

Events in Ukraine are dominating our news at the moment. For the first time in two years there's something else dominating the news. There is a great fear about what's going to happen next. Many have died; it's a terrible tragedy; a horrible abuse of power by the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. As I hear the news I can't help thinking that it connects to the book of Exodus. Here were the Israelite people, the Hebrews or Jews, who had been enslaved seeking to be freed, rescued. Ukraine is wanting to be free from the attacks of Russia. Many of you know the stories of the Jews, the Hebrew slaves who left Egypt, got across the Red Sea and finally get to a Land that was promised to them. Or you know some of the stories. Over the next 4 months we're going to go on a journey of rediscovery. Some people say that this story lies at the very heart of what we know about God.

We looked at Matthew for most of last year; followed the life of Jesus that led to his death and resurrection. We know that Matthew and the other Gospels are at the heart of what we know about Jesus. The rest of the NT flows out of what Jesus did on the cross and his rising again.

Well, in the same way we're going to be looking at Deuteronomy, which was at the core of the Bible that Jesus used. We'll keep on seeing references by Jesus to parts of Deuteronomy, and we'll say, "Oh yes, I remember Jesus saying that last year in Matthew." Deuteronomy is like three sermons that Moses gave at the end of his life as the Jews are about to enter the promised land. In order to understand Deuteronomy I want us to take a 6 week whirlwind tour of Exodus – the book that records the most significant incident in the whole of the OT. It's like, if you don't know the story of the exodus then you don't understand the rest of the OT and the NT. The whole of the Bible is grounded in this event not just because it is a great rescue story but because it is a great reveal story of what God is like, of who this God is that is the God of the Jews.

So we're going to be studying the books that Jesus studied, Exodus and Deuteronomy. Exodus records the most significant event by far in the OT – coming out of Egypt.

The meal that we celebrate every month is the meal that comes out of Exodus.

The word "exit" comes from the Greek word Exodus, which means to escape, to depart, to flee, to move out of.

For the British, the Battle of Britain is the moment they look to that shaped them – Churchill standing there, defying Hitler; we'll fight them on the beaches etc; for Aussies, it's Gallipoli – the story of the ANZACS. These events and their story shaped the way nations thought about themselves. For Israel without a shadow of a doubt it's the story of the Exodus.

The story of the Exodus answers the question for the Jews of who we are, and Who is our God.

Who are we? We are the people rescued from Egypt.

Who is our God? He is the one who rescued us; we were slaves and now we are free and that is because of the hand of God.

The first 5 books of the Bible are all about the Exodus. Genesis sets it up, the other 4 books are all about this event. It's a bit like the NT. The 4 Gospels are story of Jesus, and the rest of the NT is kind of like the shrapnel after that bomb. OT is just the same - first 5 books the Torah; they are THE event that the rest of the Bible is riffing off; they are THE event where Israel first learnt who their God was and what his purposes are; so if you want a leg up into the book that Jesus called THE book, the Bible – this was his Bible – you got no better place than Exodus. So let's have a quick look at these 5 books – show diagram.

Exodus 1-4 – context – Exodus picks up where Genesis left off. Joseph sold into Egypt – he brings his family into Egypt. A minority community sets itself up in Egypt due to events around Joseph. Generations come and go – Israelites numerous – Remember back in Gen 12 – God had made a promise to Abraham – He calls him and then gives essentially three promises – blessings, children, land. God promises Abraham that he will be blessed, and that he and his children will be a blessing and that they will be the means of the blessing of the nations, that all nations will be blessed through Abraham, 2. As many descendants as the stars in the sky, or sand on the seashore; 3. They will be in a land, that will be their home.

So as we start in Exodus 1 – are they blessed? – No, they were a slave nation, treated harshly, so not a blessing; do they have a land? No; do they have children? Yes. God is beginning the work in his people. The children who are a sign of blessing from God are, however, simultaneously a threat to Egypt – 1:8,9 – rulers saying that they are too numerous; too fertile. So the solution is to put them into slavery and also to kill them. Things haven't changed much have they? You could find lots of countries where that continues to happen today.

Human nature hasn't changed. So the Israelites or they're also called Hebrews. They're put into slavery, put into labour camps, forced to build the cities of Ramses; and the king ordered the genocide, killing of all male babies of the Hebrew women. It's interesting how the only people named in Egypt in his first part of the story are the midwives. Even mighty Pharaoh doesn't get his name mentioned. Shiprah and Puah. These midwives – we're told that they feared God and wouldn't do what the king had told them to do. So they disobeyed the ruler of the land. And God blesses the midwives. The government, Pharaoh, wants them to kill babies and they refuse; Pharaoh is real angry; so he gives general pronouncement to all Egyptians to kill any Hebrew babies they find.

Chap 2 - Enter Moses – it's a miracle he survives. Notice how it's women again who do all the saving – Mum, sister, and Pharaoh's own daughter. So Moses is raised by his Mum and Dad for a number of years and then he goes into Pharaoh's court where he is trained in everything Egyptian.

The next part of the story is that he kills an Egyptian who was whipping one of the Hebrew slave. In Acts 7 we're told that he's about 40. Moses is really a man of two worlds. His first few years, maybe till he was 6 or 7 he's raised as a Hebrew, but then for the last 30 odd years he was raised as an Egyptian. But he never forgot he was a Hebrew as is seen in this incident where he defends his Hebrew brother against the Egyptian taskmaster. But then the next day as he tries to stop a fight between two Hebrew slaves they turn on him and reject him. He's not accepted by either world. He has to flee or be killed by Pharaoh and he goes to Midian, again another place that he is a foreigner.

So as we get to the end of chapter 2, Moses is a nobody in a foreign land. But we see another interesting thing – there's a whole bunch of rescues. The midwives rescue the Hebrew boys; Moses was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, the Hebrew slave was rescued by Moses, Moses attempts a rescue of the 2 Hebrew slaves who were fighting but was rejected, the daughters of Reuel are rescued and the priest of Midian rescued Moses and gave him a people and a home (although perhaps not the one for which he longed!) We're being set up for the very same thing that this book is all about. The whole book is about a people who needed rescuing and God will rescue them.

And so chapter 2 finishes with the words that God heard the cries of his own people, v.24-25 and he remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is the God that we know. Nothing escapes his notice. He is always looking, always hearing, and particularly watching out for those who belong to him, and as we've seen in the Psalms, those who cry out to him. There will be a greater rescue in the New Testament from a far greater oppression than the Hebrews suffered. And God would act. But I'm jumping ahead of myself.

So in chapter 3 and 4 He's now 80 years old. Yes, he's 80 and minding the sheep. This is where our reading picks up from. I love the story and the understatement here. v. 3 – Oh, there's a burning bush! Oh, look it's not being burnt up. "I will go over and see this strange sight." You bet you will! Man, this is amazing!! What is going on here? Burning bushes are meant to destroy the bush, but not this one. And so God gets Moses' attention. And God calls Moses to a special mission in the desert at the burning bush. And Moses goes and stands and hears the voice of God. And God says, "Moses, Moses"; "Here I am"; God says take off your sandals because the place on which you're standing is holy ground; and Moses hid his face because he was

afraid to look at God. And here Moses is given his commission from God as the person who is to stand between the oppressor and the oppressed and to say to Pharaoh, "Let my people go."

And the rest of chap 3& 4 are about the conversation that Moses has with God. Moses raises 4 objections as to why he is not a suitable leader. So in our reading in v.11, Moses says, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelite slaves out of Egypt." Good point. You're just an ordinary shepherd. But God's answer is, "I will be with you." Moses was a man struggling with his identity. He'd been rejected by his own people; he's had to flee Pharaoh. He's sort of in the middle of being a Hebrew and an Egyptian. But he's not either. Or, at least he doesn't feel like he belongs in either camp. And now he's been a shepherd for 40 years. Who am I? But God's response to Moses is to tell him: Look, Moses, the issue is **not who you are Moses, but who God is**. God's presence was all that mattered. God was with him. If Moses had God with him all would be secure. Without God, nothing was secure and Moses would indeed fail as he feared. There's a lesson for us here isn't there?

In the second objection, in v. 13, Moses is basically saying, Who are you God? Are you the same God who called our ancestor Abraham? And so God's answer is a powerful one, "I am who I am" This is a difficult phrase to translate but basically has the meaning or the idea that I am the same God who revealed myself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and I'm now revealing myself to you and I will continue to reveal myself as your God. Again, it's not a matter of who Moses is in this task that has been given to him. It's **who God is** that is important. Can we trust God today in the midst of our everyday lives, our joys, our difficulties, our disappointments? Will God be with me today? God says look at the history. And this is what we're doing now, God is present and is about to save his people. And then, we see later on, God performing the ultimate saving act through Jesus on the cross. I am who I am. I am unchanging. My brothers and sisters, this is the God we've come to be reminded about this morning. The God of Moses and the Israelite people is our God.

I want us to briefly look at Matthew 17. We read this last year. Jesus goes up to this mountain with three of his disciples and he is transfigured – his clothes are really bright, and it's not that he's doing a washing powder commercial. And then this amazing thing Moses and Elijah appear with him. And Matthew tells us they were talking with Jesus. What is going on – 2 guys who have been dead, one of them for over 1,000 years and they're talking to Jesus. What were Moses and Jesus talking about? This is what I reckon. "Hey Moses, remember when you were minding sheep in the desert and I called you to rescue my people. I gave you a new identity then, remember? You became my man. You were no longer Moses the shepherd but you were now YHWH's man, the one who would rescue. Moses. I'm involved in the biggest rescue of all. It makes the exodus seem like chicken feed. I'm going to be rejected just like you were and I'm going to be put on a cross." You could have a discussion in home groups this week about what the conversation was all about.

But we leave Moses now, he's ready to go to Pharaoh after a number of objections. His brother Aaron will accompany him and do the talking. But let's close with this thought that our identity is bound up with the God who calls us. Perhaps at times he will overwhelm us. But in him we have found who we are. We know that there is nowhere else to go, because he knows us and he alone has the words of eternal life. In John's gospel we hear Jesus taking these words of Exodus 3:14 and Jesus says, I AM the bread of life; I AM the resurrection and the life; I AM the light of the world; I AM the good shepherd. Jesus alone gives us meaning, purpose and identity. We are known by God and we are his child and members of his family as we trust him for his saving death on the cross. Like Moses we may feel that we're lonely and without strong identity. But God meets us and says to us, "I am", the powerful God is with you. You are not alone. You are my child. I have a purpose for your life. In me you will find life. Jesus came to do the ultimate exodus, a deliverance, the ultimate liberation in our lives. A rescue that would bring us into his family.

That's good news!