

CHAPTER 1

We have here,

- I. God's kindness to Israel, in multiplying them exceedingly (v. 1-7).
- II. The Egyptians' wickedness to them,
 1. Oppressing and enslaving them (v. 8-14).
 2. Murdering their children (v. 15-22). Thus whom the court of heaven blessed the country of Egypt cursed, and for that reason.

◀III▶ EXODUS 1:1-7

GOD'S KINDNESS TO ISRAEL

In these verses we have,

1. A recital of the names of the *twelve patriarchs*, as they are called, ~~408~~Acts 7:8. Their names are often repeated in scripture, that they may not sound uncouth to us, as other hard names, but that, by their occurring so frequently, they may become familiar to us; and to show how precious God's spiritual Israel are to him, and how much he delights in them. The account which was kept of the number of Jacob's family, when they went down into Egypt; they were in all *seventy souls* (v. 5). according to the computation we had, ~~1457~~Genesis 46:27. This was just the number of the nations by which the earth was peopled, according to the account given, Genesis 10. *For when the Most High separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel*, as Moses observes, ~~638~~Deuteronomy 32:8. Notice is here taken of this that their increase in Egypt might appear the more wonderful. Note, It is good for those whose latter end greatly increases often to remember how small their beginning was, ~~888E~~Job 8:7.

3. The death of Joseph, v. 6. *All that generation* by degrees wore off. Perhaps all Jacob's sons died much about the same time; for there was not more than seven years' difference in age between the eldest and the youngest of them, except Benjamin; and, when death comes into a family,

sometimes it makes a full end in a little time. When Joseph, the stay of the family, died, the rest went off apace. Note, We must look upon ourselves and our brethren, and all we converse with, as dying and hastening out of the world. This generation passeth away, as that did which went before.

4. The strange increase of Israel in Egypt, v. 7. Here are four words used to express it: They *were fruitful*, and *increased abundantly*, like fishes or insects, so that they *multiplied*; and, being generally healthful and strong, they *waxed exceedingly mighty*, so that they began almost to outnumber the natives, for the land was in all places filled with them, at least Goshen, their own allotment. Observe,

(1.) Though, no doubt, they increased considerably before, yet, it should seem, it was not till after the death of Joseph that it began to be taken notice of as extraordinary. Thus, when they lost the benefit of his protection, God made their numbers their defence, and they became better able than they had been to shift for themselves. If God continue our friends and relations to us while we most need them, and remove them when they can be better spared, let us own that he is wise, and not complain that he is hard upon us. After the death of Christ, our Joseph, his gospel Israel began most remarkably to increase: and his death had an influence upon it; it was like the sowing of a corn of wheat, which, if it die, bringeth forth much fruit, ~~6124~~ John 12:24.

(2.) This wonderful increase was the fulfillment of the promise long before made unto the fathers. From the call of Abraham, when God first told him he would make of him a great nation, to the deliverance of his seed out of Egypt, it was 430 years, during the first 215 of which they were increased but to seventy, but, in the latter half, those seventy multiplied to 600,000 fighting men. Note,

[1.] Sometimes God's providences may seem for a great while to thwart his promises, and to go counter to them, that his people's faith may be tried, and his own power the more magnified.

[2.] Though the performance of God's promises is sometimes slow, yet it is always sure; *at the end it shall speak, and not lie*, ~~3123~~ Habakkuk 2:3.

EXODUS 1:8-14

THE ISRAELITES OPPRESSED IN EGYPT

The land of Egypt here, at length, becomes to Israel a house of bondage, though hitherto it had been a happy shelter and settlement for them. Note, The place of our satisfaction may soon become the place of our affliction, and that may prove the greatest cross to us of which we said, *This same shall comfort us*. Those may prove our sworn enemies whose parents were our faithful friends; nay, the same persons that loved us may possibly turn to hate us: therefore cease from man, and say not concerning any place on this side heaven, *This is my rest for ever*. Observe here,

I. The obligations they lay under to Israel upon Joseph's account were forgotten: *There arose a new king*, after several successions in Joseph's time, *who knew not Joseph*, v. 8. All that knew him loved him, and were kind to his relations for his sake; but when he was dead he was soon forgotten, and the remembrance of the good offices he had done was either not retained or not regarded, nor had it any influence upon their councils. Note, the best and the most useful and acceptable services done to men are seldom remembered, so as to be recompensed to those that did them, in the notice taken either of their memory, or of their posterity, after their death, ²⁰⁰⁵Ecclesiastes 9:5, 15. Therefore our great care should be to serve God, and please him, who is not unrighteous, whatever men are, to forget our work and labour of love, ³⁰⁰Hebrews 6:10. If we work for men only, our works, at furthest, will die with us; if for God, they will follow us, ⁶⁴³Revelation 14:13. This king of Egypt knew not Joseph; and after him arose one that had the impudence to say, *I know not the Lord*, ⁰⁰⁰Exodus 5:2. Note, Those that are unmindful of their other benefactors, it is to be feared, will forget the supreme benefactor, ⁰⁰⁰1 John 4:20.

II. Reasons of state were suggested for their dealing hardly with Israel, v. 9, 10.

1. They are represented as more and mightier than the Egyptians; certainly they were not so, but the king of Egypt, when he resolved to oppress them, would have them thought so, and looked on as a formidable body.

2. Hence it is inferred that if care were not taken to keep them under they would become dangerous to the government, and in time of war would

side with their enemies and revolt from their allegiance to the crown of Egypt. Note, It has been the policy of persecutors to represent God's Israel as a dangerous people, *hurtful to kings and provinces*, not fit to be trusted, nay, not fit to be tolerated, that they may have some pretence for the barbarous treatment they design them, ~~ESTH~~ Ezra 4:12, etc.; ~~ESTH~~ Esther 3:8. Observe, The thing they feared was lest they should *get them up out of the land*, probably having heard them speak of the promise made to their fathers that they should settle in Canaan. Note, The policies of the church's enemies aim to defeat the promises of the church's God, but in vain; God's counsels shall stand.

3. It is therefore proposed that a course be taken to prevent their increase: *Come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply.* Note,

(1.) The growth of Israel is the grief of Egypt, and that against which the powers and policies of hell are levelled.

(2.) When men deal wickedly, it is common for them to imagine that they deal wisely; but the folly of sin will, at last, be manifested before all men.

III. The method they took to suppress them, and check their growth, v. 11, 13, 14. The Israelites behaved themselves so peaceably and inoffensively that they could not find any occasion of making war upon them, and weakening them by that means: and therefore,

1. They took care to keep them poor, by charging them with heavy taxes, which, some think, is included in the *burdens* with which they afflicted them.

2. By this means they took an effectual course to make them slaves. The Israelites, it should seem, were much more industrious laborious people than the Egyptians, and therefore Pharaoh took care to find them work, both in building (they built him *treasure-cities*), and in husbandry, even *all manner of service in the field*: and this was exacted from them with the utmost rigour and severity. Here are many expressions used, to affect us with the condition of God's people. They had *taskmasters* set over them, who were directed, not only to burden them, but, as much as might be, *to afflict them with their burdens*, and contrive how to make them grievous. They not only made them serve, which was sufficient for Pharaoh's profit, but they made them *serve with rigour*, so that their lives became bitter to them, intending hereby,

- (1.) To break their spirits, and rob them of every thing in them that was ingenuous and generous.
- (2.) To ruin their health and shorten their days, and so diminish their numbers.
- (3.) To discourage them from marrying, since their children would be born to slavery.
- (4.) To oblige them to desert the Hebrews, and incorporate themselves with the Egyptians. Thus he hoped to cut off the name of Israel, that it might be no more in remembrance. And it is to be feared that the oppression they were under had this bad effect upon them, that it brought over many of them to join with the Egyptians in their idolatrous worship; for we read (¹²⁴⁴Joshua 24:14) that they served other gods in Egypt; and, though it is not mentioned here in this history, yet we find (³⁰⁸Ezekiel 20:8) that God had threatened to destroy them for it, even while they were in the land of Egypt: however, they were kept a distinct body, unmingled with the Egyptians, and by their other customs separated from them, which was *the Lord's doing, and marvellous*.

IV. The wonderful increase of the Israelites, notwithstanding the oppressions they groaned under (v. 12): *The more they afflicted them the more they multiplied*, sorely to the grief and vexation of the Egyptians.

Note,

- 1. Times of affliction have often been the church's growing times, *Sub pondere crescit* — *Being pressed, it grows*. Christianity spread most when it was persecuted: the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.
- 2. Those that take counsel against the Lord and his Israel do but imagine a vain thing (⁹¹¹Psalm 2:1), and create so much the greater vexation to themselves: hell and earth cannot diminish those whom Heaven will increase.

~~0015~~ EXODUS 1:15-22

THE ISRAELITES OPPRESSED IN EGYPT

The Egyptians' indignation at Israel's increase, notwithstanding the many hardships they put upon them, drove them at length to the most barbarous and inhuman methods of suppressing them, by the murder of their children. It was strange that they did not rather pick quarrels with the grown men, against whom they might perhaps find some occasion: to be thus bloody towards the infants, whom all must own to be innocents, was a sin which they had to cloak for. Note,

1. There is more cruelty in the corrupt heart of man than one would imagine, ~~0015~~Romans 3:15, 16. The enmity that is in the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman divests men of humanity itself, and makes them forget all pity. One would not think it possible that ever men should be so barbarous and blood-thirsty as the persecutors of God's people have been, ~~0016~~Revelation 17:6.

2. Even confessed innocence is no defence against the old enmity. What blood so guiltless as that of a child new-born? Yet that is prodigally shed like water, and sucked with delight like milk or honey. Pharaoh and Herod sufficiently proved themselves agents for that *great red dragon, who stood to devour the man-child as soon as it was born*, ~~0017~~Revelation 12:3, 4. Pilate delivered Christ to be crucified, after he had confessed that he found no fault in him. It is well for us that, though man can kill the body, this is all he can do. Two bloody edicts are here signed for the destruction of all the male children that were born to the Hebrews.

I. The midwives were commanded to murder them. Observe,

1. The orders given them, v. 15, 16. It added much to the barbarity of the intended executions that the *midwives* were appointed to be the executioners; for it was to make them, not only bloody, but perfidious, and to oblige them to betray a trust, and to destroy those whom they undertook to save and help. Could he think that their sex would admit such cruelty, and their employment such base treachery? Note, Those who are themselves barbarous think to find, or make, others as barbarous. Pharaoh's project was secretly to engage the midwives to stifle the men-children as soon as they were born, and then to lay it upon the difficulty of

the birth, or some mischance common in that case, ~~(KJB)~~ Job 3:11. The two midwives he tampered with in order hereunto are here named; and perhaps, at this time, which was above eighty years before their going out of Egypt, those two might suffice for all the Hebrew women, at least so many of them as lay near the court, as it is plain by ~~(KJB)~~ Exodus 2:5, 6, many of them did, and of them he was most jealous. They are called *Hebrew midwives*, probably not because they were themselves Hebrews (for surely Pharaoh could never expect they should be so barbarous to those of their own nation), but because they were generally made use of by the Hebrews; and, being Egyptians, he hoped to prevail with them.

2. Their pious disobedience to this impious command, v. 17. *They feared God*, regarded his law, and dreaded his wrath more than Pharaoh's and therefore saved the men-children alive. Note, If men's commands be any way contrary to the commands of God, we must obey God and not man, ~~(KJB)~~ Acts 4:19; 5:29. No power on earth can warrant us, much less oblige us, to sin against God, our chief Lord. Again, Where the fear of God rules in the heart, it will preserve it from the snare which the inordinate fear of man brings.

3. Their justifying themselves in this disobedience, when they were charged with it as a crime, v. 18. They gave a reason for it, which, it seems, God's gracious promise furnished them with — that they came too late to do it, for generally the children were born before they came, v. 19. I see no reason we have to doubt the truth of this; it is plain that the Hebrews were now under an extraordinary blessing of increase, which may well be supposed to have this effect, that the women had very quick and easy labour, and, the mothers and children being both lively, they seldom needed the help of midwives: this these midwives took notice of, and, concluding it to the finger of God, were thereby emboldened to disobey the king, in favour of those whom Heaven thus favoured, and with this justified themselves before Pharaoh, when he called them to an account for it. Some of the ancient Jews expound it thus, *Ere the midwife comes to them they pray to their Father in heaven, and he answereth them, and they do bring forth*. Note, God is a readier help to his people in distress than any other helpers are, and often anticipates them with the blessings of his goodness; such deliverances lay them under peculiarly strong obligations.

4. The recompence God gave them for their tenderness towards his people: *He dealt well with them*, v. 20. Note, God will be behind-hand with none for any kindness done to his people, taking it as done to himself. In particular, *he made them houses* (v. 21), built them up into families, blessed their children, and prospered them in all they did. Note, The services done for God's Israel are often repaid in kind. The midwives kept up the Israelites' houses, and, in recompence for it, *God made them houses*. Observe, The recompence has relation to the principle upon which they went: *Because they feared God, he made them houses*. Note, Religion and piety are good friends to outward prosperity: the fear of God in a house will help to build it up and establish it. Dr. Lightfoot's notion of it is, That, for their piety, they were married to Israelites, and Hebrew families were built up by them.

II. When this project did not take effect, Pharaoh gave public orders to all his people to drown all the male children of the Hebrews, v. 22. We may suppose it was made highly penal for any to know of the birth of a son to an Israelite, and not to give information to those who were appointed to throw him into the river. Note, The enemies of the church have been restless in their endeavours to *wear out the saints of the Most High*, ~~2025~~ Daniel 7:25. But *he that sits in heaven shall laugh at them*. See ~~1004~~ Psalm 2:4.