

## Forming a Family: *Superman*

Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### INTRODUCTION

Good morning West Portal and happy Thanksgiving. Thankfulness spills over from a heart aware of God's faithfulness. And God's faithfulness is front and center in the story we're continuing this morning. Last week we began our journey in the book of Exodus—a story of oppression, rescue and the forming of a family or community where God will reign as king. Exodus is not so much a new story, as it is a continuation of God's story begun at creation. While the specifics of God's plan are not divulged, despite humanity's sinful rebellion, we're told God's blessing will continue and it's going to happen through a man named Abram and his eventual family. Somehow, through this one person, God's blessing will impact all people. Abraham has a son, Isaac. Isaac will later have a son, Jacob. Jacob, later named Israel, relocates his family to Egypt to escape a famine in Palestine and to be reunited with his son Joseph. Several generations go by and this family grows significantly, but pharaoh does not see this growing immigrant people group as a blessing, but as a threat and takes steps to put a stop to this first with slavery and forced labor and later through more murderous methods. One of the questions that drives the storyline is, who will Israel serve? The answer seems obvious, but where God is in control power is found in unlikely places—as it's a series of women in the opening chapters who undermine, outwit and outmaneuver pharaoh. Into this time of darkness and oppression a Hebrew baby is born, placed by his mother in a basket along the banks of the Nile River, discovered by an Egyptian princess and ultimately adopted into pharaoh's household. This is where our story dropped us off last week. If you have your bibles, Exodus 2:11 is where we're going to pick this story up.

As a reminder, we're encouraging you to be reading through this story (or book of the bible) along with us. If you can read ahead that'll be helpful as some Sundays we'll be looking at larger sections of the text and won't have time to read it in its entirety. If there are things you notice or questions this raises, feel free to send them to me at [andrew@westportalchurch.ca](mailto:andrew@westportalchurch.ca). I can't promise we'll look at them all, but this will help shape our teaching time and will likely influence some of the discussion we have afterwards. Just to give you a taste of this, here's a question that was raised during our discussion after last week's teaching.

#### Exodus Timeline: (1 Kings 6:1)

- 966 B.C. (*Solomon's 4<sup>th</sup> year*) - 480 years = 1446 B.C.

How can you say we don't know when the exodus took place when 1 Kings 6:1 gives us a very definite timeframe—480 years prior to Solomon's 4<sup>th</sup> year as king? Solomon's 4<sup>th</sup> year in office was 966 B.C. and one can do the math from there—leading to a date of 1446 B.C. for the exodus. This makes it likely that the two pharaohs of the exodus are Thutmose III and his son Amunhotep II from the Egypt's 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty. This is the traditionally accepted date. I don't have any particular issue with this, but here are a few reasons why some remain unconvinced.

Questions:

- 480 yrs *literal or general*

To begin with, we have examples from ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian records that use numbers in general instead of specific ways—480 could easily be an ancient way of referring to 12 generations assuming 40 years per generation. But this kind of recording, while accurate for its purposes, is hardly the kind of precise way we're used to using numbers.

- Pithom & Ramses?

Exodus 1 tells us the Israelites were responsible for building Pithom and Ramses—city names that fit with the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty, not the 18<sup>th</sup>. Although these names may simply be later editorial updates.

- Canaanite destruction?

We have archaeological evidence of the destruction of numerous Canaanite cities in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Is this when Joshua's troops conquered the Promised Land? If so, again this fits better with a later date.

- Pharaoh's palace?

Here's one more problem with the traditional date. We repeatedly find Moses, who lived in the Nile Delta, frequently in touch with the ruling pharaoh. Unfortunately, the Egyptian capital and royal palace were located in Thebes during the 15<sup>th</sup> century—a distance of more than 400 miles to the south of where the action is said to take place. These are some of the reasons why this conversation continues to be unresolved and why I choose to suggest we don't know with absolute certainty when the exodus took place. If you want to be a part in shaping some of our teaching and discussion, feel free to send in some of your questions. Anyway, that's enough about that. Let's get into our story today. I'm picking up in the middle of Exodus chapter 2.

***Read Exodus 2:11-22.***

CONTENT—*Exodus 2:11 – 3:22*

Crusader for Justice:

Kind of a lot has happened between verse 10 (where Moses is adopted into pharaoh's household as a child) and verse 11 (which tells us he's grown up). Some passages in our NT hint that Moses is around 40 years old at this time (Acts 7:23). We can presume he has been afforded all the privileges and education that were part of growing up in a royal family yet it is his passion for justice that stands out as, in 3 back-to-back incidents, he confronts injustice. Moses kind of does his own superhero impersonation in these verses. He just needs the Zorro mask, Iron Man suit or Superman cape to complete the look.

This portion of the story raises several great questions. How much of his ancestry is Moses aware of? How did he find out? Does he identify primarily as a compassionate Egyptian (given his upbringing) or an incensed Israelite (given his actual ethnicity)? How much of Moses' ethnicity is pharaoh aware of? The clues from our text certainly suggest Moses is keenly aware of his ethnic roots and this, coupled with his strong sense of justice is about to bring things to a head.

- Striking down Egyptian oppression

One day Moses sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew severely. It might interest you to know the same verb is used to describe what the Egyptian is doing to the Hebrew and what Moses does to him. Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. (I can't actually substantiate this.) Moses swoops in to the aid of the Hebrew—violently and definitively. *Don't worry. He won't be bothering you again.*

- Breaking up Israelite quarrels

The very next day Moses encounters two Hebrews fighting and confronts them. *Break it up fellows. The enemy is out there, not in here.* It's hard not to read this abbreviated story with a sense of Moses' idealism as the crusading avenger come to rescue the oppressed. Moses must have been stunned at the retort—*who made you ruler and judge?* Moses may identify with the Israelites, but the Israelites don't acknowledge or accept him. Worse, it becomes clear the incident the previous day has not been kept as secret as hoped. If the Israelites know of the murder, it's only a matter of time before pharaoh finds out. Moses instinctively understands the clock is ticking and wastes no time fleeing the country. We'd be reading between the lines, but it feels like if Moses knows his true ethnic roots, likely so does pharaoh. If the princess is as strong-willed as our opening chapter seems to imply, she may have been a primary reason why Moses is allowed to live. However, Moses' actions here may now be offering pharaoh a justified reason for killing him.

Either way, Moses flees to Midian. Midian is a territory that's historically difficult to pinpoint, but is generally assumed to be in northwest Saudi Arabia. Likely east of the Gulf of Aqaba, but the territory may well have included some of the western shore and extended north to the borders of Palestine. As a people group, the Midianites trace their ancestry back to Abraham as well as Midian was also a son of Abraham, but through his wife Keturah (Gen. 25:1-6). It was Midianite traders who bring Joseph to Egypt. By the time of the judges they will be an enemy to the Israelites, but for now, they're distant relatives of Israel.

- Defending Midianite girls

Moses is a long way from home and, as was common in the ancient Near East, he sits down by a well—which was a meeting place for shepherds, nomads and townsfolk. This would have been a natural place for a newcomer to gravitate.

However far from home he may feel, Moses sense of justice and fair-play is in no way diminished, as he quickly comes to the defense of several girls who are being harassed by shepherds. Moses' education has almost certainly included military combat and tactics. I suspect Moses was more than capable of not only taking care of himself, but doing a little butt-kicking should the situation demand it.

Moses not only comes to the defense of these women, he waters their flock. *Hello ladies*. Not surprisingly, their father Reuel, wants to meet this helpful stranger and ancient hospitality was astonishingly generous. *Can I offer you something to eat, drink? Would you like to marry my daughter?* Ironically, Moses only finds acceptance apart from his people—first by being raised in an Egyptian household, later by starting his own family on foreign soil with a foreign wife. This stranger is accepted into Reuel's family, marries his daughter Zipporah and they have a son together. Every indication is that Moses has found a new home and has every intention of settling down although his son's name will be a constant reminder of his banishment.

#### Textual Tidbits:

a) *I have become an alien* – Moses' experience mirrors Israel's

*I have become an alien in a foreign land*. The word *alien* or *sojourner* is the same word used to describe Israel's experience or time in Egypt. They were *aliens* or *foreigners* there. Moses may already side with his Israelite brothers and sisters, but he is about to slowly learn to identify deeply with their experience. It feels like Moses' passion for justice needs to be tempered with a humility that comes from experiencing injustice firsthand. Here in Midian, Moses will get a taste of what it means to be a *stranger in a foreign land*. **Read Exodus 2:23-25.**

b) *The king of Egypt died* – often a time of release & reprieve

Meanwhile, back at the ranch...I mean, in Egypt, the pharaoh who was trying to kill Moses dies. Apparently it was an established practice in Egypt for a new king to celebrate his ascension to the throne by granting amnesty to those guilty of crimes, by releasing prisoners, and by freeing slaves. With a new ruler coming to power, the Israelites had reason to hope for some change to their predicament. Sadly, this was not to be. Israel's cry for help goes up to God and God is ready to respond.

God's timing is always something we struggle with. Why does Israel need to wallow, perhaps for centuries in Egypt before God is ready to deliver them? Why does Moses need to spend 40 years in the Midian wilderness before God approaches him? What we do know, is the God who hasn't been directly mentioned thus far, has not been absent or idle. He's been slowly working, laying the foundation for the story that is about to unfold. **Read Exodus 3:1-6.**

In the previous chapter Moses' father-in-law was named Reuel. Now he is referred to as Jethro. There is no definitive answer to this. Perhaps he had two names. After all, Jacob is later named Israel and I used both interchangeably last week. Horeb and Sinai seem to be used interchangeably also. Jethro may also be a title pertaining to his role as a priest.

If this is the case, then Jethro might be the equivalent of *his excellency*. Regardless, shepherding was a common occupation in the ancient Near East, and one day, while Moses is on the far side of the desert, he encounters something one doesn't see every day—a burning bush (not uncommon) that isn't burning up (very uncommon). Moses' curiosity is piqued and he goes to check it out.

c) *Angel of the Lord* – the word of God & (somehow) God himself

The precise identity of the *angel of the Lord* has always been a matter of debate. The Hebrew can also be translated *messenger of the Lord*. Throughout the OT, this mysterious figure is closely identified, if not equated, with Yahweh himself. One who brings the word of the Lord and yet somehow is the Lord. Or one who makes the message of God visible. Does this sound familiar? This has led some to wonder if the angel of the Lord is an OT manifestation of Jesus (the word made flesh) who we encounter in the NT. I don't know what the correct answer is, but wanted to give you something to think about.

The removal of sandals is still a common sign of reverence or respect in the Near East. And God introduces himself to Moses—*I am the God of your dad...* How much does Moses know about the God of his father and the God of the Hebrews? He was a mere infant when we was taken to the Egyptian palace and the education he received there would hardly have pointed him in this direction. *I am the one you have heard about (albeit vaguely). I am the God of your ancestors and your people.* Introductions out of the way, God moves on to explain the reason for this unusual encounter. **Read Exodus 3:7-10.**

The Lord has seen, has heard, and knows what his people have been enduring under Egyptian oppression. To *come down* is typical biblical language to describe God when he is about to intervene in human affairs. God is about to make the Israelite oppression his issue. This is good news. Against this backdrop, verse 9 and 10 must have landed like an unexpected punch—*now go, I am sending you.* The pauper-turned-prince-turned-shepherd, the Hebrew-turned-Egyptian-turned-Midianite, has been chosen to play a leading role God's rescue operation. You can kind of feel the stunned silence as Moses searches for a response. **Read Exodus 3:11-12.**

Given the reckless heroism of the preceding chapter, Moses' response catches us a bit off-guard. In a fashion more like a pouting child than a commissioned warrior, Moses begins to question God's wisdom—not once, not twice, but five times. We won't look at all of Moses' excuses today, but we'll look at the first two.

Moses' Questions:

a) Who am I – *I can't do this!*

Moses' initial response to God's presence—*here I am*—now becomes *who am I?* 40 years tending sheep in the wilderness have turned Moses' self-confidence into self-doubt. In fairness to Moses, this opening question is not unreasonable.

Moses knows the plight of the Israelites and he knows, first-hand, the power of Egypt. This is a monumental undertaking. Moses' assertion that *he* cannot accomplish this task is entirely correct and entirely beside the point. He is not the one doing the saving. Moses says, *I can't do this*. Yahweh responds, *you're not, I am*. **Read Exodus 3:13-22.**

b) Who are you – *what credentials can I flash?*

*Who am I* becomes *who are you? What's your name?* Once again, this is a logical request. All the Israelites know of Moses, if they know anything at all, is that he was brought up as an Egyptian, committed murder, and is a wanted man. The last time Moses tried to do something heroic for his people he was met with the question, *who made you ruler and judge?* Before Moses can confront pharaoh, he needs to gain the trust of the Israelites and to do this he will need some credentials to flash.

- I am who I am – *ahya asher ahya*
- I will be who I am – *I will be faithfully God*

God's response is one of the most puzzled over verses in the entire Hebrew bible. *I am who I am. Ahya asher ahya*. It's simply the first person singular verb *to be* repeated twice. This could be rendered *I am who I am, I will be what/who I will be, I will cause to be what I will cause to be*, or *I will be who I am*. It's this last one that may actually be the best option as it implies not only that God is present, but that God will be faithfully God—for Moses and for the Israelites. Let the Israelites know *I am* has sent you. Then God adds, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers...has sent me to you. This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered...'"

- LORD (YHWH) – (lit.) *he is*

Let me give you a quick Hebrew grammar lesson. The LORD (notice the capital letters) is four Hebrew consonants—YHWH. In Hebrew you don't write the vowels. You need to know them to pronounce the word though. These 4 consonants are referred to as the Tetragrammaton—meaning, 4 letters. Every time you see the word LORD in capital letters in your OT this is the way translators have chosen to render this personal name of God. Jehovah is one way this has been pronounced. Today it's almost universally accepted that Yahweh is probably the closest and best translation. Yahweh is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular of the *ahya* (the verb *to be*). Literally, Yahweh means *he is*. So Moses asks God his name and God responds in the first person—I *am*. But then adds, "It'll probably be most appropriate for you to refer to me as *he is*." If you call me *I am* it'll sound like you're calling yourself God. Grammar matters.

By the way, it's sometimes popular to hear people suggest Jesus never claimed to be God. In John's biography (chapter 8) Jesus is embroiled in a discussion with some of the Jewish religious leaders about the OT figure of Abraham. The argument heats up and Jesus finally drops the following bomb into the conversation. *I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!* At this point the Jews pick up stones to try to kill Jesus.

Why are they so offended? Because Jesus used poor grammar? Sort of. Jesus takes Yahweh's personal name and applies it to himself. The Jews knew how inappropriate this was and responded with the kind of indignation we would expect. Who do you think you are? Um...God. Anyway, that's a neat way how the long-arc of God's blessing and redemptive plan traces back and echoes even in these early parts of our OT.

## APPLICATION

### 1. (Big Idea) God works in the world through us (Ex. 3:8 & 10)

There are other things we could talk about, but we'll save them for another day. What do we do with this? Let me offer two thoughts. Here's the first and this is the big idea for the morning. God works in the world through us. I'm not sure if you caught the seeming irony of verse 8 and 10 of chapter 3. God meets with Moses and basically says, *I've seen the oppression of the Israelites and I've come down to rescue them*. You can picture Moses responding, *um...you go God!* Right around the corner, verse 10 becomes the *wait...what* verse. *Now go I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt*. Talk about mixed messages. *God are you doing this or am I? Make up your mind*. This is God's preferred method of operation—how he loves to work and move in our world...through people.

This isn't new. In the opening chapters of Genesis, God creates a beautiful, good world so he can rule and micro-manage all of it, right? No, God makes a beautiful place where he can dwell alongside his image-bearing creation—humanity—who he will ask to rule on his behalf. Humanity, when they choose to live in God's world, God's way, become his representatives in this world. God does this with Moses. God will still be the primary mover and shaker as our story moves forward, but Moses will play an integral part. As we'll see later in Exodus (and we see throughout the OT), God will do this with the Israelites as a people group—calling them to live as community where God reigns as king. As they do this, they become a place where God's compassion, justice, love and truth is lived out in practical ways that blesses the world that touches others in practical ways and invites them to consider becoming a part of this story themselves.

It shouldn't surprise us to find Jesus operating the same way. Do you remember the final marching orders Jesus gives his followers in Matthew 28? *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*. You can picture his disciples saying, *you go, Jesus*. *All authority in heaven and earth have been given to ME...therefore (you) GO and make disciples of all nations...* God continues to partner with his human creation to be his image-bearing creation in this world. God doesn't have to do this. It certainly isn't the easiest or most efficient way, but he chooses to. Why? I heard a pastor explain it this way. As a parent, if you want to do a project like baking cookies or mowing the lawn, the most efficient way to accomplish the task is by doing it yourself. However, if fostering and building relationship is as important (or perhaps more important) than the task, then doing it with your kids is probably the best way to go. It's not as efficient, but our kids get to know us and grow and develop through the experience.

What we discover is that our God is inherently relational. God is relationship. This is part of who he is and is part of how he loves to operate. Last week we mentioned that in God's family everyone has a part to play and because we never know what's at stake, there are no unimportant parts. In the same way God calls Moses, he continues to call you and me to take our place as his image-bearing creation in this world. Think about that in the various places you connect and engage in the week ahead. We may not need to take a lead role in rescuing a people group from oppression and slavery, but God continues to work in this world through you and me.

## 2. God *SEES* his people...*identifies deeply, moved to respond* (Exodus 2:25; 3:7)

Let me leave you with a final thought and this will bridge towards us participating in communion together. Our passage began this morning with Moses *seeing* an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and it moved him to respond. Later, we find several references to God who *sees* the suffering of his people. This kind of *seeing* doesn't refer to making eye-contact. It's not about noticing something for the first time. *Oh, I hadn't seen that before.* It's about moving towards another with kindness and sympathy. It's a *seeing* with the heart that identifies with the experience of the other and is moved to respond as a result. Moses' heart is moved by what he sees and he responds. God sees the situation of his people and he is moved to intervene. This is our story as well—of the word of God, leaving heaven, being wrapped in humanity, identifying with his sin-sick, estranged, image-bearing creation by living among them. But more than that—of honoring God's justice by taking the death penalty for our sin upon himself so that we could experience a restored, healed relationship with God. Jesus continues the story of the God who *sees*—who identifies deeply, loves radically, and is moved to respond compassionately and selflessly. As we eat and drink and worship together spend some time reflecting on a God who *sees* you. Be humbled once again by his sacrifice. Be encouraged to continue to allow HIS story to become part of ours.

### BRIDGE TO COMMUNION

- Raise your hand if you need communion elements
- Spend some time reflect as the worship team begins to sing, participate when you're ready, join us as you're able