

# Slavery and Exodus

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     that take place in the Old Testament. And as we do so, we want to learn more about what happened at these big moments. We want to try and explain how these fit together across the Old Testament. And above all else, we want to see how they're all pointing forward towards Jesus Christ in the new.

Our title today is Slavery and Exodus, and we can read again at verses 13 and 14 from the passage we read. Moses said to the people, Fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord which he will work for you today.

For the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you and you only have to be silent. We're going to look at this together under four headings. What's the story so far? What's the story at this point?

What's the bigger story? And what does it mean for your story? So first question, what's the story so far? This is the fourth sermon in our series. We started off at creation and we saw that God created the universe. And as he did so, he created it as a wonderful homeland for humanity, where we could enjoy a wonderful relationship with God and with one another.

It's a place of beauty, order, purpose and potential. A place where humanity has both the amazing privilege and the profound responsibility of bearing the image of God.

[ 1 : 3 5 ]     But from that beautiful starting point, tragedy follows. In Genesis chapter 3, humanity rebels against God by sinning. And the result is that creation becomes disordered, humanity becomes disorientated and dysfunctional.

Harmony and community are replaced with suffering and hostility. And above all else, that close communion with God that humanity first enjoyed is lost.

That means that by the time you reach Genesis 4 in the Old Testament, humanity and indeed the whole of creation are beautiful and broken.

That means that from Genesis 3 through the rest of the Bible and in fact the whole of history, everything is now in the context of a conflict narrative.

The kingdom of God is being opposed by the kingdom of evil and humanity is totally caught up in the midst of that conflict. And that of course is the reason why that for every human who has ever lived, life is a struggle and a battle.

[ 2 : 5 5 ]     In that conflict, there is no neutral ground. Humanity is either in fellowship with God or in rebellion against him. There is no third option.

As you read through Genesis 4 to 11, you see the awful consequences of all that's happened. Humanity becomes horribly hostile towards God and towards one another and becomes both the victim and the cause of terrible suffering.

The story of Genesis 1 to 11 is that everything is broken. The beautiful homeland of Genesis 1 and 2 is now a battleground.

But the story of the rest of the Old Testament is that God is not giving up. And from Genesis 12 onwards, God begins to implement an amazing plan of restoration.

That plan begins with Abraham, who we looked at last week. Abraham is chosen by God. He is called to a new life and he's given wonderful promises by God.

[ 4 : 11 ] Central to those promises is a family, as you have in these verses in Genesis 1 to 3. Abraham is called by God. He's promised that he will have a child. He's promised that through that child, his descendants will grow into a great nation through whom the whole world is going to be blessed.

And throughout all of God's dealings with Abraham, the great emphasis on the promises that Abraham receives is that he has done nothing to deserve any of it.

The promises are all grounded on the grace of God. Grace is foundational to God's dealings with Abraham and we call these promises of grace that Abraham receives. We call that a covenant of grace.

But what's happened between Abraham and this chapter that we read in Exodus 14? Well, two key things have taken place. First, the family has grown into a nation. So you can look at that diagram there. It's just really a very simple family tree.

Abraham did eventually have a son, Isaac. He actually had other sons, but Isaac was the first one born to Abraham and Sarah. He was the one promised by God.

[ 5 : 42 ] Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob is the figure that Genesis focuses on and God gave Jacob a new name. He called him Israel.

Jacob went on to have 12 sons, as you can see on the diagram there, and they went on to have sons and descendants. And they were all soon part of one big family nation that was named after Jacob's other name. They were called the Israelites.

So by the time we reach Exodus, the Abraham, Isaac, Jacobite family is huge. It's become a nation. But we must not forget, it was still a family.

So when we hear the word Israel today, we tend to think of a political nation. But when you read the word Israel in the Bible, we are primarily talking about a family.

This family has grown so big, it is a family nation. The second key thing that's happened though is that the family has gone from prosperity to slavery.

[ 6 : 57 ] Abraham was a very wealthy man. He had flocks and herds, gold and silver, male servants, female servants, camels and donkeys. That prosperity continued through Isaac and Jacob. And Joseph, one of Jacob's descendants, he actually reached the very top of the civil service in Egypt.

And so in many ways, the family was very successful. But towards the end of Jacob's life, there was a severe famine in the area where they lived.

And so the family moved en masse to Egypt to settle in an area called Goshen. And that takes us right up to the end of the book of Genesis. And at that stage, everything looks pretty good. However, Exodus chapter one tells us what happened over the next 400 years.

And I'll just read it quickly for you. These are the names of the sons of Israel who came out of Egypt with Jacob, each with his household. Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, Issachar, Zebulon and Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

All the descendants of Jacob were 70 persons. Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly.

[ 8 : 18 ] They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph and he said to his people, behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.

Come, let us deal shrewdly with them lest they multiply and if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land. Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens.

They built for Pharaohs, Storsities, Pithom and Ramesses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves.

This slavery had actually been anticipated by God right back in the days of Abraham. You see that in Genesis 15, he says, no for certain that your sojourners will be offspring, will be in a land that's not theirs and will be servants there and will be afflicted for 400 years.

But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterwards they'll come out with great possessions. The rest of Exodus tells us the dramatic account of how God did indeed judge that nation and how he raised up Moses who confronted Pharaoh and brought the Israelites out of slavery and into freedom.

[ 9 : 54 ] So that's the story so far. What's the story at this point? We've heard from Exodus 14, which describes one of the most famous and most dramatic moments in the whole Exodus from Egypt.

After a long struggle between Moses and Pharaoh and the awful plagues that were provoked by Pharaoh's resistance, the Israelites finally escaped. But no sooner had they left that Pharaoh changed his mind and he sent his army in pursuit of them.

In Exodus 14, the Israelites are cornered. The Red Sea is in front of them. The Egyptian army is caught up behind them and in the midst of this impossible situation, God saves them by parting the waters of the sea.

The Israelites are able to escape. The Egyptians are drowned as they try to pursue them. It is an amazing moment. God miraculously intervenes to save his people.

I want to just look in a little bit more detail at verses 10 to 14 because these verses highlight three very important truths about how God's saving plan works.

[ 11 : 12 ] First of all, we see that the people saved by God are helpless. Verse 10 highlights that very clearly. When Pharaoh drawn near, the people cried out to God and they were terrified.

As we said at the start, the whole of the Old Testament is a conflict narrative between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil. That spiritual conflict frequently manifests itself in the physical conflicts that are common throughout the Old Testament.

And that threat of conflict is very much apparent here. You have the most powerful army on earth bearing down on a bunch of runaway slaves. And on the face of it, the Israelites look doomed. Egypt is incredibly powerful.

Israel is utterly helpless. That means that God does not save them because they're strong.

Secondly, we see in verses 11 to 12 that the people being saved by God are not just helpless. They're also foolish. They said to Moses, is it because there's no graves in Egypt that you've taken us to die in the wilderness? What have you done in bringing us out of Egypt?

[ 12 : 36 ] Is this not what we said to you when we were in Egypt? Leave us alone that we might serve the Egyptians, for it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness. Faced with this seemingly hopeless situation, all Israel's confidence vanishes.

So much so that they start thinking that they will be better off back in Egypt, and that's a pattern that repeats itself throughout the Exodus journey. When faced with difficult circumstances, they keep thinking that they would have been better off staying as slaves.

And in doing so, they are incredibly foolish. They always seem ready to choose permanent slavery over temporary challenges.

And the point that this emphasizes is that the Israelites whom God rescues out of Egypt are not a godly, pious, impressive religious nation.

They're a mess. Abraham was a man of great faith, but his descendants are nothing like him. They were constantly doubting God. They were desperate to find idols that they could worship, and they were forever making very foolish choices.

[ 13 : 55 ] That means that God does not save them because they are worthy. So we see that the people being saved are helpless. The people being saved are foolish.

The third thing we see is that the people being saved by God don't actually do anything. I want you just to imagine for a moment that you were among the Israelites in this chapter.

You've been walking day and night. You've had the excitement of escaping Egypt, but now reality is setting in. What's going to happen? Where do we go? All the time you're thinking, what if the Egyptians catch up with us?

You come to the sea. You've got your family, your relatives and friends all around you. You're tired. You're hungry, and you're thinking, okay, we're at the sea. What are we going to do now?

And then in the distance, you hear rumbling, and over the horizon you see Egyptian chariots appear.

[ 14 : 58 ] And quickly you realize that there's hundreds of them swarming towards your location near the shore. And you can imagine what people around you would start to say. They would be like, let's get out of here.

But which way do we go? We're stuck. We can't go this way. We can't go that way. Let's try and fight. No, let's run. What are we going to do? And Moses stands up and he says, you don't need to do anything.

Fear not, stand firm. See the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.

The Israelites don't do anything. God does it all. And reading on from verse 15, we see how God miraculously delivers these people.

If you had been standing in the Israelite camp, watching the Egyptians hurtling towards you, you'd have said to yourself, we're dead.

[ 16 : 09 ] But the outcome is that it's the Egyptians who perish. The Israelites are saved, and it's entirely down to what God does. And it's all summed up beautifully at the end of the chapter in verses 31 and 32.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians. And Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians.

So the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord, and in his servant, Moses. God is the one who acts. That means that the Israelites are not saved through anything that they do.

So the people saved by God are helpless, they're foolish, and they don't actually do anything in order to be saved. And it's essential to recognize this because it is showing just how broken humanity is.

It's very easy to think that sin has left humanity kind of a wee bit spoiled, a bit less than ideal. But if we get our act together, then we can put things right.

[ 17 : 22 ] And that of course is what many of the world's religions say. And looking at the Old Testament, it's easy to think, well, the Israelites, they're kind of the good guys, aren't they?

So yes, they had their issues, but obviously they weren't as bad as the other nations. So they're the ones that God liked best because they weren't too bad. It's so easy to think like that, but we must recognize that that is a totally inaccurate understanding of both the Israelites and humanity.

The Israelites in the Exodus and in the whole of the Old Testament were a broken mess. They were not the best of a bad bunch. They were not pretty good with just a few wobbles.

They were not a model of faithfulness or godliness. They were a broken mess. And that's because the whole of humanity is a broken mess.

And the Israelites were no different. Sin has wrecked humanity. And the horror of things like famine and slavery and deception, violence, conflict and all the other terrible things that have happened between Genesis 3 and Exodus 14 are all showing us that humanity is in an awful state.

[ 18 : 40 ] And if you stretch things from Genesis 3 right through to Scotland in 2021, it's still the same. The result of that is that humanity desperately needs to be rescued.

And it's at this point we see that Exodus 14 is revealing another crucial aspect of what makes God's saving plan possible.

With Abraham, you remember we said a moment ago that there's this wonderful emphasis on grace. God initiates a plan of salvation. Abraham does nothing to deserve it.

With the Exodus, there's the same grace because the Israelites aren't worthy of anything. But alongside the grace of God, there's another crucial aspect of what makes God's saving plan possible.

And it's in verse 31. Can you see it? It's power.

[ 19 : 48 ] If anyone is going to be rescued from danger, these two things are absolutely essential. Grace and power.

So imagine that you're stuck in a storm at sea, your boat is capsized, you're hanging on and suddenly the helicopter winchman reaches you. At that moment, he doesn't say, can you just clarify that you deserve this rescue and that you're going to be able to cover all the costs?

He doesn't say anything like that at all. He just comes to you because of grace. He doesn't ask any questions about what got you there, about what you deserve, or about who's going to pay for it.

And when he reaches you, he doesn't shout, here's a rope. I hope you're strong enough to climb it. No, he just grabs you, puts a harness around you and then 5000 horsepower of helicopter hoists you to safety.

If you are going to be saved from that situation, your rescuer needs the grace to be willing to save you. And they need the power to be actually able to do it.

[ 21 : 04 ] That's how a rescue works. And that is exactly what God does here. He rescues the Israelites because he's a God of grace. It's got nothing to do with what they deserve.

And he delivers them to safety in an amazing demonstration of his power. But all of that can still leave us wondering, well, why does this matter so much?

And why is it just the Israelites that get saved? And why is the liberation of this relatively small and insignificant tribe in North Africa so important?

Well, that's where we need to ask our third question. What's the bigger story? As we've been saying, the Old Testament, the story of the Old Testament is a conflict narrative between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil.

The events of Genesis 3 brought humanity under the grip of sin and evil. And from there, humanity is on a downward trajectory.

[ 22 : 16 ] So when you think of the whole story of the Old Testament, the general thrust is downward. It's not positive. It's negative.

But in the midst of all of that brokenness, God does not give up. So within that downward trajectory, there are moments of hope.

And we could draw it a wee bit. That's a very, very simple drawing. But a wee graph line like that captures, I hope, what I'm trying to say.

It's generally going down, but all the little upward bits are moments of hope. And these wee upward bits are actually the bits that we're highlighting in this series.

So the first was Abraham, where God places family at the heart of his saving plan, and he gives precious promises of grace. So Abraham was a really positive moment. But after Abraham, things went downhill again.

[ 23 : 21 ] The family grew, but they ended up as slaves. So the next kind of moment of hope is Moses. The family are rescued from slavery.

But even in that rescue, they doubted God. And as we'll see next week, I think, it does not take them long to abandon God, despite everything that he's done for them.

And that's the pattern that continues throughout the Old Testament. There are these positive moments, but the general direction is downward. The pull of sin is too strong.

In the great Old Testament conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil, it's not the kingdom of God that's winning.

And you can easily think to yourself, well, that doesn't really sound very good. But none of that should actually surprise us. Because in the Old Testament, God is not trying to give us a series of successes.

[ 24 : 30 ] He is giving us a series of signposts. All of these moments are pointing forward. They're pointing forward to Jesus Christ.

And that means that just as it was with Abraham as we saw last week, so it is here in Exodus, that everything before us in this chapter and all these great events, all of that is a sign pointing us forward to what God is doing through Jesus.

Slavery in Egypt is pointing us to the fact that we are slaves to sin and we desperately need to be rescued. The weakness and foolishness of the Israelites is showing us that we cannot save ourselves.

But the extraordinary power demonstrated in Exodus 14 is telling us that when it comes to saving you, Jesus will do whatever it takes.

And so when Moses says, the Lord will fight for you, you have only to be silent. That is exactly what Jesus has come to do.

[ 25 : 53 ] He's come to reach us and to rescue us. And it's described beautifully in Hebrews 2 where it says, Since therefore the children shed in flesh and blood, he himself likewise particular same things that through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

That is the devil. That's conflict language. He's come to destroy the enemy. And he has also come to deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

The Exodus is just a shadow of that deliverance from slavery that Jesus has come to give us. And in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the conflict narrative changes forever.

Because the kingdom of evil is defeated. The head of the serpent is crushed. The risen exalted Jesus is king overall.

And every broken, fearful, enslaved human who trusts in him is set free.

[ 27 : 11 ] But last of all, what does it mean for your story? Exodus 14 happened about 3400 years ago or so. Does that story of what happened way back then have any relevance to the story of your life? No.

Well, I really hope that you can see that it does because Exodus is showing us the inescapable reality of our situation as humans. And it's showing us the fundamental truths of how salvation works.

And I hope that you can see all the implications of this because it's teaching us some of the most important lessons we can ever learn. It's teaching us that we need to recognize that you can forget about religious neutrality.

It does not exist. The whole of human existence is a conflict narrative. We are either with God or against him. We're either in Christ or outside of him.

We're either safe or lost. There's no third way. Spiritual neutrality can never be your story.

[ 28 : 38 ] We also need to recognize that sin is not a bit of fun or a moment of kind of naughty indulgence. Sin is brutal slavery.

So when the devil dangles an attractive sin in front of you, whether that's to do with money or power or sex or gossip or drink or status or revenge, whenever he does that, he's not doing it to give you a wee bit of pleasure because following God is dull.

He is doing it to enslave you. But one of the best tactics that the devil uses to enslave you is to make you think that you are the master.

So he dangles pride or bitterness or lust or greed in front of you. And he says, you can just have a bit of this and then you can put it down again later.

Isn't that exactly what happens? So we think, well, I'll just have that. I'll have one more drink or I'll have another look at that website.

[ 29 : 44 ] Or I'm just not going to forgive this time. And we think that we can kind of just pick these things up and put them down because the devil is convincing us that we are the master.

But if you cannot go a day without satisfying a sinful habit, if you can't encounter someone else's mistakes without getting angry or bitter, if you can't work with someone without having the urge to prove that you're better than them, if you can't control these sins that you think that you can pick up and put down, then you have to ask yourself, am I the master or am I the slave?

There's a very solemn lesson from Paul about this, which relates directly to Exodus 14. He says, I don't want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink.

They drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did.

We also need to recognize that Jesus is offering you freedom. Jesus wants you to be free, free from sin, free from fear, free from death.

[ 31 : 29 ] Because freedom doesn't mean just doing whatever you like, because freedom is never, it never means doing whatever you like. The freedom that Jesus offers you is freedom to be everything that God created you to be.

And one of the best illustrations I ever heard of this was to think of a steam engine. A steam engine is an incredible piece of engineering, they're just magnificent when you see them in all their glory.

But if you took that steam engine and thought, I'm going to use this steam engine to go along a beach and you put it on the sand and you think I'm going to fire it up and I'm going to get the boiler billowing and we're going to go along this beach because I want to go wherever I want and I want to go along this beach.

If you tried to run a steam engine along a beach then it's a very feeble site. But if you put that steam engine onto the rails that it's made for, then it thrives and it can roar through the countryside in magnificent freedom.

And the point of that illustration is to say that humanity thrives when we live to be what God created us to be.

[ 32 : 59 ] And that makes perfect sense because if you think of all the great achievements of humanity, they're actually all examples of humanity simply doing what God tells us to do in Genesis 1 and 2.

So the brilliant examples you see of someone who champions community or someone who cares for the environment or someone who makes an amazing discovery or someone who is astonishingly creative in art or music, they are simply doing what God has created us to do.

And one of the great goals of Christianity is to redeem and restore all of that wonderful potential in humanity. And it's a great reminder that Christianity is not slavery.

And any presentation of Christianity that implies that it is, is a counterfeit. So as a Christian, that means that in everything that you do this week, whether that's as a student, a parent, a colleague, a boss, a member of this church, God does not want you to be a slave. He wants you to thrive.

But perhaps the most important thing that we need to recognize from this whole story is this. That no matter who you are, no matter how bleak your circumstances, no matter how great and numerous your mistakes, God has enough grace and enough power to save you.

[ 34 : 36 ] Do you feel weak and helpless? Do you feel foolish? Do you feel like an idiot with all the things that you've done and that you regret? Do you feel like you've got nothing to offer? The people around you or this church or God, do you feel like you're just, that you just mucked up so much? There's nothing you can do.

Well, if you feel like that, right now, God is saying to you, I will fight for you and you have only to be silent.

And in that silence, look at the cross where Jesus died. Because on the cross, you will see just how much Jesus will fight for you.

And all you have to do to be saved is hold out your empty hands to Him. And in His abundant grace and in His immeasurable power, He will do the rest.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for your grace and for your power, for the salvation of the Lord that you have accomplished.

[ 36 : 16 ] And we pray that in every way we would just lean on you and look to you. And instead of thinking that we know best and instead of doing our own thing, that we would remember your great words, that you are the one who will fight for us and we have only to be silent.

In that silence, help us to see more of you, Lord Jesus. Amen.