

**Exegetical Notes – Exodus 1:1-14**  
**“When Good Things Go Bad”**

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Cornerstone Fellowship  
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320  
610-384-1375  
charleshjensen@aol.com

**Exodus 1:1-14**

**Verse 1-5:**

*These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt.*

- The book of Exodus picks up the story of God’s people where the book of Genesis left off. To pick up the details of the story, read Genesis 37-50. Here is a brief summary of the story told in those chapters.
  - + Joseph, the son of Jacob most favored by his father, was badly disliked by his ten older brothers. They were jealous of the special favor that Joseph received from their father. So they sold their younger brother, Joseph, to a slave trader headed for Egypt. As a result, Joseph, who was believed to be dead by his father, became a slave in Egypt.
  - + Over the next several years, Joseph rose in favor with his Master but, because of the lies told by his master’s wife about him, he ended up in prison.
  - + Again, through a strange twist of fate, Joseph saved Egypt from a great famine by interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh, Egypt’s king. He was elevated in Pharaoh’s service to become the second most powerful man in Egypt.
  - + However, the famine also struck the land of Canaan where Joseph’s father and his brothers lived. Joseph’s family was forced to come to Egypt for food. As a result, Joseph was reunited with his brothers and brought his father’s family to Egypt to live.
  - + Once they had come to Egypt, Pharaoh lavished wealth and prosperity upon the family of Joseph because Joseph had done so much to help the nation.
  - + For some years, the Jews lived in Egypt as a favored people.
- In these verses we are told the names of Joseph’s brothers who came with their father, Jacob, to Egypt at Joseph’s request. All of his brothers came

- with their families.
- The entire group numbered about 70 persons.

#### **Verse 6-7:**

***Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.***

- The first generation of Jews living in Egypt passed away. But being favored people, the Jewish population in Egypt increased. We know that they were only a large family when they arrived and that there were about 2 million of them when they left Egypt with Moses. However, at this point in the story, in the generation just after Joseph, we do not know how many Jews lived in Egypt, exactly.
- What the text wants us to know is that only one generation into the experience, things were beginning to go wrong. The Egyptians were becoming alarmed because the Jews were still favored among them and were becoming a large subgroup within the population.

#### **Verse 8:**

***Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt.***

- This new king was, most likely, Ahmose 1 (1570-1546 BC). The Egyptian records of the period show that when Ahmose became Pharaoh, he removed the Hyksos rulers from Egypt. The Hyksos, were foreign rulers, among the Egyptians. The Hyksos were, most likely, the descendants of Joseph.

#### **Verse 9-10:**

***“Look,” he said to the people. “the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”***

- The Pharaoh was concerned for two reasons: 1. The population of Jews within the Egyptian population was increasing and; 2. The Egyptians were becoming increasingly dependent on the Israelites.
- Pharaoh’s solution is to deal “shrewdly” with the Jews. What he wants to do is to limit the number of and influence of the Israelites in Egypt. But he wants to do it “shrewdly.” He wants to do it in such a way as to limit its negative effects and maximize its positive ones. The implication is that he will make changes in such a way as to benefit the Egyptians and create hardship only for the Jews. Pharaoh wants to reassure true Egyptians that

this change will be to their advantage.

**Verse 11:**

***So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh.***

- Pharaoh's plan is to force the Israelites to do public work projects for the common good. They are put into work camps and forced to build cities in which Pharaoh will store grain for distribution to his people. A generation before, Joseph had ordered the building of such cities in Egypt.

**Verse 12-14:**

***But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.***

- Pharaoh's shrewd plan to deal with the Hebrew problem did not work. Though the Egyptians worked the Jews ruthlessly, the Jewish population continued to increase. The plan did not fix the problem.
- However the stature of the Hebrew population within Egypt changed. Within a generation, they went from favored status to a hated and despised people, reduced to the level of slaves.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *When Good Things Go Bad*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)