

Exodus 1-2. Bethesda. Lord's day evening. 29 May 2005.

The second book of the Bible - known as 'Exodus' (a title derived from that in the LXX) - 'the going out', because it centres on the record of the great deliverance which God wrought when he brought His people, the children of Israel, out of bondage Egypt. The first few verses of the book form a bridge, a connecting link, with the events recorded in the latter section of the book of Genesis. This is made clear both by the opening words – literally, 'And these are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt'¹ – and the repeated references to Jacob and Joseph, whose life-stories dominate the second half of Genesis. The main purpose of chapters 1 and 2 is to set the scene for the great confrontation between the Lord, represented by His servants Moses and Aaron, and the might and power of Egypt, represented by its king and Pharaoh – which confrontation was brought to a dramatic conclusion by the liberation of Israel from its bondage and the death both of Pharaoh and the elite Egyptian cavalry. In sense therefore chapters 1 and 2 are largely concerned with setting the stage and introducing the principal characters in the drama to follow. And yet ... in selves these chapters are packed tight with instruction for us.

Probably more anything else they confront us with working of God's providence. And it is this I should like us to take away with us this evening – that there is a God who – though largely unseen – is there and is active behind scenes – a God who is in control and who somehow brings His will and purpose to pass in spite both of opposition and hatred of bad men, as in ch1, and failure and undue haste of good men, as in ch 2 – I say 'largely unseen' because you may have noticed He is mentioned only connection courage midwives in ch 1 and people's plight and call to Him at end ch 2.

Long before, God had promised Abr that would make his descendants into great nation – and Ch1 largely concerned with God's preparation of that nation. Important note that opening verses draw attention 2 facts in particular – first, that Jacob's direct descendants who went down Egypt from Canaan numbered only 70 – and second they there increased in most remarkable and unnatural manner. As Moses later, 'Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude', Deut. 10.22. Our passage emphasizes Israel's rapid population growth by expressing it in no less five ways, 'the children of Israel were *fruitful* and *increased abundantly* ('teemed'), *multiplied* and *grew exceedingly mighty*; and the land was *filled* with them'. That this was God's doing is made clear in that the language used here in Ex 1 matches closely the very language of God's great creatorial commands in Gen. 1 – 'be fruitful, increase abundantly (teem), multiply and fill', 1.20, 22. Land of Egypt was in fact only place on earth offer sufficient space and opportunity for family of Jacob expand into a nation which – based on 'about 600,000' men of military age who left Egypt, 12.37² – must numbered well over 2 million. There was no way could have reached reach such proportions or become 'exceedingly mighty' if had remained Canaan. Existing Canaanite nations and clans wiped out well before then. One occasion, Jacob accused 2 of sons – 'you have made me stink among inhabitants of land, among the Canaanites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I', Gen. 34.30. Even king Egypt became apprehensive, uneasy about their growth – viewing them as very real threat. Yet descendants Jacob didn't stand dog's chance of tackling and conquering Canaanite tribes unless first become that big. Egypt was place therefore which all-wise God chose as incubator in which grow.

But sojourn in Egypt fulfilled second important purpose. Land of Canaan dangerous also from standpoint of purity of Israel's faith. Name of game among clans and nations of Canaan was mixing and intermingling. Hamor, one of Canaan's chieftain kings had suggested free intermarriage between his people and family of Jacob, Gen. 34.16. Already Esau, Jacob's brother, and Judah, Jacob's son, married Canaanites. So God's chosen people in real danger of losing identity – of being absorbed both socially and spiritually into surrounding pagan nations. No such danger existed in Egypt. Egyptians were separatists –disdaining all foreigners, and abhorring shepherds in particular – which what Jacob's family were.³ Israel's isolation in Egypt was then desperately important if they to preserve spiritual identity.

Man God used get family to Egypt was Joseph – mentioned x3 in opening 8 verses of reading. Certainly been no easy ride for him – sold by brothers to Ishmaelites, by Ishmaelites to Potiphar, and cast by Potiphar into prison. But we know – as Joseph came to know – that the Lord was above all – accomplishing His own purpose through it all – as said to brothers, 'it was not you who sent me here, but God', Gen. 45.8.⁴

But God also overruled hostility and persecution of Pharaohs to make Egypt uncomfortable for Israel. God stood behind trials – permitting all - Psalm 105, 'He increased His people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants'. Point was that otherwise sorely tempted stay where were – as later in exile, Ezra 1, mere 50,000.

Their afflictions came two main stages. First, the Egyptians in person of Pharaoh enslaved, appointed taskmasters and afflicted them, vv. 8-14 – intention being to wear down physically, crush spirit and restrain population growth. King of Egypt saw as shrewd move which enable kill 2 birds one stone – because also furnish large labour-force for building projects. Note 'opening v.12 – 'But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew'. God had turned Pharaoh's vaunted 'wisdom' and cunning scheme to foolishness. And so, secondly, K of Egypt decide tighten screws and have all Hebrew male babies put to death - initially on the sly - secretly – by attempting turn Israel's midwives into executioners. But, because faith and courage of chief midwives ('Hebrew women delivered before midwives arrive', v.19) – if excuse awful puns, Pharaoh's 'ill-conceived' plan 'miscarried'! For chief midwives feared God more than feared Pharaoh – forcing king of Egypt out into open – so as to involve all his people in planned genocide. I suspect it was no coincidence that some 40 years later it was Egyptian male children – the firstborn - who perished during night of the Exodus Passover and that, again, was Egyptian males – Pharaoh's elite cavalry – who were drowned in waters of Red Sea.⁵

God's purpose was accomplished – the people – now numerous and strong enough to tackle the Canaanites – sighed and cried to God by reason of their severe bondage. They were ready to go.

But God was not only preparing the people – He was also preparing their deliverer. For while Pharaoh was busy plotting Israel's extermination, God was preparing for their emancipation.

M was remarkable man every way. Was child of a slave, yet was the son of a queen. Was born in slavery yet grew up in a palace. Inherited poverty, yet enjoyed fabulous wealth. Was the keeper of sheep yet led an army. Was educated in wisdom of Egypt, yet had faith of a child. Was at home in the royal court, yet spent 2/3rds life in a wilderness. Was backward in speech, yet talked with God. Carried only the rod of a shepherd, yet with it wielded the power of God. Was born under sentence of death, yet lived for 120 years.

God over-ruled the home into which Moses arrived – born to parents of great faith and courage - otherwise he would have perished at birth – NT = 'By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command'. But God preserved Moses from being drowned in the river – not only by faith of parents but compassion of Pharaoh's daughter – who, as read, 'saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. And she had compassion on him'. Been well said that big doors often swing on small hinges. In one sense at least, on tears of this baby rested the defeat and downfall of a Pharaoh, the preservation of a whole nation and the faithfulness of God's promises to the patriarchs. Just as envy of Joseph's brethren was means under God to bring about what most feared – Joseph's exaltation – so oppression of Israel by Egypt's kings – was means under God to bring about what *they* most feared – that Israel would 'get them up out of the land', 1.10. He that sat in heavens laughed. Pharaoh's own daughter ended up paying Moses' natural mother for her services as his wet-nurse – and Pharaoh himself ended up providing home, upkeep and education for the future deliverer of Israel from Egypt. God was at work behind scenes ensuring that His, and Israel's, future ambassador to the court of a later Pharaoh was familiar with the workings of the royal court – and that the man who was to communicate and codify His (God's) laws and write the first 5 books of Bible was given the best education available anywhere in world. Oh yes, God was very much in control – the very malice of His enemies chained to the chariot wheels of His purpose.

During his 40 years in Egypt, Moses grew to be man with many sterling qualities – not least, as read, that of champion and deliverer of the oppressed, ill-treated and downtrodden - of which no less 3 examples in ch 2.

But Moses was distinctively a man of faith - following in steps of parents. NT = 'By faith Moses, when he became of age (40), refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked away to the recompense'. It is clear from this that he made his life-changing decision to throw in his lot with God's people *before* he went out to 'look on' them and their burdens, 2.11 – something which God Himself is said to do at end chapter, 2.25. Though raised in comfort of Egypt, Moses' heart was a reflection of the heart of God, looking with compassion and pity on the afflicted.

So – no – Moses didn't forfeit his status as the son of Pharaoh's daughter by killing the Egyptian. He renounced that position first – preferring be known as a son of Abraham than the son of Pharaoh's daughter. World lay at feet – its wealth and glory – its power and position – its pomp and prestige – and he trampled on it all. But what kind of man, we may well ask, would value hardship above comfort; reproach above honour, poverty above treasure, shame above fame, a slave camp above a palace, enduring affliction above enjoying untold pleasure. In eyes of world, I guess only a madman. But Moses was no fool. It was simply that his faith laid hold on another world – and in the light of that world, he simply weighed issues of time in balances of eternity – reached perfectly sane decision – indeed, the only intelligent decision – and plumped for the most valuable.

And yet Moses still wasn't ready – wasn't fully equipped for the work God had in store for him. And so God overruled Moses' haste and impatience to enrol him on a course of *further education* – lasting a second 40 years – but this time in the fields of Midian, keeping sheep. There, in God's college, he learnt lessons in keeping sheep together, leading them into places of pasture and refreshment, rounding up strays, waiting patiently for stragglers to catch up, protecting the flock from enemies and preventing rebels from wandering away. All this was part of God's plan and preparation of His servant – training Moses to become, as Isaiah once described him, 'the shepherd of His (God's) flock', 63.12.

[By end of ch2, the stage is set. All props are in place and key characters are on stage. The action is about to begin – and the sparks to fly. Can't afford to miss Mervyn taking up story on 12th June. Meanwhile, we can each take away assurance that, in way I altogether unable explain, in spite rage of His enemies and failures of His friends, God in control of whatever happens in world and in our lives. Can enjoy assurance this week that my life and all my circumstances are safe in His hands.]

Here then in the opening of Exod 2 we discover God's plan for the salvation and deliverance of His people – and it certainly didn't look very much. Just a man, a woman and a baby. Who ever would have thought that you would find God's appointed Saviour and deliverer lying in a papyrus basket? But then we read in the opening of *Luke 2* in NT of another man, woman and a baby - over 1500 years later. Again we discover God's plan of salvation and deliverance – this time from a more severe and fearful bondage than even that of Egypt. But who would ever have thought that you would find God's appointed Saviour and deliverer lying in an animal's feeding trough?

¹ Hebrew Bible entitles, 'And these are the names of'.

² Num. 1.46.

³ Hence Joseph's earlier tactic obtain land of Goshen for them, Gen. 46.34.

⁴ Was no question Jacob's family greatly blessed on account of Joseph, but even long after his death, Israel continued grow by leaps and bounds. Because ultimately was not Joseph who source of Israel's blessings, but God.

⁵ Hard to miss Moses' constant emphasis in his celebratory song on fact Pharaoh and his cavalry perished in water – God 'threw' into sea, 'cast' into sea, 'depths covered them' etc, 15.1,4,5,8,10,19.