

# Ministry of Grace

## Exodus 1 - Speaker Notes Two Heroic Midwives

### Background

In order to get the full effect of what we are taught in Exodus, we need to understand the background of the sons of Israel (Jacob). He was the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. However, he had a tenuous relationship with people. Like Abraham and Isaac, he had a tendency to be less than honest at times. His name means, “he who takes the place of another,” which we will see is appropriate for him. We read in Genesis chapter 25 that even in his mother’s womb, he was struggling against his brother Esau. Then, later in that chapter, we learn that Jacob purchased his birthright from Esau for a pot of stew when Esau was famished after having been out hunting. In Chapter 27, we learn that Jacob and his mother Rebekah, tricked his father Isaac into giving him the blessing instead of Esau. In doing so, he took the place of his brother, just as his name suggests. Following that, with Rebekah’s help, Jacob ran off to Rebekah’s brother, Laban. While there, he gained two wives, Leah and Rachael, daughters of his uncle Laban. Then, some 20 years later, while returning to his homeland as God had instructed him, Jacob sent messengers on ahead of him to greet his brother Esau, and prayed to God that He would deliver Jacob from the hand of his brother.

That night, Jacob wrestled with God until God dislocated Jacob’s hip. But before letting loose of Jacob, God said, “what is your name?” When he said “Jacob,” God changed it to Israel, meaning “he who wrestles with God.” This has been the history of the people of Israel ever since. Jacob asked God what His name is. But instead of answering Jacob, God blessed him.

The following day, Jacob divided up his family and his animals and sent them on in groups. He also sent Esau a present in order to appease his anger. When Jacob was finally approaching Esau, he bowed himself to the ground seven times. Esau ran up to him and embraced Jacob saying, “what’s the meaning of all these that you have sent on ahead of you?”

*Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” Thus he urged him, and he took it. (Genesis 33:11)*

Esau then offered to travel back to his home with Jacob, but Jacob declined because the animals and children would slow them down too much. Jacob told Esau to go on ahead and that he would follow. Instead, like the deceiver he was, Jacob turned and headed to Succoth, to the city of Shechem.

While Jacob and his family were living there, Shechem, the son of Hamor, the leader of the people in the land, was attracted to Dinah, Jacob’s daughter. Shechem forced himself on Dinah and raped her. He then sent his father to Jacob to ask for Dinah’s hand in marriage. But Jacob’s sons learned of the awful thing that Shechem had done to Dinah. So, they answered Shechem and Hamor, his father, saying that they could not intermarry with uncircumcised people. So, Shechem and Hamor returned and convinced all the men of the city to be circumcised. On the third day, when all the men were very sore, Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah’s brothers, went into the city and killed all of the men and plundered the city.

Through Jacob's two wives and their maidservants, Jacob ended up fathering twelve sons. Two of them, Joseph and Benjamin, were born to Jacob's favorite wife Rebecca, who died giving birth to Benjamin. Later, while Joseph was tending the flocks with some of his brothers, he had a dream, which he told to them:

Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.

His brothers recognized that in the dream, they were bowing down to Joseph and they said,

Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?

The he dreamed another dream and he said, "I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

When he told it to his father and brothers, Jacob said, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?"

In spite of all of this, Joseph became the favorite son of his father and Jacob gave him a coat of many colors. This signified a position of favor and it was a dramatic way of saying he was the son who would receive the birthright. Eventually, his brothers became so jealous of him that they sold him to a caravan of Ishmaelites heading to Egypt where he was sold as a slave.

In Egypt, the captain of the guard, whose name was Potiphar, bought Joseph. Seeing that everything that Joseph was in control of prospered greatly, Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything in his household. Then Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph but he ran out of the house. She then accused Joseph of trying to rape her and Potiphar had him put in prison,

While Joseph was in prison he met Pharaoh's cup-bearer and his baker. They each had a dream that Joseph correctly interpreted and the baker was executed while the cup-bearer was restored to his position just as Joseph had predicted.

Two years later, Pharaoh also had a dream, but none of his magicians could interpret it. The cup-bearer, remembering his experience in prison, informed Pharaoh that Joseph could interpret dreams, so Pharaoh called for Joseph. Joseph correctly interpreted the dream which was predicting that there were going to be 7 years of plentiful harvest in Egypt followed by 7 years of extreme famine. Pharaoh then promoted Joseph to second in command over all of Egypt and he successfully brought Egypt through those years of plenty and famine.

Meanwhile, back in Canaan, Joseph's father and brothers were running out of food, so 10 of the brothers went down to Egypt, but Benjamin did not go. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. He asked them about their family and they told him that they had an elderly father and one more brother. Joseph then accused them of being spies and put them in confinement. After three days, Joseph told them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus, your words will be verified, and you shall not die. So Simeon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest brother remained in confinement in Egypt while the rest of the brothers returned home.

When Joseph sent them on their way back home, he had one of his servants put their money back in the bags of grain. On their journey, they discovered the money in each man's sack. Then they were afraid. So, when the food ran out, Jacob sent them back to get more grain, but the brothers told him

that the man in Egypt (their brother, Joseph) had told them, “You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.”

Benjamin was Jacob’s youngest, and the only remaining son of his favorite wife, Rachel, at least that’s what Jacob thought. Judah then said, I will pledge my life for Benjamin’s safe return. So, the brothers returned to Egypt with their youngest brother, Benjamin. When Joseph saw the brothers, including Benjamin, He told his steward to bring the men up to Joseph’s house. As they sat to eat, Joseph asked them if their father was still alive. They replied, “Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.” Between learning that his father was alive, and seeing his younger brother, Joseph was so overcome with emotion that he excused himself to go out and cry. After composing himself and returning to the brothers, they all ate their meal.

Joseph then instructed his steward to again return each man’s money in their sack of grain and to put Joseph’s own silver cup in the sack of Benjamin. Shortly after the brothers left, Joseph sent his men after them to accuse them of theft. When the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack, all the brothers fell down before Joseph. Then Judah said to Joseph, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.”

Once again, Judah stood forth and explained that he was responsible for Benjamin and asked to be kept in prison instead of his brother. Then Joseph could not control himself and sent all the Egyptians out of the room, called his brothers near, and revealed himself to them.

And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. (Genesis 45:3-4)

Joseph ordered that wagons be sent to go get his father and all his father’s household and had them brought back to Egypt as shepherds. So, they were settled in the land of Goshen.

### **Exodus 1:1-5**

**These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt.**

Notice, that the list of names given here are listed (in order of birth) for sons to Jacob’s two wives (with Joseph left out) followed by the sons (in order of birth) born to the two concubines.

There arises a problem regarding the number of people who went into Egypt when this is compared to the testimony of Stephen:

And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. (Acts 7:14)

The version of Scripture that Stephen had at his disposal was the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). According to the Septuagint translation, both Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5 have the number 75, instead of 70. There are some who claim that the number 75 includes three grandsons and two great-grandsons of Joseph.

All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all. And the sons of Joseph, who were born

to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy. (Genesis 46:26-27)

And, the Septuagint Version, in Genesis 46:26, after giving the sixty-six, adds: "And the sons of Joseph born in Egypt were nine souls." The nine, added to the sixty-six, make the seventy-five that Stephen gives.

But, even when we assume that 70 is the correct number, there is a second problem. It is the problem of identifying who the seventy are, because in Genesis 46:8-25, the numbers add up to seventy, but it appears that there are only sixty-nine names listed. Who is missing? If you carefully read Genesis 46:8-25 you will actually see a list of the 70 people. Notice that verse 20 states:

And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the priest of On, bore to him.

The wife of Joseph was Asenath who, Jewish tradition identifies as the daughter of Dinah (Jacob's daughter who was raped by Shechem.) She would have been a granddaughter of Jacob, making her the 70<sup>th</sup> person of Jacob's family who went to Egypt.

### **Exodus 1:6, 7**

**Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.**

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. In that time, the children of Israel grew to about 600,000 men (plus women and children - See Exodus 12:37-38). The total number of Jews who left Egypt could easily have been between 2 and 3 million people.

### **Exodus 1:8**

**Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.**

There is great debate among Egyptologists as to which king this was. Possibly, this was Akhenaten (the predecessor of Tutankhamen), or Rameses II. Or, it may be, by virtue of the fact that the term "a new king" likely refers to a new dynasty, Ahmose, who was the first ruler of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty. Most likely, however, it was Thutmose III, a descendant of Ahmose, as we will see later.

The term "who did not know Joseph" most likely refers to the fact that the new ruler did not agree with the ruling methods of Joseph. Certainly, this king would have had access to records of all the former rulers and their Prime Ministers and would, therefore, very likely have known who Joseph was.

### **Exodus 1:9, 10**

**And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."**

The concern of the "king who did not know Joseph" was that the Jews had grown numerous and physically strong. His real worry was not that they would revolt against the Egyptians and conquer them, but that they would emancipate themselves and return to their homeland in Canaan.

## **Exodus 1:11, 12**

**Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.**

The king's plan was to work the Israelites hard so that they would become weaker and would quit multiplying so fast. He used them as slave labor to build cities. However, instead of making them weaker, the hard labor made them stronger. This reality is well known today: hard work does not weaken a person over time but it strengthens a person. As a result, instead of making weaker subjects, the king was making stronger subjects who procreated even more rapidly. Notice, however, that this is precisely what God intended. He wanted them to get stronger, since they would be required to wander through the wilderness, through greater hardships, before they could reach the Promised Land.

It is also interesting to note that one of the effects of continual hard labor on men is the production of additional testosterone. This would have made them more interested in procreation rather than less interested, as the king had hoped.

## **Exodus 1:13, 14**

**So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.**

The word translated "bitter" represents the notion of "crushing" or "breaking to pieces."

It is interesting to note that more bricks have been discovered bearing the name Thutmose III, who is thought by some to be the king of Egypt at the time of the Exodus, than any other name. This also lends credence to the notion that the "king who did not know Joseph" was of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty of which Thutmose III was fifth in succession.

## **Exodus 1:15, 16**

**Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live."**

The king's next attempt to reduce the population explosion of the Israelites was to instruct the midwives of the women to kill all the male children as they were born.

According to Adam Clarke in his Commentary on the Bible:

Jonathan ben Uzziel gives us a curious reason for the command given by Pharaoh to the Egyptian women: "Pharaoh slept, and saw in his sleep a balance, and behold the whole land of Egypt stood in one scale, and a lamb in the other; and the scale in which the lamb was outweighed that in which was the land of Egypt. Immediately he sent and called all the chief magicians, and told them his dream. And Jannes and Jambres, the two chiefs of the magicians (see [2 Timothy 3:8](#)), opened their mouths and said to Pharaoh, 'A child is shortly to be born in the congregation of the Israelites, whose hand shall destroy the whole land of Egypt.' Therefore, Pharaoh spoke to the midwives, etc."

## **Exodus 1:17-19**

**But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”**

The midwives knew that it is better to obey God than to obey Man. The reason given by the midwives may have been a lie to placate him, or it may very well have been the truth. It seems that the Israelites were indeed healthier and more robust than the Egyptians. Even today, the nomadic Arabian women have quite rapid and comparatively easy childbirth, very likely owing to the strenuous life that they live.

The expression “for they are vigorous” could be translated as “for they are midwives,” that is, they are skilled in the practice of midwifery. This would give rise to the explanation that they did not call the midwives because they were able to give birth themselves without the assistance of the midwives.

## **Exodus 1:20, 21**

**So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.**

It was not because of their explanation to the king but their fear of God that He dealt well with them. Throughout the Scriptures, it is those who have a strong faith and reverential fear of God that He chooses to bless. The blessing is not because of their deeds, but because of their submission to Him.

## **Exodus 1:22**

**Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”**

Having twice been thwarted by God, the King of Egypt now drops all pretense and commands his subjects to commit murder against the newborn Israelite boys.

## **So What?**

What was it about the midwives that brought God’s blessing on them? Was it their obedience?

**So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. (Exodus 1:20-21)**

It was not obedience, observing a list of commandments that endeared them to God. Remember, the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law had not yet been given. They feared God! Do you have to believe in something to fear it? Of course, you do!

Solomon, years later, wrote these words:

**The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)**

In the New Testament, however, the Apostle Paul spend the entire book of Galatians and most of the book of Romans teaching us that we are no longer under the Law, but under grace! He summed it up this way:



For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Now this, of course, is speaking of salvation specifically and of the good works which we will do as a natural response to the grace which has been given to us. The real question is, “What do we need to do to receive God’s blessing in this lifetime?” The answer lies in the book of Hebrews:

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. (Hebrews 11:5)

What was it about Enoch that caused God to take him directly into His presence without having to go through death’s door? **He pleased God!** So, we get down to the crux of the whole discussion. What does it take to please God? Is it obedience? Look at the next verse in Hebrews 11:

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

The writer of Hebrews tells us that it takes two things to please God. First, we must believe that He is. This is the foundation of all faith. We must first believe that God exists and that He is who He says He is. The second thing that is necessary in order to receive God’s blessing is that we must understand that he rewards those who seek Him. Notice that it does not say that he is a rewarder of those who obey Him, but of those who seek Him. “Seek” is translated from *ekdzēteō*, which is made up of *ek*, meaning “out,” but used as an intensifier, and *dzēteō*, meaning “to seek after, look for, or strive to find.” Therefore, *ekdzēteō* means “to **diligently** seek-out God and develop a relationship with Him.

What are you seeking for in your life? Is it money, happiness, “stuff,” fame, power? Or is it Him? Do you truly seek God’s presence in your life each day? It is only through this practice that we can guarantee that we are pleasing Him.

But, why should we want to please God? Possibly because His offered up His only son on the cross to make a way for us to know Him.

My final question, my friends, is this: Are you pleasing God each day of your life? Are you at least trying to please God every day of your life? This is the true source of God’s blessing on your life.

If you want God’s blessing on your life, they you need to be diligently seeking Him daily!

Let’s Pray.