

Exodus 1:15-22 (KJV)

15 And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiprah, and the name of the other Puah: **16** And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see *them* upon the stools; if it *be* a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it *be* a daughter, then she shall live. **17** But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. **18** And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? **19** And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women *are* not as the Egyptian women; for they *are* lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them. **20** Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. **21** And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses. **22** And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

Thou Shalt Not Kill

OUTLINE

- (1) The Decree to Kill (v15-16, 22)
- (2) The Deference to Kill (v17-21)

INTRODUCTION

In 1968, Singapore had a population of 2 million. That year there were 47,241 babies born. The number of Israelites in Egyptian before the Exodus numbered possibly 2 million. And if there were 47, 000 babies born to the Israelites, there would have been massive killing that resulted in the extermination of a whole new generation of Israelites.

When Pharaoh decreed to kill the male babies of the Israelites in Egypt by casting them into the river Nile, he was committing murder, transgressing the sixth commandment that the Israelites will receive from God through Moses in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt.

The 6th commandment “*Thou shalt not kill*” (**Exodus 20:13**) teaches the sin of murder is forbidden. Implicit, is the duty to preserve our own life and the life of others, in other words, not injuring another and ourselves.¹ The very first command from God to this effect was given in Genesis 9:6.

Genesis 9:6 *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.*

Implicit in this command is that we are to refrain from injuring another in name and in body. It is well observed that the boiling emotions of anger, envy and hatred are associated with the acting of killing.

God would soon judge the murderous Pharaoh and the Egyptians with a great defeat by the ten plagues and the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.

The Roman orator, statesmen and writer of *De Republica* observed concerning the universal laws of God that bounds mankind throughout the ages even before God saw the Ten Commandments to Israel through Moses:

¹ Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986, 137-138.

“There is indeed a true law, right reason, conformable to nature, diffused among all, unchanging, eternal, which, by commanding, urges to duty; by prohibiting, deters from fraud: not in vain commanding or prohibiting the good, though by neither moving the wicked. This law cannot be abrogated, nor may anything be withdrawn from it; it is in the power of no senate or people to set us free from it; nor is there to be sought any extraneous teacher or interpreter of it. It shall not be one law in Rome, another at Athens; one now, another at some future time; but one law, alike eternal and unchangeable, shall bind all nations and through all time; and one shall be the common teacher or interpreter of it and governor of all – God, who is Himself the Author, the Administrator and Enactor of this law.”

The rule of law is a reflection of God’s authority upon mankind whom He created for an orderly society.

It is observed that Singapore law came from Indian law and Indian law from British law and British law from Roman law and Roman law from God’s law as expressed in the Ten Commandments.

Without the enforcement of law, there would anarchy in human society. When wicked rulers are in power, there can be great miscarriage of justice and oppression.

Chang Hsien-Chung is well-known as **Butcher of the Ages**. He was a bandit leader who gained control of the Chinese province of Szechuan, killed 40 million people during his reign of five years (1643–1648).

He ranks with the most murderous butchers in history. His government policy consisted of condemning to death everybody within reach. Their extermination is euphemistically called “His Reforms.”

Chang slaughtered:
32,310 students
2,000 soldiers
3,000 harem attendants
27,000 Buddhist priests
600,000 inhabitants of Chengtu (his capital)
280 of Chang’s wives
400,000 wives, daughters and sisters of his soldiers

Then, tiring of listing his victims by categories, Chang lumped the entire 38 million inhabitants of the province of Szechuan in a single hideous holocaust. The culminating horror which cost the life of 38 million people is ascribed to Chang’s irritation when he sat down upon a prickly plant, native to the province.

When the butcher was overthrown and killed in battle by the victorious Manchus, Szechuan, the largest of China’s provinces, was a howling wilderness—without a single survivor, with not a house left standing or anything inflammable spared from incineration. For eighty years, it remained a desolate shambles before the Chinese government could induce foreign settlers to begin populating the province again.²

² Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 869). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

1643-1648 was also the time when the king of England ordered the formulating of the best creed of the Bible ever framed or written in the English language by a time of godly men called the Westminster Assembly.

The Larger Catechism reads:

Question 134: Which is the sixth commandment?

Answer: The sixth commandment is, Thou shalt not kill.

Question 135: What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?

Answer: The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavours, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defence thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labour, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behaviour; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succouring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.

Question 136: What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defence; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labour, and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarrelling, striking, wounding, and: Whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

Two thoughts for our continuing story of Israel in Egypt just before the Exodus as we consider this murder scene in Ancient Egypt:

(1) The Decree to Kill (v15-16, 22)

(2) The Deference to Kill (v17-21)

(1) The Decree to Kill (v15-16, 22)

15 And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: 16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live...22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

The king of Egypt who knew not Joseph ordered the killing of Israelite babies as a systematic way of cruelly de-populating the Israelite camp. A frightening time if you are a newly wedded couple with young children in Egypt at that time.

The Pharaoh understood how the killing can be executed. Through the mid-wives and by indoctrinating his people to follow his decree to kill.

We observe behind the scene an invisible evil power that energised and feed this hatred for God's people. Pharaoh's hatred of the Hebrews is the beginning of anti-semitism³ in Israel's history. During the second World War, 6 million Jews were exterminated in mass genocide in concentration over Europe. That hatred was never abated. But the Scriptures tells us will grow stronger (Rev. 12) till Satan is defeated.

We trace this hatred to Satan, the fallen angel, the old serpent, the devil. Satan is called the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). Satan hates God's people and his hatred of God's people is so deep, he is relentless in his attack of God's people even from the days in the garden of Eden.

But Satan is a defeated foe as God declares in the Garden of Eden - **Genesis 3:15** *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

Satan was defeated when Jesus Christ uttered upon the cross on the 9th hour – “*It is finished*”. God knows what His people can bear and will not Satan to go beyond this breaking point.

1 Corinthians 10:13 *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

The testing that God allows His people to undergo is meant to strengthen their faith in Him and to purify them, to draw closer to Him.

James 1:1-4 *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

³ **Antisemitism** (also spelled **anti-Semitism** or **anti-semitism**) is hostility, prejudice, or discrimination against Jews. A person who holds such positions is called an **antisemite**. Antisemitism is generally considered to be a form of racism.

The root word *Semite* gives the false impression that antisemitism is directed against all Semitic people. However, the compound word *antisemite* was popularized in Germany in 1879 as a scientific-sounding term for *Judenhass* "Jew-hatred", and that has been its common use since then.

Antisemitism may be manifested in many ways, ranging from expressions of hatred of or discrimination against individual Jews to organized pogroms (A **pogrom** is a violent riot aimed at the massacre or persecution of an ethnic or religious group, particularly one aimed at Jews.) by mobs, state police, or even military attacks on entire Jewish communities.

Although the term did not come into common usage until the 19th century, it is now also applied to historic anti-Jewish incidents. Notable instances of persecution include the Rhineland massacres preceding the First Crusade in 1096, the Edict of Expulsion from England in 1290, the massacres of Spanish Jews in 1391, the persecutions of the Spanish Inquisition, the expulsion from Spain in 1492, the Cossack massacres in Ukraine from 1648 to 1657, various anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire between 1821 and 1906, the 1894–1906 Dreyfus affair in France, the Holocaust in German-occupied Europe, official Soviet anti-Jewish policies, and Arab and Muslim involvement in the Jewish exodus from Arab and Muslim countries. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antisemitism>]

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1 Peter 1:6-7 *Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*

God's people is to resist the devil by submitting to the will of God!

James 4:7 *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

Be Submitted to God – it means “to put under” which means “to obey”. It is a command, it appeals to the will, there is no option if we would like to receive God's blessings again. This word is first used in Luke 2:51 “*And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was **subject** unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.*” The word to submit is a voluntary act of placing oneself under the authority of someone else to show respect and obedience. This submission is to no man but to God. Let us put aside our pride and come before God. And this word to submit stress the beginning of an action or entrance into a state, to the realm of God's blessing by coming to Him. The Israelites cried out to God for deliverance in times of distress.

Resist the Devil and he shall flee from you – to resist is “to stand against”, let your loyalty be given to God and not to the wiles of the Devil. This word resist has the sense of describing an event that is not yet past as though it were already completed in order to stress the certainty of the event. When we do not yield to the temptation of the evil one, it is certain we will have victory. Paul says in Romans 7:24-25 “*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*” Jesus has won the victory for us, we can depend on Him to help us.

The Hebrew mid-wives were instructed, ordered by the Pharaoh to kill the male babies. It was a cruel decree and inhumane. In particular, Shiphrah and Puah were tasked to organise this massacre of babies. It is noteworthy that the names of these mid-wives were given in the Scripture whereas the name of Pharaoh was passed. Indeed, evil men has no place in God's heart!

When these Hebrew mid-wives refused to obey Pharaoh's instruction, the Pharaoh decreed the Egyptians themselves to cast the babies into the Nile River.

(2) The Deference to Kill (v17-21)

17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. 18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? 19 And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them. 20 Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. 21 And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.

We observe the spiritual battle raging. The midwives although were under threat and even feared for their lives nevertheless stand firm to defy the decree to murder.

1 Timothy 1:5 *Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:*

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The Hebrew mid-wives would not go against their conscience (the law of God written in their hearts 1 Cor. 2:15). They trusted God to protect them as they maintain a good conscience by sparing the male babies.

Hebrews 10:22 *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

We observed in our text that the midwives feared God. They feared the judgment of God when they would transgress the commandment of God.

Recall the words of Peter in **Acts 5:29** *Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*

Peter was imprisoned for preaching the gospel and healing the sick, but the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought Peter and his companions forth from prison so that they continue to preach in Jerusalem.

This is the mark of a true child of God. The fear of God characterises his actions. He fears to offend God. He would rather offend men and face their wrath than offend God and face His wrath.

Jesus said **Matthew 10:28** *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

In other words, God will take care of you as you obey Him.

Matthew 10:29-33 *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*

17 *But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.*

They had faith in God to protect and take care of them come what may! To fear God is to depart from evil.

Job 28:28 *And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*

18 *And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? 19* *And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.*

The mid-wives must have sought the Lord to allay their fears and grant them courage to stand their ground - **Psalms 34:4** *I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.*

Psalms 34:11-16 *Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep*

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thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

The mid-wives desire life although defying Pharaoh means death. Indeed God is true to His promises.

20 *Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. 21* *And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.*

God blessed the mid-wives and God prospered them, special lodgings were made for them by God when they were incarcerated by Pharaoh.

God promised His protective care to Abraham for His people - **Genesis 12:3** *And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

19 *And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.*

Here is an example of deceit motivated by a desire to protect God's people as in the case of Rahab's lie to the king of Jericho (Joshua 2:5). The fact that God rewarded them is not to be understood as an approval of their deceit, but rather of their simple faith in Him. This is explained in v21. [Whitcomb]

Egypt was the most powerful, modern, impressive representation a most advanced civilisation in the ancient world. It would be foolish not to be associated with all the wealth and pomp of Egypt though it comes with a price tag. It was also the most idolatrous of the ancient people. The Egyptian has a god for each calendar day of the year to worship and bless them.

Jesus said to His disciples **John 15:18-21** *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.*

There is a spiritual warfare that is going on between light and darkness. Because we are the children of light, we are to expect persecution but gave these Jesus encouraging words in **Matthew 5:10-12** *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

CONCLUSION

May God's people be strengthened with simple faith to follow Him by obeying His Word despite persecution and difficulties to the honour and glory of His name. Amen.