

The Nation of God's People

Exodus 1:1-14

We finished our study of the book of Deuteronomy this morning, and since we finished the book of Philipians as well last Sunday night, I want to continue our study of the historical books of the Old Testament in the afternoon, though we'll move a bit backward in history, from the nation of God's people about to enter the promised land, as was the situation in Deuteronomy, to the time and occasion when God actually called his people to himself by delivering them out of the land of slavery in the nation of Egypt. So we'll go back 40 years, before the time spend wandering in the wilderness. We'll go back to the very moment when God would first establish the descendants of Jacob, the nation, as the nation of God's own people.

Let me say something clearly at the very outset, something you will hear me say often as we study Exodus in the coming months, something you hear me say clearly about all these Old Testament books. And that is, that Exodus is about the gospel. It is about the the redemption and the salvation of God's people. And it is about Jesus. For Moses wrote about Jesus.

Listen to this astounding statement which Jesus' said to the Jews in,

John 5:45 "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

"He wrote about me?" Moses wrote about Jesus. I don't want you to ever forget that in our study of Exodus. I don't want you to lose that context. Moses wrote about Jesus. Do you remember

what Jesus taught the two disciples on the road to Emmaus?

Luke 24:25 "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

You can be sure that Jesus used the book of Exodus in that most fascinating Bible study. "Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

So as we study Exodus, I will be expounding to you the things concerning Jesus, the things concerning the gospel, the things that relate to the grace of God in the redemption of his people. Beginning with the whole concept of redemption. Salvation. Thus the central event of this whole book, the main event which defines the context for the whole book, is the event of redemption. The event of salvation, lived out in the lives of God's people of the nation of Israel. The climax of that event is described in the words of,

Ex. 12:40 "Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years--on that very same day--it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. 42 It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations...51 And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies."

And so a nation was born. But not just any nation. Not just another nation. Rather, the nation of God's people. God's nation.

But where did that nation come from? Pretty small beginnings. We read in our text in Exodus 1 about just 70 people. The descendants of Jacob.

v.1-5

What is so important here is to realize that this tiny nation traces its origin to the promise of God, a covenant promise. For this is a covenant people.

I. A COVENANT PEOPLE AND A COVENANT PROMISE.

A people formed as the result of a promise which God made. That promise was so clear when God spoke to Abraham.

Gen. 12:1 "Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Later we read,

Gen. 17:1 "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 "And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8

"Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

That's the covenant of God's grace. He chooses Abraham, to make him into a great nation. And that is,

A. The identity of God's people.

God chose them. God's people are a chosen people. Beginning with Abraham. God chose Abraham. And he chose Abraham's seed, he chose Isaac, not Ishmael. And God chose Isaac's seed, he chose Jacob not Esau.

And then, finally, with Jacob, he chooses the whole family. All twelve of his sons, the twelve tribes of Israel, as they are identified in verses 2, 3 and 4 of our text. God's chosen people.

Now, why do I emphasize that? More importantly, why does Moses emphasize that? Because the emphasis of that is upon the sovereign promise of God. And that is the identity of God's people. They are people of the promise.

So we read this in the New Testament,

Rom. 9:6 "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."

Children of the promise. That's who the people of God are. And the identity of God's people didn't change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It is still our identity. It was the

identity of the nation of Israel. Children of the promise. Not children of our own works. Not children by our own efforts. Not children by our own performance. But children of the promise. God's promise to be our God. And so we read in,

Gal. 3:29 "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

That is your identity, if you are a Christian, a believer in Jesus Christ.

Gal. 4:28 "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise."

We are the Israel of God. We are God's chosen people, we the church. That's why we study the book of Exodus, because it proclaims to us our identity. Children of promise.

And that is what ought to drive our worship, that God has made a promise to us, a covenant promise. God has chosen us to be his covenant people. And in response, we give him our lives as a living sacrifice. And we sing his praise. And that is the very definition of our lives. We are worshipers!

Eph. 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

The reason your identity is so important is because it gives you reason to sing God's praise. Particularly in the awareness of,

B. The promise of God's blessing.

It might not seem like a blessing to those 70 people who went into Egypt with Joseph.

v.6

But the point of verse 6 is to contrast it with,
v.7

God's blessing. The fulfillment of God's promise.

Gen. 28:14 "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Literally, they swarmed, like a nest of insects. They grew exceedingly mighty, exceedingly numerous. The words of verse 7 are actually this, "they were exceedingly exceedingly." Do you get the point?

Let me be specific. We read of 70 people here among the family of Jacob, yet only 430 years later at the actual Exodus event we read about 600,000 fighting men. It is realistic then to count the total number of people to include another 600,000 women and at least 800,000 children. A total of 2 million people, having increased from 70 in only 430 years. You can look at those numbers statistically and see clearly just how prolific these people of God were. And that in the days of very high infant mortality, too. From 70 to 2 million in 430 years. Certain evidence of God's great faithfulness.

Interestingly, this is the same promise God first made to Adam

and Eve, before the fall! The same words were used in what we often call the cultural mandate,

Gen. 1:28 "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Fill the earth and subdue it. How? Children. That's the fulfillment of God's promise of blessing. For the covenant promise is for you...and for your children! And for generations far off! What a blessing of God that is, especially when we see that blessing fulfilled in our day in generation after generation of Christians.

This is really quite a startling thought in today's world, that the covenant promise of God is fulfilled by the blessing of reproduction. In our day, reproduction is not generally considered a blessing. And in our day, the emphasis is not upon the fullness of this blessing but how we ought to manage and limit it! Children are seen as a burden, and their number is often and intentionally severely limited. Even put to death in the womb before they are born, often simply because they are unwanted.

Why do we think that way about children today? Because we have missed the biblical emphasis upon the blessing of God from generation to generation. And with that, we miss the influence that our children can have. Just think if God's blessing were upon us today as it was for the descendants of Jacob. "The land was filled with them." Indeed, it was.

But that does, of course, raise another issue. A problem. Non-Christians won't like it. And neither did the Egyptians. They were fearful of the influence of these strangers in their midst. Fearful of their influence.

v.8-10

Let me muse a little bit. Wouldn't it be great for non-Christians to fear that sort of influence from God's people today? Not in the context of war, of course, since in the New Covenant the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, not physical or literal weapons. But it is warfare. Spiritual warfare. War in the spiritual realm. And too often, Christians are just marginalized. They are ignored. Ridiculed. Despised and rejected as foolish and silly.

Not so for the Egyptians, who so us what is still taking place today. This, too, is a fulfillment of God's own prophetic words. There shall be,

II. A CONFLICT BETWEEN GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE AND THE WORLD.

This, too, goes back to Genesis.

Gen. 3:14 "So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

There is Jesus, but the way. The seed of the woman shall crush the head of the seed of the serpent. Jesus shall crush Satan at the end of the age, but until then, there shall be enmity. Warfare. Irreconcilable conflict.

We see the obvious example of that here.

v.11

v.13-14

"Rigor" means ruthless. Harsh. Cruel. With a severity that

you and I can hardly imagine. There were as mean-spirited and wicked as you could possibly describe. And why is that important for us?

A. The world will always treat God's people with fearful wickedness.

There is enmity. And so you and I must resist the devil, as we studied in 1 Peter. We must resist his temptations, walking in God's ways rather than being conformed to the world. But all the while, the world will be against us.

The words spoken to Adam and Eve in the Garden are still directly applicable to us as Christians,

Gen. 1:28 "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

That is often called the cultural mandate for Christians. Fill the earth and subdue it. Not with guns. Certainly not with acts of terrorism. But with godliness. With righteousness. With the faithful worship of God. With the gospel. That's what it means to be salt and light. That's what it means to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

And we ought to live out our lives in the anticipation of that very thing. Because of the promise that,

B. God will always sustain and prosper his people.

Just look at,

v.12

So what's the point of that? Let me be very practical with specific applications.

First, for the nation of Israel in the Old Covenant. It is an encouragement to remember God's goodness and blessing, even in the context of opposition and persecution.

Ps. 105:42 "For He remembered His holy promise, And Abraham His servant. 43 He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with gladness. 44 He gave them the lands of the Gentiles, And they inherited the labor of the nations, 45 That they might observe His statutes And keep His laws. Praise the LORD!"

God is faithful. Yes, the world will oppose you and cause you harm, but God is faithful. God fulfills his covenant promises, that we might worship him. With the obedience of our lives and with the praise of our lips. Obedience to the law, and corporate, public worship. That's the application. That's the encouragement and the exhortation.

God will always sustain and prosper his people.

So what do you do when you face circumstances that are difficult, to say the least? What do you do when you can identify with the descendants of Jacob in Egypt when a new king arose who did not know Joseph, a king who was cruel and heartless toward the children of Israel? What do you do?

You might well begin by meditating on,
v.12 "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel."

That's the encouragement of our text this afternoon. That's the perspective upon which we need to live our lives. God will prosper his covenant people. And in the largest sense of the big picture, you ought to be optimistic when it comes to the kingdom of Jesus and the influence of kingdom in this world. Jesus is

building his kingdom, despite the opposition of those wicked taskmasters oppressing the nation of God's people. So you need to be careful not to live only in the small, little world of your own life. Yes, there will be trouble. But Jesus has overcome the world. And that is what is being played out before us here in Exodus 1.

This is God's plan and God's purpose for the nation of God's people. Now, in the close-up picture of your own life, that might not seem to be true. It might not seem true in the life of our nation over the past year. You might see the reality of those harsh taskmasters in your life, and the trouble they inflict. You might see that reality in the life of our nation and the exercises of our government. But you need to be able to see the big picture. The afflictions will remain, but to use words from the New Testament that would say the same thing as our text this afternoon,

Rom. 8:31 "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

That's the confidence that Exodus 1 should give you. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8 continues for your encouragement,

Rom. 8:32 "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I

am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So what should you do? Above all else, sing his praise. Don't think that the hymns we sing are just fillers, unrelated to the whole worship service. So how should you respond to the preaching of God's word and the reminder of his covenant promises? Sing, in praise. For example, as we sang together earlier,

"Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel, for he alone does wondrous works in glory that excel. And blessed be his glorious name to all eternity; the whole earth let his glory fill. Amen, so let it be." And with specific mention of Jesus, we will sing, "All glory, laud and honor to thee, Redeemer, King." May that be the song of our hearts and our lips this afternoon.