

Who has the Power?

Message 2

1.12.20

Exodus Series

Introduction:

A. Today's passage is both deep and difficult.

1. This will probably not be one of those messages where I get really excited.
2. You may not walk out of here ready to conquer the world.
3. In fact, I hope you leave today with a greater awareness of the battle that is taking place in the spiritual realm.
4. And, I hope you leave with a greater understanding of the spiritual roots behind some of our day's greatest struggles.

B. Before we read this passage, remember that the first chapters of Exodus are about the battle between the true God, YHWH, and the false gods of Egypt.

1. God's people are caught in the crossfire of this battle between the true God and the anti-god.
2. It is through God's people, that God will demonstrate His supremacy and power.

Exodus 1:15–22 (ESV)

¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ "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." ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?" ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 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."

Exodus 2:1-10 (CSB)

2 Now a man from the family of Levi married a Levite woman. ² The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son; when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could no longer hide him, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with asphalt and pitch. She placed the child in it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. ⁴ Then his sister stood at a distance in order to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe at the Nile while her servant girls walked along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds, sent her slave girl, took it, ⁶ opened it, and saw him, the child—and there he was, a little boy, crying. She felt sorry for him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew boys."

⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Should I go and call a Hebrew woman who is nursing to nurse the boy for you?"

⁸ "Go," Pharaoh's daughter told her. So the girl went and called the boy's mother. ⁹ Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman took the boy and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

1. A paradox of Christian faith is that blessing and opposition go together.

A. Wherever there is great blessing, there is also opposition.

1. That is because Satan doesn't want to see the promises of God to prevail.

a. Satan was not happy to see Adam and Eve blessed, happy, and fulfilled In the Garden,

b. So he did what he could to disrupt that.

2. In the Noah story, it wasn't long after Noah and the family were off the Ark that Noah was found naked and drunk in his tent which brought shame to the family.

3. It is no wonder that, as God is greatly blessing Israel in Gen. 50 and Exodus 1, that Satan is not happy with the blessings of God.

4. So Satan convinces Pharaoh to treat God's people ruthlessly.

B. At first, the opposition was oppressive labor.

1. Yet, the enemy can never oppress the Word of God to the point that it becomes powerless.

2. Under this great oppression, the people of God remained blessed and productive.

3. It is at this point, that Pharaoh conjures a terrible plan to stop God's blessings from the people.

C. Pharaoh decrees that every male baby and child is to be killed.

1. As we will see in just a moment, this is a desperate plan to stop the blessings of God.

2. Yet **God's plans cannot be defeated, only challenged.**

Allow me to dig into some details for a minute and then show you how this applies to us.

2. Pharaoh gives two midwives an incredibly difficult task.

A. Pharaoh, frustrated by the multiplication of the Hebrews, orders two midwives to stop the blessing.

Exodus 1:15–22 (ESV)

¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ “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.” ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” ¹⁹ 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.” ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 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.”

1. The Egyptians were incredibly advanced.

a. The roots of modern medicine, technology, mathematics, and astronomy started in Egypt.

b. We are still struggling to understand exactly how the Egyptians did what they did.

2. It has been discovered that the Egyptians could, within reason, discern the sex of a baby while in utero.

a. They also had the technology to abort babies as well.

b. This is what Pharaoh was asking the midwives to do.

B. Two details help us know that Pharaoh is ordering abortions.

1. First is the phrase “birthstool”.

a. Although some study bibles or commentaries will try to describe some sort of gynecological device, that misses what the original audience would have known.

b. **The phrase is actually “potter’s wheel” not birthstool.**

c. The original audience would have all been familiar with Egyptian mythology and religion.

d. Here is what we have discovered about this phrase: (I'm going to get nerdy for a minute).

Morschauser proposes:

The “potter’s wheel” is regularly linked to pregnancy in ancient Egyptian religious literature and art. The implement (Eg. neḥep/neḥeb) was associated with the creator-god, Khnum, a ram-headed deity who was depicted as an artisan. In mythopoetic texts, Khnum would mold and shape each human being at conception “upon his wheel,” with the potential child being granted the physical and psychological traits that would define it as an individual—obviously including characteristics of gender. During this time of fashioning, the developing infant was said to be “upon the potter’s wheel” (ḥer neḥep), from which it would hopefully be delivered male and healthy. What is significant, is that the metaphor refers to a gestating fetus prior to parturition. We suggest that the Hebrew is an adaptation of the idiom ḥer neḥep and refers to a child still forming in the womb that has not yet come to full term... When you look/determine 'upon the potter's wheel' [i.e., when you undertake a prenatal examination], if it is a son, then terminate him; if it is a daughter, she shall live." Such a procedure would have been within the scope of ancient Egyptian knowledge and practice. Medical texts contain prognostic recipes for determining the sex of an unborn child, as well as prescriptions for ending a pregnancy through draughts and potions. (2003, 732-733)¹

e. The phrasing and everything used here makes it evident that Pharaoh is asking the midwives to determine the sex of the baby and, if male, abort him.

2. The second piece of evidence is found in what happens after the midwives fail to do their job.

a. Pharaoh then orders all of the people of Egypt to throw every Hebrew boy in the Nile.

b. When abortion doesn't work, Pharaoh orders infanticide to stop the blessing and multiplication of God's people.

¹ The episode quoted throughout from Heiser sheds great insight on Morschauser's article. The author of this paper originally came across the article of Morschauser due to the reference by Heiser.

c. How would Egyptians know if a baby was Hebrew?
(Covenant sign of circumcision).

C. What we have here is a mass conspiracy to stop the blessing of God by killing the blessings of God.

1. Remember, life can only come from God.
2. No one else has the power to create life, except God.
 - a. Satan is jealous of this.
 - b. All he can do is steal it, kill it, or destroy it.

3. I believe there is a deceiving and evil Spirit at work that continues Satan's desire to undo God's blessings.

A. The Spirit behind abortion in America is the same Spirit that led Pharaoh to abort the Hebrew males and King Herod to kill the male babies and toddlers in Bethlehem.

Each occurrence has these things in common:

1. Both occurrences of infanticide coincided with God blessing His people:
 - a. Israel was flourishing in Egypt, so let's kill babies.
 - b. God had just given the Son of God to the world, the greatest gift, and King Herod said, "Let's make sure this blessing doesn't pose a threat."
 - c. I can't see all that God has planned since Roe v. Wade was instituted, but I am sure there is more at stake than a woman's right to choose.
 1. It is more than expedience.
 2. It is more than careers or financial problems.
 3. Behind abortion in America is the same spiritual forces that were in Exodus 1.
2. Both occurrences of infanticide questioned "who is really in charge?"

- a. Pharaoh saw himself as God and, thus, had the right to declare all Hebrew male babies dead.
- b. King Herod was called "King of the Jews" and believed he had the authority and power to kill out all of the generations in Bethlehem.
- c. The Spirit behind abortion in America is saying, "You have the right to kill your baby because there is no other god but you".

B. No other Spirit, except the Holy Spirit, can create life.

1. Even the ability to make life, to have babies, is strictly ordained by God.
2. This is evident in God's declaration, "And He created them male and female".
3. This is why, when some of the great women of Scripture like Sarai, Rebekah, and Hannah, struggled having children they called out to God.
4. *Could it be that our struggles with identity, gender, and sexuality are also connected to this lying and deceiving Spirit who is trying to stop the blessings and the Word of God?*

C. The Enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy, But Jesus came to give life more abundantly.

1. If Pharaoh had been successful, then there would have been the loss of a whole generation.
2. There would have been no sons to pass the Promise on to.
3. No sons to take part in being fruitful and multiplying.
4. If Pharaoh, and this anti-god Spirit, are successful then he wins and God loses.

D. We know that Pharaoh wasn't successful.

1. At some point, the order is rescinded because, 40 years later, this Pharaoh was dead and there were still men of Israel in the land.

2. Men like Joshua, Gideon, and Moses.

3. Men who would do exactly what Pharaoh had feared, the Exodus of Israel from Egypt.

E. Maybe you, or someone you know and love, has had an abortion.²

1. It is estimated that 1 in 3 women in America will have an abortion in her lifetime.³

a. Many of these women identify as Protestant and Catholic.

b. When you Google “How to minister to women who have had abortions” the answers range from ridicule to acceptance.

2. Thursday afternoon, in the quiet of my office, I began to read Christians tell their story about their abortions. (My notes online include links to articles and papers).

a. One woman, speaking as a Christian, wrote:

I felt no doubt that I was being more faithful in my walk with God by ending the pregnancy than I would have been if I had gone through with the pregnancy. Having a baby at that point would have meant turning away from my call to ministry. I was not ready to be a mother, and so it never even occurred to me to keep the pregnancy and give the child up for adoption. I was not ready to carry a child, and I didn't want to bring a child into the world without being able to give it a home.⁴

² Check out the book “Surrendering the Secret” by Pat Layton.

³ <https://auburnseminary.org/voices/breaking-silence-on-abortion-and-faith/>

⁴ <https://www.redbookmag.com/body/pregnancy-fertility/a48398/christian-women-speak-out-on-why-they-had-abortions/>

b. I'm heartbroken for women who have abortions, and are ok with it.

c. I'm heartbroken that mentors and religious leaders taught that abortion is an acceptable way out.

d. I'm heartbroken that so many of my sisters in Jesus have had abortions, many sitting in our churches wondering if God will ever forgive.

3. Please know that an abortion is a sin, but not an unforgiveable one.

a. God amazes me how He loves, cherishes, and forgives those who had abortions.

b. I'm amazed by God and ticked at the devil.

1. I'm ticked because of sin.

2. I'm ticked because he has sold sin so completely.

3. I'm ticked because he stops at nothing to destroy life.

4. I'm ticked that he leads people into situations, shows them no way out, and then encourages them to sin in life changing ways.

4. If you have had an abortion, I want to tell you that Jesus loves you and forgives you.

a. There's nothing I want to do more for you right now than to give you a huge hug and tell you Jesus loves you.

b. Know that your darkest and most painful secret is redeemable.

c. You are still loveable.

d. You are still of worth and value.

e. Your abortion does not have to define you.

f. The beautiful thing about Jesus is He redeems the impossible.

4. It is not by accident that Pharaoh's evil plan is immediately followed by the rescuing of the baby Moses.

A. And it is also not by accident that the 5 heroes who overcame the plans of Pharaoh are women.

1. Shiphrah and Puah refuse to be obedient and are blessed.
2. The mother of Moses boldly hides Moses then, by faith, places him in a little ark praying he will find mercy and not death.
3. Pharaoh's daughter feels compassion for the Hebrew baby and rescues him (how did she know he was Hebrew, because all Hebrew boys are circumcised on the 8th day).
4. Then Miriam, Moses' older sister, acts boldly and confidently to make sure that Moses' mother nurses and cares for her baby.
5. God uses 5 women, a class of people without rank or respect, to thwart the plans of Pharaoh and Satan.
 - a. This is how God works.
 - b. God uses the most unlikely of heroes.
 - c. God causes the least to be the conduits of God's power and blessings to the many.

B. It is also no accident that it was in the Nile that Pharaoh's daughter found Moses.

1. The Nile was the source of life in an otherwise desert place.
2. Where the Nile flowed, so did life.
 - a. Pharaoh was insulting YHWH God by throwing God's people into the Nile.
 - b. For the Nile was in itself a god.
3. Yet, from the Nile the future deliverer of Israel is rescued and redeemed.

a. That very tool with which the enemy intended to use to destroy God's blessings became what God used to further His plans and purposes.

b. Again, God can use anything and anyone to do His will.

5. What do we do with a passage and message like this?

A. First, realize that spiritual battles manifest themselves into physical challenges.

1. Where do you think the seeds of abortion, mass murders, genocide, gender confusion, and other modern-day issues originate from?

2. They all have their roots in the anti-Christ and anti-God spirit.

a. 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chron. 18, we are given a glimpse into this world I'm talking about.

b. It says that a "lying spirit" went out to deceive the prophets and to confuse the plans of King Ahab.

c. The Apostle Paul says we wrestle or fight against principalities, powers, and rulers of darkness in the spiritual realm.

d. God's people must wake up to the spiritual reality happening around us.

3. Spiritual battles require spiritual weapons and spiritual power.

4. **In just a few moments, I'm going to ask all who are willing to join me in praying for the defeat of God's enemies in our day!**

B. Second, notice the power of faith when placed in the right place.

1. Moses' mother was in an impossible situation:

a. Kill her baby like the government ordered her to do.

b. Or, place her hope in God's guidance and providence.

c. More than likely, Moses' mother was not the only mother to try to desperately save her baby.

d. But, in this instance, God does the miraculous and intervenes.

2. Some of you are in desperate situations.

a. Instead of things getting easier, things are getting harder.

b. Let me, again, encourage you: God has a way of multiplying blessing in the most troubling of times.

c. The presence of difficulty does not mean you are outside of the will of God. Sometimes, the presence of difficulty means that the enemy is trying to prevent God's blessings from reaching you.

C. What we need are men and women of God who won't give up on the promise.

1. When times are hard, we pray harder and worship more.

2. When times are hard, we refuse to identify people groups as the true enemy but pray for discernment to see the spiritual war taking place.

3. We need a church who will take serious the message of redemption and deliverance.

4. We need Saints who declare encourage others, saying, "Exodus is coming."

5. Jesus is coming.

The Battle to Reverse the Blessing:
Pharaoh and the Anti-Creation of Exodus 1

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Introduction

Exodus 1 continues the Genesis narrative as expressed by the brief genealogy of Exo. 1:1-7. John Durham (1987, 2-3) states, “This opening passage of Exodus functions as a compact transitional unit that summarizes that part of the preceding Genesis narrative that is essential to what follows, states a new and discontinuous situation, and anticipates the progress of the family of Jacob/Israel toward their birth, in exodus and at Sinai, as the people of God”. Further, the first six words of Exodus are the same exact words found in Genesis 46:8 (Durham 1987, 3). Clearly, the writer/editor of Exodus wanted the reader to see the continuation of God’s promised blessing and growth in Genesis carried over into the Exodus narrative. This same observation is expressed by Douglas Stuart (2006, 57) who writes, “An even more basic reason for beginning the book with a list of names, however, was the desire to ensure that the reader understood Exodus as a direct continuation of Genesis...”.

The prodigious blessing sets the stage for the persecution and oppression that Pharaoh placed on the Hebrews. A battle rages for twelve chapters of Exodus between the God of the Hebrews and Pharaoh, god of Egypt. A battle to reverse the blessings of Genesis forms the backdrop of the opening chapters of Exodus.

This paper hopes to examine the battle Pharaoh waged to reverse the Blessing through analysis of Exodus 1:8-22. After exegeting the passage, this author intends to demonstrate how this battle reveals itself in today’s Western Culture by taking a pastoral approach to applying the content.

Part 1: Exegesis and Background of Exodus 1:8-22

The forgotten Joseph and unknown Pharaoh.

The mention of Joseph in verse 8 signals both continuity and transition. Continuity, in that, the final chapters of Genesis are still in view. Transition because the focus changes from Joseph's generations to a time much further in the future. To quote Douglas Stuart (2006, 56-57), "Thus there is a conscious concern here to be sure the reader understands that Exodus is not strictly a self-contained narrative but a segment of a narrative on a grander scale, that is, the full Pentateuch. In other words, the story continues smoothly from Genesis into Exodus".

Regarding the gap of time between Joseph's death and the beginning of the Exodus narrative, "There is no attempt to explain the amount of time that elapsed from Joseph's death (Gen. 50:25-26) until the opening of the book of Exodus, from the "good old days" under Joseph to the oppression that begins in Exodus 1" (Hoffmeier 1996, 107). This "gap" frustrates the exegete's demand for exact setting and times, yet does not make accurate exegesis impossible.

Another exegetical issue arises when trying to identify the Pharaoh(s) in the Exodus story. Michael Heiser (2019) in his podcast on Exodus 1 comes to the conclusion that, first, it is impossible to determine the specific Pharaohs referenced in Exodus and, two, that dual Pharaohs are in view based upon the textual evidence that the Pharaoh of Exodus 1 dies in Exodus 2:23.

What plausible reason warrants the author of Exodus to neglect such an important historical detail? James Hoffmeier (1996, 109-111) puts forth the following possibilities:

The absence of the pharaoh's name may ultimately be for theological reasons, because the Bible is not trying to answer the question "who is the pharaoh of the exodus" to satisfy the curiosity of modern historians; rather, it was seeking to clarify for Israel who was the God of the exodus...

Another factor that might account for the absence of Pharaoh's name in the exodus narratives is that it was normal in New Kingdom inscriptions not to disclose the name of Pharaoh's enemies...the New Kingdom Egyptian practice of omitting a king's name is followed in Exodus...

The omission of Pharaoh's name in the exodus story, I suggest, was deliberate. For the Hebrew writer, there was good theological reasons for this silence: the reader learns of the name of God Yahweh and his power as the Exodus story unfolds, whereas his arch-rival, Pharaoh, remains anonymous—a nice piece of irony.

Attempts have been made to identify the specific Pharaohs yet consensus has eluded scholars. It is dangerous exegesis to create specifics where the Scripture provides generalities. Therefore, the answer to the timing and the specific dynastic reign will more than likely continue to elude modern-scholars.

The Egyptian problem.

Exodus 1 confronts the expositor with a paradox, namely, that the persecution of the Hebrews is directly tied to the fulfillment of God's Word and promise to the Patriarchs. Schnittjer refers to this as the "Egyptian problem" (2006, 207-209). "This Egyptian problem was really caused by the creational and covenant blessings of Israel... The fruitfulness of Israel became the target of the Egyptian oppression. The Egyptians attacked the life God gave his people and in doing so they were defying the Creator" (Schnittjer 2006, 198).

Authors such as Schnittjer and Heiser propose that the ensuing oppression had roots deeper than mere pragmatism. These authors frame the oppression in terms of Creation/anti-Creation that creates an interesting backdrop to the Exodus story.

Douglas Stuart (2006, 61) picks upon the theme of Creation in Exodus 1:7:

Most of the vocabulary of this verse hearkens to the Genesis creation story, showing that Israel was in itself a fulfillment of the creation commands ("Be fruitful ... increase [multiply] ... fill," Gen 1:22, 28). This language continues at many points in Genesis (e.g., 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4) as the creation theme unfolds in the narrative. The common but incorrect notion that the creation story is to be found only in the first chapters of Genesis misses the fact that the biblical picture of creation is one of ongoing creation, starting with Adam and Eve, continuing with human society in general, continuing further with Noah and the patriarchs, then with the nation Israel and many of its institutions (even Jerusalem; cf. Exod 15:17; Isa 65:18), and culminating in the new creation (Isa 65:17) in which all who truly place faith in Christ are recreated (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10). In support of this theme of ongoing creation relative to Israel in Egypt, Moses

packed into the verse about every possible way of saying that the Israelites rapidly increased in number. The Hebrew literally reads, “As for the Israelites, they grew, they were fruitful, they swarmed, they increased, they got powerful more and more, and the land was filled with them.”

Heiser (2019, 8) draws attention to the anti-Creation theme by seeing a connection between Exodus 1 and the chaos of Babel found in Genesis 11. While his argument is based upon the similarities of particular Hebrew lemmas that are, to be honest, beyond my comprehension, Heiser makes the following summation: “The writer is casting Egypt as the new Babel—the new reference point of chaos, of opposition to God’s will. Remember chaos is opposition. It’s a metaphor. It’s a symbol in ancient Near Eastern thought. But ironically, the harder the new Babel (Egypt) tries to oppress Yahweh’s portion, Israel, the larger it grows”.

If Heiser’s exegesis is correct, then the writer of Exodus wanted the audience to see the battle between God/Creation and Pharaoh/anti-Creation. Regardless of Heiser’s exegesis, this theme can be found throughout God’s dealings with Egypt as evidenced in Pharaoh’s denial of God (Exo 3:18-19, 5:1-2) in the Ten Plagues, and in the edict to kill the male babies (discussed below).

The Exodus story presents a powerful demonstration of God exercising His rightful authority and power not only over Israel but all of Egypt and her gods. If Moses is the author/curator of many parts of the Pentateuch, and if they were assembled during the Wilderness journey, then the theme of Yahweh’s power over life and death, along with the teachings of monotheism, would provide a powerful foundation for the new Israelite theology and identity.

Oppressive labor as the first Egyptian solution.

The solution Pharaoh proposed first involved oppressive, slave labor. Many readers of Exodus have wondered if the Israelites built the pyramids. The answer to this is no. The text of Exodus is clear the Israelites built the “store cities” and the walls and buildings connected with the storing of material (Hoffmeier 1996. 116-117). It should also be noted that the Israelites were not the only people oppressed by the Kingdom of Egypt. For example:

Captive foreign labor was exploited by the pharaohs of the Empire or New Kingdom period in particular, not least under Ramesses II. Already around 1460 B.C. under Thutmose III, we have the famous scene of foreigners (Semites, Libyans) slaving away at brick making for the temple of Amun in Thebes. A later leather roll, housed in the Louvre, itemizes forty young stablemasters who had to act as taskmasters for a target of two thousand bricks in a day. Absence of straw for brick making (cf. Ex 5:7, 18) is cause for concern in a contemporary papyrus, as is also the production of set quotas of bricks (Ex 5:8, 13–14, 18). Moreover, much like the Hebrews (Ex 5:14), in the papyri others were beaten up by taskmasters. They were not alone in these labors; we read also of “Apiru-folk who drag stone for the great pylon-gateway” of Ramesses II at Memphis. While in Nubia, that king’s viceroy Setau was royally commissioned to raid the southern oases and to seize Libyans to build a temple there (at Wadi es-Sebua). The work records from the Valley of the Kings at Thebes and its satellite village (Deir el-Medina) show that workmen sometimes gained numerous days off for all manner of reasons, including going “to worship their god.” Thus it is little wonder that up north (and with foreign slaves asking leave) the pharaoh reacted angrily (Ex 5:1–5) to yet another request (by Moses) for simply “time off” (as he saw it), without of course any inkling of the consequences that were to follow in that case. (Kitchen 2003, 211)

Peter Enns (2000, 43) in his commentary on this passage picks up on the Creation/anti-Creation motif:

The very oppression of the Egyptians in wanting to reduce the number of Israelites is antithetical to the created order. *This* is the sin of Egyptian slavery, which anticipates a point to be elaborated in subsequent chapters: Since the increase of the Israelites in Egypt is a fulfillment of the creation command, it is fitting to speak of the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt in creation language and to punish the Egyptians by means of a series of creation reversals (the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea).

Freitheim (1991, 30) picks up on a theme that extends beyond hard labor and creation to the question of whom will Israel serve? Again, the tension between God and Pharaoh comes to attention. Pharaoh does not want Israel to serve God, so he oppresses them into service for his

projects. However, “The exodus does not constitute a declaration of independence, but a declaration of dependence upon God” (Freitheim 1991, 30-31). The forced labor was merely an oppressive reminder of Pharaoh’s desire for Israel to serve him and not their God.

The midwives and the birthing stool/potter’s wheel

Exodus 1:16 and the “birthing stool” has received numerous interpretations but most interpretations seem to be lacking. The traditional interpretation is that the Hebrew midwives were to kill the male babies during the birthing process (Schnittjer 2006, 209). Some commentaries from the 19th and 20th centuries such as those from Lange and Keil interpreted the “birthing stool” as “birthing tub” and interpreted these phrases as a euphemism for the vagina (Lange 1874, v2, p2). Although the terminology varies slightly among interpreters, the results remain congruent that what is in view in Exo. 1:16 is a gynecological/obstetrical device used by the Egyptians to help facilitate birth. When the midwives failed to murder the boys at birth, Pharaoh acts in extremis and orders the people of Egypt to commit infanticide of all male Hebrew babies.

However, according to Heiser (2019, 18-21) this argument does not do justice to the authority and power of Pharaoh over the midwives. Why would Pharaoh accept an excuse for failure to kill the male babies? If the order to kill the male Hebrew children was to kill them during the birthing process, why would Pharaoh accept disobedience or failure on the part of the midwives? The response of Terrence Freitheim (1991, 34-35) is reflective of the traditional interpretation of these events, saying that these two “lowly” women “silence” the wisdom of Pharaoh. However, Freitheim (1991, 34) recognizes the irony that “no king worth his scepter would have considered this response satisfactory, let alone from midwives”.

John Durham (1987, 11-12) challenges the “birthstool” interpretation of the original

Hebrew word:

The key word of the Pharaoh’s instruction to the midwives, apart from his order of genocide, is אבנים, literally, “stones”. This word occurs in the OT only here and in Jer. 18:3, where it refers to stones, apparently a pair of them, employed by a potter at his craft. Despite many ingenious interpretations, the most frequent of which is “birthstool” (see especially the elaborate theory of Cassuto, 14, and the dialogue of Brongers and van der Woude, *NedTTs* 20 [1965–66] 247–49, 252–54); the best translation remains “stones,” as a euphemism for “testicles.” The root of the noun is certainly “stone,” and its form is clearly dual, thus signifying a pair. Given the point of Pharaoh’s instruction, the determination of the sex of the infant at the moment of birth, the term is best understood as a euphemism, in use to this day, for the male genitalia (cf. Cohen, *AJSL* 40 [1924] 157–59; and Tsevat, *HUCA* 24 [1952–53] 109–10, who proposes, in part on the basis of the text of Isa 65:3 in 1QIs^a, “the female sex organs”).

Yet, Durham’s response does not reconcile the problem of why Pharaoh permits this excuse from the midwives. Could it be possible that the Hebrew word interpreted “birthing stool” is actually better interpreted as something else? Scholars Morschauer and Heiser propose a different interpretation that, if true, sheds an enormous amount of light on the situation.

Scott Morschauer (2003, 732-733) presents a fascinating study of the etymology of the word interpreted as “birthing stool”, based on the use of the same Hebrew word interpreted as “birthing stool” in Exodus 1:16 being interpreted as “Potter’s wheel” in Jeremiah 8:16. If the word should be interpreted as “Potter’s wheel” then this could be evidence of an allusion to an “Egyptianism” (Morschauer 2003, 732). Morschauer proposes:

The “potter’s wheel” is regularly linked to pregnancy in ancient Egyptian religious literature and art. The implement (Eg. *neḥep/neḥeb*) was associated with the creator-god, Khnum, a ram-headed deity who was depicted as an artisan. In mythopoetic texts, Khnum would mold and shape each human being at conception “upon his wheel,” with the potential child being granted the physical and psychological traits that would define it as an individual—obviously including characteristics of gender. During this time of fashioning, the developing infant was said to be “upon the potter’s wheel” (*her neḥep*), from which it would hopefully be delivered male and healthy. What is significant, is that the metaphor refers to a gestating fetus prior to parturition. We suggest that the Hebrew is an adaptation of the idiom *her neḥep* and refers to a child still forming in the womb that has not yet come to full term... When you look/determine 'upon the potter's wheel' [i.e.,

when you undertake a prenatal examination], if it is a son, then terminate him; if it is a daughter, she shall live." Such a procedure would have been within the scope of ancient Egyptian knowledge and practice. Medical texts contain prognostic recipes for determining the sex of an unborn child, as well as prescriptions for ending a pregnancy through draughts and potions. (2003, 732-733)⁵

Heiser (2019) finds Morschauser's findings instructive for the interpretation of this difficult passage. The author of this paper proposes that, assuming Morschauser and Heiser are correct, that interpreting this episode as an example of Pharaoh asking the midwives to practice selective abortion another extension of the God/anti-God motif that is evident in the showdown between the God of Israel and the god of Egypt. Also, it adds further drama to the Creation/anti-Creation motif. God is the originator and purveyor of life and death, but Pharaoh attempts to exercise power over life. If he could not oppress the blessing of God through oppressive labor, then he would attempt abortion. When that fails, he proceeds to national infanticide as he enlists all of Egypt to cast male children into the Nile.

Peter Enns (2000, 44) illustrates the irony of the order to kill babies in the Nile. "The final solution is the murder of all male infants (v. 22) by throwing them into the Nile. Thus, what for the Egyptians is a life-giving force is intended as an instrument of death for the Israelites. The significance of this act, both for Egypt's future destruction and Israel's deliverance, cannot be overstated. Water will play a central role in bringing this struggle to a close". Pharaoh's plans, unlike God's, are constantly thwarted. The blessing God pronounced upon Abraham and his seed (Gen. 12) cannot be undone even by the greatest powers in Egypt.

Part 2: Discussion and Application

⁵ The episode quoted throughout from Heiser sheds great insight on Morschauser's article. The author of this paper originally came across the article of Morschauser due to the reference by Heiser.

Exodus was a formative book in the identity of Israel. Within Exodus, we see the process with which God formed a monotheistic people from a polytheistic society. It was in Egypt that God demonstrated His divine power over the gods of Egypt and His special care to the people He had chosen to be His conduit of blessing to the world. Yet, this forming of Israel into God's chosen people did not come without a struggle and that struggle rises to the forefront early in Exodus.

Exodus 1:8-22 summarizes a flurry of activity in a few short paragraphs. Yet, these short paragraphs are full of historical importance and practical value. Although today's Western culture is far removed from the specific cultural practices of Egypt, the battle being waged among God and the gods of the land are still taking place. This section of the paper desires to illustrate how the tactics and attacks utilized by Pharaoh upon Israel are still being used in our modern culture today through the work of Satan, while avoiding the hermeneutical dangers of allegorizing the Exodus text. The tone of this section will be pastoral, reflecting the author's primary audience and context.

The Pursuit to Erase God

A loud debate rages regarding if America was ever a truly Christian nation, a debate that I refuse to engage although a cursory examination of the writings and the monuments of the Founding Fathers demonstrates a Judeo-Christian worldview. What is evident is the rise in Americans who no longer claim a religious affiliation and a rise in the numbers who claim to be Atheist and agnostic. According to a recent survey, 23.1 percent of the American population claim to be a "religious none" or someone who claims no religious affiliation (Jenkins, 2019). Just as a Pharaoh and government came to power that did not remember the deeds of Joseph, could it be possible that a generation will arise in America that no longer knows about Jesus?

Judges 2:10 tells of a generation of Israelites who grew up far removed from the testimonies and experiences that the previous generation experienced with God. After the passing of Joshua and his generation, another generation grew up who “knew not the Lord”. Somehow, the previous generation’s experience and knowledge was not passed down. As a pastor, I can attest there are people in America who have no idea who Jesus is. Biblical illiteracy is prevalent. Many youth and adults do not realize how lost they are and how much they need Jesus in their life. The rise in the “religious nones” show that many people do not believe they need God. Again, it seems, that history repeats itself. Just as Pharaoh saw no need to remember the work of God in the previous generations, many today do not see their need for God either.

Oppression as a tool of the enemy.

Pharaoh attempted to God’s blessing of Israel because the fulfillment of God’s promises was a direct threat to Pharaoh’s rule. The more God blessed the sons of Israel, the more they grew. The larger they grew the greater the danger they became. The first tool Pharaoh used to suppress the blessing and promise of God was oppression.

Oppression is a theme found through Scripture and is prevalent in the opening of Exodus.

The harsh oppression that profoundly marked the theology of the OT was the slavery suffered in Egypt. The Israelites were afflicted by ruthless taskmasters and threatened with infanticide; any hint of rebellion brought more irrational demands from the pharaoh (Ex 1–2, 5). This oppression at the dawn of the nation’s history also produced another key element that becomes a recurring pattern throughout the Bible: the people of God, when desperate under oppression, cry out to him for mercy and deliverance. In Egypt the Israelites called out to the Lord, who remembered the covenant (Ex 2:23–25; 3:7–9; Deut 26:6–8). (Ryken 2000, 607-608)

Pharaoh’s intention was to choke out the promise and blessing of God through the use of oppressive, slave labor.

This work of oppression continues through Satan today. John 10:10a declares, “The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy.” These are words of oppression and active warfare against the

people of God. That Jesus has come to grant life (John 10:10b) and to relieve the heavy burdens of His people (Mat. 11:28-30) serves as the antidote for the oppressive world we live in.

Believers must not equate the presence of pain, suffering, or trouble as evidence that they are out of the will of God. The Exodus story continues the narrative of Genesis that tells of how the Lord led them to Egypt and the land of Goshen and that it was there the Lord had blessed them. In fact, if it had not been for the blessing of God upon the people of Israel there would have been no need for Pharaoh to oppress them. Jesus declared, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Instead of dismissing the presence of pain and oppression as signs of God’s absence, we are far better served to see the presence of pain and oppression as an opportunity for God to intervene. In Exodus 2:24-25, God heard the cry of help from the midst of the oppression and prepared to send a deliverer. Out of our personal pain and struggles, we have the opportunity to see God deliver us.

Abortion and the fight over life.

The order to kill the male Hebrew babies is an awful act of oppression, an action also perpetuated in the days of Jesus’ birth under the reign of Herod (Mat. 2:13-18).⁶ Both occurrences were acts of desperation by despotic rulers who attempted to thwart the Word of God.

The research referenced above by Morschauser and Heiser draws out the possible interpretation that what was in view in the midwives’ commission was the practice of selective abortion. If this is, indeed, the correct interpretation, then the contemporary application to believers is immediate: A strategy of the enemy is to kill and destroy the blessing/promise in the womb.

⁶ Interestingly, in the Matthew text, Jesus’ family flees to Egypt as a place of temporary safety until such time that Jesus’ return to Israel was safe. Hosea 11:1 prophesied this as well.

Psalm 127:3 states that children are a blessing from God. The Biblical witness is that procreation is part of God's commission, promise, and blessing to His people and a sign of God's covenant being fulfilled (Gen. 1:28, 12:1-2, 13:16, Exo. 1:7). Creation is the sole prerogative of God. Satan does not have the power to create life, but does have permission to destroy it. Pharaoh's attempt to kill the males at birth posits him against God and in place of God. To abort the "blessings" is to actively rebel against Creation and the Creator.

I have never lived in a time when abortion was not legal. Although many states are currently fighting the legality of abortion, the fact remains that a woman has the right to an abortion in the United States. Why is this significant? Because the issue of abortion is an issue with a historical and spiritual heritage. Satan, through Pharaoh and Herod, has tried to kill the blessing of God through the abortion of children. The issue of abortion is actually a battle between God the Creator, and Satan the author of Chaos.

Although the midwives thwart the original plan of Pharaoh, Pharaoh then turns to national infanticide by enlisting all of the people to throw the male babies into the Nile. Douglas Stuart (2006, 83-84) posits two reasons for this. First of all, the Nile would be a "clean" way of killing and getting rid of babies. Second,

"it shifted some of the blame because of the way the pantheistic Egyptians viewed the Nile as a god. If the Nile were to "receive" the infant, it would at least to some degree represent the god Nile's judgment rather than that of the individual who carried out the pharaoh's order. The Nile was viewed both as a giver and taker of life. If the Nile were to take a baby's life, that was the Nile's decision, was it not? While the narrative is appropriately terse at this point, it is easy to imagine that the pharaoh's messengers, in bringing his command to the people, were instructed to inform them that by throwing babies into the Nile they were doing the will of the gods and giving the Nile its proper due among the gods.

This second reason mentioned by Stuart returns the reader to the battle between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt. The prerogative that the God of Israel claimed for Himself (life

and death) was given to the Nile. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the final act of Israel's leaving Egypt involved the miraculous drowning of the army of Egypt while Israel passed on dry ground.

Modern believers can look at the infanticide narrative and see historical evidence of the enemy attempting to thwart God's promises and blessings by the killing of children and families. Although the immediate effect would have been the crushing blow of the murder of male babies, the long-term effect would have been the absence of future fathers and families. Recent surveys show that 1 in 4 children today are raised in a fatherless home according to a 2017 U.S Census report. Could this be a long-term part of Satan's plan? Could the growing trend of absentee fathers in America be a continuation of Satan's plan to thwart the Blessing of God by destroying the building block of the family?

Conclusion

Exodus 1:8-22 prepares for the work of God to Israel in Egypt. The following chapters of Exodus records the failure of Pharaoh's plans to kill all of the male children (otherwise there would have been no men for Moses to return to), God's methods to make Moses into a deliverer, God's demonstrations of power against the gods of Egypt, and the ultimate deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery. But much of this is far off at the end of Exodus 1. Is there any hope?

An interesting glimpse of hope slips into the narrative when God blesses the midwives. Because they "feared God", God blessed them with their own children. The women who refused to take lives were granted their own little lives to take care for. Even in the middle of terrible situations and circumstances, God has a way of sneaking in blessings.

Contemporary audiences can appreciate the paradox of Exodus 1:8-22: the blessings of God often initiate opposition and persecution. How we manage the tension of this paradox is crucial to our faith. "In Reaching for the Invisible God, author Philip Yancey related his

discovery that Basil of Caesarea's faith was called "ambidextrous" because he held God's blessings in his right hand and life's difficulties in his left, trusting God to use both to accomplish his divine purposes in and through him" (Chand 2015, 14).

It is in the arena of "ambidextrous faith" that Exodus invites us to participate. Blessing and opposition. Slavery that leads to freedom. We are often caught in between demonstrations of God and demonstrations of the anti-god with the land of Goshen (God's people) caught in the middle. Yet, in this paradox God demonstrated His goodness to His people and drew them into a level of relationship previously not experienced. Samuel Chand (2015, 20-21) in his book *Leadership Pain* quotes Dan Allender: "If we fail to anticipate thoughtfully how we will respond to the harm of living in a fallen world, the pain may be for naught. It will either numb or destroy us rather than refine and even bless us. . . . Healing in this life is not the resolution of our past; it is the use of our past to draw us into deeper relationship with God and His purposes for our lives". The pain of Egypt was intended to lead Israel closer to God.

The believer is cast into a war that can be felt but not seen (Eph. 6:12). A war between the real God and the pretender god. The One who has the power to create and the one who can only manipulate. A war that was evident in Exodus 1 and is evident in the 21st Century. A war that God proved victorious in the past (Exodus) and will again be in the future (Revelation). In between, we must choose to allow our experiences to draw us into deeper relationship with God.

Despite all of his schemes, Pharaoh failed to halt God's plans and purposes. The believer lives in a world where the Enemy still attempts to halt God's plans through pain, oppression, opposition, and distraction. But we can take solace and the words of Jesus, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Fear God, not Pharaoh for God always wins.

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