

Exodus I – Notes

II. *In the Crucible*

11-Jun-06 Exodus 1:1-22

Theme: *In the light of God's sovereignty and Christ's victory, we must balance the lure of materialism against the pain of living in a fallen world.*

Key Verses: Exodus 1:6-8 ⁶And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. ⁷But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. ⁸Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

Review

Last week we introduced our study in the book of Exodus. This summer, we will be studying Exodus 1:1-15:21, which focuses on the *redemption of God*. Let me briefly review the five introductory points regarding the book of Exodus.

1) First, Exodus is *biblical*. This means we will read the text verse by verse and strive to understand its meaning and context, within the book and within the Bible as the inspired Word of God. 2) Second, Exodus is *historical*. The events described in Exodus really happened. God actually sent the plagues and parted the Red Sea. The same God who acted in history 3500 years ago has the same power today. God's sovereignty over Egypt then is the same as His sovereignty over Creation now. 3) Third, Exodus is *theological*. Exodus teaches us who God is and what God does. He is a God who covenants with His people and redeems them for His own possession. God demonstrates His glory throughout the book of Exodus, leaving us in awe of the God who saves. 4) Fourth, Exodus is *Christological*. The God who saves has a name – Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the Savior of Old Testament people, and He is the Savior of New Testament people. He is our Savior. As we read Exodus, let us see Jesus. 5) Finally, Exodus is *practical*. Exodus exposes our greatest need – deliverance from sin – and describes the greatest gift ever given – redemption. If we really understand Exodus, our thoughts, our actions, and our lives will be changed.

Introduction

As we begin our verse-by-verse study of Exodus today, I want to keep these five points in front of us. We will clearly see the Biblical link between the first chapter of Exodus and what has gone on before in Genesis as we consider the historical record of Israel in Egypt. I will sprinkle theological, Christological, and practical points throughout the lesson and attempt to summarize the main lessons of Exodus 1 under those three headings in my concluding remarks.

A. The Good Old Days (1:1-7)

1. *Shadows of the Past (1:1-6)*

What is the first word of Exodus? The NIV and the ESV start out “These are the names....” The KJV, NKJV, NASB, and the ASV all start out “Now these are the names....” However, in Hebrew, the first word of Exodus is actually “and.” Why does the book start out with a conjunction, as if in mid-thought or mid-sentence? Because Exodus is not a stand-alone story. It is integrally connected with what went before. There is a natural flow from Genesis chapter 50 to Exodus chapter 1. This is not an independent book – it is the sequel of Genesis. The Hebrew

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and thus connects Exodus to Genesis and grounds it in history. This is only the first of several verbal clues we have in the opening verses of Exodus that link us back to the book of Genesis.

The second verbal clue is in the first six Hebrew words of Exodus: “And these are the names of the children of Israel...” Moses is here quoting from Genesis 46:8, the passage which describes the descent of Jacob and his family into Egypt. Moses seems to be saying, “In case you forgot, the reason the book of Exodus starts out in Egypt is because Jacob and sons immigrated here hundreds of years earlier!”

Interestingly, the list of names that follows does not match the genealogy of Genesis 46 exactly. The order of sons is different. Genesis 46 lists sons by mother in this order: sons of Leah, sons of Leah’s maid Zilpah, sons of Rachel, and sons of Rachel’s maid Bilhah. But here in Exodus 1, Moses follows a slightly different order: Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah. This order is exactly the same as given in Genesis 35:23-26, except that Joseph is omitted (because he was already in Egypt). So Moses is once again tying the opening verses of Exodus back to an earlier part of Genesis to reinforce the flow of Biblical history.

The next verbal tie-in to Genesis is the reference to “seventy persons” in verse 5. Moses takes us back to the genealogy of Genesis 46 with its summary statement in verse 27: “...all the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy.” Although seventy persons from Jacob’s loins descended into Egypt, we can assume that many hundreds, perhaps even thousands of people initially populated the land of Goshen. In addition to wives, daughters, and granddaughters not counted, there would have been many servants and others allied to Jacob. After all, Jacob’s grandfather Abraham had a private army of 318 fighting men (Gen. 14:14).

The next reminder of Genesis comes in verse 6: “and Joseph died.” Well we knew that already. The book of Genesis starts in a Garden with the Tree of Life and ends in 50:26 in a foreign land with a coffin. Joseph’s coffin.

2. *A New Creation (1:7)*

So far, we are just reviewing Biblical history. Moses has not told us anything new. Everything up through verse 6 has already been covered in the book of Genesis. I usually do a short review each week; Moses just completed his. It is when we come to verse 7 that we begin to encounter new information. But even this new information is rooted in the past, in the book of Genesis.

⁷But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them (Exodus 1:7).

God had promised Abraham many times that his descendants would be numerous, like the stars of the heavens, like the dust of the earth, and like the sand on the seashore (*cp.* Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:6; 22:17). Exodus 1:7 is the fulfillment of these promises. Father Abraham at long last had his multitude of offspring.

But the meaning of this verse goes beyond simply fulfilling promises made to Abraham, important as that is. The language of verse 7 takes us all the way back to the beginning of time, when God created Adam and Eve and told them to “be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). This is the same command God gives to Noah after the Flood (Gen. 9:7). The deliberate use of this *fruitful and multiply* language gives us another clear linkage to the book of Genesis. Just as God gave this cultural mandate at the original Creation and the subsequent re-creation after the Flood, so we see it being carried out by the children of Israel.

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This suggests that the children of Israel were a “new creation,” the beginning of a new line of God’s people.

Up to this point in the book of Exodus, God’s blessings on His people are clearly seen. Although Joseph and his generation have passed away, God’s blessing still continues through their descendants. In the original Hebrew text, seven terms are used to describe this explosion of growth and increase. Since seven is a symbolic number indicating moral perfection or completion, this is another indicator that the hand of God is involved in this rapid growth of Israel. Surely these were the “good old days.”

B. The Fire of Oppression (1:8-14)

1. Regime Change (1:8)

So far, so good. Everything is hunky-dory in Goshen-land. God’s people have the good land and the good life. Everything they touch is blessed, and they are filling the earth and subduing it, in obedience to the command of God. Then we come to the ominous words of verse 8:

⁸Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8).

There arose a new king. This phrase seems to indicate a change of dynasty. This is not simply referring to a legitimate successor of the previous pharaoh. What we have here is regime change. Assuming the early date for the exodus (c. 1446 BC), this regime change could be the invasion of Egypt by the Hyksos, an Asiatic people who took control of the Nile delta region around 1730 BC. More likely, this refers to the expulsion of the Hyksos by the first king of Egypt’s 18th dynasty, Ahmose (1584-1560 BC). This new pharaoh drove the Hyksos out of their capital city of Avaris and into the northern reaches of Palestine. Mackay indicates that shortly after the fall of Avaris, “magnificent Egyptian royal palaces were built in the same area, and built of brick. There is therefore much to suggest that Ahmose was the pharaoh of the oppression.” Regardless of who this king actually was, there was a clear break with the past. It’s a new day in Egypt.

Who did not know Joseph. This phrase is not talking about acquaintanceship. Joseph was dead and had been dead for some time. Furthermore, this phrase does not necessarily mean that the new pharaoh had never heard of Joseph or was ignorant about what Joseph had done. Joseph’s fame in saving Egypt would have been recounted in their histories and in their bedtime stories. Everyone in Egypt would have known the story of “Joseph and the Great Famine.” What this phrase most likely means is that the new pharaoh did not adopt or appreciate the policies of Joseph. “He knew who Joseph was, but he did not acknowledge Joseph or his faith. Rather than bless the Israelites, he chose to persecute them” (Jordan). The new administration was going to have a radically different plan with respect to the family of Joseph.

The death of Joseph and the arrival of the new king point out significant spiritual truths for us. First, the work of the gospel goes on, regardless of the individual workers. Joseph had a tremendous ministry. He spared Egypt from the devastation of a terrible famine. He was the instrument God used to bring his brothers to salvation and heal the wounds in his family. Likely many Egyptians also converted to worship the LORD under the influence of Joseph. But like all of us, his time on earth came to an end. And the ministry of the church continues, even when she loses great leaders like Joseph.

In addition, the rise of this ungodly king reminds us that the work of the gospel is never done. There will always be enemies of the church. There will always be fields white unto harvest. We

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are not to sit back and let the Josephs do all the work – each of us has a responsibility. Let us all go forth, be fruitful, and multiply in a spiritual sense, bringing the good news of the gospel to this generation which needs to hear it.

2. *Plan 1: Slavery (1:9-11)*

The new king had a completely different attitude towards the children of Israel. Joseph's pharaoh had welcomed them, blessed them, and given them the choicest land available. The new king had other ideas.

As the king took stock of the situation, he decided to “deal shrewdly” with the Israelites. This word picture takes us back to the early chapters of Genesis. The king is setting himself up as another serpent in another garden, speaking cunning words against God's people. Pharaoh comes up with a plan to deal with the “Jewish problem.” This is the first of three plans of increasing severity presented in Exodus chapter 1. The first plan is simple: *slavery*. Pharaoh decides to enslave the Israelites.

He gives two reasons for this policy change. First, he cites the obvious fact that we've already observed in verse 7: the Israelites were fruitful and multiplying. They were a numerous people, so numerous in fact that they outnumbered the Egyptians! Enns comments:

To put it another way, Pharaoh is opposed to their fulfillment of the creation mandate to be fruitful and increase. In this respect, Pharaoh represents not only a force hostile to God's people by enslaving them (vv. 11-14), but a force hostile to God himself, who wills that His people multiply. This is not a battle of Israel versus Pharaoh, or even of Moses versus Pharaoh, but of God versus Pharaoh.

The second reason Pharaoh gives is that he is afraid of the Israelites! He is afraid they may ally themselves to Egypt's enemies and rise up against them in war. Ryken comments:

Pharaoh used the threat of warfare as a pretext for persecuting foreigners. Blaming things on ethnic minorities is always convenient because racism is part of our sinful human nature. Playing the race card worked for Pharaoh.

What an elegant solution! In one fell swoop Pharaoh has solved both his immigration problem and his labor problem. Now at last he is able to build those cities he only dreamed of: Pithom and Rameses. Notice the irony? Joseph had spent seven years storing up grain during the years of plenty in anticipation of feeding Egypt during the seven years of famine. Now the heirs of Joseph's generation are building supply cities for this new pharaoh to store his grain against a future emergency.

This turn of events does not surprise us. It was anticipated by God centuries earlier:

¹³Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years” (Genesis 15:13).

Once again, there is a linkage between Exodus 1 and the book of Genesis, as the pharaoh's plan begins to fulfill God's prophecy to Abraham. Beyond that, there is another connection to Genesis in the words of the pharaoh. The pharaoh phrases his plan this way in verse 10: “Come let us ... lest they....” This is the same phraseology as the builders of the Tower of Babel:

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⁴And they said, “*Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth*” (Gen. 11:4).

I don't think the parallel structure is a coincidence. We've already seen that Pharaoh is setting himself up as a challenger to God's rule and authority. He is opposed to God's plan for Israel to be fruitful and multiply. He is opposed to letting God's people go to the Promised Land of Canaan, instead holding them in captivity in Egypt as slaves. Just as the builders of Babel shook their fists at God and tried to take heaven by storm, so Pharaoh is indulging in building structures for his own glory rather than for God's. Within just a few verses, the spiritual dimensions of the upcoming struggle are becoming apparent.

3. *Grace Under Fire (1:12-14)*

So, how did Pharaoh's plan work out? He had two reasons to enslave Israel: 1) there were too many Israelites; and 2) the Egyptians were afraid of the Israelites. What does verse 12 tell us happened after the first plan went into effect?

¹²But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel (Exodus 1:12).

Let's see, instead of reducing the numbers of Israelites, they “multiplied and grew.” And rather than reduce their fears, the Egyptians grew “in dread.” 0 for 2. So much for “Plan A”!

What's a king to do? If Plan A doesn't work, then let's just try it again, only with more effort and intensity! Obviously the only problem with Plan A was that it wasn't being applied appropriately. If only they could really oppress the Israelites under very hard labor, surely everything would work out right for Egypt.

So that's what they did. In verses 13-14, the Egyptians made the Israelites serve “with rigor,” making their lives “bitter with hard bondage.” Just as in verse 7 we had seven Hebrew words indicating God's blessing upon the Israelites, here in verses 13-14 we have seven Hebrew words describing the intensity of the Egyptian slavery. What a difference a new king makes! Israel has gone from the seven-fold blessing of God to the seven-fold curse of Pharaoh. The people of God had moved from the good old days into the fire of oppression.

4. *Suffering of God's People*

What can we say about the situation of Israel? Has God abandoned them? Of course not! The suffering of Israel was all part of His plan, announced to Abraham hundreds of years earlier. Then the question arises, “Why did God allow Pharaoh and Egypt to cause His people to suffer?” After all, if God is truly sovereign (and He is!), then He could have easily eased the circumstances in Goshen. He could have done it completely differently, without slavery and without misery. We come back to that age-old question, “Why does God allow suffering?”

Well, there are several good answers to that question with respect to the Israelites in Exodus 1. First, consider the effect that the oppression had. Contrary to Pharaoh's stated goal of reducing the growth of Israel, he actually spurred it on! In the history of the Church, persecution has often had this effect. The rapid growth of the early Church in the book of Acts happened when persecution scattered the apostles from Jerusalem. Rather than destroying the Church, it caused the gospel to spread rapidly throughout the known world. Bentley says: “A life of ease tends to

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lead to Christians who are weak and listless in their faith, but persecution produces strong and fearless believers.”

Second, the oppression of Israel had the effect of isolating God’s people from the rest of society. Rather than being tempted to indulge in the pagan practices of Egyptian culture, “the new Pharaoh actually helped preserve their identity as a close-knit community” (Ryken). Instead of destroying their uniqueness, Pharaoh’s oppression actually served to preserve it!

Third, bondage in Egypt taught Israel their need for redemption. God had promised them a land “flowing with milk and honey.” How were they ever going to get there? They couldn’t escape Egypt in their own strength. They needed to be redeemed, saved, brought out with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm. Ryken applies this principle to our own salvation:

This teaches us an important lesson about our own spiritual pilgrimage: Suffering helps us look for our Savior. If we never have any trouble along the journey, we would never have any reason to long for Heaven. Like the Israelites, we need the house of bondage to help drive us to the Promised Land. Our sufferings help us look for our salvation.

Finally, the experience in Egypt was forever impressed upon the collective consciousness of God’s Old Testament people. Time after time they are called to remember the great salvation that God had accomplished:

⁵And you shall answer and say before the LORD your God: ‘My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. ⁶But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. ⁷Then we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. ⁸So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders (Deuteronomy 26:5-8).

God intended His people of all ages to remember the exodus; not just Old Testament people, but New Testament people like you and me as well. We are the heirs of the exodus generation. Paul tells us that everything that happened to them happened for our instruction (1 Cor. 10:6). Let us rejoice in the great salvation of God in the exodus, because He has also brought us out of the house of bondage, out of slavery to sin and death.

So, we shouldn’t be surprised when we read about God’s people suffering. God is like a refiner of precious metal; removing the dross and making us fit for His service (*cp.* Mal 3:2-3). Jesus told us that the way of the cross would be the way of suffering (Mt. 16:24-25; *cp.* Jn. 16:33; Rom. 5:4-5; 1 Pe. 2:21). The crucible may be uncomfortable, but it is a sure sign that God’s work is in progress!

C. The Heat Increases (1:15-22)

1. Plan 2: Infanticide (1:15-16)

If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. Plan A was a dismal failure. The more Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites, the stronger and more numerous they became. Clearly, it was time to come up with Plan B.

Pharaoh’s second plan was as simple as the first. In one word, it was *infanticide*. If he couldn’t beat the Israelites into submission, then he would kill them! Pharaoh seemed only interested in

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killing the male children. This fits in with his fear of Israel joining with a foreign nation and rising up in arms against Egypt. Eliminating the boys would squash any military uprising by Israel. Meanwhile, the Hebrew girls could grow up and intermarry with the Egyptian population, thus effectively assimilating Israel and destroying their unique identity and culture.

Of course, there is a deeper, spiritual current running through Pharaoh's plan. As he attempts to kill all the male children, he is playing directly into the hands of the Serpent who is trying to prevent the Seed of woman from being born (Gen. 3:15). Once again, we can see that there is a spiritual war going on in Genesis; Pharaoh is pitting himself against God.

Who can Pharaoh get to implement this dastardly plan? Enter the Hebrew midwives. Two of them are given by name: *Shiphrah* and *Puah*. Their names mean "beauty" and "splendor," respectively. Why are there only two? Most commentators believe that they are representatives of an entire guild of midwives, sort of the head nurses of the maternity ward. Of interest is the fact that these humble women, otherwise unknown to history, have their names recorded in Scripture, while the great and mighty pharaoh who commands them, remains nameless. "For all his 'greatness', Pharaoh is left unnamed, while the midwives (whom he regarded as mere tools of his policy) are remembered individually. This is Exodus' perception of who is important and who is not!" (Motyer).

2. *Civil Disobedience (1:17-21)*

Once again, we are left to consider how Pharaoh's plan worked out. Did it accomplish its objective of reducing the strength and number of the Israelites? In one word: no way! The midwives "feared God" more than they feared Pharaoh, and so they disobeyed the evil command of the wicked tyrant. Shiphrah and Puah lived up to their names; their civil disobedience was both *beautiful* and *splendid*.

The actions of the Hebrew midwives highlight one of the major themes of Exodus: whom does Israel serve – God or Pharaoh? (Currid). This is the underlying spiritual struggle throughout the entire first section of the book. Is Pharaoh in control or God? It is clear from actions of the midwives (or lack thereof) that God is the one to whom reverence and obedience is due. Ryken calls Shiphrah and Puah the "first pro-life heroines."

The midwives knew that their actions could not long escape the scrutiny of Pharaoh. After some period of time had passed and the nurseries of the Hebrew women were full of healthy baby boys, Pharaoh realized his plan had backfired. So he called Shiphrah and Puah back to give an accounting for their poor performance in meeting his infanticide goals. Pharaoh demanded, "Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?" (v. 18).

If you had been in their shoes, what would you have said? We know what the midwives said: "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them" (v. 19). Their response poses us with a moral dilemma. Like Rahab confronting the pursuers of the Israelite spies (Jos. 2:3-7), it appears as if the Hebrew midwives have lied, thus breaking the Ninth Commandment (although it had not yet been given on Mt. Sinai). Of course, like Rahab, the Hebrew midwives were deceiving the enemies of God's people in order to preserve life, in this case the lives of many "innocent" children.

Some commentators (*e.g.*, Jordan, Mackay) believe that the tyrant Pharaoh did not have any right to the truth; that it is "entirely proper to lie to the Serpent." Other commentators (Bentley, Ryken) state that the midwives are mocking Egypt and the Egyptian women by their response.

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The Hebrew women were much stronger and hardier than their Egyptian counterparts; they didn't even need midwives!

Currid suggests that the best solution to the moral dilemma regarding the midwives' statement is to take it at face value; that is, the statement is true on the surface. He argues that "the Hebrews were under an extraordinary blessing of increase. Maybe the Hebrew women had quick and easy labor. In addition, God may have speeded up their deliveries in order to protect the midwives and His people."

The Bible often does not provide direct commentary on the motivations of individuals. If we are to evaluate their actions, we often have to look at the results. In this case, the Scripture gives a clear sign of approval for what the midwives did:

²⁰Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. ²¹And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them (Exodus 1:20-21).

Because the midwives feared God, He provided households for them. Faithfulness to God is rewarded. Let's not major on the minors. We can get lost in the details of whether or not the midwives lied to Pharaoh, but the Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the main point of this vignette is their faithfulness. They *feared God* more than they feared man, and that made all the difference for Shiphrah and Puah. They risked everything they had to serve God rather than man. They safely delivered the children of Israel, and in turn received children of their own. Another indication of approval in the text is the number of times the word "midwives" appears in the original Hebrew. If you guessed seven, you are correct! This is another indication of God's blessing upon them for their courageous pro-life stance.

3. Plan 3: Genocide (1:22)

Plan number one was a failure, and so far plan number two was a bust as well. You may fault the pharaoh on many points, but at least you can say he was persistent! If the Hebrew midwives wouldn't do the dirty work, then Pharaoh would turn to his own countrymen to get the job done. Thus is born plan 3: *genocide*. Once again, the seed of the Serpent attempts to destroy the Seed of woman.

Pharaoh commanded all his people. This is really just a refinement of plan 2; the goal is the same – kill the Hebrew boys, save the Hebrew daughters – but now the entire nation is complicit in this wicked plot. Pharaoh has certainly turned up the heat on the crucible of Israel's suffering. Not only are they forced to work at hard labor, but now their families are in danger of being destroyed by their overseers.

There is a delicious sense of judicial irony in the account of the exodus. By making genocide public policy, Pharaoh has implicated the entire Egyptian nation in the guilt of this horrific crime. Although God's justice seems delayed, in the fullness of time all of Egypt will pay for participation in Pharaoh's sin. The Angel of Death will strike the first-born of every Egyptian household, making all of Egypt suffer the punishment they sought to impose on the house of Israel. Instead of casting Hebrew boys into the Nile River to drown, a generation of Egyptian warriors will be consumed by the flood of the Red Sea crashing down upon them. Furthermore, as we will see next week, Pharaoh's policy is even used by God to provide the future deliverer of His people. In the final twist of irony, the deliverer Moses will be raised in the very house of Pharaoh himself!

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What is the end result of Pharaoh's third plan? Unlike the first two plans, Scripture does not directly tell us. Instead, chapter 2 launches into an account of Moses' birth and upbringing in the house of Pharaoh. Indirectly, that tells us that plan three met with about as much success as plans one and two. Furthermore, we can tell from the size of the exodus generation (80 years later), that the policy was only sporadically enforced if at all. So we can safely conclude that Pharaoh's third plan was no more successful than the first two at controlling the population growth of Israel. If you've been keeping score, so far it's God – 3, Pharaoh – 0.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me try to summarize some of the main lessons of Exodus chapter 1. We've already dealt extensively with the Biblical flow of history in Exodus 1. There are multiple verbal clues and ties back to Genesis, firmly grounding Exodus in what has gone on before. Thus, let's consider the theological, Christological, and practical aspects of Exodus chapter 1.

1. Theological

Exodus chapter 1 teaches us that God is *sovereign*. One way the sovereignty of God is seen is in His selection and protection of His people Israel. God had it all planned out from the beginning. We've seen that God laid out the plan to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16. Exodus 1 is the continuation of the unfolding of that plan. God blessed Israel; God caused Israel to suffer. But through it all, His purposes were coming to fruition.

For much of the chapter, God seems to be absent. It is only when we are told that the midwives "feared God" that we see Him in the story. God "dealt well" with the midwives, but many people may question why it took Him "so long" to get involved in the story. Where was God when Pharaoh began oppressing the Israelites? Where was God when the rigor of their labor increased? The answer is the same to the question: Where was God when the Israelites were being blessed in Egypt? He was right there with His people.

The "absence" of God is felt keenly by the Israelite slaves in chapter 1; it is felt even more keenly in chapter 2. And yet, as Enns points out, "God *is* with His people even though it does not appear to be so." The sovereignty of God in ruling His creation is not limited to our perceptions of Him. Just because He seems distant doesn't make it so; just because we feel abandoned doesn't make it true.

The sovereignty of God is confronted by Pharaoh. Pharaoh sets himself up in opposition to God. The spiritual conflict we've already seen hinted at in Exodus 1 is primed to explode into an all out confrontation between God and Pharaoh in the Ten Plagues. We've already seen the vanity in which all of Pharaoh's plans have ended. This is a mere foreshadowing of what is to come. One of the chief lessons of Exodus, and one of our chief encouragements, is the reminder that God is sovereign and that nothing can frustrate His plans from coming to pass. This should be of special comfort when our feelings don't line up with our theology. God isn't present and active only when we "feel" Him. God is sovereign despite our feelings. Cling to Him!

2. Christological

The struggle between God and Pharaoh ultimately points us to Christ. It is Christ who is the promised Seed of woman who crushes the head of the Serpent (Gen. 3:15). Throughout Biblical history, Satan tried in vain to prevent the Seed from coming. The attacks of an earlier pharaoh and Abimelech upon Sarah were an attempt to spoil the seed line. The overt attempt at genocide

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by this pharaoh is another example. Haman joins the list as he attempts to wipe out the Jews of Esther and Mordecai's day. All of these attempts to wipe out the seed line culminate in the one last ditch effort of Satan – Herod's "slaughter of the innocents," recorded in Matthew 2:16-18. But just as Pharaoh's attempt is doomed to fail, Satan is helpless in preventing the advent of the Christ, the Seed of woman, the head crusher.

3. *Practical*

Exodus chapter 1 teaches us that we are involved in a spiritual battle. We know that Jesus Christ has already won the war through the sovereignty of God the Father, but we still go through skirmishes in this life. We are all sojourners in Egypt. The battles we face may be boiled down to the two extremes of Israel's situation in Exodus 1.

At first, life was very good in Egypt for the children of Israel. They were blessed with every sort of material blessing. On the surface that sounds wonderful, but there are potential dangers lurking in the lap of luxury. Bentley warns us:

There is a parallel between the Egypt of those days and the world of today, just as there are similarities between the ancient Israelites, living in luxury in Egypt, and Christians now enjoying all manner of pleasures. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ must remind themselves constantly that this world is an alien land. We are living today in an 'Egypt' which is under the influence of standards which are anti-Christian. We must not become complacent about our faith in Christ just because everything is going smoothly for us. We must certainly not allow ourselves to be driven away from the simplicity of the gospel, or put our trust in worldly riches or acclaim.

On the other hand, we need to be aware that there is no guarantee of immunity from pain and suffering in this fallen world of sin. Motyer concludes:

Exodus begins to speak to us in our situation. When we read Exodus we are not just learning of the past, we are learning for the present. This is a living word for us. We are the people of God—scattered in the world, subject to the world's pressures, enduring the world's hardships, suffering the world's sorrows. We would like an answer to our question, 'Why?', but God does not come down to explain himself. Experiences without explanations — that is what the first chapter of Exodus is all about. Our only comfort is that God comes to us in the day of darkness and lovingly reassures us that, 'It is all right, it is all planned and it will all be well.'

This is the challenge of Exodus 1: in the light of God's sovereignty and Christ's victory, we must balance the lure of materialism against the pain of living in a fallen world. We need to have the same attitude as Moses, whom we will meet in more detail next week:

²⁵[Moses] ... choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward (Hebrews 11:25-26).

Close in Prayer.

Next week: Lesson 3 – The Once and Future Savior – Ex. 2:1-22