

Exodus Context for the Series
Sermon Title: OUR COVENANT KEEPING GOD
EXODUS - Then & Now, Our Covenant Keeping God
INTRODUCTION

[Personal notes more as my script and not to be included on the online version:

Pastor John is on vacation and asked Kevin and I to fill the pulpit in his vacancy. Kevin sat down recently and shared with me how he approaches preaching working through Genesis. He encouraged me to possibly consider tackling an expository study through a book of Scripture over the periodic times I speak as well. As I prayed and thought about this, I really liked the notion.

You ever think about the Bible content God illuminates for us here at the Chapel?

- If you've been around for awhile, you'll know that we've been in a chronological study in the Life of Christ with Pastor John for quite some time now. I trust you've been pondering Jesus, the very epicenter of Scripture and our lives, through that series!
- Kevin has been walking us through Genesis for longer than I can recall. I trust that the critically important truths and lessons gleaned from Genesis have an effectual work in your life!
- Times I've been in the pulpit, we've looked at themes related to Christmas, prayer, discipleship, and suffering. If you were with us during that previous Sunday evening service, I walked through an exposition of Esther, where we saw the sovereignty of God and His bold call of regular servants.
- (BY THE WAY, don't forget about our church app, where you can easily find, listen, or download many current and previous sermon series.)
- Then, of course there are the Sunday school groups and the many Bible study groups and small groups that meet throughout the week, led by many of you servants in this room.
- In addition to all of this, there is your own Bible reading/devotionals and study as well as any sermon podcasting you may listen to throughout your week.
- Finally, most recently, we had Rick Thomas join us for our conference on Biblical Soul Care. We as a church care about God's Word, and we believe what it says regarding equipping believers to be like Jesus and everyone being a part of making disciples. If you want to go through more equipping for Biblical soul care, we're trying to keep the momentum going forward. In our small group leader meetings (which we have one next week) we are specifically focusing monthly on Biblical soul care in small groups... as small groups provide an excellent opportunity to shepherd souls as you do life together and work out the practical application of Bible truth in real life. So, if you want more equipping that way, please come join us like next week for one of our monthly small group leader meetings... even if you don't currently have a small group!
- We are also looking at ways to further partner with Rick Thomas' ministry to bring even more opportunities for discipleship equipping. So, if you're interested, talk to Kevin or me!

In all of this, let me ask you one big/main question: Sitting under all of this great Bible content, does your life look more like Jesus?

It's not a confusing question, but it may indeed be a HARD question.

Now, none of us are perfect. But, as you sit and participate in many of these Bible saturating environments, your (AND MY) lives should look more like Jesus.

SOLDOTNA BIBLE CHAPEL, what we're after is NOT mere academic Bible study, but true life change!

So, as we approach today starting a brand new series (at least a periodic one when I speak), I believe you can see a similar struggle of God's people throughout history. Israel was immersed not only in hearing from God directly through it's leaders and prophets, but they visually saw and experienced God's miraculous working on their behalf. Was this enough to keep them centered on what mattered and truly see their lives becoming more like God? Sadly, no. Although Israel had God's revelation and deliverance, they all too often turned their walk with God into mere religion that was void of much real life change.

The series we're embarking on today is the book of EXODUS.

Exodus is the second of the first 5 books of the Bible known of as the Torah (law) or Pentateuch (5-volumed books of law). These books are foundational for Israel

My Bible I use most is the ESV Study Bible, and I find the introduction notes to each book really helpful. On a portion of the Exodus intro it reads, "The overarching theme of Exodus is the fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs that He would make their descendants a great nation. This is carried out despite the opposition of the greatest superpower in the ancient world of the time, Egypt, and despite the unbelief and disobedience of the people themselves. Exodus shows that the success of the exodus must be ascribed first to the power and character of God, who remembers His promises, punishes sin, and forgives the penitent."

Despite some accounts, Moses is not the hero of this book. God is the Hero Who works through servants like Moses in accord with His covenant love.

Chapter 1 brings us into the forming narrative after the gap of time from Genesis.

Although it doesn't say it directly, the overarching theme right out of the gate is on God's covenantal love for His people. We will see this theme over and over throughout the book.

As we work through chapter 1, we'll see 3 aspects about Biblical covenant and how they gloriously relate to our walk as God's children today.

MAIN BODY

Chapter 1:

Vs. 1-7

- Sets the link to the Genesis account and provides the link to the events that occurred around 70 years prior.
- It is indeed interesting to see the same person referenced in **verse 1** in 2 ways:
 - * Israel
 - * Jacob

WHY? - God reminds the readers here of the narrative unfolded back in Genesis and how this same narrative continues through the faithfulness of our COVENANT LOVING God!

Jacob is the man God chose (instead of Esau) to work His Abrahamic covenant through (Gen. 25, 27, 35:11-12), and Jacob is the man God renamed "Israel" in keeping with this covenant and covenant forming people (Gen. 32:28, 35:10).

MAIN GLORIOUS POINT: What we're going to see time and again through Exodus is the absolute FAITHFULNESS of our COVENANT KEEPING God!!!

- **Vs 2-4** records for us the sons of Jacob/Israel who together with Joseph [specifically his sons] would form the 12 tribes of the people of Israel.

So, why start a book out with a brief list of genealogies?

And why do some books in Scripture start with a genealogy?

As one commentator wrote,

"It was, however, not only good style but entirely welcome in the ancient setting, where a group of refugees of mixed ethnic origin, many of whom were young enough to be learning their national traditions for the first time, were being reminded of God's plan through a people descended from Abraham and heirs to the promises first made to him."

Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 57.

This particular commentary continued to make 4 excellent points:

These promises [God's plan and purpose] had four main components: (1) vast population increase for his descendants (Gen 12:2); (2) a long and important family lineage (the meaning of "make your name great" in Gen 12:2); (3) a worldwide blessing through his offspring¹⁷ (Gen 12:2-3), and (4) the eventual granting of unearned citizenship in a special land of God's choosing (implied in Gen 12:1; explicit in Gen 15:18-21).

¹⁷ The Hb. for "offspring," *zera* ' , is richly ambiguous and may be either singular or plural, so that Paul's explanation of how the original is best understood as singular (offspring = Christ, Gal 3:16) is grammatically sophisticated.

Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 57.

This massive group of newly formed people whose parents and grandparents had lived and died right there in Egypt, now find themselves living after Joseph's death. They have heard from their parents the oracles of God passed down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and to Jacob's sons. They've heard the stories of how they ended up in Egypt. They've heard the purpose of God for them through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. SO they clearly know God's purpose for them. They know God's promises for them. Yet, living for 400 years of generations coming and going in Egypt has a way of familiarizing a people to their lifestyle and the lingering time awaiting to actually see God's purpose and plan unfold. They stood in need of reminding. Furthermore, as the scene unfolds in chapter 1, we see that their lifestyle makes a sharp turn into severe oppression in Egypt.

Vs. 5 - The descendants of Jacob were 70 people.

(Stephen in Acts 7:14 lists this number as 75, but as Genesis 46:26-27 reads 66 and 70... the Scriptures seem to treat this number as a round about number.)

We then read that Joseph and all his brothers died and all that generation.

Notice, God blesses them and the people of Israel now greatly multiply in numbers, strength to where the land was filled with them.

Note that the text says they were fruitful and increased greatly.

God KNOWS EXACTLY what He is DOING!

He allowed His people into this foreign land and culture to prepare them for what lied ahead.

NO MATTER what you FACE, we CAN TRUST GOD and that He KNOWS what He's DOING in your life!

Vs. 8-22 - After Joseph's passing, God's people are multiplying in the land so much that the new ruler over Egypt sees the people of Israel as a threat. Our covenant keeping God again has things completely under control and knows what He is allowing. Maybe the people of Israel saw this coming, maybe they did not. In either case, God allows a very dark period to come upon His people. And somehow in the mysterious plan of God it still serves His ultimate purpose. Egypt's king/Pharaoh instructs the Hebrew's midwives to kill at birth any Hebrew sons. Interestingly, the text tells us that these midwives feared God and therefore refused to do this. If these midwives were Egyptian, it seems that Israel's influence in the land had rubbed off on some of the Egyptians, at least to this degree.

If these midwives were Hebrew attending to their own, it still shows their fear of God above human governing orders.

God blesses these midwives and their own families grow along with the rest of the Hebrews. What you see at this point is the Israelites a baby-producing factory amidst the rising tide of oppression.

This all builds to verse 22 when we see Pharaoh order an all out genocide, commanding all Egyptians to find all male babies born and cast them into the Nile River.

In a similar grotesque way akin to Herod's maniacal decree later in Jesus' own infancy days, we can only imagine the horrors the hit many Israeli families.

It was a dark time in Israel's early history.

Had God forgotten them?

Had God failed them?

As hard as it is for us to comprehend, as the book of Exodus unfolds, what we're left with is the absolute providential acts of God Almighty to faithfully work out His covenant love among His called out people. He accomplishes this purpose amidst a sin-cursed world not through lives of ease and comfort, but instead through lives of difficulty, tragedy, and much time.

The Israeli living through the Exodus and those looking back reading on it are left with one course of action.... Our God is faithful to His covenant purposes, and we must therefore trust in Him no matter what comes our way.

So the START of EXODUS SERVES THREE PURPOSES:

1. They stand in NEED of remembering their **COVENANT IDENTITY!** These people who were forming their own culture, but also influenced by Egypt, are in need of God's reminders of His purpose and plan for them.
 - THEN & NOW... We today must remember our IDENTITY under the NEW COVENANT of Christ's shed blood.
 - As we live in a culture ruled by the prince and power of this world (Satan), we are constantly at war with the propensity of our flesh toward rebellion and compromise.
 - Many of our sin struggles root with a loss of our identity. A text like Romans 6 or 8 or 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 shows how our new identity in Jesus shapes the way we live. I think it was Rick Thomas either last week or in one of his recent articles online who mentioned Gospel amnesia. God's people in Egypt needed to hold on to their unique God-given identity. Likewise, don't forget your unique God-given identity in Jesus. This is the very thing Paul likes to remind the churches about in the beginning of his New Testament epistles (Ephesians 1 as an example).

- Many sin struggles would become less behavior modification and more root-issue change if we worked on rooting out Gospel amnesia... continually day by day, remind yourself of your Gospel identity, where we live in a Romans 12:1 living sacrifice way. It's a continual thing.

- Don't forget your identity in Jesus. Next time you're tempted to despair, don't forget who you are in Christ. Next time you're tempted to be passive when you know really how you should act, remember you are in Christ. Next time you are tempted to the lust of your heart (sexual or some substance), remember who you are in Christ. Next time you are tempted to say that hurtful comment back to someone or speak about someone behind their back, remember who you are in Christ. Next time you are tempted to want to seize control of some situation on your terms, your agenda, your way, your timing, remember your identity in Jesus.

- You see, as we see who our identity is in our Redeemer God, we actually see God for Who He is and us for who we are. Preach the Gospel (remind yourself of it) to yourself daily!

2. Their circumstances are about to get really, really difficult, and it would be imperative to recall God's **COVENANTAL PURPOSE** for them amidst the incoming trials.

- God formed and preserved His people in Egypt for a purpose... that full purpose will be revealed through the course of Exodus. Suffice it to say that God formed Israel to show the world more of His attributes... really to draw the world to Himself.

- This would be Israel's covenantal purpose. And they would likewise have to hold on to this glorious purpose when the circumstances in their lives seemed to shout everything opposite.

- Think of these midwives who could have let the societal and governmental pressure to cause them to lose their purpose under God. They made a conscious choice to place God's purposes primary.

- THEN & NOW... We as God's children today must likewise recall our covenantal purpose under the New Covenant of Jesus' shed blood. As Paul reminded the church in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, we are bought with the price of Jesus' blood for the purpose of glorifying Him with our entire being.

- We are saved to as Paul said in Ephesians 2:10 to do the good works of God prepared for us.

- We are brought into the New Covenant of Jesus to become like Jesus in character and be like Him in mission to a world in need of Him. That is our fundamental purpose in this life.

- This world has so many things that can distract us from God's redemptive purpose... don't lose sight of this.

- One healthy thing when you go home today is to have a conversation with your family or those who you do life with most and really ask how your lives together show this priority. Does your life reflect this fundamental purpose? You were saved for a purpose... to grow more like Jesus in character and in mission (making disciples). Sometimes, if we're honest and having these regular conversations, we may need to adapt and adjust our schedules or priorities to make room for this basic life purpose that all too often slips from being primary.

3. Those reading Exodus later (Israel and us even today) need this glorious reminder of our **COVENANT KEEPING GOD**.

- The mystery of this God of Israel Who worked on their behalf through all of the sin and all of the tragedies under a pagan people truly is amazing. As Israel pondered their God and His workings for them overall it was clear that He was for them. They may not have seen it in the nitty gritty of their daily oppression, but nonetheless over the totality of their lives seen through Exodus God was still faithful and trustworthy to His promises.

- I also think here of the midwives' bold decision to stand up for life... notice the text says it was because of their resolute fear of God. When the pressure was turned up, they still remained faithful to God Almighty.

- THEN & NOW... As Paul wrote in Romans 8, God is for us as Christians. Oh, it may not always seem like it in the nitty gritty of life's sometimes intense trials. But, church, over the totality of the Scriptures and the totality of your life, God IS SOVEREIGN and FAITHFUL. See this in Israel's Exodus history. See this in your own life as well and hold on to your faith.

Just as you were saved by faith, continue your Christian walk in faith.

As Israel experienced, it's often through the intense trials of life that we see the beauty of our covenant keeping God more fully.

CONCLUSION:

- So this first look at Exodus and specifically chapter 1, we've made observations about this concept of covenant and the God behind covenant.

- As we started our time today reflecting on all the great Bible content we are saturated with each week, like Israel, don't forget the reason for God's revelation in our lives... to effect life change... to make us more like Jesus!

- The next time you're tempted to despair at what in the world God is doing in your life, don't forget your identity as part of God's family! Under God's providence, His were about to enter a severe time of trial. In a congregation this size, I KNOW there are souls in this room or under the sound of this voice who are encountering some REALLY hard things. In times of intense trial, like God's people in Exodus we MUST HOLD ON to our identity in Jesus and retain your trust in Him!

- I think the words to the song "Just Be Held" by Casting Crowns are apropro - Mark Hall the lead singer of Casting Crowns tells the story how he and a friend (Matthew West) wrote this song together around the Biblical concept of trusting God. Mark goes on to tell how he and the group sang this song for 1.5 years before God really took him to the mat over the real life reason for this song. He found out that he had a cancerous mass in one of his kidneys, and through surgery just over a year ago the cancerous tumor was removed and he's back to health again. Through the time of diagnosis and even in the days ahead knowing you've previously had cancer, Mark says the words from this song really hit home for him.

- And so whatever you're going through, don't forget your identity in Christ.

Hold it all together
Everybody needs you strong
But life hits you out of nowhere
And barely leaves you holding on

And when you're tired of fighting
Chained by your control
There's freedom in surrender

Lay it down and let it go

So when you're on your knees and answers seem so far away
You're not alone, stop holding on and just be held
Your world's not falling apart, it's falling into place
I'm on the throne, stop holding on and just be held
Just be held, just be held

If your eyes are on the storm
You'll wonder if I love you still
But if your eyes are on the cross
You'll know I always have and I always will

And not a tear is wasted
In time, you'll understand
I'm painting beauty with the ashes
Your life is in My hands

So when you're on your knees and answers seem so far away
You're not alone, stop holding on and just be held
Your worlds not falling apart, its falling into place
I'm on the throne, stop holding on and just be held
Just be held, just be held

Lift your hands, lift your eyes
In the storm is where you'll find Me
And where you are, I'll hold your heart
I'll hold your heart
Come to Me, find your rest
In the arms of the God who won't let go

So when you're on your knees and answers seem so far away
You're not alone, stop holding on and just be held
Your worlds not falling apart, its falling into place
I'm on the throne, stop holding on and just be held (stop holding on and just be held)
Just be held, just be held, just be held, just be held

- There were those of the people of Israel that I'm sure stood in the reality of the words of that song.

- Covenant Identity, Covenant Purpose, and our Covenant Keeping God...

- Let us today not forget who we are in Christ, our redeemed purpose in Christ, and our loving, faithful God behind it all!

- Oh, church, the same covenant keeping God was Israel's identity as a people.. and the same covenant keeping God gives us our identity today as His children! We can trust Him no matter what! Don't lose that!