

Exodus Chapter 1 Continued

Exodus 1:12 "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel."

This result was not natural. It can only be ascribed to God's superintending Providence, whereby "the fierceness of man" was made to "turn to his praise." Naturally, severe and constant labor exhausts a nation, and causes its numbers to diminish.

"They were grieved": This is scarcely strong enough. Translated, the Egyptians "They were sore distressed" as the numbers of the Israelites grew and they feared they would become too strong for them.

This word "grieved" here actually means they greatly feared the Israelites. It is very strange how many times God will send many children to those who are oppressed. It is as if it is to compensate for the lack in their lives. Poor families, even today, have more children than the wealthy.

Exodus 1:13 "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor:"

"The Egyptians": The naïve inhabitants continued to enslave Israel. Between verses 12 and 13 a major change in Egyptian history took place, the Hyksos were driven out (ca. 1570 B.C.).

Possibly these Egyptians here were under the reign of Ahmose I.

Here we see the anger of the Egyptians toward Joseph's family shows up in the degree of hardship they bring to them.

Exodus 1:14 "And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, [was] with rigor."

"Bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick": Archeologists have uncovered reliefs and painting confirming the Egyptian practice of imposing forced labor on prisoners and slaves. These paintings also show foremen and guards watching construction work while scribes registered data on tablets.

We see work beyond the normal. Perhaps instead of working 8 hours a day, the work was probably extended from sunup to sundown, and in Egypt it is very hot. Perhaps they were also required to carry heavy bricks all day in this heat.

Verses 15-22: "Shiphrah" and "Puah" were possibly leaders of the guild of midwives who refused to commit infanticide, fearing the real King more than their earthly ruler (Luke 12:4-5;

Acts 5:29). These women were likely Egyptians who came to faith in Yahweh and were included in Israel (He provided households for them).

Exodus 1:15 "And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one [was] Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah:"

This Pharaoh would be Amenhotep I (1545-1525 B.C.), who commanded the midwives to kill the Hebrew boys (verses 15-22), being succeeded by Thutmose I (1525-1508 B.C.), who commanded the Hebrew boys to be thrown into the Nile (verse 22).

These Pharaohs, like their spiritual predecessors Cain and Esau, and like their successors Haman and Herod, were tools of Satan for the attempted destruction of the Seed of the Woman. But God providentially overruled their wicked plans and thus preserved the Messiah's line.

These midwives were like doctors of today. They assisted in the birth of a child. This is an old profession, and many women prefer them over a conventional doctor even today.

"Shiphrah" seems to be a Hebrew name, and it means elegant or beautiful.

"Puah" means one who cries out.

Exodus 1:16 "And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see [them] upon the stools; if it [be] a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it [be] a daughter, then she shall live."

The failure of rigorous bondage to suppress population growth necessitated that different measures were taken; hence, the royal order to the Hebrew midwives to murder male infants at birth.

“Stools”: Literally “two stones” on which the women sat to deliver.

Their function was to save lives, but here we see the king ordering them to destroy all the boy babies. The stool mentioned here is a special chair built for the purpose of child birth. We know the midwife would be the first to see the child and would have the opportunity to kill the baby. Here the king gave them a mandate. Disobeying the king could cause them to lose their heads. If these were Hebrew midwives, it is totally opposed to their respect for life. As we have said before, children were believed to be blessings from God and should not be destroyed.

Exodus 1:17 "But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive."

“The midwives feared God”: These brave, older women revered their God and thus obeyed Him and not man. They obviously understood that children were a gift from God and that murder was wrong. The two midwives mentioned by name were probably the leading representatives of their profession, for it is unlikely that such a burgeoning population had only two midwives to deal with all the births.

“And did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive”: If they truly had not made even one Hebrew male delivery during the months of Pharaoh’s murderous program, then their response would have been laudable and justified by Old Testament ethics. However, if they were partially truthful and partially lying, they were just as blameworthy as Rahab, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob was when they lied.

In verse 17, we see a strong statement indicating that these midwives feared God. This almost certainly makes them Hebrew, because Egyptians knew little about the real God. We see numerous Scriptures throughout the Bible telling us to obey those in government, but we see a higher law than the government. We must not break God's law to obey government. We are subject to the law of the land and should be good citizens, but if in so doing we break God's law, we must first obey God.

Exodus 1:18 "And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?"

Perceiving by the increase of the Israelites; that they did not obey his commands.

"And said unto them, why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?" Not only did not kill them, but did everything for them that were necessary for their future preservation and health (see Ezek. 16:4).

The anger of the king had been kindled toward these midwives.

Verses 19-20: Rather than trying to argue for a justifiable lie on the part of midwives seeking to protect God’s people, take it as a statement of what was true: God was directly involved in this affair of birth and national growth. That’s the key to understanding why no decree of Pharaoh would work out as he intended, and why Hebrew women were so healthy and gave birth with ease.

Exodus 1:19 "And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women [are] not as the Egyptian women; for they [are] lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them."

The statement by the midwives: “Because the Hebrew women [are] not as the Egyptian women; for they [are] lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them” is probably a lie in light of the statement (in verse 17); “and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive”.

Here we see midwives facing their death, because they will not kill these boy babies. This is the very thing martyrs are made of. They were unwilling to go against what they believe, even if they know they would be killed for their stand they have taken. They not only were brave, but were smart as well. This was probably the only excuse that Pharaoh would believe.

Exodus 1:20 "Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty."

If they truly had not made even one Hebrew male delivery during the months of Pharaoh's murderous program, then their response would have been laudable and justified by Old Testament ethics. However, if they were partially truthful and partially lying, they were just as blameworthy as Rahab, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob was when they lied.

It appears from this Scriptures above, that God probably softened the heart of the Pharaoh and caused him not to punish the midwives. God controls all people, not just the ones who have decided to follow Him. We see that Pharaoh's plan backfired on him and that multiplying of the people went on without Pharaoh's blessing.

Exodus 1:21 "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses."

The juxtaposition of the account of their lie to Pharaoh with the statement that God dealt well with them in verse 20 might appear to imply an endorsement of their lie. But this suspicion cannot be sustained in the text, for twice it attributes the reason for God's blessing them the fact that they "feared [believed] "God"

Whether this means physical houses or whether this means God blessed them with a family, we really do not know; but whatever it was, it is a blessing abundantly from God. God overlooked them lying to the Pharaoh because they took no thought for themselves in sparing these babies' lives.

Exodus 1:22 "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."

The failure of the extermination program demanded of the midwives finally caused Pharaoh to demand that all his subjects get involved in murdering newborn boys.

This was like human sacrifice. The Nile River was worshipped by the Egyptians. These Egyptian people would see the day when they would regret the murdering of these babies, for the tenth plague would kill their firstborn.

Exodus Chapter 1 Continued Questions

1. In verse 12, the more they afflicted them, the more they _____.
2. Who was grieved by this?
3. What does "grieved" actually mean?
4. What word describes the severity of their service?

5. What is a midwife?
6. What did he instruct the midwives to do?
7. What does the name "Shiphrah" mean?
8. What does "Puah" mean?
9. What one thing makes us believe these midwives were Hebrews?
10. Why did the midwives not do what the king asked them to?
11. When is the only time to disobey government?
12. When the king called the midwives to explain their action, what did they tell him?
13. What were these midwives willing to do so as not to disobey God?
14. Instead of the Hebrews decreasing, what happened?
15. We read because the midwives feared God, He made them what?
16. What was throwing these babies into the Nile River like?
17. Why?
18. In what area did these Hebrew live?