

Lesson 1 . . . The King Who Did Not Know Joseph

Exodus



Suggested responses to questions about Exodus 1:1-22

Note: Be sure to respond to all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.

1. Genesis 47:1-6 describes how Jacob and his family traveled from the land of Canaan to Egypt in search of pasture for their flocks during a time of famine. Pharaoh welcomed them to Egypt, gave them their pick of the land, and even suggested that Joseph put some of his family in charge of Pharaoh's own livestock. In Genesis 47:5-6, Pharaoh tells Joseph: "The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen; and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my cattle."
2. The fruitfulness of the descendants of Israel is a fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham (who was called Abram at that time) in Genesis 15:5: "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" Israel is another name for Jacob, who was Abraham's grandson, so the descendants of Israel are direct descendants of Abraham.
3. In Hebrew language, to "know" someone is to have a sacred covenant relationship with them. The use of covenant language indicates that a covenant had been established between the pharaohs of Egypt and Joseph and his descendants. When Exodus 1:8 records that "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph," this means that the new Pharaoh deliberately was breaking Egypt's covenantal bond with the descendants of Israel.
4. In Exodus 1:9-10, the Egyptians are afraid that the large number of Israelites might join with Egypt's enemies in war and "escape from the land." During Joseph's lifetime, the Israelites prospered in Egypt. Genesis 47:27 records that they "gained possessions" and "were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly."
5. In Exodus 1:11-14, the people of Israel are afflicted by being forced into slavery to build store-cities for Pharaoh and to perform "all kinds of work in the field." Exodus 1:12 includes the detail that the more the Israelites were oppressed, "the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad." Their fruitfulness is an indication of God's blessing.
6. To regain land controlled by the Israelites, the new Pharaoh settles on a "quiet" policy of property theft. By ordering all the Hebrew male children killed, he hopes that within a generation there will be very few Hebrew men and the Hebrew women then will marry Egyptians. The title to the women's property would then pass to their Egyptian husbands. In *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II explained that the most prolific and poorest peoples are perceived as a threat to the well-being and peace of the powerful of the earth.

Exodus Lesson 1 Suggested Responses

7. In Exodus 1:17, the Hebrew midwives refuse to comply with Pharaoh's edict to kill male babies because they "feared God." Isaiah 11:2-3 lists the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit—"the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might [fortitude], the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD [piety], and his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD [awe]." Paragraph 1831 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that these gifts "complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations."
8. Exodus 1:20-21 records: "God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God he gave them families."
9. In Romans 13:1, St. Paul advises Christians "to be subject to the governing authorities" because they've "been instituted by God." In Romans 13:6, he writes that the authorities are "ministers of God." In Acts 4:19-20, after they've been cautioned by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem not to speak about Jesus, Sts. Peter and John reply: "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."
10. In Exodus 1:22, Pharaoh now addresses the order to kill the Hebrew boy babies to all his people, that is, all the Egyptians. Pharaoh is compounding his evil by requiring other people to do evil.

Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.