

God has been using Egypt as an incubator to make the children of Israel “a great nation” (Gen. 46:3) and the time is approaching for them to leave. In these first chapters of Exodus we see God raising up a deliverer that He would eventually use to bring the children of Israel from out of Egyptian bondage. According to the plans of Pharaoh, Moses should not have lived but men cannot thwart the purpose of God.

The book of Exodus is the second book of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT) which is attributed to Moses. The theme of the book is the exodus of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Since Moses is the author, the book seems to be somewhat autobiographical since it records large portions of Moses’ life starting with his birth.

Verses 1-5: Setting the context, we are reminded of who came to Egypt with Jacob along with their families. We are told that 70 people came to Egypt (eleven of Jacob’s sons and their families, not counting Joseph and his family since he was already in Egypt). Exodus is essentially picking up where Genesis left off.

Exodus 1

6 And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7 And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.

“And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation” – The years have passed and all those family members that had personal contact with Jacob and his sons have all died. All memories of Jacob, Joseph and the rest are based on stories told verbally or written down.

“And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty” – During this time God blessed the children of Israel and began fulfilling His promise to Jacob that He would use Egypt to turn Jacob’s descendants a great nation (**Gen. 46:3** “*And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation:*”).

“and the land was filled with them” – Apparently the number of Israelites had grown to the point they were in danger of rivaling the number of Egyptians in the land (v. 9).

8 Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. 9 And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we: 10 Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.

“Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” – Enough time had passed that not only was there no one who remembered Joseph being alive among the children of Israel, but now a new Pharaoh had taken the throne that had no personal memory of Joseph. Apparently this man had no respect for who Joseph was or his importance to Egypt and he certainly had no respect for the descendants of Joseph’s family.

“And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier [more numerous] than we” – This Pharaoh addresses his “cabinet” and gives them his observation concerning the children of Israel. He’s probably exaggerating the situation by saying that the children of Israel outnumber the Egyptians and are mightier than them due to their numbers. However, his point is likely that if the children of Israel were to join forces with their enemies (v. 10) then they would definitely be a force too strong for the Egyptians.

“Come on, let us deal wisely with them” – Pharaoh wants to deal with the situation before it has a chance to turn against them.

“lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us” – Pharaoh wants to prevent the children of Israel from multiplying and becoming a factor if they decided to join forces with the enemies of Egypt.

“and so get them up out of the land” – Not only did Pharaoh fear defeat if the children of Israel were to join with the enemies of Egypt during a war, but ironically it seems he also feared the loss of the economic benefits of having the children of Israel in Egypt. This is our first clue that the children of Israel may have already been paying a tribute of labor to the Egyptian government. Pharaoh must have been afraid that the children of Israel would desire to return to Canaan, which would leave a gaping hole in Egypt’s economy.

11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses.

“Therefore they did set over them taskmasters [captains of tribute/workers] to afflict [humble; humiliate; weaken] them with their burdens [forced labor]” – It seems that perhaps, as subjects of Pharaoh, the children of Israel may already have been working to pay tribute for the privilege of living in the land but they were doing so under their own leadership. Now Pharaoh sets men to oversee the labors of the children of Israel for the purpose of oppressing them and weakening their numbers. He wants to minimize the threat they pose if they were to join their enemies during a war.

“And they built for Pharaoh treasure [storage] cities, Pithom and Raamses” – As part of the effort to weaken the children of Israel, Pharaoh takes advantage of this forced labor to build cities to be used for storage.

12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.

“But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew” – God keeps His promise to bless and make the children of Israel a “great nation” (Gen. 46:3) despite Pharaoh’s efforts to weaken and decrease their number. The Egyptians were working against the purposes of God and the harder they worked, the more the purposes of God triumphed.

“And they were grieved [to feel a sickening dread] because of the children of Israel” – The Egyptians began to realize that their efforts are doing the opposite of what they intended. Their problem is getting worse rather than improving.

Verses 13-21: The Egyptians start to become desperate and intensify the oppression, forcing the children of Israel to work harder and harder. Pharaoh then resorts to reducing the Hebrew population by instructing the Hebrew midwives to kill any male children they help deliver. However, the midwives fear God and do not obey Pharaoh and God blesses them for their faithfulness.

22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

Since he can’t depend on the Hebrew midwives to kill the male newborns, Pharaoh now instructs Egyptian citizens to take part in the killing. Any male Hebrew babies they encounter are to be thrown into the river (probably the Nile) to drown.

Exodus 2

1 And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. 2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.

Moses is born in the midst of this dangerous time but God will protect him. We see here that Moses came from the tribe of Levi. They did not have the medical knowledge we have today so it was not unusual for a child with health problems to die soon after birth. However, when Moses’ mother saw that he was a “goodly child” (beautiful and healthy) and would survive, she hid him for three months to protect him from being thrown into the river.

3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. 4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

It was becoming increasingly dangerous to attempt to hide her son, perhaps because people knowing that she had been pregnant might start asking questions or because keeping a crying baby quiet was becoming increasingly difficult. Knowing that her son would certainly be killed if he were discovered, she decides to place his fate in God’s hands. She takes an “ark” (likely a woven basket) made from bulrushes (papyrus) and waterproofs it so it will float. She places the baby in the ark and sets it afloat in the edge of the river. Moses’ sister (named Miriam, as we discover in a later chapter) keeps an eye on the ark as it floats downstream to see what would happen to him.

Verses 5-6: Through God’s providence, the daughter of Pharaoh happened to come down to the river to wash herself. This washing was likely ceremonial since the Egyptians considered the Nile River to be sacred. She sees the ark and becomes curious, sending one of her maids to retrieve it. When she opens the ark, she sees the baby, who begins to cry at that moment. It is a rare woman who can harden her heart against a crying baby and Pharaoh’s daughter has compassion on the child despite recognizing that this baby was Hebrew.

7 Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? 8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. 9 And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.

Miriam volunteers to find a Hebrew woman to be the child’s “wet nurse” (to nurse the baby until he could be weaned) and she returns with Moses’ actual mother. Pharaoh’s daughter hires Moses’ mother to nurse her own son. God is in sovereign control, for He not only protects the baby Moses, but he is returned to his mother and his mother is paid to nurse her own son.

10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

“And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son” – Moses stayed with his biological mother at least until he was weaned and then she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter to be raised by her. It’s amazing that the man that God will raise up to set the children of Israel free will grow up as the grandson of the very king that would have had him killed as a Hebrew baby. God’s purposes cannot be foiled by men!

“And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water” – The name “Moses” means “drawn.” Pharaoh’s daughter uses the circumstances through which Moses came into her life as the inspiration for his name.