

NOON BIBLE STUDY: EXODUS 2

The backdrop of Exodus 2 is the final verses of Exodus 1. The new Pharaoh in Egypt is fearful of the strong and growing Israelite population and tries three different plans to squash their growth: hard labor, midwife intervention, and finally a dastardly plan to have all male newborns thrown into the Nile! Imagine the pressure and fear that must have filled the hearts and homes of the children of Israel in Goshen. What would they do? How would they respond? And with this reminder, we return to the text.

Before we begin, a quick word on the importance of Scripture forming our understanding of Scripture. This chapter, and some of early Exodus in general, is a place where pop culture has shaped our understanding in ways that differ from the biblical text. As we read, we may be surprised by what the text actually says compared with what we've seen on big and small screens. Movies and shows can be helpful, but the Bible must remain our first source for truth and for the story of God and his people. In this case, the book really is much better than the movie.

Exodus 2:1-4 - One Family's Reaction

Pharaoh's plan must have been working. We are invited into the home of one family from the tribe of Levi as we see how they are dealing with this new law. They have a son, an event that normally would have brought tremendous joy to their hearts, but in this case the joy is mixed with anxiety and worry. For the first three months of his life they hide him (v. 2) but verse 3 tells us that after this time "she could hide him no longer." These must have been three long months. Every cry was heard as a siren. Every simple knock on their door was heard as a battering ram.

We'll talk about the details of how this all happens in a moment, but we will start with just an attempt to understand the emotional hurricane that must be swirling in their souls. No parent wants to see their child ripped from their arms, but the text tells us that there was something special about this specific child. Something about him was "beautiful," which is the same Hebrew word (*tov*) that we read in the Creation story when God said it was "good" (*tov*).

There is something about this child that was "good" and of God. And so the child's parents acted as they did, by faith (cp. Hebrews 11:23).

Exodus 2:5-10 - Pharaoh's Daughter's Bath Time Surprise

What an amazing turn of events! Can you imagine being Moses' sister and watching this all unfold?! The day begins with your brother being placed in the Nile and ends with your mom being hired by Pharaoh's daughter to nurse her own child, now free from the threat of death! When the child is grown, he will be given to Pharaoh's daughter and raised as her son. She names him

"Moses," a name Exodus connects with the Hebrew word meaning '*to draw out*,' because she drew him out of the Nile.

Let's step back and look at this section more carefully. After three months, the family can no longer hide the child and must come up with a new plan. Most Bible readers know this story, right? Many of us have seen *The Ten Commandments* or (the far superior, in my opinion) *The Prince of Egypt*. Baby Moses is placed in a basket, pushed off into the Nile with one final kiss and prayer, and his sister watches as the basket floats right to Pharaoh's daughter.

But Exodus doesn't actually say that Moses' mother sends him floating down the Nile.

Exodus 2:3b - Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.

His sister stays at a distance to see what will happen. Maybe she is hoping someone will find and adopt him. Maybe she is simply keeping watch over her brother. Technically, the family is obeying the law. They *did* place their son in the Nile River. But they are also shrewd. One place Pharaoh and his people would not expect to find a newborn Hebrew boy was at the Nile, the very place those boys were being sent to die.

Now notice where Pharaoh's daughter comes in:

Exodus 2:5 (ESV) - 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.

Pharaoh's daughter sees the basket among the reeds, right where Moses' mother had left it, and sends her servant to retrieve it. There they find Moses.

Rather than a happenstance move on the part of Moses' parents, this appears to be a thoughtful plan, one we know was motivated by faith (cp. Hebrews 11:23). They walk by faith, not by sight, doing what they can to protect their son while trusting God with what they cannot control.

There's one more connection to the Genesis story in verse 3. It is special basket, put in the river which will carry and protect Moses and by extension the hope of God's people at this critical moment, covered in "tar and pitch" (v. 3). The word for "basket" (*tevah*) is the same word translated "ark" in Genesis 6 which will carry and protect Noah and his family, and by extension the hope of God's people at that critical moment, covered in tar and pitch (Gen. 6:14).

Exodus 2:11-15 - The Early Adventures Of Grown Up Moses

Here is another part of the Exodus story that movies have often dramatized. Moses, now grown, knows full well that he is a Hebrew (Israelite). This wasn't something hidden from him only to be discovered later. He was raised by his mother, a Hebrew woman of faith, and has a soft heart toward his "brethren" (v. 11), both in their hard labor and in their conflicts with one another (v. 13).

So much so that Moses kills an Egyptian slave driver abusing a Hebrew, "look(ing) this way and that" before he did it (v. 12)! Though he thought he was in the clear, news reaches Pharaoh, who then seeks to kill Moses. This leads him to flee Egypt and settle in Midian.

Before we travel with Moses to a well in Midian, we get an early glimpse into the heart of the people of Israel in Egypt. The two men who are quarrelling don't thank Moses for trying to stop them from fighting as brothers. Instead, they reject his attempt to intervene: "Who made you a prince or a judge over us?" Their response foreshadows how Moses and his "brethren" will interact for years to come.

Exodus 2:16-22 - Moses In Midian

Unlike the Israelites we've just left in Egypt, Moses' heart is not hardened and he is able to discern right from wrong. Something doesn't sit right with him when a slave is oppressed, two brothers are fighting, or women are pushed aside at a well by shepherds.

This is our first introduction to Moses' life in Midian. He helps the daughters of Reuel (later known as Jethro), who was a "priest of Midian," and is eventually invited into their home and welcomed first as a guest and later as a son-in-law. We don't know much about Reuel at this point, but he comes across as a hospitable and welcoming man. The name "Reuel" means "friend of God."

Moses is first identified to Reuel as an "Egyptian" (v. 19), even though we know he is a Hebrew. But he's on the run, a man without a home or a people. For now, Moses finds

himself in Midian, where he will become a husband, a father, and a shepherd. It is in Midian that Moses will meet the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and be called by him to deliver his chosen people. And like the patriarchs before him, it all starts at a well.

Exodus 2:23-25 - Meanwhile...

Meanwhile back in Egypt, the Pharaoh who tried to kill Moses (possibly twice?) has died, but the oppression of God's people has not died with their oppressor. Before Exodus 2 ends, though we've only just met Moses, we are reminded of the bigger story and why we have spent the last 22 verses focused on his life. During "those many days" (v. 23), Moses is being shaped for the assignment God has for him.

The people of Abraham are slaves in Egypt. This is not God's ultimate purpose for them. Their "sighs," "cries," and "groaning" reach God's ears (v. 23). He "remembered" his covenant and "took notice" of his people (vv. 24-25).

"When the Bible says that God 'remembers' someone or his covenant with someone, it indicates that he is about to take action for that person's welfare." (ESV Study Bible, Gen. 8:1)

That's what's happening here. These final three verses remind us what this story is really about. We've just concluded an epic introduction to a great hero in redemptive history. But in case we're tempted to think, "Oh good, Moses was spared from death. What an interesting story about a special man," Exodus 2:23-25 reminds us: this story isn't about one man. It's about God fulfilling his covenant and promises.

Moses is spared because the nation is to be spared. Moses is delivered because he is going to deliver Israel. Moses is rescued because God is rescuing his people through Moses. How he plans to do that is where we go next.

There are many lessons to glean from the fast and full 2nd chapter of Exodus. God works through Moses' parents and their risky plan to save their son. He works through Pharaoh's daughter, who notices the basket and agrees to allow Moses' mother to nurse him. He works through Moses' sister, who stays nearby and has the courage to approach the Egyptian princess. He works through Pharaoh's daughter again as Moses is raised with the privileges of an Egyptian. He works through Moses' actions, even as they lead him to flee Egypt. And he works in bringing Moses to the well in Midian at just the right time to meet Reuel's daughters and eventually join their family.

Even when it looks like trouble is increasing and God is absent, he's working. The takeaway from Exodus 1 and 2 isn't, "Look how God has abandoned his covenant people," but look how God is working, often behind the scenes, to bring his plans to pass. God knows what his people are going through. He knows what must happen for his will to be done. Even when they don't see it, he's working. Even when they don't feel it, he's working.

Exodus 2 challenges us to consider whether we put our faith and trust only in what we can see. Faith allows us to believe even when we don't see things changing or moving. Faith gives us insider information about our circumstances. It allows us to sigh, cry, groan, and long for deliverance while knowing that our prayers and pleas are not simply fading into the air, but are reaching God's attentive ear.

Israel didn't see anything changing for many years. But their "cries...rose up to God." God "heard" and "remembered." God "saw" and "took notice."

For us to endure this life, we have to live by faith. Faith is not a warm and fuzzy feeling that nothing bad will come our way. Faith is about what we *can't* see and what we *don't* yet have. It is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). We don't see our prayers being heard by God, *but they are*. We don't see God noticing when we cry, *but he does*. We don't experience our sighs reaching his throne room, *but they do*.

Knowing that he sees, hears, and cares ought to change how we view what is happening and live our lives in the meantime. We can be confident that God is working, that God is for us, and that God wins in the end. Even when we don't see it, he's working. Even when we don't feel it, he's working. Because that is who he is and what he does. He is a rewarder of those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

And so, it's his job to work and our job to have faith. Like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and many other children of Abraham, we may not see all of God's promises come to pass in our lifetime, but in the end ***they will***.

So we rejoice now while we wait, knowing our faith is not in our ability to bring it all to pass, but in his. After all, he's the way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, and light in the darkness, and that's exactly who he was, who he is, and who he always will be.