

The Providence of God Over the People of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 February 2024

Preacher: Dr. Wes Feltner

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

And I'm, as you can imagine, as I am with every new series, I'm excited to start this series. Excited to, see, I'm so excited I get my words tied up. Excited to start a series on really what is one of the most important books in the Bible.

And there's reasons for that. Several reasons why studying the book of Exodus is so important. And I'll give you just a few of those and then we'll dive in. First of all, the Exodus is really the first major act of redemption, major act of redemption in the Bible.

In fact, it's where God redeems a people to himself. It's the major redemptive act of the Old Testament, which really sets the stage for the redemptive, the greatest redemptive act, which is the cross of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 46] And so the Exodus is often something that's referred back to to understand what Jesus does. In fact, you could almost say it this way. The Exodus is the gospel of the Old Testament.

So if you want to know the gospel, and we're all about the gospel, amen, if you want to know the gospel in the Old Testament, the Exodus is the clearest narrative to give you God's redemptive plan.

And so it sets the stage for what we know as the gospel of Jesus Christ. Next is Exodus is one of the, maybe the most referenced book in the New Testament.

It's frequently referred to by the New Testament authors. Here's a few examples. For instance, the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 says this. He says, And notice what Paul says.

These things took place as what? Examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did. So all of that is Exodus language.

[3 : 09] Paul is taking the Corinthians back to the Exodus event. The author of Hebrews does this as well. Look here at Hebrews chapter 3, verse 16. It says, Again, the author of Hebrews, just like Paul in 1 Corinthians 10, takes his listeners back to the Exodus event.

Peter does this. Writing to Gentiles, he uses Exodus language to them. Notice here 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 9. You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and in to his marvelous light.

This is Exodus language here in verse 10. Once you were not a people, but now you're God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

And by the way, in Revelation chapter 15, what song are they singing? The song of Moses. The point is, over and over and over again, the New Testament takes you back to the Exodus, which means studying this book is significantly important because it helps us understand the New Testament as well.

You with me? One final important reason, I could do a whole sermon on reasons to study the book of Exodus. One final one is that it's a practical book. I mean, think about the title of this series, Into the Wilderness.

[4 : 53] Anybody ever been in the wilderness? I don't mean literally, but like metaphorically in life. You ever been lost, confused, not knowing where you're going, not knowing how things will turn out, wondering where God is?

Is God ever going to show up? Have I done so much that I'm no longer a part of his covenant people? And all of this, God is taking his people to a place of freedom and abundance and promise. So really, in a very real way, the Exodus story is your story. It's going to relate and cross into your everyday life as you try to figure out this wilderness you're in and what God is doing through it all.

So, you ready to get started? We're going to, whether you're ready or not. So, we're going to start at Exodus chapter 1 and the first seven verses. If you're able to stand, please do so as we honor the reading of God's word.

These verses are so exciting. When we read these, you're going to be like, I'm so glad I came to church. Like, I can't even hold back the excitement. Listen, listen, listen. The names, it gets better. [6:03] The names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt were Jacob, each with his household. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Nephtali, Gad, and Asher.

All the descendants of Jacob were 70 persons. Joseph was already in Egypt. You're kidding. And Joseph died and all his brothers and all that generation.

But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly. They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. Where's the excitement?

Aren't you like, we get to study the 70 descendants of Jacob? Yes! But God has a word for you tonight. Let's pray. God, help us because I know that what's behind these verses is exactly what we need to hear.

And I pray that in these moments as we begin this book and we begin specifically with these seven verses, that you would speak deep into our soul, that you would plant a deep faith in a big God as we navigate the wilderness of life.

[7:23] What we learn in these verses is something we must take with us every single day. So Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, would you come and teach now? To the glory of Jesus, I pray, and God's people said, amen.

You can be seated. The year was 2010. The event was the London Chess Classic, one of the most competitive chess events and tournaments in all of Europe.

It was there that Vladimir Kranich, a former world champion of chess and at the time was one of the top rated players in the world, got methodically and embarrassingly beat by an 18-year-old boy.

His name was Magnus Carlsen. Throughout the match, young Magnus acted the whole time like he was bored. He'd yawn.

He'd fidget. He'd slump down in his chair. He would even get up and walk around to the other chess matches that were taking place in the tournament and watch them while his opponent was trying to figure out his next move, only to return just in time to move his piece until Kramnik finally resigned.

[8:41] Checkmate. I don't know why, but I've always been fascinated with the game of chess, even though I gotta admit I'm not very good. I love the challenge, the strategy, the mental battle of the game, and that's why people like Magnus Carlsen just fascinate me.

The way he thinks, his intellect. He was the grandmaster of chess by age 13. To put that in context, that means he's 13 years old and he's beating the best chess players in the world.

By age 19, he's ranked the number one player in the world, making him the youngest ever to hold that ranking. He got the nickname of the Mozart of chess.

Let me give you just an example of how good he is. Just look at what he's doing. Competing against 10 players simultaneously.

That in itself is not extraordinary, but Magnus cannot see the boards he's facing the other way. So he has to keep track of the positions of 320 pieces blind.

[10:01] And the number of possible moves, infinite. And Magnus comes out on top. That's sick!

That's crazy! 10 games at one time, and he's not even looking! And he wins every single one. But as great as Magnus is at thinking through moves, there's one thing he struggles with.

He did an interview with Time Magazine. And in the interview with Time Magazine, Magnus said, even though he can calculate several moves ahead, this is the hardest thing for him to do.

To envision what's at the end of those calculations. In other words, what he's saying is that it's one thing to know your next move or the next two or three moves, but what's really difficult is to know what the final result will be.

Listen to me. That's not just true for Magnus. That's true for every one of us, right? It's not just true in the game of chess. It's true in life. Most of us, all of us, in fact, are next move people.

[11:19] We are doing the best we can to figure out the next move. The next phone call, the next email, the next deadline, the next meeting, the next project, the next paycheck, the next day, maybe the next week, maybe the next year.

How is it all going to work out? How is it all going to come to pass? Will we be standing in the end? Will we win in this game of life?

We are all next move people. And you say, not me. Oh, no, no, no. I'm like, I'm playing five years in advance. I mean, I know exactly what things are going to be like 10 years from now.

No, you don't. In fact, James warned you of such arrogance. Look at James 4, verse 13. Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow, we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.

You don't know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead, what you ought to say is, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

[12:30] See, listen, even if you don't want to admit it, here's the reality. You and I are next move people. We're trying to figure out how to move the pieces of life like Magnus, having no idea what the final outcome is going to be.

Amen? That is our life. And it is because we are next move people that the opening verses of Exodus chapter 1 are so encouraging.

Because do you know what these first seven verses teach us? Oh, listen, listen, they teach us more than a bunch of names that you find boring and skip. Don't lie. You skip them, right?

It teaches us more than that. The opening verses of Exodus 1 teach us this great truth. God is not a next move God.

God is not a next move God. Listen to me. He is not trying to figure out a plan. He's already got one. He's not trying to envision what the final outcome will be.

[13:34] He has already ordained it, including the redemptive plan of his people. Listen, most people don't start where Exodus starts.

Again, we jump past the opening names and we jump right to a baby floating down the Nile. But I would submit to you that if you do not understand the opening verses, you will get lost and discouraged in the wilderness.

And here's why. Come on, lean in close. Exodus begins by connecting you to Genesis. Exodus begins by connecting you to Genesis.

And the reason why it does this is because Moses wants to show you the providence and sovereignty of God that guides the people of God.

And why would you start with the providence of God? Why would you start with the sovereignty of God over the people of God? Because you're going to need it when Pharaoh orders the death of the firstborn.

[14:41] You're going to need it when you're standing by the Red Sea and the Egyptian armies are chasing you. You're going to need it when you're trapped in slavery for years and it seems like it's never going to end. You're going to need it when you're wandering in the wilderness of life.

You're going to need it when you have broken God's law so many times you wonder if he still loves you. Moses gives you in these first few verses what you're going to need when you get into the wilderness.

Namely, that the providence of God is always with the people of God. Let me show it to you. Verse 1. These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt.

Jacob, each with his household. Do you know what that means?

It means this. This is what Moses is saying. He's showing you God's providence in getting his people to Egypt. He's telling you how they got here.

[15:57] He starts with Jacob's 12 sons and then he says something that, again, I don't think we feel it. I don't think we get it. I don't think we understand it. We just read the verses and keep moving on.

It is so unbelievable. It's incredible. In fact, I'm going to force you tonight to stop and think about it. He says they all made it to Egypt. Every one of them.

All 12 descendants. They all got to Egypt. Joseph was already there. And they all got to Egypt. And the reader, if you understand your Bible, if you know anything about the book of Genesis, the reader is saying, how could that possibly happen?

How did they all make it? How did they all get there? God got them there. In fact, if you just go back to Abraham, God comes to Abraham in Genesis chapter 15 and he says, I want you to go outside.

I want you to look at the sky. Look at the night sky. As many stars as you see, so will your descendants be. And Abraham's like, no, no, no, no, no.

[16:59] There's no way that could possibly happen. He can't even imagine a multitude of descendants. And do you know why he can't imagine a multitude of descendants? Because he doesn't have one. It's hard to imagine a bakery when you ain't got a slice of bread.

It's hard to envision a million dollars when you ain't got a dime. And yet God gives Abraham a child named Isaac. And Isaac has a child named Jacob.

And Jacob has 12 sons. If you know the answer, shout it out. What is the occupation of Jacob's 12 sons? They are shepherds.

Doesn't mean much to you, does it? It's because we don't really understand shepherds, even though we've talked about it many times in passages like Psalm 23 and John chapter 10.

Shepherds lived a very dangerous life.

I mean, imagine getting an insurance policy if you're a shepherd. Because shepherds faced danger every day. They would face bears and wolves and lions and a host of threats that would be out to kill the sheep.

[18:04] That's why when Joseph's brothers try to tell their dad that he's dead, what do they do? They take his coat, cover it in blood, and make it look like he was killed by an animal. Because that would be normal.

It would be an occupational hazard. You just get killed when you're a shepherd. It's like if you worked on a skyscraper. Which, by the way, I would never want to do in all God's people said. Amen. Like you, like one step and it's over. Or growing up in the ghetto, a place that's very difficult to get out of. My point is that these 12 sons have like a 1% chance of making it to an old age. And then what about the youngest? You remember Joseph, right? Oh my goodness. Remember what he went through when his brothers hated him and sold him as a slave? He could have been killed. But instead he ends up in Potiphar's house where he's wrongly accused and put in prison. And he could have been killed. But instead he interprets dreams and ends up getting on the radar of Pharaoh so that when Pharaoh has a dream, Joseph gets the opportunity to interpret his dream. And what was the interpretation of that dream?

[19:13] There's coming a famine. And I don't know if you know this, but famine tend to kill people. Particularly in the ancient Near East, when you're in a guerrilla society, this famine is going to kill thousands.

But guess what? All 12 brothers make it to Egypt. Moses is telling the reader, Oh, lean in through barren wombs and dangerous occupations and jealous brothers and broken family relationships and being sold into slavery and accusations and imprisonment and threats of famine and starvation over a period of many, many years.

Guess what God did? He got his people to Egypt. But God preserved his people.

And they all got right where they were supposed to be. Not one was lost. Not one was killed. God preserved them.

Why? Because he ain't a next move God. He's not lost in the details trying to figure out how it's all going to come to pass. He is sovereign.

[20:30] And he gets his people precisely where they're supposed to be. This is one of my favorite illustrations. I think I used it years ago. But I want to use it again.

And it's a book called *Changed Everything* by Jeff Greenfield. It's a book about alternate histories. And what Greenfield does is he talks about there are small events in American history that if they had just been slightly altered, the results would have had a huge effect on life as we know it. And he gives one a very unknown event in the life of JFK. He writes that in December of 1960, JFK was president-elect at the Kennedys' home in Palm Beach, Florida. Many don't know there was a suicide bomber who was armed in dynamite waiting outside their home with the intent to kill Kennedy. The bomber hesitated. And the reason he hesitated, in fact, he ends up being arrested and doesn't kill Kennedy. And the reason that he hesitated is because as JFK was about to leave, Jackie Kennedy walked to the door holding their baby.

[21:41] And upon seeing the baby, the bomber freezes, decides not to go through with it, and the rest is history. And this is what Greenfield writes. Listen.

Suppose JFK Jr. had been sick with colic. It's likely Jackie doesn't come to the door holding him. It's likely Kennedy is killed. Lyndon Johnson becomes president.

Johnson, unlike Kennedy, would have taken the advice of the top military leaders during the Cuban Missile Crisis. This would have likely led to a nuclear confrontation between the U.S. and Russia. So, Greenfield suggests, you're alive today.

Because a baby in Palm Beach, Florida, in December of 1960, didn't have colic. The point, faith family, God is sovereign over the details of life.

Even the messy ones. I'm not going to take the time. But there's a story, many stories, behind each one of those names.

[22 : 49] I'll give you just a few. Jacob is a deceiver. Reuben committed incest. Simeon and Levi committed mass murder. On and on and on.

These are sinful people. But can I just tell you something that I encourage you to know? You ready for something good? Listen, listen. Notice it on the screen. God does not preserve his people because they are righteous.

God preserves his people because they're his people. God preserves his people not because they're righteous, not because you have it all together, but because you're his. He gets you where you're supposed to be because you belong to him.

Moses tells us that God gets his people to Egypt. And you might ask, why didn't God use better people? My professional opinion of that is because there aren't any.

They're messed up just like we are. If God doesn't use sinners, he doesn't use anybody. Amen? And God got them through their sin and all right where they were supposed to be.

[23 : 53] Listen, faith family. Your sin never puts God in checkmate. Never puts God in checkmate. God got his people to Egypt. Here's the second point.

I only have two points tonight, so be encouraged. Verse 6 and 7. Then Joseph died and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly.

They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. The first point, God got his people to Egypt. Second point, God got his people through Egypt.

Again, you see the providence of God here in these opening verses. Moses tells us that he didn't just get them to Egypt intact. He got them through Egypt.

Not only should we... Listen, listen. You should read these verses, but... Oh my goodness, that's amazing. How in the world did they get there? Because I know the book of Genesis and it's like impossible that all this would even happen.

[24 : 54] And they'd get there. And then it's like next to impossible that these people would survive. They get through Egypt. But these 12 sons become 70 persons, 70 descendants.

And then those 70, Moses said, grew to a great multitude. They are great in number. And if you know anything about human history, you ought to be saying it's amazing that that happened.

It's absolutely astonishing that I... Can I prove it to you? All right, you ready? Here's a test. Here's a test. Show of hands. Show of hands. How many of you have ever met a Hittite?

Nope. How many of you have ever met a Hivite? No hands. How many have ever met a Philistine? Nope. How many have ever met an Amorite?

Why? Because they don't exist anymore. When a people absorb another people, do you know what happens to the people that get absorbed?

[25 : 55] They go extinct. They're gone. They exist no more. Faith family, it is historically unheard of that a people would be absorbed by another people and not cease to exist.

In fact, there's really only one... There's maybe a couple, but one main way that a people that gets absorbed by another people remain a people? They're made slaves.

Why? Because if they're slaves, no one will want anything to do with them. If they're slaves, the Egyptians won't want anything to do with disgusting slaves.

In other words, what do you see here? Oh, this is deep. You ready? Here it is on the screen. God was sovereign over their slavery because it kept them separate.

How did God make sure his people made it through Egypt? By making them slaves. He is sovereign over what they're going through.

[27 : 10] He is sovereign over their suffering. Why? To multiply them and grow them and see that they do not cease to be.

Why? Because God has a plan for them. He gets them to Egypt and he gets them through Egypt. He sustains his people in a foreign land.

And that is why, dear friends, I shake my head in confusion when Christians start freaking out over election results in Supreme Court decisions.

I have heard this so many times in my years of ministry. Well, we're just one president away from Christianity being removed. We're just one Supreme Court decision away from Christianity being gone.

We're just one more generation away from Christianity no longer. Stop it! The U.S. government has no authority over whether or not Christianity exists.

[28 : 06] God does. Jesus builds his church, faith family. Come on. Do not misunderstand what I'm saying.

I want America to align with godly values. And I want American leaders to be godly people. Yes and amen. And we vote that way and we engage in that way.

I'm not suggesting that at all. I'm simply saying this. God will sustain his people in America just like he sustained his people in Rome, just like he sustained his people in Egypt.

Christians aren't going anywhere because God's not going anywhere. He got you to where you're supposed to be. He's going to get you through where you're supposed to be.

The providence of God over the people of God. And these verses are screaming and dripping with fulfilled promises of all that God has done for his people in spite of his people.

[29 : 09] Even in their rebellion and in their disobedience, God remains faithful to his people. In fact, did you notice some language in verse 7 that ought to seem a little familiar?

Look at it again. Verse 7. But the people of Israel were, say it? Hmm. Keep that verse up there.

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land. Where have I heard that before?

Genesis. God is preserving his people. Starts with one through Abraham.

Goes to 12 through Jacob. Ends up with 70. By the end of Exodus, there is a great multitude. God is seeing that his people are fruitful and they multiply and they fill the earth.

[30 : 16] So Christian, breathe. Just breathe. But it's an election year.

Breathe. But I just got laid off of work last week. Breathe.

God gets his people where they're supposed to be and he gets his people through. And he will see to it that you are fruitful and you multiply and you fill the earth.

It just may not be the way you think it will. Aren't these verses now exciting to you? Oh, they are so much more than names. It is Moses taking you back to Genesis, declaring to you the providence of God over the people of God.

He got us to Egypt and he got us through Egypt. So what do we take away from this as we close? A few words of application and I'm done.

[31 : 25] This is said to your heart and to my heart tonight. Listen. Number one is this. Trust God to move the pieces. Trust God to move the pieces. Listen, listen. Come on. Some of this stuff that I talked about tonight in a few short minutes, whether you believe that or not, in a few short minutes took years.

Decades. Generations. God is not moving his redemptive story along according to your timeline.

He's moving it according to his. Why? Because it's not your story. It's his story. It's his story. And he's moving the pieces how he wants to move the pieces to accomplish his sovereign plan.

And we just ought to be grateful that we're a part of it. I don't know what you're going through right now, but trust God. Like, see this and think, you know what?

I'm Joseph in a prison cell wondering what in the world is God doing? He's moving the pieces. He's moving the pieces to get his people where they're supposed to be.

[32 : 31] Number two. Trust God to get you to the end. Trust God to get you to the end. Faith family, the ability to write your story is an ability you don't possess.

The ability to write your story is an ability you do not possess. God is the one that will get his people where they're supposed to be. Paul says it in Philippians 1, that he is the one, that Christ is the one that will finish the work he started.

Listen, yes, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We are to be active. I might preach a series sometime on the word abide. How we are to be actively pursuing Jesus.

Oh, make no mistake that we are to be active in our faith. And faith without works is dead. Yes, but it is God who is sovereign and ultimately gets his people to the end.

You may not feel like you're going to get there. You're going to get there. John MacArthur was asked one time if you could lose your salvation. And I loved his response. He said, if you could lose

your salvation, you would lose your salvation.

[33 : 38] Because you do not have the ability to preserve yourself. You do not have the ability to keep yourself. If Exodus shows us anything, it's that the power to preserve the people of God is the providence of God.

You're going to get to the end. You're going to get to the end. Trust him to move the pieces. Trust him to get you to the end. And lastly, trust God when sovereignty includes suffering. Trust God when sovereignty includes suffering. This is the part that I know a lot of people struggle with. And some of you in your small groups, when you discuss this, like I hope that you'll dive deep into this.

And to me, there's no way around it. There's no way to avoid it. And I won't avoid it. Exodus is a messy story. It's really messy. There's murder and slavery and idolatry and disobedience and wandering in the wilderness and stress and uncertainty.

And through it all, God is sovereign. Sometimes we want to say, well, God is sovereign over the good things, but God wouldn't make his people a slave people. Yeah, he did.

[34 : 50] Because that's how he's going to get his people through Egypt. God is sovereign even over your suffering. And so when life is messy and this is really hard to understand and none of it makes sense, guess what?

You need to come back to these verses and remember that God is preserving his people. And this is real life and it hurts and it's messy and it's ugly, but it doesn't make God any less on his throne.

And so when you're in the wilderness, trust God's sovereignty. Notice this on the screen. The journey to freedom goes through a wilderness. And there's some amens to that.

The journey to freedom goes through a wilderness, but God is in control. There's a story I close with this of two men walking through an art gallery.

They're admiring the paintings. As they do, they come upon a painting that's called Checkmate. It looks like this. It's a picture of the devil on the left playing a man.

[36 : 01] And the devil has the man in Checkmate. The devil has won. One of the two men staring at this painting was an international chess champion.

As he stopped and stared at the painting for a few moments, he then turned to his friend and he said, It's wrong. What do you mean it's wrong?

He's not in Checkmate. What do you mean he's not in Checkmate? Because the king has one more move.

The king has one more move. Faith family, listen to me tonight. When you are in the wilderness of life, here's what you need to know and believe with all that you are.

Your king has one more move. When you are caught in slavery and addiction and hopelessness, listen, your king has one more move. When you are standing by the shore of the sea and enemies are coming after you, your king has one more move.

[37 : 08] When you have completely screwed up your life like Moses did and you think it's over, I'm finished, God will never use me again. Remember, God has one more move. And how should you know that's true?

Because on the darkest Friday the world has ever known, when Jesus went into the wilderness of Calvary, it appeared as though the enemy had won. It appeared as though the serpent had put the Savior in Checkmate.

And what did we learn Sunday morning? The king had one more move. It was the providence of God that got Jesus to the cross.

And it was the providence of God that got Jesus through the cross. So, faith family, know this, that what was true in Egypt and what was true at Calvary is true for you.

You are never forsaken in the wilderness. And all God's people said, amen. Let's pray. God, thank you for this opening verses of this great book.

[38 : 16] What a journey. What a journey we are on. And what a gift of your grace to be on it. Oh, how we need the lesson of these verses. For past the names that we don't often know, there's a story that you're writing.

It's a story of your sovereignty, of your providence over your people. That you get us where we're supposed to be and you get us through what we're going through. And I really pray that as we leave from this place in a few moments, that that truth will be an anchor in our lives as we face the wilderness that we are in.

And to know you have not left your people. You will not forsake us. We are yours. And you are at work. Help us trust you to move the pieces.

Help us trust you to get us to the end. Help us trust you in suffering. To know that you are sovereign. Help us now as we remember the ultimate wilderness.

Of what Jesus went through. And how nails and a cross didn't put you in checkmate. It was a part of your plan.

[39 : 41] To lead us to freedom. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.