

How did the family of Israel (Jacob) get into this mess? That story is in the book of Genesis. If you weren't with us through the study of Genesis, I encourage you to go to the web site and read a sermon for a devotional each morning or evening. It will only take you about 20 minutes a day and you'll get caught up with how they ended up here. Briefly, man rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. Because of his sin, the earth was cursed. Critics of faith in God often point to the suffering in the world. It is a complex issue, but the basis of suffering is man's rebellion against God. We brought it on ourselves. When the catastrophes of this fallen world strike, we turn to God or turn against God, but it forces us out of neutrality to a decision.

The descendents of the first couple quickly multiplied and became increasingly evil. God picked Noah and family to preserve the race and destroyed those living in slavery to sin. Again the human race quickly multiplied and turned their back on God, building the tower of Babel to try to stick together and probably as a part of astrological worship. God confounded their languages and people began to spread out over the earth according to their language groups.

God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees and made a covenant with him. Abram's name was changed to Abraham and he bore the son God had promised him when he was 100 years old. The son of promise was Isaac. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob bought the birthright from his brother and stole his father's blessing through deception. He had four wives that produced the 12 sons of Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. Next to the youngest son was Joseph who was the favorite. In jealousy over his favored status, his brothers sold him to traders that were on the way to Egypt.

The last portion of Genesis is all about how God directed Joseph to interpret the Pharaoh's dream and save the world from starvation. Our passage begins by describing the family of Israel that went into Egypt to avoid starvation. They were given the best of the land, Goshen.

Archeological remains of Israelite construction in Goshen remain to this day. According to the chronology of the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:19-20) and Jephthah in Judges 11:26, the exodus occurred during the reign of Amenhotep II (1453 – 1425 B.C.). There will be more on the historical characters in next weeks bulletin.

The Hebrew title for Exodus is *elleh semot*, which means "These are the names..." The phrase, "These are the names of the sons of Israel who went..." is identical with the first six words of Genesis 46:8. This is to help the readers see the continuity with the Book of Genesis. The text actually begins with the word "and", which also helps us see it as a story already in progress. Though there is a 400-year gap, it is quickly covered in the first fourteen verses.

The family of Israel had landed in the best of Egypt. The Nile Delta provided the perfect pasture for their flocks. The promise of God to Abraham came to pass, and they multiplied into a great nation. (Genesis 46:3) It looked like the best possible

Commented [notes1]: Genesis 46:8 (NIV)
8 These are the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob and his descendants) who went to Egypt: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob.

Commented [notes2]: Genesis 46:3 (NIV)
3 "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

place for the family to live, but before Joseph's death, he had made his family promise to take his bones back to the land God had promised to Abraham. (Genesis 50:24) Ironic, isn't it, that the posterity of the brothers who sold their brother into slavery ended up as slaves in Egypt. What looks like a paradise can end up being a prison camp.

Commented [notes3]: Genesis 50:24 (NIV)
24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

It is quite possible that Joseph was in power during the reign of a Hyksos Pharaoh, a foreign people who were eventually driven out of Egypt. That may have added to the fear factor and ease at which Pharaoh convinced the country to abuse the Hebrews for Israel and the Hyksos were both Semitic peoples.

To say the Pharaoh didn't know of Joseph was another way to say he did not honor any agreements made with him by the foreign power that was ruling at the time. ¹⁰ *"Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."* The Pharaoh's solution was to keep them worn out with work and limit the male population. The idea behind the labor was not only to physically break them but probably also to separate the men from their wives making it less likely they would reproduce as well as starving them by keeping them away from their flocks and fields.

It is amazing how we see ourselves as better than others and can actually use people like one would use a tool. Sometimes the basis for that is fear, as in the case with the Egyptians. Most of the time it is simply greed. History is replete with examples of one group enslaving another. Most nations of antiquity, including Rome in the days of Jesus, saw conquered people as a physical asset to perform acts of labor. Americans used blacks to make cotton production profitable. They reasoned that one of the sons of Noah was black because his name, Ham, could be interpreted that way. Ham was cursed because of his sexual sin. That became their justification for using blacks as slave labor.

Japanese used Koreans before World War 2 as cheap expendable labor. Hitler decided to use the Jewish people as a scapegoat for all the nations problems. He used the increasingly popular theory of evolution to say that the Germans were the superior race and the Jews were less evolved. In the process of trying to exterminate them, they robbed the wealth of the business savvy Jews. We could go on and on. It is the often used tactic of ethnic fear to justify violating their rights. The balance between being reasonable in keeping a nation secure and unreasonable in violating the rights of people as human beings is often a very fine line. Pharaoh was about to step way over the line and used ethnic fear and loathing to justify it.

In our society we take the life of the unborn to save us from the expense and trouble having a child would bring at that point in our life. The justification is that the child will grow up in poverty. We are one of the wealthiest nations on earth. Our poor live like wealthy of in the third world. The other excuse is it is the mother's body to do with as she chooses, but who will speak up for the body of the baby?

The problem stems from man's sinful nature. If man accepted the Genesis account that tells us man is made in the image of God, every life would be sacred from the

Haitian in the slum to the baby in the womb. Do you realize that the death blow to slavery came when the pope declared that slaves could partake in communion? It wasn't long after that declaration that Europe could no longer tolerate slavery. If a person was your brother or sister in Christ, or has the potential to become one, how can you enslave them? How can you say you own them? Jesus bought them and they are His! (1Corinthians 7:23) We are all His servants.

Commented [notes4]: 1 Corinthians 7:23 (NIV)
23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

Pharaoh saw the family of Israel as commodity, building tools, to do his bidding. Since their birth rate was probably higher than that of the Egyptians, there was the fear that they would join with enemies of Egypt or rise up and overtake Egypt. The end of verse 10, "leave-*ala*- the country" has been shown to possibly be an idiom for rising up and taking over the country. (See use in Genesis 2:6 and Hosea 1:11) If there were too many Israelites, Pharaoh reasoned that he should get rid of some.

Commented [notes5]: Genesis 2:6 (ESV)
6 and a mist was going up -*ala*- from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—

Commented [notes6]: Hosea 1:11 (ESV)
11 And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up -*ala*- from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

It should remind us of the Christians of the early church. The more they were persecuted the more they evangelized. When missionaries in China were booted out by the Communists, they feared the little progress they had made would be exterminated. A few decades later we learned the opposite was true. The Chinese church is now 100 million strong and not propped up by Western support but completely indigenous and sending out missionaries. When Christianity thrives in spite of the conditions, those in governmental power become fearful. It is happening around the world even today. What secular societies don't realize is that Christians are instructed by Scripture to be good citizens and to honor the government. (Romans 13:1) We should be the best of citizens. Of course, in a democratic republic, we might not vote to throw the babies in the Nile and that is seen as a threat to the agenda of some as well.

Commented [notes7]: Romans 13:1 (NIV)
1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

¹² *But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.* This again reminds us that the promises to multiply the seed of Abraham had come to pass in spite of Pharaoh. (Genesis 26:3-4) God keeps his promises but the conditions may not always be what we imagined.

Commented [notes8]: Genesis 26:3-4 (NIV)
3 Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.
4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed,

In verse 10 Pharaoh says, "lest they multiply" *pen-yeribe*, and in this verse God says *ken-yeribe* "the more they shall multiply". All through the story it's as if Pharaoh is set in opposition to God. God wants them to go to the Promised Land. Pharaoh doesn't want them to leave. God wants to be honored through them. Pharaoh wants to be honored through them. Pharaoh wants to reduce their number. God has promised to multiply their number. God wants them to serve Him. Pharaoh wants their service. Pharaoh is really a type of antichrist in the story. He has set himself in opposition to God and His people. We are never told the name of this Pharaoh because he represents all powers that set themselves against God. The story is about the greatness of God in spite of every power set against Him. It is a chapter in the age-old battle between God and Satan.

Verse 14 gives us five different expressions of how difficult life had become. "*Lives bitter, "hard labor," "all kinds of work," "hard labor," and "used them ruthlessly" follow after "worked them ruthlessly" at the end of v. 13 to hammer home the point that the situation was intolerable.*— New American Commentary *One of the interesting*

literary features of Exodus is that significant words often come in groups of seven. One example of this occurred back in verse 7, which used seven different words to describe the miraculous multiplication of the Israelites. Another example occurs here in verses 13, 14, which use seven words (some of which are repeated) for Israel's slavery. Umberto Cassuto claims that each word is like another blow from a slave driver's whip. - Preaching the Word – Exodus: Saved for God's Glory.

Pharaoh's next strategy at limiting the Israelites was infanticide. ¹⁷ *But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.* He ordered the midwives to kill any male child that was born. I suppose he thought they could just smother the baby before it took its first breath and say it was stillborn.

The fear of God can keep us from evil and its consequences. Though the Ten Commandments had not been given, they knew that life was sacred. (Genesis 9:6) How many miraculous births had the midwives witnessed? How many mothers had they comforted when their baby did not survive? They refused to obey the Pharaoh. The heroic resistance of the midwives earned a place for their names in Scripture, Shiphrah and Puah. Compare that with the fact that the elders' names and the Pharaoh's is never mentioned. (3:16, 18) These two women, who were probably the older overseers of a number of midwives, are the heroines of the first chapter. Their civil disobedience could have cost them their life, but they chose to obey God rather than man. (Acts 5:29)

When we give God the respect that is due Him and live in accord with His will, blessings follow. ²⁰ *So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong.* ²¹ *And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.* It sounds as if they were childless and up in years. While Pharaoh tried to stop the growth of Israel, even these matrons were blessed with children because of their fearless obedience to God.

Did God reward the midwives for lying? Did they lie? There is much debate over this passage. The word for vigorous may also be translated "involved". It could very well be that Hebrew women were more involved in the birth process and therefore it would have been impossible to strangle or suffocate the baby without them knowing it. They said they gave birth even before they arrived. It could have been that the midwives intentionally delayed their arrival so as not to be able to carry out the Pharaoh's decree. So, while they may not have exactly been telling the whole story, they may have not been lying either. Whatever the case, they had more fear of God than they did of an irate Pharaoh. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

The mixed conditions in the story show the mixed conditions of life. The blessings to Abraham of making him the father of many had come to pass, but the many are oppressed. Ultimately the oppression will result in the liberation of Israel. They probably would have stayed in comfortable Egypt had Pharaoh not oppressed them. God often has to use difficulty to get us to finally do what we were meant to do. Even with all they endured, they were still tempted to go back. (Numbers 14:3-4) And what suffering have you endured that turned your heart from this world and fixed it upon God? It's not so easy to look at conditions in life and label them as the favor or

Commented [notes9]: Genesis 9:6 (NIV)
6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."

Commented [notes10]: Exodus 3:18 (NIV)
18 "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.'

Commented [notes11]: Acts 5:29 (NIV)
29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

Commented [notes12]: Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NIV)
13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

Commented [notes13]: Numbers 14:3-4 (NIV)
3 Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"
4 And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

displeasure of God. His ways are certainly different from man's ways. (Isaiah 55:8)
Some of our greatest blessings come from our deepest trials.

Commented [notes14]: Isaiah 55:8 (NIV)
8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

The midwives' faithfulness to God made Pharaoh come out in the open with his social engineering plan. If the job can't get done in secret, if there is enough power in the hands of the one that leads, he will just come out and openly declare his intentions. It's a familiar pattern of human nature. You can bet there was a lot of explanation and justification given for this decree. ²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

Now all Egyptians were to participate in Pharaoh's ethnic cleansing program. The Nile was considered to be one of the great gods of Egypt. While it brought the much-needed water, it also carried away the waste. If the baby disappeared in the waters of the Nile it was thought to be the Nile's judgment and thus take the guilt from the one that threw the baby into its waters. The Nile was viewed as both the giver and taker of life. It was something like the Salem witch trials. If they dunked a witch in the water for five minutes and she lived, she was using magic. If she died it was God's judgment. Either way the executioner felt justified. The Egyptians may have even considered it an act of worship of the Nile. What the Egyptians have sown they would soon be reaping when they chase Israel through the Red Sea.

Some scholars believe that Moses wrote the Book of Exodus near the end of his life to the younger generation that would enter the Promised Land. Many were Egyptians and slaves from other nations that had been in Egypt and left with the Israelites during the Exodus. (Exodus 12:37-38) Even the Israelites had to learn again of the God of their fathers and the covenant they had with Him. This retelling of the national history gave them all a sense of purpose and identity. It helped them to become a family.

Commented [notes15]: Exodus 12:37-38 (ESV)
37 And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.
38 A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

That is what Scripture does for us today. We are very much like the mixed rabble in the desert. Hopefully, by the grace of God, we are more like the younger generation that is willing to enter the Promised Land, a people who believe God. Though we too are from various backgrounds, we have been adopted into the family of God. We have a national history, for we have been grafted into the tree of Israel. Now their past is ours as well. The promises to them are promises to us as well. (Galatians 3:29) I'm not saying we have replaced them. I'm saying we have joined the people of faith. We were in bondage to sin, and Satan is a hard taskmaster. But we too were led out of bondage. The stories are repeated again and again. Nations fear us, then persecute us (1Peter 2:21), and God brings deliverance and finally the ultimate Deliverer.

Commented [notes16]: Galatians 3:29 (NIV)
29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Though I believe this is an accurate historical account, I also believe it foreshadows a spiritual reality. We will see how Egypt is symbolic of the world system that is under the control of the evil one. We will see how the history of the Israelites is our history as well and that God calls us out of the world to wander in the wilderness until we are ready to reach the Promised Land. We'll see the tests and trials along the way, the stretching of our faith, while suffering turns our hearts from this world to our Promised Land. We'll see our failings in some, and desire to be like Shiphrah and Puah. But most of all we'll see a God that no one can stop. A God who knows the end from the

Commented [notes17]: 1 Peter 2:21 (NIV)
21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

beginning (Isaiah 46:10), and who always keeps His promises, and foils the enemy of our soul time and time again. He even takes a stuttering failure and raises him up to become a picture of the great Deliverer.

Commented [notes18]: Isaiah 46:10 (NIV)
10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.