

CHAPTER 1 FULFILLED MULTIPLICATION AND FORCED ERADICATION – DIVINE POWER AT WORK

Chapter Structure

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- vv. 11-14 Pharaoh's First Plot – Slave Labour
- vv. 15-22 Pharaoh's Second Plot – Genocide

Spiritual Principles:

- P1: It is foolish to work against God's plan.
- P2: The times of severe trials would always be seasons of blessings for those who love God

A. Ancient Egypt

- 1) Egypt is fertile. The Greek historian Herodotus called Egypt "the gift of the Nile". Practically anything would grow in Egypt. There are rich soil, plentiful water and perpetual sunshine. The fields produced two bountiful crops each year; fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic, (Num 11:5) wheat, barley, fruit, vegetables, apples, olives, dates, pomegranates.
- 2) Egypt is wealthy. Egypt is rich in natural resources. The land is ideal for raising cattle. In Delta area, thick-stemmed papyrus plants provide fibre for paper, baskets, matting, sandals and even the making of small boats. Wild animals such as the jackal, fox, hyena, lion, lynx, leopard are abundant. The fine mud of the river provides an inexhaustible supply of clay for making bricks and pottery; the river also provides sandstone and limestone and harder rocks such as granite for monuments and temples. Copper, gold are also plentiful.
- 3) Egypt has sophisticated Literature, fine arts, science & mathematics. Acts 7:22 "*Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*" Egypt was known as a major repository of knowledge. Their writings started long before Moses' time. They excelled in arts and music, pottery and textile (Joseph wore fine linen garments Ge 41:42). Egyptian's tombs have included sculpture, musical instruments and jewellery. Most remarkable is the nations' mathematical and engineering skill. The building of Great Pyramid at Giza was a remarkable achievement. It was the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and was the only one to remain largely intact today. Artificial mummification as early as 2800 BC was discovered in Egypt, from which it was believed that Egyptians at that time were practicing sophisticated forms of medicine, including the filling of decayed teeth and even brain surgery.
- 4) Egypt was pagan. Egypt was a polytheistic nation of the ancient world. They depicted their gods in images of animals such as bulls, cows, birds, cats, snakes and crocodiles (Ro 1:20-23) . '*...although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*' They have wise men, sorcerers and magicians who cast spells and enchantments.

Egypt was very impressive and was the superpower of the world at that time. However, 1Cor 3:19 "*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.*" Modern technology calls for respect, but without the Truth, technologies, wealth or sophistication would expedite the decay of humanity and the decline of morality of a nation. That was why the Egyptians soon forgot Joseph and his contribution, and

when “*a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.*” (1:8), they began to sin against God out of their jealousy for the Hebrew’s prosperity.

B. God’s Promise fulfilled vv.1-10

1. vv.1-7 Israel Prospered

Through a severe famine that lasted for seven years, God moved the entire household of Jacob (Israel) to Egypt and sheltered them in the land of Goshen. The Pharaoh and the Egyptians embraced them because of the great contribution of Joseph who was serving as the Prime Minister of Egypt (Ge 47:5,6). For the next 400 years the Israelites stayed in Egypt and prospered. Goshen was located at the delta area of Nile and was a fertile land for husbandry, the Israelites grew in number greatly. There were seventy of them when Jacob moved to Egypt. By the time they left Egypt, there were 603,550 fighting men, which could mean a population of 2-million people (Ex 12:37 Num 1:46). Verse 7 said they “*waxed exceedingly mighty*” (KJV) which means that they were healthy and strong. They had become a strong eastern frontier of Egypt as well as a valuable asset to the national economy of Egypt, this was why Pharaoh feared that the Israelites would eventually “*leave the country*” (v.10)

We see that God has been working on His plan during the 430 years and has blessed the Israelites as He has promised Abraham, “*17I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.*” (Ge 22:17).

2. vv.8-10 The Evil of the Egyptians

The new Pharaoh saw the threat in the Israelites. His fear was not only that the people might “*fight against us*”, but also that they might “*leave the country*”. Pharaoh wanted to keep the Israelites in the country without jeopardizing Egypt’s national security. This is a legitimate concern as the king of Egypt. However, Pharaoh was not interested in keeping the Israelites as Egypt’s citizen but as her free labour force. Pharaoh’s godlessness led him to think godless thoughts and use godless means. As our Lord Jesus said, “*A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart.*” (Luke 6:45) So let us guard the godliness in our heart.

C. Pharaoh’s First Plot – Slave Labour vv.11-14

Slavery was the major labour force of the ancient world. In war, people of the defeated city would be taken captive to the defeating city as slaves. However, in the case of Egypt, the Pharaoh’s took away the free lives of a law-abiding people who has been living in Egypt for 400 years with great contribution to the nation, and made them slaves overnight and oppressed them with intensive labour ‘*...in all their hard labour the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.*’ (v.14b). They built two store cities at the north-eastern frontier of Egypt. Store cities were strongholds where weaponries of war could be laid up for use in case of an invasion. Phithom and Rameses had been unearthed by biblical archaeologists in 1883AD and they are the historical evidence of the sin of Egypt as well as the external evidence of the inerrancy of the Bible.

However, as long as God’s Providential Hand overarches the Israelites, the evil plot of Pharaoh would not succeed. When The king of Egypt said, ‘*let them not become more numerous*’ (v.10 paraphrased) The King of heavens and earth said, “*the more they multiplied*” (v.12)

If only Pharaoh could stop and reflect at this point, he would have realized that he was not battling against man but the God of Israel.

P1: It is foolish to work against God’s plan

God has revealed what He's doing in the bible. He has also sent His Spirit to dwell in each of us that we might have an ever-present Divine Guide on God's thought in all matters at all time. Let us be careful to ensure that what we do does not hinder God's plan.

D. Pharaoh's Second Plot – Genocide vv.15-22

The unrepentant Pharaoh moved on with a second plan – the genocide of the Hebrew babies.

Most people who read this chapter would respect and love Shiphrah and Puah, the two Hebrew midwives who demonstrated outstanding courage and wisdom in this extraordinary trial. Pharaoh's evil plan did not succeed because these two midwives refused to comply with the evil decree of the Pharaoh (v.17). They risked their own lives to let the boys live, by telling Pharaoh that the Hebrew women gave birth before they arrived. They would not shed the blood of the innocent because they feared God. True fear of the LORD produces the conviction that it is only right to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29) and also produces the courage to do so.

Were the midwives giving false testimony to the Pharaoh? If they had done what Pharaoh asked them to do, they would have sinned against God. We should do all things according to the truth, and the truth will set us free from guilt, from fear and from the punishment of God. If speaking according to the fact brings about evil, then let us rather not speak, just like the two midwives in this passage, Rahab of Jericho in the chapter 2 of Joshua, or the apostles who said to the Jewish officials, elders and scribes when prohibited to preach Jesus, *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge”* (Acts 4:19)

God did not condemn the midwives, instead *“God was kind to the midwives”* (v. 20). Firstly, God protected them from being pursued by Pharaoh. Then *“He gave them families of their own”* (v. 21) and allowed their names to be recorded and be known to all all (v.15).

P2: The times of severe trials would always be seasons of blessings for those who love God

For people who do not have God, there is no guarantee that they will pull through the severe trials of life. But God's people have the blessed assurance that He will bring us out of the valley of shadow of death, if we could trust and obey Him, and God will reward our faith, as He did the midwives.

“So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Heb 13:6)

E. The Spiritual Reality

1. Pharaoh's Genocide plan was not the only anti-Semitism cruelty in History. There were two other expressions of Anti-Semitism in the Bible. One was recorded in the book of Esther when the evil Haman convinced King Xerxes to issue a decree to exterminate the Hebrew people in the Persian empire in the 5th century BC. Another was Herod's order to kill all boys two-year-old and below in the area of Bethlehem in order to eliminate the threat of the One born to be King of the Jews, who was Jesus (Mat 2:16). Not to forget the killing of six million Jews under the Nazis “The final solution to the Jewish problem” in World War II in recent history. The Jews underwent one genocide after another, yet they live. Today there are about 14 million Jews worldwide according to a census taken in 2019. God remembers His covenant with Abraham and has faithfully preserved Israel this far.

Why was the Jew hated and persecuted fiercely? Needless to say, each genocide has its political and religious reasons. However, when placed under the spiritual microscope, it could be seen clearly that the wrestle was not against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world and against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12) Besides being punished by God for their apostasy, the Jew is being attacked by Satan for being God's

elect. The spiritual warfare started in Eden, when God pronounced the judgement on the serpent: “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*” (Ge 3:15) The seed of the woman, who is the Saviour that will crush the power of Satan will come through the chosen people of God.

Dear saints, let us not view faith as a luxury in life or as merely the comfort for weary souls. Spiritual warfare is the reality of life and every man is born in it. Arrogant rulers and corrupted powers such as Pharaoh, Haman, King Herod, Hitler...etc have become a weapon of Satan. Let us be serious and diligent in spiritual matters, such as spiritual exercise, participation in the work of the Gospel and understanding the spiritual reality behind events in the world. Spiritual complacency will lead to the loss of spiritual awareness and numbing our sensitivity to sin.

2. Seeing that the midwives “could not” execute his command, Pharaoh gave a decree to drown all Hebrew baby boys. The midwives’ refusal seem to bring about greater oppression! How do we interpret that?

The grumbings of the Israelites in the wilderness was a giveaway to their contention in Egypt. God foreknew this. Without the cruel oppression of the Egyptians, the Israelites would not want to leave the comfort of Egypt for the Promised Land. God allowed Pharaoh to harden his heart towards the Israelites to an extent that they could not wait to leave Egypt. In here we see that God was not passively reacting in the events of history. He is in full control over our history as He proactively unfolds the salvation plan for mankind.

In Genesis 12:2,3 God blessed Abraham:

*“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.^[a]
³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”*

God has allowed His people to live among the Egyptians for four centuries, certainly He intended for Egypt to be blessed through their blessing for the Israelites, as how Potiphar, the prison warden and the Pharaoh of Joseph time had blessed Joseph and were blessed. It is a pity that the new Pharaoh who knew nothing about Joseph knew therefore nothing about Joseph’s God, and Pharaoh’s spiritually blindness led the Egyptians under his care to cast away God’s blessing and brought upon themselves curses instead.

Dear brothers and sisters, God also places godly men and women around you to bless you with godliness. Be careful not to let your ungodliness cast away this blessing, as did the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph.

F. Closing

The Israelites reckoned that the once friendly environment has turned into an extremely hostile environment. Things in this transient world will change. The only one unchanging is God and His eternal purpose. Therefore regardless of the circumstance, whether in success or in failure, in wealth or in poverty, in health or in sickness, let us follow Christ closely till we complete our pilgrimage in this world.

God’s divine power was at work in bringing about the promise He gave to Abraham. He has blessed them by providing them with a fertile land in Egypt. He has made them numerous. He is now preparing them for a greater blessing – living in the Promised Land.

