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**Israel's Oppression**

**Evil Plans, Courageous Resistance**

***Exodus 1***

**Purpose:** To discover the depths of Israel's oppression and what is required of believers in those circumstances.

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*For some people, history is a big yawn. Make the study live by emphasizing the human aspects. Help the group to use their imaginations.*

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Oppression is a nasty word, but it grabs the headlines because it's the reason for much conflict today. Scenes out of this chapter fit totalitarian societies. Only the methods of oppression change. God's people were not spared in 1700 b.c., and they are not always spared now. But in this study you will find a bright spot of courageous resistance.

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**1.**  To you, what is the most obvious example of oppression in the world today, and why?

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**Question 1.** *Every study begins with an “approach” question, which is meant to be asked before the passage is read. These questions are important for several reasons.*

*First, they help the group to warm up to each other. No matter how well a group may know each other, there is always a stiffness that needs to be overcome before people will begin to talk openly. A good question will break the ice.*

*Second, approach questions get people thinking along the lines of the topic of the study. Most people will have lots of different things going on in their minds (dinner, an important meeting coming up, how to get the car fixed) that will have nothing to do with the study. A creative question will get their attention and draw them into the discussion.*

*Third, approach questions can reveal where our thoughts or feelings need to be transformed by Scripture. This is why it is especially important not to read the passage before the approach question is asked. The passage will tend to color the honest reactions people would otherwise give because they are, of course, supposed to think the way the Bible does. Giving honest responses to various issues before they find out what the Bible says may help them to see where their thoughts or attitudes need to be changed.*

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**2.**  Read Exodus 1. How did “the sons of Israel” (Jacob's descendants) fare in Egypt (vv. 1–7)?

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**Question 2.** Seventy people and a large number of household slaves had come to Egypt. By the time of the exodus, the Israelites numbered about 600,000 men, “besides women and children” (Ex 12:37).

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**3.** What was their situation under a king who had forgotten Joseph's role (Gen 41) in saving the country (vv. 8–14)?

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**Question 3.** Do not skip over Joseph's crucial role in saving Egypt. Nearly three hundred years have elapsed since his death and the end of Genesis. Egypt is at the height of her power under a new dynasty of pharaohs. A great building program is begun in the fertile delta region. There is a large labor force in the area. Also, Pharaoh is uneasy about an alien group on his borders. The foreigners, called the Israelites, are shepherds of a religion that sacrificed bulls, regarded as sacred by the Egyptians. The process of making the Israelites slaves lasted many years, through the reigns of several pharaohs. In the end, the Israelites lost their land, possessions, courage (with rare exceptions), and desire to be free (2:13–14).

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**4.** How do oppressors today usually justify their actions?

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**Question 4.** Get several ideas quickly. Do not get into political debates.

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**5.** Why did Pharaoh's strategy backfire (v. 12)?

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**6.** The old privileged status of the Hebrews had faded into abject slavery. How would you have felt as a Hebrew youth doing backbreaking labor under a burning sun?

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**7.** What new population control plans did Pharaoh devise (vv. 15–22)?

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**8.** How were his plans thwarted?

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**9.** Imagine the emotions of the king and the midwives when he summoned them (v. 18). What was the secret of the women's self-control and wisdom (vv. 17, 21)?

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**Question 9.** Explore in depth what it means to fear God. The root biblical idea means trust and faith in God and his Word, and hatred for anything that is contrary to his will.

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**10.** How does your fear of God motivate right moral conduct and give you the courage to withstand the temptation to do evil?

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**Question 10**. Fear of God is to be taken in the positive sense of account ability to him for one's actions, not in the negative sense of abject cowering before him.

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**11.** The tougher Pharaoh's pressure, the greater Israel's increase (vv. 20–21). How do you account for this?

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**12.** In what circumstances have you felt oppressed by unreasonable demands?

How did you find God's help?

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**Question 12.** Avoid superficial generalities. Encourage people to be honest. Some may never have had the experience of finding God's help in unfair, unreasonable situations.

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