

Israelites in Slavery in Egypt

Exodus 1:1-22

Bible Memory Verse

Psalm 9:9 NIV

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Bible Story

The book of Exodus opens up after some 400 years since the close of the book of Genesis. During the time when Joseph ruled alongside of Pharaoh (king of Egypt), Jacob (otherwise known as “Israel”), came to Egypt to live during the extreme famine of the day. The family of Jacob, or Israel, settled in the land of Goshen—the finest and most fertile land in all of Egypt. They numbered around seventy in all (Exodus 1:5). So the up and coming nation of Israel, at the beginning of Exodus, is currently living in the land of Egypt, enjoying the protection of the Pharaoh and the blessing of God.

What we see in the opening chapter of Exodus paints us a disturbing picture of the treatment of the “Israelites” in the land of Egypt. The text tells us that “the Israelites had been fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7). But a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph came to power. They were afraid of the rapidly growing Israelite people and wanted to put them under Pharaoh’s authority. Because of Egypt’s fear, the Israelites were made slaves and forced to build big cities. The Egyptians tried to crush and oppress their spirit. And yet, the more the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites, the more they multiplied and spread. So the Egyptians oppressed them even more harshly.

Pharaoh even went so far as to command the ladies who helped the pregnant mothers give birth, to let the female babies live and the male babies die. These ladies did not agree with this policy at all and did not obey, for they knew and loved God. Pharaoh later asked them why they were not complying with his order. They said that the Israelite women were so

strong that they give birth before they even get there. God smiled with favor on these ladies and gave them families of their own.

Meanwhile the Pharaoh of Egypt commanded that any Israelite (also known as “Hebrew”) male child that is born was to be thrown into the Nile River.

This is the condition and the environment in which the book of Exodus opens. It explains God’s covenanted people’s need for a deliverer. The Israelites, based on conservative estimates, probably counted in the 1-2 million people range. No wonder the Egyptians were afraid of them! Throughout this 400 year time span, there is no recorded account of what God was doing in and amongst the people. The text only tells us that the Israelites knew that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would deliver them. They were just waiting for a deliverer.

Kind of like the people prior to the birth of Christ. They were an oppressed people (by the Romans); there were approximately 400 years of silence from God (no account of his working with people); and they were anticipating a deliverer (a Messiah). This person was the Christ—Jesus. The story of the exodus is a foreshadowing of what was really to come. God working with his people through a deliverer (Messiah figure), ultimately to be found in the “Word made flesh”—Jesus Christ.

Life Application

In our current lives, we do not want to account for suffering in positive ways. We try our best to make our existence as pain free as possible. Suffering is often—in the view of God—a tool to point our hearts to Him and really identify ourselves to Him—the suffering Savior.

- What does suffering look like?
- Why do we have to suffer?
- What are some examples of how we can suffer for Jesus?

In addition, even in spite of a higher authority commanding us to do something, when it is in disobedience to what God has commanded, then we are to obey God and not man. Pharaoh wanted the ladies to kill the baby boys and that was not okay with God. So the women divinely disobeyed.

- When is it okay to disobey those in charge of us?
- What if it costs us something we don’t want to pay?

Fear is also in view here. The king of Egypt was desperately afraid of the sheer numbers of the Israelites, and their constant, almost unstoppable multiplication. His way of controlling the hand of God on the Israelites was to oppress them, to control them, and also to begin the process of extermination of the race by killing newborn baby boys.

- How is it appropriate to respond to fear?
- How should the Pharaoh have responded differently?

The courage of the women in defying the order of the king.

- What does courage mean?
- What are some examples of someone being courageous?
- How can you be courageous?

Review Questions

1. How many years were there between the book of Genesis and Exodus?
Approximately 400 years.
2. Where was Jacob's family (aka the Israelites) located? In what country? Egypt.
3. What eventually happened to the Israelites in Egypt that was not good? And why?
They were made slaves. Because the Egyptians feared the numbers of the Israelites living in the land with them. They thought the Israelites would eventually turn on them instead of help them.
4. What was Pharaoh's plan (other than slavery) to limit the spread of the Israelite people? Not to let the male babies live.
5. How did God prevent Pharaoh from killing some of the baby boys? The Egyptian women who were helping the Israelite women give birth did not agree with Pharaoh's "kill baby boys" policies, so they disobeyed.
6. What happened to the Egyptian women who helped the Israelites? Pharaoh was mad at them, but God blessed them and gave them great families of their own!
7. What river did Pharaoh have the baby boys thrown into? The Nile River.

Coloring Sheet

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