

grace, is ours: “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 1:4).

What can we say of this experience that lies in the future for us, when the Divine nature will be part of us? The sons of God are in heaviness for a season, but, when their warfare is accomplished, they will receive a garment of praise, and in the vigour of an immortal nature rejoice evermore in the great joy that is their appointed portion.

Today we sit down with one another; then we shall sit down, not only with our friends, but with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets. It will be our privilege to enjoy many joyous assemblies of the saints, to sup and commune

with the Lord himself. He said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me” (Jno. 6:53-57).

What is true of him must be true of us also. If we are like him now, we shall be like him then. Therefore, says John, “every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 Jno. 3:3).



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1–15

C. The birth and early life of Moses—Exodus 2 (Part 1)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional ‘one-off’ points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

Introduction

EXODUS 2 deals with four topics: the birth of Moses; his murder of an Egyptian; his experiences and marriage in Midian; and the cry of the suffering Israelites when Pharaoh dies. The first two of these, describing the birth and early life of Moses, will be examined this month.

Chapter 1 had portrayed in graphic detail the suffering which Pharaoh had inflicted upon the Israelites. What would God do about it? Would He have mercy on the Hebrews and deliver them from their shame? And if so, how?

Chapter 2 begins to answer these questions, but apparently in a tangential manner. For God’s solution consists not in some phenomenal miracle or in the promotion of a mighty Israelite leader who was already alive (either of which we might have expected, had we not already known the

story). God's solution consists instead in the birth of a son.

This provides both a pattern for the future and a salutary lesson. One day God would again send a son—this time *His own*—to deliver a people from slavery. Again He would prepare the child from birth, bringing it safely from the womb and nourishing and developing it for the immense task that lay ahead. How does one begin to create a people, as God begins to do in the book of Exodus? One does it, so Exodus informs us, by means of a son. How remarkably history repeats itself!

The lesson comes from this point about preparation. God was not rushed into the task of saving the Hebrews. He would perform the task *His way*, at the time *He* decreed, and in the manner *He* knew to be the best. God begins with a child, and, having done so, He prepares the child for the task ahead. Moses' preparation took approximately eighty years to complete, and for a considerable part of that time Israel were suffering. But God knew what He was doing; His plan would ultimately bring about the best solution. The challenge for faith is to believe that this is so.

We can learn a principle for our own lives. God may be working in our lives and preparing us for service from our very births. We may not even hear about the Truth until old age, but God

could still have been shaping us for use throughout our days. God's work of preparation may go back long before we care to remember, so we must ask ourselves what we bring to God's service from the experiences He has sent us; we must ensure that we extract the benefit from the way in which God has been working in our lives.

A final point from chapters 1 and 2 as a whole concerns the female characters. Consider the heroines to which we are introduced in these chapters:

- the two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, who disobey Pharaoh
- Moses' mother, who hides her son
- Pharaoh's daughter, who rescues him
- Moses' sister, who courageously arranges a nurse for the new child.

In contrast, the men have done very little. Apart from Moses, the only male character of note is Pharaoh, who seems capable of little except tyranny. We find no males who are prepared to stand up for justice in the narrative except Moses; we are shown no men whose faithfulness and courage towards God merits record. It is the women who triumph and through whom God works in these chapters to ensure that His purposes are accomplished.

So now we wait and watch as Moses is born and his early experiences unfold before us.

Moses is born

2:1 And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.
 2:2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child,¹ she hid him three months.
 2:3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes,² and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags³ by the river's brink.⁴
 2:4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.
 2:5 And the daughter of Pharaoh⁵ came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.
 2:6 And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

2:7 Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse⁶ of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?
 2:8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.
 2:9 And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take⁷ this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.
 2:10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses:⁸ and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

Comment

The whole episode of Moses' birth and childhood is full of delightful twists and dramatic irony:

- Moses is carefully hidden in the very river in which he is supposed to have been cast. He is saved by the very water which was expected to bring about his murder.
- An Egyptian, one of a race supposedly bent on exterminating the Israelites, sees the child and resolves to help it, observing that it is one of the Hebrew's children.
- The one who does this is none other than Pharaoh's daughter. She acts in flagrant disobedience of the command of her own father, the great lord of Egypt himself! Pharaoh is subtly mocked by this. He cannot even exercise dominion over his own daughter, so what real chance does he have of subduing the nation of the Israelites?
- Moses is hidden and then found by Pharaoh's daughter in the very place where Moses would later repeatedly meet Pharaoh himself to plead for the release of the Israelites and to announce the plagues ([see note 4](#)).
- Moses' sister acts the part of the innocent bystander, politely offering assistance to the royal party. 'May I call a nurse for you?', she asks, and goes to fetch the child's mother!
- Moses' mother is called and given wages for bringing up her own son. Few mothers in history have received that privilege.
- To cap it all, the child eventually becomes the son of Pharaoh's daughter—in effect Pharaoh's grandson—perhaps, we may conjecture, with a claim on the throne itself.

Perhaps the main issue being explored here is the question of Moses' identity. He is born a Hebrew; he is found by an Egyptian. He is handed over to the Hebrews again; he is named by Pharaoh's daughter and returns to her care as her 'son'.

These fascinating developments cause us to ask a simple question: So who is Moses? Is he an Egyptian, or is he an Israelite? In fact, he is a man with a dual identity, a man for whom two opposing destinies will beckon. He cannot be both; he may choose only one, for the two paths before him are mutually exclusive. It is this dichotomy inherent in the account that receives rich exhortational development in Hebrews 11: 24-27. By faith Moses forsook Egypt, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and esteemed the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt.

There are two reasons why this issue of identity is such a powerful one. The first is its aptness for the Lord Jesus Christ, whom Moses prefig-

ures. He was the Son of God and the Son of man; every day he had to decide to which identity he would be true.

But, in second place, Moses' identity crisis is one that is typical of us all. We see in Moses the human dilemma in relation to God. There is the natural way and there is the spiritual. We have the choice to hearken to the voice of God and the choice to shut our ears. The choice for us lies wide open, just as it did for Moses.

The salvation of Moses from the waters of death carries with it several important echoes. The first of these goes back to the Flood. Noah and his family were also saved from the destructive waters in an ark daubed with pitch. Although the words 'pitch' and 'daub' are different Hebrew terms in the two accounts, the word for 'ark' is the same in both episodes and does not occur elsewhere. There is a foreshadowing, too, of the deliverance of the whole nation at the Red Sea. There, once again, the waters before the Israelites seemed to augur certain death as the Egyptians charged from behind. Yet those same waters brought salvation and the destruction of their enemies. In all of these pictures we are taken forward to the symbol of baptism, a death to the old man and the beginning of a new and saving way.

Right at the end of the account the child is finally named. There is an element of climactic suspense about this, especially when the use of names elsewhere in the narrative is compared. In chapter 1 we noted the significance of the naming of the two Hebrew midwives and the absence of the name of Pharaoh. Chapter 2 is likewise sparing in its use of names: neither Moses' parents, his sister, nor the daughter of Pharaoh are named—but Moses is. But what is Moses' name? It is not until the last climactic verse of the birth narrative that we finally find out.

The name chosen by Pharaoh's daughter is particularly apt, since it can exist both in Egyptian and in Hebrew. It was a common enough name in Egypt, and is often found in compounds, as for example in the name of the Pharaoh Thutmose. Its basic Egyptian stem means 'to be born', and the Egyptian word *ms* means 'child', 'son'.

The interesting point is that Pharaoh's daughter ascribes to the name a Hebrew rather than an Egyptian significance. She makes a pun on the root *m-sh-h*, to draw up/out, by explaining that the baby was drawn out of the water. In this

way, the significance of Moses' name is based on sound-play, not strict etymology. This is often the case with Biblical names, and is an equally legitimate naming technique as using the historical derivation of a word: "she called his name Moses [*mosheh*]: and she said, Because I drew him out [*meshiythihu*] of the water" (v. 10).

But as she makes this pun, it is intriguing that she seems to make a tiny grammatical slip of just the kind that a foreign language learner might make. She explains the name as if the form were *mashuy*, one drawn out (a passive participle, for she explains "because I drew him out"). However, the form *mosheh*, Moses' actual name, looks much more like an active participle in form. This would mean 'he who draws out'! Such a meaning powerfully prefigures the work that Moses would do in drawing God's people out of bond-

age of Egypt and bringing them to the land that God had promised. True, Moses was drawn out of water, but he would himself be one who would draw out others. Pharaoh's daughter inadvertently gives us a name with a prophetic meaning, and her saving of Moses from the Egyptians itself prefigures Moses' own work!

This process whereby Moses is drawn out of the water himself and then proceeds to draw out others with God's help reminded me of the instructions one always hears from the air-stewardess when making a flight: "Please fit your own oxygen mask before helping others". It is the same procedure when we engage in preaching; we must first ensure that we are not castaways ourselves, then we must go out and try to draw out others from death by sharing with them the wonderful gospel message.

Moses stands up for justice

- 2:11 And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren.
- 2:12 And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid⁹ him in the sand.
- 2:13 And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?
- 2:14 And he said, Who¹⁰ made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.
- 2:15 Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses.

Comment

This episode continues to play on the theme of Moses' identity. Normally one would go out into the world and 'return' to one's brethren, but for Moses it is the other way round. As an adult with free will he now chooses to go out of Pharaoh's court to see his brethren—though at first only as an observer: "he . . . looked on their burdens".

Such is his character and sense of justice, however, that he cannot passively stand by for long. The narrative juxtaposes his looking with the

spying of an incident of cruelty to which he feels compelled to react. Still self-conscious at this stage, he looks this way and that, and quickly disposes of the Egyptian. On the occasion of his second attempt at intervention there is no record of his checking for an 'all-clear' signal.

Was Moses right to step in as he did? Was it his business to right the wrongs of the political system? Do we have the right to take another's life unless God commands it, irrespective of the wrong they may have done?

The text does not give the answers to these questions, but it seems to me that two opposing approaches are each defensible in their own way.

- 1 Although his sense of wrong and his desire to correct injustice are commendable, Moses is too quick to take things into his own hands. One act of sin (the smiting) is considered to justify a worse act (the murder), and Moses behaves as though he believes humans are capable of solving the exploitation and injustice in the world. Although God will ultimately appoint him a ruler and judge, that call has not yet been given, and Moses must learn patience after this mistake. We might smile at his naïve attempts to put the world right, or, to take a stronger line, think that he was pushing himself forward as a self-appointed judge in a way which was not appropriate—and that he had to learn his lesson by forty years of humbling in Midian.
- 2 A contrary view would take a more favourable estimate of Moses' actions. God is

repeatedly revealed in the Scriptures as the One Who cares for the afflicted and down-trodden, the fatherless and the widow; perhaps these are verses we sometimes fail to apply practically in our own lives, even if it is only in the giving of our money. Moses, the special son and future leader of God's people, strives to put these principles into action from the moment he reaches adulthood. He tries to stand up for what is right where others do not have the courage to do so. Already he is distinguishing himself for the unique role he is later to play in God's purpose.

There are three textual details that might support the latter view, although I do think both are defensible interpretations and the text does not provide unequivocal evidence.

- The phrase, "when he saw that there was no man" (v. 12), is later echoed in Isaiah of God's resolve to save His people (59:16); this allusion implicitly commends Moses' behaviour as Godlike and Christlike.
- The question, "Who made thee a prince and a judge . . . ?", reads well as an ironic criticism of the Hebrews for failing to recognise Moses. It is a rhetorical question, for God Himself had singled out Moses for this task. Moses was acting true to his role, even though it had not yet formally been given him.
- When Moses arrives in Midian he behaves in exactly the same way—it is almost as if he cannot help himself from standing up for justice, even though he knows the trouble it got him into in Egypt. In 2:17 Moses 'helps' the women at the well by defending them from the shepherds, and the verb used is the one from which the names Jesus and Joshua derive. This, once again, ever so lightly underscores the spiritual quality of Moses' behaviour.

Whichever is the correct interpretation, it seems likely that these details are in the text deliberately to cause us to reflect on the future role that Moses will play.

For the present we note simply that, under the guidance of God, circumstances contrive to force Moses into the next stage of his development. Standing up for justice in the way that he has means that he now has no alternative but to flee to Midian. There he will take up a very different lifestyle from the one to which he has become accustomed in Pharaoh's court. It is a strange training, but one in which, as in all things, God knows best.

1. **v. 2 a goodly child.** What is meant by this peculiar phrase? What constitutes a "goodly child"? At first sight the Hebrew offers little help, for it simply uses the regular Hebrew word for 'good', yet evidently a point of some importance is being made, since the incident is picked up twice in the New Testament (Acts 7:20; Heb. 11:23, where the AV has the rather quaint translation, "a proper child"). The Greek word used in those passages (as the Septuagint of Exodus) is the word *asteios*, which usually means 'genteel', 'cultured', 'refined' (sometimes the sense is of a 'city slicker' as opposed to a 'country bumpkin')—but this does not help particularly either.

There was evidently something special, remarkable even, about Moses' appearance, which his mother had the faith and insight to perceive. Hebrews 11 would seem to imply that it was more than that the child was merely cute or strong-looking. What it was precisely that she saw we cannot say. What we can say is that she saw it, and that she had the courage to act upon what she saw, by hiding the child. It is interesting that Pharaoh's daughter is likewise moved to disobey Pharaoh when she first observes the child.

The best explanation of the passage is one which observes within it an echo of Genesis. The Hebrew reads literally, 'she saw that it/he was good', which is exactly what is said of God each time He surveys His creative acts in Genesis 1. Here is another subtle piece of evidence that God is once again embarking on an act of creation, this time the creation of a people through the creation of a son.

2. **v. 3 bulrushes.** Used only here and Isaiah 18:2 ('papyrus boats', NIV). Papyrus had many uses in Egyptian life, one of which was boat-making.
3. **v. 3 flags.** This should be translated 'bulrushes' or 'reeds', but is a different term from 'bulrushes' (papyrus) earlier in the verse, and perhaps slightly more general. Moses was saved by being placed amongst the reeds (Hebrew *suph*), so that he did not float downstream; Israel was delivered from the hand of Egypt at the Red Sea. (The Hebrew term translated 'red' is *suph*; indeed, many believe *yam suph*, 'Red Sea', should be translated 'Reed Sea'. I hope to touch on this in a later article; it is quite legitimate to reject the 'Reed Sea' interpretation but still to recognise a play on words here.)
4. **v. 3 river's brink.** This is the location of later encounters between Pharaoh and Moses. (Pre-

cisely the same terms are used in Exodus 7:15; yet other passages, such as 8:20, appear to refer to exactly the same location, even though our word 'brink' is not used.)

5. **v. 5 actions of Pharaoh's daughter.** It is fascinating that the verbs used of Pharaoh's daughter in verses 5,6 ('came down', 'saw', 'sent', 'saw', 'had compassion') are each used elsewhere in the narrative of Exodus 1-4 of God Himself. God 'comes down' to 'see' the sufferings of the Israelites, He 'has compassion' upon them, and He 'sends' Moses to deliver them. The compassion and care that Pharaoh's daughter showers on Moses prefigures the attitude God Himself will show towards the Hebrews.

We are not told explicitly whether Pharaoh's daughter was a woman of faith or not, but this would appear to be a clue. It is not the only one. Aside from the kindness that she showed, we note her readiness to disobey her father's command in order to save the child, her evident knowledge of Hebrew (v. 10), and the fact that she allows a Hebrew nurse to look after the child. Had she had the nationalism of her father she would surely have done things differently. (Could not an Egyptian nurse have looked after the child in greater luxury?) On reaching adulthood (v. 11) Moses has a very strong sense of identity with the Hebrews ("the Hebrews, his brethren" occurs twice, almost laboriously, in v. 11); this might imply that Moses' Egyptian 'mother' had been quite open with him about his true identity. The most powerful clue, however, remains the one with which we began: the parallel between her actions and the language used to portray the actions of God Himself.

6. **v. 7 nurse.** This term usually refers to a *wet nurse* who breast-fed a child (typically for around two years in the Near East), weaned it, and often remained in the house as a family

servant. Rather interestingly, the term is later used of Moses (who would lavish the same attentive care on Israel) in Numbers 11:12, where it is translated 'nursing father'.

7. **v. 9 take.** The Hebrew here is unusual and may have been selected to give a double meaning. Some linguists have suggested that the phrase "take it" may also be understood to mean 'here, it is yours!'. Pharaoh's daughter would thus unconsciously be acknowledging the true mother!
8. **v. 10 Moses.** [See the comment](#) for a detailed discussion of Moses' name. There appears to be a deliberate pun in Isaiah 63:11 on the incident of the naming of Moses. This verse can be translated, "Then they remembered the ancient days, him, who pulled his people out [*mosheh*] [of the water]".
9. **v. 12 hid.** A better translation would be 'buried'.
10. **v. 14 Who . . . ?** Irony here, surely, for several reasons. First, God *would* later appoint Moses as both a prince and a judge. Second, in relation to the Hebrews, Moses *was* a prince, for he was the son of Pharaoh's daughter, a member of the royal court! Third, the question (literally, 'Who set thee a prince?') utilises the same expression that was used in 1:11, "Pharaoh set over them princes of burdens [that is, 'taskmasters', AV]". The Israelites resigned themselves to Pharaoh's authority to do this, but they were not prepared to accept Moses as a prince! The 'Who?' question returns us to the theme of *identity*, so dominant throughout these opening chapters.

The question of the authority of Moses would arise again at a number of points in his life, for example in the murmuring of Miriam and in the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Such disputes foreshadowed similar questions that would later be asked of Jesus.

The Gospel in the Book of Judges

This 148-page book is by Brother Ian Giles, brother of the *Testimony* printer, who has printed it to his usual high standard. The following extract from the author's foreword gives an idea of the contents:

"In an effort to show how [the principle set out in 2 Timothy 3:16,17 regarding the inspiration and value of all Scripture] applies in the book of Judges, these pages look at the types, shadows, parables and allegories of Christ which are evident in the record. To familiarise ourselves with such things is an exercise calculated to strengthen our faith in the providence and foreknowledge of God, to broaden our perception of the work of Christ and to increase our sense of wonder at the power of His Word".

The Gospel in the Book of Judges is available at £7, plus postage and packing, from 'The Dawn' Book Supply, 66 Carlton Road, Nottingham, NG3 2AP.