

Comments on Exodus 2

1 AND there went a man of the house of Levi, and took [to wife] a daughter of Levi. 2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he [was a] goodly [child], she hid him three months. 3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid [it] in the flags by the river's brink. 4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

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

v1-10 Background on Moses, and the circumstances that result in his life being preserved. Owing to the circumstances described in ch. 1, when a Levite couple (v. 1) conceives and bears a child, the mother hides him as long as possible (v. 2), but is forced to put him into the river. She does so by placing him in a basket among reeds (v. 3), while having his older sister watch to see what happens to him (v. 4).

Pharaoh's daughter and her entourage come to bathe in the river, where she sees the basket and has it brought to her by a servant (v. 5). She has mercy on the crying baby, which she recognizes as a Hebrew (v. 6). Miriam approaches and offers to get a nursemaid for the baby (v. 7), which offer is accepted, with wages attached, and the baby ends up being nursed by his own mother (v. 8-9) while enjoying the legal protection of an Egyptian. After the baby is weaned, his mother brings him to Pharaoh's daughter and she adopts him as her own son. She names him after the event wherein she found him (v. 10).

Note the irony of the entire situation. Pharaoh commands all Hebrew male babies to be thrown into the Nile so as to avoid being militarily subverted, but it is his own daughter

who rescues the one who ultimately confronts and humiliates Pharaoh. The downfall of Egypt can be traced back to Pharaoh's own family.

v2 "goodly", Everett Fox, in his Five Books of Moses says "The parallel in Genesis is 'God saw the light: that it was good' (Gen. 1:4). goodly, [meaning] handsome (so Ibn Ezra, among others), although others interpret the Hebrew tov as 'healthy,' given the context. What is important is the Genesis connection just mentioned."

v3-5 It is likely Moses' mother deliberately intended for what happened to happen. She probably deliberately set the basket down in the river, sitting still among bulrushes (v. 3), near to where she knew a group of Egyptian woman would be congregating and thereby hope they would take mercy on him, as opposed to floating him down the river and hoping fate would spare him. The baby being "a goodly child" (v. 2), or pleasant looking with an agreeable disposition, probably didn't hurt any either. The daughter of Pharaoh found the floating basket in the bulrushes where it was left (v. 5), and Miriam was there waiting to see what happened (v. 4). This was no act of blind faith, sending the child down the river in the hopes someone would rescue him.

v6 The Egyptians held the Hebrews as servants and would not eat with them, cf. Gen 43:32. But, given their reaction here, they do not appear to have been entirely bigoted against the Hebrews. For the daughter of Pharaoh and her entire entourage to accept the child shows there was no universal hatred between them.

v10 "Moses", the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation states, "Hebrew Moshesh from Egyptian for "born of"; here associated with mashah "drawn out". The name clearly has predictive implications as it is Moses who draws Israel out of Egypt." Clearly, this is from the Hebrew perspective. From the perspective of the daughter of Pharaoh, drawing him out of the water was symbolic to her of his birth to her, or a similitude of the birthing process, since he is an adopted son and not by natural childbirth.

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. 12 And he looked this way and that way, and when

he saw that [there was] no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. 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? 14 And he said, Who 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. 15 Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.

v11-22 These verses portray the young man Moses as a zealot for justice, one who in his younger years will lash out with physical force at the unjust when needs be. These two accounts are undoubtedly included in order to contrast his impassioned and somewhat reckless youth, with his later calling as a wise and much more deliberate prophet of God. But they do serve to show his strong sense of justice, and his willingness to apply it to all, Egyptian, Hebrew and Midianite alike.

Another thing to be noticed is the two stories present Moses as a man in between two nations. When confronting the fighting Hebrews in v. 14, they question his authority as he is in fact just another Hebrew and has killed an Egyptian. Then in v. 19 they mistake him for a an Egyptian and not a Hebrew. So Moses is presented as neither, he is a misfit. A Hebrew raised as an Egyptian, rejected by his fellows who were in slavery as he was raised in privilege, but now on the run from Pharaoh he ends up dwelling in Midian being thought of as an Egyptian. Why would this be noteworthy? Consider the way Moses rails on Israel and Canaanite alike in his attacks on immorality. He is impartial to his audience, without the slightest hint of favoritism for the Hebrews. Would the events in his life shape his actions? His impartiality in judgment later in life, certainly would have been influenced by his detachment in his younger years.

v11-15 Moses, aware of his Hebrew heritage, sees his brothers being oppressed and has sympathy on them. He witnesses a Hebrew being viciously beaten by his Egyptian taskmaster (v. 11), looks around to see if there is anyone else to intervene, and there is no one, so he kills the Egyptian and hides his body (v. 12). The next day Moses sees two Hebrews fighting and he reprimands them for fighting amongst themselves (v. 13). The one who is reprimanded for beating his fellow Hebrew questions Moses' authority for censuring him, and then insinuates, or perhaps even threatens, blackmail for his

killing the Egyptian the day before. Moses realizes word has spread concerning the events of the preceding day and is fearful (v. 14). News spreads to Pharaoh and he intends to have Moses put to death over the matter, but Moses flees to the land of Midian (v. 15).

v11-12 At issue here is whether or not Moses is a murderer. The KJV "smiting" is the Hebrew "nachaw" and Strong's has this entry:

05221 nakah {naw-kaw'}

a primitive root; TWOT - 1364; v

AV - smite 348, slay 92, kill 20, beat 9, slaughter 5, stricken 3, given 3, wounded 3, strike 2, stripes 2, misc 13; 500

- 1) to strike, smite, hit, beat, slay, kill
- 1a) (Niphal) to be stricken or smitten
- 1b) (Pual) to be stricken or smitten
- 1c) (Hiphil)
- 1c1) to smite, strike, beat, scourge, clap, applaud, give a thrust
- 1c2) to smite, kill, slay (man or beast)
- 1c3) to smite, attack, attack and destroy, conquer, subjugate, ravage
- 1c4) to smite, chastise, send judgment upon, punish, destroy
- 1d) (Hophal) to be smitten
- 1d1) to receive a blow
- 1d2) to be wounded
- 1d3) to be beaten
- 1d4) to be (fatally) smitten, be killed, be slain
- 1d5) to be attacked and captured
- 1d6) to be smitten (with disease)
- 1d7) to be blighted (of plants)

The Hebrew suggests the "smiting" here was not simply a couple of slaps across the face, but rather was a life-threatening beating and Moses stepped in and killed the would-be murderer. Thus, Moses would not be guilty of murder, but acting as a vigilante.

v12 "when he saw...no man", Everett Fox states "Although some have interpreted this as 'no man around to help,' the

expression taken in context would seem to indicate that Moshe was afraid of being seen. This incident reveals Moshe's concern and early leanings toward being a liberator, but also demonstrates his youthful lack of forethought. In fact, it will take God, not Moshe's own actions, to set the liberation process in motion."

v13 Even though Moses has been raised among Egyptians, he clearly has a strong sense of Hebrew identity and feels brotherhood with them, so much so that he insists they not fight among themselves.

v14 The lack of respect the censured Hebrew shows Moses indicates he either held no authority through his association with the Egyptians, or whatever authority he held was impeached by his killing the Egyptian. Either way, the Hebrew rejects his censure and threatens him with the knowledge of what Moses had done the day before. Whatever sense of brotherhood Moses felt was clearly not reciprocated by this individual, perhaps suggesting Moses was not considered a Hebrew among the Hebrews because of his association with the Egyptians, as v. 19 clearly suggests that in all outward appearance he was an Egyptian and not a Hebrew. Perhaps the Hebrews didn't even know Moses was a Hebrew, but saw knew him only as an Egyptian, even though he protected a Hebrew from an Egyptian.

16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew [water], and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. 18 And when they came to Reuel their father, he said, How [is it that] ye are come so soon to day? 19 And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew [water] enough for us, and watered the flock. 20 And he said unto his daughters, And where [is] he? why [is] it [that] ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread. 21 And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. 22 And she bare [him] a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land.

v16-22 Being at the well (v. 15), Moses witnesses conflict between Shepherds and the daughters of Jethro over watering of flocks. Moses intercedes on behalf of the women, and assists them in watering their flock (v. 16-17). When the women return so quickly from their chores, their father questions

them (v. 18) and they tell him concerning Moses' actions (v. 19). Jethro then insists they get Moses and bring him back so he may be thanked for his deeds (v. 20). Moses agrees to settle with Jethro's family and he marries Jethro's daughter Zipporah (v. 21). They have a son, and name him in token of Moses being a traveler in a foreign land (v. 22).

The events of this story are in stark contrast to the events of the preceding story. In v. 11-15 Moses rises up to defend his own people from the Egyptians and encourage them to not fight among themselves, only to be rejected and set to flight. Here, he defends strangers who wholeheartedly accept him and bring him into their family.

23 And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto [them].

v23-25 As time passes, the Israelites are oppressed terribly by the Egyptians (v. 23) and the Lord hears their cries and remembers the covenant with their fathers (v. 24), respecting them because of it (v. 25).

v23 "their cry for help", the "cry" here is the same kind of cry God hears in the Sodom account, a cry of the innocent suffering injustice and oppression (cf. Gen. 18:22, also cp, Isa. 5:7). This kind of outcry raises the ire of an impassioned God, and results in Him taking action for His people, cf. 3:7 (or in the case of the Isaiah reference, He takes action against His people).

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