

ISRAEL AND THEIR OPPRESSION IN EGYPT

The story of Israel as a whole is a journey! The word Exodus itself means "going out" The book of Exodus talks of a particular people going out from a particular nation! In this book, we see a nation being born within a nation, because of godly influence. This book is a continuation from well-groomed people God is using; people who were saved from the wickedness that existed before Gen. 9, when God raised a new generation from Noah! It is a record of God preparing an atmosphere to deliver the children of Israel; it starts with 70 people who God used to flourish in a foreign land.

The book of Exodus begins about four hundred years after the point where Genesis ends. In **(Gen. 50:20)** for a long time, Egypt had been a hospitable place where God elevated Joseph to save the lives of the descendants of Abraham. It was to fulfill God's promises to make Abraham into a great nation, to bless him and make him a blessing to others, to make his name great, and to bless all families of the earth through him. The family of Joseph became fruitful determining the destiny of the whole race of Israel, because of the devotion of Joseph's life to God. So they were fruitful; they had favour before men, Kings. But there came a time when two things happened: first, *"the generation of Joseph died"* and secondly *"a new King who didn't know Joseph came to power!"* It is not surprising becoz there was a period of 226 years after Joseph had died. King Ahmose then came to power and indeed, *"did not know Joseph"* God raises a new King to do a new thing in the lives of Israelites. Exodus teaches us that even when generations die, godly generations will always be fruitful. This is why we need to invest in family life; The political atmosphere, the religious atmosphere all changed, reconstructing itself and laying ground for God to deliver the Israelites. Slowly by slowly Egypt became living hell for the Israelites. Remember they were fruitful, blossoming, but all of a sudden *"a new dawn"* came! Let me tell you, every time you are in a comfort zone, God will take you to a *"No fly zone"* a zone of war, where nobody wants to operate; characterized by strife, pain, frustration. God cannot deliver us where everything is alright! What will be there to be delivered from? There must be darkness for God's people, so that light can come This is why in **(1Peter 2:9)** *"But you are a chosen people....a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"*.

Exodus is a journey of darkness, oppression, faith, & patience! Humanly speaking you do not expect these aspects to bring about positive effects; that is why every

time believers are oppressed, and they apply a humanistic approach to their suffering, they make things worse! For Israel, they went through a lot of trouble because they kept applying a humanistic thinking to what God was taking them through! By taking them through oppression, they thought God didn't know what he was doing! Let me tell you there is nothing that happens and God does not know! If it is a journey of suffering and trials, he knows it! In fact God had known about this experience becoz it had been prophesied sometime back in Gen. (**Gen. 15:13-16**). *"Then the Lord said to him, Know for sure that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions"*. God will never take you into tribulation without preparing your mind, first. But in your faith, you must be ready to go through challenges! The King who didn't know Joseph decided to reduce all Israelites to the status of slaves, the idea was to dehumanize them and kill the fruitfulness in them! But in **vs. 12** it says *"the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied"* fulfilling **Gen.1:28** *"...be fruitful and multiply..."* God might have allowed situations in your life, in order to bring about the missing fruit in you!

As we get right into Exodus, something catches our attention; two Hebrew women who defy the orders of the most powerful King on earth of the time, Pharaoh:

The systematic mistreatment of the Hebrews by Pharaoh was because he wanted ethnic cleansing: Hebrew boys were to be killed at birth (verse 16) or drowned in the Nile. This is the psychology of hate, driven by fear.

This is a Pharaoh, who does not know Joseph or recognize how Joseph helped to save Egypt from famine. But God in Exodus is a God who moves, *"going out"* The very things that Pharaoh fears and seeks to avoid, happen. This was an attempt to control the Hebrew population. It was His plan to keep the Hebrews from escaping the land. Pharaoh did not know that God had greater plans for the Israelites. Let me tell you, God has not drawn a radius to limit those who love him. With God, the sky is the limit.

Humanly speaking the story challenges us to ask and say; *"where is God found in this story of hate, oppression, death"*. Is it possible to find God's footsteps in difficult situations? In fact when you consider this question, you can even ask to say: *"why do we do thanksgiving? Is it because God has 'smiled' on us, or because*

we are going through challenging moments? In 1 Thess.5:18 the bible says, “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

Let me tell you once we walk in the will of God we can defy man's wishes like what the two women did. The two midwives, commanded by the king to kill the boys: Pharaoh wanted these midwives to ignore their life-saving actions, and become systematic killers. Today, they are those in our society who are saving interests of men, at the expense of others dying. These two midwives agree with St Peter and the other Apostles in **Acts.5:27-29** when they stood before the Council and said, “*We must obey God rather than men*” As we will be seeing later, Pharaoh does not even know this God! In **Ex.5:2**, he confessed and asked, “*Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go*”

Friends what motivates us to persevere during the journey of faith is the fear of God. There are certain things we will never do, because of the fear of God! As believers we are motivated by the fear of the Lord. From this passage today we draw a number of lessons:

1. Affliction is like transport to a better place and destiny

God allowed the affliction of Israelites to create a desire in them to have a land of their own; Sometimes God uses the rejection of hateful people to move us to a new place or assignment--where we wouldn't have thought of going on our own. The Israelites thought Egypt was better; they thought it was the only thing that ever happened, they didn't know there was something better! God makes us look in another direction when it is time to move to a better place! When we get to that new place, we thank God for the rejection rather than being bitter about it. God promised His people a land of their own--the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Affliction therefore, was like transport and the only way to get them there.

2. Oppression/ Suffering encourages a daily Commitment to Christ: There is a way suffering strikes a cord in us and our commitment is tested. We live in a world where daily commitments are rare. If it is a payment, we want to pay for everything at once! The landlords ask for more than one month because they don't want to keep coming and coming! There is a tendency of “*doing it once and for all*” not so with Christ! With Christ we need a daily commitment in everything that will keep our relationship with him stronger! It is true that we are saved once and for all, but we now need to daily seek him. Christians, need to understand that faith in the name of Jesus, is not just

a general knowledge of God. It is a direct relation between you the believer and the person who saves mankind, and that is Jesus Christ!! Our faith should always be accompanied by a commitment to Jesus! A commitment is strong belief in something; a promise to do something; it is an enthusiasm; a duty/responsibility! Suffering teaches us to look to God daily! After this experience of being subjected to oppression the Israelites looked to God daily to sustain them and pray for His promise to deliver them. During our hard times, an attitude of self-sufficiency gives way to an attitude of dependency on God. Through those times, we walk closely to Him and our faith can grow tremendously as a result. Through those times, we learn empathy for others who go through difficult times, and we become more Christ-like in character as a result of the “fiery” trials.