

# When God's Plans Seem Thwarted (Exodus 1-28)

**Big Idea:** No matter how bad things get, never doubt God's power to save.

I don't know if you've ever thought about one of the moments when all of God's plans seemed to be going down, literally.

The moment takes place in Mark 4. Jesus had just finished teaching about his kingdom: that it was going to grow and take over the whole world. Immediately after, Jesus and his disciples get in a boat. I want you to picture what happened: "And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling" (Mark 4:37).

Think about this. Jesus has just said his kingdom is going to grow and take over the whole world. Now his entire kingdom is taking on water and on its way to the bottom of the sea.

Doesn't it feel like that sometimes? Jesus made some big promises. "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). And yet sometimes it seems like the kingdom is sinking fast.

- 14% fewer Canadians identify as Christians compared to 2011
- The lowest percentage of Christians is found in the 25-34 age group
- Rates of religious adherence are declining
- The proportion of non-religious Canadians has more than doubled in the past 20 years

When we started Liberty Grace Church, one of the questions is why we would start a new church when churches were closing all over Toronto.

It's hard to imagine these trends reversing. Jesus said he would build his church, but sometimes it seems like the trends are going the other way, and it's hard to imagine them changing.

## The Problem

We're in a year-long journey throughout the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. And in today's passage, everything that God has promised seems to be lost.

Here's what we've seen so far in the story.

- In Genesis, we learned that God created the world to be good and beautiful, but we broke the world through sin. All kinds of misery and death entered the world because of sin, and things kept getting worse.
- But God launched a rescue plan through a man named Abraham and promised that his offspring would one day save the world.
- But that family was hopeless. They kept messing up. And yet God kept working out his purposes despite their sin.
- We've also learned from Job that life is full of suffering, that evil is on the loose, and yet God is in control, and what he needs even more than answers is God himself.

We're not very far into the Bible, but what we've learned so far is so helpful. It helps explain why this world is so full of beauty and pain. It helps us understand that God cares about the brokenness and evil in the world and is doing something about it.

But that brings us to the problem in today's part of the story.

When we left off in Genesis, God had just saved Abraham's descendants from starving to death. God didn't just save the family; he kept his plan to rescue the world through this family on track despite all kinds of obstacles and despite their sins.

But now 400 years had gone by. One thing had gone right. They'd entered Egypt with only 70 people, but in Exodus 1:7 we read: "But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them."

But something had also gone very wrong. Despite God's promise to save the world through this family-turned-nation, it looked like this new, larger nation through which God was going to rescue the world was going to be destroyed.

A new pharaoh had come to power who oppressed them. We read:

*So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. (Exodus 1:13-14)*

Not only that, but he tried to kill them:

*Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." (Exodus 1:15-16)*

You get two brief glimmers of hope:

- The two midwives refuse to obey Pharaoh. They rescue a baby named Moses, and in an amazing twist, Moses ends up being raised in Pharaoh's house.
- As Moses grows, he decides to take action to save God's people. It looks like he could be the deliverer.

But just when you start to hope again, things go south. Moses ends up killing an Egyptian. Word gets out, and Moses has to run for his life. We read in Exodus 2:15, "When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well." Moses ends up in the Midianite wilderness for 40 years.

By the time we get to the end of Exodus 2, God's plan to rescue the world lies somewhere between stalled and hopeless. Israel is in slavery to the most powerful nation on earth. Their supposed rescuer is looking after sheep in the desert. It's been centuries (480 years – think about that!) – since they've had anything but a tiny glimpse of good news. It looks like God's rescue plan is sinking and there's no real sign of hope.

## **Learning from Exodus**

What do we learn from all of this? Three lessons.

## **One: Don't be surprised when things look hopeless for a long time.**

In the 1916 Cumberland vs. Georgia Tech football game, Georgia Tech defeated Cumberland College by a score of 222-0. The Los Angeles Times called the game "the biggest blowout in football history." You can't come back from a score like that.

But God often seems to do his greatest work when the score would seem to indicate he's lost the game. The exodus is a great example. After 480 years, against the most powerful nation on earth, with his people in slavery, and the supposed rescuer discredited in the desert, things look hopeless. Think about that: 480 years. That's like from 1543 to today. In 1543, King Henry VIII was on the English throne. That's how long 480 years is. Imagine waiting all that time with things seemingly stalled and looking hopeless not just for years but centuries.

And then we read these words:

*During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew. (Exodus 2:23-25)*

God heard. God remembered. God saw. God knew. It doesn't get better than that.

In 3:14, God gives his name to Moses. Here's his name: I AM WHO I AM. According to Old Testament scholar [Ian Vaillancourt](#), the idea is: I am the never-changing one; you can count on me. That's who God is.

Friends, no matter how lopsided things seem, no matter how hopeless the situation, no matter how much it seems like things are irrecoverable, you can count on

God. No matter how long you're waiting, no matter how hopeless things get, he never forgets his people or his promises. Don't be surprised when things seem hopeless for a long time. God never forgets his people or his promises.

## **Two: Never underestimate God's power.**

You may have heard of the ten plagues. Between Exodus 7 and 12, God sends ten plagues to Egypt until Pharaoh finally relents and lets God's people go.

There are a couple of important things to notice about these plagues:

First, they're a direct challenge to Egypt's gods. They were "a full frontal attack on the so-called gods of Egypt" ([Vaillancourt](#)). For instance:

- Egypt worshiped the sun god, Re. But Yahweh not only created the sun; he could also cause darkness to prevail in the land (Ex. 10:21).
- Likewise, if Pharaoh was worshiped as a god, and his firstborn son would soon ascend to the same heights, YHWH would put that same firstborn son to death (11:5).

In other words, God is communicating that he has no rivals. No power can stand against him. There are no other gods beside him.

But I want you to notice something else. They're an undoing of creation:

- On day 1 of creation, God created light out of darkness. In the 9th plague, God threw Egypt into darkness.
- On day 2 of creation, God separated and ordered the waters. In the 1st plague, he turned water into blood.

- On day 5 of creation, God created birds, fish, and sea life. In the 1st and 2nd plagues, fish and frogs died.

God is able to create the world. God created it. He is also capable of undoing his creation. His power is unlimited.

Even when Egypt is pursuing Israel, God divides the Red Sea to let Israel cross and then lets the sea return to normal as Egypt passes through.

Exodus shows us that God's power is unlimited. I like how Moses puts it in Exodus 15:6: "Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy."

Friends, never underestimate God's power. No god can stand against him. He has complete power over everything he has created.

Don't be surprised when things look hopeless for a long time. Don't underestimate God's power. There's one more lesson I want to highlight.

## **Don't think the exodus is a one-time event.**

I think I had better explain this one.

You may think that the exodus is a one-time event. God only sent the plagues once. He only rescued his people from Egypt one time.

But the exodus is more. It's paradigmatic. Centuries later, with Israel in captivity once again, God promises a *second* exodus.

*In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from*

*Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. (Isaiah 11:11)*

But that's not all.

Centuries after that, Jesus celebrates a meal with his disciples right before he goes to the cross. What night does he choose? Passover, which is when they remember the exodus. On that night, he turns to them and says, "This is my body, which is given for you ... This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19-20). What is he saying? He's saying that he's giving them a better exodus. This is the exodus that the exodus anticipated. As he went to the cross, God once again delivered his people from slavery and set them free.

This is the ultimate exodus. Sin was paid for. Satan was conquered. Death was swallowed up in victory.

*The exodus of Jesus was the true exodus in which the hope promised in the Old Testament was finally fulfilled, and all who are "in Christ" – who trust him as Savior and follow him as Lord – receive something better than the first exodus would ever accomplish: citizenship as God's people in a new heavens and new earth forever. What a glorious gospel! (Vaillancourt)*

When things look hopeless, God is powerful to save. That was true in Moses' time, and it's true today. Jesus is the new Moses who sets his people free. No matter how bad things get, never doubt God's power to save.

Lord, things look bad now. We look around the world and see bad news all around us. Evil seems to have the upper hand.



But we shouldn't be surprised when things look hopeless. That's when you do some of your best work. We should never doubt your power. Nobody can rival your power or challenge your authority.

And so help us to trust you. Thank you for Jesus, who delivered us from slavery. Thank you for the hope we have in him. I pray that everyone here would experience the even better exodus that he offers. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.