

**Introduction:**

- A. You probably remember some of the lines from Charles Dickens' famous novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*. He was contrasting London and Paris before the French Revolution, but we all have our own stories: *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, ... it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..."*

Your baby is born, but you lose your job. Someone you've prayed for a long time comes to Jesus, but your boss hates everything about your faith. You're growing in your faith yet depression threatens. *Best of times; worst of times. The God-blessed life is often like that.*

- B. We are first taught about the mysteries and wonders, the demands and heartbreak of the God-blessed life in the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament, written by Moses. Today we begin a study in Exodus, the epic story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. **Turn to Ex 1.** By the time we get to Exodus we would have already read the stories of Noah and Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons—especially his youngest and favorite, Joseph. Joseph, who was a slave in Egypt, and yet became God's instrument of saving that whole nation, as well as his own people. God had promised Abraham in Gen. 12,
- "I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."*

- C. But ask Abraham about the God-blessed life when he stands with the knife poised over the life of his only son Isaac. Ask Jacob about the God-blessed life as wrestled God through the night or when famine forced him from the land God promised. Ask Joseph about the God-blessed life when he sat forgotten for seven years in an Egyptian prison.
- D. One commentator [Motyer] said Ex. 1 could be titled, *“Experience without explanation.”* I’m sure you know that feeling. God is blessing while the bottom falls out. The best of times and the worst of times.

In the Hebrew Bible, Exodus actually begins with ‘and,’ an unmistakable signal that we are continuing the story started in Genesis. So to get properly oriented, turn back a page. Joseph, who had become second in power only to the king of Egypt, speaks his last words:

*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.” And **Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath** [“Raise your right hand and swear on a stack of Bibles that you won’t forget this!!”] and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.” So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.* [50:24-26]

While you turn the page to Exodus over 400 years pass. That’s like the landing of the Pilgrims till now! And that’s not all. **Vv.1-7...** We’re told later in Exodus that Israel’s population was 600,000 men, plus women and children. *Many* children. From 70 to well over 2 million. Did you notice the verbal redundancy of v.7...? Seven different Hebrew words are used in that one verse to *really* emphasize the extraordinary birthrate of Israel.

Do you remember why that is so important? In **Gen 15** God took the aged and childless Abram outside at night and said,

“Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” These are a God-blessed people! **Ps. 127** explains:

<sup>3</sup> *Children are a heritage from the Lord,  
offspring a reward from him.*

<sup>4</sup> *Like arrows in the hands of a warrior  
are children born in one’s youth.*

<sup>5</sup> *Blessed is the man  
whose quiver is full of them.  
They will not be put to shame  
when they contend with their opponents in court.*

Children, of course, are a blessing to anyone. But in that day children proved God’s special favor. Children meant security for the family and, ultimately, the nation. They grew up to become a nation’s army—their “arrows.” Children were also a kind of everlasting life—the promise that your name would not die, that you had a future. All those children told Israel that God was keeping his promise to Abraham and to them.

Today God’s people are innumerable—*“a multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.”* And our future does not depend on the children we birth, for we ourselves shall never die.

## **I. GOD ALWAYS KEEPS HIS PROMISE TO BLESS HIS PEOPLE WITH A HOPE AND A FUTURE (1:1-7)**

- A. Hundreds of years after the Exodus, Israel was again in captivity, this time in Babylon because of their incorrigible sinning. But still God promised in **Jer. 29:10-13**, *“This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. **For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you...”**”*

Well, it was good to be God-blessed people! The best of times.  
Then **vv.8-14**....

## II. THE GOD-BLESSED LIFE DOESN'T PRESERVE US FROM TERRIBLE TROUBLE (1:8-14)

A. We're introduced to one of history's legendary villains, the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and the pawn of Satan. Pharaoh was no different than all the other arrogant, ignorant, fearful fools through history who have challenged the sovereignty of God and who have oppressed God's beloved, blessed people. Here is the older brother of every antichrist and the final Antichrist. Here is the puppet and prophet of Satan himself, who believes to this day that he can outwit and overpower the Almighty God and his anointed King, Jesus Christ. In this world God's people are never far from the heavy hand of wicked power. But Pharaoh and his ilk are not all they think they are. Moses shows his disdain for this tyrant he knew so well by what he tells us:

1. The first thing we're told in v.8 is that Joseph meant nothing to him. That is *not* just a way of telling us that a lot of time has passed. **Joseph had saved Egypt's life.** The nation would have starved into oblivion if God hadn't intervened through this great grandson of Abraham. The Pharaoh at the time had said, "*Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God? Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.*" [Gen 41:38-39] But Joseph meant nothing to *this* Pharaoh. Add to that what Pharaoh himself said to Moses in **Ex. 5:2**, "*Who is the LORD .... I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go.*" So what's the first thing we learn about Pharaoh? He might have been powerful, but **Pharaoh was a fool!**

2. There's another interesting thing here: we are never told his name. Pharaoh was his title. We certainly know God's name: *Yahweh*. We know the names of the 12 sons of Jacob. We even learn the names of two Hebrew midwives. We're told the names of Moses' great uncles, his cousins and nephews, his mom and sister, but Pharaoh's name is not important in the annals of the Almighty God. **Pharaoh was forgettable.**
3. Then there is his fear. God had said that all who blessed Israel would be blessed and all who cursed Israel would be cursed. But Pharaoh saw only a threat. **V.10...** Then look at **v.12...** 'Dread' implies that they were *worried sick*. Even tho' the Israelites had never struck back at their oppressors, the Pharaoh and all his people had a pathological fear of them. Despite the might of his chariots and horsemen, **the mighty Pharaoh was a fraidy-cat, a coward.**
4. It is interesting how Pharaoh's concern for national security coincided so conveniently with his desire to build two great store cities. How convenient that the Israelites became free forced labor. **Pharaoh was an murdering egomaniac.**

In the end, of course, the vast divisions of Israel posed no threat at all to Pharaoh. They never raised a weapon. **But the enemy Pharaoh never considered—the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—would crush Pharaoh and all Egypt with him.** The wicked people who oppress God's people never reckon on the might of the LORD.

- B. But this foolish, forgettable, frightened egomaniac brought terrible suffering upon Israel. And that is so often the way it is to this day. Ask North Korean Christians, or Iranian, Sudanese, or Syrian brothers and sisters. God's blessed people suffer terribly at the hand of God's enemies. Look again at **v.13-14**. Again seven Heb. words are used here, as if to suggest it was a perfect storm of suffering. One writer

likened these repeated words to the lashes of the slave drivers whip. *“the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and **worked them ruthlessly**. They made their lives **bitter with harsh labor** in brick and mortar and with **all kinds of work** in the fields; in all their **harsh labor** the Egyptians **worked them ruthlessly**.”* Crack, crack, crack!

I’m grateful we do not suffer as they did, nor as many of our Christian brothers and sisters elsewhere. But we must remember what **Jesus** told us, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* [Jn 16:33]. **Paul** encouraged churches *“to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.’”* [Acts 14:22] And **Peter** wrote, *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”* [1 Pet 5:8-11]

- C. But look again at **v.12**, *“But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.”* God’s blessing is relentless. Think of it! Here are slaves—exhausted, discouraged, helpless, impoverished—and yet they just keep having children, and thus they just kept getting richer and more threatening to the foolish, frightened Pharaoh. You’ve heard what Tertullian wrote only 100 years after Jesus, *“the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”* **Just as God used Jesus’ suffering to save us, he uses the suffering of his people to grow his kingdom.** God never lets our suffering go to waste—not a precious second nor tear. God’s blessings sometimes work unseen below the fiery surface of suffering. And suffering always reminds believers of our Savior and our hope.

Suffering, of course, is never in the abstract. It comes down to real people. So Moses tells us this little story in **vv.15-22....** Some of our kids might not know what a midwife is. She is a kind of nurse who is called in to help with the birth of a baby. Israel had far too many babies for two midwives so perhaps these two were the supervisors—the head nurses of Israel. If that is the case, Pharaoh expected them to see that his command was carried out every time a son was born in Israel. But they wouldn't do it. I'm sure they were revolted by the very thought. These were women who had held hundreds of newborns; women who loved babies. But even apart from that, even when their lives were threatened, they refused to obey Pharaoh because **they feared God**. How could any God-fearing person kill a helpless baby?

### **III. WHEN THE WICKED SEEM TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND GOD ALWAYS BLESSES THOSE WHO REVERE HIM (1:15-22)**

- A. When evil reigns, it always comes down to real individuals with real names deciding whether they will honor God or not. Real people, slammed up against a dark and terrible wall with the fist of evil in their faces. Sometimes it isn't clear just what a person should do but this is always true: *the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*. Start with reverence for God and you will find the way forward.
- B. Some time passed and Pharaoh realized that Hebrew baby sons were not being killed. There was no outcry. So he called Shiphrah and Puah in to give account. Now their answer has upset a lot of theologians—Augustine and Luther, among them—because it appears they lied, and we should always tell the truth. But I think any ordinary person reading this smiles at their cleverness. I suspect that these two midwives knew of cases—maybe many cases—where Hebrew babies were born before they arrived. Actually, we know of that happening from time to time. They aren't actually saying that they *never* got there

in time. And if Pharaoh wasn't so dull he might well have said, "*Then why do they have midwives?*"

Do you remember how Jesus told his disciples, "*Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*" [Mk 13:11] I personally think these women had a God-given reply. I think God himself might have smiled a little to see Pharaoh's gullibility.

- C. The midwives actually double-trumped Pharaoh's command, first by letting the little sons live and then, according to v.21, when God "*gave them families of their own.*" **No Pharaoh, no tyrant—not Satan himself—can stop God from blessing his people.** Never forget that!
- D. The God-blessed life often carries us into the dark realms of the wicked where we feel the oppression and death of Satan himself. It may seem we are left helpless but remember what **Rom. 8** promises:

*"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.*

*Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* [Rom 8:31-39]