

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT— YEAR C

First Reading Exodus 3: 1–8, 13–15

The Book of Exodus is the second of the group of five books of the Old Testament called the Pentateuch, which form the Jewish Torah. The word Exodus means 'going forth' and refers to the main event in the book: the flight of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.

Moses's life parallels that of the Jewish people. He was rejected by the Hebrews, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter as a baby, then banished from Egypt and reduced now to tend a flock of animals in Midian. He has no home to call his own.

Moses's life can be seen as a model for subsequent prophets and for Jesus. He shares people's plight, but through his actions and his words, people develop a close relationship with God.

Horeb, the mountain of God

The same place is also called Sinai and is variously thought to be in the South or in the North-East of the Sinai peninsula. It was probably a sacred place.

A flame of fire coming from the middle of a bush

Fire, symbolising passion, purity, light, or mystery is often used as an indication of God's presence (e.g. Genesis 5: 17).

Take off your shoes

This is an action which acknowledges being in a holy place: to this day, it is still carried out by Muslims entering a mosque, but it is also what many people do on coming home. Moses is finding his true home.

Moses covered his face

People believed that one could not look at God and live (see Ex. 33: 20).

A land where milk and honey flow

The milk would be provided by ewes and goats; the honey was in fact grape juice reduced to a sweet fermented syrup. Both of these would seem like Paradise for semi-nomadic groups.

I am who I am

Much has been written about the origins of this expression, written originally as YHWH, thus making it impossible to pronounce. Later, vowels were added to make the word Yahweh, but mindful of the holiness of the word, many translations of the Bible prefer to use the expression 'the Lord'.

Gospel Luke 13: 1–9

Repent or perish: The parable of the fig tree

Jesus is addressing a large crowd and his disciples, including Peter. The passage focuses on the unpredictability of the end of one's life and the need to be prepared through repentance of one's sins. The first verses of this chapter are only to be found in Luke's Gospel.

The Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices.

There are no historical records of this event; however some scholars think it might refer to an episode recorded by Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian. Galileans were leading a rebellion against Rome, protesting about Temple funds being used to pay for an aqueduct for the town. Pilate ordered his men to attend the Temple in disguise. At a given signal, they attacked the Jews in the Temple. Others suggest it might refer to the massacre of Samaritans climbing their holy mountain, Mount Gerizim, in 35 AD. Pilate was recalled to Rome to explain his actions. At all events, the episode is in keeping with the character of Pilate as we know it.

Those eighteen on whom the Tower of Siloam fell.

Nothing is known about this event but clearly it was familiar to Jesus's listeners. Jesus probably refers to one of the towers on the South-East corner of Jerusalem guarding an aqueduct bringing water to the pool of Siloam.

Were they more guilty than the people living in Jerusalem?

At the time people believed that there was a relationship of cause and effect between sin and punishment. Pain and premature death were seen as signs of God's displeasure. Jesus is keen to refute that idea. Whatever the cause of death, the people did not die because they were sinners, nor do their deaths indicate that they were sinners.

Parable of the barren fig tree

This parable is designed to give people hope. It is possible to see the landowner as symbolising God; the fig tree as the Jewish people; and the gardener as Jesus.

- * **The fig tree:** A common plant in this area. In the Old Testament, it is often seen as a symbol of safety and security (1 Kings 4: 25) or of the people of Israel (Hosea 9: 10, Micah 7: 1).
- * **Dig round it and manure it:** A reprieve for the tree is negotiated. We can see in this a symbol of God's mercy and the fact that we will have help when we endeavour to bear fruit.

Some scholars also see in this parable an example of a favourite idea of Luke in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, that of Christ delaying his return (also called the Parousia) in order to give more time for the Gospel to be preached and for people to repent.

