

St Paul's August 2026

The people of God and persecution
Exodus 1:8-2.10. Matt. 16:13-20

I'm going to look through our readings at the theme of the people of God and persecution.

Our first reading is the start of Exodus. **Genesis finishes with** the wonderful story of Joseph.

Joseph went to Egypt as a slave, was promoted to the leading governor when he saw there was going to be a time of plenty and then famine, and his family then join him, his father Israel, and his 11 brothers and his sister, Dinah. And Genesis ends with his Joseph's death.

So **Exodus starts with the people of Israel in Egypt** going from Israel's children, the 12 sons and daughter, and grandchildren, to them multiplying over generations.

These are the **PEOPLE OF GOD**. The people of God were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who was renamed Israel, and then his descendants.

What we also have at the **beginning of Exodus** is the People of God being **PERSECUTED**. They went in at Pharaoh's invitation at the beginning, but it says a later Pharaoh set "*taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens*". And they **built** "*Pithom and Raamses*". Looking on AI it says of Raamses (Pi-Ramesses): it "was the magnificent northern capital built by Pharaoh Ramesses II (19th Dynasty). Excavations have revealed a massive metropolis that featured colossal statues, grand palaces, and a sprawling equestrian complex capable of housing hundreds of horses and chariots." Pithom is another similar place. We went on holiday to Cyprus and saw in Larnaca ancient Kition, a 1200 bc temple, with really thick walls. This was serious work and oppression. "In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves." Ruthless & hard.

The King of Egypt then told the Hebrew **midwives to kill** all the male boys. It says that they feared God and didn't do it. There were human powers, probably moved by spiritual powers, trying to wipe out the people of God, but it didn't work and God's people just increased.

So Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall **cast into the Nile**". This is genocide and an escalation of trying to kill all God's people.

But again it didn't work. **God protects his people**, against all the oppression and hate against them, and he raises up a deliverer. One of the boys is drawn out of the water and lives, and so is given the name **MOSES** which means '**draw out**'. The water was a figure of death, because all the boys were being killed in the water, and Moses being drawn out of the water is a **figure of resurrection**, coming out of death.

Then later on, **he leads all God's people through the waters** and out the other side. At the Exodus, he leads all Israel out of Egypt through the waters, and when the Egyptian armies try to follow, they of course all drown and die.

It is of course a **picture of Christ**. Jesus first rises himself, then leads all God's people through death to be resurrected.

We see these same themes of God's people and persecution in our **NT** reading. Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, and Jesus then says: "*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" God is still building his people, which Christ calls here his **church**, and now it is anyone who recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. This is the rock on which God builds his people.

And there are **powers trying to destroy the church**. "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." There is persecution against God's people, but it will not prevail.

And like we see in Exodus Resurrection, going through the waters into the promised land, we see that here too. We have the **keys of heaven**, and we have spiritual authority even now, as the people of God. "*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*"

So let's rejoice We are among the people of God, following from Abraham and Moses and the saints of old. The going may get tough, but the gates of hell will not prevail, and we have the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

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