

Sermon 2, Genocide in Four Easy Steps, Exodus 1

Proposition: Exodus shows us immediately that God keeps His promise of fertility — and that Pharaoh will fight to stop God’s promises from coming true.

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Introduction

In January 1942, the Third Reich saw victory on the horizon. “Nazi officials believed that the war was almost won and that Germany would shortly be ruling all of Europe, including England and Ireland.” So the chief of the extermination group within the SS called a meeting of the “various ministries and agencies of the S.S.-S.D.” At this meeting, he told them the following:

“The Jews should now in the course of the Final Solution be brought to the East . . . for use as labor. In big labor gangs, with separation of sexes, the Jews capable of work are brought to these areas and employed in road building, in which task undoubtedly a great part will fall through natural diminution.

“The remnant that finally is able to survive all this — since this is undoubtedly the part with the strongest resistance — must be treated accordingly, since these people, representing a natural selection, are to be regarded as the germ cell of a new Jewish development.”

Shirer goes on to recount that among high Nazi circles,

None of them understood at this time — not, in fact, until toward the end of 1942, when it was too late — how valuable the millions of Jews might be to the Reich as slave labor. At this point they only understood that working millions of Jews to death on the roads of Russia might take some time. Consequently long before these unfortunate people could be worked to death — in most cases the attempt was not even begun — Hitler and Himmler decided to dispatch them by quicker means.¹

Brothers and sisters, this horrifying Nazi nightmare in our own time uses the language and thought-forms of the twentieth century to express genocidal hatred identical to that of the Bronze

¹ William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 965-966.

Age Pharaoh who determined to work the Jews to death. “They made them serve with rigor, so that a great part would undoubtedly fall through natural diminution.” Yet that genocidal intent of Pharaoh is undoubtedly the main thrust of our chapter this evening. The book of Exodus opens with a presentation of the extraordinary fulfillment of God’s promise of a seed for Abraham, and quickly introduces a Pharaoh who is determined to stand against God and stop His people’s increase. The rest of Exodus will be about who wins.

I. Prelude to Genocide: Proliferating by God’s Promises, v.7

As we saw last week, our story begins with a “now,” harking back to Genesis. If you are not familiar with the book of Genesis, Exodus will make little sense to you. For a very quick review, let me remind you that in its first 11 chapters, Genesis recounts the primeval history — the creation of the world, the fall, the promise of a redeemer, and then the destinies of the two prominent lines, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, down through the Tower of Babel incident. From there, it zooms in on a single family, the family of Terah and his son Abraham. Immediately after the narration of the Tower of Babel, God calls Abraham to leave Ur and go to a land that God will show him. This calling is not only to leave, but to be the bearer of a sevenfold blessing whose climax is that in Abraham’s seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. The rest of Genesis relates the significant events in the lives of Abraham, his son, his grandson, and then his great-grandsons. Those great-grandsons of Abraham are named here at the beginning of the book of Exodus. They came to Egypt, not alone but with their households. These dozen men, with their wives and children, added up to a nucleus of 70 people. That’s a pretty respectable number, for sure. Imagine trying to get all of your siblings and their children to move to Egypt with you.

But not only did they come to Egypt. In the generations following the death of Joseph and the other brothers, their descendants multiplied overwhelmingly. I grew up in a big family. I am the oldest of ten children. My father and mother each had one brother who had eight children. And I know a number of other families with 8 or more children. Yet even in the little subculture in which I grew up and in which I still live, families of more than four or five are the exception rather than the rule. But because the promises of God centered on descendants, the children of Israel surely had families of ten or a dozen children not as an exception, but as a rule. Notice what v. 7 says:

Seven expressions for increase are used in this verse [Exodus 1:7], a number indicative of perfection: (1) *were fruitful*; (2) *and teemed*; (3) *and multiplied*; (4) *and grew mighty*; (5) *with strength [b-meodh]*; (6) *strongly [meodh]*; (7) *so that the land was filled with them*.²

The multiplication of Israel was a perfect multiplication, a growth so enormous that there is no other verse in the Bible that talks about “being fruitful and multiplying” with seven different ways of referring to that growth. Now, the text is simultaneously highly emphatic and highly vague. It does not say “They increased at an annual rate of 8%.” It tells us where they started

² Rabbi Umberto Cassuto, *Exodus* (1967), pg. 9.

(with 12 brothers) and where they ended (603,550 men over 20 years old, Numbers 1:46) 430 years later. Now, I don't want us to get turned aside from the point, as we so easily can here. But I enjoy spreadsheets and I know some of you do too. Here is a very quick-and-dirty summary of the mathematical facts. God told Abraham that his descendants would multiply, yes, but also that they would be enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years and that they would depart in the fourth generation (Genesis 15:13, 16). Now, according to the genealogy in Exodus 6, Moses himself is only the fourth generation from those great-grandsons of Abraham. His great-grandfather was Levi. So if we assume the very impressive *average* of 12 surviving children per couple (that is, a six-fold multiplication with each generation) we get the following table.

First Generation	12	Levi
Second Generation	72	Kohath
Third Generation	432	Amram
Fourth Generation	2,592	Moses
Fifth Generation	15,552	Gershom
Sixth Generation	93,312	
Seventh Generation	559,872	
	3,359,232	
	20,155,392	
	120,932,352	
	725,594,112	
	4,353,564,672	

Now, this table only contains a few facts. The original generation was 12 brothers. That's a fact. Moses was the fourth generation. That's a fact. But how fast the children of Israel were multiplying? That's guesswork. The second generation is about right, or actually a little high. But again, the point here is that by the time Moses was eighty years old, we could already be looking at the beginnings of the seventh generation, assuming that his parents were born around the same time as most people of their generation. If they were late in their generations, we could be looking at the beginnings of the eighth generation, which is what the total population figures in Numbers 1 seem to suggest.

In other words, brothers and sisters, the narrative requires us to believe that Pharaoh is not quite as much a bozo as he looked. Just like civil rulers today, he could look at mathematical tables that claimed to predict the future and make decisions according to what those statistical models suggested. Let's just say that during the third generation Pharaoh is looking at this particular model. His royal bean counters are there telling him that *right now*, Israel is only five

or six hundred people. That is a pretty tolerable minority, even in an era when national populations were most likely far lower than they are now. But the bean counters are urging the reality that left unchecked, in forty years (two generations), the Hebrews are going to be *over fifteen thousand* strong, with the next generation catapulting to almost one hundred thousand! Pharaoh, this is a crisis! Pharaoh, you have got to take this seriously! Make them all wear masks or *two million people are going to die!* Oh, wait. Wrong statistical projection. I meant, make them all wear condoms!

But in all seriousness, folks, we know that these kinds of mathematical projections can drive policy. We have no idea what Pharaoh's motives were. But we can run the numbers just as his court officials might have, and we can see that if your typical Hebrew family is raising a dozen kids to maturity, social unrest is going to come out of nowhere as the native Egyptians feel like they are losing their homeland to these interlopers. "When I was a kid, there were 36 times fewer Hebrews than there are today!" Well, the text is telling us that Egyptian grandfathers could say something like that and be perfectly correct.

The blessing of God is a problem. We love blessing, but we don't love it so much when we see it falling on the wrong people.

Have you ever thought about the blessing of God as a potential liability? Are you aware that it can make certain people very upset to see you flourishing? That if our church grows to the point where its members really have a certain likeness to one another, and a certain stiffness to their spines that makes them offensive to the elite, we could get in serious trouble? Our civilization is not a forward-looking one. When I see on my mortgage bill that the loan will need to be paid off in full in June of 2048, I can't even comprehend how far in the future that is. Yet the inexorable mathematics of blessing raised the hackles of Pharaoh, the god of the Egyptians. In his mind, Egypt was only big enough for one god, and it was not Yahweh. The blessing of the LORD could not be tolerated in his borders. The fulfilled promises of God were making him feel weak.

So we need to get ready, brothers and sisters. We should pray for God to keep His promises — His promise to save our children, His promise to build His church, His promise to deliver us from sin such that the vices that enslave our neighbors have no power over us. And then when He does, we should expect it to goad the world to madness.

II. Four Steps to Genocide, vv. 8-22

That is exactly what the blessing of God did sometime during the annals of Bronze Age Egypt. It made Pharaoh decide to commit genocide. Again, we need to recognize that according to the text of Exodus, this may not have been anything like the effort to wipe out 11 million Jews that Hitler undertook. At the outset, it may have had very modest goals, even as low as working a few dozen prime-age men to death. Genocide seems like a name far too harsh. Let's call it "population management," "labor force services," even (dare I say it) "planned parenthood." Yes, he wanted to keep them in Egypt — already he was aware that they might depart from the land, leaving his service altogether. But he also wanted them to not be too large a part of Egypt. Minorities need to stay minorities. And here begins the long record of anti-Jewish policy that

fills the pages of history. Egypt did not want to nurture a fifth column within its bosom. So it set about dealing shrewdly with the people of God.

A. Set Taskmasters Over them and Make them Work, v. 11

Very much along the lines of the S.S. in January 1942, Pharaoh and the Egyptian elites surrounding him came up with a plan. The plan was simple: afflict them with hard labor. If you don't like what a group is doing, put them to work. In this case, Pharaoh set them about a fairly large task — the building of a pair of cities. If you've ever built a house, you know it's a lot of work. If you've built a subdivision, you know it's even more work. But to build a city is indeed a project that could strike fear into the heart and put soreness in the back. But the one thing it can't do is defeat the promises of God! The more they were oppressed, the more they increased. Can we say that about the people of God today? Is your faith in something greater than material prosperity and comfort? Are you eager to claim the promises of God even when under duress? The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. But if you thought you might be put on the roads of Russia or the store cities of Egypt to be worked to death, would you still be willing to have children? Would you still believe that God's promise of a seed was worth claiming, even under the dire circumstances with which Pharaoh afflicted the Hebrews? Are you ready for persecution?

B. Make their Work Much Harder and More Bitter, v. 14

Well, it can always get worse. And it quickly did. The Egyptians made them serve with rigor, in all kinds of rigorous and tough work. Once again, the verse uses seven words for labor and toil and pain to get the point across that this was not just some kind of typical hard job. This was an extraordinarily abusive treatment. We've gone beyond trying to get the Hebrews to work, and started mostly trying to kill them with work as the preferred method of death. I have never laid brick, but I understand that it is an extremely tough job under the best of circumstances. I have done fieldwork, and it is hard.

C. Secretly Instruct the Midwives to Kill their Sons at Birth, vv. 15-16

But of course, as the S.S. so quickly did in 1942, the Egyptian taskmasters discovered that people actually have a pretty large amount of work in them. We were made to work, and while it is possible to work humans to death, it is definitely not the speediest or most efficient way to engage in ethnic cleansing. And so Pharaoh summoned the midwives. Are these Hebrew midwives or (Egyptian) midwives of the Hebrews? The bottom line is that the text does not say. Their names (Bonnie and Sparkle) are beautiful, and their actions are even more so. It seems that Pharaoh instructs the midwives to secretly kill the babies during the birth process, so that they can say, "Oh no! It looks like you have a stillborn baby boy here." The malignancy of this action is extreme; in his evil, Pharaoh not only hates God but His promises and His children.

We have got to recognize this: The Serpent and his seed hate children! If you see Pharaoh and Herod wanting to kill all the little boys, or the Chinese government wanting to kill all the little girls, you should ask yourself "Why?" Why the hatred for these children? The answer is that Jesus loves children, and so Satan hates them. The pagan concept of children is that they are fodder for adult appetites. They are there to be enslaved, beaten, objectified, and used. And then

when they become adults, they perpetuate the cycle all over again. Pharaoh had no regard for the life of the children. As the great enemy of Christ, he foreshadows the modern abortion industry, which is itself the child of the eugenics movement, which grew out of the racist practices of American slavery combined with the “scientific” nonsense of Darwinism. Jesus hates those who hate children. Let me say that again. The book of Exodus clearly shows us Pharaoh as the enemy of God, the one who is out to frustrate God’s promises at every turn. And God hates that and judges that by shaking off Pharaoh and his military might into the sea. So will perish all who hate children. They have made an implacable enemy of Jesus Christ. Being thrown into the sea wearing a millstone is the best thing that could happen to them.

So if you hurt a child, beware. If you victimize your own or others’ children, look out. God hates that. If you donate to Planned Parenthood, you make an enemy of the Almighty. If you yell at your child and let him know that his little opinion is worthless, you make an enemy of the Almighty. Don’t be Pharaoh. Don’t be a genocidaire without a cause.

Commentators through the centuries have wondered why there were only two midwives if the population was so enormous. Of course, our statistical table can answer that question: When Moses was born, there may have been only about 200 Hebrew families. I have not had the chance to interview our midwives about this question, but I daresay that 100 families, even 100 families that each have a baby every year, is a fairly manageable practice.

If there were way more Hebrews at this point in time, of course, we can posit that these midwives ran the guild of midwives, or that Pharaoh only instructed the two he thought might be open to his plan, or that the narrative is written in a folk-tale style that deliberately elides extra details to focus on the meat of the story. In my book, of all the things to focus on in this story, “Why only two midwives?” is far from being the main point.

D. Openly Mobilize an Entire Population to Kill their Sons on Sight, v. 22

Thank God, the midwives did not carry out Pharaoh’s plot. We will talk more about that next week, but for now recognize that your obedience will not necessarily calm the rage of the God-hating tyrant. Far from it, actually. Instead, Pharaoh drafts all the people of Egypt to help him with genocide — a task for which the typical population is only too willing, as we have seen repeatedly in the last century. You would think that the ordinary human being would say “No, I’m not going along with that.” But the reverse is more likely true. Schindler and the Ten Booms stand out because they, like the midwives, feared God and stood against evil. Most people won’t.

So all of Egypt is turned against this little group in the Delta, that, as we have said, may number no more than 250 families.

III. How Can God Save Now?

And there the chapter ends. Pharaoh, the seed of the serpent who literally wears a snake on his head, plots against the people of God and wants to kill them. You can criticize his policy as irrational; most of the commentators do, one even going so far as to call him the original “rebel without a clue.” But that of course is the point. Sin is always irrational, whether it’s Pharaoh doing it or anyone else doing it. But though it’s irrational, it’s still deadly.

How can God save now? That is the question the opening chapter of Exodus poses. Genocide is happening. The midwives stood up for what was right, but now all of Egypt is getting involved. The conflict is set. God and Pharaoh are going to have it out. Who is going to win?

Now, we've read the book of Exodus. We know who is going to win. But what about in our own time? What about when the resources of our society are mobilized to commit genocide against the unborn? What about when a wicked government in China puts Muslims into concentration camps, or when a wicked government here puts Christians into concentration camps? How can God save? What if He doesn't plague the Chinese? What if He doesn't plague the USSR? Well, the answer of course, is that He did and does. In three years, the communist Chinese regime will be as old as the Soviet regime was when it collapsed in 1991. God let His people be afflicted four hundred years/four generations, yet brought them out in the end.

When the suffering seems interminable, when the night seems way too long, when you're wondering when the Son of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings, turn your eyes upon the God of the Exodus. He delivered. He will deliver again. Genocide is easy. God can and does let it happen. But He will not let it happen forever. He will intervene, and in the end, justice will be done. Wait on the Lord, like Israel did in Egypt's land. And in the meantime, fear Him. We will talk about that next week. For now, wait on the Lord and keep having babies. He will keep His promises; He will shake off Pharaoh. Your children will prosper and triumph. Wait, I say, on the Lord. Amen.