

. . . And

^{ESV} Exodus 1:1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household:

² Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah,

³ Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin,

⁴ Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

⁵ All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt.

⁶ Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation.

⁷ But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

⁸ Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

⁹ And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.

¹⁰ 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 [of "gain control over"] the land." (foreshadowing)

¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.

¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.

¹³ So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves

¹⁴ 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.

Exodus 1:1-14

And

And my fourth grade English teacher told me never to start a sentence with "and." **And** I used to do it all the time. But in the Queen's English, doing this goes against all Sense and Sensibility. **And** so, I have stopped using "and" at the beginning of sentences. But when you learn to read Hebrew, one of the first things that become apparent is that those gnarly, wind-torn prophets and war-heroes of Israel did not take grammar class from my fourth grade teacher.

There is a literary device in Hebrew that allows them to have serious run-on sentences. And you won't see this from reading English translations, because most of our translators apparently were taught by my fourth grade teacher!

Nevertheless, the device is called the *vuv-consecutive*. *Vuv* is a letter that looks a lot like our number 7. The word means simply: “and.” You attach the *vuv* to the beginning of the first word of the sentence and you get your *vuv-consecutive*. It can denote either a sequence (“and then”) or a consequence (“and so”).

Moses uses the *vuv-consecutive* a lot! The first place he uses it in Exodus is in the very first word. And today I want to highlight this common Hebrew literary feature as a way to begin our series on Exodus. “**And these are the names of the sons of Israel.**” That is how Exodus literally begins. It becomes immediately apparent as to why. In reporting the names of Jacob’s children, the reader is taken back to the second half of the book of Genesis, especially the Joseph narrative.

Because we have a [list of 12 names](#) given in Exodus, and because we have not looked at Genesis together, it seems important to me that we spend some time remembering the story. After all, this is the backdrop to the entire Exodus story. Moses says that these boys, each with his household, came into Egypt with Jacob. He then lists the boys in a particular order: “**Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah Issachar, Zebulun**” are the [six sons of Leah](#), Jacob’s first wife whom he was forced to marry when his uncle Laban tricked him.

Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob, and Zebulun was the lastborn son of Leah. So, the names are [given in descending order of their birth](#). Let me give you just a snippet from the life of each of the six. **Reuben** is the son that collected mandrakes (an aphrodisiac) and gave them to Leah ([Gen 30:14ff](#)) because she was so sad that Jacob loved her less than Rachel. When Rachel demanded the mandrakes, Leah traded them for a night with Jacob, and this led to the birth of Issachar. This is the story that led Jacob to reject Reuben’s birthright as the firstborn son ([Gen 49:4](#)). Yet, Reuben is also the son that tried to save Joseph when the brothers wanted to kill him because he held his father’s favor.

Simeon is the son, who, along with Levi, sought revenge on the people of Shechem because their prince raped his sister **Dinah** ([Gen 34](#)). Perhaps not surprisingly, since he was the oldest of the brothers to conspire against him, when they came to Joseph in Egypt, it was Simeon that Joseph held captive while the others went back to Canaan to get their father Jacob. Simeon is chastised by his father at Jacob’s death as a man of unbridled violence against people and animals ([Gen 49:5-7](#)).

Levi, along with his part in the Dinah event, would become the son through whom would come [the priesthood](#). This began as a curse, as Jacob swore that Levi and Simeon would be scattered and have no permanent settlement in the land of Israel ([Gen 49:7](#)). Simeon was eventually absorbed into Judah ([Josh 19:9](#)). But the Levites would eventually be scattered as priests to the four corners of the nation, becoming ministers and servants of God to the people.

Judah is a character that gets a lot of play in the story. His name means “[praise](#),” and it is from his name that the word “[Jew](#)” is derived. However, Judah does not seem like much of a praise to his father. Judah comes up with the plan to sell Joseph into slavery. Judah is also known for another, even more sordid event. Judah [married a Canaanite named Shua](#). He had two sons, whom the Lord put to death because they were wicked. His firstborn son was named [Er](#), and Judah took a wife for him named [Tamar](#). After her husband and his wife both die, it happens that through trickery and deception, Judah ends up sleeping with Tamar whom he thinks is a prostitute. They have a son named [Perez](#), who becomes the line from which Christ would be born! This is not a comment on how good Judah was, but on how gracious God is!

The only thing we really know about [Issachar](#) is that Leah viewed him as vindication against her sister Rachel, whom Jacob loved. For, Issachar was born after Leah had become convinced that she could no longer bear children. Thus, she named him “[recompense](#).”

[Zebulun's](#) birth is the sad story of an unloved woman hoping against hope that now, after bearing him six sons, her husband will finally love her! This is what Zebulun means, “[good gift](#).” Yet, the naming of the son as a good gift from God [demonstrates Leah's faith](#) in God despite her husband's bad will towards her. Other than this, we know basically nothing about Zebulun.

Here we need to go back to the list in Exodus. The next person is [Benjamin](#). Benjamin is Rachel's son. The reason that Joseph is not mentioned here is because he is called out specially by Moses after the list ends. Otherwise, the two would be placed together, because Benjamin and Joseph are full brothers of the women that Jacob spent 14 years slaving for Laban in order to win as a bride.

[Jacob loved Rachel](#) and after she bore him Joseph, she gave birth to Benjamin. Yet, the delivery went terribly wrong, and Rachel died. We don't know much about

Benjamin, except that when Joseph apparently had died, his father took extreme care to insure that nothing about happen to him. He was all that Jacob had left of Rachel. When the brothers travel to Egypt during the Famine, Joseph instructs them to go back and get Benjamin, because this was his only full brother. Thus, it is because of Benjamin that both Jacob and Joseph weep. Benjamin is also treated with special love by Joseph when they are reunited in Egypt. No surprise there.

Dan and Naphtali are mentioned next, as they are the two sons of **Bilhah**, Rachel's maidservant. It was **Rachel's scheming** that brought about their conception. She figured that if she could not bear, then at least Jacob could have her children through an old-fashioned surrogate. Their very **conception seems to go against all moral law**. But then again, so does the entire life of Jacob for the most part!

Again, we know little about **Dan**, but Jacob predicts **he will be a judge**, a **serpent**, a viper, a deliverer (**Gen 49:16-18**) when the tribe is established in the land. In contrast, **Naphtali** "is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns" (**Gen 49:21**). **What does Jacob mean?** Perhaps it simply refers to the idea of settling the land, that Naphtali would be relatively free and at peace in comparison to the other tribes. But that doesn't say anything about the man himself.

Gad and Asher are mentioned last. These are the two sons of **Zilpah**, the handmaid of Leah. Like Dan and Naphtali, these two boys are **the product of a conniving and jealous woman** trying to make her husband happy. The birth narratives reveal a lot more about Israel than most would ever want to admit, because the picture it paints is not very pretty.

Gad would be like Dan, violent and at war. Jacob said he would be a **raider**. **Asher** would be more like Naphtali, "rich" and "yielding royal delicacies" Yet, Jacob's pronouncements don't really tell us a lot about these later boys. They mostly refer to the future, not the past.

With that in mind, let us look a little closer into the situation that Moses reminds us about. "These are the names of the sons of Israel *who came to Egypt with Jacob*." **How did this nomadic group of scoundrels end up way down in Egypt?** It happened through two complementary things: The **evil plans** of the 12 brothers, and the **sovereign good plan** of God (**Gen 50:20**). This was how Joseph saw at it. Joseph, who Moses recalls, "**was already in Egypt**."

Joseph was the firstborn son of Rachel, the only woman Jacob ever loved. As such, this made Joseph very special to Jacob. Jacob was a man who played favorites. He made for his son that now infamous coat of many colors (Gen 37:3). After this, Joseph had a dream that he reported quite joyously to his brothers. He would rule over them and they would bow down to him.

This was the occasion that put the brothers over-the-edge. They could not stand this little upstart, so they devised a scheme to kill him. But Reuben intervened and Judah devised to have him sold to a band of marauding Ishmaelites (their cousins). It turns out that Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt, but Joseph eventually becomes a prominent ruler there. The Pharaoh of those days said to him, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” He was given a signet ring, clothed in the garments of royalty, given a gold chain, made to ride in Pharaoh’s second chariot, and given a wife—the daughter of a priest On—named Asenath who bore him two children: Ephraim and Manasseh.¹

But Joseph rose to this position because he had predicted that a famine would come upon the land of Egypt. God had revealed to Joseph something that none of the pagan priests could figure out. This prediction led to Egypt storing away tons of food that then became the means by which Jacob sent his sons to try and buy some food, because the famine was severe in Canaan too. It also led to Joseph rising to such a prominent position in Egypt.

After a long story, Joseph convinces the brothers to first bring Benjamin and then their father Jacob. And they all end up in Egypt together. Genesis 46:27 says, “And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.” Moses says the same thing again in Exodus 1:5.

Just like You

At this point I want to make a comment, and then return to the number of people that Moses talks about entering into Egypt at the beginning. What do you come away with from this all too brief tale of these boys and their flight to Egypt? Here is something you must never forget about the Bible, nor about Exodus, because the

¹ By the way, if you want to read one of the great love stories of all time, the book Joseph and Asenath (in the OT Pseudepigrapha) is one of my all time favorites.

Bible is perhaps the only book in all the world that **tells the truth about the heroes of its history**. This gives the Scripture great credibility for reporting historical truth, because if it were not the truth, no one would dare write it, let alone think of it for all time as their Holy Scripture.

What is that truth? For the greater part, this is a family of wicked, rowdy, violent, deceptive, conniving, lying, sexually immoral, murdering villains! You just can't say it any other way. And if you think it's not true, because it goes against your preconceptions of human nature or of Christianity, well, then, you just haven't read the story or been honest with it. This is why I wanted to recount their tale to you. Yes, **God worked amazingly in their lives**. Yes, **God slowly brought about sanctification in them** (frankly, VERY slowly!).

But these people are *real* people. In as much, you can relate to them very personally, because they are you. What is true of the ancestors of Israel will soon become all too apparent of those lead out of Egypt by the mighty hand of God. Everyone is in the same boat of depravity. And if God does not do something about it, all is lost.

Understand, God did not choose them because they were better than others. **Frankly, they may have been worse than just about any family on earth!** No, God's choice rested in nothing more than his sovereign good pleasure to take a man named Abram and give him a blessing in order to show the world how great and glorious He (that is God) is. When you read the book of Exodus, then, and all of the complaining, grumbling, bickering, back-stabbing and the rest, remember that they are their fathers. Remember that they are you!

And when you remember them, you are to remember yourself. Not the person next to you in the pew. But you! You are to know that you are like them, and if left to your own good pleasure, you would do the very same things that they did. This is the truth that God's word consistently brings to bear on human nature. If you cannot get this basic truth down, then the Scripture will never be for you. You might as well go and read Ben Franklin's proverbs on living, because the Bible will be of no use to you. For, you will have no need of a God to save you. All you need to do is figure out how better to save yourself.

“Seventy” and “Fruitful”

Now, I wish to return to this number seventy and the phrase that comes after it in **Exodus 1:7**. Verse 7 says, “The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceeding strong, so that the land was filled with them.” There is a very specific theological purpose for telling you this, besides how it sets up the chapter as the new Pharaoh decides to try to kill off these ever increasing pests of the field.

“Be fruitful and multiply” was a command given to the people of the earth in Eden and on Ararat. These facts mean that built into the very purpose of mankind is the idea of multiplying our seed. It is not a curse to have lots of children, but a blessing. Mankind is not a virus invading mother earth, therefore needing to be eradicated as a few Satanic professors and politicians are advocating. The earth was given to man in a state that would require lots of children to subdue it, to turn every part of it into the original pattern set in the Garden itself.

The Israelites were taking this command seriously! Yet, there is more to it than this. God had promised this particular people that they would become a mighty nation. Thus, when it says that they were multiplying, this shows the covenant faithfulness of God. But his faithfulness, doesn't always (perhaps doesn't usually) come about the way we think it should. It took a very long time for this promise to even be kindled into hope.

Sarah, you will recall, could not even have a child, because she was 90 years old. Yet, God granted her Isaac. But only Isaac. Isaac was granted two boys: Jacob and Esau. Yet, he only had these two boys. In those scores of years before Reuben was finally born, there was really not much hope at all that God would turn them into a mighty nation. This is partly the way you are to read the true explosion of children in **Genesis 29-30** of 12 boys to one man. Then, just as suddenly, the number moves from 12 to 70 in only a single generation.

What is about to happen now, in the centuries of silence in Egypt, is that God is going to turn that 70 into 2,000,000+.² Moses is intentionally drawing to our attention the fact that **God is keeping his promise to Abraham**, *in spite of everything that the Pharaoh of Egypt is trying to do to stop it!* In other words, the

² We learn in **Exodus 38:26** that there were 603,550 men, twenty and older that could serve in the army. Most scholars believe that means there would have been over 2 million people that left in the Exodus. A lot of scholars doubt that this is even possible. But I assure you, it is quite feasible mathematically. Besides, if it was just a few people that left in the Exodus, it totally defeats the point of Exodus 1.

incredible growth of the people here is more than just a mathematical equation. It is a miracle of the Lord God who is the **Covenant Keeper**. This is what the point of **Exodus 1:8—14** (Pharaoh's speech) is about.

Dating the Exodus

It says that a **new king** arose in Egypt. Later he is called **Pharaoh**. “Pharaoh is a title rather than a name, although it came to be used as a name. Originally it was the Egyptian word for ‘great house,’ referring to the palace of the king.”³ And this king did not remember Joseph. It is evident that a good deal of time has passed, perhaps three-four generations, even more.⁴ We do not know exactly which Pharaoh is now ruling. The problem is that there is precious little extra-biblical information about anything in Exodus. And what we have in the Bible is slightly confusing. Scholars usually date the Exodus to one of two time periods: around **1260 BC** or around **1445 BC**. **Why the difference?**

Solomon says that he built the temple “**480 years after the Exodus**” (**1 Kgs 6:1**). If this is a literal date (and not all record keeping is literal)⁵, then the Exodus took place in 1445 BC during the reign of **Amenhotep II** (1453-1425⁶) or **Thutmose III** (1479-1425⁷), both of whom were mighty building of Egypt. This date seems supported both by **Jephthah**, who said it had been 300 years since the conquest of Canaan (**Jdg 11:26**), and by **Paul** who says there were 450 years between the Exodus and the capture of Jerusalem (**Acts 13:19-20**).

On the other hand, Solomon could be using the number symbolically. Some suggest that this is what is going on based mostly on a rather large number of archeological finds, which presently support the later date, and actually it is pretty overwhelming. What is especially troubling for these scholars is that the store city of Raamses (**Ex 1:11**) was completed by Raamses II, who reigned 200 years after the early date. **This, for instance, is why Raamses is the name of the Pharaoh in Hollywood movies.**

³ Osborn, N. D., & Hatton, H. (1999). *A handbook on Exodus*. UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (21). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴ Demetrius the Chronographer (3rd Cent. B. C.) says there were seven generations between Abraham and Moses (Frag. #3).

⁵ For example, the number “70” in the Masoretic text of Exodus 1:5 is changed to “75” by the Septuagint as well as Stephen (see Acts 7:14).

⁶ Date found in Ryken, *Exodus*, p. 20.

⁷ Wiki. TourEgypt.com has Thutmose III (1504-1450).

As for me, I tend to think that the numbers in other Scriptures are reflecting something more than symbolism (this isn't apocalyptic literature). Thus, I lean towards the earlier date of around 1445 BC. And archeological evidence cannot rule this date out.

But **the point of the Pharaoh's speech** is the **important thing**. He viewed the foreigners as an increasing threat to the Egyptian Empire. **Why?** Because they had remained a separate people, not mixing into Egyptian civilization. **And** they had been **multiplying like fruit-flies**. **And** finally, there appears to be talks between the Israelites and other enemies of Egypt to wage war on the Egyptians. This is why he says, **"if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."**

Let me call your attention briefly to that last phrase. It is possibly a figure of speech (like we have "it's raining cats and dogs"). It may mean **"gain control over"** the land which would explain why the king would be afraid of them. But most translations say **"escape from"** the land, which makes sense if Moses is using this as a piece of **foreshadowing** in the book itself.⁸ If this is its meaning, then it fits with what we know about this man later on in the book. He did not want them to escape, because they had become **valuable slaves** in building his empire.

In order to prevent the control or the escape, he sets **taskmasters** over the people. It is here that we see the first attempt not only to enslave, but quite possibly, to kill a large number of Israelites through harsh living. Murdering Jews will be **Satan's strategy** from here on out, in order to keep the promise given to Eve from coming true! Remember, Pharaoh is trying to eliminate their numbers (and Satan does not want Messiah to be born. What we will see in a remarkable way is how the birth of Moses parallels the birth of Jesus Christ to perfection)!

So Moses points out not once, but many times **the condition of the people**. They were **"afflicted"** with **"heavy burdens"** (**vs. 11**). They were **"oppressed"** (**12**). The Egyptians **"ruthlessly"** made the people work as **"slaves"** (**13**). Their lives became **"bitter with hard service"** (**14**). They were made to work **the bricks and the fields** in ways that it is no wonder the black man in the west latched onto and identified with, especially in America.

⁸ Contra Douglas Stuart ('Exodus', *NAC*, p. 66) who says that this interpretation doesn't make sense at all.

But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread abroad (12). That is the point here. And [the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel](#). Here then you see something very strange. God had said it was a blessing to increase and multiply. Yet, this blessing is becoming a curse for Israel. [Why is this?](#) It is not because increasing is an evil thing.

It is because we live in [an evil world](#). Yet, it is not difficult to put yourself in Pharaoh's shoes, so long as you are willing to read the story objectively. He was [looking out for his own people](#), the Egyptians. He was looking out for [his economy](#). He did not want the slaves to leave and so send Egypt into a recession. He did not want to bring [a war](#) into his own land, because some upstart people from the land of Goshen decided maybe they might just be able to take Pharaoh's army with the help of some of the other nomads.

What we have here is nothing that we do not also have today. [Political expediency](#). [National pride](#). Belief that [your way of life is the best](#) and that you do not want foreigners taking over and changing all that you have built up. Frankly, in the city of man, I do not really disagree with any of these thoughts of the Pharaoh. I think he is somewhat justified, as the ruler of the land, to have them, in the same way that America is justified if she wants to build a wall on her border in order to keep illegal immigrants out (i.e. from breaking the laws of the United State), or in the same way that I believe it is desirable to keep peace in our land, rather than have war.

[It is what the Pharaoh did, however, to solve the political and cultural problems, that is itself a very grave problem](#). He put a people, a people blessed by one of his own predecessors, into extremely harsh and ruthless slavery.⁹ Rather than fence them out of Egypt, he walled them in, like the Soviets in East Berlin. He had forgotten Joseph. Quite possibly, since Joseph would have known about the covenant with Abraham and would surely have shared it with the Pharaoh to whom the LORD revealed so much, it means that he forgot Joseph's God as well!

Conclusion

Whatever the case, we have here many things to learn from the opening sentences of Exodus. You have seen first and foremost that those who went down into Egypt were a sordid band of brothers. The biblical doctrine of [total depravity](#) fits their

⁹ It is certainly possible that this Pharaoh was a different nationality than the previous Pharaoh, as Egypt was not a monolithic culture ruled forever by one and only one people group.

lives quite nicely. The point of seeing this is that you do not idealize the stories of the Bible. This is not mythology, nor national-pride building. This is a story that builds up God and God alone.

For, he is the one that **predestined** these men to come into the world, to cast away Joseph, to go down into Egypt because of a famine, to remain there with their families, to become slaves, to be delivered by a mighty right arm. God is the one that gets the credit, even in these early verses, for seeing them increase and multiply according to his grace and covenant promises.

God is also the one who also oversees the actions of the Pharaoh, to turn against the Jews, to treat them terribly, so that a mighty deliverance might be proclaimed throughout the earth, for all time, right down to you and I. **You must not think that any of this was outside of the will and plan of God.** But the LORD told Abram centuries earlier, “**Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions**” (**Gen 15:13-14**). God did not intend for Egypt (the mighty Egypt) to ever become the Promised Land. He foretold of their coming slavery and of the deliverance that would arise out of it.

And, though I have told you a lot about the brothers and about the Pharaoh, **it is really God** that you are to be focused upon this morning. **And** God is about to do something incredible, but not before a great deal more suffering occurs and a deliverer is born and grows up to being about God’s gracious salvation. **And** when you think on your own sufferings (and they surely will come if you are a Christian), then remember the story of Israel in slavery to Egypt.

Our contemporary world has movies to help make this story so memorable to us. In the old days, they had plays. Quite possibly, the exodus was turned into a play by a man named Maybe Ezekiel the Tragedian. I like the way he summarizes our verses today. Maybe this will help it stick in your mind:

- 1 And when from Canaan Jacob did depart,
- 2 With threescore souls and ten he did go down
- 3 To Egypt’s land; and there he did beget
- 4 A host of people: suffering, oppressed,
- 5 Ill-treated even to this very day

- 6 By ruling powers and by wicked men.
- 7 For Pharaoh, seeing how our race increased
- 8 In swarms, devised against us this grand scheme:
- 9 He forced the men to manufacture bricks
- 10 For use in building lofty walls and towers;
- 11 Thus with their toil he made his cities strong.

And then remember the God who orchestrated all of the events so that he might gain a great name for himself. **And** trust in him by faith alone. He is not a God to be crossed. He is not a God to be stopped. Pharaoh—and behind him, Satan—tried and tried. They were afraid of the Jews. They were afraid of being overtaken. They were afraid of being crushed, especially by one that was promised to come from their line. Try as he might, Satan cannot destroy the promise. And try he will, as we will see next week! But in the end, this will mean his downfall, the binding of the Strongman, the casting of Leviathan (whom the Scripture also calls Pharaoh; **Ezek 29:3, 32:2**) into the bottomless pit.

And therefore, worship the LORD and as you leave to go into a new week. **And** be reminded that he alone is God over man and beast, over history and time, over Israel and over Pharaoh, over you and over me.