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## Prayers

### To God

#### Praise God for Creation

*Thank God for the advances of technology that have been developed by the human mind, and praise His name for the creative instincts He has placed within people who have discovered things (from God) and used their 'discoveries' for the benefit of all.*

### For myself

I praise You, Lord Jesus Christ, for showering me with Your love and mercy. Send me Your Holy Spirit now, so that I may know Your everlasting compassion, and show something of this as I seek to help other people I meet. Take away my fear of the unknown and help me submit to Your will, O God. **AMEN**

### For others

*Pray for any you know who are in trouble, because things have happened to them that are hard to understand and difficult to grasp, and God seems far away ...*

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## Meditation

Have you chosen to set aside your whole life,  
Risking all for Christ in unfettered discipleship?  
Letting go of all the things that have defined you,  
Money, property, friends, memories and status?

Have you chosen to leave the past behind;  
Not ignoring it, but leaving it with Christ and launching out,  
Pressing on beyond the social boundaries of the day,  
Leaping on ahead to do greater things as promised?

Have you chosen to defy this disillusioned world,  
By confounding the sceptics and making tomorrow's news,  
Creating the world's history by being a step ahead in Christ,  
Standing above culture and prejudice in quality discipleship?

Would you stand with your head and shoulders  
High above this apparently 'post-modern' world,  
Because the standard you bear without shame or fear  
Is the unmistakable and empty Cross of Jesus Christ?

Would you take the suffering and glory of the Cross,  
And live by this alone, until the glory of heaven descends?

Is this where your heart is? Do you see the glory?

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## Bible Passage

### Exodus 2:16-25

<sup>16</sup> The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and fill the troughs in order to water their father's flock, <sup>17</sup> but other shepherds used to come and drive them away. Moses, however, came to their defence and watered their flock. <sup>18</sup>

When they returned to their father, Reuel, he said,

*'Why have you been able to return so quickly today?'*

<sup>19</sup> They replied,

*'An Egyptian man rescued us from the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the flock.'*

<sup>20</sup> *'Where is he?'*

he said to his daughters,

*'Why did you leave the man? Invite him to come and have something to eat.'*

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses agreed to live with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. <sup>22</sup> She bore a son, and Moses named him Gershom; as he said,

*'I have become a stranger in a foreign land.'*

<sup>23</sup> After a long time, the king of Egypt died, but the people of Israel groaned under the weight of their slavery, and called out. Their cry for deliverance from bondage went up to God, <sup>24</sup> and He heard their groaning and called to mind his Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God saw the people of Israel, and understood.

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## Review

The general scene we are presented with in our reading today was typical of the Middle East, a couple of thousand years before the time of Christ. In those days, shepherds and nomadic families competed for scarce water resources in the desert, and it was the role of women to go to established wells to get water and enable the flocks to drink. Although the manner of digging wells has changed over the centuries, similar scenes can be seen to this day. However, as scripture now reports, God was powerfully at work.

This is not the first story in the Bible in which a servant of God experiences testing after being thrown out of his home, finds himself beside a well in a foreign land and meets a woman who will one day become his wife! Jacob had experienced a very similar sequence of events after deceiving his brother and father (Genesis 28), and being packed off to Paddan-Aram (Genesis 29). These incidents happened at low points in the lives of both Jacob and Moses, but prior to some mighty acts of God which, for each of them, changed their lives forever and also the history of God's people.

In the case of Jacob, God had to change the character of the man over many years before he could return to the Promised Land and fulfil his calling. In the case of Moses, God waited for an even longer period of time (Ex 7:7) before revealing Himself to Moses and commissioning him to lead the people of Israel back into the Promised Land. There are many differences between the stories of Jacob and Moses, but the similarities are fascinating.

Now if Moses knew something of the heritage of his own people, he would have known it through the stories of the forefathers. He could have been aware of the connections between what was happening to him and what had previously happened to Jacob, and this may have indicated to him that God was present within his circumstances. Much was about to happen, and neither Moses nor Jacob knew what God's ultimate plans for them would be, but each event indicated that God had not forgotten them, and their waiting on the Lord was not in vain. So here, God's immediate plan was to provide a secure and stable home life for Moses, just as he had done many years previously, for Jacob.

It appears that Moses was still recognisable as an Egyptian (2:19), perhaps by his haircut or by his clothes. This suggests that Moses had left Egypt in haste after his aborted attempt to identify with the Hebrew people. Having settled by a well (2:15), Moses saw local shepherds obstructing the efforts of local women to draw water; it was probably a regular occurrence, yet it was also an opportunity for Moses. He intervened and rescued the women, watering their flock, apparently with no ulterior motive or attraction to the women. This of course is a major difference between Moses and Jacob. Jacob had been specifically looking for a wife, but Moses, full of emotions after what had happened in Egypt, was intent on nothing more than doing what was just. Perhaps he had learned a lesson (2:11-15).

The father of the women was a man named Reuel (2:18 – we discover he has a different name in 3:1, which is Jethro). He was surprised to discover that his daughters came home early; and they told him what had happened. As was appropriate in those days, such an act of kindness called for the offer of hospitality, and Reuel then invited Moses to eat with him according to nomadic custom (2:20). In a brief comment, scripture records that '*Moses agreed to live with the man*' (2:21), and this is tantamount to saying that Reuel offered Moses a job looking after his flocks and herds. It was something Moses could hardly refuse, although it would be surprising if he had experience of such work. He had been raised at the court of Pharaoh, amongst Egyptians who were prejudiced against shepherds (Genesis 46:34)!

Nevertheless, if Moses had picked up such sensitivities in his youth, they did not hold him back now; hard work would suffice. Reuel decided to cement the relationship and give Moses a daughter in marriage, Zipporah, and the union was marked with the birth of a child, named 'Gershom'. All this is touching, but we will discover later that all these characters are introduced to the story of Moses because they have an important role to play later on in the story of Israel's Exodus.

For now, perhaps the most significant part of this reading is found at its end (2:23-25). The people of Israel hoped that a change of leader would bring changes which might benefit them, as people have always done. However, when the Pharaoh who had begun their oppression died, his successor proved to be no different and their cruel suffering continued, indeed, the text implies it got worse (2:23). Quite naturally, the Hebrew people then began to pray in the midst of their distress, which was a trigger for God to act (2:24,25). But if we read carefully, verse 23 offers us an intriguing picture. It is just possible that in their cruel bondage, the Hebrew people had forgotten much about their God, for the verse says not that they 'called out to God', as we might expect, but simply that they 'called out'. In their distress they had lost something of their close covenant relationship God, but this was about to be restored in a dramatic way.

If we keep to the traditional view that Moses was the original author behind much of what we now read in Exodus, then the verses we have read here (2:23,24) are something more than mere comment from a story teller. This is information that became known to Moses, as he was waiting for the right time to act, according to God's agenda. Very slowly, God was drawing together His people and the leader He had chosen to lead them out of their bondage. Some versions of the Bible say at this point that God 'remembered' His people and then decided to act to help them. However, it was not a case so much of God 'remembering' His people, but of

His responding to their call and their readiness to be saved. God had His servant Moses waiting 'in the wings' and ready to act.

There was yet one more thing that God had to do before Israel could be saved. As we will read tomorrow, Moses had to be faced with his need to know God far more deeply, and far more personally. He needed to submit completely to God's will before He could do the work of saving his people, and before God could do the signs and wonders through him that would make Israel pay attention to him.

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## Going Deeper

### ***Further Comments***

There are many things yet to discover in this passage. What did it mean for Reuel to be called a 'priest'? Was Zipporah as important to Moses as the great patriarchs of Genesis, Rebecca and Rachel? Was there any meaning in the name of Moses' son? Why did God not act sooner to help His people in their slavery? We will start by looking further at the 'priest of Midian'.

### ***Moses meets the priest of Midian and his daughters***

As we saw in yesterday's study, Midian was a natural place for Moses to go when he fled Egypt. The desert regions of the Sinai Peninsula were inhabited by Midianite people who were descended from Abraham through his wife Keturah (Gen 25:1f.) Although they were not included in the general descent of God's Covenant people, their religious beliefs were likely to be similar to that of Abraham. There is also evidence in Genesis that there were people in this part of the world who God used as 'priests' (see the priest Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18 and Hebrews 5,7). Certainly, if the 'Reuel' in this passage is the same as the 'Jethro' (Moses' father-in-law) in the rest of Exodus, and we have no good reason to doubt it, then this man became an important friend, father-figure and confidant to Moses in critical periods of the experience of the Exodus and wandering through the wilderness (Ex 18:1f.). Reuel provided Moses with a ministry in the same way that Melchizedek did for Abraham (Gen 14), so there is no reason for us to think of him as a 'pagan' priest (as some commentators do).

It was also possible that Moses himself knew the Midianite regions of the Sinai. Records from that era in Egyptian life indicate that significant numbers of Egyptians traders, craftsmen, ambassadors and soldiers travelled west and north from the northern tip of Egypt to engage in trade with other parts of the Middle Eastern world with some regularity and freedom; probably far more so than we would expect. Moses was a well trained court 'prince' from Egypt, who absconded at the age of forty; old enough to have experienced more than simply the luxuries of living in Egypt. All this may well explain why the daughters of Reuel recognised an Egyptian and could converse with him; and Moses with them. And if Moses was spiritually becoming aware of his own heritage, then the Midianites provided a small traditional connection with his own past. All of this would be important.

### ***Reuel, and other people from the story and their names***

There is a great deal of speculation in the various commentaries written on Exodus about Reuel. His name could mean 'friend of God', but there is no doubt that he must be the same man named 'Jethro' in Exodus 3:1. The name Reuel only appears elsewhere in the Old Testament as the name of one or two other unconnected individuals, and also as Moses' father-in-law in Numbers 10:29; also, the name Jethro only appears in Exodus (3:1, 4:18, 18:1f.). Some believe that one name, perhaps Reuel, is a clan name, and Jethro is a

personal name; but we could equally suggest the names might be the other way round! It is hardly a problem, as there are plenty of places in the Old Testament where people have more than one name (for example, see Gideon, also known as 'Jerubbaal' – Judges 6:32, 7:1, 8:29f.)

The other names of people mentioned in this passage are Moses' wife and his first son, Zipporah and Gershom. In comparison to the great matriarchal figures of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah in Genesis, Zipporah is lightweight! Her name is difficult to interpret, but may mean 'twittering' (like bird song!) and apart from one incident (4:25), she does not play an important part in the story of the Exodus. There is more confusion about the name of Moses' son, named Gershom. The same name, sometimes spelt 'Gershom' and sometimes 'Gershon' is elsewhere used to describe the son of Levi (Gen 46:11, 1 Chron 6:1f. etc), but we hear little more in Scripture of Gershom as the son of Moses.

Looking at these names does not therefore appear to get us anywhere, but the fact that these names are relatively insignificant is interesting in itself. It reminds us that the focus of the story of God's work is now exclusively on Moses as the leader of God's people. This is the perspective which the Scriptures focus in upon relentlessly, and although Moses has only just been introduced to us, the message is very clear. This is the man God will use to rescue His people; he, and no-one else. The story of Genesis was about the growth of God's family. The story of Exodus is about deliverance from slavery and the leadership God used to bring about that deliverance.

### ***The groaning of the people of Israel***

Verses 23 to 25 are a clear example of the dependency of God's people upon their Creator and Saviour. Firstly, the circumstances had to be right for God to act to save them. The phrase 'the king of Egypt died' is not in this passage just to tell us that Israel's slavery continued (as it did); it is there to let us know that Moses was no longer a wanted man. Moses had rebelled against the previous king and he was now in a position to go back to Egypt without being hounded. This was essential to God's plan, though it was not possible for him to see this at the time.

Secondly, the people of Israel were depressed by their continuing enslavement. It is possible that they had hoped to find their conditions eased by a new king with different ambitions, but sadly disappointed, they knew that many more years of slavery lay ahead, and instead of hoping for relief from the natural human circumstances of life, they needed it from God alone. This led to the third significant factor in the story; they prayed. Initially, all the text says is that they 'called out' (2:23) with 'groaning' (2:24), and it is unclear whether they had any clear understanding of to whom their cries were addressed. Scripture does not say 'they cried out to God'; however, God was listening simply because he was their Covenant God who always kept Covenant faithfulness whether His people did or not.

God's 'calling to mind' (2:24) of His people is the fourth feature of the story. In some translations of the Bible, it says that God 'remembered' His people, but this hides the fact that the Hebrew word used here implies that God was not merely thinking about His people, but preparing for action. The stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were filled with God's action to achieve His purposes, and the mention of them in this text tells us that it was God's intention to intervene in history once again.

Finally, in verse 25, the Hebrew sentence is strangely truncated, saying quite literally 'God saw the people of Israel and He knew ...' We do not know whether this was part of a longer sentence, but as it stands, it really does give us a strong impression that God understood what was happening to his people, with a deep and sympathetic understanding. It was time for Him to act, as we shall see tomorrow.

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# Discipleship

## ***Application***

### ***Seeing the blessing in what happens around us***

The story of Moses' discovery of the family of Reuel is one of the incidents which happen to people which God uses for their blessing. Such things can happen to us if we are ready to open our eyes and see them as such. It is probably true that God is constantly involved in the circumstances of our lives, working for good even though we cannot see it. However, it is wonderful when we are able to appreciate what He is doing. Moses probably felt very blessed by the favourable welcome he had from Reuel for without it, he would have been homeless and without a family. We too are blessed when we are able to see God's hand in what happens around us.

### ***Being dependent upon God***

The last three verses of our passage explain how it is that God's people reach a place of true need and dependency upon God, and it has much to teach us. There are similarities in the pattern of events described in this study to the social and religious conditions which led to significant revival and renewal at the time of Luther and Wesley, for example, though space does not allow me to explain this in more detail. Many people pray for revival today, and it is important that we do; but God's work will come when He is ready and when He has His leaders prepared and ready to do His will, in response to the cries of the people. We are now living in New Testament times, and the work of the Kingdom never ceases, but there remain times and seasons when God will act to bring about great and world changing renewal. We pray, and wait on Him for this.

## ***Ideas for what to do***

- To what extent do you empathise with Moses in this story? Your life is continuing year by year according to what people might expect, but you feel that God has something greater for you to do at some time in the future? As we hold such aspirations close and do not make them a matter of bragging, then God loves the purpose and intent that this represents, and we do well to hold them throughout our lives and especially as we get older.
- As an exercise in discipleship, use a sheet of paper or a diary over a week to write down the particular things which you can clearly identify as God's work in your life. At the end of the week, spend time reflecting on what God has done for you.

## ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. What similarities can you find with the story of Isaac (Gen 24) and Jacob (Gen 29)? How do these help our understanding of this passage?
2. Discuss the meaning of Moses' son's name, and in what ways it described Moses' personal situation.
3. How do verses 23 to 25 describe the church today, if at all?

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## Final Prayer

Heavenly Father; come into my life and do those miracles of grace by which I may know Your hand is guiding my life and leading me in the right direction. And if I am not 'right' with You, please bring me to a place of repentance where I can be set free, and therefore find this glorious liberty: AMEN

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