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Brief introduction to Exodus prior to Scripture reading: Exodus is the sequel to Genesis. Exodus is the great book of redemption. It reveals, in picture form, how God delivers us today—from sin, the world, and the devil—and saves us for heaven. Have you been set free from the bondage of sin? Has God called you to be His instrument in helping others be free? Will you respond to the call of God? Will you follow where He leads? Will you obey His commands? These issues will be addressed as we study the book of Exodus together. Let's begin our study. Turn with me in your Bibles to:

Exodus 1:6-22 "Courage in the Face of Adversity"

Intro. Have you ever been oppressed or taken advantage of? Have you ever been persecuted because you are a Christian? Do you feel like your boss at work is just a step above a cruel taskmaster? Do you feel like you are in bondage? I'm told that even here in America, the average person works 5 months out of the year just to pay all of our federal, state, & local taxes. There are quite a few powerful people who take advantage of people. Some even do violence against others & can be rather cruel.

In our text today we read that God's people Israel faced hardships imposed by the Egyptian government (vv.8-10). The new king never knew Joseph and felt no indebtedness to him or his descendants, even though Joseph was a hero to a previous generation.¹ It's amazing how quickly people forget those who have died. These hardships may have begun just one generation after Joseph's death,² and they became severe, and involved harsh, involuntary service (vv.11, 13-14). The Egyptians selfishly took advantage of the Israelites. Their cruel oppression even extended to the point of attempted murder of their precious children (vv.16, 22).

This morning I want to share with you what you should do when people oppress you, or take advantage of you. Anyone who has greater power than you can oppress you. You can be their next victim. What should you do when you find that you are being oppressed, especially when you are being oppressed because you are a child of God? After all, Jesus said in John 15:19, "...because you are not of the world.... therefore the world hates you." Then He said in the next verse, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." Just as Israel was persecuted, even so God's church has faced persecution down through the years. And I believe that persecution will increase in the years ahead. It is already happening to 250 million Christians worldwide. It can happen here in America. Congress is considering so-called "hate crimes" legislation. If it passes, I could be fined or jailed for preaching that homosexual behavior is sinful, especially if someone who has heard me preach commits a violent act against a homosexual. So we ought to prepare ourselves for the possibility that we could face persecution and oppression by ungodly people, just as Israel did.

Now based on this text, I want to answer the following question: What should you do if you are oppressed or persecuted? First of all:

¹ Pink believes the new Pharaoh was not only part of a new dynasty, but from the Assyrian nation. This is based on Acts 7:18 & Isa. 52:4.

² That their peace was disturbed thirty years after their settlement in Goshen seems clear from a comparison of Acts 7:6, Ex. 12:40, & Gen. 15:13.

I. REMEMBER, GOD'S PROMISE WILL PREVAIL

When you're facing a problem, I'm sure God has a promise that you can claim. 2 Peter 1:4 says that God has "given unto us exceeding great and precious promises...." If you lay hold of God's promise by faith, you will find that God's promise will prevail over the problem you are facing.

Let me show you an example from our text. God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would multiply. For example, He said in Gen. 22:17, "blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore...." There were only about 75 Israelites at the time they moved down to Egypt. However, it did not take long for the people to grow into the thousands. We read in v.7, "But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them." "The land" probably refers to the land of Goshen. The great increase was partly due to the favorable circumstances of the life in Goshen. But it was primarily due to the blessing of God upon the people, in fulfillment of His promise.

It did not escape Pharaoh's³ attention that the Israelites had increased abundantly and multiplied. The new Pharaoh & his people decided that they did not want to Israelites to multiply into a mighty nation. He had his own reasons, as stated in v.10, "come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land." They were afraid that the Israelites might turn against them by forming an alliance with one of the enemies of the Egyptians. They were also afraid that they might loose the Israelites as a labor force if such an alliance was successful. So Pharaoh tried one plot after another to limit the growth of the Israelites.

So notice the first shrewd plot that was attempted against God's people. They hoped that a good dose of hardship would make the Israelites less inclined to have children. Indeed, when you are too poor & too tired, you may indeed be less inclined to have children. The birth rate during the depression here in America was certainly less than the years after WW2, when there was peace and prosperity. So we read in v.11, "Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses." They probably did not build the pyramids because they had already been in existence many, many years.⁴ Instead, they built the supply cities mentioned in v.11. The Egyptians would store up grain & other supplies, and then they would use these either for trading, or for reserves in wartime. They were not employed in this endeavor according to their will, and given a fair wage. They were forced. The word "burden" in v.11 means "forced labor." Over them were placed taskmasters, not simply to supervise the work, but to afflict the people - to make them work harder and faster by whipping them. You think you have it bad at work? How would you like to have a boss standing over you with a whip in his hand? These taskmasters made life hard for the Israelites. But their plan failed. We read in v.12, "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel." This plot by the Egyptians was an utter failure. The hardship only resulted in even more growth in the population.

³ The title "Pharaoh" literally signifies *a crocodile*, which was a sacred animal among the Egyptians. This word procured greater reverence and respect by the people.

⁴ However, the Jewish historian Josephus expressly says that one part of the oppression suffered by the Israelites in Egypt was occasioned by building pyramids (Antiq., lib. ii., cap. ix., sec. 1).

Then Pharaoh & his people tried another tactic. They decided to oppress them even more. They turned up the heat & became downright cruel in their treatment of the Hebrews, which made their life almost unbearable. We read in vv.13-14, “So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.” They had to dig up clay, make bricks, and do other difficult labor. They probably dug trenches for irrigation from the Nile River. However, even that didn’t slow down the growth of the Israelite nation either. Normally slave labor does diminish the population, for mothers who are forced to work long hours are not able to give proper care to their young children. But God overruled Pharaoh’s plans.

Finally, Pharaoh tried another, more desperate plan. Now he’s ready to resort to infanticide. We read in vv. 15-16, “Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; and he said, ‘When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.’” The two women were probably heads over all the midwives that assisted in the birthing process. But God worked to thwart that plan as well. As we shall see, the Hebrew women often gave birth before the midwives even arrived, and the midwives who did refused to carry out Pharaoh’s order. So we read in the last of v.20, “... the people multiplied and grew very mighty.” In spite of the efforts of one of the most powerful kings in the ancient world, God carried out His promise to cause the Israelites to multiply into a mighty nation. Clearly God, not Pharaoh, was in control; for Pharaoh could not accomplish his purposes, while God did accomplish His. Indeed, Rom. 8:31 says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

All the shrewd plots of Pharaoh & his advisers failed. This is a great example of 1 Cor. 1:19, which says, “For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’” Then the next verse says, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” Indeed, worldly wisdom failed, just as atheistic communism has failed. Prov. 21:30 says, “There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the LORD.” This proves how thoroughly vain it is to fight against the purpose of Him who has sworn, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa. 46:10). Remember, God is on the throne.

Years ago there was a man by the name Frederick Douglas, a black man, who had worked for the freedom of the slaves in our country. Frederick Douglas had suffered pressures, persecution, loss of freedom, and death threats, but he loved the Lord Jesus. One day he came to Atlanta to speak to a group of people who needed to hear an encouraging word. But when he stood up to speak, all of the pressures just caved in on him. He lost his composure. Instead of beginning his address, he simply put his head on his hands and began to weep. An old black woman, sitting in the audience, took out a white handkerchief and waved it to get his attention. After a while he looked up and saw her, and she said to him, “Mr. Douglas, I want to ask you a question today.” “Yes ma’am, what is it?” She said, “Mr. Douglas, is God dead?” There was only silence. So she said again, “Is God dead?” He lifted his head high and said, “No ma’am, the Lord Jesus Christ is very much alive.” That little old black woman stood to her feet, waving that white handkerchief and said, “Then Mr. Douglas, if Jesus Christ is still alive, no Christian should ever hang his head in defeat.”

Listen, God is alive. He’s still on the throne, and He will work out His plan and fulfill every promise for the child of God, especially as we trust in Him. So when you are under attack by an enemy, remember Ps.18:30, which says, “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the

LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.” Or how about this one: Psa. 33:20 says, “Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield.” What if some adversary tries to hurt you financially? Is there a promise for you? Indeed, for Jesus said in Mt. 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” In the context he is talking about meeting your need for food & clothing. I believe that God’s promise will prevail over your adversary. And even if God allows an enemy to persecute you, and even hurt you to accomplish some divine purpose, even then God has a promise for you that will surely prevail. Jesus said in Mt. 5:11-12, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

I want to make another application, and then apply my main point. The world does not want Christians to multiply. They especially don’t like it when we achieve any political or economic power. So they may persecute us in an attempt to diminish our numbers. They will try to make life hard for us, to discourage us. But God has promised that the church will ultimately prevail. Jesus said that His Gospel would be preached in every nation, and then the end would come. In the book of Revelation we read that ultimately, God’s people will come from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). The number of the redeemed will be so great that no man will be able to number us! (Rev. 7:9). Let us claim that promise, and keeping seeking to be on mission to share the Gospel, and reach our world for Christ.

Now the second main lesson I draw from our text is this. What do you do when people in power try to force you to do something that is morally wrong? What do you do when you & others are persecuted, oppressed, and threatened:

II. FEAR GOD, NOT MAN

If you fear God, you need not fear what man will do to you. Ps. 118:6 says, “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (This is also quoted in Heb. 13:6). I told you earlier that Pharaoh became desperate, and ordered the murder of newborn Hebrew boys. Had this been done, the women of Israel would have to marry Egyptian men, and the nation of Israel would have been fully assimilated into the Egyptian population. Israel would have ceased as a separate nation. While Pharaoh had his purposes, Satan was working to accomplish his own purposes. He knew the promise of Genesis 3:15, the promise of a Savior who would crush Satan’s head. So this was another attempt of Satan to destroy the blood line leading to the Lord Jesus Christ. If all the male children of the Hebrews were destroyed, there would have been no King David. If no David, then his Messianic Son would not have been born. But we read in v.17, “But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive.”⁵ They clearly feared God more than Pharaoh. And because they feared God, they did not carry out his order to commit infanticide. They knew that God had forbidden murder of every kind. Hebrew tradition was very clear on this point. God had declared way back in the time of Noah, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man” (Gen. 9:6).

Even though I commend these ladies for saving the lives of children, I cannot commend them *if* they used deception to cover up their failure to carry out the king’s orders. When called to account for not carrying out Pharaoh’s orders (v.18), they said in v.19, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are lively and give birth before the midwives

⁵ Literally, they caused the male children to live. “Saved” is not in the original.

come to them.” However, there could have been a lot of truth to what they said. Women who work hard up until childbirth are stronger and healthier. They often give birth quicker than women who live a life of ease, especially if they have already had a child or two, as was the case with most Hebrew women. Regardless, the very oppression imposed by Pharaoh again worked to his disadvantage!

Nevertheless, we can learn the following principles from the example of these two midwives:

A. Fearing God Will Help You Not Be Intimidated by the Threats of Evil Men – Ancient pagan kings were very powerful, and they could have disobedience punished with death very quickly, without so much as a trial. It was very brave of these women to resist the will of Pharaoh. Their courage no doubt resulted from their fear of God, and their faith in God. Remember this: An earthly king can punish with physical death, but God can punish with eternal death! Indeed, Jesus said in Mt. 10:28, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were commanded by the king of Babylon to bow down before his golden image. They refused to disobey a clear command of God not to worship idols. Why? No doubt it was because they feared God far more. And God honored their courageous commitment. He delivered them from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). When the apostles were threatened with punishment if they kept preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Peter said in Acts 5:29, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Their fear of God made them fearless before the Jewish authorities.

B. Fearing God Will Help You Live a Moral Life –These midwives refused to carry out Pharaoh’s orders because they feared God. Listen, God is all-knowing. He sees what you are doing. You can’t hide your sin from Him. If you fear God, you will indeed live a more morally upright life. For example, those who fear & respect God will not kill babies through abortion!

Even so, when we believe God, and fear God, we will have the courage to take a stand for what is right. Young lady, if you make a big mistake and get pregnant out of wedlock, and your boyfriend threatens to break up with you if you do not get an abortion, are you going to take a stand for what is right, and save the life of your baby? You will if you fear God! Sir, if your boss requires you to do something dishonest, and threatens to fire you if you do not go along, will you take a stand for what is right, and refuse to be dishonest? If you fear God you will have the courage to do what is right!

Now let’s consider yet another principle from our text:

III. SEEK THE FAVOR OF GOD OVER MAN

These ladies had a choice to make. Should they seek to please Pharaoh, or God? Well, they chose to please God. And notice what God did for them. We read in v.20, “Therefore God dealt well with the midwives...” Then in v.21 we read, “And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them.” God gave them husbands and children, and a lasting family dynasty in Israel. Wouldn’t you rather have the favor of God over the favor of men?

Listen, Hebrews 6:10 says, “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do

minister.” I believe I am far better off seeking the favor of God than I am seeking the favor of men, especially ungodly men.

So make pleasing God your #1 priority. If you do, He will bless you and your family. He will deal well with you, as He did with these Hebrew midwives who feared Him, and sought to please Him.

Now let’s consider my last point. As the Israelites were suffering at the hand of the Egyptians, I’m sure quite a few look up to God and asked, “Why is this happening to us?” We tend to do the same thing. So when you are facing oppression or difficulties in your life, I want to encourage you to do one more thing:

IV. REMEMBER GOD’S PURPOSE FOR YOUR TRIALS

Yes, God has a purpose in your trials, even as He had a purpose in allowing Israel to go through such trials for so long. I could give at least 7 of God’s purposes in allowing Israel to suffer, but I will focus on about 4 of them. First, it may have been to chastise Israel for their sin. Not all adversity is due to our sin, but it can be. Israel’s forefathers had sinned against Joseph by selling him into bondage, and now what are they suffering from? Bondage! Israel also had begun to worship the idols of Egypt, and had turned from the Lord in their prosperity in Goshen. They had plenty of sins to justify this corrective chastisement. Second, until their time of suffering, the people had prospered and settled in the good land of Goshen. The majority of Israel had grown to love Egypt, and their love for God had grown cold. They were not about to move out to relocate to the land of Canaan on their own. Yet God promised that He would bring them back to the land of Canaan some day. So God used these trials to make them more willing to seek their freedom, and move out to the Promised Land. Sometimes we need to experience life’s sorrows and burdens, and find how hard the world’s service is, in order that we may be more willing to be detached from this world, and reach up to God. Third, our trials tend to drive us to God. Look over to 2:23, “Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage.” Someone said, “When you get to your wit’s end, you’ll find God lives there.” Finally, this suffering was to prepare Israel to obtain their inheritance. The rough schooling they had in Egypt served to develop their muscles and toughen their sinews. They would be tougher and stronger when it came time to conquer the land of Promise. I am told that the trees that grow in windy areas produce the strongest wood. Even so, it is well known that our burdens typically make us stronger, especially when we respond the right way.⁶ All of these reasons make it clear that God had His purposes for allowing His people Israel to suffer many years under Egyptian bondage.

Even so, when God allows you to go through difficult times, you can be sure that He has a purpose in it. You may not understand it at the time, but the day will come when you will see it. For example, He may be seeking to correct you. He may be seeking to save you. Sometimes people only seek the salvation of the Lord during times of distress. He may be seeking to strengthen you, and draw you closer to Him. He may be closing one door, that you may be willing to walk through another open door. Just trust in the goodness of God, and rest in the belief that God has a purpose in your suffering. You may even face a situation like Job

⁶ Another answer is suggested by Gen. 15:16: “But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” After 400 years Israel was ready, as a nation, to be His instrument to destroy them.

experienced where God does not tell you what He is doing. In those instances acknowledge God's love and sovereignty and depend on His sustaining grace to see you through the situation.

Conclusion: So when you are facing oppression or persecution, remember the lessons learned by the children of Israel. God's work through their experience teaches us that God's promises will enable us to prevail over our trials. We should fear God, not man. We should seek the favor of God over the favor of man. And finally, we should always remember that when God allows His people to suffer, He has a purpose in it. Let's not fight against God's purposes, but submit to His purposes in our lives.

Are you going through a tough time in our life? Perhaps God is seeking to turn you from sin and your love of the world. He wants to save you. Will you turn to Him today? Will you trust in His Son Jesus today? Are you trusting in God's promises? Are you fulfilling God's purposes?

Sources: Ronald A. Beers, ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House & Zondervan, 1991); Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary* (accessed from *Online Bible*), completed by 1832; Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2007; Douglas Kuiper, "Israel's Bondage in Egypt" (prca.org, 2002); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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