



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 3—Exodus

Lesson 1: The Story of Israel's Oppression—Exodus 1

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

GOD'S STORY

Despite the miracles and blessings God brought to Egypt through Joseph, the Lord watched as new kings rose to power and forgot about Joseph, his people, and what God himself did. It took years for this to come about as Joseph had died and new rulers were put in power; but as was the case throughout much of Israel's history there were those who sought to oppose God's people and rule over them. Any sense of respect for the Jews faded with the passing of time.

Nonetheless, because of the blessings that came through His servant Joseph, the multitudes of Israelites grew. The new king did not see God as worthy to be praised, but saw God's people as a threat to his power. God wasn't at all feared in a reverent or honoring way, but acknowledged only from afar in an "I don't know you" way. The new king began to hate and fear those he did not know or understand.

As a result of that fear, God's people were oppressed and forced into slave labor. By their hands, two cities were built. Throughout this oppression, God's people multiplied. Their numbers grew so much that the Egyptians actually dreaded them. The Scriptures say their lives were made bitter with hard labor and the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

This was why Pharaoh ordered the death of all infant Hebrew baby boys to try to stop the population growth. He ordered midwives, those who attended to pregnant Hebrew women, to kill the baby born if it was a boy. Thankfully, the midwives feared God and ignored Pharaoh's orders. God blessed the midwives with families of their own, showing that even in the midst of persecution He wanted to remind His people that He hadn't forgotten them.

OUR STORY

God and His followers have throughout history been misunderstood, feared, and even hated. Pharaoh's reasoning for the oppression as recorded in the Bible was completely unfounded and irrational; yet, he went to extreme measures to maintain his own power and not be overthrown by a people who were peacefully living in Egypt. He had zero respect for the one true power in the universe.

As we follow God, we will also experience run-ins with big or small people who don't know or understand the Lord. There may be no way around how poorly they will treat you. Jesus even promised "you will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Luke 21:17). This is a hard teaching, and few can accept it. Many people are looking to be "good" in their relationship with God, when He's looking for a relationship that will require us to carry our cross. Thankfully, if we are in Christ this world is the only "hell" we will ever experience.

OTHERS' STORY

There are others in the world who feel the type of oppression that Exodus describes. This isn't a persecution that is exclusive to God's people, for all throughout history people have been on the other end of someone's clawing for power. Often their attempts involve gaining wealth by making others powerless, seizing control by giving others no voice, or try to look great by causing others to look bad.

The more we realize this, the more we can develop empathy for the struggles of everyone. The words of Jesus speak hope into not just our lives, but their lives as well when He said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30).

The truth is that even if it's under the surface, behind someone's back or online, that oppression is still a part of others' lives today. Sometimes the word "bullying" is properly used to identify these tensions, while other times it's overused to create a type of "reverse-bullying-about-bullying" to silence people who disagree with one another. We may not be under "Egyptian" oppression, but we are subversively under one another's attacks.

THE WORLD'S STORY

Like Pharaoh, the world seems to acknowledge God from afar in an "I don't know you" way. Some countries enjoy the freedom to worship the Lord, while others oppress believers at every turn. As His followers, we don't just have to roll with the punches but can stand firm even against the tide. If our country lets us legally worship the Lord without hiding in the shadows in fear of our lives, then we should work every angle with biblical shrewdness to make the most of every opportunity. In doing so we may come up against the world on occasion, but we know God wins in the end and the battle belongs to the Lord.

God's view of the world hasn't changed even amidst all of this. He loves the world enough to give everything to save it, including himself. Imagine if we as Christians did the same. Jesus said to not only love your neighbor, but to love and even pray for your enemies. The world is full of both, and we're only getting started.