

## Exodus, Part 2

Last session we left our story with the Hebrews in Egypt suffering under slavery which constituted mostly working on Pharaoh's building projects in northern Egypt in the land of Goshen on the eastern side of the Nile Delta. (This was under a pharaoh who did not know of Joseph (Ex 1:8) and what he had done for Egypt, probably Ahmose I.) Much of the buildings in this part of Egypt were of mud bricks made with the delta mud. Straw was mixed with the mud to make it go farther. The Hebrews were originally supplied the straw for the bricks by Pharaoh, but he later decreed they must source the straw for themselves and do so in addition to all their other tasks. Furthermore, they will be required to take on this additional workload without any loss of productivity – not one brick less.

Pharaoh felt threatened by the growing Hebrew population. Considering the object of his fears, one cannot help but believe Satan put this fear in his heart to drive him to the actions he took. The Hebrews entered Egypt some 70+ in number, and by this time several hundred years later, their total population wasn't probably around a million. Perceiving the growing numbers of Hebrews as a threat, a new Pharaoh (probably Thutmose I, at this point) decreed a process to reduce their numbers by having the Hebrew midwives kill any male Hebrew babies at birth. But the midwives could not bring themselves to do that, and the Hebrew numbers continued to grow. Pharaoh learned of the midwives' disobedience and confronted them. Their defense was that they claimed the Hebrew women were of a much sturdier stock than the Egyptians and delivered before the midwives could arrive. Pharaoh then sought to manage the problem himself and decreed to "all his people" that all male Hebrew babies would simply be tossed into the Nile to drown. Only the daughters would be allowed to live. As a reference, all the above events cover a timespan of about 60 years.

And so the oppression of the Hebrews deepened, but as God's people were suffering under this subjugation, God prepared a deliverer.

**Exodus 2:1** Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup> When she

could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. <sup>4</sup> And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.

We have here the birth of Moses, but he will not be given his name until verse 10. The names of Moses' parents are also not given here, but in 6:20 we learn that his father was Amram and his mother Jochebed, Amram's aunt. This Levite couple had two other children: Miriam (15:20) and Aaron (6:20). Aaron was three years older than Moses (7:7). Assuming that the Exodus occurred in 1446 and since Moses was 80 years old at that time (7:7), he was born in 1526 BC.

Moses' parents defied Pharaoh's decree and hid the baby (cf. Acts 7:17–20). The child was “fine,” that is beautiful and healthy. In Acts 7:20, Stephen said Moses “was beautiful in God's sight”. The writer to the Hebrews made a similar statement about this child in Hebrews 11:23. Not fearing the king's edict, Moses' parents hid him. But after three months it was no longer safe to keep him at home. They were compelled to take some risks to save the life of their baby.

Pharaoh's decree jeopardized Moses' life, so his mother Jochebed decided to hide the child in a basket along the Nile River among the dense reeds. She wove papyrus stems into a boxlike structure and then coated the exterior with tar and pitch to make it waterproof before placing it in the marsh. Ironically, Jochebed putting her son into the Nile was in one sense obeying the Pharaoh's edict to “throw” baby boys into the river! (Ex. 1:22)

Jochebed had the baby's sister Miriam stand at a distance and watch the little reed ark with Moses in it. This was certainly planned by Jochebed in the hope that someone would find and protect the child. I believe she selected the location because she knew Pharaoh's daughter went there to bathe. The mother's instruction to Miriam to see what would happen to him and Miriam's question to Pharaoh's daughter who found him concerning the need for a midwife to nurse the baby suggest planning on the mother's part.

There was *faith* here which Moses' parents exercised in God, believing that he was able to work out all things for them. It was faith that was *tested* by Pharaoh's decree; how long these days must have seemed! In one sense, it was easy to have faith when Moses could be seen and protected at home, but it was something else to commit him to God's care and the waters of the Nile! Yet God gave grace for this trial.

**Exodus 2:5** Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. <sup>6</sup> When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." <sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" <sup>8</sup> And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. <sup>10</sup> When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

The scheme worked and, as planned, Pharaoh's daughter (probably Hatshepsut, the daughter of Thutmose I) came to bathe where Moses had been strategically placed for her to find. God used the tears of the infant to touch the heart of Pharaoh's daughter as she came down to the sacred Nile to take her ritual bath. Her motherly instincts kicked in.

The princess recognized the baby as a Hebrew not because of his circumcision (Egyptians also circumcised), but because he was an abandoned male. Miriam who was hiding nearby then stepped forward and offered to secure a Hebrew nurse for the infant, to which Hatshepsut agreed. Miriam brought Jochebed to the princess who contracted with her to nurse the baby. That his mother would be paid by an Egyptian princess to nurse her own son is ironic and even a bit humorous. Moses' mother took the child and nursed him until "the child grew older," meaning when he was weaned, and then she released him to the princess.

Moses was named not by his parents but by an Egyptian princess (Ex. 2:10). Moses or *Mosheh* /mo·**sheh**/ means drawn. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.” “Moses” or “Mosheh” is Hebrew but possibly a variation of an Egyptian word.

I wonder how the daughter of Pharaoh bringing a child into the household of Pharaoh was received. The women of the court surely all knew he was a Hebrew baby. How did she explain to her father where this kid came from? The text is silent on this. Regardless of how she explained the presence of Moses, the boy prospered and received a fantastic education that he would make use of later in his life.

Though Jochebed took a risk with her scheme, it was one not only worth taking but she had little choice. It was a case of finding a solution or the baby would be killed when hiding him would inevitably be found out. The plan was God’s all along, and He surely gave her the idea to use the daughter of Pharaoh as a means to save her son. She trusted in God to deal with the problem. God indeed had big plans for Moses and arranged everything to see that those plans came to fruition exactly as purposed.

### **Moses Forced to Flee to Midian**

**Exodus 2:11** One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. <sup>12</sup> He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

We spin ahead about 40 years after Moses’ birth to when this incident of Moses killing an Egyptian who was abusing an Israelite takes place. Acts 7 gives some more detail of this period.

**Acts 7:22** And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

He has been somewhat sheltered in the palace environment as he received his education and training. As the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses became learned “in all the wisdom of the Egyptians”. He is described as “mighty in words and deeds”. He was raised and trained as an

Egyptian. He looked like an Egyptian. He talked like an Egyptian and acted like an Egyptian. When he escaped to Midian, he was recognized as an Egyptian by the Midianites. As far as Moses is concerned, at this point in his life, he is an Egyptian. That is about to change.

**Acts 7:23** “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. <sup>24</sup> And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.

But Moses was a Hebrew and somehow knew that. How or when that was revealed to him and by whom is not stated in the text unless the Acts 7:23 gives us a hint when it says, “It came into his heart to visit his brothers.” Egyptian aristocracy would not normally be mingling with the slaves. He had not previously had much if any contact with his fellow Hebrews. He went out from the palace that day, and God had put it in his heart to identify with the Hebrews and their plight which was so vividly and brutally illustrated by the attack on a Hebrew slave by an Egyptian. Reflexively, Moses leaves the ranks of the perpetrators and joins those of the victims. This character trait of his is again demonstrated later in our story.

**Exodus 2:12** He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

Some argue that Moses looked to see if there were any witnesses to what he was contemplating. And seeing none, he killed the Egyptian. Such is thought to be a cowardly act by Moses. But surely there would have been potential witnesses nearby, Egyptians and Hebrews. Later events suggest there were indeed others present. Thus, some interpret this as Moses looking to see if there was anyone who would come to the aid of this poor Hebrew. Seeing none who dared to become involved, Moses stepped up and acted, killing the Egyptian in the process. It isn't clear if he intended to kill the Egyptian or if Moses' intercession escalated to that point. He then buried the dead man “in the sand”. Thus, we have Moses not identifying with the Egyptian oppressor but rather identifying with the abused Hebrew.

Verse 12 suggests that Moses was walking by sight, not by faith, for “he looked this way and that” before he killed the Egyptian who was beating a

Hebrew. Like Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, Moses depended on the sword in his hand and the energy in his arm. Later he was to exchange that sword for a rod, and the power would be from God's hand, not his own (see 6:1).

**Exodus 2:13** When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" <sup>14</sup> He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known."

Moses "goes out" (from the palace) the next day, and comes upon two Hebrews "struggling together". In this incident, we have a second situation where Moses comes to the aid of the abused. He chastises the man in the wrong. "Why do you strike your companion?" he asks. That didn't go over well with the attacker. His response to Moses strikes me as odd considering the disparity of the social status of the two, one being a slave and the other being from the royal household. The man answered demanding to know who made Moses a "prince and a judge" over them. Is he alluding to some previous suggestion by Moses claiming to be a deliverer of the Hebrews? Following that, the man hits Moses with a zinger, "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"

Then Moses became afraid, for the incident with the Egyptian he killed only the day before had become public knowledge. It is obvious from the Hebrew's question, "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" that the first incident was witnessed by others, and the story was spreading among both the Hebrews and the Egyptians, as we shall shortly see.

Of course, we know that Moses has been a Hebrew since his birth, but how did Moses come to know that he was a Hebrew? Did his adoptive mother reveal this to him? Or was his conscious connection with the Israelites a result of his intervention in what he observed as an act of injustice and everything flowed from this? If the latter, this was not initially a case of family loyalty, but a profound commitment to justice that affected him. We will see this character trait come out again when he flees to Midian, and in that case, the abused is not an Israelite, suggesting he has a strong sense of justice and a deep sense of identification with the abused. If not already

aware that he is a Hebrew, he will soon become aware these Hebrews are his brethren. But I believe he is already aware of that fact. Because of his background and training, he has a sense that he is in a unique position to influence their condition, even free them. Though exposed to the idolatry of the Egyptians, Moses had a relationship with the one true God and believed He had called Moses to free his people as suggested in Acts 7:25.

**Acts 7:25** He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.

Presumably, it was this quality above all that singled out Moses as God's choice to be the future redeemer of an enslaved nation. But they weren't quite ready to be delivered yet, nor was Moses ready to be their deliverer. Moses was not yet fully prepared by God for the task of leading the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. He faced another 40 years of "schooling" before he would be ready for that monumental task.

These two incidents were indicative of Moses' future role as the deliverer, but that was not then recognized by his fellow Israelites. Although his actions reveal a positive concern for the weak and oppressed, Moses did not yet qualify for the role of national deliverer. Rather he was forced to abandon membership in the Egyptian royal court and flee for his life. Similarly, in a world full of injustice, Christians must, even in the face of opposition, be constantly active on behalf of the poor and helpless.

Meanwhile, Pharaoh has heard of the killing of the Egyptian by Moses.

**Exodus 2:15a** When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh ...

When Pharaoh heard of the murder, in anger, he tried to kill Moses. (Perhaps this Pharaoh was Thutmose III who was reigning with Hatshepsut.) According to Hebrews 11:27, Moses fled not out of fear of Pharaoh but because his faith told him to. Moses fled eastward and lived among the nomadic Midianites. The founder of these people was Midian, a son of Keturah, wife of Abraham, who sent them "to the land of the east" (Gen. 25:1–6). The Midianites lived in southeastern Sinai and northwestern

Arabia on both sides of the Gulf of Aqaba. This desert land differed greatly from Goshen in the fertile Nile Delta of Egypt.

## Exile in Midian

**Exodus 2:15** When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well. <sup>16</sup> Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. <sup>17</sup> The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. <sup>18</sup> When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come home so soon today?" <sup>19</sup> They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock." <sup>20</sup> He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." <sup>21</sup> And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. <sup>22</sup> She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

And here is the third incident in which Moses sought to deliver others from harm. Moses was sitting by a well when he met the seven daughters of Reuel (elsewhere called Jethro, 3:1; 18:1), a priest of Midian. Moses' benevolent act, protecting the daughters while they were securing water, and the two incidents before back in Egypt anticipated his future role as his nation's deliverer. This heroism on his part caused the girls' father to invite Moses (whom they called an Egyptian, perhaps because of the way he was dressed) to dine with his family. Moses subsequently married Reuel's daughter Zipporah (which means "little bird") and to them was born a son Gershom, whose name means "expulsion" or "resident alien there." It is probably related to the Hebrew verb *gāraš*, "to drive out or banish". Gershom was a child of Moses' banishment, that is, a child born while Moses was an alien in a foreign land.

For 40 years (Acts 7:30) Moses undertook the toilsome life of a shepherd in the Sinai area, thus gaining valuable knowledge of the topography of the Sinai Peninsula which was later helpful as he led the Israelites in that wilderness land.



Moses' flight to Midian can be viewed as an act of faith in that he made no effort to defend himself or reconcile himself to Pharaoh.

**Heb 11:27** By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

That word translated as “endured” is the Greek *kartereo* /*kar·ter·eh·o*/ which means to be steadfast. In this case, it means to be “faithful” to “him who is invisible”. That can only be referring to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From this, we get the impression that God was leading Moses, and he was responding to that leading. Though left unstated, obviously God told Moses to leave Egypt and go to Median.

For the next forty years, Moses lived in Midian. Through those difficult years Moses endured “as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). Four developments in Moses' life during this period are clear.

1. Even after his leadership setback in Egypt, Moses was still willing to champion the cause of the weak. The seven unmarried daughters of Reuel, following the custom of that region, were shepherdesses. They had come to water their father's flock at a well, but some shepherds drove them away. This injustice aroused Moses' anger. He rescued the daughters and even watered their flock for them (2:15b–17).
2. Moses was lodged in a godly home. Reuel (“friend of God”), was a “priest of Midian.” Reuel is called Jethro in 3:1, a name which appears to be a title meaning “highness.” He seems to have been a worshiper of Yahweh. This is not surprising since the Midianites were descendants of Abraham by Keturah. When Reuel heard of the kindness performed by Moses at the well, he rebuked his daughters for their lack of hospitality and sent them to seek out the “Egyptian”. Reuel was so impressed with Moses that he invited him to live with him and manage his flocks. Moses agreed, and for the next forty years, he lodged in the camp of Reuel (2:18–21a).
3. Moses eventually married Zipporah, one of the daughters of Reuel. By her, he fathered Gershom. The name of the child reflected Moses' discouragement at being an exile from the land of his birth and his people (2:21b–23).

4. Moses tended the flock of Reuel for forty years and learned the discipline of the desert and leadership (3:1a).

## God Hears Israel's Groaning

Exodus 2:24–25 is a hinge in the narrative. Suppression, slavery, and death were dominant themes up to this point. Now deliverance and triumph will be major emphases. In His sovereign power, God was ready to act in accordance with His promises to deliver and preserve His people.

**Exodus 2:23** During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. <sup>24</sup> And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

The deceased king is probably Thutmose III, the Pharaoh of the oppression who was followed by Amenhotep II the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

During Moses' 40 years in Midian, the Israelites continued to suffer under the servitude of the Egyptians. It seemed as though God was doing nothing. The "people of Israel groaned" because of their slavery and wondered where God's deliverance was. Had they only remembered the Word in Genesis 15, they would have known that 400 years had to elapse.

Hearing their anguish God thought of His covenant promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:18–21; 17:3–8), Isaac (Gen. 17:21), and Jacob (Gen. 35:10–12). In His compassion, God considered the plight of the Israelites. He looked on them (cf. Ex. 3:7, 9), was concerned about them, and decided to intervene. The divine concern was translated into concrete action when God called a prophet to be their deliverer.

At the heart of this covenant is the promise that the patriarchs' descendants will possess the land of Canaan (cf. Gen. 17:8; 26:3; 28:13; 48:4). Abraham had received an even more specific promise: "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward, they will come out with great possessions" (Gen. 15:13–14).

Whenever God works, He chooses the right worker, uses the right plan, and acts at the right time. Moses has been trained. The time has come for the deliverance of Abraham's descendants from bondage and oppression in Egypt, and God is getting ready to deliver the children of Israel.

God did not choose to deliver the Israelites because they were superior to the Egyptians, or because they had been true and faithful to Him, or because they had not gone into idolatry. They had been unfaithful to God and served idols and would again in the wilderness even after they were freed. God gave two reasons for delivering Israel:

1. He heard their groaning.
2. He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Why do you think God delivered those of you who are redeemed? He saved us for the same reason He saved Israel. He saw nothing in us that suggested we should be saved by Him. There was no merit in our being that made us good candidates for God's salvation. Romans 3 suggests quite the opposite.

**Rom 3:23** For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The word translated "gift" is translated elsewhere as "freely" and means "without cause". You did nothing to earn that "gift". It comes to you "without cause" on your part. It is the same word used in John 15:25 when it says Jesus was hated "without cause". Just as Jesus did not *deserve* that hatred and we do not *deserve* to be saved, neither did Israel *deserve* to be delivered.

God didn't look at us and think, "I see something in this person that suggests much potential, so I will redeem him/her." Nor did He look at Israel and see some redeeming qualities there either. Many people believe that God sees in us that we are potentially lovely people, but each of us has a sin nature in which no good dwells, as Paul makes clear in Romans.

**Rom 7:18** For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

God saw nothing but the blackness of our hearts trapped in the darkness of sin and ignorance. We cannot produce good because any product of our sin nature will fall woefully short of the righteousness of God. This is why God gives us a new nature that can relate to Him and access the power to live righteously through His help.

**Phil 4:13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

And this is why the old sin nature must eventually be destroyed.

It was not because of anything “lovely” about us that God’s love saved us. God saw our desperate condition and saved us. God saw no good in Israel either, but He heard their cry for help in bondage, recognized their desperate condition, and redeemed them.

He did not consult us on the matter either. He did not come to us for approval. He did not say, “Here is my plan for salvation. What do you think?”

No, he comes to us and says, “Here is the salvation I offer you. Take it or leave it.” It is free, and it is your choice to accept the free gift or reject it.

And all those in hell have replied, “I’ll pass.”

There was nothing attractive about the children of Israel. In fact, there was so much about them that one must wonder why in the world was God concerned with this ungrateful bunch. God doesn’t see people the same way we do, and that is a VERY good thing because none of us have anything to merit His favor. But God heard their cry. He had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and promised to redeem Israel. He also agreed to save anyone who trusts Jesus Christ as Savior. Grace is love in action. He saves us by grace, and His great love has provided redemption.

**John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

The report of Pharaoh's death (Ex 2:23) introduces a brief but highly significant paragraph that focuses on the continuing plight of the Israelites in Egypt. Thematically it is linked to the preceding section; God, like Moses, cares for the oppressed. Although there have been brief allusions to God's concern for his people, only now does the narrative reveal in detail his awareness of the Israelites' suffering: God hears, remembers, sees, and knows (vs. 24–25).

The reference to the divine covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is especially important. At the heart of this covenant is the promise that the patriarchs' descendants will possess the land of Canaan (*cf.* Gn. 17:8; 26:3; 28:13; 48:4). Abraham had received an even more specific promise.

**Gen 15:13** Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

The time has now come for the deliverance of Abraham's descendants from bondage and oppression in Egypt.