

SUMMER 1 - Way Out

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[0 : 0 0] To us now, Father, we pray that your word may live in our hearts and bear much fruit for your glory. Amen. And you may like to have open the Bible at Exodus chapter 1 or page 43 if you're using the Bibles in the pews.

And over the course of these five Wednesday nights in January, I'm going to try and give us a big picture of the book of Exodus. More or less, hopefully, from beginning to end. We'll sort of see how far we get.

But anyway, three chapters tonight to start us off. The story of the book of Exodus is well known, not just because it's in the Bible, but because of Charlton Heston and because of Dreamworks, which made the film The Prince of Egypt.

But I'm sure, not that I've seen either of those films, but from what I've read and heard about, there are a few embellishments in those films. And certainly lots of things that get left out.

I think the book of Exodus has a lot more to say to us than the films with Charlton Heston and The Prince of Egypt have portrayed. Interestingly, the book begins with the word and.

[1 : 1 3] It's not in our translations, probably, but it's not really how you begin a story. I'm sure that when you were at primary school and you began writing an essay and, your teacher would have told you off and said and is a conjunction.

You shouldn't start a sentence with the word and, and so on. But in Hebrew, you can begin sentences with and. But more to the point, the book begins with the word and because it is a continuation of what's gone before.

So that even, even though the book of Exodus does stand as a unit, we should actually read it as sort of like the second chapter of the book of the Old Testament, let's say, because it's very much a continuation of what's happened before.

And indeed, the first paragraph is in part a summary of what's gone on before and a little bridge from the end of the book of Genesis up to the beginning of the story of the book of Exodus.

So we get at the beginning. These are the names of the sons of Israel. Well, let me point out straight away in case you're unclear. The name Israel at this point is a person, not a nation.

[2 : 1 6] Israel is another name for Jacob. And if you remember back to the book of Exodus, when Jacob is returning to the land with his wives and their maids and 11 children, 11 sons, at least, he wrestles with God.

And in the course of that wrestling during the night, God gives him another name rather than Jacob, the name of Israel. And it's from him and that name that the nation comes to take its name.

But at this point where it says the sons of Israel, it means Jacob. And they came to Egypt with Jacob in the middle of the story of Joseph at the end of the book of Genesis.

And then we get a list of them. They each come with their household, so their wives and their own children, some of them and so on. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin, and then Dan and Naphtali and Gad and Asher.

Count them up and they're 11. But we all know there are 12 tribes of Israel and we all know there were 12 sons of Jacob. The one that's missing is Joseph. And the reason he's missing is because he didn't go to Egypt with Jacob.

[3 : 22] He was already there in the first place, sold because of his technicolor dreamcoat by his brothers to slave traders. And he went down there first. The 11 sons are not in age order.

The first six are the sons of the first wife, Leah. Then Benjamin, number seven in this list, but the son of Rachel. Joseph was also her son.

And then you get the two pairs of sons that belong to each of the two handmaids of Leah and Rachel that are mentioned there. We're told in verse five that the total number of people born to Jacob was 70.

That implies, I think, his grandchildren as well as his sons. And we know there was at least one daughter, Dinah. There may have been others. But basically it's saying there were 70 people who went down to Egypt.

Not very many. And the point of saying just 70 is to contrast it with what follows later on in this first chapter. We go from 70 to a great multitude very quickly.

[4 : 23] Joseph, we're told, was already in Egypt, as I've said. That takes us up in effect virtually to the end of the book of Genesis. Joseph died and he dies in chapter 50 of Exodus.

But he's not buried in Egypt. He's embalmed, placed in a coffin, but not buried because the end of the book of Genesis makes it clear that his burial will take place on the day when God's people return to the land.

The book of Genesis finishes, in a sense, looking into the future and the return to the land. And that little thread lies, of course, in the book of Exodus as well. Because that's where ultimately the people of God are headed.

Joseph died and all his brothers. And now we've gone beyond the book of Genesis because they haven't died there. And that whole generation. But now comes the contrast with the 70 people.

The Israelites were fruitful and prolific. They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. It's almost like a plague of insects is the sort of language that's used.

[5 : 29] It's quite emphatic. It's not just that they gradually grew and increased like the population of Australia for the last hundred or thousands of years. But rather that they were abundantly fruitful.

And the language of verse 7, the fruitfulness, the multiplying and so on, is the language of Genesis chapter 1. And so we're not meant to see here the fact that for some reason these people were just particularly fertile.

We're meant to see here the hand of God at work. A sign of blessing, even though God's name's not mentioned. That's one of the intriguing things of Genesis 1 and 2, as we'll come back to later.

God's hand is clearly at work here, even though God's not mentioned verse after verse. And sometimes in the Bible that's a deliberate ploy. That we're meant to see other ways in which it refers to the work and the hand of God.

God is mentioned once or twice in these chapters. He's not totally absent. But in other parts of the Bible, like the book of Esther, where God is not mentioned at all in the whole book, it's very clear that the hand of God is very active.

[6 : 32] So we've got to have the eyes of faith and discernment to see where God is active. And sometimes in the Bible it's where his name isn't mentioned very much. And this is the case here. By using the language of Genesis 1, the language of blessing the people, human beings who are created in the last bit of Genesis 1, talking about them being fruitful and multiplying and filling the land and subduing it, here we get a sense that this is God's blessing at work.

Because Genesis 1 talks about God blessing humanity and then commanding them to do all those things as well. The other link to God, of course, is that God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be numerous, very numerous indeed.

So here is another link to that idea. Here now we see that in the intervening years from the end of Genesis, in effect to the beginning of the story of Exodus, God actually is keeping his promise to Abraham, at least the promise of descendants, ironically they're far from the land, of course.

So the language in verse 7 is strong, but because it refers back to Genesis 1 and also to the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12 and later, it's clearly the sign of God at work.

Now, the problems begin. So far it's all right. But now a new king arose over Egypt. We're not just talking about the successor to the pharaoh of the end of the book of Genesis.

[7 : 57] We're talking probably about 300 to 400 years difference. So it's not just saying the next pharaoh came, he didn't know Joseph, who'd become the prime minister of one of the previous pharaohs. We're talking about a fair period of time here.

He didn't know Joseph. And he said to his people, the Egyptians that is, Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we are.

That's how strong they've become. It may be slightly hyperbolic in an expression, but clearly he's worried about what's going on. So he says, Now, interestingly, it happens throughout history that opposition, to God's people at least, occurs when God's people are strong.

When the church is piddling and small and ineffectual, the rest of the world couldn't care less. It's no threat. But it's when the church is strong and makes a stand, in particular, that persecution comes.

So sometimes when we see of the persecuted church in other places of the world, but not in our own country, maybe it should give us cause to think the church over there must be making some sort of impact or waves.

[9 : 19] Why aren't we doing the same here? Why aren't we as strong? Because Jesus said that the church will attract persecution because he attracted persecution. And that's what's happening here.

We can't really quite call it the church, but in effect, that's what it is, the people of God. And their increasing, their multiplying has become a threat to Pharaoh.

And they're worried about the military effect of that, that in the event of some war, and of course there were many wars then as there are today, the Israelites may not be loyal to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians.

So what's he going to do about this problem? Well, he says in verse 11, Strong words again.

This is slavery in effect. No doubt to this point the Israelites have been working in Egypt and doing very well, presumably as well. But now their work is to become an added burden.

[10 : 23] Slavery, forced labour. The idea of that, I guess, would be that the more they were subjected to slavery, maybe the less time they had to produce children is perhaps what's behind it.

They built supply cities, Pithom and Ramesses. The archaeologists debate about the existence of these cities and the dating that this represents, and there's no clear consensus about this.

And they built these supply cities for Pharaoh. But, this is Pharaoh's plan A, I should suggest, but the response to plan A or the effect of plan A to try and curb the proliferation of Israelite children, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.

So the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour.

They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed upon them. It's not the response you expect. Pharaoh's measure to curb their fertility rate has backfired.

[11 : 40] They've become even more fertile. There's no mention of God here, but the fact that they're producing even more children is an indirect pointer to the fact that God is at work blessing his people.

If we're keeping score, it's God one, Pharaoh nil. Pharaoh's first plan to try and curb Israelite production of children has failed and failed badly.

Incidentally, this hard labour that is forced upon the Israelites by the Egyptians becomes in effect a model for what Israel must not do to its own people later on.

So if you read later in the book of Leviticus with the laws about how they were to employ people and work, they were not to employ people with forced labour and hard service as the Egyptians had done for them.

Although later on again in Israel's history, Solomon, it seems, probably broke that law in the building of the temple and his palace in one king's. So plan B.

[12 : 39] Pharaoh doesn't stop there. Plan B, verses 15 to 21. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shifra and the other Pua, when you act as midwives to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him.

But if it's a girl, she shall live. Male infanticide. Later on, of course, this in effect becomes God's final plague also against the Egyptians.

Sometimes people think, isn't it awful of God to have killed the firstborn of the Egyptians on that first Passover night? There's a sense in which God is doing what Pharaoh tried to do but failed to do, showing that God is effective where Pharaoh, who was revered as God by the Egyptians, is not.

We'll see more about that in a week or two's time. The Hebrew midwives, only two of them are named, maybe they're the head ones. We can't imagine there'd be just two Hebrew midwives for the numerous number of Israelites that are there, disobey Pharaoh's command in verse 17.

We're told that they did it because they feared God. So here is a direct reference to God coming into the scheme of things. Because they feared God and therefore did not fear Pharaoh, that's the implication of it, they feared God above fearing Pharaoh and the punishment they may face, they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.

[14 : 12] Well, here is a case of civil disobedience and one, I think, that is commended by the Bible writer. Because they feared God, they were civilly disobedient to Pharaoh the king.

Now, sometimes in the Bible, we get strong words about Christians having to be people who are respectful and submissive of their governments and state, and rightly so.

Governments are given by God, we're told in a number of places. But there are occasions when it is right for God's people to be civilly disobedient to the government. Especially in cases where the government's laws prevent people from doing what God requires of us to do.

Now, thankfully, in our country, there is not all that much scope, I guess, for that sort of civil disobedience. But I suspect in times to come in our country, that may change.

I gather, though I haven't seen the details in New South Wales, some of the human rights type legislation that's being propounded, may well, if it's carried out, stop churches or preachers preaching some of the Bible's ethics, for example, about sexuality.

[15 : 23] Well, I think a such a case would become a cause for civil disobedience. Let's hope it doesn't get to that state in our country, but it could well do, I suspect. But of course, we've also got to remember our brothers and sisters around the world.

A third of the Christian church faces persecution. And they're always facing that dilemma of to what extent are they civilly disobedient, to what extent are they obedient to the state without compromising their fear of God.

They're not always easy cases to decide. And we must pray that God in his mercy gives us wisdom and helps us to be able to fear him without compromise.

So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, why have you done this and allowed the boys to live? Now, the next verse presents a bit of a dilemma, perhaps.

The midwives said to Pharaoh, because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them. Now, I think we're probably meant to read that as a lie.

[16 : 26] But there are commentators who say, no, they're not lying. How could they lie? Because that would be breaking one of God's commandments. It must also be true. But I think the way the story's told, I think we're meant to see it as a lie.

They haven't tried to stop to do what Pharaoh said at all. They feared God, we've been told. So I suspect that there's probably not all that much truth in them saying about, I mean, it may be partly true about the women being vigorous, but I'm sure that that has not prevented them from carrying out Pharaoh's command.

Now, that's a moral dilemma. Do you lie to Pharaoh because of your fear of God? Can God actually lead us into a situation where we break one of the Ten Commandments about bearing false witness?

They're very difficult ethical decisions and Christians disagree about those sorts of issues, I think. I guess in part we could say it's the lesser of two evils. Perhaps lying is a lesser evil than murder.

But both are in the Ten Commandments. I guess we must feel for the dilemma that these women are placed in. So, the response though, from God, who's mentioned now explicitly, is that he dealt well with the midwives.

[17 : 48] I think we're meant to see there some commendation for their action, if not their words as well. And the people multiplied and became very strong.

And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Presumably they had no children of their own to that point. So, here again, the plan B of Pharaoh has failed terribly.

Not only has it failed to be carried out, that is the males or firstborn males being killed, but the result of it is even further fertility and blessing and multiplication of God's people.

Now, I think that the writer of this has probably got a slight smile or smirk on his face. Here is the great Pharaoh, revered almost as a god by the Egyptians, issuing decrees, and here are two Hebrew midwives who refuse to obey him and the result is that there are even more Israelite children.

There's almost a sense of mockery of Pharaoh here. Remember that he's regarded sort of as a divine figure by the Egyptians. So really what we've got here is a contest between the real God and a pseudo-god Pharaoh.

[18 : 59] And to this point, the real God's winning 2-0. Well, plan C comes in the last verse of chapter 1. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, not just the Hebrew midwives this time, but all his people, every boy, not just the firstborn, that is born to the Hebrews, you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.

Now that's an escalation of the oppression. Now it's the job of every Egyptian to carry out this law. And every male Hebrew or Israelite is to be thrown into the Nile.

Thus ends chapter 1. Let me say one brief thing before we move into chapter 2. There's a slight irony because the Nile is the source of life for Egypt.

About a bit over 12 months ago I was flying over the Nile or down the Nile on the way to Nigeria. And I realised how starkly that is true for Egypt because it was like looking at a sort of a rugby jumper that's yellow with a thin strip of green almost like an Australian coloured jumper.

The thin strip of green was very sharply distinct from the yellow either side. The Nile was in the middle. There was a little bit of irrigated green land and then there was a very sharp line when you hit the desert and that's the rest of the country going both ways.

[20 : 23] The Nile is very much the source of life in Egypt. And here ironically it is to be a place of death with all these Israelite babies meant to be thrown into it. The other thing to comment is that here is plan C of Pharaoh but there's no obvious statement about the result of it.

We're not really told did the people carry it out? What happened? We just go on into chapter 2 to be told that a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.

Well where does that fit? it's almost as though we're now beginning a completely new story. But as we read on we're meant to see in the story of chapter 2 God's answer to plan C of Pharaoh.

It now becomes focused onto one person. In effect not the Levite or his wife they're not even named but their son who's born in verse 2 and when she saw that he was a fine baby literally a baby who is good doesn't mean moral it's a word that's got a very broad meaning fine or healthy is probably fair enough but it's the word good which is the same word that occurs back in Genesis 1 and I think this is another link back into Genesis in Genesis 1 everything that God made was good and behold at the end of six days of creation he saw everything that he'd made and it was very good now we find a good baby as I say not morally we'll actually see that he's a murderer in a few verses but I think what it's an indication of is here is God's hand again at work even though God is not mentioned so what about this baby when after three months the mother couldn't hide him any longer she got a papyrus basket for him plastered it with bitumen and pitch she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river that's the

Nile presumably and his sister who's not named here but later on Moses' sister we're told is called Miriam she stood at a distance to see what would happen now maybe technically the mother has done what Pharaoh required placing the baby in the Nile but she hasn't thrown him in she's placed him carefully in a basket the word of which is actually the word that's used for ark as in Noah's ark it's a rare word in the Old Testament and maybe we're meant to see here another link back to Genesis that where God through a little ark saved Noah and his family and a few other animals here perhaps in the same sort of means God is doing some other work saving a little baby from the death that Pharaoh has decreed now I think the story becomes a little bit more intense but also I think there's a stronger note of humour in the next paragraph because the person who comes down and finds the basket is none other than the daughter of Pharaoh the princess royal I guess imagine princess

[23 : 16] Anne coming down to bathe at the river while her attendants walked beside the river she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it when she opened it she saw the child he was crying and she took pity on him compassion mercy the word to take pity has the connotation of sparing something so in the warfare terminology later in the Old Testament do not have pity on your enemy means do not spare them kill them don't save or spare any of them well here she takes pity on him that is the connotation she spares him from the death that Pharaoh has decreed she says this must be one of the Hebrews children we're not quite sure exactly how she could tell that maybe he was circumcised we're just not told maybe it's because the baby's left there and presumably that would imply that it's a Hebrew child because of the threat of death then

Moses' sister is still standing by so she wanders up coincidentally perhaps and says to Pharaoh's daughter shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you Pharaoh's daughter said to her yes so the girl went and called the child's mother so here's Miriam calling the baby's mother to come and be the nurse for her own baby even though Pharaoh's daughter doesn't realize that it's actually the mother of the baby Pharaoh's daughter said to her to the mother that is take this child and nurse it for me and I'll give you your wages so the woman took the child and nursed it now here I think we're meant to be laughing at Pharaoh because we've already seen plans A and plans B fail badly and we're sort of meant to be having a little smile at Pharaoh's expense to that point but now God has taken the game right up under Pharaoh's nose here is a baby who's found right in the precincts probably of his palace by his own daughter not only is the baby spared because the daughter has pity on him but the baby ends up with its real mother who is actually paid to look after her own baby now clearly I think we're meant to be mocking Pharaoh at this point he really is not as effective as the great

Pharaoh of the Egyptian Empire is meant to be and when the child grew up Moses' own mother brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and she took him as her son so he becomes in a sense a pseudo grandson for Pharaoh how ironic and she named him Moses because she said I drew him out of the water the name Moses here I guess is a tricky one because the derivation of the name we're told in Hebrew means drew him out of the water which would be an unlikely language for the daughter of Pharaoh to use now the languages of the Middle East and ancient world were related and it could well be that in Egyptian as well as in Hebrew there might have been some relationship to the name Moses as to draw him out of the water but certainly the name Moses was not an uncommon Egyptian name one of the Pharaohs at some point was Fatmos in fact I think there might have been a few of them and the most bit on the end is I think something like son of or child of so the Moses bit is certainly an

Egyptian sort of name even if here it's got a Hebrew meaning placed on it drawn out of the water well I guess things had looked pretty bleak for God's people to this point Pharaoh's three stages of escalating oppression have each now backfired God three Pharaoh nil God's not really mentioned in the story of Moses being saved nor in the motivation of his mother trying to preserve him in a basket but just by the very nature of what's going on in these two chapters I think we're meant to see a hidden hand of God at work to all intents and purposes to all appearances God has abandoned his people and they're suffering oppression but the truth is of course that God has not abandoned his people and he's not forgotten his promises to them and his hidden hand is at work there are a few miracles here there to come in later chapters but God sometimes works with great powerful miracles but here he's just working in the turn of events maybe influencing the heart of the daughter of

Pharaoh so that his own people are preserved we should also make a comment I guess about the weakness of a little baby boy here and the might of Pharaoh yes true the battle really is between God and Pharaoh but God chooses the weak things of earth to fight his battles sometimes and time and again in scripture we find God actually winning victories in totally unexpected ways and here through a little tiny helpless baby through a mother that might have been scared of Pharaoh we find actually God's plan of redemption for his people at work and actually holding sway over mighty Pharaoh a time and again of course that happens in the battles of the Old Testament in the great figures of the prophets and the judges who are fairly fallible and weak people often but most of all I guess in the weakness of the cross does God bring powerful victory we should also bear in mind just the theme of special babies because time and again in the Bible when something about the birth of a child is mentioned and we're told a little bit about them in growing up they are significant people and they are significant events you think of the barren women who have children such as Sarah having Isaac

[29 : 09] Rachel having Joseph and then Benjamin for example Hannah having Samuel the birth of Samson maybe not barren but of course the birth of Jesus is the climax of that sort of pattern in scripture time and again these special little babies are hints of the fact that God is the God of life and from situations that seem to suggest death God turns it around for life so where really the line of Abraham was under threat time and again and death to his line seemed the result God produces life with a child and here where the people of God are facing death in Egypt God produces a child to bring them life and then later on of course especially in Jesus facing death on the cross God turns that around to bring that situation to life again I think that theme is a biblical one this is just one glimpse of it amongst many but God is the God of life who brings life out of death unexpectedly perhaps sometimes miraculously sometimes in hidden sorts of ways but let us take heed of that and when we face situations that seem hopeless or even full of death the end of promises and so on we must cling on to the fact that God is the

God of life and brings life even out of death the next section of chapter 2 we'll skip over fairly briefly Moses has grown up now some years down the track and he sees an Egyptian in verse 11 beating a Hebrew the beating suggests the beating that could go to death whether or not the Hebrew died I'm not sure that we know so Moses looks this way and that to make sure there are no witnesses and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand I'm not sure that we're meant to think that that was the mighty fine act although there is an indication here already of Moses seeking to bring some sort of rescue for his people against the oppression of the Egyptians whether or not this Hebrew man lived beyond the beating later on we're told that people knew that Moses had done this and it may well be that given that there was no one around looking the person who's told people was the man whose life was spared well the next day

Moses sees two Hebrews fighting and he said to the one who's in the wrong why do you strike your fellow Hebrew and he answered who made you a ruler and judge over us well he's not really a ruler and judge although later on he will be and later on he'll receive the same sort of grumbles and complaints when the people of God are in the wilderness so I think here we're meant to get a little foretaste of the bigger events to follow Moses will be the ruler and judge and he won't always be popular with the people of God even if he's actually worked to save them from the Egyptians so Moses was afraid in verse 14 he thought surely this is known when Pharaoh heard of it that Moses had killed this Egyptian Moses he sought to kill Moses presumably knowing he was his sort of adopted grandson but Moses fled and he settled in the land of Midian he's gone from Egypt he's somehow crossed the Suez Canal and he's gone south into the Sinai Peninsula or maybe even across into what is modern day Saudi Arabia the Midianites were in that sort of Arabian and Sinai Peninsula sort of area they were the people who were the slave traders who took Joseph from the land of

Canaan and took him to Egypt the Midianites were descended from relations of Abraham we're told back in Genesis and he came and sat down by a well which is a good place to sit because it's the only sort of place you're going to get water there were no coke machines in those days even then and there was a priest of Midian who had seven daughters they came to get water some shepherds tried to drive them away verse 17 Moses came to their defence here is Moses acting again to defend people from others and he watered their flock and when they returned to their father whose name here is Ruel though later on we're told it's also Jethro but that shouldn't be too much of a puzzle people often had a couple of different names he says how can we come back so soon they thought Moses was an Egyptian presumably he was dressed as one and they said well he helped us against the shepherds and he drew water for us and he said to his daughters well why didn't you bring him back and they go and get him and in return Moses gets one of the daughters Zipporah in marriage which is a fairly big sort of gift to save them from giving them a bit of water at a well and saving them from shepherds she bore him a son he named him Gershom and he said I've been an alien residing in a foreign land the name

Gershom is the name sojourner there probably it's referring back to the fact that he's not really an Egyptian but he was a temporary resident back in Egypt some time passes a long time we're told in verse 23 it's probably up to 40 years it seems Moses life was 40 years in Egypt and then at about the age of 40 probably he fled to Midian and at about the age of 80 or just before he went back eventually to lead the people out of Egypt and then spent 40 years in the wilderness before dying at the age of 120 so after a long time could well mean something close to 40 years it's worth bearing that in mind we're not just talking about the day after tomorrow here it really is some long time and the king of Egypt died and another one comes but the Israelites still groan under their slavery nothing's changed with the change of Pharaoh and they cry out and out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God

[34 : 53] God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham Isaac and Jacob God looked upon the Israelites and God took notice of them now that's very significant those verses for various reasons the name that's used for God is Elohim it's just a general name for God that's the God to whom they cry and God we're told remembers his promises to Abraham Isaac and Jacob what that means is that everything that follows in Exodus and beyond is God keeping promises that he made to Abraham and repeated to Isaac and repeated then to Jacob down the generations those promises if you remember back in Genesis 12 and other places later in Genesis were that God's people would be numerous descended from Abraham that they would be in the land that was promised to them and that they would be a blessing and through them the world would be blessed but at this point little of that seems to be fulfilled God seems to be absent the people have grown numerous but they're severely oppressed they're well away from the land and other people are not being blessed through them but God remembers his covenant it doesn't mean really that God forgot as though

God's got a faulty memory what it does mean is that God acts now to fulfill the promise you see in the Old Testament when somebody including God remembers something it usually means that they decide to act upon that information or that statement or promise so for example in the flood story when the water has come down and Noah's floating away on his cruise God remembers Noah in chapter 8 verse 1 and from that point onward the rain stops and the flood is in reverse that is God now acts to reverse the cause of action to bring about the good result so when God remembers his covenant it's now saying that God is on about changing the affairs to fulfill his promises the same thing applies though for humans in the Old Testament when the Israelites are commanded of various laws to go into the land God says to them remember that you were slaves in

Egypt remember the law that I've given you remember what I've done and said to you it doesn't just mean something cognitive that stays up in their mind ready for an exam but it means heed what you've learnt and do it act upon it so remembrance is about acting in the Old Testament behaving and that's what God is about to do now he's remembered the promises and now he's going to keep them not that he wasn't going to keep them but it's now time to act to reverse the difficult situation so God looked upon the Israelites he saw them and he knew them literally is the end of verse 25 he's not remote from them but he's almost intimate with them because the word to know denotes some sort of intimate relationship so it's reminding us here at the end of this chapter that God is faithful he's keeping his promises even though to all intents and purposes the Israelites could well have thought God has abandoned them but he hasn't well we come to the non-burning bush well it's called the burning bush but in a sense it doesn't burn it blazes but it's not really a burning bush it doesn't burn up it blazes without burning up

Moses is in the Sinai peninsula he was looking after a flock a fairly insignificant shepherd in these days presumably he's nearly 80 years old people seem to live a bit longer in those days and he came to a place called Horeb the mountain of God Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai we don't know why this name is used here and why the Bible is not consistent but names often do have places often do have two names and here it's called Horeb Mount Sinai in the Sinai peninsula in what is now I guess Egyptian territory south of the land of Israel today and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush and Moses looked and the bush was blazing yet it was not consumed now that's what's intriguing not the fact that it was blazing maybe that was something that happened from time to time but the bush didn't burn up it didn't sort of die away to embers as the leaves burnt and disappeared and that was the thing that caught the attention along with the angel for Moses intriguingly the angel really doesn't get any much much more of a mention because later on when there are words spoken it's God and there's a lot of debate about who is the angel is it Jesus already I'm not sure that we can say that often in the Bible an angel almost takes the place of God such as visitors to Abraham back in Genesis 18 for example but certainly the angel denotes the presence of God in the middle of this bush

Moses says I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up and when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see God called to him out of the bush Moses repeating his name a sense of importance or urgency and Moses says here I am the same words that Abraham had used when God called him at Mount Moriah before he sacrificed Isaac and the same words that Jacob used back in Genesis 46 and he said come no closer remove the sandals from your feet for the place on which you're standing is holy ground now any place that's holy holy ground for example holy places in the Old Testament there are none in the New but in the Old Testament are holy places because of one thing God is there the only reason any place is holy in the Old Testament because God is there that's what makes a place holy there's nothing inherently holy about any building any geographical place apart from the fact that God is there and of course the reason in the New

[41 : 09] Testament there's no holy place geographically is because God is by spirit in his people wherever they are wherever two or three are gathered in my name there am I in your midst in effect we could say there's holy ground here is holy ground tonight but when we all leave here tonight this building is not holy ground because it's where God's spirit is and presence is and that's in people not in places or buildings here is holy ground because God is present there and so taking off the sandals and the feet was a sign of respect a sign of honor and that's what Moses is commanded to do so Moses did know something of course of his Israelite heritage Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God that's understandable everywhere in the Bible that anyone comes into a direct vision of God they seem to want to hide their face or prostrate themselves on the ground even the angels in the temple in Isaiah 6 hide their eyes from the sight of God we shouldn't think that God we can just sort of wander in and see God and say hi

God how you going there's a sense of holiness and awe and having to keep our eyes from such pure light as God himself God then says I've observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt I've heard their cry so this is a link back to the end of chapter 2 on account of their task masters indeed I know their sufferings since they're not just that God has observed them from a distance but I know them almost as though they're his and of course ultimately that's where God is headed he knows his people's sufferings not because of an academic observation exercise but because he himself takes them on himself in the form of his son on the cross I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians a sense of them God coming down from heaven to earth but it's figurative sort of language we shouldn't take it too literally in a sense and to bring them up out of that land which is dismissed Egypt without name Egypt that is and then he describes the other land the promised land in three ways it's a good and a broad land a spacious land a land where there's plenty of room for all these people is the idea secondly it's a land flowing with milk and honey well picture of a land flowing with milk and honey literally is a bit sort of odd a hot day like today it wouldn't all be that pleasant I should think the milk going off rather quickly in the sun but of course it's figurative language it's saying it's a bountiful land it's a land where there is lots of fruit because honey probably denotes the nectar of fruit as much as it denotes the honey that bees produce and milk suggests animals as well as of course drinking milk that is this is a land that's got everything you want it's a glowing description of the land go to Israel today you think has God got it wrong this doesn't seem to be a land flowing with milk and honey it seems to be a harsh climate and it is and it's changed a lot in the last few thousand years for various reasons but nonetheless it's a good land and thirdly it's described as the land of the Canaanites you get two good descriptions and then you get one that maybe puts you off a bit hey God you're about to take us into a land that's filled with Canaanites

Hittites Amorites Perizzites Hivites and Jebusites I don't know that I want to go to such a land with all those odd people there but it's actually a pointer to the power of God ultimately he's not taking them into an empty land but he will show his power by bringing in them into a land that is inhabited which he'll conquer but of course the benefit of that is as he says later on to the Israelites in Deuteronomy is that now you're going into a land that's got cities that you don't have to build it's got systems that you don't have to dig out of the ground it's got wells there that you don't have to build it's got trees and fruit trees that are already grown and mature you see God's plan is is actually not to scare the people off by the inhabitants but they're actually there unknown to themselves preparing the land for God's people so it's all ready for them when they walk in the cry of the Israelites has now come to me I've seen how the Egyptians oppressed them so come I'll send you to Pharaoh now to this point Moses probably been thinking God this is pretty good God's going to save our people but now comes the punchline the sting I'm going to send you Moses to

Pharaoh but Moses said to God who am I that I should go and bring the Israelites out of Egypt and the rest of this chapter and next chapter Moses doesn't like this plan and he keeps drawing out ways in which he wants to sort of buck the system and find an alternative plan for God's salvation for his people but God says to him not Moses look you can do it Moses there's no sort of what you find today in modern motivation saying come on don't think so badly of yourself you've got lots of skills and abilities you can do it none of that at all God doesn't say to Moses you know you are an important person you're a great person you can do this in effect he says okay you're nothing as you've said but I'm with you and that's all you need and God promises that to his people time and again from beginning to end of Bible I am with you and that's all you need Moses that's all you need you people to share the gospel around the world to make disciples and baptize in my name Jesus said for I will be with you to the end of the age so time and again we've got to think of ourselves as yes unworthy to carry out God's tasks but because God is with us totally sufficient for the task and then he gives him a sign which is rather peculiar in verse 12 because it's not actually a sign that happens before the event you'd think if God was trying to motivate and encourage Moses he'd say well look let me give you a sign now look up in the sky and there'll be something up there you know some sky writing or something no he says I'll give you a sign after this has all happened you'll come here to this mountain and you'll all worship me now that's not a sign that's actually going to sort of bolster your confidence to go and do the events that lead up to the sign you see what Moses is being drawn out to do so to speak is to exercise confidence and faith in God not to do something on the basis of a sign or a miracle like say Gideon later but to trust God's word and to do it well Moses second objection is to say not who am I but who are you God if I come to the Israelites and say to them verse 13 the God of your ancestors has sent me to you and they ask me what's his name what shall I say to them now it's a strange question this haven't got time to unpack it all now but we're going to finish with these last couple of verses here why is Moses asking God's name is it because he doesn't know God's name is it because he's trying to pin down something more about God

God says to Moses I am who I am now that little expression has occasioned lots of debate over the centuries what is God saying here what does it actually mean it could be translated I am who I am or I will be who I will be or I will cause to happen what I will cause to happen whatever the case it is a statement of the sovereignty and autonomy of God that is God is who God is God is not who we make him to be God is not who we name him to be because often naming rights indicate your power over what you name God tells us that in one sense he doesn't have a name because he doesn't want people to have control over him perhaps but on the other hand what he does say about himself I am who I am is certainly a statement about sovereignty I think it's a statement about eternity because he's not bound by anything he is always who he is he will be he was he is who he is but more importantly comes the following verse or the verses the rest of 14 and 15 thus you shall say to the

[49 : 16] Israelites I am has sent me to you and God also said to Moses thus you shall say to the Israelites I am the Lord and see where it's capital letters that's the I am bit the God of your ancestors the God of Abraham the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you you see what God's answer is is not just my name is I am who I am but he's also saying the answer is I am the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob that is God the sovereign God is being identified with one particular person and his descendants Abraham Isaac then Jacob so it's the same God who's acted in the past who is acting now and who will act in the future the sovereign God over all things and yet the God of Abraham and that line of people which is now the Israelite nation at this point now a couple of things about this whenever we get the this expression I am later in the Bible it usually gets translated with the English word Lord in capital letters usually a slightly small print as you've got it at the beginning of verse or in the middle of verse 15 it literally translates I am Yahweh or

Jehovah we don't quite know how to say it because Jewish and Israelite people for centuries and centuries refuse to say the name partly because they don't want to take the Lord's name in vain so to make sure we don't take the Lord's name in vain we won't even use the Lord's name at all so whenever they read their scriptures even to this day and they come across what we've got in our Bible says Lord or some English translations have Jehovah they will say Adonai and Adonai is the Hebrew word for Lord or Master so that's just to explain what this word Lord is about it's the name of God in one sense we can't quite pin it down and maybe all the debate about this verse is healthy to the extent that it shows us that God though he's revealed what we need to know of himself still stands over and above our minds and our comprehension we know what we need to know he is knowable because he reveals himself but there's much more of God that's far bigger than we can ever imagine at all here is God declaring his hand before going to fight Pharaoh the pseudo God of the Egyptians I am the sovereign God

I am the autonomous God I am the independent God I am who I am I'm not who somebody else makes me to be I'm not an idol or creation of imagination I'm the real God bigger than anybody else and bigger than any other God he's saying this is my name forever from the beginning of time to the end of time and this my title for all generations I think it's significant when we get to the New Testament that Jesus uses some emphatic words when he describes himself I am the bread of life I am the way the truth the life I am the resurrection and the life and though in one sense he uses acceptable Greek it's emphatic on the I am bit and I think there there's a veiled claim that in Jesus we find Jehovah Yahweh the Lord of the Old Testament you see when God declares himself here as I am we've got to see not God the Father alone but God who's ultimately revealed as Trinity it is Jesus as much as God the Father who is speaking here it is Jesus who is the sovereign God as much as it is God the Father as well

Jesus words about himself and also other ascriptions to Jesus in the New Testament calling him Lord are saying that he is the Jehovah of the Old Testament along with God the Father and the Spirit well let's leave it there in a sense we've got the prelude to the story there's a lot more to follow we'll pick it up a little bit later next week we'll stand and sing a hymn just have five minutes at the most if you want to ask questions other years I've never always had time for questions but I'm trying to be more disciplined this year but if there aren't any that's fine we'll pray and we'll sing a hymn at finish Gary we're just not told what happened to them I'm not sure that we we should assume that I guess we probably have to assume that some were killed but we're just not told question is if God is specially present in a burning bush and pillar of fire later on in other places and yet God is everywhere how do you put the two together I suppose the same applies today God in a sense is everywhere and yet he says that there's a special sense in which he's in the midst of his people later in the Old Testament he's specially in the in the temple and yet God is regarded still as being everywhere and in heaven I guess we both are true God is everywhere there's nowhere we can go beyond the the presence and scope of God and yet he does say that in some sense especially he's in his people and especially in his people as they gather and are obedient to his tasks of evangelism mission etc so there's some special presence of God in those places beyond that I'm not sure that I want to sort of speculate or define it too much more I guess but both things are true I don't think God's presence is limited to the burning bush but there's a sort of special focus of his presence when he speaks and reveals himself and and he's active I guess yeah the question is when the midwives were lying wasn't that before the law was given well yes it's true it's before the Ten Commandments were given later on so we could I mean some people do excuse it on the grounds that it's pre the Ten Commandments and there may be maybe an element of truth in that but I I think I think nonetheless the the sort of element of truth and lying is is a fairly basic principle that probably even transcends the Ten Commandments that is the Ten Commandments isn't always saying something new but it's formalizing what what is in one sense some basic morality in some part of it anyway or not not every commandment I mean some bits of it are new in the sense of the command of the Sabbath although that had already occurred anyway earlier in Genesis in Exodus 16 so I think it's still probably right to see them as as doing something less than good when they lie yeah oh there's a great debate about that the the name Hebrew it seems tends to be used in the Old Testament to refer to the people of Israel but sometimes in context like this that it's sort of an outsider looking in in some way there's some debate that the that the word happy rous is to do with some perhaps slightly nomadic sort of existence but that that's fairly debatable there is a a steely from about the 12th century BC that I think has

the word happy rous on it but there's debate about whether that refers to the Israelites if it does it's the probably the earliest inscription that does refer to them outside the scriptures but there's some who would say no it doesn't refer to them it's talking about general nomadic sorts of people so that's a very debatable question where the term Hebrew comes from yeah pray for us and then we'll sing a final hymn and then if you want to stay for a cup of tea or cold drink you're welcome to do so in the hall and some biscuits there as well heavenly father we thank you that you have revealed yourself and spoken so clearly through time to your people to this world thank you that you spoke and revealed yourself to Moses in order to fulfill your promises to Abraham and to raise up a rescuer to lead your people from slavery into the promised land thank you that you are the sovereign God independent and autonomous free from any bounds placed free from the creation of our own imaginations and thank you that you the same God as you were then you are today and will be forever that you are working to fulfill those same promises made to

[58 : 20] Abraham and fulfilled in and through the Lord Jesus Christ the great I am we pray Lord God that the lessons we've learned about you from this passage of your sovereignty and your faithfulness your hand at work in world situations even perhaps in hidden ways bringing life out of death hope out of hopelessness that you may be the God whom we trust give us eyes to see and hearts to believe your promises and that you are indeed with us to the end of the age we pray this for Jesus sake amen what we pray the Lord you this for are we birriminating love you and therewith lucrative ■■ hah Hod ambiente

Arkom Wurayo What we pray is that you had a delimating love to be ayahu wasperable about you you I just saw when we part of course you're meeting singular times of the pers marc who we've honestly felt inicity therewith we refer to go something Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[61 : 48] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.