of the Exodus itself, the departure from Egypt on the way to Sinai to worship the Lord. And so this first section of the book is in the form of a gripping historical narrative worthy of the best of sagas ever written.

Now, two preparatory thoughts before we look at the book of Exodus. First of all, remember this. Paul tells us that what happened in the book of Exodus was not only written for our instruction, but it happened for our instruction. Now that's kind of amazing. He's speaking to Christians, and he's saying that the events of the book of Exodus were not only written for our instruction, but they happened -

don't believe me? Turn with me to I Corinthians, chapter 10. Keep your finger there at Exodus 1, and you'll want to have your Bible out all evening because we're going to be flipping back and forth from Exodus to Genesis, especially. But in I Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 11, especially. We could also look at verse 6. But in verse 11, remember what Paul says? "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages have come." Now he's just described the coming of the children of Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and there are wanderings in the wilderness and frankly, there are murmurings and there are grumblings in the wilderness. And then he says this, "These things happened to them and were written for our instruction." So that when we read the book of Exodus, we are reading a story which is for us. We are not just studying ancient history. Paul says these events have direct application to us as Christians.

One second preparatory comment, and it's this. Let's not forget the scene that Derek reminded us about last week at the Mount of Transfiguration. When Elijah and Moses are speaking with Jesus, what are they speaking about? They are speaking about His exodus. Luke tells us, in Luke, chapter 9, verse 31. They were speaking about the departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. And the word there in Greek is *exodon*. The exodus that He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. So let's keep those things in mind as we study this great book. Vanderwald rightly says that, "Exodus is not the account of the history of some foreign nation in which we have a passing interest. No, the ultimate issue of Exodus is our deliverance from the house of bondage and our covenant with the Lord."

And that brings us to God's word. Let's hear it here in Exodus, chapter 1, verses 1 through 7:

Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob. They came each one with his household. Rubin, Simeon, Levi, and Judah,; Issachar; Zebulun and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. And all the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was already in Egypt. And Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel were fruitful, and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly might, so that the land was filled with them.

Amen and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Father, we do bless You for Your word. We ask now that as we take, as we hear it, as we listen to it that we would eat it as the very honey of Your heart for Your people. We pray, O God, that we would reverence it, that we would be corrected by it, instructed by it, encouraged by it, built up by it, in Jesus' name, Amen.

When we were last together in Genesis, chapter 50, verses 1 through 26, we saw Moses end that great part of this unified story with four very important truths. First of all, and look back with me at Genesis, chapter 50, in verses 1 through 6 Moses emphasized in the death of Jacob that God's servants come and go, and they live and die, but His promise endures. The transition from Jacob to Joseph in the line of promises, stresses the enduring nature of God's promise to Abraham as it has been passed on to Isaac, and now to Israel, now to Joseph and to the sons of Israel. We see here in verses 1 through 6 the death of Jacob, and Joseph's request of Pharaoh, that that request of Joseph sets in motion not just the fulfillment of his father's wishes, but it sets in motion a testimony to God's faithfulness in fulfilling the promises. And so though the patriarchs come and go, God's promise endures. God's faithfulness continues.

Then in verses 7 through 13 of Genesis, chapter 50, God points us to a grave that marks his people's hope. The grave of Jacob is not in Egypt, the grave of Jacob is in Canaan. And so Jacob's burial site is simultaneously reminding us of the promise of the land and setting Israel's hope in the land of promise, in the land of Canaan. Israel's hope is not in Egypt, Israel's place is not in Egypt, Israel's place is in the land of Canaan.

Then in verses 14 through 21 it is emphasized, perhaps as clearly as any place in the Bible, that God is sovereign. And He has been sovereign even over the darkest period of Joseph's life. Joseph could pick out the top ten worst moments in his life and say this about them, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." And so Moses stresses the sovereignty of God in Joseph's dark experiences. And this may well be Moses central theological assertion of this portion of the book of Genesis.

And then finally in verses 22 through 26 we see that God has a purpose for Israel's suffering. There Joseph's final reminder of the covenant promise of God to Abraham, and his testimony to that promise to Abraham points Israel forward in days that are going to be very dark.

Now each of those truths have enormous significance for slaves in the land of Egypt. And though it is true that the book of Genesis which began with the origin and light and life, ends with death and darkness as Matthew Henry tells us. And though it is true that man traveled from Eden to a coffin from Genesis 1 to Genesis 50 as Derek Kidner reminds us, yet in the final analysis those last words of the book of Genesis are encouraging. Think about it. The Hebrew slave has to remember each of those four truths. God's servants die, but the promise endures. Who is going to die in the first verses of Exodus? Joseph. And what's it going to mean for Israel? Disaster. God's servants die, but the promise endures. And God will raise up another servant and another servant and another servant as He brings about His promises for His people. Hebrew slaves need to hear that. God's servants come and go. They live and die, but God's promise endures.

Secondly, Hebrew slaves needed to remember that Israel's hope and future is not in the land of Egypt, it's in the land of Canaan. They needed to remember where Jacob's grave was. They needed to remember what Joseph says. When you go out, don't leave my bones here. This is not my home. Those Hebrew slaves needed to hear that word of hope and promise.

Thirdly, those Hebrew slaves needed to hear that God was in control, even and especially in the hardship of His people. Joseph's hardships not only parallel Christ's hardships, but Joseph's hardships foretell and portend the hardships of the people of God in Egypt. The people of God in the midst of their hardships must remember that God is still in control, and finally those Hebrew slaves needed to remember that God has a purpose for their suffering in Egypt, just as he had a purpose for Joseph, so also he has a purpose for their suffering. There is no wasted suffering for the people of God. And the Hebrew slaves needed to know those things.

Do you see how closely tied Genesis and Exodus are? The themes are Genesis 50 rolling over into and throughout the first six chapter of the book of Exodus. So I'd like you to see two things tonight as we look at these first seven verses.

I. God is making a people for Himself, and though their origins are small and humble, He will accomplish His purpose.

First, I'd like you to look at verses 1 through 6. Now there are a lot of things in these verses, and we can't do justice to them. But verses 1 through 6 of Exodus, chapter 1 prepare us for transition from a family to a nation. God has chosen a man, Abraham, and he has chosen his descendants, his family, and in the book of Exodus, he is going to transform a large family into a nation. In Genesis or Exodus 1, verses 1 through 6 is going to prepare us for that transaction from a family to a nation. It's also going to remind us of Israel's origins. Seventy patriarchs or so go down into Egypt along with their households. Small number. Thousands and thousands and tens and hundreds of thousands come out. The humble origins of Israel are pointed out, and there are links with this story and Genesis 50, right here in Exodus 1, verses 1 through 6.

But here's the overarching message of verses 1 through 6. God is making a people for Himself. God is making a people for Himself and though their origins are small and humble, He will accomplish His purpose. Let's look at a few things in these verses.

First of all, your translations probably say that the first word of the book is 'Now.' There's nothing wrong with that translation, but literally the first word of this book is 'And.' Sorry, English teachers. The first word of this book is 'And.' Why? It shows the connection of this book Exodus with the book that goes before it, Genesis. The book begins with 'And,' and that shows the connection between the

promises to the patriarchs and their fulfillment in the Exodus from Egypt in the interest into the land of Canaan. It shows the connection between God's story in Genesis and the completion of it in the book of Exodus.

Furthermore, look at the phrase the "sons of Israel." Now we saw that phrase over and over in the book of Exodus, but this is the last time in the five books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, the so-called the Pentateuch. This is the last time in the Pentateuch that the phrase "sons of Israel" will mean Jacob's immediate family. From now on it will refer to the people of God as a whole, collectively. Notice also that interesting number seventy. Seventy. This is the number of the sons of Jacob given in Genesis 46 that went down to Egypt. But it's interesting that the order of the sons' names are not given in the birth order. They are given according to their mother, Leah, Rachel, the concubines. This is the order that we saw in Genesis 35. Now you may be interested to know that in Acts 7:14 Stephen speaks of seventy-five going down into Egypt. And you think, oops. This says seventy, Stephen said seventy-five. But Stephen is most likely referencing the Greek translation, and the Greek translation of Genesis 46 says, "Seventy-five went down." You get that number by adding to the patriarchs some of the wives and daughters-in-law who went down into the land. But seventy is often a symbolic number for completeness in the Old Testament. Do you remember that the number of nations descended from Noah's sons was seventy when we looked at Genesis 10 together? And so this is a number for completeness. The whole of Israel had gone down into Egypt.

Now another interesting thing. Some of you may have caught that only eleven tribes are mentioned here. Only eleven of the tribes are mentioned as going down into Egypt. But that is explained at the end of verse 5 by the statement that Joseph was already in Egypt. The death of Joseph here reconnects us with Genesis 50, and it makes sure that we keep the story together, that we see that the theme of promise and fulfillment. And the indication that in verse 6 that Joseph died and all his brothers and all that generation, that phrase not only connects us with the story of Genesis, it prepares us for the ominous announcement of Exodus 1:8, that there arose a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph. It explains why that had happened.

His whole generation had passed away, and so we see a few facts about these first verses in Exodus, but the big point is clear: God's church is precious to Him simply because He created her. The repetition of the names of the patriarchs in the Scripture is a reminder of just how precious spiritual Israel, the church, is to God.

Genesis is the story of God's creation of the world; Exodus is the story of His creation of the church. In this passage, this list of names also prepares us for a new work that God is going to do. It is a work of creation — the creation of a people, the creation of a nation; it is a work of redemption. And throughout this passage God's sovereign providence is operative, even if it's not emphasized up

front. We can see throughout behind the scenes, and even when His people are apparently overlooked (and where they are definitely oppressed), we see the hand of God's sovereign providence, because He's making a people for himself. And despite their origin, despite their circumstances, He is going to accomplish His purpose. That story will continue throughout.

II. God has one plan of salvation, the same in all ages, one plan, one purpose, one people. Then, secondly, I'd like you to look at verse 7. Verse 7 links God's purposes in the Exodus to the creation, to Noah, and to Abraham. Verse 7 links God's purposes in the Exodus to the ordinances given by God originally in creation, reiterated to Noah after the flood, and promised to Abraham in the covenant of grace. And again here in verse 7 we see that God has one plan of salvation. That one plan of salvation is the same in all ages. He has one covenant of grace, though it comes in manifold administrations. He has one plan, one purpose, one people.

Open your Bibles and let's be ready to look at some passages in Genesis. First of all, let's see how these words in Exodus 1:7 are linked to God's promise to Abraham. Here we read:

“But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that land was filled with them.”

Well, turn back to Genesis 46, and let's trace this theme backwards in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 46:3, God spoke to Israel and said to him,

“I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there.”

Exodus 1:7 is Moses' way of saying God is already in the midst of fulfilling His purpose, even though it looks like they are far from a great nation. It looks like they're just a bunch of random oppressed slaves. But there are gobs of them! And we have the makings of a nation here.

But that's not all. Let's go back further, in Genesis 35:11. The Lord had said to Jacob, right in the context of renaming him (Genesis 35:11):

“I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you.”

So here again the emphasis on his fruitfulness and his multiplying, and we see again fulfillment of this in Exodus 1:7.

Then, turn all the way back to the story of Abraham, in Genesis 17:6. Here's God's promise to Abraham:

“I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.”

And then all the way back to the beginnings of God's dealings with Abraham in Genesis 12:2:

“And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing.”

And so we see the connection between Exodus 1:7 and the promises that God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And so there is a connection between God's redemption in Exodus and God's promises to Abraham, but there's also a connection between God's redemption in Exodus and God's promises and commands to Noah.

Turn with me to Genesis 9, a little bit further back in the book of Genesis. Chapter 9:7...

After the flood is done, after the rainbow is given, the Lord says this:

“As for you, be fruitful and multiply, populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.”

And so we see a link between the command given to Noah and the blessing in Exodus 1:7. The redemption of the Exodus is also linked to the command that is given in the covenant of Noah.

And then, finally, turn all the way back to Genesis 1:28, and you'll see that the redemption of Exodus is linked with the creation account itself, with the repetition of the fact that the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly. For in Genesis 1:28, God blessed our original parents, Adam and Eve,

“And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

That language comes of course from the creation ordinances of marriage and of procreation, and it indicates that though God's people were oppressed, God's hand of blessing was upon them. And in their very obedience to the creation ordinances, they were gaining advantage over their enemies.

And hence we learn also that God's creation ordinances, first instituted before the fall and under the covenant of works, are still in effect under the covenant of grace, and His blessings in the covenant of grace are tied to their fulfillment as they are originally given to God's people. God grows His people according to His commands, and in the context of His sanctifying providence.

And though we see a picture of church growth here in Exodus 1:7, we are hastily going to see that that church growth brings with it pain. The growth of the church can be a painful process, especially as God weans us from worldliness. And so not only does God grow us as we are obedient to His commands, but in the context of His sanctifying providence we often face painful processes. But those painful processes themselves provide a test situation in which we trust the providence of God. It would be very easy for the people of God in bondage for 430 years to question whether God would ever fulfill His promises, but the wheels of God grind slowly. But they grind exceeding small. And though God may seem slow to some, He is right on time in His providences. So the people of God in the days of Exodus will see His one plan of salvation as He continues to fulfill promises that He had made hundreds of years before to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in their own day, even in the midst of their oppression. And as a result of this He brings them out of Egypt as a nation made to worship Him.

May God bless us as we study that story over the weeks to come.

Let's pray.

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for Your word. We ask that You would grip our hearts by the story of Your redeeming love and and plan. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

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