



# Oppression of the Children of Israel

## The Birth of Moses

### Exodus 1 and 2

#### **I. Continuation of the History of Israel (Exodus 1:1-6)**

##### **A. Names of Jacob's Children (Exodus 1:1-4)**

In Genesis 32, we have the account of Jacob the patriarch wrestling with the angel before he crossed the river Jabbok as he was returning to Canaan from Mesopotamia. It was here that God gave him the name, Israel. Throughout the Bible, the descendants of Jacob are referred to as "*the children of Israel*," "*Israelites*" or "*sons of Jacob*." The book of Exodus opens with the actual names of the sons of Jacob and tells us that "*they came into Egypt*." The very first word of this book "*now*" indicates that the first two books of the Bible are a connected narrative.

##### **B. The Number of Jacob's Descendants Who Went Down into Egypt (Exodus 1:5)**

We must keep in mind that the seventy souls named in the narrative are not the number of people that left Canaan for Egypt. The migration included the sons of Jacob and their "*households*." This included wives, children, grandchildren and servants. It was a large band of emigrants. The object of the writer is to give a complete list of the heads of separate families at the time of their settlement in Egypt.

So we might understand the history of the children of Israel, it is good to review the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to understand why they were in the land of Egypt and how they got there. We must also keep in mind that God, through this people, was effecting His purpose of bringing into existence a people through whom the Redeemer of the world would come.

Joseph's brothers, through envy, jealousy and hatred of their brother, sold him as a slave into Egypt. It was as a result of this incident that the book of Exodus opens with the descendants of Jacob in bondage. God blessed Joseph in Egypt, and he was lifted from slavery and imprisonment to become Prime Minister, a place of supreme power, in this land. In the book of Exodus, we have the account of the deliverance of Israel from bondage and the developing of that nation consecrated to the service to God.

Although Joseph was brought to Egypt by the cruelty of his brothers, they were brought to Egypt by his generosity and pardoning grace. This was all a part of God's plan. The children of Israel could never have developed into a powerful nation in the land of Canaan, because of their extensive involvement and intermingling with the heathen people of the land. In Egypt they were given the most fertile land of Goshen, and because shepherds and herdsmen were an abomination to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34), they were kept a separate people. In the space of four centuries, they became a powerful people.

##### **C. The Death of Joseph (Exodus 1:6)**

Joseph lived 110 years, and all but seventeen of those years he lived in the land of Egypt. For most of those years, Joseph had all he could wish for of earthly power and splendor in his lifetime. There were 71 years from the descent of Jacob into Egypt until the death of Joseph. From the death of Joseph until the birth of Moses, there were 278 years.

## II. Oppression of Israel in Egypt

(Exodus 1:7-22)

### A. Multiplying of the People

(Exodus 1:7)

It is here that the real narrative of Exodus begins. We now enter into the history of the Israelites after the death of Joseph. The writer of Exodus does not tell us how large a population existed at this time, but he uses four verbs to express the fact that the multiplication was great. The family had grown into a nation, they were fruitful, increased abundantly, multiplied and waxed exceeding mighty. It was this prosperity that posed a threat and invited disaster. It is probable that the name of Joseph was unknown to the “*new king*,” and any sentiment of gratitude toward the children of Israel was forgotten. In Genesis 46:3-4, we read the promise to Jacob: “. . . *do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again*” God is faithful who promised.

### B. A Fearful King

(Exodus 1:8-10)

It is believed that the reference to a “*new king*” means more than just “another king.” Quite possibly it means a king of a new dynasty. We know this “*new king*,” the first persecutor of the children of Israel, is referred to as the Pharaoh of the Oppression. The general view is that he was an Egyptian king of the nineteenth dynasty. If the period of sojourn were 430 years, the administration of Joseph would have been in the time of the shepherd kings. Their successors would mark the beginning of the period of the oppression. Most Egyptologists hold that Ramses II and his son, Menephtah, were the pharaohs of the oppression and the exodus. Their combined reigns, according to secular history, correspond with the length of the persecution indicated in the Bible. Their characters, according to secular records, correspond with the Biblical accounts of the cruel treatment of the Israelites. The “*treasured cities*” of Pithom and Ramses (verse 11) which the Israelites built for that pharaoh have been excavated. Chambers discovered were very strongly constructed and divided by brick partitions eight to ten feet thick. The bricks used were sunbaked and some were made with and some without straw.

The increase of the children of Israel in Egypt was the source of the king’s fears; however, they were a useful people and he did not want them to leave. He had to keep them under subjection lest they overpower the Egyptians. Seeing in this race of people a threat to his own sovereignty, he determined to weaken if not destroy them. It is not probable that Israel planned a migration, or that they would have joined invaders from the east. They were a pastoral people and had dwelt peacefully for many years in their homes, taking care of their flocks and herds in the fertile land of Goshen. Fear forms a huge monster and is a destroyer. It is still prevalent today and more and more people are enslaved by it. Many innocent people become victims of its effects. Homes as well as nations are destroyed by it, and people live in bondage as individuals as a result of it. Perhaps the Lord would say something to us here and have us pause and ask Him to deliver us from any fears that grip our hearts, and dwarf not only ourselves but our families, causing us to rob God of our complete surrender and service.

### C. The Bondage (Exodus 1:11-14)

In fear and hatred, the king forced the Israelites into the most cruel form of slavery. Taskmasters were set over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They were forced to labor in cultivating the fields, digging canals, building dikes and constructing store cities. Under the scorching sun, their bare bodies, bleeding from cruel beating, were made “*to serve with rigour*” and we are told that their lives were “*bitter with hard bondage.*”

God had promised Abraham an extraordinary increase in the number of his descendants, and He would not permit a crafty and cruel king to interfere with or to bring to naught His gracious designs and promises. So the more Pharaoh and his subjects afflicted them, “*the more they multiplied and grew.*” It is good for us to remember at this crucial period of history that Christians need never fear the devices of their enemies, however political they may seem. God has the power to turn the wisdom of the world into foolishness, upset all human calculations, confound all prudent counsels, and make each act done in opposition to His will to actually help fulfill His will.

In Israel's case, the hard labor and unceasing toil which made their lives bitter (verse 14) was needed to wean their hearts and minds from the delights of Egypt, thus making them content to leave it. God also prepared them for the severe life of the wilderness journey, conditioning them for endurance.

#### **D. A King's Edict (Exodus 1:15-22)**

When cruel oppression failed to check the growth of the Israelites, Pharaoh adopted a measure even more satanic. He ordered the midwives to put to death every male child born to an Israelite woman. The midwives were professing the intention of carrying out the orders given them, but they killed none of the infants. When charged by Pharaoh with disobeying orders, they made the excuse that the Israelites did not need their services. This was only partially true. God rewarded them, not for their deception, but for their courage in defying Pharaoh. God gave them households and families of their own.

Pharaoh would not be outwitted. He gave another order that all sons born to Hebrew women should be cast into the Nile River. How long this command was in effect we do not know. The situation of Israel was desperate at this time. If they were to survive, a deliverer must come.

### **III. The Birth of Moses (Exodus 2:1-10)**

#### **A. A Mother's Love (Exodus 2:1-4)**

The parents of Moses were from the tribe of Levi, slaves and members of a hated race of people. Yet to them was born a son who was to be the deliverer of a people, and from which was to come the Saviour of the world. Moses at his birth was under the sentence of death and needed to be delivered. His rescue involved a mother's love, a baby's cry, compassion of a princess, the shrewdness of a sister and the faith of godly parents. A Hebrew slave, a loving mother, dared to defy the orders of a cruel Pharaoh. When she could no longer hide the baby in her home, she wove a basket and, making it watertight, placed the baby in the basket by the river side. This loving mother made sure his sister was there to watch him.

We would lose the key to the study of the history of Moses to overlook what the writer of Hebrews said: "*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.*" (Hebrews 11:23). Faith in God made them fearless of Egypt's cruel king. The mother of Moses did her part. The bulrushes, the slime and the pitch were part of her necessary preparation. God at the same time prepared His materials and His instruments. His designs go far beyond ours.

#### **B. A Child of Providence (Exodus 2:5-10)**

Throughout Biblical history we find an interweaving of the history of Israel with that of the Gentiles. This was true in the history of Joseph and now in the story of Moses. Throughout the Bible we discover that the salvation of Israel was always connected with the instrumentality of the Gentile. The daughter of the king who wanted to destroy the Hebrews was the very instrument God, in His divine providence, used at this time. God miraculously stretched forth His hand. His secret providence brought the king's daughter to the river and she had the courage to save the life of the child, even though she knew it to be a Hebrew child under sentence of death. God influenced her mind to the kind act of saving this life. She did not take the pains to find out who the child's parents were or why someone was near enough to immediately offer to get a nurse.

The beautiful faith of Moses' mother was rewarded; she received her child again and received wages for caring for him until he was weaned and was taken into the palace of Pharaoh. Satan's plan was foiled by his own weapon, as the very instrument he was using to frustrate the purpose of God was used by God to nourish and bring up Moses, through whom God would confound the power of Satan.

### **IV. The Education of Moses (Hebrews 11:24-27; Acts 7:20-29)**

There were three periods in the training of Moses to prepare him for the work to which God had called him: first, in the home of his parents, then in

the court of the Egyptian king and then in the desert of Midian. Moses recorded no incidents of his life during these years. His purpose was not to write his biography but to give an account of God's dealings with His people. Without doubt his early training in the home of his parents was the most important. From parents who had expressed such great faith, he would learn of the traditions of his people and the promise of God through their father Abraham to deliver them out of Egypt. The seeds were planted in the heart of this young child that would mold his character and give him a firm and abiding foundation.

How important it is that we do not underestimate the value of influencing our little ones in the things of God early in life. The Bible instructs us to "*train up a child in the way he should go*" (Proverbs 22:6). This does not mean that we wait until he gets old enough and then let him choose. Parents have a solemn responsibility before God in the religious education of their children. It is in the early years of a child's life that character is molded. Stephen, in his Spirit-given message in the book of Acts, chapter seven, says that "*Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.*" Thus Moses knew his people Israel and he also knew the oppressor — all the pride, power and cruelty of Egypt. He had learned the wisdom of Egypt, but he also needed to learn the wisdom of God. The third period of training for Moses was spent in Midian. Here God prepared him, through an ascetic and laborious mode of life, for the great task of being a ruler and a deliverer of his people.

## V. Moses' Concern for the Oppressed (Exodus 2:11-15)

### A. Would-be Deliverer (Exodus 2:11-12; Hebrews

11:24-27)

There came that time in the life of Moses when he had to make a choice. To remain in the Egyptian court as the son of Pharaoh's daughter with all of its pleasures and riches and power would have been the easier way. We are told he chose rather to suffer with the children of God, having faith in God's promises. The education of Moses in the Egyptian court could not make him forget that he belonged to the people of Israel. We are not told in history how this feeling was

nurtured, but as a child his parents would certainly have taught him his true identity and given him, by example, a faith in the true and living God.

We gather from the text that he did not visit his brethren to show pity, but to bring them consolation and to share their lot. By this act he chose to expose himself to enmity and to incur the hatred of all the Egyptians. Moses looked on his people's burdens and, seeing the unjust oppression, was aroused to give them help. He "*saw an Egyptian beating an Hebrew.*" Filled with indignation at the cruel treatment of the taskmaster beating a helpless Hebrew, he acted in the capacity of a judge and ruler over this situation. In self-will and presumption, he attempted a deliverance before God's time. Killing an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew was not the way to solve the problem.

### B. Moses as a Peacemaker (Exodus 2:13-15a)

The fact of Moses seeing the great oppression of his brethren did not discourage him from returning to them the second day. Seeing two of his brethren arguing, he again sought to help in the capacity of a peacemaker and exhorted reconciliation. His act the day before was wrong, showing an ardent but undisciplined spirit, but in this case he did that which was in line of duty. However, because they viewed his murder of the Egyptian as an act of expressing cruel power rather than an attempt to protect slaves, Moses was rebuffed by the aggressor in the argument. Moses had to leave Egypt, because his wrong deed was exposed by his own people and the King sought to kill him.

## VI. Moses as a Fugitive (Exodus 2:15b-25)

Moses' flight from the Egyptian pharaoh led him to the land of Midian in the Sinai Desert. The children of Israel were not ready to be delivered from the land of Egypt. God needed to fully prepare this people for the deliverance, as well as groom a leader for the task. God removed Moses from Egypt to a land, where in the solitude and desolation of the desert, he would be trained in divine wisdom.

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:1-5). They, as a people, did not embrace the worship of the true and living God, but it is very probable that there were those in this land who did worship God, such as Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. Jethro, the priest and prince of Midian, treated Moses kindly and Moses chose to dwell with him. Here he became the husband of a simple shepherdess, the daughter of Jethro, who bore him two sons: Gershom (meaning stranger in a strange land) and Eliezer (God is my help).

God had a purpose in putting Moses in Midian. He was preparing His instrument to return to the land of his birth. God had not forgotten His people, still in oppression in the land of Egypt. "God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham." In Midian, God was preparing one who would lead them out of bondage. Moses could never have led his people in the wilderness without the experience in Midian. His knowledge of language, his extensive schooling and his city life would have been of little value in the wilderness.

## Daily Bible Study Questions for Group Discussion

**Note:** Read notes and Scripture references before answering the questions. Some questions are for those more advanced in Bible study. Try to answer all questions, but don't be discouraged if some seem a little hard. Unless otherwise instructed, use Bible only in answering questions.

### FIRST DAY: Read notes on Lesson 2.

1. What did you find most interesting about last week's lesson?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Make a list of individuals in last week's lesson who through their actions gave expression of faith in God. Give verse. (You may use a New Testament reference.)

### SECOND DAY: Read Exodus 2

3. From **Exodus 2**, list the events of Moses' life which changed his mode of living.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. **(Challenge Question)** Consider the life of Moses in three periods of 40 years: (1) from birth till he left Egypt for Midian - 40 years, (2) years he spent in the land of Midian - 40 years as a shepherd, (3) God's call and years as leader of the children of Israel through the wilderness - 40 years. How does this compare with our lives today? (See map in Appendix titled "Moses' Flight/Return to Egypt")

5. (a) According to **Exodus 2:11**, what did Moses see as he looked?
- (b) **Exodus 3:2** refers again to Moses looking. What did he see?
6. Do you think there is some significance here in the children of Israel not being destroyed in spite of great affliction?

**THIRD DAY: Read Exodus, chapter 3.**

7. Give some incidents, if you can, of modern history that would remind us of the suffering Israel in Egypt.
8. In **Exodus 3:4-6**, what three things did Moses do?
9. (a) What about this place made the ground where Moses stood holy ground?
- (b) Do you know a place where some time in your life you had that very special time of communion with God, and knew it was "*holy ground*" because of what transpired?

10. (a) What verse in **chapter three** gives three phrases that tell us of God's concern for His people? List the phrases.
- (b) What do you personally learn about God from this verse?

**FOURTH DAY:**

11. In what verse do we find the call of Moses by God?
12. What three things did Moses learn about God before his call?
13. In considering the call of Moses, what impressed you most about the manner in which God called him? (**verse 10**)
14. (a) Do you think Moses' response to the call of God was due to a sense of his own weakness? Is this a hindrance or help to us in making a response to the call of God in our own lives?
- (b) Considering an experience Moses had before he left Egypt, what would have given him an even greater sense of weakness? (**Exodus 2:11-14**)

**FIFTH DAY:**

15. What two doubts did Moses express to God?
16. What assurance did God give Moses in answer to his doubts?

17. **Read Exodus 4.** After God carefully instructed Moses as to what he should do and gave him assurance and promises, what two excuses did Moses use?
18. (a) Did Moses want God to forget the whole thing or to let someone else do it?
- (b) Have you been guilty of perhaps the same thing when you have been asked to serve in some capacity in your church?
19. What signs did God give to Moses that his faith and trust might be strengthened in what God had commissioned him to do?

**SIXTH DAY:**

20. What solution did God use for the last excuse Moses offered?
21. (a) God assured Moses that Israel would be delivered and that his mission would succeed. For what else did God prepare Moses?
- (b) Does God promise us success without our encountering times of adversity and disappointment?
22. When and where is the best time for you to make expression of your doubt and fears? (Moses made expression of his before God when he was alone on the desert - not when he stood before Pharaoh.)
23. What question did you find most challenging in this lesson?

# Notes