

EXODUS Chapter 1

FEARFUL CHOICES 9-8-13

(Exodus 1) We begin this morning a new study that will last us through the Fall. We will go straight through this story of redemption for fifteen chapters. And just as every long journey begins with a single step so shall we as we look today at the first chapter. **1-22**

Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came each one with his household: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; 3 Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; 4 Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5 All the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was already in Egypt. 6 Joseph died, and all his brothers & all that generation. 7 But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, & multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. 8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. 10 Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land." 11 So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. 13 The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; 14 and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them. 15 Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; 16 and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." 20 So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. 21 Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."

What a ghastly order came down from Pharaoh! To any person without a seared conscience it would seem unthinkable to do what Pharaoh has done here but the story of history is replete with such abominations and the abominations continue in our day. You can read any day of the terrible atrocities taking place in the Islamic world and in North Korea. And you know well of the forty years of governmentally-approved baby-killing right here in the land of the free and the home of

the brave. We can better understand our own day and our own struggles as we take a look at the factors which led to Pharaoh's gruesome order.

There were three factors or contexts behind this executive murder. The first context for Pharaoh's decision was the tremendous expansion of the Hebrew people within the land of Egypt. You may know the story of how God moved Joseph, Abraham's grandson, down to Egypt and saved both Egypt and the Hebrews through him and how Joseph was exalted to Pharaoh's right hand and his whole family brought to live with him in Egypt. Well, some time had passed since then, and the Hebrews, living as a minority community within Egypt flourished incredibly. I have a friend who has gone into the rabbit business. She has learned that you can sell baby rabbits and that momma rabbits can produce those babies in large numbers with just a little help from Papa Bunny. It only takes a rabbit about 30 days to deliver her babies and my friend's last litter included thirteen bunnies. That is why we talk about multiplying like rabbits. They are fruitful critters and so were the Israelites in Egypt. Now today we would look at this and shake our heads. How selfish of these Egyptians to have large families when we are already suffocating mother earth with our human presence! But until very recently this was looked at as the blessing of God. Abraham, remember, was promised that his descendants would be like the stars of heaven and the sand on the beach in number. And that was a good thing. But not in Pharaoh's eyes.

The second context for Pharaoh's holocaust was his own ignorance of Egyptian history. This Pharaoh is described as a new king and most commentators believe this means that he actually was the first of a new dynasty. This was not a son taking over for a father but a new ruling family moving into power and this new ruler was ignorant of Joseph. That is, he had never been to Sunday School. He had never seen those pictures of Joseph in the multi-colored robe and he did not understand the place Joseph and his people had in Egyptian history. When the Hebrews first came down to Egypt they were treated with honor as the family of a national savior. But now, well... times do change. The honored national guests are now a persecuted minority. Do you see any parallels in our own social developments? I would propose to you that over time our nation has forgotten where it came from. We have lost the lessons of history. Our school history texts have been rewritten to eliminate or downplay or distort the role of Christian faith in the founding and the prosperity of our nation. In a very real sense we live in a culture that has forgotten not Joseph but William Bradford and Christopher Columbus and George Washington and Abe Lincoln. The spiritual descendants of these men are now persecuted and put down and even labeled un-

American. Times have very much changed. Our nation has practically cut off its founders and heroes, men who would be astonished to see what America has come to mean in the eyes of some. I fear a generation rising to power that knows not George or Abe or the Puritans. I am not the kind of guy who would typically get excited about the government spending money on memorials and that kind of thing, but after being in D.C. a few years back I have come to appreciate the importance of monuments. They are helpful because they are built to last and to communicate something of what was. I find it startling to walk around D.C. and read the inscriptions at the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. Do you know what I am talking about? The engraved quotations on those buildings are filled with Scripture. The Supreme Court building is engraved with the ten commandments and the center bust, the one to which the other busts which decorate those chambers all look is that of Moses. You see these things and you realize how far the country has fallen. You wonder when the Supreme Court will have all those Biblical references sandblasted from our monuments. It is easier to rewrite textbooks than monuments so I thank God for the monuments. Maybe a nice statue of Joseph would have saved Egypt, but no....this king was ignorant of history. He didn't know about Joseph or the blessing the Hebrew people had been.

The third context for the awful edict of death was the new king's distrust or fear of the people of God. In spite of the fact that the contributions to Egyptian life made by the children of Israel were overwhelmingly positive the Pharaoh found that they made him nervous. In verse 9 he says with alarm 9-10 *"Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. 10 Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land."* You see, he questions their national loyalty. He doesn't trust them. He is frightened by them. Verse 12 said the Egyptians were in dread of the sons of Israel. And this too is a situation we face as believers in the USA at this time in history. There are lessons in early Exodus on life as a minority holy people in a pagan land. Understand that if you are a true Christian, radically committed to Jesus Christ, that you are scary to unbelievers. They get nervous around you and don't tend to trust you because you are so different. They can't relate to you. And that is really understandable. As believers we operate from a wholly different set of values and motivations. *What do you mean you won't pay for the abortions of your employees? What do you mean you won't allow two men to marry each other in your church?* Seriously committed believers have always made others a bit nervous. In Ezra 4 the enemies of Israel wrote to the king of Babylon arguing that he should not rebuild Jerusalem

because that city has always been disloyal to kings and a hotbed of revolt. In Esther 3:8 listen to what Haman says to the king in order to persuade him to destroy the Jews. **8** *Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain.* Did you get that? This people in the land have a different set of laws. Can that be said of Christians in Egypt? In the US of A? You bet it can. We march to the beat of a different drummer. We have a heavenly allegiance. We have a different set of laws handed down by a higher authority. And if you are a king, wanting peace and tranquility and stability you want everybody operating from one standard - yours. So, yes, Christians are a problem. This was the same conflict the early church ran into. Look at one example from the city of Thessalonica and Acts 17. We saw this a few weeks ago. Referring to the apostles who were staying in the home of a brother named Jason it says **6-8** *When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also;⁷ and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."⁸ They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.* What stirred them up? The idea that these people were under a different king. People like that worry us. They are unpredictable. That is why these days *fundamentalist* has become a dirty word. It denotes a person who is controlled by something other than financial prosperity, personal peace and pleasure -- someone with principles greater than his lusts.

If you are a Christian like that - you need to know how your spiritual commitments will be received. The fact that you have greater loyalties can create conflict in your vocational life. Your boss doesn't understand that you want something more than to climb the corporate ladder. "You won't work overtime this week?! Church commitments? Family commitment?" The world hates that. They are disturbed that your loyalty to God exceeds loyalty to your company or your country or even your family. And if their actions seem to you as hatred understand it might just be fear. Your message, your existence irritates whatever is left of their conscience. If the secular progressives oppress us it is to keep us under control and shut us up. They are afraid to give power to a weirdo religious guy like you. That is why it is very hard for a serious Christian to make it politically. When folks realize that your politics, not just your family life, but your politics, not just your church life, but your politics, not just your devotional life but your politics is determined by

the Bible then they are afraid to give you power because they don't know what that will mean. Do you understand what I'm talking about here? Some of you know exactly what I mean. I am saying that there are two types of people walking on this planet and they don't exactly get along. They are not a little different; they are very different. Tozer writes: *What we need to restore power to the Christian testimony is not soft talk about brotherhood but an honest recognition that two human races occupy the earth simultaneously: a fallen race that sprang from the loins of Adam and a regenerate race that is born of the Spirit through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. To accept this truth requires a tough-mindedness and a spiritual maturity that modern Christians simply do not possess. To face up to it hardly contributes to that "peace of mind" after which our religious weaklings bleat so plaintively.* But face up to it we must. We are God's people in a foreign land. We are light in a dark place and we must realize this and that sometimes, many times, the forces of darkness hold the levers of political power. When an earthly king sees the people of light who swear allegiance to the king of kings growing in strength and influence what is he likely to do? He does what the communists did and the Romans did and Herod did and Pharaoh did. He uses his power to squish them because he is afraid.

So that is the context of the king's decree, the factors which contributed to his decision. The Israelites were increasing, the king didn't know history and he was afraid of God's people. Now let's look at Pharaoh's decision itself and the strategy behind it. The first decision was to turn the Hebrews into a slave force, thinking that this would keep them under foot, but it didn't work. Under persecution they multiplied even more. So, the next part of Pharaoh's plan was to kill all the boys born to Hebrew women. Let's sit on that point for a minute. To stop the people of God from becoming more powerful, Pharaoh, acting as an agent of hell, sought to stop their biological multiplication. If Pharaoh could limit their birthrate he figured he could limit their influence. Is that true? Yes it is. Is that a strategy Satan uses today? Pharaoh, like the devil himself, wasn't completely stupid. He knew that most social battles last beyond a generation and he was trying to protect Egypt's future against these wacko Jewish fundies. Now, if the church is to win our nation and save America it will likely not be in the power of the baby boomers to do it or the baby busters but in the babies themselves. That is why I believe that the preservation of freedoms in this country depends on Christians having children and then training them in the fear of the Lord. Pharaoh understood the battlefield of babydom and so, he ordered these two mid-wives to do his dirty work. Now, for you kids, a mid-wife is sort of like a nurse who helps women have babies. They are there

to help the mother give birth. And somehow Pharaoh thought these women could turn from baby helpers to baby killers, but they would not. When plan A failed to work for him Pharaoh turned to plan B. No pun intended, but plan B is the name of an abortifacient drug which, by federal mandate, is now to be made available to females of all ages without a prescription. Your Christian employer is required by our new laws to provide coverage for such a drug in your health care plan even though the drug, when it works (about fifty percent of the time) destroys a conceived human life. That is our plan B. Here is Pharaoh's. 22 *Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."* The destruction of the males. You wonder what the National Organization for Women would have said about Pharaoh's plan had they been around in those days. They'd have probably been strangely silent, just like they are now over what is going on in India. Did you know that in that largely Hindu land of India couples are killing their babies through abortion because they are girls. That's right. I have heard that sex preference is the primary reason for abortions in India and that nine times more girls are slaughtered before birth than boys. Where is the outcry of our feminist leaders over that? I haven't heard it.

But Pharaoh's plan was to get rid of the boys, the boys who could fight, the boys who could work in the fields, the boys who would produce more boys. Did Pharaoh have a smart plan? Do you think he did? Well, yeah, except he didn't reckon with one reality. He didn't count God in. When a king oppresses God's people he has set himself up for some major troubles as we will see.

But let's look now at those Hebrew midwives. Most believe they were Egyptian women and called *Hebrew* midwives because their job was to attend to the Hebrew ladies. Then one day their job was changed drastically by a king who held their lives in his hand. The midwives disobeyed the king. They let the boys live. These were pro-life midwives. And they participated in a form of civil disobedience. That is, they disobeyed their governing authority. Now, Romans 13 says we are to obey the civil authority, but there is a limit to that isn't there? When the king tells you to disobey God's law you do not do it. Thankfully that usually is rare but when it occurs it is very, very hard. Sometimes it's hard to know what is right to do. Other times it is just hard to do what is right when you know the consequences could be painful. But the midwives rejected Pharaoh's order and then they lied about it didn't they? I mean, there may have been some truth to what they said but it is presented here as a fabrication. Was it right for them to lie to Pharaoh? Maybe not but I'm not throwing any stones. These brave women are commended by God aren't they? They are rewarded

with children and families of their own. And notice this please - what was it that gave them the courage to disobey Pharaoh? Verse 17 says, “the midwives feared God.”® The fear of God is the desire to please God and avoid his displeasure. It is this fear that keeps our consciences from succumbing to the fear of men. Bernard Ramm says this about the midwives: *They had to choose among their fears: (a) to fear the invisible God, or (b) to fear the visible Pharaoh with the visible signs of his power – his soldiers and his jails. Faith sees the real power: sight sees the immediate power. Sight fears Pharaoh; faith fears God. The midwives feared God.* It wasn't just love for little babies that made them do it. 21 *Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them.* And I warn you now, times are likely ahead for us in this culture when we will more and more face this decision: to fear Pharaoh, or fear God - to fear the visible power brokers of this world or fear the One who will judge every man. Will it be Christ or Caesar? You may face a similar choice tomorrow at work, today in church, next week in your family. The key to your choice will be the fear of God. Whose opinion about you really matters? Who is your king?

I invite you, I urge you to decide the matter now, to make the decision now when the pressure isn't so great. Trusting in His promises, choose the fear of the Lord today. Commit yourself now to do what He says, to do what is right no matter how hard, no matter how costly. In that is found a pure conscience, a true freedom and a guarantee that when you close your eyes in death you will awake on the other side to behold the face of your Redeemer. Let's pray