



Exodus - Chapter Two

- I. Exodus 1:1-18:27 - The Exodus of Israel from Egypt (continues)
- I.a Exodus 1:1-2:25 - Setting: Israel in Egypt (continues/concludes)
- I.a.ii Exodus 1:8-2:25 - New Pharaoh, New Situation (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter narrates two different points at which Moses' life was preserved: as an infant (vv.1-10) and as a young man (vv.11-22). Clearly, the Book of Exodus intends to narrate the setting, events, and characters in each case as the actual events of Moses' preservation. In the NT, these two particular narrative motifs will converge in the events of Jesus' preservation from Herod following his family's flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-23). It is crucial for the first audience to know how God preserved Moses from several dangers: this story, together with the account of God's call on Moses (Exodus 3:1-4:17), should enable the people of Israel to embrace Moses as God's authorised 'prince and judge' (v.14), as well as their lawgiver.

I.a.ii.2 Exodus 2:1-10 - The Birth and Youth of Moses

This passage identifies Moses as a Levite, whose mother hid him initially at birth to prevent him being killed under the dictates of Pharaoh. Then, when he was three months old, it tells how she placed him in a basket on the River Nile to be found by the daughter of Pharaoh. Moses' older sister witnessed the discovery of the baby by the princess and offered to bring a Hebrew wet-nurse to feed him, which turned out to be his birth mother. Thus Moses was raised as an Egyptian prince.

¹ Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.

Exodus 2:1

That Moses was born in the house of Levi will become significant later in Exodus when they are identified as the tribe descended from Jacob's son Levi from which both priests and Tabernacle servants would be drawn.

That the man married a Levite woman was later not uncommon as the tribes wanted to maintain their identities. However, the point is made here so that when the priesthood is later established their Levite heritage cannot be disputed.

Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59 reveal the names of Moses' parents: Amram and Jochebed. Fanciful Jewish legends say that Moses' birth was painless to his mother, that at his birth his face was so beautiful that the room was filled with light equal to the sun and moon combined, that he walked and spoke when he was a day old, and that he refused to nurse, eating solid food from birth.

² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months.

Exodus 2:2

The woman conceived and bore a son. The baby Moses opened his eyes to an unfriendly world. He was born in a powerful nation, but was of a foreign, oppressed race during a time when all babies such as he were under a royal death sentence. Nevertheless, Moses had something special in his favour: he was the child of believing parents. Moses was not the firstborn in his family. He had at least an older brother Aaron, from whom the priesthood would come, and an older sister Miriam.

She saw that he was a fine baby. The Hebrew is literally 'she saw him, that he was good.' This may refer simply to Moses' being healthy. Some have seen here an echo of the creation account; this would fit with the way the opening events in the Book of Exodus act as a creation-like account for the birth of Israel as a nation.

She hid him for three months. The parents of Moses did not do this only because of the natural parental instinct; they did it also out of faith in God. Hebrews 11:23 describes the faith of Moses' parents: <<***By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict***>>.

³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

Exodus 2:3-4

The birth account of Moses contains several words that are likely influenced by or borrowed from Egyptian, like the terms used for a papyrus basket and the reeds. The Hebrew term translated papyrus basket is only used here and to describe Noah's Ark. However, papyrus is also indicated as a material used for boat-making: <<*Ah, land of whirring wings beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, sending ambassadors by the Nile in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide*>> (Isaiah 18:1-2).

She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river.

In a literal sense, Moses' mother did exactly what Pharaoh said to do for she put her son into the river (1:22). However, she took care to put him in a waterproofed basket and strategically floated him in the river. This is a great example of trusting the child's welfare and future to God alone. When Moses' mother let go of the boat made of bulrushes, she gave up something precious, trusting that God would take care of it, and perhaps find a way to give it back to her.

⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. 'This must be one of the Hebrews' children,' she said.

Exodus 2:5-6

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. There was clearly a private part of the river bank for the household of Pharaoh to use for bathing, probably enclosed within the palace grounds for Pharaoh too went to such a place: <<*Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake*>> (Exodus 7:15).

He was crying, and she took pity on him. Under God's guidance, Pharaoh's daughter found baby Moses. She was conditioned by her culture and upbringing to reject the Hebrews, but the cry of baby Moses melted her heart. God had this beautifully planned for the deliverance of both Moses, and eventually for the people of Israel. He skilfully guided the parents of Moses, the currents of the Nile, and the heart of Pharaoh's daughter to further his plan and purpose.

This must be one of the Hebrews' children. Pharaoh's daughter may have known this because other women had perhaps tried to save the lives of their newborn sons by hiding them in similar ways. However, most commentators believe it is more likely that she recognised the distinctive pattern of his clothing and blanket.

⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' ⁸ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed it.

Exodus 2:7-9

As someone from the population of slaves in Egypt, it took significant courage for Moses' sister to presume to speak to Pharaoh's daughter. Her bold move ends up bringing about a situation that surely Moses' mother could not have imagined possible when she hid him: she was paid wages to nurse her own son.

Scripture names Miriam as the sister of Aaron and therefore of Moses too (15:19). Numbers 26:59 seems to indicate that Moses had only one sister. Therefore, it can be said almost with certainty that it was Miriam who approached the princess.

Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages. Using both the clever initiative of Moses' family and the need of Pharaoh's daughter, God arranged a way for Moses' mother to train him in his early years and be paid for it. God rewarded the faith of Moses' mother, both as she trusted him in hiding Moses for three months and also as she trusted God by setting Moses out on the river.

¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

Exodus 2:10

She took him as her son. Being the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was in the royal family. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus wrote that Moses was heir to the throne of Egypt and that while a young man he led the armies of Egypt in victorious battle against the Ethiopians. Certainly, he was raised with both the science and learning of Egypt. Acts 7:22 says: <<***So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds***>>. Egypt was one of the most academic and scientific societies among ancient cultures. It is reasonable to think that Moses was instructed in geography, history, grammar, writing, literature, philosophy, and music. In addition, early instruction from his mother would have taught him the ways of God.

Moses. In Hebrew, the name sounds like the verb *mashah*, meaning 'to draw out'. The name may also be related to the common Egyptian word for 'son.' Since Pharaoh's daughter clearly knows that Moses is a Hebrew child (vv.6-9), it is

possible that she chose the name for both its Hebrew, i.e. 'drawn out of water', and Egyptian 'son' senses. The irony of such a dual reference would be that her action not only prefigures but is also a part of the means that God uses to draw Israel as his son out of Egypt: <<***When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son***>> (Hosea 11:1).

I drew him out of the water. This not only links in with the name Moses as already described but is reminiscent of David's song of thanksgiving: <<***He reached from on high, he took me, he drew me out of mighty waters***>> (2 Samuel 22:17).

The narrator tells nothing of what it was like for Moses in Pharaoh's household: Did Pharaoh know of Moses' origin? Why did he allow one of his daughters to adopt a child at all? Did the daughter marry? The attentive reader may guess at answers to these questions, but the absence of further comment probably shows that the narrator did not intend to supply these details. It would seem likely that the daughter never told Pharaoh the truth about Moses' origin, but this can only be surmised.

I.a.ii.3 Exodus 2:11-25 - Moses Flees to Midian

Moses witnessed an Egyptian guard beating Hebrew slaves and he killed the guard secretly, or so he thought. The following day Moses intervened in a fight between two Hebrews but his authority to do so was challenged by one of them who asked if Moses would kill him as he had done the Egyptian. When Pharaoh heard what Moses had done he wanted to kill him, so Moses fled to Midian.

Moses found two local shepherdesses being bullied by shepherds at a well. He chased the shepherds away and watered the flocks of the two women. They took Moses to their father and he gave one of his daughters to Moses as a wife; thus he settled and set up a family in the region. Meanwhile God noticed the suffering of his people in Egyptian slavery.

¹¹ One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk.

Exodus 2:11

After Moses had grown up. In Acts 7:23 Stephen gives Moses' age at this time as 40 reflecting Jewish interpretative tradition. Even after a life preserved from the affliction of slavery, and privileged by what he would have received as a member of Pharaoh's house, Moses identifies himself with the Hebrew slaves as his kinsfolk. The writer to the Hebrews goes further in his description: <<***By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the***>>

Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward>> (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Moses saw their forced labour. The phrase means more than ‘to see’. It means, ‘to see with emotion’, either with satisfaction: <<*Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth*>> (Genesis 9:16 NIV) or, as here, with distress: <<*Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, ‘Do not let me look on the death of the child.’ And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept*>> (Genesis 21:16).

He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Because Moses had a heart filled with sympathy and brotherhood toward his people, he could not stand by while one of his fellow Israelites endured a beating.

¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

Exodus 2:12

He looked this way and that. These are the actions of a man who knew he was about to do wrong. Moses had several reasons for doing what he did, but his concern to hide what he did shows a troubled conscience.

He killed the Egyptian. The Bible itself explains some of Moses’ thinking behind this action. Acts 7:23-25 explains that Moses did this to defend and avenge the beaten Israelite, but also with the expectation that his fellow Israelites would recognise him as their deliverer: <<*When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his relatives, the Israelites. When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand*>>. This would not be the case as the following verses will indicate.

¹³ When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, ‘Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?’ ¹⁴ He answered, ‘Who made you a ruler and 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.’ ^{15a} When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

Exodus 2:13-15a

Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew? Moses had reason to believe that his education, royal background, success, and great sympathy for the people of Israel would give him credibility among them. He here tried to intervene in a violent dispute between two Hebrew men.

Who made you a ruler and judge over us? The words of the Hebrew man foreshadow the repeated grumbling that Moses will encounter when he leads Israel out of Egypt. Acts 7:27 quotes these same words from the Septuagint.

Moses has been identified by some as a type of Christ. Both Moses and Jesus were:

- Favoured by God from birth
- Miraculously preserved in childhood
- Mighty in words and deed
- Rejected with spite
- Rejected in their right to be prince and a judge over Israel

And they offered deliverance to Israel.

^{15b} But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.

Exodus 2:15b

Moses fled from Pharaoh. Moses, fleeing for his life, probably felt that God's plan for his life was completely defeated. He probably believed that every chance he ever had to deliver his people was now over and there was nothing he could do. At this point, Moses was right where God wanted him. Moses probably had little idea of it at the time, but he was not yet ready for God to use. Moses tried to do the Lord's work in man's wisdom and power and it did not work. After 40 years of seemingly perfect preparation, God had another period of preparation for both Moses and the people of Israel, to make them ready to receive Moses.

He settled in the land of Midian. If Moses had gone into the area of Canaan and Syria, he would have found no refuge for there was a treaty between Rameses II and the Hittite king to the effect that fugitives along the northern route to Syria would be arrested and extradited. So Moses went southeast instead, into Midian. In that day Midian described the area on both the west and east sides of the Red Sea, land that today is Saudi Arabia on one side and Egypt on the other.

In sitting down by a well, Moses repeats the actions through which both Isaac, through Abraham's servant (Genesis 24:11-21), and Jacob (Genesis 29:2-12) interacted with women who would become their wives.

¹⁶ The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷ But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defence and watered their flock.

Exodus 2:16-17

The priest of Midian had seven daughters. Finally coming to Midian, Moses met the daughters of a priest of Midian, most likely a descendant of one of Abraham's other children through Keturah named Midian (Genesis 25:1-2). Because of this connection with Abraham, there is good reason to believe he was a true priest, and worshipped the true God. It seems that God led Moses to this specific family at this specific time.

Moses got up and came to their defence and watered their flock. In Egypt Moses enjoyed life as one of the royal family and was waited on hand and foot. In the distant desert of Midian, Moses finally had an opportunity to be a servant and he did a good job, working hard to help water the flocks of Reuel's daughters.

¹⁸ When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, 'How is it that you have come back so soon today?'

Exodus 2:18

Reuel is later referred to as Jethro (Exodus 3:1, 4:18 and 18:1). Clearly both names refer to the same person: the priest of Midian (v.16) who was also Moses' father-in-law. He is referred to by this name in a later account: <<***Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, 'We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, "I will give it to you"; come with us, and we will treat you well; for the Lord has promised good to Israel'***>> (Numbers 10:29).

¹⁹ They said, 'An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.' ²⁰ He said to his daughters, 'Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.' ²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. ²² She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, 'I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.'

Exodus 2:19-22

The reference to Moses as an Egyptian indicates an aspect of tension in the narrative. While Moses bore enough signs of his Egyptian upbringing for Reuel's daughters to assume his ethnic identity, he was also known as a Hebrew (v.6) and chose to identify himself with the Hebrew slaves (v.11). However, through the

events of vv.11-15, Moses becomes alienated from both the people of his birth (v.14) and his Egyptian household (v.15).

Moses agreed to stay with the man. By taking a wife and having a son, Moses seems to give up on Egypt and his hope of being a deliverer for his enslaved people. Moses was content with where God had put him, even though Midian was very different from Egypt and his life as a shepherd would be nothing like that of a royal prince.

He gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. Moses was truly accepted as part of the family. His wife's name means warbler or twitterer, and probably refers to the name of a small song bird.

He named him Gershom. This name, meaning stranger, was evidence of some loneliness, living apart from either the Egyptians or the Hebrews. This is again alluded to in the NT: *<<All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland>>* (Hebrews 11:13-14).

²³ After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

Exodus 2:23-25

These verses function with Exodus 1:1-7 to frame the opening section with the reminder that the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will not be defined by their years of slavery, but by their covenant relationship with the God who has heard their cries, and who saw and knew their affliction, and remembered the promises he had made to the Patriarchs.

After a long time. Acts 7:30 takes this period as 40 years, which is confirmed by the comment made on v.11 and Moses' age when he returned to Egypt: *<<Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh>>* (Exodus 7:7).

God took notice of them. This is similar to the statement made by God towards the remnant he had saved in the flood: *<<But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided>>* (Genesis 8:1). It is not that God forgets his people but is an indication that it is the time that he has decided to act upon a given situation.