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THE MORAL DISASTER OF REJECTING GOD (Exodus 1:5-21)

In the final installment of our series on lessons from the life of Joseph, we'll consider some lessons that occurred after Joseph's death in Exodus 1. Many of those lessons in Joseph's story are positive – his character, integrity, faith in God, sexual purity, strong work ethic, generosity to others, and willingness to forgive – but after he passed from the scene, the future for his country turned in a dark direction.

The lessons from this chapter have particular interest to those involved in politics. We'll consider what happens when a leader turns away from honoring God, the disaster of immoral policies, and the need and justification for civil disobedience.

ISRAEL INCREASES

*Exodus 1:5-7 – All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. **But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.***

Even though Joseph came to Egypt through the betrayal of his brothers, God planned for the nation of Israel to eventually get its start there to avoid the famine in Canaan. Once Jacob and his twelve sons died, the people increased over the generations and it got the attention of the new governmental leaders of Egypt, leading to some troubling decisions.

A NEW PHARAOH FORGETS JOSEPH

*Exodus 1:8 - Now there arose a new king over Egypt, **who did not know Joseph.***

This may be the most crucial verse in the chapter. It definitely set the stage for the harsh treatment the Israelites would soon suffer. When Joseph was led from prison to help his Egyptian king with the uninterpreted

dreams that were bothering him so much, he established a trust and relationship that eventually placed Joseph in an important administrative position. His policy of conservation saved Egypt from a coming famine and made it possible for many lives to be saved, including his own family.

Joseph gave credit and glory to his God for being able to accurately use Pharaoh's dream to predict the famine. Pharaoh could see the counselors surrounding him didn't have the ability to help him, yet the God of Joseph was powerful and led him to the answers that were needed. The favor Joseph and his family received were a direct result of this Pharaoh's respect for Joseph's beliefs and the power he had seen God perform.

Years after Joseph died, the new leader of Egypt knew nothing about Joseph or his God or that the nation had been saved through the kindness and might of that God.

THE OPPRESSION SOLUTION

*Exodus 1:9-14 - And [Pharaoh] said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. **So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves** and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.*

What started as seventy family members blossomed into thousands as Israel multiplied. The paranoia of the new Pharaoh kicked in and his solution was to exert power over them, in direct opposition to the previous policy in Joseph's day. When leaders reject God and his people, oppressive solutions become acceptable.

The Scriptures have serious warnings about the exploitation of people, especially when it's done through government action.

*Proverbs 28:16 – A ruler who lacks understanding is a **cruel oppressor**, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.*

*Isaiah 1:17 - learn to do good; seek justice, **correct oppression**; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.*

AN EVEN WORSE SOLUTION

*Exodus 1:15, 16 – Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “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.”*

As unimaginable as it seems to us today, infanticide was used in the ancient world to exercise power and control the possibility of a takeover. Centuries later, Herod even tried this when he heard a King had been born in Bethlehem.

*Matthew 2:16 - Then Herod became furious, and he sent and **killed all the male children in Bethlehem** and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained. . .*

The Bible is crystal clear that innocent human life is made in the image of God and is deserving of protection, not destruction. No matter what the reason, the ending of a human life at the hands of another human is morally repugnant and repudiated by God's Word. These midwives now had the choice – to obey the king by killing babies or obeying God by preserving life.

JUSTIFIED CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

*Exodus 1:17-21 - But **the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them**, but let the male children live. . . So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.*

As a rule, those who follow God are commanded in Scripture to submit and obey civil government.

*Romans 13:1 - Let every person **be subject to the governing authorities**. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*

*1 Peter 2:13, 14 - **Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution**, whether it be to the emperor^{as} as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*

But there are instances when we are given examples (like these Hebrew midwives) in which disobeying government is commended by God. In cases when a ruler or authority would require one to disobey what God has clearly established, civil disobedience is not only an option, but a necessity.

Another example is Peter and John, who were told not to preach the message of Christ by the Jewish rulers in Jerusalem. They continued, even though there were penalties for their actions. But these disciples had no choice, as they made plain.

*Acts 4:19, 20 - But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for **we cannot but speak** of what we have seen and heard.”*

It is rare, but sometimes necessary that a follower of God prioritize his allegiance when faced with the choice between obeying God or men. According to Scripture, disobeying governing authorities is sanctioned if we are commanded to do anything in opposition to what God requires of us.

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
Room 165, House Office Building