

Journey to Freedom.

PART II

Introduction

Last week we introduced our new series that we'll be exploring here on Sunday mornings and evenings and in our Life Groups during the week.

We've called this series "Journey to Freedom" and we're going to be making our way through the book of Exodus in the Old Testament.

Exodus is the account of Moses and the Israelite's deliverance from over 200 years of slavery and torment in Egypt. It's a most remarkable journey where we see, for the first time in history, God revealing Himself and His plans to the world as He takes a disconnected collection of individuals and creates a nation for Himself through which He will reveal Himself to the world.

It is in the accounts of the people recorded in Exodus that God's desire for fellowship and relationship with us is revealed. It's where we see His plan for restoring us to Himself begin. Here, in stunning and intimate detail we are given a most remarkable glimpse into the character and nature and person of the Creator of the Universe. And, finally, we discover the pinnacle of our lives as we unveil the true nature of our life's purpose and the goal for which God has created us and the means by which we can fulfil this purpose.

This morning we're going to take the first glimpse of this amazing journey; it's quite remarkable what we can glean from the purpose of a book simply by looking at the mood it begins with.

Exodus begins with the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham that he would have many descendents but within a few lines quickly moves to reveal that the fulfilment of God's promises to us do not always mean an end to trouble. In fact, here we will see that moving on and into the things God has for us can actually be the catalyst for opposition to rise up against us. Thankfully, again, within a few lines, Exodus reveals that when we remain faithful God will protect us and the end result often leads to an even greater experience of or fulfilment of God's promise and blessing.

Let's jump right into things this morning by reading the whole passage we'll be exploring...

Scripture – Exodus 1:1-22

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

^{NIV} **Exodus 1:8** Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. ⁹ "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. ¹⁰ Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." ¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

^{NIV} **Exodus 1:15** The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ¹⁶ "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." ¹⁷ The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸ Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" ¹⁹ The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." ²⁰ So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. ²² Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

Part of the Promise

Exodus 1:1-7 is the first section that we're going to look at this morning. It's our first point where we see *Part of the Promise* fulfilled.

Our first point is that Exodus begins with the evidence of the fulfilment of God's promise to the Israelite's ancestor, Abraham. From a relatively small extended family who settled in Egypt, this group has grown during the course of 430 years to be around 3 million people.

I mentioned earlier that we can learn a lot from the mood of how a book begins. This book begins with a description of the fulfilment of God's promise. The opening lines of this book point towards God's faithfulness, to His purposes being outworked; Exodus is about a God who keeps His word.

What we can also take from this is the consciousness of God's ongoing and continuing thread of relationship with His people throughout history. You see, Exodus was not written as a diary but was written by Moses after the events had taken place. In Moses' mind is the ongoing dialogue which God has continued with His people throughout time.

It can be tempting to view our lives and our relationship with God and our experiences with Him as an individual thing; but even though God does interact with us personally and uniquely – what He desires for us and to achieve through us is part of what He's doing in the lives of everyone else sitting here with us this morning and what He's been doing through the lives of everyone who has ever sought to follow Him since time began.

Moses understood this perspective and it allowed him to write this book, unveiling for us the context in which all these events took place. Moses wrote with the dialogue of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ringing in his ears as he struggled to comprehend the journey which he had travelled with God for 120 years.

As I've mentioned, the background we need to see this *Journey to Freedom* through is that of God's promise to Abraham many, many years earlier to give him many descendents and a land to call their own.

Let's just back-track for a moment and listen in on this dialogue between God and Abraham...

^{NIV} **Genesis 15:1** After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." ² But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. ⁷ He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it..."

^{NLT} **Genesis 22:17** I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. ¹⁸ And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed-- all because you have obeyed me."

With this now firmly in our minds, let's return to Exodus where we read in the first paragraph:

^{NIV} **Exodus 1:6** Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, ⁷ but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

We need to keep this perspective firmly in mind as we take this *Journey to Freedom* – this perspective of a faithful God who keeps His Word through generations and ages, a God whose plans are fulfilled progressively through all who choose to follow Him.

We begin this *Journey to Freedom* with *Part of the Promise* fulfilled, but not completed...

Pressure of the Promise

What follows is a pretty quick turn-around in mood. We go from the awesome realisation that God keeps His Word, that He's working throughout all of history and that all who choose to follow him are connected to His purposes right from before time began and into eternity – from this lofty beginning we come crashing to earth...

^{NIV} **Exodus 1:8** Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. ⁹ "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. ¹⁰ Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." ¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

Our second point is the *Pressure of Promise*.

The Israelites enjoyed around 200 years of prospering and thriving and increasing in Egypt, living favoured lives because of their relation, Joseph's position and the high regard he was held in for his services to the Pharaoh.

You know, one thing that never changes is that no matter what we do for other people that favour we might enjoy will run out one day. Have you ever noticed how many people only ever remember the silly or bad things you do and ever recall that 95% of the time you're amazing?

The Israelites discovered this out big time, except they didn't actually do anything stupid.

There are two things I'd like to point out on this initial stage of our journey:

- (i) The fulfilment of God's promises to us doesn't mean an end to our troubles
- (ii) At times we will discover that the fulfilment of God's plans, purposes and promises to us are a catalyst for pressure against us.

We may often be holding onto the promises of God – whether personal things we've received from Him or the many universal promises to those who follow Him that God has made – and it would be easy to think that when God fulfils these in our lives everything will be wonderful, and it is, however – the fulfilment of God's plans, purposes and promises in our lives does not mean the pressures of life will disappear.

Indeed, if we look at this passage in Exodus we can see that it was actually *because* of the fulfilment of God's promise that the Israelites faced pressure. It wasn't until the Israelites began multiplying and flourishing as God had promised that the Pharaoh began to turn against them.

Standing up for God, moving on in God, accepting the things of God, realising the fulfilment of God's plans, purposes and promises in our lives can actually be a catalyst for the enemy to rise up against us. Sometimes there is a *Pressure* which comes with the *Promise*.

Perseverance for the Promise

There are actually degrees of *Pressure* that we may encounter. Initially the Israelites merely faced discomfort and restriction. But the *Pressure* increased:

NIV **Exodus 1:15** The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ¹⁶ "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." ¹⁷ The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸ Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" ¹⁹ The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive."

The *Pressure* the Israelites faced increased to a point of personal risk and danger. What we see here is a choice to either succumb to the *Pressure* or to *Persevere*. This third thing I want to highlight is the need we often have for *Perseverance for the Promise*.

There will always be challenges to meet, obstacles to overcome, doors to kick down and walls to climb – but do so we must. *Perseverance* for the plans, purposes and promises of God is essential if we want to experience these things, not just in part, but in every increasing measure.

Perfection of the Promise

What we see here in Exodus is the result of *Perseverance*.

NIV **Exodus 1:20** So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. ²² Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

We can be sure that standing up against Pharaoh's order was not an easy thing for the midwives to do, but their faith and conviction in God was enough to persuade them to do so.

Standing firm against the *Pressures of the Promise* is not an easy thing for anyone to do, but what we see here is that doing so releases an even greater fulfilment of the plans, purposes and promises of God.

God's kindness ensured the protection of the midwives and as a result we see not simply that these babies were spared in this case, but that the Israelites "*became even more numerous*".

We can call this the *Perfection of the Promise*.

Of course, we know that God's promise would not be completely fulfilled for another 80 years, more if we include the time it took to settle in the Promised Land, but what we see is a clear pattern of progressive fulfillment. We see God's promises being fulfilled in every increasing measure.

Conclusion

When we've hungered after something for so long and we finally begin to see it realised, when we catch a glimpse of it on the horizon, it can be tempting to imagine that everything will be easy from now on.

What we can learn from these first layovers on our *Journey to Freedom* is that, not only do the pressures of life continue *despite* the fulfilment of God's plans, purposes and promises, but oftentimes these are accompanied by an increase in pressure against us.

We can draw great strength and comfort from the understanding that when we persevere, not only will God sustain and protect us, but that this typically leads to an even greater experience and realisation of the things of God in our lives.

I'd like to invite you to stand with me and pray as we close this morning. We're going to pray for three things together today:

- (i) That for those of us who have been longing, that we will begin to see the fulfilment of God's promise.
- (ii) For those facing pressure, that God will give us favour and strength and perspective to persevere through them, seeking after God.
- (iii) And for all of us, that regardless of whichever stage we may be at on this *Journey to Freedom* that we will daily experience in ever increasing measure the fulfilment and perfection of the plans, purposes and promises of God in our lives individually and as a Church and community.