

Exodus 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 February 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Exodus chapter 2 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. 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.

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? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. So the girl went and called the child's mother.

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. 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. One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens.

[1 : 3 1] And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hit him in the sand.

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? 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. 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. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.

The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. When they came home to their father, Rule, he said, How is it that you have come home so soon today?

[2 : 3 4] They said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the flock. He said to his daughters, Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him that he may eat bread.

And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.

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, and God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew. The story of the deliverance of the infant Moses in Exodus chapter 2 is a familiar one to us.

We've all heard it many times. Even though some details have been exaggerated or changed for dramatic effect, it is a story that we remember well. The story begins with a man from the house of Levi going and taking, as his wife, a daughter of Levi.

[3 : 47] Levi. She gives birth to a son and sees that he's a beautiful child. The beauty of Moses is a sign that he's well favoured. He's one that is marked out already for a good destiny.

We can see other examples in scripture of people who have a striking physical appearance. Rachel, or Joseph, or people like David. And these people are marked out for rule, or for leadership, or for some blessing, by the symbolism of an attractive appearance.

This is not to say that God prefers people who are physically attractive. As we see in the context of the choice of David, man looks at the outer appearance, but God looks at the heart.

So the heart is what matters. Your physical appearance doesn't make you more or less loved by God. But yet, a beautiful physical appearance is a sign of someone who's set apart in some way.

And from the very beginning of his life, there is something that singles Moses out as different. Moses is bound for some remarkable destiny. And his appearance is commented upon for this reason.

[4 : 56] She hides him for three months. We've already noted periods of three in the book of Genesis. On the third day, or in the third month, or in the third year, it can be a time of testing.

A time when things come to a head. On the third day, Abraham arrives at the mountain with Isaac. On the third day, the chief baker and the cupbearer will be taken out of prison and face their fate.

And in the third year, Joseph will be released from prison. These sorts of events occur at the third period of time. And the three months here lead to a point where there is a crisis moment.

And she can't hide him any longer. So she takes a basket, or literally, an ark, made of bulrushes, and daubs it with bitumen and pitch. Now, the word for ark here is the same word as we have used of Noah's ark.

It's not the same word that we have used of the ark of the covenant, or the chest of the covenant. This is a different word. And it's a very unusual word within scripture. We don't really see it used apart from in reference to Noah's ark and to this ark.

[6 : 06] Now, why might that be? Pharaoh is trying to drown the baby boys. And here, one baby boy is saved through the waters in an ark.

Now, the mother of Moses is literally obeying the rule of Pharaoh. She's casting the child into the water. But yet, she's doing so within an ark.

And he's going to be brought through the waters like Noah was brought through the waters and delivered. And the description of the ark is also similar. It's covered with pitch.

And that preparation of the ark might also remind us of the story of Babel, where Babel is this preparation of bricks and using bitumen as mortar.

And the bringing together of bitumen and pitch here is interesting. On the one hand, the ark of Moses is like the ark of Noah. He's going to be delivered through the waters in which others are drowning.

[7 : 01] It's also like a reversal of the Babel themes. In the context, there are great store cities being built. The Israelites are being caught up in the task of making bricks.

And here is a sort of brick being made. But yet, this brick is being used to rescue a child, to form a different sort of kingdom. Not the kingdom of Pharaoh's great building projects, but a kingdom that will have a very different character to it.

She places the ark among the reeds by the riverbank. And the sister stands at a distance to see what will happen to the child. And at this point, the daughter of Pharaoh comes down to bathe at the river.

And her young women are walking beside the river at this time. She sends out her servant woman to take the ark. And as she opens it, she sees the child. Sees the child's crying and takes pity on it, declaring that it's one of the Hebrews' children.

A few things to notice here. First of all, that there are some similarities between the characters of play. So you have a symmetry between the daughter of Levi, Jochebed as we later find her name to be, the mother of Moses, and the daughter of Pharaoh.

[8 : 17] And then the servant girl, and the sister of Moses. These characters have a symmetry to them. And the daughter of Pharaoh knows that it's one of the Hebrew children.

And yet still rescues the child. Rescues the child knowing that she's disobeying her father's command, and rescuing one of the children that's supposed to be killed. She sees the child, and she sees that the child is crying.

We don't have references to children crying within biblical narrative, for the most part. This is something that's very rare. The fact that the baby is crying is a matter of importance.

What does it matter that the child is crying? Well, the child is crying in part because his state of distress represents the state of his people more generally. And she takes pity upon the child, but also recognises the state of the people from which this child comes.

It's one of the Hebrew's children. And the compassion that she takes upon the child is the first of a number of series of people in this chapter who see and take notice and have compassion and act.

[9 : 26] She is the first one to play out this pattern, and others will follow. At this point, the sister of the infant comes up and speaks to Pharaoh's daughter and says, should she go and get a nurse for the child?

Now, don't presume that it was common for Hebrew children to speak so directly to a princess of Egypt. And the fact that she could suggests to me that Pharaoh's daughter knew that this was the sister.

She wasn't just a random Hebrew child. And she knew that in entrusting the child to this girl, she was entrusting the child to the mother and saving the child for the sake of that family.

Without the courage of this one woman, none of the rest of the story would take place. Her salvation of Moses sets the terms for what takes place afterwards. She's prepared to risk word getting out.

There are servants around her. There are other women around her. Any one of those could spread rumours within the palace and word could get back to her father and she could be in serious trouble. But her courage is seen in the fact that she goes ahead anyway.

[10 : 34] When the child is weaned, the child is brought to Pharaoh's daughter and she becomes the son of Pharaoh's daughter. And at this point, the child is named Moses because he was drawn out of the water.

Now, Moses, in that sense, is a Hebrew name. But the Egyptian meaning would suggest that he's son or born. He's born out of the water. He's the one who is the child of the water.

He's her son as well. We can think about the way that we have names like Ramses, son of Ra. The fact that Pharaoh's daughter gives Moses his name and that is Moses' name, not a name that he was given by Amram and Jochebed, his parents, not a name that God gave him at some point, but a name given to him by the daughter of the antagonist within the story.

It's remarkable. It's a sign of how remarkable Pharaoh's daughter is as a figure, that she is the one who has the honour of naming the great saviour of God's people. And the name he receives anticipates things that will happen in the future.

In Isaiah chapter 63 verse 11, it speaks about Moses. Then he remembered the days of old of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock?

[11 : 49] Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit? Moses leads the people up out of the sea. He draws them up out of the water. So he's not just the one drawn out of the water himself.

He is the one who draws out of the water. And the events that we have here are played out again in the story of the Red Sea crossing. Once again, there is an event of threat from Pharaoh.

Once again, there is this deliverance in the sight of the reeds. The Red Sea could also be translated as Sea of Reeds. It's the same word that we see here used for the reeds in which Moses is placed.

And Miriam is present again in both occasions as a witness. And that drawing out of the water, being associated with birth, is also something that's the case of Israel's deliverance in chapter 14 and 15.

They are drawn out of the water and that's a birth experience for them too. Moses was drawn out of the water. He was born out of the water. Israel will later be born out of the water.

[12 : 53] And they will enter into the experience of Moses at that point. The text jumps forward some years here in Stephen's account in his sermon. Forty years. Moses has grown up and he goes out and he sees his people, looks on their burdens.

He sees their distress. Much as his mother, his adoptive mother, saw his distress and his sorrow and his crying. So he goes out and he sees his people and he takes compassion upon them.

He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and he intervenes. He intervenes also recognising that the Hebrew is one of his people. That there is a connection between him and that person.

No matter the difference in their status that he has been raised with in the palace, that Hebrew is one of his people. And he strikes down the Egyptian and hides him in the sand.

But the next day, when he sees two Hebrews, he discovers that the word concerning his action has come out. It is known that he has killed the Egyptian. And the Hebrew is not prepared to recognise him as a ruler over them.

[13 : 57] Rather, he's seen as an outsider. He's seen as an Egyptian. And they reject him accordingly. When Pharaoh finds out, he tries to kill Moses. And Moses flees and goes to the land of Midian and arrives at a well.

Now, we've encountered a number of wells in the book of Genesis. Wells are often associated with women. And at these wells, there can often be significant encounters. Rebecca was first met at a well.

Rachel was first met at a well. And now Moses comes and he sits down at a well. And the priest of Midian has seven daughters. Again, there are women associated with the well.

And they come and draw water, fill their troughs to water their father's flock. And they're assaulted by the shepherds who drive them away. And Moses stands up and intervenes and saves them and waters their flock.

They go back to their father, tell him the news. And he is obviously used to the fact that day after day, they're driven away by these shepherds and harassed. And it's surprising to him that they've come back so early on this occasion.

[15 : 01] Then he hears about this Egyptian who's intervened on their behalf and calls for him to come and have a meal with them. And Moses ends up dwelling with Reuel and his family and becoming one of them.

He is given the daughter of Reuel, Zipporah, as his wife. She gives birth to a son and he calls his name Gershom. He has been a sojourner in a strange land.

There should be a number of patterns that jump out to us here. First, we've encountered a very similar story in Jacob. Jacob goes to this foreign land fleeing from a threat to his life, someone trying to kill him.

And he ends up arriving at a well, meeting the woman that he's about to marry, being invited in and welcomed into the family, serving with a new father-in-law figure.

And this is what we see in the case of Moses. Reuel is pretty much the same sort of character as Laban at this point. But it also looks forward. Moses leaves Egypt, fleeing Egypt.

[16 : 04] And there's a threat to his life, pursuit. Come to water and there's a threat at the water. The shepherds are trying to drive the people away. And he intervenes and acts on their behalf, drives away the shepherds single-handedly, saves the women and waters the flock.

Then he meets Reuel, who's later described as Jethro, and ends up marrying one of his daughters. This is a very similar pattern to that which we find in Moses' later ministry.

He leaves Egypt with the people of Israel, as Pharaoh tries to take their lives. At the waters, he stretches out his hand and delivers the people, saves them and delivers them from the hand of their opponent.

And then he waters the flocks of God in the wilderness. From then, he has an encounter with Jethro in chapter 18 of Exodus. And then there's a marriage.

A marriage between God and his people at Sinai. And also the next thing that happens within the story here is an encounter with God at Sinai. A similar pattern is playing out.

[17 : 11] The events of Moses' life are anticipating what will later happen to him and to the people that he leads. The Midianites are sons of Abraham by the concubine Keturah.

And they are seemingly God-fearers. They're presumably not circumcised. Moses does not circumcise his son while he's with them. But they do seem to worship the true God.

And later on, Jethro will lead Moses and Aaron in sacrifice. When we're reading the Old Testament, it's important to consider that the Jews weren't the only people that believed in and worshipped God.

There were other people out there who were God-fearers. People like Jethro. They had a genuine relationship with God, but they were not part of the special priestly people.

You did not need to be an Israelite in order to be saved. The chapter ends with the king of Egypt dying and Israel groaning because of their slavery and crying out for help.

[18 : 06] And just as we've seen the daughter of Pharaoh seeing the crying infant Moses and taking compassion on him and Moses seeing the distress of the daughters of Reuel and taking compassion upon them and acting to save them, now we see God hearing and seeing his people and acting on their behalf.

Their cry for rescue comes up to God and God remembers his covenant and promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He sees the people of Israel and he knows.

Two questions to consider. First question. What might seven daughters associate with a well remind us of that we've already encountered in the book of Genesis?

Second question. What are some of the ways that Moses is described or in which he acts within this chapter that set him apart as a fitting leader of his people in the future?