

• *Abraham's people are in a situation of great difficulty – slavery in Egypt*

• *Abraham was told about this and also of a mighty liberation by God*

• *Exodus 1-15 tells the story of deliverance by the blood of a lamb*

• *Exodus 16 onwards – the establishment of the people of God*

• *Exodus 19 to Numbers 10 at Sinai*

• *By 'the blood of a lamb' – the way God works*

• *The principles of salvation demonstrated in Old Testament events*

• *The whole people of God are involved*

1. The people of God go through a time of many changes and great difficulty

• *New opportunities*

At the point where 'Exodus' begins Israel are in a situation of great difficulty. They had fallen into slavery and oppression in Egypt. The book of Genesis has told us the story of how men and women were created in God's image, but then fell into sin and darkness (Genesis 1–11). The later chapters of Genesis have told us of a promise of salvation that is to come through a 'seed of Abraham'. In Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph we have seen some models of faith and patience. Readers of Genesis should know by now that salvation is by grace and through faith. Before any legislation is given on Mount Sinai we are to know that salvation is by trusting God's promise. Abraham believed God and that was reckoned to him as righteousness¹. Yet Abraham was also told that there would come a time when his people would fall into slavery and would be ill-treated in a foreign land². God would then liberate His people in a great and mighty deliverance.

Exodus to Numbers tell the story of the creation of Israel and its establishment as the people of God. In Exodus 1:1–15:21 we have the story of how the people of God came to be in need of deliverance by the blood of a lamb. The people were experiencing persecution and slavery¹. God prepared a deliverer, Moses². After an initial period of conflict with Pharaoh³ there came a time when Pharaoh was confronted by nine powerful judgements from God⁴, but it was a tenth judgement, the battle over the 'firstborn son', that led to the redemption of Israel by the blood of a lamb⁵. They march out of Egypt singing a song of triumph⁶.

The rest of Exodus tells the story of the establishment of the people of God. They journey to Sinai¹, facing two different reactions to their redemption². Then they arrive at Sinai and the 'books of the law' record no further travelling until Numbers 10:11. The whole of Exodus 19:1 to Numbers 10:10 finds its setting at Mount Sinai. Our concern for the moment is with Exodus 1–20.

The story begins with 'salvation by the blood of a lamb'. It is a story which is relevant for the Christian for it gives us a sample of the way in which God works, and a preview of His altogether greater deliverance from sin and judgement 'through the blood of a lamb'. Jesus is the lamb of God.

All the principles of our salvation are to be found in the Old Testament. As we read Exodus we are not only reading about historical events – although the 'Exodus' was certainly historical. We are also reading of God and of the way in which He saves. At a higher level His way of salvation is still the same today. The human race is in bondage. No one can escape the power of sin. God prepares a deliverer, Jesus. Through the blood of God's lamb, there is escape from our sinfulness and bondage and we become pilgrims travelling to a promised land.

Exodus 1:1–5 begins by listing the seventy ancestors of the nation of Israel (the sixty-eight of Genesis 48:8–26 plus Jacob himself plus Joseph and two sons).¹ The whole people of God are involved in this event, and Exodus 1:1–5 emphasises the fact by listing the whole nation of Israel.

1. The people of God go through a time of many changes and great difficulty. The change came quite suddenly. A new situation was abruptly thrust upon them. None of us like change. We like to be in a routine that is safe and secure and goes on for ever. But God has a habit of allowing change to come in our lives and in the story of our nation. It makes us realise we are dependent on God. They had been progressing well and were growing in numbers¹. Their situation might have stayed that way indefinitely if God had not brought about a change. Often a time of change is a time of challenge when we discover God's faithfulness in a new way. But when there are things happening that force change we must realise that God is giving us new opportunities and His kingdom is about to go forward in some way.

¹ Gen 15:6
² Gen 15:13

¹ Exodus 1
² 2:1–4:31
³ 5:1–7:7
⁴ 7:8–10:29
⁵ 11:1–14:31
⁶ 15:1–21

¹ 15:22–17:7
² 17:8–18:27

¹ 1:6–7

- A new king
- Harsh treatment
- Secret persecution
- Open persecution
- Changes that shake us cause us to seek God

2. God is using oppression to prepare them for the future

- Count it joy – God is moving us on – and shaping us

There came a new king that did not know Joseph^{□1}. He does not like this ever-increasing number of Israelites in his country^{□2} and soon persecution and oppression start for God's people. Joseph their leader is no longer with them. They go through a time when they are not recognized as having any importance. It is always difficult to be less important than before in a society. Then they face fierce persecution. It comes in stages. (i) First, there is harsh treatment^{□3}. (ii) Then there is secret persecution^{□4}. Pharaoh does not say much publicly but there is a quiet campaign to exterminate the people by allowing only girls to live. If the programme had continued, soon there would be no men and the people would die out. (iii) When this does not work there is open persecution. Pharaoh issues a decree. *'Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile'*^{□5}.

Why does God allow such things to happen? Because unchanging progress makes us spiritually careless. We need changes in our lives to shake us up and drive us to seek God. Israel would not have been calling on God^{□1} if their life had continued to be a life of ease and privilege. The new events in the nation drive them to pray as never before^{□2}.

2. **God is using oppression to prepare them for the future.** Despite what was happening to them God was with them. God gave them some bold and courageous women to help them. The midwives 'feared God'^{□1}. God can give us people who favour us.

God prospered them numerically. They had been growing in numbers before^{□1}; now they continued to grow in numbers despite all that Pharaoh was doing^{□2}. Oppression could not crush them. God is able to preserve His people.

If we are going through a time of change or distress we can count it a matter of joy. We may not be enjoying precisely what is happening but if we let God work we shall discover He is moving us a stage further on in blessing and in His purpose. God can work in our circumstances to shape our character and prepare our future. He does it with individuals; He can do it with His entire church. Every one of the sons of Israel are involved in what is happening^{□1}. God was preparing His entire people for some dramatic forward steps in their history. He had told them what would happen centuries before^{□2}; now He is superintending what He predicted. Soon they will see great things happening. They will be redeemed by God's mighty stretched out arm and taken towards a new promised land.

Note

1 The ancient Greek translation has 'seventy-five' here and in Genesis 46:27 and was followed by Stephen in Acts 7:14. Various reasons might be given for the change of figure. (i) In Genesis 48:8–26 there are sixty-six names. The Greek version added in verse 27 mention of nine sons of Joseph. (ii) In addition to the sixty-six, there was Jacob himself, Joseph and his two well-known sons, plus seven grandchildren mentioned in 1 Chronicles 7:14–15. 'Seventy-five' (rather than seventy-seven) might be a rough round figure. (iii) Stephen was adapting himself to the common tradition without bothering about pedantic accuracy. Scripture is accurate in recording what he said!

□1 1:8
□2 1:9–10

□3 1:11–14
□4 1:15–20

□5 1:22

□1 2:23
□2 2:23

□1 1:17

□1 1:7
□2 1:20

□1 1:1–5
□2 Gen 15:13–14

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