

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 2:1-10

To understand more about the birth of Moses.

Throw Him In the River!

The end of chapter 1 was both heavy and exceedingly depraved: “Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, ‘Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live’” (Ex. 1:22). The harrowing message of the king to all Egyptians to kill every male-born Hebrew baby demonstrate the full wickedness of this new Pharaoh and the hardness of his heart (a theme that will stretch across multiple upcoming chapters). Chapter 2 begins where chapter 1 left off, with a Hebrew woman giving birth to a male child and seeing him eventually thrown in the Nile. However, the details of this unfold differently than how Pharaoh likely anticipated. The baby is Moses, and instead of him drowning in the Nile, he finds his way into the hands of Pharaoh’s daughter and eventually becomes her son. This sets the stage for Moses’ journey out of Egypt, back to Egypt, and out of Egypt once more.

Pre-Qualified

Verse 1 begins with a seemingly insignificant detail, but further investigation reveals its great importance: “Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son” (Ex. 1:1-2a). Verses 1 through 9 give detail of the birth of Moses and begin by notifying the reader of his priestly descent. Here, Moses comes from the Levitical line, a line that will be established as the clergy tribe during Moses’ lifetime. The Levites are the descendants of Levi (Gen. 29:34), the brother of Simeon who together avenged the rape of their sister Dinah by killing the inhabitants of Shechem (Gen. 34:25). Levi’s tribe eventually is designated into a priestly class under their very first high priest, Aaron (Ex. 28). Unlike the other tribes, the Levites were not assigned a portion of land but were instead spread across the remaining tribes to maintain priestly duties among all of the people of Israel (Num. 35:1-8).

While the priestly line has not yet been established (it will be under Moses’ leadership), it was important for Moses to be a Levite because his role in Israel would be priestly in nature. God, in other words, prequalified Moses for the services He intended him to perform. There are a number of examples of God pre-qualifying individuals for future service in the Old Testament. Douglas Stuart points out: “Abraham’s prequalification involved his family’s willingness to settle in Canaan, which then led to the revelation of his position as the father of many nations (Gen. 11:31; 12:1). Aaron, Moses’ brother, had to be a Levite and witness of God’s theophany if he were to be a priest and the leader and progenitor of all subsequent priests (Ex. 4:14; 19:24; 28:1). Samson was set aside from birth as a Nazirite to become a deliverer of his people from the Philistines (Jdg. 13:2–25). Samuel’s prequalification came in the form of a divine call of endearment early in life (1 Sam. 3:2–21). David’s early anointing (1 Sam. 16:13) and precocious military skills (1 Sam. 17) established his

prequalification.”¹ Moses was set apart to do what only a Levite would eventually be qualified to do, and so God raises him up from the appropriate line prior to his service. God’s ordering of events are intentional. He acts with the future in mind because he sees the end from the beginning (Is. 46:9-10).

A River and a Reunion

Verse 2 continues: “And when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.” Because of the edict from the new king for all Egyptians to kill the male-born Hebrew babies, Moses’ mother feared him being caught and thrown into the river. Her solution to this issue is found in verse 3: “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.” Her actions are almost ironic. Her fear of Moses being captured by Egyptians and thrown into the river leads her to... throw Moses into the river. Of course, she puts him in a basket so that he won’t drown in hopes that he will somehow be preserved, but her actions in verse 3 are reminiscent of the king’s commands in Exodus 1:22.

There is also an incredible play on words in this passage. The “basket” in which she places her son is the Hebrew word תַּבָּחַת (tēbāḥ), and it’s a rather unusual word in the Old Testament, only found one other time. It’s found in Noah’s narrative in Genesis chapters 6 through 8 and is translated as “ark.” Moses’ mom literally puts him in an “ark” made “of bulrushes” and covered with “bitumen and pitch.” Keep in mind that Exodus is written by Moses and chronologically follows the story of Genesis. That means that Moses, under the inspiration of the Spirit, chose this word intentionally to signal to the ancient Hebrew audience that this basket was a divine instrument by which God protected Moses from outside threats much in the same way that he protected Noah and his family from the outside threat of the flood. Moses and Noah share more than this in common, as well. Moses, like Noah, is an example of a man used by God to usher in a new era of redemptive history. Moses’ story, like Noah’s, describes the massive taking of lives by water (Ex. 1:22). The connection between the two is clear for multiple purposes, but none more so than shared salvation in an ark. The basket, or “ark,” safely carried Moses through the tumultuous waters and protected him from outside threats until he reached safety in the same way it did Noah.

And the safety to which it carried Moses was ironically into the hands of the very people instructed to kill him. However, the daughter of Pharaoh did not seek to kill the baby, but rather “took pity on him and said, ‘This is one of the Hebrew’s children’” (Ex. 2:6). Seeking an opportunity to take action, Moses’ older sister Miriam, who was apparently one Pharaoh’s daughter’s “attendants” (NIV) or “maidens” (NASB), waited from a distance to watch (Ex. 2:4) and suggested to Pharaoh’s daughter that she go and find a wet nurse to care for the baby. Of course, Miriam knew the perfect wet nurse: her and Moses’ own mother! Pharaoh’s daughter agrees to this (Ex. 2:8), and Moses ends up being returned to his own mother for more care (Ex. 2:9) before he is returned to Pharaoh’s daughter and taken in as a son (Ex. 2:10a).

Moses is appropriately named by Pharaoh’s daughter because of the way in which he came to her: “She named him Moses, ‘Because,’ she said, ‘I drew him out of the water’” (Ex. 2:10b). Moses’ name is an interesting name because of its confluence between Hebrew and Egyptian culture. In Hebrew, it’s a name equivalent to the Egyptian noun that means “boy child.” It also appears in several common Egyptian names

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of The New American Commentary, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 86.

such as Ptahmose, Tuthmosis, Ahmose, and Harmose. Moses' name, then, seems to be a clear connecting point etymologically to the Hebrew residence within Egypt.

What About Now?

One of the clear takeaways in this passage is God's sovereign power over man's wickedness. Pharaoh sought to have all of the male-born Hebrew babies killed, and yet through the basket or "ark," God led Moses into the hands of Pharaoh's daughter to not only be saved, but reunited with his own mother for a period of time before being adopted into royalty. God was establishing Moses to do the work He would call him to long before Moses could even talk! God truly can "work all things together for good, for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Another takeaway might be the importance of being able to recognize God's will playing out and adapting to it. Miriam, Moses' sister, saw Moses come into the hands of Pharaoh's daughter and quickly suggested she bring the baby to a wet nurse to be cared for, knowing exactly who the baby was. This is one of the reasons why it's important to be "sober minded" (1 Th. 5:6); we ought to be alert, always discerning the work of God around us (Eph. 6:18).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 2:1-2. From what tribe were the man and woman described here? What does that signify about their child? For how long did they hide the child, and why were they hiding him?

2. Read Exodus 2:3. What did the mother do after three months? Of what materials is the basket made? What is significant about the basket? (Hint: See above notes)

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 2:4. Whose sister stood by? Why was she standing at a distance?

2. Read Exodus 2:5. Who came to bathe at the river? What did she find when she was there?

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 2:6-7. What did she find inside of the basket? What was her response to finding the baby? What did Moses' sister suggest to Pharaoh's daughter?

2. Read Exodus 2:8. How did Pharaoh's daughter respond to Moses' sister's suggestion? To whom did Moses' sister bring the baby?
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Day Four

1. Read Exodus 2:9. What did Pharaoh's daughter say to the wet nurse? Who was the wet nurse?
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2. Read Exodus 2:10. What did Pharaoh's daughter eventually do with the baby? What did she name him? What does his name mean?
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Week 3 Discussion: Think Fast

One of the most interesting characters in Exodus 2:1-10 is Miriam, Moses' older sister. She stands at a distance to watch what happens to Moses as he is sent down the river in a basket, and is ready to make suggestions to Pharaoh's daughter that will not only protect her little brother but reunite him for a time back with their mother. She is in the right place at the right time and is able to think fast and act. Talk as a group about the importance of being sober-minded and alert to what is happening around you so that you are able to think fast and act according to God's will.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever been in the right place at the right time? Share with your group the details of your experience.
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8. What does this verse say about the importance of remaining "alert?" Why would this be important for specifically Christians?
3. Does sober-mindedness only refer to alcohol? Or is there more to it? Why or why not?
4. What are some potential distractions that might prevent you from being sober-minded?
5. How important is wisdom when it comes to "thinking fast?"
6. What steps are you going to take to remove distractions and be more attentive to the work of God around you?

Takeaways:

1. Two Levites have a son who they keep hidden for a time and then send down the river in a basket for fear that he will be killed by the Egyptians.
2. The baby ends up in the hands of Pharaoh's daughter, who has pity on him.
3. The baby's sister suggests to Pharaoh's daughter that he be cared for by a wet nurse, and ends up back in the arms of his own mother for a time.
4. The baby, Moses, eventually becomes the son of Pharaoh's daughter.