

# Genocide Frustrated

## Pray

Deliver me from the fear of man, O Lord. May I learn to fear and love You wholeheartedly.

## Read

EXODUS 1:1-22

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • Did you ever take an unpopular stand against something you believed to be wrong? What motivated you?

**THINK FURTHER** • In Genesis, God promised that Abraham's descendants would become a great and powerful nation, and also that they would experience a 400-year period of slavery. And so it came to pass! Starting with v. 7, ponder the words in this chapter which emphasize the nation's phenomenal growth, and also the words which emphasize the harshness of the times. Perhaps you would not have expected both these things to happen simultaneously?

The Pharaoh is not named, although he would have been one of the greatest men in the world at that time. Ignorant of or indifferent to his country's history, and to Joseph, one of their greatest benefactors, he fears the foreigners in their midst and hatches a genocidal plan—first slavery, then secret slaughter, and finally (22) public murder. Fear can be very shrewd (10); and fear can lead ordinary people to do very evil things.

However, two named women obstruct the Pharaoh's plan, and—

their names mean Shining and Beautiful. These two women could hardly have imagined that they were to become the midwives of salvation for a whole nation. By one tiny act a whole family, a village or a people may be saved!

We are told twice about their motivation (17,21): they drove out their lower fears with a higher fear (Matt. 10:28); their civic duty was embedded in a deeper obedience (Acts 5:29). "Fear of God" means sincere obedience; utmost reverence; overwhelming awe. Think about the difference between the midwives' fear of God and the Pharaoh's fear of the Israelites. Was there ever a better reason for unpunctuality?

**APPLICATION** • What "fears" are you facing at the present time? Have you given them over to the Lord, knowing that he is always with you? Why not hide some of the "fear nots" in your heart (Psa. 23:4; Isa. 41:10; 1 John 4:18)?

## Pray

Thank You, Lord, for Your many precious promises. You are always with me, You know and meet my needs, You show me the way to go. Quiet my heart today from all fear.

# Saved to Save

## Pray

Open my eyes and heart, Lord, to see anew that You hear, remember, and know all I do.

## Read

EXODUS 2:1-25

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). Praise him!

**THINK FURTHER** • Four stories are combined in this chapter as 40 years flash quickly past: Moses’ birth; his rescue (which we might call, “How the Pharaoh got a Jewish grandson”); his interventions and escape (or, “The rejected rescuer gets away”); and his marriage. The first story is exquisitely told and focused: there are 140 words in vs. 1 to 10 and the middle ones are “the baby” (6). His mother “saw that he was a goodly child” (2, RSV, echoing Gen. 1); the rabbis said the entire hut lit up when he was born. The Pharaoh (probably Rameses II) had 111 sons and 59 daughters, and just the right one is on the river bank at the right time. Have you noticed the key roles women play in these two chapters?

The reader knows that Moses is to be the Jews’ rescuer (that’s how his Egyptian name was interpreted, “Pulled out of danger”), but his first efforts miscarry and he goes off for a long course in the school of the wilderness. Obviously, we would like to know more about all that he

learned and did in those years, but the Bible does not satisfy our curiosity. His next rescue attempt (17,19) is more successful, and gains him a wife, “Little bird” and a son, “Stranger-boy.” The boy’s name indicates that even after all the years away, Moses’ heart is still back with his people in Egypt, whose situation worsens.

God has only been mentioned in 1:17,20,21. But now, in the thick shadows and deep darkness of this chapter’s close, like the four deep notes of a bell, we are told: “God heard...God remembered...God saw...God knew” (23-25, RSV).

**APPLICATION** • What does it mean to you that God hears, remembers, sees, and knows everything you say and do? How should knowing that you cannot hide from God affect the way you will live today?

## Pray

Lord, I bring you my past mistakes, mistaken assertiveness and old sorrows, burying them quietly with the words, “You hear... remember... see... know....” Thank You, Lord.

# On Fire with God

## Pray

Set my heart on fire, Lord, as I realize who You are, the Creator and God of the universe.

## Read

EXODUS 3:1-12

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • God is our Lord, but he is also our Sovereign Lord. Reflect on your attitude when you approach your Savior who is a holy God.

**THINK FURTHER** • The first two chapters of Exodus flash through 80 years (Exod. 7:7); the last 38 chapters occupy one year. God has been silent in the last two chapters, but now he starts to speak. Unscroll the list of verbs by which God describes himself from v. 6 to v. 10. Do you recognize here the God of *your* past, your present and your future?

The extraordinary thing about the flaming bush was that the fire was burning *in* or *on* the bush, but the bush was not being consumed. It was a fuel-less fire, burning independently in and of itself. It is thus a fitting symbol of the uncreated, eternal, Trinitarian God who alone exists independently, who is uncontingent—there never was a time when he was not. The book of Exodus begins and ends with the divine presence. Here and in 40:34 there is a limit to how close we can get to God. You have perhaps had a sense of this even with a person you know and love very deeply—

the sense that there is still depth upon depth which you have not plumbed. How much more so with God—the closer we come, the greater the distance of which we are aware.

Moses' first answer to God (4), is his best. When God calls us by name, we should reply "*Hinneni*, here I am!" But when God concludes his self-description by telling Moses to go to Pharaoh, because he, Moses, is part of God's rescue plan, Moses backtracks: "Who am I...?" the first of a whole inventory of self-disqualifications! Forty years of shepherding have not erased his searing sense of failure. Verse 12 records a miracle of divine patience.

**APPLICATION** • How far back can you trace the story of God's faithfulness and tender mercy in your own and your family's life? How has this changed your life, and how are you passing it on? Will your life today show your thankfulness to God?

## Pray

Lord, when You call, help me to readily respond "Here am I" and trust You will give me anything I lack in serving You.

# Do You Know His Name?

## Pray

"I will exalt You, my God the King; I will praise Your name forever and ever"(Psa. 145:1).

## Read

EXODUS 3:13-22

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • In the Bible God has many names and titles. Reflect on those which are special to you.

**THINK FURTHER** • God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," "*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*" (14). Moses, the Israelites and we, too, are all caught up in the flux and change of history. We are changing from what we were to what we will be. Perhaps I am anxious about the future. Perhaps I have changed from what I was, almost unrecognizably. Or am I locked into patterns of thinking, acting, being that were formed long ago, even in childhood? Only God can say, "*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*," which may be paraphrased as "I always will be what I always have been." The words "is, was, will be" are the vocabulary of created beings on their way from the past to the future. But God is the great "I AM." Augustine said, "He was, because he was never lacking. He will be, because he never will be lacking. He is, because he always is."

This isn't what is usually called the changelessness or impassibility of God, which can sometimes seem rather static in its granite unyieldingness. Rather it pictures God as faithful, adequate,

entirely dependable in every conceivable situation. In the loneliness of bereavement, sometimes stabbing, sometimes dreary; when overwhelmed with tasks or trials; when we're tempted to say, "I can't; I won't; I'm not; who am I?..." we may turn again and again to the great "I AM." This is what is meant in v. 15 by remembering the name of God—not just recalling its syllables to mind, but remembering the Person it declares.

The despoiling of the Egyptians (21-22) has caused much comment. It was a fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 15:14; and in effect, compensation for years of slavery.

**APPLICATION** • "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exod. 20:7). How do you react to hearing God's name "misused"? Are you careful to keep his name holy in your conversations? How can you help others to keep his name holy?

## Pray

Holy is Your name, O Lord, a name above all others. May Your name be revered in all I say, and may I be a witness to the world of Your holiness.

# Excuses!

## Pray

Lord, apply Your Word to my heart today, so that I may become an instrument of blessing.

## Read

EXODUS 4:1-17

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • What excuses do you make when called to a service for God? Will they stand before God?

**THINK FURTHER** • Numbers 12:3 speaks of the humility of Moses. Here in this passage we see that humble people can sometimes be extremely stubborn! Moses runs through his repertoire of excuses with increasing bluntness: "What if...?" (1), "I have never..." (10), "Send someone else!" (13). Reader, how have you angered the Lord with your excuses, especially in the face of the revelation of his faithfulness? Yet notice that, in anger and in kindness, God continues to provide for Moses. In Egypt, Pharaoh and the Nile (the river of life) were regarded as divine. The cobra was a symbol of Pharaoh, the emblem of his divinely protected sovereignty and a threat to his enemies. He also had an official called "The Mouth" through whom he spoke, which may throw some light on God's provision of Aaron in v. 16.

Moses' prime concern seems to be his lack of fluency (10); in 6:12,30 he is still complaining about his "uncircumcised lips" (RSV). This need not have been a speech defect,

as many think—more likely a lack of fluency. An uncircumcised heart (Jer. 9:26b) is a heart that does not respond. Uncircumcised ears (Jer. 6:10) refers to inattentiveness, not deafness. Despite the signs he is given, Moses does not believe that God will provide the resources to do what he commands. We may take courage from the fact that despite these reservations and hesitations about the task he was called to do, Moses is still celebrated as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11:24-28. Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (died AD 258) observed, in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, that it is not difficult for a God who spoke to Balaam through an ass to inspire a person devoted to him with constancy and confidence! (Quoted in *Ancient Christian Commentary*.)

**APPLICATION** • Moses focused on his weaknesses and used them as excuses. Are you using your weaknesses as excuses for not doing God's will for you? If God could use a "staff," can he not use the ordinary things in your life? Will you yield the "ordinary things" to be used by him today?

## Pray

Lord, I have so little to give You, but that which I have I yield to You to be used in serving You. Use me in some way today.

# Not to Be Trifled With

## Pray

Teach me to obey, Lord, for “all Your words are true, all Your righteous laws are eternal” (Psa. 119:160).

## Read

EXODUS 4:18-31

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • Is there some promise you have made to God which you have not fulfilled? What is God asking you to do?

**THINK FURTHER** • This is a hard passage to understand; its very awkwardness is a tribute to its authenticity. At God’s command, a holy family has set out on the journey to Egypt. For some reason we do not know, although Moses had named his son Stranger-boy, and was thus still identifying with the Israelites, he had not circumcised the child. But God had said that all his people must be circumcised (Gen. 17:10-14), so of course it was especially important that the leader of his people should keep God’s laws. On the journey Moses’ wife became aware that a life was in danger—NIV assumes that it was Moses’ life (24, see NIV footnote). He fell sick and Zipporah was afraid he would die. So she took a sharp flintstone and circumcised their son, putting the foreskin near Moses’ feet. Some think that what she said to Moses was meant in anger or spite; but perhaps it was a combination of being upset about his disobedience and anxious about his illness. In the direct language

not uncommon in the Old Testament, with its omission of intermediate causes, the text says that the Lord tried to kill Moses. It is in this passage that we first read of the Lord hardening Pharaoh’s heart (21); and of the threat to his firstborn son. Yet it is also in this context that we are reminded that Israel is the Lord’s firstborn child (22). Ponder the violence of God in this story; the prompt, resourceful action of a discerning woman; and the belief and worship of the Israelites (in response to Moses and Aaron), which later proved to be superficial, undermined by a lack of trust in the One who called them (5:19-21; 6:9).

**APPLICATION** • Are there certain temptations or places where obedience to God is difficult for you? Are you trusting in your strength, or in God’s? You can find strength in God (1 Cor. 10:13). Will you trust him alone, completely, as you face difficult testings today?

## Pray

Lord, my strength is small, but You are faithful. I know whatever testing I face today, You will “provide a way out, so that I can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13).