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Exodus 1

"Handling Hardships"

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The author of the book of Exodus is Moses, according to Jesus, who in [Mark 12:26](#) said, *"Now about the dead rising - have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'*" Moses wrote this book circa 1450 BC, and the theme is "going out." It's the account of the Israelites leaving Egypt, heading toward the Promised Land.

In order to get a proper understanding of the timing of the account of the Israelites journey, it's important to know that when you turn the page from [Genesis 50](#) (the last chapter of Genesis) to [Exodus 1](#), you've just advanced 400 years on the timeline. By this time you get to the opening chapter of Exodus, Jacob and his 12 sons are dead, and the Pharaoh¹ who had been favorably disposed to Joseph and his was family had been long dead, too.

By way of reminder from our studies in the book of Genesis, there was a great famine that had swept over the known world, but Joseph, one of the 12 sons of Jacob, had been providentially placed in Egypt by God, so that when the famine hit, he would be in a position to help his family when they needed food. The famine caused Joseph's family to relocate from Israel to Egypt to escape the severe effects of the famine, and that temporary stay lasted 400 years! When Joseph's family left Israel for Egypt, they numbered 70, but in the succeeding years that number had

¹ It is thought that Joseph rose to prominence in Egypt near the beginning of Egypt's 13th Dynasty. At the time of the Exodus, Egypt was in their 18th Dynasty. The Pharaoh at that time would probably have been Thutmose III, the 6th Pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. By the way, Cecil B. DeMille, the famous director of the 1956 classic, *The Ten Commandments*, had it wrong when his film sanctioned the idea that Rameses was Pharaoh. It is known that Rameses was in power in the 1200's BC, which was several hundred years before the biblical timeline of the Exodus.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ten_Commandments_\(1956_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ten_Commandments_(1956_film)))

grown to approximately 3 million!² The increase in the Hebrew population caused the Egyptians to become fearful of the possibility of a Hebrew revolt, so they made the Hebrews slaves, and subjected them to harsh labor.

When you consider the life of a Hebrew slave in Egypt, it's not hard to imagine that life was very hard indeed! They were slaves in a foreign country, they were oppressed and treated cruelly, their lives were made bitter, they were treated ruthlessly, and to top it off, their baby boys were murdered through infanticide. Just think how you'd feel about yourself, your life, and God? You'd come to the quick conclusion that God didn't care, that you were all alone in the world, and life was too hard and extremely unfair.

The truth is that you don't have to be a Hebrew slave living in Egypt thousands of years ago to have these same feelings. We certainly don't have it as bad as they did by any stretch, nevertheless, there's enough going on in our lives to cause us to question God, to feel alone, to despair of life, or to feel that life is too hard or too unfair. And it's for these reasons that we need to be reminded about a few things from this account that will help us keep a biblical perspective on what it means to handle hardships.

God Knew About Their Hardship In Advance

1. More than 500 years earlier, God said to Abraham, *"Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions."*³
2. We should take comfort in knowing that nothing catches God by surprise.
3. Understanding the timing and foreknowledge of God is a reminder that nothing happens in our life that God doesn't first know about, because he sees the beginning from the end, and he knows everything in between.
4. **Psalm 139:1-10** - *"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in - behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for*

² **Exodus 12:37** indicates there were "about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children," so when you add them, the number swells to 2.5 to 3 million.

³ **Genesis 15:13-14**

me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

5. We're prone to ask God, "If you knew about my hardship in advance, why didn't you prevent it?"
 - a. Sometimes the Lord does prevent hardships, but don't forget that we have no idea how many times and in how many ways he has spared us hardships of one kind or another.
 - b. Heaven is described as a place where there will be *"no more death or mourning or crying or pain,"*⁴ and we would do well to remember that we're not in heaven yet!
 - c. In [John 16:33](#), Jesus said, *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

God Was Multiplying And Maturing Them Through Their Hardships

6. Sometimes God is up to something as he takes us through our hardships, as was the case with the nation of Israel.
7. Despite their circumstances, despite their terrible living conditions, there was fruitfulness in their lives, because God was blessing them with children.
 - a. [Exodus 1:12](#) - *"But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread..."*
8. What God was up to was growing a Jewish nation out of one family, and he needed a few hundred years to populate this new nation, while maintaining its purity as a people.
 - a. As a nation they could not be spoiled or diluted by the pagan influence or intermarriage with the nations around them.
 - b. Had they remained in Canaan, the influence of the Canaanite people would have corrupted the budding nation, so God had to remove them and isolate them in Egypt.
 - c. So how was Egypt better than Canaan?
 - i. The Egyptians were a pagan people who worshiped idols and false gods.
 - ii. Joseph even married an Egyptian woman and had two sons by her!

⁴ [Revelation 21:4](#)

- iii. Both are true, however, there was one difference about the Egyptians that wasn't true of other nations; the Egyptians thought they were better than the Hebrews,⁵ so they refused to socialize with them, let alone intermarry with them.
 - 1. **Genesis 46:34** - "... you should answer, 'Your servants have tended the livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians."
 - iv. God used discrimination to keep the young nation of Israel separate from their pagan neighbors while allowing them to grow into a nation of several million people.
 - d. God was not only multiplying and maturing them; he was protecting and preparing them, too.
9. There is often a purpose behind our hardship(s) that only God knows, and if nothing else, it is to create less self-reliance and more God-reliance.
10. **2 Corinthians 1:8-9** - "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

God Heard Them And Cared About Them

11. **Exodus 2:23-25** - "During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them."
12. **Psalms 40:1-3** - "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."
13. God's silence is not his indifference.
14. We must trust the Lord and know that he sees us and cares about what we're going through.

⁵ Egyptians considered Hebrews to be below their station in life because the Israelites were shepherds.

15. God's care for the nation of Israel came in the form of Moses, their deliverer.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Exodus 1:1-22 and 2:23-25](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Does knowing that God's perspective on time and the fact that he knows the beginning, the end, and everything in between help you cope with the troubles and difficulties of life?
4. Read and discuss [Psalm 139:1-10](#).
5. What do you do and how do you respond to the Lord in times of trouble?
 - a. Do you try to see what he's up to and what his greater purpose is in your life?
 - b. Do you spend too much time and anxious energy wondering why he doesn't quickly bring you out of a situation/circumstance?
 - c. Have you ever considered the idea that the Lord has spared you from innumerable hardships of one kind or another?
6. Read and discuss [John 16:33](#), and focus on the fact that the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Believer makes all the difference in the world when we're suffering, etc.
7. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when the Lord has brought them through difficult days.
 - a. How did the Lord work his greater purpose in your life?
 - b. Was it your experience that you had a greater reliance on the Lord and less self-reliance?
 - c. Read and discuss [2 Corinthians 1:8-9](#).
8. Is there a situation you're going through right now that you need to hear from the Lord, and personally experience the depth of his love and concern for you?
 - a. Read and discuss [Exodus 2:23-25](#) and [Psalm 40:1-3](#).
9. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: understand that even though there may be a sense of God's silence concerning a situation/circumstance, that doesn't mean that God is indifferent toward them;

recognize that the Lord knows about the intimate details of their life and it's his desire to work out his greater purposes in their life by bringing them through various kinds of hardships; know that God hears the cry of their heart and he cares deeply about them.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).