



God Sees & God Knows

TEXT: Exodus 1 & 2

Big Idea:

STUDY

*** Before interacting with this guide, all leaders should study the referenced texts using the HEAR Method. It's also important to encourage your group members to read the text using the HEAR Method. ***

H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- **Why was this written?**
- **To whom was it originally written?**
- **How does it fit with the verses before and after it?**
- **Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?**
- **What is He intending to communicate through this text?**

A: Apply the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

R: Respond to God in prayer.



Text

Read the scripture below. Use this copy to make observations, ask questions, and ask how God might be challenging you to move in response to his word.

Israel Increases Greatly in Egypt

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, 3 Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, 4 Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5 All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. 6 Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. 7 But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

Pharaoh Oppresses Israel

8 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. 13 So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

15 Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” 17 But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. 18 So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” 20 So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very



strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 22 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."

The Birth of Moses

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. 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. 4 And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. 5 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. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" 8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Moses Flees to Midian

11 One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" 14 He answered, "Who made you a prince and a 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." 15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.

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 The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. 18 When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come home so soon today?" 19 They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock." 20 He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." 21 And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter



Zipporah. 22 She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”

God Hears Israel's Groaning

23 During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.



Lesson

Summary:

God made a covenant with Abraham. God told Abraham that he was going to set apart Abraham's descendants that he might bless them and that they might be a blessing to others. God told Abraham that his descendants would inhabit a land that was bountiful and blessed. As Exodus opens, this promise that God made seems to have gone unfulfilled, but all that is about to change.

We are told that the Jewish people had made their way to Egypt through Joseph's provision. They came down into the land 70 strong. When they got there, God went to work and the promise started coming to fulfillment. They were fruitful and multiplied. Abraham's descendants filled the land.

If the book of Exodus opens with good news it turns bad quickly. Not long after the Israelites began to multiply a new king arose to the throne of Egypt. This new king did not know Joseph or respect Israel. In fact he hated Israel and feared their political power in the country. So, the king made plans to deal with the Hebrew problem. Do not sanitize what we read. The new Egyptian pharaoh makes a plan to demonize and kill the Jewish people. First, the king planned to enslave the people. Then, the king planned to kill the baby boys of the Hebrew people. Finally, the king resorted to systematic genocide of the Hebrew people. Things were not going well for the Hebrews.

Nevertheless, Exodus 2 tells us that God saw the people and he knew their pain. God had not forgotten his people. For this reason, we are introduced to Moses. Moses is the deliverer of Israel. The one born to bring out the people from bondage.

Even when things aren't going the way we had planned. God's plan is coming together.



Big Idea: God sees the pain of his people, and God moves toward his people in pain.

Group Time

Share Time: Open your group by asking for prayers request.

Opening question: How should believers respond when they experience persecution?

Or

How should believers strive to live in a society determined to rebel against God?

Read Exodus 1

Point No. 1: God's plan often looks different than ours.

God has made a promise to Abraham. However, I'm sure that Abraham didn't think that would have ended up with his descendants enslaved in the land of Egypt.



I'm sure the people of Israel didn't think that God's plan was coming together. However, in the midst of great persecution we are told that the people of God flourished and multiplied.

While the people of God were killed and persecuted, the promise of God was being fulfilled.

When the plan of God doesn't look like ours we have to trust that God knows better than we do. Our perspective is incomparable to that of the omniscient all powerful God.

Just like we know more than our kids based on time, power, and experience, God knows more than we do. We have to trust him even when we don't understand his ways.

Even when we don't completely get it, we can trust that God is good and he is working for our good.

As Charles Spurgeon once said:

God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.

Discuss: Have there been times in your life when you had to trust God's heart instead of seeing his hand? Tell the group about it.

Read Exodus 2

Point No. 2: The plan of God goes forward with everyday obedience.



Some of the most striking verses in chapter two come in verses 1&2. There we are introduced to a couple, who in the midst of persecution, do something extraordinarily brave. They get married and they have a baby.

That may not seem like much, but when babies are being killed having a baby is a big deal. The baby that they have ends up being Moses, the deliverer of Israel.

How does the plan of God go forward? It goes forward through the normal obedience of everyday people.

Discuss:

How can you move the kingdom forward with everyday acts of obedience?

Point No. 3: God's people need a redeemer.

In chapter 2 we are introduced to Moses. God positions Moses to be the man who delivers Israel. He was raised in the Egyptian court. Prepared for greatness. Moses slows the plan of God when he kills an Egyptian man in a desire to avenge his people. Despite Moses' failure, God would still use him. He would bring the people out of their bondage.

The people of Israel needed a savior, and we today are no different. We need a Savior to deliver us from our bondage, sin. We need a redeemer to buy us back from our punishment, death. The people of Egypt got Moses. We get Jesus.

Discuss:

How does Moses point us toward us to Jesus?



Leader Resources

Commentary

Tyndale Old Testament Commentary

1. ISRAEL IN EGYPT ([1:1–11:10](#))

a. Israel before Moses ([1:1–22](#))

[1:1–7](#). Background. [1](#). *And these are the names ...* The initial ‘and’ found in the Hebrew makes clear that Exodus is not a new book, but simply the continuation of the Genesis story, and the fulfilment of the promises made to the patriarchs. But this is an appropriate place for a break: it is the last time in the Pentateuch that ‘sons of Israel’ is used to describe Jacob’s immediate family. From now on, the phrase will be a collective patronymic, describing the whole people of God, formed like any Arabic tribal name.

[2–4](#). There is a sonorous roll in the names of the twelve phylarchs, like the list of the twelve apostles in the New Testament. A new work of God is about to begin.

[5](#). *Seventy* may be used as a round number, or as a sacred figure. It may however be obtained exactly by excluding Jacob’s daughter Dinah from the total. The Greek text of [Genesis 46](#) adds the five children of Ephraim and Manasseh, thus making the ‘seventy-five’ of [Acts 7:14](#)¹ The theological point is the difference between the small number who entered Egypt and the large numbers who left.

[7](#). The Hebrew deliberately repeats three verbs used in [Genesis 1:21](#), [22](#) which may be translated ‘were fruitful ... swarmed ... became numerous’. This increase was interpreted as God’s promised blessing on his creation. A considerable time had passed since Joseph’s death: at the very shortest reckoning, Moses was the fourth generation after Levi ([Num. 26:58](#)) and he



may have been many hundred years later ([Exod. 12:40](#)). *The land was filled* is either the land of Goshen (probably the Wadi Tumilat, stretching from the Nile to the line of the present Suez Canal) or else, by a natural exaggeration, the whole territory of Egypt. This last interpretation, although statistically incorrect, expresses well the feelings of the native Egyptians, perhaps outnumbered in some parts by the unwelcome immigrants.

[1:8–14](#). Pharaoh's labour camps. [8](#). *A new king* need not necessarily mean the next pharaoh. Indeed, if Israel's stay in Egypt was a matter of centuries ([Exod. 12:40](#)), then it may have been a new dynasty. The XVIIth Dynasty had been Hyksos (Semitic and foreign); the XVIIIth was a native dynasty (1570–1310) and at once expelled the foreign overlords. On independent grounds, it is usually considered nowadays that the exodus took place in the early years of the XIXth Dynasty (1310–1200), i.e. the 13th century bc. In either case, this is the simple language of popular folk history, expressing a truth, but not concerned with exact dates.

[10](#), [11](#). Forced labor was an old principle in highly centralized Egypt, as in all the ancient world: neither pyramids nor Nile canals would have been possible without it. *Taskmasters* is a technical term, and would describe the hated Egyptian officials, under whom there were minor Israelite officials ([Exod. 5:14](#)); *mas* (translated 'task') was a technical term in Israel for 'forced labor' (usually Canaanite and therefore foreign, [1 Kgs 9:21](#)). How such taskmasters were hated can be seen from the stoning of Adoram later ([1 Kgs 12:18](#)). *Pithom and Raamses*. This is a vivid touch of great value for dating the event, since the building of both cities is associated with Rameses II (c. 1290–1225 bc), probably in connection with his Asiatic campaigns. Pithom is probably Tell er-Retabe ('Broomhill') in the Wadi Tumilat. Raamses may be modern Qantîr ('Bridge'), on the eastern arm of the Nile delta, but the exact location of both cities is disputed.

[12](#). *The more they multiplied and ... spread abroad*. Such attempts to control the growth of the people of God are vain. Again, two Genesis verbs ([Gen. 1:22](#) and [30:30](#)) are used to describe their triumphant growth. But it was a life of bitter, unrelieved drudgery ([14](#)) and the rude animal health of this biologically superior people 'disgusted' the sophisticated Egyptians (cf. [neb](#)). Others prefer the translation 'sick with worry', comparing [Genesis 27:46](#).

[1:15–22](#). Pharaoh's second plan: genocide. [15](#). *The Hebrew midwives*. 'Hebrew' seems to be a term of wide application in the early Old Testament, referring to all the semi-settled West Semitic peoples, in a cultural not genetic sense, and usually on the lips of a foreigner (as in verse [22](#)). Here the term is appropriate, in the mouth of the pharaoh. In [Exodus 5:3](#) it is again properly



used, as describing the God of Israel to Egyptian pharaoh. In the legal code ‘Hebrew slave’ ([Exod. 21:2](#)) has a much wider meaning than ‘Israelite slave’. The word probably has a connotation something like modern ‘gipsy’, in a derogatory sense, combining the ideas of wandering and animal-trading. The ‘Apiru, or unskilled labourers, of the Egyptian texts, and the Habiru of the Tell el-Amarna tablets are probably the same cultural group.² *Shiphrah* and *Puah* are two good Semitic names, of an archaic type (compare Gideon’s servant Purah in [Judg. 7:10](#)), meaning something like ‘beauty’ and ‘splendour’ respectively. For the first, compare the form Sapphira ([Acts 5:1](#)). Like the names Pithom and Raamses, these detailed memories assure us that we are dealing with genuine historical tradition. But why only two midwives? Either these were the only two, or they were the only two who disobeyed, or they were the only two whose names were remembered. The first alternative would, however, mean that the total number of Israelites was only a few thousand at most. Perhaps the third suggestion is the best, most congenial to folk history and to Semitic languages. In Hebrew ‘the midwives’ means ‘those particularized by the following circumstances’ (see [Exod. 2:1](#)).

16. *The birthstool*: literally ‘the two stones’ upon which the Israelite woman crouched while giving birth: there are other Semitic parallels. A less likely suggestion is that it is a reference to the distinguishing organs of the male children, who were alone to be killed.

19. *They are vigorous and are delivered before the midwife comes to them*. We are not told whether the midwives were lying, or whether the quick delivery of ‘Hebrew’ babies was a biological fact. Arabian parallels are quoted by [Driver](#), but Rachel certainly had a hard delivery ([Gen. 35:16](#)). Even if they lied, it is not for their deceit that they are commended, but for their refusal to take infant lives, God’s gift. Their reverence for life sprang from reverence for God, the life-giver ([Exod. 20:12, 13](#)), and for this they were rewarded with families. The relevance of this to modern controversy about abortion should be carefully pondered.

22. The Hebrew for *river* ([av](#), [rv](#)) here is a loanword from Egyptian, and means ‘*the river*’ *par excellence*, that is, *the Nile* ([rsv](#), [neb](#)). (Other possible loan-words from Egyptian are ‘reed’ and ‘frog’; and numerous Egyptian proper names occur, in the tribe of Levi especially.) To execute by drowning was an obvious method in a country such as Egypt and Babylonia, just as death by stoning was obvious in rocky Israel ([Josh. 7:25](#)). Whether Israel in general obeyed pharaoh’s edict, we do not know: certainly the parents of Moses braved pharaoh’s anger ([Heb. 11:23](#)). *Every daughter*. These presumably would become slave wives, and so could be absorbed by the Egyptians in a generation. The whole vain attempt to wipe out the people of God finds its



parallel in the New Testament attempt by Herod to destroy a generation of babies at Bethlehem ([Matt. 2:16](#)). But, as in the New Testament, God's chosen agent is protected: neither pharaoh nor Herod can stand in the way of God's plan. Jewish expositors have seen parallels to pharaoh's action in the attempted genocide of Israel by Hitler and others: Christian expositors have sought such parallels in the bitter persecutions suffered by the church throughout her history.

b. Early life of Moses ([2:1–25](#))

[2:1–10](#). Birth and adoption. 1. *The house of Levi*. Amram (whose name is given in [6:20](#)) was grandson of Levi, if the genealogies are complete, so that 'house' is quite literal, meaning 'family'. Levi had no priestly associations in the early days, as can be seen from [Genesis 49:5–7](#) where, with Simeon, he comes under his father's curse for a bloodthirsty attack on Shechem ([Gen. 34](#)). The curse will be fulfilled: but in the case of Levi it will be turned into blessing, for Levi will be 'scattered' as the priestly tribe ([Num. 35:7, 8](#)). In view of the meaning of the root *lāwā* 'to adhere', and the use of *lawi* in southern Arabic to mean 'a priest', some have suggested that the name Levi denoted an occupation, not a tribe. The Bible, however, while quite conscious of this meaning of the name, associates it not with priestly status, but with circumstances of birth ([Gen. 29:34](#)). For the choice of Levi as the priestly tribe, in reward for faithfulness, see [Exodus 32](#). *A daughter of Levi*. The Hebrew text should probably be translated *the daughter*, as in [Numbers 26:59](#). If Jochebed was Kohath's sister, then she would be literally 'the daughter of Levi' ([6:20](#)). However, it is idiomatic in Hebrew to use the definite article to describe her as the particular descendant of Levi about whom the following anecdote will be told.

2. *Bore a son*. The story does not say that Moses was her first-born son. His sister, obviously several years older, appears in verse 4, and Aaron is three years older than Moses ([Exod. 7:7](#)). It is quite unnecessary to assume that they were Amram's children by another wife, although such plural marriages were common. Miriam is, however, usually described as 'Aaron's sister' ([Exod. 15:20](#)), never as Moses' sister: this has been used to support the above theory. But Old Testament narrative as a rule introduces facts only when relevant to the story: we cannot argue from silence.

3. *She could hide him no longer*. A healthy child cries too loudly to be hidden at three months old. His cries may later have attracted the attention of pharaoh's daughter ([5](#)). *A basket made of bulrushes*. The Hebrew would be better translated by 'papyrus basket'; the word is used elsewhere only of Noah's ark ([Gen. 6](#)) and may possibly be connected with Egyptian *tebet*, 'chest'. Any market in Asia is loaded with baskets of this sort, holding everything from pigs to



fruit. It was coated with ‘bitumen’ ([Gen. 11:3](#); [14:10](#)) to make it watertight, and possibly to provide extra insulation against the hot sun. [Isaiah 18:2](#) refers to papyrus skiffs as plying on the Nile, so that the ‘basket’ was a miniature Nile boat. *And placed it among the reeds.* These would be in shallow water, where the current could not carry the basket away, with less danger of crocodiles than on an open sandbank or beach. There would also be some protection from the heat of the sun, in the reeds. The *sûp*, ‘reeds’, whatever water plant it was, gave its name to the ‘Reed Sea’ or ‘Reed Marsh’ of [13:18](#). The writer remembers seeing a very thick growth of reeds (though not of any great height) roughly where the Sweet Water Canal joined the Suez Canal.

Jochebed’s act, like Abram’s claim to be the brother of Sarai in [Genesis 12](#), is just within the law. She had indeed thrown her son into the river as ordered, but in a wicker basket. Some scholars have seen the story as parabolic or ideal, however, on the grounds of similar stories told of Sargon of Accad and others. But the existence of so many stories only shows that this was a favourite way of abandoning babies in the ancient world. It was in fact the ancient equivalent of leaving them on the steps of a hospital or orphanage today. The shallows of a river near any Asian village would be the ideal place today to expose a baby and ensure its being found by the women who came to wash clothes or prepare food. Discovery would be certain; there was a good wicker basket which could be salvaged, clearly visible.

5. *The daughter of Pharaoh.* The Apocrypha calls her Tharmuth ([Jubilees 47:5](#)); see [Hyatt](#)(p. 64) for ‘Merris’ and ‘Bithiah’ as other names for her. It is hard to see why the names should be invented, so that we may well have a fragment of reliable extra-biblical tradition here. Compare Jannes and Jambres, as the names of the magicians who opposed Moses ([2 Tim. 3:8](#)). If the pharaoh in question was Rameses II, he had close on sixty daughters. He also had numerous ‘hunting-lodges’ scattered over the delta area, where duck and other game were plentiful, so there is no need to assume that Moses’ parents lived near the royal capital Zoan.

6. *She took pity on him.* No eastern mother could bring herself to abandon a sturdy boy-baby like this. We may suspect that a girl-baby might not have fared so well, but they did not come under the pharaoh’s decree of execution. In all this, God’s providence was at work.

9. *Your wages.* It probably appealed to the robust Israelite sense of humour that Jochebed was ‘spoiling the Egyptians’ by receiving pay for nursing her own son: but there was also a deeper purpose in it. No doubt it was in these early years that Moses learnt of the ‘God of the fathers’ ([Exod. 3:15](#)) and realized that the Hebrews were his fellow countrymen ([Exod. 2:11](#)).



Psychologists rightly stress the importance of impressions received during the earliest years. Without this ancestral background, God's later revelation to Moses would have been rootless, and the Sinaitic Covenant could not have been seen as a sequel to, and consequence of, the Abrahamic Covenant ([Exod. 3:6](#)).

10. *Moses, mōšeh*, would be the active participle of the Hebrew verb *māšâ*, 'pulling out'. A different vocalization could give the passive meaning 'pulled out', but there is no need to press this. As often in the Old Testament, this is not intended as a piece of exact philology, but a pun, based on assonance. Possibly pharaoh's daughter chose the Egyptian name which appears as the second half of Thuthmose, Ahmose, and many other similar forms. Whether the name 'Moses' was itself considered as a shortening of some such longer form, it is impossible to say, nor indeed is it important to know. The Bible also seems to mean not only that the name Moses is capable of supporting a pun of this sort (which to the Hebrew was rich in spiritual meaning), but that it was deliberately chosen because of this capacity. There is nothing impossible here: West Semitic dialects were widely understood, and even spoken, in the delta area. An Egyptian mistress might well understand and use the tongue of her domestic servants to give orders, like many a 'mumsahib' in later days.

2:11–15. The rejection and flight of Moses. 11. *Grown up*. [Acts 7:23](#) says he was forty years old at the time. Exodus merely says that he was eighty years old when he spoke to pharaoh ([Exod. 7:7](#)) and that he had spent many days in Midian ([Exod. 2:23](#)). It is possible that forty years is symbolic for a generation, which the Western world usually reckons at thirty years. When [Acts 7:22](#) says that he had been 'instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians', this is doubtless correct, if he was reared with other princelings. All this was the other side of God's preparation. With the possible exceptions of Solomon, Daniel and Nehemiah, no Old Testament character had such a training ([Dan. 1:4](#)). Study of law would probably have been one aspect of any such education. Hammurabi's Code, for instance, was widely studied and annotated by Egyptian scribes, so that Moses may have been well acquainted with it.

And looked on their burdens. This phrase means more than 'to see'. It means 'to see with emotion', either satisfaction ([Gen. 9:16](#)) or, as here, with distress ([Gen. 21:16](#)). Moses is one who shares God's heart. God too has seen what the Egyptians are doing to the Israelites, and he will come to deliver ([Exod. 3:7, 8](#)). It was not Moses' impulse to save Israel that was wrong, but the action that he took. *Beating*, 'killed' ([12](#)) and 'strike' ([13](#)) are all various forms of the same Hebrew verb. This gives the narrative a connectedness impossible to reproduce in English. It also



gives the feeling of ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth’ ([Exod. 21:24](#)). Perhaps the Egyptian was one of the hated taskmasters; and if *Hebrew* has the wider meaning suggested above, then *one of his people* is a necessary narrowing down, to mean an actual Israelite.

12. *Hid him in the sand*. This is a touch of local colour. There was no sand in most of Israel’s rocky hills, and a body was not so easy to hide as in Egypt.

13. *The man who was in the wrong* ([neb](#)). This is a lawcourt term. Compare the description of pharaoh himself as ‘in the wrong’ ([Exod. 9:27](#)) and of God as ‘in the right’. It is true psychological understanding that makes the guilty party reject Moses, in terms that pharaoh himself might have used later ([Exod. 5:2](#)). No doubt the other Hebrew, the innocent party, accepted Moses gladly, as the publicans and sinners welcomed Christ later ([Matt. 9:10](#)).

15. *The land of Midian*. The location is quite uncertain, but clearly it was somewhere beyond the Egyptian frontierposts, and to the east. Somewhere in the Sinai peninsula, or the Arabah (the area south of the Dead Sea), or that part of Arabia east of the gulf of Aqaba, would suit. In Ptolemy’s day the land of ‘Modiana’ was certainly to the east of the gulf. If, as in [Genesis 37:25](#), the Midianites travelled widely, whether for trade or for pastoral reasons ([Exod. 3:1](#)) or for war ([Judg. 6:1](#)), all these areas could be covered. As the later Israelites were bitter foes of the Midianites, it is unthinkable that the tradition of the Midianite sojourn of Moses could be invented. It is possible that ‘Ishmaelites’ ([Gen. 37:25](#)) and ‘Kenites’ ([Judg. 4:11](#)) were clan names used within Midian. Alternatively, [Judges 8:24](#) might possibly support the view that ‘Ishmaelite’ was a wider term than ‘Midianite’: but probably the terms are used loosely. *By a well*. Wherever there was a well in the desert, there would be a settlement: and for those who were there, it was always ‘*the well*’. The village well was a natural place in which to meet the stranger. Similar interviews are recorded of Jacob ([Gen. 29:10](#)) and Christ ([John 4:6, 7](#)); in each case help, whether material or spiritual, is given to the helpless, a picture of what God will do.

2:16–22. Moses in Midian. 16. *The priest of Midian*. Some scholars have seen support in this for the so-called ‘Kenite hypothesis’, which assumes that Mosaic religion stems from that of Midian, and in particular from Moses’ father-in-law. The Midianites by tradition belonged to the same Abrahamic stock as Israel ([Gen. 17:20](#)) and it is most unlikely that Moses would have learnt from them anything that he did not know already of the ‘common law’ of the western Semites. Furthermore the biblical account is quite clear, both that the new revelation was made to Moses at ‘God’s Mountain’ ([Exod. 3:1](#)) and that his father-in-law only subsequently accepted it,



when validated by events ([Exod. 18:11](#)). *Seven daughters*. Again, the ideal or sacred number: but it may well be used here in a literal sense. Arab women (never men) still draw water in Israel and Jordan, while the flocks are usually attended by boys and girls.

18. *Reuel*: perhaps meaning ‘friend of God’ or ‘shepherd of God’, the latter very appropriate in a pastoral society. A less likely meaning would be ‘God is a shepherd/friend’. Just as there is doubt as to the location of Midian and even Sinai itself, so there is doubt as to the exact name of Moses’ father-in-law. This name Reuel is quite a possible form? and in [Genesis 36:4](#) it actually appears as an Edomite name. In [Exodus 3:1](#) the same man is called Jethro, the nominative form of a not uncommon South Arabic name. In [Numbers 10:29](#) a Hobab appears, the son of Reuel of Midian: it is not certain from the text which of the two is father-in-law to Moses.³ Hobab is again a good Semitic name, and [Judges 4:11](#) certainly describes Moses’ father-in-law as Hobab. All this means either that several variant traditions have survived as to the identity of Moses’ father-in-law, or that he had at least two names. There is of course no problem in supposing him to have two (or more) names, since double names are known from South Arabic sources. In such cases the biblical editor sometimes specifies both names together, as in ‘Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon)’ ([Judg. 7:1](#)): but sometimes both are used independently within a few verses ([Judg. 8:29f.](#)). The matter is of no theological significance and it is best to assume that the name meant so little to Israel that such uncertainty was possible. Tradition however is unanimous that Moses married the daughter of a Semitic priest of the Eastern desert, and lived there for a considerable period.

21. *Zipporah*. We might translate as ‘warbler’ or, less kindly, ‘twitterer’; it is the name of a small bird. Compare the equally simple names of Rachel, ‘ewe’ and Leah, ‘heifer’ ([Gen. 29](#)).

22. *Gershom*. This name contains a pun by assonance, for it is translated as though it were the Hebrew *gēr šām*, ‘a resident alien there’. Philologically, it is probably an old noun meaning ‘expulsion’, from the verb *gāraš*; the general sense is thus much the same. As often in the Old Testament, the remark is rather a commentary on the meaning of the name rather than an exact translation (cf. [Exod. 2:10](#)). See [Hyatt](#) for the suggestion that he is the ancestor of the Levitical clan of ‘Gershon’ ([Num. 3:21–26](#)), with change of final consonant.

[2:23–25](#). The frame of reference. 23. *The king of Egypt died*. It is uncertain which king of Egypt died; perhaps Seti I, or even Rameses II, in which case *many days* would refer to his long



reign. The passage stresses the length of Moses' stay in Midian, and also that it was now safe for him to return to Egypt (cf. [Exod. 4:19](#)).

24. *God remembered his covenant with Abraham.* Even before the vision of the burning bush, the narrator sets the deliverance from Egypt squarely in the context of the patriarchal promise. To Israel of old, the whole course of the history of salvation could be summed up as being 'promise and fulfillment': God promises, God remembers, God acts in salvation.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Chapter 1

We have here, I. God's kindness to Israel, in multiplying them exceedingly (v. [1–7](#)). II. The Egyptians' wickedness to them, 1. Oppressing and enslaving them (v. [8–14](#)). 2. Murdering their children (v. [15–22](#)). Thus whom the court of heaven blessed the country of Egypt cursed, and for that reason.

Verses [1–7](#)

In these verses we have, 1. A recital of the names of the *twelve patriarchs*, as they are called, [Acts 7:8](#). Their names are often repeated in scripture, that they may not sound uncouth to us, as other hard names, but that, by their occurring so frequently, they may become familiar to us; and to show how precious God's spiritual Israel are to him, and how much he delights in them. The account which was kept of the number of Jacob's family, when they went down into Egypt; they were in all *seventy souls* (v. [5](#)). according to the computation we had, [Gen. 46:27](#). This was just the number of the nations by which the earth was peopled, according to the account given, [Gen. 10](#). *For when the Most High separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel*, as Moses observes, [Deu. 32:8](#). Notice is here taken of this that their increase in Egypt might appear the more wonderful. Note, It is good for those whose latter end greatly increases often to remember how small their beginning was, [Job 8:7](#). 3. The death of Joseph, v. [6](#). *All that generation* by degrees wore off. Perhaps all Jacob's sons died much about the same time; for there was not more than seven years' difference in age between the eldest and the youngest of them, except Benjamin; and, when death comes into a



family, sometimes it makes a full end in a little time. When Joseph, the stay of the family, died, the rest went off apace. Note, We must look upon ourselves and our brethren, and all we converse with, as dying and hastening out of the world. This generation passeth away, as that did which went before. 4. The strange increase of Israel in Egypt, v. 7. Here are four words used to express it: They *were fruitful*, and *increased abundantly*, like fishes or insects, so that they *multiplied*; and, being generally healthful and strong, they *waxed exceedingly mighty*, so that they began almost to outnumber the natives, for the land was in all places filled with them, at least Goshen, their own allotment. Observe, (1.) Though, no doubt, they increased considerably before, yet, it should seem, it was not till after the death of Joseph that it began to be taken notice of as extraordinary. Thus, when they lost the benefit of his protection, God made their numbers their defence, and they became better able than they had been to shift for themselves. If God continue our friends and relations to us while we most need them, and remove them when they can be better spared, let us own that he is wise, and not complain that he is hard upon us. After the death of Christ, our Joseph, his gospel Israel began most remarkably to increase: and his death had an influence upon it; it was like the sowing of a corn of wheat, which, if it die, bringeth forth much fruit, [Jn. 12:24](#). (2.) This wonderful increase was the fulfillment of the promise long before made unto the fathers. From the call of Abraham, when God first told him he would make of him a great nation, to the deliverance of his seed out of Egypt, it was 430 years, during the first 215 of which they were increased but to seventy, but, in the latter half, those seventy multiplied to 600,000 fighting men. Note, [1.] Sometimes God's providences may seem for a great while to thwart his promises, and to go counter to them, that his people's faith may be tried, and his own power the more magnified. [2.] Though the performance of God's promises is sometimes slow, yet it is always sure; *at the end it shall speak, and not lie*, [Hab. 2:3](#).

Verses [8–14](#)

The land of Egypt here, at length, becomes to Israel a house of bondage, though hitherto it had been a happy shelter and settlement for them. Note, The place of our satisfaction may soon become the place of our affliction, and that may prove the greatest cross to us of which we said, *This same shall comfort us*. Those may prove our sworn enemies whose parents were our faithful friends; nay, the same persons that loved us may possibly turn to hate us: therefore cease from man, and say not concerning any place on this side heaven, *This is my rest for ever*. Observe here,



I. The obligations they lay under to Israel upon Joseph's account were forgotten: *There arose a new king*, after several successions in Joseph's time, *who knew not Joseph*, v. 8. All that knew him loved him, and were kind to his relations for his sake; but when he was dead he was soon forgotten, and the remembrance of the good offices he had done was either not retained or not regarded, nor had it any influence upon their councils. Note, the best and the most useful and acceptable services done to men are seldom remembered, so as to be recompensed to those that did them, in the notice taken either of their memory, or of their posterity, after their death, [Eccl. 9:5, 15](#). Therefore our great care should be to serve God, and please him, who is not unrighteous, whatever men are, to forget our work and labour of love, [Heb. 6:10](#). If we work for men only, our works, at furthest, will die with us; if for God, they will follow us, [Rev. 14:13](#). This king of Egypt knew not Joseph; and after him arose one that had the impudence to say, *I know not the Lord*, ch. 5:2. Note, Those that are unmindful of their other benefactors, it is to be feared, will forget the supreme benefactor, [1 Jn. 4:20](#).

II. Reasons of state were suggested for their dealing hardly with Israel, v. 9, 10. 1. They are represented as more and mightier than the Egyptians; certainly they were not so, but the king of Egypt, when he resolved to oppress them, would have them thought so, and looked on as a formidable body. 2. Hence it is inferred that if care were not taken to keep them under they would become dangerous to the government, and in time of war would side with their enemies and revolt from their allegiance to the crown of Egypt. Note, It has been the policy of persecutors to represent God's Israel as a dangerous people, *hurtful to kings and provinces*, not fit to be trusted, nay, not fit to be tolerated, that they may have some pretence for the barbarous treatment they design them, [Ezra 4:12](#), etc.; [Esth. 3:8](#). Observe, The thing they feared was lest they should *get them up out of the land*, probably having heard them speak of the promise made to their fathers that they should settle in Canaan. Note, The policies of the church's enemies aim to defeat the promises of the church's God, but in vain; God's counsels shall stand. 3. It is therefore proposed that a course be taken to prevent their increase: *Come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply*. Note, (1.) The growth of Israel is the grief of Egypt, and that against which the powers and policies of hell are levelled. (2.) When men deal wickedly, it is common for them to imagine that they deal wisely; but the folly of sin will, at last, be manifested before all men.

III. The method they took to suppress them, and check their growth, v. 11, 13, 14. The Israelites behaved themselves so peaceably and inoffensively that they could not find any occasion of making war upon them, and weakening them by that means: and therefore, 1. They



took care to keep them poor, by charging them with heavy taxes, which, some think, is included in the *burdens* with which they afflicted them. 2. By this means they took an effectual course to make them slaves. The Israelites, it should seem, were much more industrious laborious people than the Egyptians, and therefore Pharaoh took care to find them work, both in building (they built him *treasure-cities*), and in husbandry, even *all manner of service in the field*: and this was exacted from them with the utmost rigour and severity. Here are many expressions used, to affect us with the condition of God's people. They had *taskmasters* set over them, who were directed, not only to burden them, but, as much as might be, *to afflict them with their burdens*, and contrive how to make them grievous. They not only made them serve, which was sufficient for Pharaoh's profit, but they made them *serve with rigour*, so that their lives became bitter to them, intending hereby, (1.) To break their spirits, and rob them of every thing in them that was ingenuous and generous. (2.) To ruin their health and shorten their days, and so diminish their numbers. (3.) To discourage them from marrying, since their children would be born to slavery. (4.) To oblige them to desert the Hebrews, and incorporate themselves with the Egyptians. Thus he hoped to cut off the name of Israel, that it might be no more in remembrance. And it is to be feared that the oppression they were under had this bad effect upon them, that it brought over many of them to join with the Egyptians in their idolatrous worship; for we read ([Jos. 24:14](#)) that they served other gods in Egypt; and, though it is not mentioned here in this history, yet we find ([Eze. 20:8](#)) that God had threatened to destroy them for it, even while they were in the land of Egypt: however, they were kept a distinct body, unmingled with the Egyptians, and by their other customs separated from them, which was *the Lord's doing, and marvellous*.

IV. The wonderful increase of the Israelites, notwithstanding the oppressions they groaned under (v. [12](#)): *The more they afflicted them the more they multiplied*, sorely to the grief and vexation of the Egyptians. Note, 1. Times of affliction have often been the church's growing times, *Sub pondere crescit—Being pressed, it grows*. Christianity spread most when it was persecuted: the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. 2. Those that take counsel against the Lord and his Israel do but imagine a vain thing ([Ps. 2:1](#)), and create so much the greater vexation to themselves: hell and earth cannot diminish those whom Heaven will increase.

Verses [15–22](#)

The Egyptians' indignation at Israel's increase, notwithstanding the many hardships they put upon them, drove them at length to the most barbarous and inhuman methods of suppressing



them, by the murder of their children. It was strange that they did not rather pick quarrels with the grown men, against whom they might perhaps find some occasion: to be thus bloody towards the infants, whom all must own to be innocents, was a sin which they had to cloak for. Note, 1. There is more cruelty in the corrupt heart of man than one would imagine, [Rom. 3:15, 16](#). The enmity that is in the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman divests men of humanity itself, and makes them forget all pity. One would not think it possible that ever men should be so barbarous and blood-thirsty as the persecutors of God's people have been, [Rev. 17:6](#). 2. Even confessed innocence is no defence against the old enmity. What blood so guiltless as that of a child new-born? Yet that is prodigally shed like water, and sucked with delight like milk or honey. Pharaoh and Herod sufficiently proved themselves agents for that *great red dragon, who stood to devour the man-child as soon as it was born*, [Rev. 12:3, 4](#). Pilate delivered Christ to be crucified, after he had confessed that he found no fault in him. It is well for us that, though man can kill the body, this is all he can do. Two bloody edicts are here signed for the destruction of all the male children that were born to the Hebrews.

I. The midwives were commanded to murder them. Observe, 1. The orders given them, v. [15, 16](#). It added much to the barbarity of the intended executions that the *midwives* were appointed to be the executioners; for it was to make them, not only bloody, but perfidious, and to oblige them to betray a trust, and to destroy those whom they undertook to save and help. Could he think that their sex would admit such cruelty, and their employment such base treachery? Note, Those who are themselves barbarous think to find, or make, others as barbarous. Pharaoh's project was secretly to engage the midwives to stifle the men-children as soon as they were born, and then to lay it upon the difficulty of the birth, or some mischance common in that case, [Job 3:11](#). The two midwives he tampered with in order hereunto are here named; and perhaps, at this time, which was above eighty years before their going out of Egypt, those two might suffice for all the Hebrew women, at least so many of them as lay near the court, as it is plain by ch. [2:5, 6](#), many of them did, and of them he was most jealous. They are called *Hebrew midwives*, probably not because they were themselves Hebrews (for surely Pharaoh could never expect they should be so barbarous to those of their own nation), but because they were generally made use of by the Hebrews; and, being Egyptians, he hoped to prevail with them. 2. Their pious disobedience to this impious command, v. [17](#). *They feared God*, regarded his law, and dreaded his wrath more than Pharaoh's and therefore saved the men-children alive. Note, If men's commands be any way contrary to the commands of God, we must obey God and not man, [Acts 4:19](#); v. [29](#). No power on earth can warrant us, much less oblige us, to sin against God, our chief Lord. Again, Where



the fear of God rules in the heart, it will preserve it from the snare which the inordinate fear of man brings. 3. Their justifying themselves in this disobedience, when they were charged with it as a crime, v. 18. They gave a reason for it, which, it seems, God's gracious promise furnished them with—that they came too late to do it, for generally the children were born before they came, v. 19. I see no reason we have to doubt the truth of this; it is plain that the Hebrews were now under an extraordinary blessing of increase, which may well be supposed to have this effect, that the women had very quick and easy labour, and, the mothers and children being both lively, they seldom needed the help of midwives: this these midwives took notice of, and, concluding it to the finger of God, were thereby emboldened to disobey the king, in favour of those whom Heaven thus favoured, and with this justified themselves before Pharaoh, when he called them to an account for it. Some of the ancient Jews expound it thus, *Ere the midwife comes to them they pray to their Father in heaven, and he answereth them, and they do bring forth*. Note, God is a readier help to his people in distress than any other helpers are, and often anticipates them with the blessings of his goodness; such deliverances lay them under peculiarly strong obligations. 4. The recompence God gave them for their tenderness towards his people: *He dealt well with them*, v. 20. Note, God will be behind-hand with none for any kindness done to his people, taking it as done to himself. In particular, *he made them houses* (v. 21), built them up into families, blessed their children, and prospered them in all they did. Note, The services done for God's Israel are often repaid in kind. The midwives kept up the Israelites' houses, and, in recompence for it, *God made them houses*. Observe, The recompence has relation to the principle upon which they went: *Because they feared God, he made them houses*. Note, Religion and piety are good friends to outward prosperity: the fear of God in a house will help to build it up and establish it. Dr. Lightfoot's notion of it is, That, for their piety, they were married to Israelites, and Hebrew families were built up by them.

II. When this project did not take effect, Pharaoh gave public orders to all his people to drown all the male children of the Hebrews, v. 22. We may suppose it was made highly penal for any to know of the birth of a son to an Israelite, and not to give information to those who were appointed to throw him into the river. Note, The enemies of the church have been restless in their endeavours to *wear out the saints of the Most High*, Dan. 7:25. But *he that sits in heaven shall laugh at them*. See Ps. 2:4.



This chapter begins the story of Moses, that man of renown, famed for his intimate acquaintance with Heaven and his eminent usefulness on earth, and the most remarkable type of Christ, as a prophet, saviour, lawgiver, and mediator, in all the Old Testament. The Jews have a book among them of the life of Moses, which tells a great many stories concerning him, which we have reason to think are mere fictions; what he has recorded concerning himself is what we may rely upon, for we know that his record is true; and it is what we may be satisfied with, for it is what Infinite Wisdom thought fit to preserve and transmit to us. In this chapter we have, I. The perils of his birth and infancy (v. 1–4). II. His preservation through those perils, and the preferment of his childhood and youth (v. 5–10). III. The pious choice of his riper years, which was to own the people of God. 1. He offered them his service at present, if they would accept it (v. 11–14). 2. He retired, that he might reserve himself for further service hereafter (v. 15–22). IV. The dawning of the day of Israel’s deliverance (v. 23, etc.).

Verses 1–4

Moses was a Levite, both by father and mother. Jacob left Levi under marks of disgrace ([Gen. 49:5](#)); and yet, soon after, Moses appears a descendant from him, that he might typify Christ, who came in the likeness of sinful flesh and was made a curse for us. This tribe began to be distinguished from the rest by the birth of Moses, as afterwards it became remarkable in many other instances. Observe, concerning this newborn infant,

I. How he was hidden. It seems to have been just at the time of his birth that the cruel law was made for the murder of all the male children of the Hebrews; and many, no doubt, perished by the execution of it. The parents of Moses had Miriam and Aaron, both older than he, born to them before this edict came out, and had nursed them without that peril: but those that begin the world in peace know not what troubles they may meet with before they have got through it. Probably the mother of Moses was full of anxiety in the expectation of his birth, now that this edict was in force, and was ready to say, *Blessed are the barren that never bore*, [Lu. 23:29](#). Better so than bring forth children to the murderer, [Hos. 9:13](#). Yet this child proves the glory of his father’s house. Thus that which is most our fear often proves, in the issue, most our joy. Observe the beauty of providence: just at the time when Pharaoh’s cruelty rose to this height the deliverer was born, though he did not appear for many years after. Note, When men are projecting the church’s ruin God is preparing for its salvation. Moses, who was afterwards to bring Israel out of this house of bondage, was himself in danger of falling a sacrifice to the fury



of the oppressor, God so ordering it that, being afterwards told of this, he might be the more animated with a holy zeal for the deliverance of his brethren out of the hands of such bloody men. 1. His parents observed him to be a *goodly child*, more than ordinarily beautiful; he was *fair to God*, [Acts 7:20](#). They fancied he had a lustre in his countenance that was something more than human, and was a specimen of the shining of his face afterwards, [Ex. 34:29](#). Note, God sometimes gives early earnest of his gifts, and manifests himself betimes in those for whom and by whom he designs to do great things. Thus he put an early strength into Samson ([Judges 13:24, 25](#)), an early forwardness into Samuel ([1 Sa. 2:18](#)), wrought an early deliverance for David ([1 Sa. 17:37](#)), and began betimes with Timothy, [1 Tim. 3:15](#). 2. Therefore they were the more solicitous for his preservation, because they looked upon this as an indication of some kind purpose of God concerning him, and a happy omen of something great. Note, A lively active faith can take encouragement from the least intimation of the divine favour; a merciful hint of Providence will encourage those whose spirits make diligent search, *Three months* they hid him in some private apartment of their own house, though probably with the hazard of their own lives, had he been discovered. Herein Moses was a type of Christ, who, in his infancy, was forced to abscond, and in Egypt too ([Mt. 2:13](#)), and was wonderfully preserved, when many innocents were butchered. It is said ([Heb. 11:23](#)) that the parents of Moses *hid him by faith*; some think they had a special revelation to them that the deliverer should spring from their loins; however they had the general promise of Israel's preservation, which they acted faith upon, and in that faith hid their child, not being afraid of the penalty annexed to the king's commandment. Note, Faith in God's promise is so far from superseding that it rather excites and quickens to the use of lawful means for the obtaining of mercy. Duty is ours, events are God's. Again, Faith in God will set us above the ensnaring fear of man.

II. How he was exposed. At three months' end, probably when the searchers came about to look for concealed children, so that they could not hide him any longer (their faith perhaps beginning now to fail), they put him in an ark of bulrushes by the *river's brink* (v. 3), and set his little sister at some distance to watch what would become of him, and into whose hands he would fall, v. 4. God put it into their hearts to do this, to bring about his own purposes, that Moses might by this means be brought into the hands of Pharaoh's daughter, and that by his deliverance from this imminent danger a specimen might be given of the deliverance of God's church, which now lay thus exposed. Note, 1. God takes special care of the outcasts of Israel ([Ps. 147:2](#)); they are *his* outcasts, [Isa. 16:4](#). Moses seemed quite abandoned by his friends; his own mother durst not own him: but now the Lord took him up and protected him, [Ps. 27:10](#). 2. In times of extreme



difficulty it is good to venture upon the providence of God. Thus to have exposed their child while they might have preserved it, would have been to tempt Providence; but, when they could not, it was to trust to Providence. “Nothing venture, nothing win.” *If I perish, I perish.*

Verses 5–10

Here is, I. Moses saved from perishing. Come see the place where that great man lay when he was a little child; he lay in a bulrush-basket by the river’s side. Had he been left to lie there, he must have perished in a little time with hunger, if he had not been sooner washed into the river or devoured by a crocodile. Had he fallen into any other hands than those he did fall into, either they would not, or durst not, have done otherwise than have thrown him straightway into the river; but Providence brings no less a person thither than Pharaoh’s daughter, just at that juncture, guides her to the place where this poor forlorn infant lay, and inclines her heart to pity it, which she dares do when none else durst. Never did poor child cry so seasonably, so happily, as this did: *The babe wept*, which moved the compassion of the princess, as no doubt his beauty did, v. 5, 6. Note, 1. Those are hard-hearted indeed that have not a tender compassion for helpless infancy. How pathetically does God represent his compassion for the Israelites in general considered in this pitiable state! [Eze. 16:5](#), [6](#). 2. It is very commendable in persons of quality to take cognizance of the distresses of the meanest, and to be helpful and charitable to them. 3. God’s care of us in our infancy ought to be often made mention of by us to his praise. Though we were not thus exposed (that we were not was God’s mercy) yet many were the perils we were surrounded with in our infancy, out of which the Lord delivered us, [Ps. 22:9](#), [10](#). 4. God often raises up friends for his people even among their enemies. Pharaoh cruelly seeks Israel’s destruction, but his own daughter charitably compassionates a Hebrew child, and not only so, but, beyond her intention, preserves Israel’s deliverer. *O Lord, how wonderful are thy counsels!*

II. Moses well provided with a good nurse, no worse than his own dear mother, v. 7–9. Pharaoh’s daughter thinks it convenient that he should have a Hebrew nurse (pity that so fair a child should be suckled by a sable Moor), and the sister of Moses, with art and good management, introduces the mother into the place of a nurse, to the great advantage of the child; for mothers are the best nurses, and those who receive the blessings of the breasts with those of the womb are not just if they give them not to those for whose sake they received them: it was also an unspeakable satisfaction to the mother, who received her son as life from the dead, and now could enjoy him without fear. The transport of her joy, upon this happy turn, we may



suppose sufficient to betray her to be the true mother (had there been any suspicion of it) to a less discerning eye than that of Solomon, [1 Ki. 3:27](#).

III. Moses preferred to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter (v. [10](#)), his parents herein perhaps not only yielding to necessity, having nursed him *for her*, but too much pleased with the honour thereby done to their son; for the smiles of the world are stronger temptations than its frowns, and more difficult to resist. The tradition of the Jews is that Pharaoh's daughter had no child of her own, and that she was the only child of her father, so that when he was adopted for her son he stood fair for the crown: however it is certain he stood fair for the best preferments of the court in due time, and in the mean time had the advantage of the best education and improvements of the court, with the help of which, having a great genius, he became master of all the lawful learning of the Egyptians, [Acts 7:22](#). Note, 1. Providence pleases itself sometimes in raising the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes, [Ps. 113:7, 8](#). Many who, by their birth, seem marked for obscurity and poverty, by surprising events of Providence are brought to sit at the upper end of the world, to make men know that *the heavens do rule*. 2. Those whom God designs for great services he find out ways to qualify and prepare beforehand. Moses, by having his education in a court, is the fitter to be a prince and *king in Jeshurun*; by having his education in a learned court (for such the Egyptian then was) is the fitter to be an historian; and by having his education in the court of Egypt is the fitter to be employed, in the name of God, as an ambassador to that court.

IV. Moses named. The Jews tell us that his father, at his circumcision, called him *Joachim*, but Pharaoh's daughter called him *Moses*, *Drawn out of the water*, so it signifies in the Egyptian language. The calling of the Jewish lawgiver by an Egyptian name is a happy omen to the Gentile world, and gives hopes of that day when it shall be said, *Blessed be Egypt my people*, [Isa. 19:25](#). And his tuition at court was an earnest of the performance of that promise, [Isa. 49:23](#), *Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and queens thy nursing mothers*.

Verses [11–15](#)

Moses had now passed the first forty years of his life in the court of Pharaoh, preparing himself for business; and now it was time for him to enter upon action, and,

I. He boldly owns and espouses the cause of God's people: *When Moses was grown he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens*, v. [11](#). The best exposition of these words we



have from an inspired pen, [Heb. 11:24–26](#), where we are told that by this he expressed, 1. His holy contempt of the honours and pleasures of the Egyptian court; he *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*, for *he went out*. The temptation was indeed very strong. He had a fair opportunity (as we say) to make his fortune, and to have been serviceable to Israel too, with his interest at court. He was obliged, in gratitude as well as interest, to Pharaoh's daughter, and yet he obtained a glorious victory by faith over his temptation. He reckoned it much more his honour and advantage to be a son of Abraham than to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 2. His tender concern for his poor brethren in bondage, with whom (though he might easily have avoided it) he *chose to suffer affliction*; he looked on their burdens as one that not only pitied them, but was resolved to venture with them, and, if occasion were, to venture for them.

II. He gives a specimen of the great things he was afterwards to do for God and his Israel in two little instances, related particularly by Stephen ([Acts 7:23](#), etc.) with design to show how their fathers had *always resisted the Holy Ghost* (v. [51](#)), even in Moses himself, when he first appeared as their deliverer, wilfully shutting their eyes against this day-break of their enlargement. He found himself, no doubt, under a divine direction and impulse in what he did, and that he was in an extraordinary manner called of God to do it. Now observe,

1. Moses was afterwards to be employed in plaguing the Egyptians for the wrongs they had done to God's Israel; and, as a specimen of that, he killed the Egyptian who smote the Hebrew (v. [11](#), [12](#)); probably it was one of the Egyptian taskmasters, whom he found abusing his Hebrew slave, a relation (as some think) of Moses, a man of the same tribe. It was by special warrant from Heaven (which makes not a precedent in ordinary cases) that Moses slew the Egyptian, and rescued his oppressed brother. The Jew's tradition is that he did not slay him with any weapon, but, as Peter slew Ananias and Sapphira, with the word of his mouth. His *hiding him in the sand* signified that hereafter Pharaoh and all his Egyptians should, under the control of the rod of Moses, be buried in the sand of the Red Sea. His taking care to execute this justice privately, when no man saw, was a piece of needful prudence and caution, it being but an assay; and perhaps his faith was as yet weak, and what he did was with some hesitation. Those who come to be of great faith, yet began with a little, and at first spoke tremblingly.

2. Moses was afterwards to be employed in governing Israel, and as a specimen of this, we have him here trying to end a controversy between two Hebrews, in which he is forced (as he did afterwards for forty years) to suffer their manners. Observe here,



(1.) The unhappy quarrel which Moses observed between two Hebrews, v. 13. It does not appear what was the occasion; but, whatever it was, it was certainly very unseasonable for Hebrews to strive with one another when they were all oppressed and ruled with rigour by the Egyptians. Had they not beating enough from the Egyptians, but they must beat one another? Note, [1.] Even sufferings in common do not always unite God's professing people to one another, so much as one might reasonably expect. [2.] When God raises up instruments of salvation for the church they will find enough to do, not only with oppressing Egyptians, to restrain them, but with quarrelsome Israelites, to reconcile them.

(2.) The way he took of dealing with them; he marked him that caused the division, that did the wrong, and mildly reasoned with him: *Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?* The injurious Egyptian was killed, the injurious Hebrew was only reprimanded; for what the former did was from a rooted malice, what the latter did we may suppose was only upon a sudden provocation. The wise God makes, and, according to his example, all wise governors make, a difference between one offender and another, according to the several qualities of the same offence. Moses endeavoured to make them friends, a good office; thus we find Christ often reproofing his disciples' strifes (Lu. 9:46, etc.; 22:24, etc.), for he was a prophet like unto Moses, a healing prophet, a peacemaker, who visited his brethren with a design to slay all enmities. The reproof Moses gave on this occasion may still be of use, *Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?* Note, Smiting our fellows is bad in any, especially in Hebrews, smiting with tongue or hand, either in a way of persecution or in a way of strife and contention. Consider the person thou smitest; it is thy fellow, thy fellow-creature, thy fellow-christian, it is thy fellow-servant, thy fellow-sufferer. Consider the cause, *Wherefore smitest?* Perhaps it is for no cause at all, or no just cause, or none worth speaking of.

(3.) The ill success of his attempt (v. 14): *He said, Who made thee a prince?* He that did the wrong thus quarrelled with Moses; the injured party, it should seem, was inclinable enough to peace, but the wrong-doer was thus touchy. Note, It is a sign of guilt to be impatient of reproof; and it is often easier to persuade the injured to bear the trouble of taking wrong than the injurious to bear the conviction of having *done wrong*. 1 Co. 6:7, 8. It was a very wise and mild reproof which Moses gave to this quarrelsome Hebrew, but he could not bear it, he kicked against the pricks (Act 9:5), and crossed questions with his reprover. [1.] He challenges his authority: *Who made thee a prince?* A man needs no great authority for the giving of a friendly reproof, it is an act of kindness; yet this man needs will interpret it an act of dominion, and represents his



reprover as imperious and assuming. Thus when people dislike good discourse, or a seasonable admonition, they will call it *preaching*, as if a man could not speak a word for God and against sin but he took too much upon him. Yet Moses was indeed a prince and a judge, and knew it, and thought the Hebrews would have understood it, and struck in with him; but they stood in their own light, and *thrust him away*, [Acts 7:25, 27](#). [2.] He upbraids him with what he had done in killing the Egyptian: *Intendest thou to kill me?* See what base constructions malice puts upon the best words and actions. Moses, for reproving him is immediately charged with a design to kill him. An attempt upon his sin was interpreted an attempt upon his life; and his having killed the Egyptian was thought sufficient to justify the suspicion; as if Moses made no difference between an Egyptian and a Hebrew. If Moses, to right an injured Hebrew, had put his life in his hand, and slain an Egyptian, he ought therefore to have submitted to him, not only as a friend to the Hebrews, but as a friend that had more than ordinary power and zeal. But he throws that in his teeth as a crime which was bravely done, and was intended as a specimen of the promised deliverance; if the Hebrews had taken the hint, and come in to Moses as their head and captain, it is probable that they would have been delivered now; but, despising their deliverer, their deliverance was justly deferred, and their bondage prolonged forty years, as afterwards their despising Canaan kept them out of it forty years more. *I would, and you would not*. Note, Men know not what they do, nor what enemies they are to their own interest, when they resist and despise faithful reproofs and reprovers. When the Hebrews strove with Moses, God sent him away into Midian, and they never heard of him for forty years; thus the things that belonged to their peace were hidden from their eyes, because they knew not the day of their visitation. As to Moses, we may look on it as a great damp and discouragement to him. He was now *choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God*, and embracing *the reproach of Christ*; and now, at his first setting out, to meet with this affliction and reproach from them was a very sore trial of his resolution. He might have said, “If this be the spirit of the Hebrews, I will go to court again, and be the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Note, *First*, We must take heed of being prejudiced against the ways and people of God by the follies and peevishness of some particular persons that profess religion. *Secondly*, It is no new thing for the church’s best friends to meet with a great deal of opposition and discouragement in their healing, saving attempts, even from their own mother’s children; Christ himself was set at nought by the builders, and is still rejected by those he would save.

(4.) The flight of Moses to Midian, in consequence. The affront given him thus far proved a kindness to him; it gave him to understand that his killing the Egyptian was discovered, and so



he had time to make his escape, otherwise the wrath of Pharaoh might have surprised him and taken him off. Note, God can overrule even the strife of tongues, so as, one way or other, to bring good to his people out of it. Information was brought to Pharaoh (and it is well if it was not brought by the Hebrew himself whom Moses reproved) of his killing the Egyptian; warrants are presently out for the apprehending of Moses, which obliged him to shift for his own safety, by flying into the land of Midian, v. 15. [1.] Moses did this out of a prudent care of his own life. If this be his forsaking of Egypt which the apostle refers to as done by faith ([Heb. 11:27](#)), it teaches us that when we are at any time in trouble and danger for doing our duty the grace of faith will be of good use to us in taking proper methods for our own preservation. Yet there it is said, *He feared not the wrath of the king*; here it is said he *feared*, v. 14. He did not fear with a fear of diffidence and amazement, which weakens and has torment, but with a fear of diligence, which quickened him to take that way which Providence opened to him for his own preservation. [2.] God ordered it for wise and holy ends. Things were not yet ripe for Israel's deliverance: the measure of Egypt's iniquity was not yet full; the Hebrews were not sufficiently humbled, nor were they yet increased to such a multitude as God designed; Moses is to be further fitted for the service, and therefore is directed to withdraw for the present, till the time to favour Israel, even the set time, should come. God guided Moses to Midian because the Midianites were of the seed of Abraham, and retained the worship of the true God among them, so that he might have not only a safe but a comfortable settlement among them. And through this country he was afterwards to lead Israel, with which (that he might do it the better) he now had opportunity of making himself acquainted. Hither he came, and sat down by a well, tired and thoughtful, at a loss, and waiting to see which way Providence would direct him. It was a great change with him, since he was but the other day at ease in Pharaoh's court: thus God tried his faith, and it was found to praise and honour.

Verses [16–22](#)

Moses here gains a settlement in Midian, just as his father Jacob had gained one in Syria, [Gen. 29:2](#), etc. And both these instances should encourage us to trust Providence, and to follow it. Events that seem inconsiderable, and purely accidental, afterwards appear to have been designed by the wisdom of God for very good purposes, and of great consequence to his people. A casual transient occurrence has sometimes occasioned the greatest and happiest turns of a man's life. Observe,



I. Concerning the seven daughters of Reuel the priest or prince of Midian. 1. They were humble, and very industrious, according as the employment of the country was: they *drew water for their father's flock*, v. 16. If their father was a prince, it teaches us that even those who are honourably born, and are of quality and distinction in their country, should yet apply themselves to some useful business, and what their hand finds to do do it with all their might. Idleness can be no one's honour. If their father was a priest, it teaches us that ministers' children should, in a special manner, be examples of humility and industry. 2. They were modest, and would not ask this strange Egyptian to come home with them (though handsome and a great courtier), till their father sent for him. Modesty is the ornament of woman.

II. Concerning Moses. He was taken for an Egyptian (v. 19); and strangers must be content to be the subjects of mistake; but it is observable, 1. How ready he was to help Reuel's daughters to water their flocks. Though bred in learning and at court, yet he knew how to turn his hand to such an office as this when there was occasion; nor had he learned of the Egyptians to despise shepherds. Note, Those that have had a liberal education yet should not be strangers to servile work, because they know not what necessity Providence may put them in of working for themselves, or what opportunity Providence may give them of being serviceable to others. These young women, it seems, met with some opposition in their employment, more than they and their servants could conquer; the shepherds of some neighbouring prince, as some think, or some idle fellows that called themselves shepherds, *drove away their flocks*; but Moses, though melancholy and in distress, *stood up and helped them*, not only to get clear of the shepherds, but, when that was done, to water the flocks. This he did, not only in complaisance to the daughters of Reuel (though that also did very well become him), but because, wherever he was, as occasion offered itself, (1.) He loved to be doing justice, and appearing in the defence of such as he saw injured, which every man ought to do as far as it is in the power of his hand to do it. (2.) He loved to be doing good. Wherever the Providence of God casts us we should desire and endeavour to be useful; and, when we cannot do the good we would, we must be ready to do the good we can. And he that is faithful in a little shall be entrusted with more. 2. How well he was paid for his serviceableness. When the young women acquainted their father with the kindnesses they had received from this stranger, he sent to invite him to his house, and made much of him, v. 20. Thus God will recompense the kindnesses which are at any time shown to his children; they shall in no wise lose their reward. Moses soon recommended himself to the esteem and good affection of this prince of Midian, who took him into his house, and, in process of time, married one of his daughters to him (v. 21), by whom he had a son, whom he called *Gershom, a stranger*



there (v. 22), that if ever God should give him a home of his own he might keep in remembrance the land in which he had been a stranger. Now this settlement of Moses in Midian was designed by Providence, (1.) To shelter him for the present. God will find hiding-places for his people in the day of their distress; nay, he will himself be to them a little sanctuary, and will secure them, either under heaven or in heaven. But, (2.) It was also designed to prepare him for the great services he was further designed for. His manner of life in Midian, where he kept the flock of his father-in-law (having none of his own to keep), would be of use to him, [1.] To inure him to hardship and poverty, that he might learn how to want as well as how to abound. Those whom God intends to exalt he first humbles. [2.] To inure him to contemplation and devotion. Egypt accomplished him as a scholar, a gentleman, a statesman, a soldier, all which accomplishments would be afterwards of use to him; but yet he lacked one thing, in which the court of Egypt could not befriend him. He that was to do all by divine revelation must know, by a long experience, what it was to live a life of communion with God; and in this he would be greatly furthered by the solitude and retirement of a shepherd's life in Midian. By the former he was prepared to rule in Jeshurun, but by the latter he was prepared to converse with God in Mount Horeb, near which mount he had spent much of his time. Those that know what it is to be alone with God in holy exercises are acquainted with better delights than ever Moses tasted in the court of Pharaoh.

Verses 23–25

Here is, 1. The continuance of the Israelites' bondage in Egypt, v. 23. Probably the murdering of their infants did not continue; this part of their affliction attended only the period immediately connected with the birth of Moses, and served to signalize it. The Egyptians now were content with their increase, finding that Egypt was enriched by their labour; so that they might have them for slaves, they cared not how many they were. On this therefore they were intent, to keep them all at work, and make the best hand they could of their labour. When one Pharaoh died, another rose up in his place that was governed by the same maxims, and was as cruel to Israel as his predecessors. If there was sometimes a little relaxation, yet it presently revived again with as much rigour as ever; and probably, as the more Israel were oppressed the more they multiplied, so the more they multiplied the more they were oppressed. Note, Sometimes God suffers the rod of the wicked to lie very long and very heavily on the lot of the righteous. If Moses, in Midian, at any time began to think how much better his condition might have been had he staid among the courtiers, he must of himself think this also, how much worse it would have been if he had had his lot with brethren: it was a great degradation to him to be keeping sheep in Midian, but better



so than making brick in Egypt. The consideration of our brethren's afflictions would help to reconcile us to our own. 2. The preface to their deliverance at last. (1.) *They cried*, v. [23](#). Now, at last, they began to think of God under their troubles, and to return to him from the idols they had served, [Eze. 20:8](#). Hitherto they had fretted at the instruments of their trouble, but God was not in all their thoughts. Thus *hypocrites in heart heap up wrath; they cry not when he binds them*, [Job 36:13](#). But before God unbound them he put it into their hearts to cry unto him, as it is explained, [Num. 20:16](#). Note, It is a good sign that God is coming towards us with deliverance when he inclines and enables us to cry to him for it. (2.) *God heard*, v. [24](#), [25](#). The name of God is here emphatically prefixed to four different expressions of a kind intention towards them. [1.] *God heard their groaning*; that is, he made it to appear that he took notice of their complaints. The groans of the oppressed cry aloud in the ears of the righteous God, to whom vengeance belongs, especially the groans of God's spiritual Israel; he knows the burdens they groan under and the blessings they groan after, and that the blessed Spirit, by these groanings, makes intercession in them. [2.] *God remembered his covenant*, which he seemed to have forgotten, but of which he is ever mindful. This God had an eye to, and not to any merit of theirs, in what he did for them. See [Lev. 26:42](#). (3.) *God looked upon the children of Israel*. Moses looked upon them and pitied them (v. [11](#)); but now God looked upon them and helped them. (4.) *God had a respect unto them*, a favourable respect to them as his own. The frequent repetition of the name of God here intimates that now we are to expect something great, *Opus Deo dignum*—*A work worthy of God*. His eyes, which run to and fro through the earth, are now fixed upon Israel, to show himself strong, to show himself a God in their behalf.