

Midwives Serve God

Key Verse: *“The midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.”*
—Exodus 1:17

Selected Scripture:
Exodus 1:8-21

A PERIOD OF ABOUT TWO

hundred years passed from the time Jacob and his family moved to Egypt under the guiding hand of God through faithful Joseph, settling in the land of Goshen. During this period, “the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.”—Exod. 1:7

They enjoyed this peaceful and fruitful existence until the time came when “there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.”—vss. 8-10

The new Pharaoh’s plan to ‘deal wisely’ with the Israelites was ingenious. He afflicted them with hard manual labor: gathering straw in the fields, using the straw in the making of mortar and bricks, and then building treasure cities for the king. (vss. 11-14) The goal was threefold: first, the hard labor under their Egyptian taskmasters would keep the Israelites from engaging in

any rebellion against the kingdom or from leaving; second, the heavy burdens would result in their being less fruitful and keep their ever-growing population in check; and third, the resulting treasure cities would solidify Pharaoh's power, bringing him the honor and majesty he desired.

Although Pharaoh's treasure cities were built, his other goals did not materialize. Later, as a result of the ten plagues, the Israelites left the bondage and burdens of Egypt by the mighty power of God. More immediately, however, the account says, "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." (vs. 12) Seeing that the hard labor inflicted upon them actually caused the population of the Israelites to increase, Pharaoh devised a more insidious plan for dealing with the matter. He commanded the midwives of the Hebrew women that when they assisted at the birth of any Israelite child, "if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live."—vs. 16

Once again, the evil plan of Pharaoh was thwarted. The Key Verse states that the 'midwives feared God,' and saved the male children. The proper thought of their 'fear' of God was not that they were afraid of God, but that they revered and loved him to such an extent that they could not violate their consciences by carrying out the command of Pharaoh, even though this put themselves in great danger. They knew and appreciated that God's commandments were to be obeyed, not those of man, even one as powerful as Pharaoh.

This is a lesson for all those seeking to follow after God. In another place, we read, "Fear [reverence] God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." (Eccles. 12:13) As a result of their faithfulness, the account says that God blessed the midwives, providing houses for them to dwell in.—Exod. 1:20,21 ■