

Overview of the Bible 2 – ‘Out from the garden of Eden’: Creation and Exodus(es)

Genesis 1:26-2:3 / Psalm 19 / Romans 5:12-21 / John 1:14-17

Biblical books: Genesis, Exodus

Sunday Night in the City, Bethlehem, 6 March 2022

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As we enter into our sermon series providing an overview of the whole Bible, tonight I will be preaching broadly from Genesis and Exodus, as well as the three readings and Psalm that we’ve just heard. Let’s pray: Lord God, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth.

Creation and Fall (Genesis 1-11)

The first book of the Bible can be divided into two sections. Genesis 1-11 tells the story of the whole world, while the rest of Genesis, and indeed the rest of the Old Testament, focusses on the story of God and the people of Israel, beginning with Abraham. So while most of the Old Testament does focus especially on the election of one nation, Israel, it begins with a more cosmic scope:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. (Genesis 1:1-4)

In the very opening of the Bible we hear an echo of the Triune God: The God who creates, the Spirit of God, and then the Word of God, who would become flesh and dwell among us. The book of Colossians says that *“all things were created through [Christ] and for [Christ]”* (Colossians 1:16), and in part we hear this in how God created. Not by his hands, but with his voice, showing power of his voice. As tonight’s Psalm 19 put it: *“Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”* (Psalm 19:2)

The world, also, was created good, and that includes the pinnacle of God’s creation, you and me. When God calls his creation good, there are echoes even of words like beautiful, and ordered. God’s creation is one of bringing order, and it’s a beautiful order, it’s a good order. Right from the first lines we can understand who God is for us today, seeking to bring order, and goodness and beauty out of chaos and darkness, by the power of his Word.

And as we heard in our first reading tonight, God said *“Let us make man/humankind in our image, after our likeness”* (Genesis 1:26). Who is the “us” that God is speaking to but another echo of the Triune God? The Father, Son and Holy Spirit in communication, with their life spilling out into the creation of man in God’s own image, male and female he created them. Not tall and short, or black and white. Those dimensions of existence are not foundational to the nature of humankind. Rather, male and female, both in the image of God, and even together in the image of God, blessed by God to be fruitful and multiply. For despite their differences, or perhaps because of them, male and female belong together. None of the animals would do for Adam, only with Eve does he cry out: *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!”* (Genesis 2:23).

Together they stand, but also together they fall, and both are implicated in the fall into sin. Eve succumbs to the serpent’s temptation, as Adam looks on, passively and culpably, joining

in too. Their guilt leads to shame, both before God and each other, and the honest intimacy they once had with God is now replaced with attempts to hide from God and then blame each other. But their guilt also spreads to the whole human race. We are all descendants of Adam of Eve, both according to the flesh and according to their original sin, in which we share, along with the curses that God brings upon them both. But in the curses God brings upon the serpent, there is the hint of a promise. To the serpent God says that an offspring of the woman will bruise your head, even as you will bruise this descendant's heel. On this dark day in human history, a glimmer of light, this first mention of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, pokes through. For Christ is the offspring of Eve who will bruise the serpent's head, defeating his power, even while it will come at a cost, with the offspring of Eve suffering the pain of the cross, a bruising of the heel.

And so from the very beginning, Adam and Christ are matched up. As we heard from Romans 5 in our reading for tonight, *"just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."* But,

As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.
(Romans 5:12,18-19)

But all that grace and righteousness in Christ is yet to come. For now, it is death that spreads to all men. From Adam and Eve, to Cain and Abel, to all their descendants including to the ninth generation in Adam's descendent Noah. This death, this sin, this wickedness now grows so great that the Lord was even sorry that he had made man on the earth (Genesis 6:6). But in saving Noah and his family through the flood, we can begin to see the way or method in which God begins to save the whole world. Just one family from numerous families, just two of each animal from any number of animals. And yet, by these few, God saves the whole world. And we can also see his method of saving through water. These small band of people and animals travel through the water, which brings life to them, and death to sin. It's a pattern that God will repeat at the crossing of the Red Sea. A small band of people, Israel, crossing through the water which brings freedom to them, and death to sin, personified in Pharaoh and his cohorts. And it's a pattern that God has repeated with you. In the waters of baptism, through which you passed, like Noah and the animals, like the people of Israel, you were rescued, saved, chosen. The power of sin was defeated, and you were washed *"not by the removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience"* (1 Peter 3:21), the washing of the soul.

The salvation of Noah and his family works to a degree, with God renewing his covenant with humanity in Noah, but the peace is temporary. For soon the people of the earth are again descending into wickedness and idolatry, led by Noah himself who ends up getting drunk and is left naked and ashamed, just like Adam. For now that humankind is "out from the garden of Eden", the corruption of original sin is doomed to repeat itself. After Noah, we hear that the people of the earth plot to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4) by building the tower of Babel. God condescends, in both sense of the word, to inspect the tower. He disperses the people over the face of the earth, their languages are confused, and so the damage they can do is limited. While God had created the heavens and the earth and given dominion to humankind, the Tower of Babel shows that this dominion, when corrupted by sin, requires God's intervention to be maintained. God is the one who has

created the world good, we are the ones who keep corrupting it by choosing our own way, no matter how many chances we are given. We want to make a name for ourselves.

The Patriarchs (Genesis 12-50)

As we enter the next stage of the Book of Genesis, this theme provides an interesting link, a connection between the story of the whole world, and the story now of Abraham and his descendants. Because while the people of Babel wanted to make a name for themselves, when God calls Abram, He tells Abram, that He – God – will be the one that will make a name for Abram. And he will bless Abram and make him a great nation. As we move into the history of the Patriarchs, we can see the Scriptures showing that we cannot attain the things that we want, but that, somewhat surprisingly, God attains those things for us, and more, and wants to give them to us. The blessing and approval we strive for, the good name we desire, are not ours to earn, but gifts to be given by the gracious hand of God.

So Abram simply hears this call. Genesis doesn't really introduce him, other than to provide a family connection, that he is about a dozen generations on from Noah. The whole history of Israel, and so too of the church, begins with this simple call of Abram, at the beginning of Genesis 12:

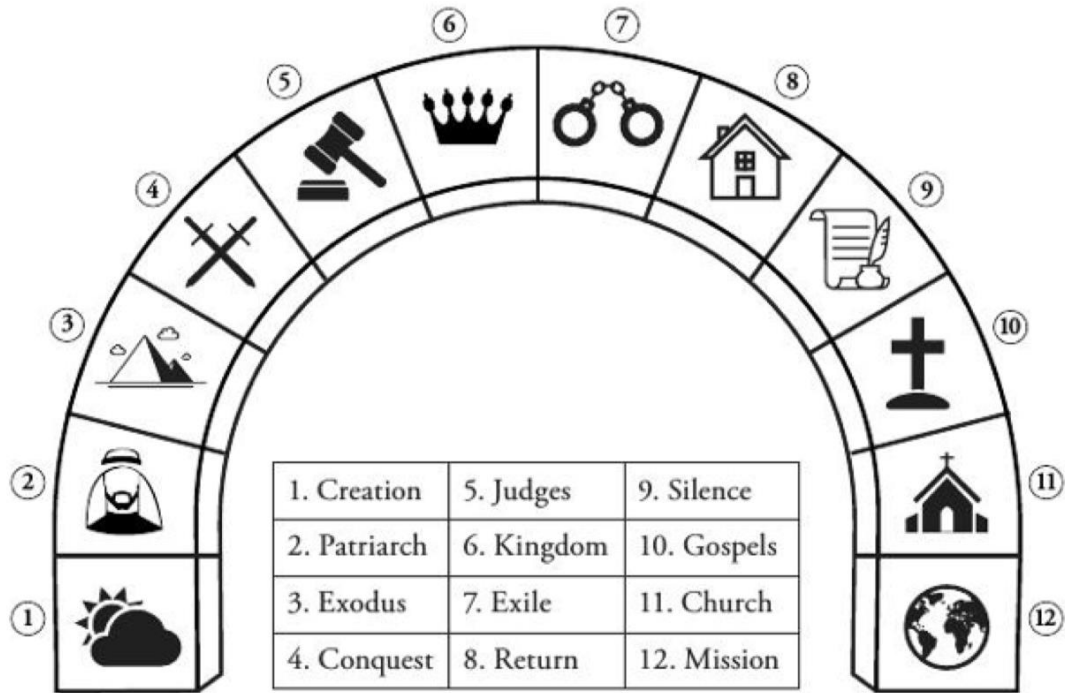
Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abram doesn't earn this, he rather simply trusts in what God says, and so receives God's righteousness (Genesis 15:3; Romans 4:3; cf. Hebrews 11:8-10). So here again, we can see God's method in saving the whole world. In this one man Abram and his family, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And so for this reason, the rest of the Old Testament focusses on Abram's family and descendants, the family through whom all families of the earth will one day be blessed. And it's in the New Testament that Abram's descendant Jesus Christ will bring the blessing of God to the whole world, opening up the grace of God to all through trust, or faith, in Him.

Interlude: Old Testament Geography

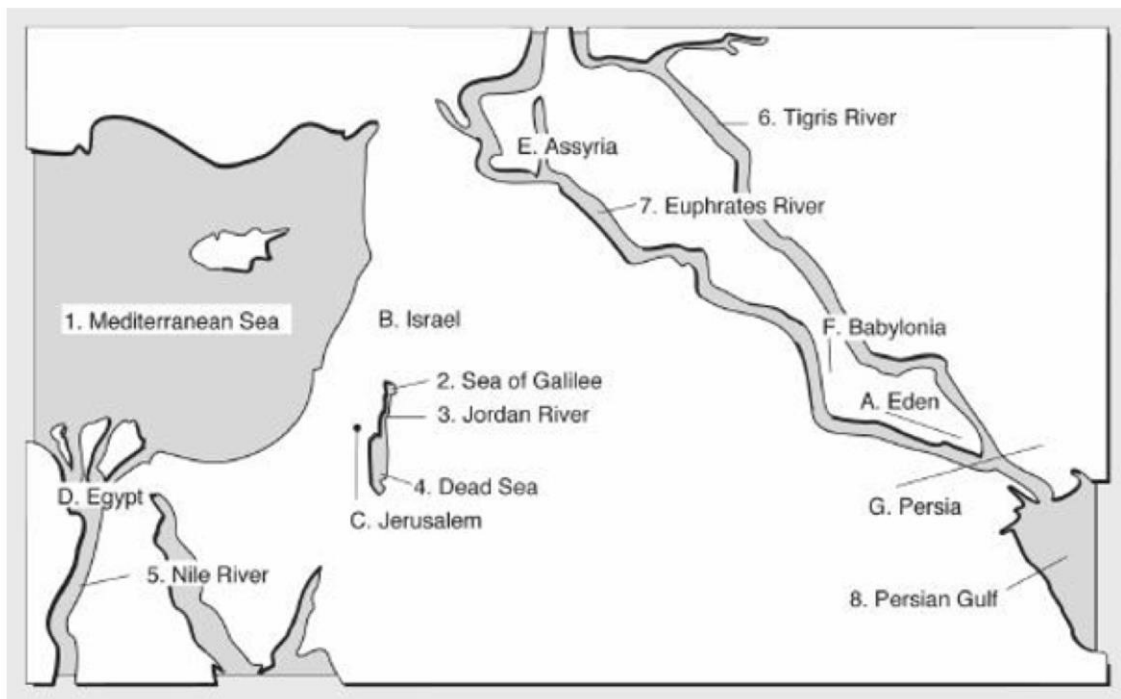
Before we continue to look at this next section of Genesis, I want to take a little interlude to look especially at the geography of the Old Testament, for which I'd like you to open the booklet for this series, or look at the manuscript of this sermon which you may have received.

On the bottom of the third page, you'll see an overview of the Scriptures presented in twelve icons.



We've now just looked at the first icon, and are moving onto the second, and the third today. Some icons will take longer, but the image does give you a good way of keeping in mind the whole story ark that we'll be looking at. But I mainly want to draw your attention, in this interlude, to the fourth page, and the map titled 'The Geography of the Old Testament'.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



Both Genesis and Exodus include a lot of moving around, and to understand them, it can be helpful to have an understanding of where we are geographically. If you look at the map,

you'll see on the right hand side that this map even situates the Garden of Eden. Of course no place is identifiable today, but Genesis does tell us that the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers split downstream from Eden (see Genesis 2:10-14), rivers which you'll see running through our map. So from somewhere there, humankind is expelled. Noah's Ark is also located in Genesis, at least in its resting place, on Mt Ararat (Genesis 8:4) which isn't marked on this map, but is roughly north of the "Tigris River" label. Babel is the Hebrew word for Babylon, and so the tower is perhaps situated between the two rivers. In a contemporary map, the action of Genesis 1-11 is largely located in Iraq, with Mt Ararat in Turkey.

But with the call of Abram, the action moves West. Abram's father Terah lived in a city called Ur, sort of near Babylonia on our map, before moving up the Euphrates river to Haran, sort of near Assyria on our map (See Genesis 11:27-32).

Continuing the Patriarchs (Genesis 12-50)

And it's in this town, Haran, that Abram receives God's call and blessing, telling him to travel down to the land of Canaan, marked on our map as Israel, the name it will receive when Israel conquer the land. This land of Canaan or Israel, where our Lord was born, died, risen and ascended, enters the Biblical story now, with Abram travelling there with his wife and nephew Lot where he builds an altar, and calls upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 12:8).

Now, because this is an overview, I just want to summarise briefly the rest of Genesis, which is the story of Abraham and his descendants in three main sections. The first deals with Abraham and his family (Genesis 12-25), the second section deals with his son Isaac and his son Jacob (Genesis 25-36), and the third section deals with Jacob's sons, with Joseph as the main character (Genesis 37-50).

(By the way, while we've been calling him Abram thus far, in Genesis 17 God makes a covenant with Abram, telling him that his children will be as numerous as the stars in the night sky, that his sons are to be circumcised, and that from now on he will be called Abraham, which we'll use from now on.)

The three sections dealing with Abraham and his descendants all share a common theme, one that will already be familiar to us now. In all of these sections, Abraham and his descendants get into trouble of some sort, only then for God to be faithful and to rescue his people. With echoes of Babel and Eden, they want to make their name great on their own terms, and it never works, only for God to step in and rescue them, and then graciously granting them what they were seeking, only on God's terms and in God's ways, so that He can bless them, and bless the world through them.

How do they try and make their own name great? Well, in Abraham's case, he doesn't trust in God's promise that he'll have a son, even in old age. So, with his wife Sarah's encouragement, he takes matters into his own hands, having a child with her slave, Hagar, creating all sorts of problems. In the next section, Jacob takes his blessing in his own hands by cheating his blind father Isaac into thinking he is Esau, the eldest. He then literally takes his blessing in his own hands, by mysteriously wrestling with God at the river Jabbok. And in the third section, Jacob's sons hate their brother Joseph so much that they sell him into slavery in Egypt. They want their father's love and blessing all for themselves. Each generation repeats the failures of their forefathers.

But in all these cases, God bails out Abraham and his descendants. The failures of humankind are mirrored by the faithfulness of God. While Abraham chose to have a child with his slave, God chose to give him a son with his wife, called Isaac. Then while Isaac's son Jacob wrestles for his own blessing in many ways, God saves him from peril, and blesses him regardless, renaming him Israel. Finally, while Joseph is enslaved, God uses this for good, making him second in command under Pharaoh, saving not only Egypt, but also his brothers and family from the famine that is consuming the land.

And so at the very end of Genesis, Joseph can even sum up the thread that runs through the book by saying to his brothers: *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."* (Genesis 50:20)

And it's at this point that we turn to Exodus.

Exodus from Egypt to God

For while Genesis ends on a positive note, with Israel and his sons and families settling in Egypt, Exodus begins some 400 years later where the people of Israel have fared well insofar as they have multiplied and filled Egypt (Exodus 1:7), but have nevertheless been enslaved by Pharaoh, as their size begins to pose a threat to him (1:13-14).

This theme of slavery runs through the whole book of Exodus, and it has to do with the fact that Hebrew uses the same word for slavery and service. While our Bibles sometimes use these two different words, Hebrew just uses one. Why this matters for Exodus, is because the whole book is a journey, a struggle, from serving Pharaoh, to serving God at Mount Sinai. From belonging to Pharaoh, to belonging to God, the beginning of Israel as a holy nation, with God dwelling in their midst.

Moses is the one called by God to lead Israel, when God appears to Moses in a burning bush. I've called tonight's sermon Creation and Exodus(es) because in some ways there are a few little Exoduses, mirroring the great Exodus through the Red Sea. So for instance, shortly after Moses' birth, he has an Exodus, being sent by his mother to float in the water in an ark – the same word as Noah's – escaping death through the water, and then being rescued to become a member of the royal family, echoing our own baptisms. Then, when Moses is older, he has another Exodus. He's killed an Egyptian who is enslaving and beating a fellow Israelite, and so he flees Pharaoh to escape death. And it's while Moses is now wandering by himself on Mt Sinai that God calls to him in the burning bush, telling him not just to lead the people out of Egypt, but also to lead them to serve God on this very mountain (Exodus 3:12). Like us, the question for the people of Israel is not whether to serve someone, but whom we will indeed serve. And so at the burning bush, God doesn't just give an order for evacuation, he also gives Moses a new identity, he gives Moses his holy name: *"I am who I am"* (Exodus 3:14) and also the name that sounded something like *"Yahweh"* but which our Bibles render as *"LORD"* in capital letters (Exodus 3:15). For this LORD doesn't just rescue from a false identity, but in his graciousness grants a true identity.

While Moses is often depicted as the hero, Exodus really shows God to be the one in charge. Moses is even reluctant (Exodus 4:1) and worried that he is not eloquent enough (Exodus 4:10) and so God assures him that He, God, is the one in charge. So while Moses confronts

Pharaoh, really the war is between God and Pharaoh, a spiritual war, rather than a merely political war. The ten plagues show God challenging, and winning, against every level of the Egyptian gods – gods under the earth in the rivers, gods on the earth, and gods in the sky, culminating in the death of Pharaoh’s son, along with other Egyptians’ sons. In the midst of this, however, Israel is protected, by the blood of a lamb which they smear on their doorposts, so that the angel of the Lord passes over their houses.

It’s a devastating humiliation for Pharaoh, but it was not without warning. About a dozen times we hear some version of the refrain: *“Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me”*” (Exodus 4:23; 7:16; 8:1; 8:20; 9:1; 10:3; 10:7; 10:8; 10:11; 10:24; 10:26; 12:31; 14:12). Notice that it’s not just “let my people go” but also for a purpose “that they may serve me.”

And serve God they do. After the final devastation for Pharaoh – the destruction in the watery depths of the Red Sea which again is not at the hands of Moses so much as at the hands of God the General – God leads the people of Israel to Mt Sinai. Just as he had told Moses there in the burning bush, he has kept his promise to bring Israel to serve him here. And so on the mountain, God constitutes Israel as his own. He gives them the ten commandments, but he also gives them a pattern for serving him in worship. While we will look at this latter part of Exodus more next month, as we look also Israel’s worship and the Promised Land, for now it is enough to note that at the tabernacle, the place of worship, God declares: *“I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God”* (Exodus 29:45). From slavery to Pharaoh, to service to God, the people of Israel are made a holy people by God dwelling in their midst, in a gracious intimacy, which is a but a foretaste of intimacy we now have with God in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion: Our Story

And so the books of Genesis and Exodus are not just history, they’re our story, the story of how God is determined to love you and bless you, despite your best efforts. But as we leave the people of Israel wandering in the desert from Mt Sinai, seeking the Promised Land at Canann, we can also see their story as our story in another way. If you were to ask one of these wandering Israelites, “Who are you?” we can imagine him or her replying with something like this, words that should ring true to us:

“Well, I was in a foreign land under the sentence of death and in bondage, but I took shelter under the blood of the lamb. God led us out of bondage, through saving water, and into freedom and service to Him. Now we’re on our way to the Promised Land, although we’re not there yet, and we suffer as we look with hope towards our true home. But God has given us his Word, He has made us holy, and He is dwelling in our midst. And He’s promised to stay with us, until we reach our true home.”

And the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Next Month...

3 April: 'Worship the Lord in the splendour of holiness': The Promised Land

Biblical books: Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth

Texts for the Divine Service:

Deuteronomy 12:1-7 / Psalm 96 / Hebrews 9:1-15 / John 4:5-26

Recommended Pre-Reading:

- Leviticus 16 – The Day of Atonement
- Leviticus 19 – The LORD is Holy
- Numbers 11 – Complaint in the Wilderness
- Numbers 21 – The Bronze Serpent
- Numbers 22 – Balaam, the Donkey and the Angel
- Deuteronomy 1-3 – Moses' Summary of Israel's Journey
- Deuteronomy 6 – The Greatest Commandment
- Deuteronomy 34 – The Death of Moses
- Joshua 6-7 – Victory at Jericho; Defeat at Ai
- Judges 6-7 – Gideon's Fleece and 300 Men
- Judges 19 – Chaos without a King
- Ruth 1-4 – Short Old Testament book on Jesus' ancestors

Recommended on YouTube:

- Search for 'The Bible Project Leviticus', and likewise for the other books