


TIM CHESTER
EXODUS
FOR YOU



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Exodus For You

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SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centred
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *Exodus For You*:

To read. You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

To feed. You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two (or occasionally three) shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

To lead. You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **grey** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary towards the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

Carl Laferton, Series Editor

Bible translations used:

- NIV: New International Version, 2011 translation (this is the version being quoted unless otherwise stated)
- ESV: English Standard Version
- KJV: King James Version
- AV: Authorised Version

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS

A princess goes to bathe in the river and has her heart won by the cries of an abandoned baby.

A bush on fire never burns up, and from it speaks a voice that will change history.

An unarmed shepherd walks out of the wilderness to do battle with the most powerful man on earth.

The people of Egypt turn back their sheets to find frogs in their beds.

The lone cry of a bereaved mother is joined by another and then another and then another until a loud wailing echoes across the land.

A whole nation walks through a sea, with walls of water on either side.

God is put on trial and, when the verdict is announced, God receives the judgment of the court.

Amid thunder, lightning, thick cloud and an earthquake, the voice of God booms across the plain.

In the wilderness, a man argues with God about the future of a people, and God relents.

The glory of God so fills a tent that everyone must evacuate.

There is no shortage of dramatic moments in the book of Exodus. It is a story that has repeatedly captured the public imagination and which has been a favourite of film-makers. Its story of deliverance from oppression has inspired liberation movements from the Pilgrim Fathers and the English revolutionaries of the seventeenth century to the anti-slavery campaigns of the nineteenth century to the civil rights movements in the twentieth century. Its cry of, "Let my people go" has echoed down across the centuries (5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3).

But in truth, its message is more dramatic than these dramatic moments and more revolutionary than these revolutionary movements. Exodus is a book about...

Liberation

The book of Exodus is a story of liberation. The Israelites are rescued from slavery in Egypt through a series of extraordinary encounters and spectacular miracles. But it's a liberation that points to a greater liberation: the liberation of God's people from slavery to sin.

Sacrifice

Exodus points to this spiritual liberation because at the key moment, the Passover night, the Israelites are threatened by death just as much as the Egyptians. Like everyone else, God's people are guilty and deserve the judgment of death. But they are saved by daubing the blood of sacrifice on the lintels of their homes. Redemption through sacrifice is then built into the rhythms of Israel's life.

God's presence

The book of Exodus does not end with the escape through the Red Sea in chapter 14. God's people are not only liberated *from* slavery; they are also liberated *for* God's presence. The law and the tabernacle create a framework in which God's people can enjoy God's glory.

Servitude and worship

The word used to describe Israel's "slavery" is the same word which is used to describe her "worship". The movement in the book of Exodus is not so much from slavery to freedom as from slavery to slavery. But serving God is completely different from serving Pharaoh. Indeed, God's service is true freedom.

Mission

At key moments in the story, God reveals his name to Moses. In the book of Exodus, God gets intimate and personal—and, at the same time, God also reveals his name to the whole world. The exodus

takes place, God tells Pharaoh, so that “my name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (9:16). And God’s people are called to bear his name in a worthy manner (20:7). Shaped by God’s law, they are to be a royal priesthood and holy nation, displaying God’s character to the world (19:4-6).

All creation

Again and again in the book of Exodus, God un-creates in judgment and recreates in salvation. The law begins the reordering of a broken world, and the tabernacle-tent is full of echoes of Eden because it is a blueprint of God’s new creation. Our future—and creation’s future—are woven into its fabric.

Our story

The book of Exodus is not simply an inspiring tale from the past. It is our story. The Old Testament prophets promised a new exodus: a repeat of the exodus that would be more dramatic and more revolutionary. The exodus sets God’s story on a trajectory that comes to a climax with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus sets us free from slavery to sin. He is our Passover Lamb, whose sacrifice rescues us from judgment and death. He is God’s presence on earth, God “tabernacling” among us. We have seen God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ. And his resurrection is the beginning of a new creation. So the book of Exodus is key to understanding the person and work of Jesus. It graphically reveals the means of our salvation (redemption through sacrifice) and the content of our salvation (enjoying God’s presence in a world made new).

Exodus is an exciting story. It is a historical story. And, as it points us to and inspires us to worship Christ, it is our story.

1. A PEOPLE AND A LAND

We live at a time in the West when the church is under increasing pressure. It is not just that Christian truth has move from the main-stream to the margins—on many issues what we believe is now seen as immoral and offensive. Many, both inside and outside the church, wonder whether Christianity has a future.

How can we live well, optimistically and positively in the face of hostility? This is the question faced by God’s people in Exodus 1 – 2, and that we need to grapple with today.

A missing “and”

The book of Exodus begins with the word “And”. It’s missed out in most English translations, but it’s there in the original Hebrew, in which Exodus was first written. And you may have been taught not to start sentences with the word “And” (a rule I have just broken). Yet here is a whole book that starts with “And”. It immediately alerts us to the fact that this story is part of a bigger story. The end of the previous book, Genesis, has already hinted at a sequel (Genesis 50:24-25), and the first nine words of Exodus are an exact repetition of Genesis 46:8: “These are the names of the sons of Israel”. The book of Exodus is in many ways chapter two of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. And so the whole book needs to be read in the light of what has gone before.

In Genesis 12, 15 and 17 God made a promise to Abraham, the man he called out of idolatry to know, obey and follow him, and he

sealed that promise in a **covenant**[†]. There were two key components to God's promise:

1. The promise of a people—Abraham would become a great nation.
2. The promise of a land—Abraham's family would inherit the land of Canaan.

Above all, God promised a "**seed**" from Abraham: a Saviour who would defeat Satan, who would "crush [his] head", just as he had promised even further back in history (Genesis 3:15). So God promises to bless all nations, by fulfilling all his purposes, through Abraham's family.

The people threatened

Four hundred years before the events of Exodus 1, that promise had been under threat. It looked as if famine would wipe out the family of Abraham. But in his **providence**, God arranged things so that Joseph, one of Abraham's great-grandsons, became "prime minister" in Egypt. Joseph gathered grain during years of good harvest so that Egypt could survive the years of famine. And Joseph extended this relief to his father's family. They moved to live in Egypt and enjoy Egypt's provision. The future of the promise was secured, for now at least. God's people had blessed the nations through Joseph and the people of God had been preserved.

And four centuries later, at the beginning of the book of Exodus, the promise of a nation is being fulfilled. Exodus **1:1-5*** lists the sons of Israel who came to Egypt. The total number of those who made that original journey 400 years previously was just 70 (**v 5**). But now, those 70 people have become a great nation. They have "multiplied greatly", so they fill the land (**v 6-7**).

This is a story of economic migrants. Initially they are welcomed. But as they prosper, they are resented and feared. Oppressive

[†] Words in **grey** are defined in the Glossary (page 267).

* All Exodus verse references being looked at in each chapter are in **bold**.

measures are imposed. The fear is they will outnumber the local people and change their way of life:

“Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ‘Look,’ he said to his people, ‘the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.’” (v 8-10)

It is a situation replicated across our world today.

So once again the promise is under threat. At first, Pharaoh enslaves the Israelites (v 11-14). He works them ruthlessly. He gives them no time or energy to plot rebellion. W. Ross Blackburn translates **verses 13-14** more literally as:

“And the Egyptians forced the sons of Israel to serve with violence. And they caused their lives to be bitter with hard service, with mortar and with brick and with all kinds of service in the field. In all their service with which they served in violence.”

(The God who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus, page 32)

Each reference to “service” is like another crack of the whip. But this ploy doesn’t work, as Philip Ryken clarifies:

“In verse 10 Pharaoh says *pen-yirbe*, which means ‘lest they multiply’; but in verse 12 God says—‘the more they shall multiply.’ The Bible uses this Hebrew pun to show that the joke was on Pharaoh.” *(Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory, pages 35-36)*

And so, his initial plan having been thwarted, Pharaoh tells the Hebrew midwives to kill every newborn baby boy (v 15-16). But the midwives “feared God”—they are willing to defy the authority of Pharaoh. They let the boys live (v 17), and when challenged, they claim the Hebrew (that is, Israelite) women give birth before their midwives arrive (v 18-19).

Foiled again, Pharaoh tries a third time to eradicate the threat posed by the Hebrews. This time, he turns to genocide. He orders a

general execution of all infant boys (v 22). They must all be thrown into the River Nile.

Plans thwarted

But again, Pharaoh's plans are thwarted. One particular Hebrew family hide their newborn son (2:1-2). Three months on, it's getting harder to keep him hidden, so they place him in a basket on the River Nile (v 3-4). The river that is supposed to bring death to the boys brings life to this boy—he is found by Pharaoh's daughter, who has pity on him (v 5-6). The boy's sister intervenes, offering his mother as a nurse (v 7-9), and so this boy is raised by his mother and then becomes a member of the Egyptian royal court (v 10).

Only at the end of this episode are we told his name—Moses. And you don't need to know much of Israel's history to know Moses will be its great liberator. The first readers would certainly have heard this name many times before. In this child, there is hope for God's people.

In 1:10, Pharaoh says the Egyptians must be shrewd. Here, as so often, evil is dressed up as wisdom. But in fact Pharaoh is outwitted by five women—the two Hebrew midwives (Shiphrah and Puah), the mother and the sister of Moses, and his own daughter.

But behind all of this, we are meant to see the providential hand of God. It is a remarkable sequence of events: the coincidences of Pharaoh's daughter coming, the pitiful cries of the baby, the provision of a **wet-nurse**. And it leads to a remarkable scenario: Moses being cared for by his mother and her being paid to do so. This means that Moses is raised a Hebrew with the privileges of Egypt. In Acts 7:22, the early Christian (and first **martyr**) Stephen says that Moses "was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action". Moses is saved from Pharaoh to live in his court, and one day he will defeat him, rescuing God's people.

All this happens with God hardly being mentioned. Yet the writer invites us to see his hand—and perhaps to seek to detect his hand

in our own lives when we trust God's covenant promises. After all, Moses is kept safe in the place of violence and death. Here is sin at its most cruel and insane—and yet right here, the hand of God is at work. Even sin is a context in which God is at work, for he incorporates acts of sin into his purposes. That is what he is doing here; it's what he did when two other rulers opposed not his people but his own Son (Acts 4:27-28); and it's what he does in and around us still today as he works for our good in *all* things (Romans 8:28).

Fear the Promise-Keeper

The three statements of blessings and multiplication here (Exodus **1:7, 12, 20**) give the chapter its structure. Despite being in Egypt (**v 1-7**), despite being oppressed (**v 8-14**) and despite being threatened (**v 15-22**), God's people prosper because of his promise.

Again and again, throughout their history, the future of Israel would look fragile as successive foreign armies threatened to wipe them out. Throughout those times God's people could return to this story and find hope—find confidence that, however bleak the setting, God would be at work to keep his promises. And that matters, because what is at stake each time is not just the future of a people, but the future of God's promise and the future of our salvation.

Hundreds of years later, another king ordered the slaughter of innocent children. King Herod ordered every boy under the age of two in Bethlehem to be killed (Matthew 2:16-18). Again, what was at stake was the life of God's Saviour and the future of God's promise. Again, the king was thwarted when the baby's adoptive father, Joseph, was warned in a dream to flee and, somewhat ironically, escaped with Jesus to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15).

This repeated threat to the people of God—and therefore to the promise of God—is part of Satan's on-going rebellion against God. Satan is trying to destroy God's people in order that he might defeat God's promise. And the whole Old Testament is dominated by the promise of God that the One who will crush Satan will come from

Abraham's family (see Genesis 3:15; 22:18). So if Satan can destroy Abraham's family, then he can prevent the Saviour being born and prevent his own defeat.

That Saviour was born, and Satan is defeated—yet still today, he tries to wipe out the church. And what is at stake is the promise of that Saviour, who said, "I will build my church, and the gates of **Hades** will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). Under Soviet communism, under Mao in China, and today in the Middle East, Satan has tried to destroy the church and prevent the preaching of the gospel. But each time God has demonstrated his **sovereign** power. Adapting Exodus **1:7**, Christians have been "fruitful and multiplied greatly and become exceedingly numerous, so that the [earth is] filled with them."

In the 1970s, President Mengistu in Ethiopia implemented what was called the Red Terror. 1.5 million people died and church buildings were closed down. When Mengistu fell, no one was sure what would remain of the church. But Christians had been meeting secretly

in homes, and the church had not only survived but grown. God has purposed to keep his promises, and he will not allow anyone—not Pharaoh, not Satan—to thwart them.

This confidence in the purposes of God enables us to be courageous in obeying God. This confidence is what enabled the Hebrew midwives to act in the way they did: "The midwives, however, feared God and did not do

what the king of Egypt had told them to do ... because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own" (**v 17, 21**).

As we read their story, we are confronted with the choice they faced: to fear man or to fear God. Don't underestimate the pressure they were under or the risks involved in what they did. Why did they act as they did? Because they feared God—they held him in higher

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awe than the ruler of the superpower of their day, and they so trusted him to keep to his plans that they were prepared to defy those of Pharaoh. The seventeenth-century **Puritan** William Gurnall put it well when he wrote, "We fear men so much because we fear God so little". These midwives are an example of how we can act with courage when we trust in the promise of God, which Paul describes in Galatians 3:8 as the gospel announced in advance. The midwives are rewarded with children, a sign of having a share in Israel's future. Indeed this blessing is itself a confirmation that God will keep his promises, for these children are born at a time when newborn children are supposed to be killed (Exodus **1:21**).

How can the church today survive in the face of increasing hostility? How can you survive in your workplace or your home? How can you be fruitful in the service of Christ when your colleagues and friends despise your faith? How can your church multiply in the face of hostility?

Because God has promised to fill the earth with the glory of Christ. Christ has promised to build his church. God is still on the throne. And he is the One we should fear. No one else.

Questions for reflection

1. How does the failure of Pharaoh's plans to extinguish Israel encourage you as you look at what is happening in the world today?
2. Who or what do you find it easy to live in greater awe of than God? Why?
3. In what ways are you being called to act in courageous obedience by trusting the promises of God?

PART TWO

The promise of a land

The promise of a people was only half the promise. The other half was a land of blessing, a place of rest.

In Exodus 1, the promise of a land is literally far away. Israel are foreigners in a foreign land. And they are certainly not a people who enjoy rest. Slavery is the very opposite of the fulfilment of the promise, for it is work without rest. But all that is about to begin to change, for by **2:11** the baby in the basket has become a man.

When the time comes, Moses chooses to be a foreigner. "One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour" (**v 11**). He chooses to be a Hebrew, to go out to his own people. Acts 7:25 suggests Moses knew even at this point that "God was using him to rescue them".

But at this point, Moses lacks the maturity to lead his people. He takes matters into his own hands as he attacks "an Egyptian [who is] beating a Hebrew" (Exodus **2:11**). "Beating" (**v 11**), "killed" (**v 12**, literally "beaten down"), "hitting" (**v 13**) and to "kill" (**v 14**) are all the same word in the Hebrew. Moses responds to the unjust aggression of Egypt with unjust aggression of his own—and so he becomes a murderer and has to flee to **Midian (v 15)**. Not only is Moses threatened by Pharaoh, but he has lost the respect of his own people. "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" one asks when Moses challenges him for striking a fellow Hebrew. "Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" (**v 14**).

We know Moses will liberate God's people from Egyptian slavery. But here he behaves like an Egyptian slave master. He needs to unlearn the ways of the Egyptian court. It is a reminder that we cannot do God's work in worldly ways. But perhaps the real point is that it's not Moses who will liberate Israel through human politics. It's God who will liberate his people through divine power.

When Moses escapes from Egypt, he immediately finds a welcome and a home in Midian (**v 16-20**). Is this a coincidence? No, because Midian is home. The Midianites were nomads, but they wandered around the Sinai Peninsula and the land of Canaan—all areas that were part of the land promised to Abraham. And here, in contrast to Egypt, the LORD is worshipped freely (the reference to a “priest” in **verse 16** raises this possibility; 18:9-12 confirms it). In leaving the only home he has ever known, Moses has come home.

Moses settles down, he gets married and he starts a family (**2:21-22**). He rescues a group of women in distress at a well before marrying one of them (**v 16-19**). It is a story full of echoes of the patriarchal narratives (Genesis 24:15-17; 29:1-14). Again, we are seeing that Moses has come home.

But this scene of domestic bliss for Moses cannot be the end of the story. In Exodus 1, we saw the promise to Abraham fulfilled in a people—Israel had become a nation. In chapter 2, Moses finds the fulfilment of the second part—he finds a home in the promised land. But the rest of the people are hundreds of miles distant and further away from experiencing rest. We have a people without a land; and we have Moses in the land without a people.

And so, in the final verses of chapter 2, we return to the promise to Abraham:

“During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with **Isaac** and with **Jacob**. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.” (**v 23-25**)

God “remembered his covenant with Abraham”. What is going to drive this story is the promise to Abraham. “Remembering” is a covenantal term. It means deciding to act in order to fulfil a covenant. It’s not that the promise to Abraham had somehow slipped God’s mind. It’s not that he got distracted by other things. “Remembering” means

God is about to take the next step in the fulfilment of his promises. **Verse 25** is literally, "God saw the people of Israel and he knew"—he knew their suffering and he knew his promises.

This story is not just the story of how God liberates one particular oppressed people. It is the story of how God fulfils his promise to bring salvation to all people. What's at stake is not just the liberation of one nation. This story will set the pattern for the liberation of all nations from bondage to Satan. The Bible is the story of God leading us back home.

The question of identity

Moses grew up as both a Hebrew and an Egyptian. The name "Moses" itself could be both Egyptian and Hebrew. A number of Egyptian names have a *ms* syllable like "Rameses", which means "born of Ra" (Ra was the Egyptian sun god). So "Moses" could mean "born of the Nile". But "Moses" also sounds like the Hebrew word "drawing out".

This raises the question: What is Moses' true identity? When he must choose, Moses identifies with the Hebrews, even though Egyptian princes were taught to despise manual labour. He opts for the oppressed people of promise over the glamour of Egypt (**v 11**). His identity is defined by the promise of God. And so should ours be.

Even his new profession loosens the grip of Egypt on his heart. Genesis 46:34 says, "All shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians". So Moses becomes something that would have been unthinkable to his old Egyptian friends.

Perhaps a similar process was happening to the Israelites back in Egypt. Left to themselves, the Israelites might well have integrated with the Egyptians, have been absorbed, and have disappeared from history. But their ethnically-defined persecution meant their identity was maintained and clarified. Again, left to themselves, the Israelites might well have settled down to life as a marginalised people in Egypt.

Even with their sufferings, it was hard to get them to leave and they quickly wanted to return (see, for instance, Exodus 16:3). One of the ways in which God works good from suffering is that he uses it to make us cling to him in faith, to clarify our identity as his children and to increase our longing for the new creation.

For Moses, his time in the wilderness as a shepherd prepares him for leadership. The writer of Psalm 77 recalled how God “led [his] people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron [Moses’ brother]” (Psalm 77:20). The prophet Isaiah spoke of how God’s people “re-

called the days of old, the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock?” (Isaiah 63:11). One day, Moses will lead Israel like a shepherd leading sheep. So he is prepared for this great task by being a literal shepherd, leading literal sheep. From the moment Moses comes home to Midian, in fact,

God uses suffering to make us cling to him, clarify our identity and increase our longing.

he is changing into a man who can lead God’s people. In contrast to the violence of his actions in Egypt, Moses rescues the Midianite women without violence and then serves them in a way that surprises them because he is a man serving women: “He even drew water for us and watered the flock” (Exodus **2:19**).

Moses calls his first son “Gershom”. The tense of the verb in Moses’ explanation of this name is ambiguous. The NIV translates it, “I have become a foreigner in a foreign land” (**v 22**). But the ESV fits the context better: “I have been a **sojourner** in a foreign land”. The point is not that Moses is away from home, but that Moses has come home. Moses is enjoying rest and peace in the promised land. Despite Egypt being the place of his birth and upbringing, Moses now sees it as a foreign country.

The best commentary on this story is Hebrews 11:24-27:

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.”

We face the same choice as Moses. Every Christian is in the same situation. After our **conversion**, the land of our birth and our upbringing becomes a foreign land to us. Now we are **pilgrims** heading for the promised land, the home that is kept for us in heaven.

We have to choose. Which home will set our priorities? Which home will shape our behaviour? Which home will define our standard of living? Will we choose the “pleasures of sin” and “the treasures of Egypt”? Or will we choose “to be ill-treated along with the people of God”? Will we choose “disgrace for the sake of Christ”? There is the stark choice: will you live for pleasure and treasure, or will you live in disgrace?

Moses chose the disgrace. Why? Because he “was looking ahead to his reward ... By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger.”. Notice again how his faith meant he did not fear the king—just like the Hebrew midwives.

How do we live in the face of hostility? By looking to the home that God has promised. And by fearing God rather than men. The story of Exodus is part of the bigger story of God’s promise to Abraham—a story of which we are a part. But that’s not all.

The story of creation and re-creation

We have seen that “the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them” (Exodus **1:7**); and that, in response to

their risky obedience, “God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous” (v 20).

We have heard this kind of language before in the Bible story—back in Genesis 1:28: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’” This command is reiterated after Noah comes out of the ark: “God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth’.” (Genesis 9:1). So notice the links:

- God tells humanity to “be fruitful”. Israel is “exceedingly fruitful”.
- God tells humanity to “increase in number”. Israel has “increased in number”.
- God tells humanity to “fill the earth”. Israel has filled the land.

Exodus 1:7 uses seven different words to describe the fruitfulness of the Israelites. “They multiplied greatly” is literally “they swarmed”, the same word that is used in Genesis 1:21 to describe the waters “teeming” with life. What is happening in Exodus 1 is not just the fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham, but the fulfilment of the covenant with the first human, Adam. God’s people are fulfilling the command which humanity has neglected.

And the links with God’s creation continue. In Exodus 2:2 we are told that the mother of Moses “saw that he was a fine child”; literally, “she saw that he was good”. It is the same language as in Genesis 1:31: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good”. Here in Egypt the world is being recreated.

And all might be well—“very good”—were it not for the fact that Pharaoh becomes a kind of anti-creator. Pharaoh tries to restrain this explosion of creative power. In place of life, he ordains death. The newborn boys—the fruit of this creative energy—are to be thrown into the Nile. In Genesis 1, humanity was told to subdue the earth. In Exodus 1, humanity in the person of Pharaoh is subduing... humanity.

And what happens? God’s liberator is placed in the Nile. He is placed in the place of death—and he lives. As we’ve noted, the name

“Moses” sounds like the Hebrew words “to draw out”. Moses is drawn out of the waters of death, just as Israel will be in chapter 14.

The word basket in Exodus **2:3** is literally “ark” (*tebha*). The baby Moses is placed in an “ark”. The only other time this word is used in the Bible is to describe Noah’s ark. Both Noah and Moses escape a watery judgment in a bitumen-coated ark.

In the midst of the waters of judgment, the people of God are safe. Both Noah in Genesis 6 – 9, and Moses here, experience an act of re-creation, or resurrection. They enter the waters of death and pass through to a new life (1 Peter 3:20-22). We’ll return to this idea when we get to Exodus 14, but it is exciting to see it here!

Pharaoh is trying to impede this creative fruitfulness—and so he has set himself on a collision course with God. Both Pharaoh and God lay claim to Israel, though the nature of their respective rules is very different. One rule is oppressive and deadly; the other is liberating and life-giving. Pharaoh’s hostility is the latest manifestation of the ancient hostility which was written into history after the **fall** of Adam, when God told the snake, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers” (Genesis 3:15). Egypt will be the site of the latest battle between those who belong to the snake, and those who belong to the promise. Pharaoh will try to undo God’s re-creation—God will unleash the forces of creation on him. And as he does so, he will save his people. And the world will know that he is God.

The church continues to experience that enmity—and the story of the exodus stands as a reminder that, no matter how bitter the fight, there is only ever going to be one winner. The church will experience the battle—we will also experience God’s salvation and enjoy his liberating, life-giving rule.

Questions for reflection

1. Looking back at the beginning and the ongoing experience of your Christian life, how have you found yourself identifying as a “sojourner in a foreign land”?
2. “Will you live for pleasure and treasure, or will you live in disgrace?” As you look at your own life, how are you able to answer this question in ways that encourage you? In which areas of your life does this question challenge you?
3. How does knowing the end of the story—God’s victory and re-creation—enable you to live positively and excitedly as you experience the battle of the Christian life now?