

The Providence of God and the Preface to Exodus (Exodus 1:1-5)

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It's been said of his life 'he was abandoned early by a dying mother. He was favored harmfully by a foolish father. He was hated desperately by jealous brothers. [He was] victimized violently, confined mercilessly, sold greedily, forsaken thoroughly. All before his 18th birthday.¹ That's the story of Joseph, we read part of it in our scripture reading. Please turn to Exodus chapter 1 and today we finish our series on God's attributes and start a new book study verse-by-verse. There's an attribute we didn't see that will be our bridge to this new series, and a back story of Joseph and his family. Today we'll see the Providence of God and the Preface to the Exodus

Just the intro today, next message rest of chap 1, week after that ch 2, bigger sections TBD

Exodus 1:1 *These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household:* ² *Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah,* ³ *Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin,* ⁴ *Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.* ⁵ *All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt.* This is the preface to the book of Exodus in our Bibles, but in the original the first 5 books were all part of one scroll and story Jews call 'the Torah.' Synagogues to this day have this 1 scroll they consecutively read from. Ex 1 is a continuation of what we call Genesis, and we'll need to spend time in Genesis today to start and get a running start to its sequel saga.

Ex 1:5 ends with 'Joseph was already in Egypt' [that's the story of Gen 37-50]

Young's Literal Translation starts E 1:1 **And** *these are the names...* the Hebrew conjunction for 'and' – consecutive action – this picks up with the 'to be continued' at the end of Genesis. Look back at Gen 50 for how the prequel left off, maybe just a blank line in-between in the original: **50:24 And** [same Hebrew at start of Exodus] *Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."* ²⁵ *Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."* ²⁶ *So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.* [then the scroll continues the thought in a new chapter] **And** *these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob*

...

That's Exodus 1:1 but it's all one story, and the 'to be continued' part is: when will God visit Israel's descendants and bring them out of this land of Egypt? This wasn't their home, Joseph makes them promise to bring his remains to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So the Genesis installment ends with a bit of a cliffhanger and we need some cliff notes on Genesis

Ex 13:19 tells us Moses brought the bones of Joseph in their exodus from Egypt

This is Torah, Episode 2. The writer is Moses, and he assumes you know these characters from the prior episodes. If the first J.R.R. Tolkien book you read was The Return of the King, you'd have a lot of questions about who these dwarfs, hobbits and wizards are and what they're doing. Or if you start watching Star Wars at movie # 7 or 3.5 you'll be pretty confused. You walk into an episode of Downtown Abby randomly, even if you've seen parts of earlier episodes, you see these characters and ask 'wait, did Mary's husband die?' 'Why do those girls have issues?' (and your wife says quiet!). Or if you start watching the series 'Lost' mid-season, you'll be lost, too!

Moses starts with a review, a recap, like 'previously in Torah.' The rest of chap. 1 fast-forwards hundreds of years after Israel came to Egypt, but first we need to know who these people are and why they came to Egypt and how this fits in the bigger story God is writing through Moses.

- Outline:**
- 1. The preface with Jacob's family**
 - 2. The providence in their story**
 - 3. The purpose of this for us**

We'll introduce Moses in a couple weeks when the story introduces him, but the first intro in Ex 1:1 is Jacob, who was also renamed Israel (so his boys are called '*the sons of Israel*'). His story covers Gen 25-50 and his name appears about 200x after Genesis, far more than Joseph's name. Jacob is a major character, but he's no hero, he needed redemption and deliverance from his sin.

Here's his bio: a rascal and wrestler from the womb. He has a limp from when he stubbornly kept wrestling with an angel. He looks nothing like his twin who was red and hairy and manly, a hunter while Jacob was more of a quiet indoors momma's boy who cooks a mean bowl of stew. He was born grabbing Esau's heel and spent much of his life tripping him up to take his place. Jacob took advantage of Esau's weakness to steal his birthright, and then he stole his blessing by deceiving their dying blind father. He dressed up like Esau, lied to his face, kissed him like Judas and even blasphemed, saying '*Yahweh your God granted me success...*' (Gen 25 & 27).

Jacob aka Israel needed redemption and deliverance! That's just his early years, he's a bad dad, too. He passively doesn't deal with sons committing crimes in Gen 34 (just makes it about him: '*you have brought trouble on me*'). Jacob plays favorites in Gen 37 loving Joseph more than all the rest and giving him a coat of many colors. That's the guy in Ex 1:1 who came to Egypt. And in v. 2-3 these kids are from 4 different women he had sex with, multiple wives and concubines.

You thought your family had issues? If He can work in theirs, He can work in yours!

This is the dysfunctional family God adopted so all the families of the earth would be blessed! Sovereign grace and providence and deliverance is what they needed, and it would change them and make them blessed. These 12 sons became 12 tribes of Israel, but v. 1 says they '*came to Egypt*' (not their promised land). So there's this tension: Israel is not in Israel the land, God's chosen people are not in His chosen place, Canaan. They need to exit (what 'exodus' means).

But they also need deliverance from their own sin. v. 2 starts with *Reuben*, the firstborn. Gen 35 says he committed incest with his dad's concubine, the mom of his brothers Dan and Naphtali (to show his preeminence over his dad?). Look at the next 2 names in Ex 1:2 '*Simeon and Levi*.' In Gen 34 they led the way in genocide on the Shechemites in revenge for their sister, deceiving and disabling the men they mass murdered, and captured and plundered the women and children – all under the cover of the covenant sign of circumcision, using their religious sign to slaughter

You may have a wayward child, but not this bad. Don't give up hope. The story's not over

That was evil and they were evil. v. 2 mentions *Judah* and in Gen 38 he left his father and went away from God's people to marry a pagan and was also known to go with any prostitute sitting along the way. His sons were so evil that it says God put them to death for their wickedness. In Gen 37 the brothers agree with him to sell Joseph as a slave for about 2 pieces of silver each. And they lie to their dad about it, almost killing him in grief. These aren't good guys in v. 1-4.

This is a messed up family in need of redemption in Egypt, which is what Exodus is all about!

Israel's story to and from Egypt is a story of deliverance and the providence of God. Look back at Gen 50, just across the page, and remember this is all the same page on the old Torah scroll.

These brothers had guilty consciences over their evil toward Joseph and are just waiting for the other shoe to drop. **Gen 50:15** *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for **all the evil that we did to him.**"*¹⁶ *So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died:¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, "**Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.**"* And now, **please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.**" Joseph wept when they spoke to him.¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "**Behold, we are your servants.**"¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "**Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?**"²⁰ *As for you, **you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.***²¹ *So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."* Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

There was forgiveness and deliverance for them, and him as He trusted providence

That takes us from #1. the preface with Jacob's family #2. The Providence in Their Story

We're not God, we don't need to fear, God's providence is a comfort and kindness to us

Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 27 'What is the providence of God? Answer: The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and all things come, not by chance, but by his fatherly hand' [all of that is in the story of Jacob and Joseph and his sons]

Recent merciful providential hand – Daniel Alterton, Don Schwarzberg?

We sometimes say 'that's a God thing,' if it's a good thing, but everything is a God thing. Eph 1:11 says God predestines and '*works all things according to the counsel of his will... to the praise of his glory.*' Rom 8:28 says He causes all things to work together for a believer's good. We talk about fluke events, accidents, or coincidence, but God's providence is really in control. There's no impersonal chance, only personal providence. There's no blind fate, or dumb luck, there's an all-seeing all-wise sovereign. The old confessions clarify that as He directs and orders all things, the evil itself proceeds only from man and 'not from God, who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin. (James 1:13–14, 17, 1 John 2:16).'¹²

Death is a result of sin in the world, but even in that God is sovereign and can bring good

2-subpoints: 1) God provides and guides all things by His hand, 2) God overrides evil for good. Gen 50:20 '*you meant evil [man is responsible] but God meant it for good [God is providential].* God overrides, and v. 20 talks about how He guides events to save lives, through fruitful and barren famine years He prepared Joseph for. Then in v. 21 He provides for them through Joseph

Don't fear! God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform (Cowper)

The Reformation Study Bible says 'the root meaning of the word providence is...to provide for ...sovereign providence stands over and above our actions. [God] works out His will through the actions of human wills, without violating the freedom of those human wills. The clearest example of concurrence that we find in Scripture is in the case of Joseph and his brothers.'³

God doesn't just permit evil, He purposes good in it for His people

Go back to Gen 37 and see God's providence provide and guide and override evil for good. It starts with Joseph dreaming of his brothers bowing down to him and telling them and they're determined to make his life a nightmare, if not over. Look at **37:23** *So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.*²⁴ *And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.*²⁵ *Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites... just so happened? No, providence.*

²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites... He had an evil motive of greed, but God meant it for good so that Joseph wouldn’t die (so they wouldn’t). ³⁶ Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh... Cool coincidence? No, providence.

This isn’t serendipity, this is sovereignty coordinating and orchestrating

Fast forward to ch 40, God guided Joseph to Potiphar and provided a good job but there was an evil untrue accusation by Potiphar’s wife that lands Joseph in prison. v. 1 says the King’s own cupbearer and baker got in trouble, and v. 3 says they end up in the same prison as Joseph (not by happenstance, by providence). The cupbearer has a troubling dream and tells it to Joseph.

¹² Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. ¹³ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. ¹⁵ For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.” [but v. 23 says he forgot as he got out]

That was providence and a God thing, too, even though he didn’t see good things short-term

Joseph will be in that pit of a prison 2 more years, probably wondering if God forgot him or if his prayers were getting past the ceiling of his cell. Joseph was ‘behind a frowning providence,’ but behind it was God’s smiling face and never-failing skill working His sovereign will.⁴ Better than any chess grand wizard, God is preparing the board, anticipating every move, setting up a rook to move next to the king, and 12 pieces will move across the board safely (Jacob+11 sons)

We can’t see His end game but need to trust He’s in control even if we don’t see His plan

Some of you know the story of when our son Mark Joseph died at 3 months old. We couldn’t fathom the why question. Someone sent us a song about the Joseph in the Bible we named his middle name after. It comes from the Dreamworks movie Joseph, imagining his prayers in jail:

I thought I did what's right...But that road brought me here...
 Now just when I have given up, The truth is coming clear
Chorus: You know better than I, You know the way
I've let go the need to know why, For You know better than I
 [2nd stanza] If this has been a test, I cannot see the reason
 But maybe knowing I don't know is part of getting through
 I tried to do what's best, But faith has made it easy
 To see the best thing I can do, Is to put my trust in You.

Gen 41:1 says 2 years later Pharaoh had a dream. All the king’s men can’t tell him the meaning, but what are the odds, Joseph’s former cellmate is in the room with the king and God guides his memory to the guy who interpreted his dream. Is that a chance occurrence? No, it’s providence! God shows Joseph the dream means 7 years of plenty will come before 7 years of famine that would wipe out the land. So he advises to store up resources so that they’ll survive and beyond.

Much bigger than Joseph, it’s about a big God and His providence and plan for the world

By the end of the chapter Joseph has gone from the pit to the palace, prisoner to prime minister! He was in chains as a slave, now he’s wearing a gold chain as second in command to Pharaoh! In Gen 41:43 he’s riding in the king’s second chariot (Ground Force 2). And he’s married. v. 51 ‘Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house...[God delivers on many levels]...⁵² Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.’

42:1 *When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?”*² *And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, **that we may live and not die.**”* That’s the bigger picture in all this, Jacob and his 12 sons had promises but they needed to all be alive for God’s Word to be fulfilled. They were shepherds, a dangerous job with predators, but are all alive. Joseph is still alive even though they tried to kill him and shipped him to another continent. Judah left the family to live with pagans 20+ years and became one and all his male heirs are dying (the line of Messiah). Simeon and Levi are mass murderers and what they did in Shechem deserved their death and put all 12 in jeopardy. But they’re all still alive and are about to reunite

After surviving all that, they’re about to die in a famine if not for a dream-interpreter in Egypt

Skip to Gen 45 where God’s providence guides them to cross paths with Joseph, it’s a dramatic redemption story of deliverance from their sinful past and Joseph’s deliverance from bitterness. **45:4** *So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.”*⁵ *And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because **you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life...***² *And **God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.***⁸ ***So it was not you who sent me here, but God*** [but God meant good from evil]

...

You sold me as a slave, but God sent me to save your lives! It’s the magnificence of providence –He uses sin in a sinless sovereign way as He provides and guides all and overrides evil to good

That’s the providence in their story, but 3rdly finally what’s **The Purpose of All This For Us?** Heidelberg Catechism question #28 for Christians: ‘What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by his providence does still uphold all things? Answer: That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from his love; since all creatures are so in his hand, that without his will they cannot so much as move’

God is with us in good and bad and works all things (including the bad) together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Providence also tells us God has far bigger purposes than what we can see. Look at 46:2: *And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.”*³ *Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for **there I will make you into a great nation.***⁴ ***I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again ...***

That’s God’s promise that Exodus fulfills. And God’s purpose statement of the book of Exodus in sending the plagues and judging Egypt is ‘*for this purpose...to show you my power, so that my name will be proclaimed in all the earth*’ (9:17). Exodus shows God’s purpose for nations and salvation. It’s the picture of deliverance and redemption, the pattern for rest of the Bible. It’s the paradigm of God’s power and platform for missions proclaiming His name and nature. And it’s the plan of God that points to Christ who is the Passover and Lamb and great ‘I AM.’

Jesus would also rejected by His brothers, who plotted to put Him to death (same wording in Gen 37 and Jn 11). He was also stripped of His robe, and sold for the price of a slave in silver.

Jesus also was falsely accused and imprisoned, but would be exalted to reign and save many, saying on the cross ‘Father, forgive them...’ What they meant for evil, crucifying Messiah, God meant for the greatest good ever, converting many. nations. So don’t fear, the Lord will provide

Whatever drama you've gone through is not worse than what God brought His people through in the Bible, and the grace that could change people like them can change people like us. There are serious problems in Jacob's family and for some in this room, but there's hope! Genesis promises in Jacob's family all the families of the earth would be blessed! These 12 unlikely and undeserving sons are changing by grace and God will use them to change the world! Kind of like 12 other men in the NT descended from these 12 sons, men Jesus chose and changed and used to change the world, 12 disciples descended from the 12 sons of Israel.

A corrupt sellout money collector Matthew seems as unlikely as Jacob's son Judah who sells out his brother Joseph for money. Judas sold the Lord for a slave’s price with silver pieces just as Judah sold Joseph before he became a lord of Egypt. Jesus even chose a Zealot, a radical group known for wanting to overthrow Rome and assassinate some of them, terrorists and murderers not radically different than Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi in Gen 34. Jesus' disciples were not only uneducated laborers like Jacob's sons, they often argued about who was the favorite and told of their visions of greatness of themselves over the others. They not only said and did stupid things, they sinned greatly, betrayed the Lord. They're not just like them, they're like us!

Look to Jesus for grace greater than all sin. Plead with Him for forgiveness by trusting Him as Lord and Savior. If you need forgiveness from others or to forgive others, behold the Lamb.

¹ “The Whisper of Grace in the Shout of Scandal,” 10/3/2012 (Masters University chapel).

² 2nd London Baptist Confession, 5.1, 5.4, Westminster Confession of Faith, 5.7.

³ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1045.

⁴ Words adapted from William Cowper, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.”