

## Lesson 2

# Exodus



## Moses: The Early Years

Early World	Patriarchs	Egypt & Exodus	Desert Wanderings	Conquest & Judges	Royal Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Messianic Fulfillment	The Church

### Introduction

The second chapter of Exodus introduces the figure of Moses and his important connection with the Christian understanding of salvation, especially as it relates to the sacrament of Baptism. Even as an infant, Moses' link to Baptism is apparent. Water figures in the baby Moses' salvation from death, just as it did for Noah before him. Both Noah and Moses undergo a type of Baptism, but it isn't until the New Testament that Jesus introduces Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Moses, like Jesus whom he foreshadows, is saved from a wicked pharaoh king who seeks his death. As an infant, Jesus was saved from a wicked king attempting to kill him. Moses has two identities, both Hebrew and Egyptian, and Jesus has two natures, both human and divine. Both Moses and Jesus are rejected by their own people and by foreigners. Moses' story is more than a fable in which the people, things and happenings have another meaning—he's a real human being with real failings. In the second chapter of Exodus, Moses tries to run ahead of God and fails badly. Although he risks endangering his relationship with God, God's grace remains with him, preparing Moses eventually to accept his role in salvation history.

### Exodus 2:1-25

2 <sup>1</sup>Now a man from the house of Levi went and took to wife a daughter of Levi. <sup>2</sup>The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup>And when she could hide him no longer she took for him a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with bitumen and pitch; and she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink. <sup>4</sup>And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him. <sup>5</sup>Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked beside the river; she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it. <sup>6</sup>When she opened it she saw the child; and lo, the babe was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." <sup>7</sup>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?" <sup>8</sup>And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>**And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses, for she said, "Because I drew him out of the water."**

<sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. <sup>13</sup>When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together; and he said to the man that did the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow?" <sup>14</sup>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." <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. <sup>17</sup>The shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. <sup>18</sup>When they came to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come so soon today?" <sup>19</sup>They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the flock." <sup>20</sup>He said to his daughters, "And where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." <sup>21</sup>And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. <sup>22</sup>She bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

<sup>23</sup>In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. <sup>24</sup>And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup>And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.

*[Please Note: One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is through memorization. A suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the Scripture text, or you may choose a verse of your own.]*

The Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1965, 1966  
by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ  
in the United States of America.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## Study Questions

It's best to read all of Exodus 2:1-25 and *Points to Ponder* before responding to the study questions. To aid in discussion, please note Scripture verses where you find your responses.

### Pharaoh's Daughter Named the Child Moses

#### Exodus 2:1-10

1. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews provides some insight into the minds of Moses' parents. Why did they hide Moses for three months? How did they feel about the Pharaoh's edict to kill all the male babies born to the Hebrews (see *Heb* 11:23)?
2. List similarities between Moses' infancy and the story of Noah (see *Gen* 6:11-20).
3. In Exodus 2:3-4, Moses' mother placed her 3-month-old child in a basket among the reeds in the river. Was she abandoning her baby? In Exodus 2:7-8, what does Moses' sister do to help the infant Moses?
4. **And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses, for she said, "Because I drew him out of the water."** In Exodus 2:10 (our suggested memory verse), Pharaoh's daughter gives Moses a name reserved for members of the Egyptian royal family. Moses sounds similar to the Hebrew word *mosheh*. How is the Hebrew meaning of his name fulfilled in the second chapter of Exodus?

## **Who Made You a Prince and a Judge over Us?**

### **Exodus 2:11-15a**

5. In Exodus 2:11, what is indicated by Moses' concern for the Hebrew being beaten by an Egyptian? What does Moses do in Exodus 2:12?
  
6. Read Exodus 2:13-14. What does Moses attempt next? What is the reaction of the Hebrews? Why? What does the New Testament record that St. Stephen (the first Christian martyr) says is Moses' reason for getting involved with the Hebrews in the first place (see *Acts 7:23-25*)?
  
7. What is Pharaoh's reaction when he learns of Moses' actions? What did Moses stand to lose by intervening in the affairs of the Hebrews? Where does Moses go?

## **The Well at Midian**

### **Exodus 2:15b-25**

8. What are meetings at wells often associated with in the Bible (see *Gen 24:1-51* and *Gen 29:1-20*)? How does Exodus 2:15b-17 foreshadow what's going to happen to Moses next? What does Reuel's behavior in Exodus 2:20 suggest, and what do Leviticus 19:34, Matthew 25:35, and Hebrews 13:2 have to say about hospitality?
  
9. How do Reuel's daughters describe Moses? While Moses is living in Midian, he marries Zipporah, one of Reuel's daughters. Who are the Midianites, and how are they related to the Israelites (see *Gen 25:1-6*)?

10. Exodus 2:24-25 explains that God heard the Israelites' groaning under their bondage to Egypt and that he "remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob." What is the covenant that God made with Abraham (called Abram at that time) and later renewed with Isaac and Jacob (see *Gen 15:18-21*, *Gen 26:2-5*, and *Gen 28:13-15*)? What new name is given to Jacob (see *Gen 32:24-32*)?

## Questions for Reflection

The following questions are designed to help you reflect further about how ideas in Exodus 2:1-25 might apply to your own life:

1. Moses wanted to do something to help his fellow Israelites, but he ran into difficulties because he didn't know God's plan. Think of a time when you wanted to hurry "good" things along in your own life. What guidance and help does the Catholic Church offer to those who are seeking to learn God's plan for their lives?
2. In the *Rome to Home* excerpt from *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II wrote about one of his favorite themes—that the discovery of God and the discovery of self go hand in hand. How has learning more about God taught you more about yourself?

## Opportunities for Additional Study

### Points to Ponder—Exodus 2:1-25

#### What's in a Name?

The second chapter of Exodus introduces one of the most important figures in the Old Testament. Moses' name can be seen as a sort of divine and providential pun. "Mose" is an Egyptian dynastic suffix, and Pharaoh's daughter most certainly intended the name to indicate Moses' relationship to the royal family. The name Moses also sounds similar to the Hebrew word *mosheh*, which means "to draw out." Biblical names frequently disclose important information about a person's inmost reality. Moses isn't just "drawn out" of the Nile River, he's drawn out of Egypt itself. Later, he'll draw the people of Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea. These stories of salvation subtly relate Moses to Noah, another important Old Testament figure who's rescued from water in a vessel covered with pitch. The book of Exodus begins, then, with a type of "re-creation event" similar to the re-creation described in the story of Noah and the flood (*Gen 6:9-9:1*).

## **Exodus Lesson 2 Points to Ponder**

Moses, raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, is a princely figure. His double identity as a member of the royal family and as a Hebrew would have made him valuable to Pharaoh when the Egyptian ruler needed to deal with the powerful and prosperous Israelites. This surprises many modern readers, who tend to associate the idea of the Israelites' bondage with the type of slavery practiced in the United States prior to the Civil War.

The Israelites' situation in Egypt doesn't correspond to the situation faced by black slaves in the American South before the Civil War, however. To begin with, the Israelites came to Egypt of their own accord, they weren't kidnapped. The Israelites were numerous, prosperous, and powerful, which is why they posed a threat to the new pharaoh. He feared that they'd form a military alliance with the enemies of Egypt. Forcing the Israelites into servitude didn't change this, because even as slaves they retained control of the property they owned. This wasn't unusual in the ancient world, and some slaves even owned slaves themselves. The Israelites' wealth was considerable. In addition, Pharaoh was indebted to the Israelites because of the skillful land-management policies introduced by their ancestor Joseph during a time of famine.

### **An Identity Crisis**

While Moses' dual citizenship would have made him a valuable asset for Pharaoh, a person with strong ties to two diverse cultures often experiences something of an identity crisis. This apparently happened to Moses. After living 40 years in the household of Pharaoh, Moses begins to identify with the Israelites, and this leads him to kill an Egyptian who's beating one of the Hebrew slaves. Moses stood to lose everything by such an act—his freedom, wealth, citizenship, and status as a member of the royal household. It was a brave thing for Moses to do, but the Israelites' reaction suggests that Moses also may have been acting out of vanity. The Hebrew who asks him: "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (*Ex 2:14*), isn't being perversely hard-hearted. Imagine what it would be like for someone living under oppression to be confronted with a person who's been sheltered in the lap of luxury for 40 years and who's suddenly interested in social justice. Society finds those who adopt a naïve or faddish approach to serious social issues tiresome, and many people question the motives of such "do-gooders." Under the circumstances, it's not at all unusual for the Israelites to react to Moses with suspicion and even hostility. After all, what reasons have they to trust him?

In the second chapter of the book of Exodus, two patterns emerge that will dominate Moses' life—the tension between Moses and the Israelites, and the tension between what Moses wants and what God wants. These issues will remain constant through all the events surrounding the Exodus. Moses' love for his own people, the Israelites, isn't yet rooted in faith. In Genesis, there are several examples of how things always go amiss when people try to force God's hand. When Abraham tries to "help" God fulfill his promise to give him an heir (*Gen 15:1-16:15*), Hagar gives birth to Ishmael. Ishmael's descendants are the Arabs, who oppose the people of Israel to this day. When Jacob tries to get one jump ahead of God by stealing the blessing intended for Esau (*Gen 27:1-29*), the immediate result is years of servitude, exile and suffering for Jacob. When Moses relies on his own strength to begin rescuing the Hebrews from slavery, the results are similarly disastrous. Moses, rejected by both the Egyptians and the Israelites, becomes a man without a country.

## Zipporah

In the Bible, wells frequently are associated with marriage betrothals. More often than not, when a man meets a woman at a well, a wedding isn't far off. Both Isaac (*Gen 24:1-51*) and Jacob (*Gen 29:1-20*) find their brides-to-be at wells, and Moses also meets his wife-to-be, Zipporah, at a well. This Old Testament pattern prefigures Jesus, who also will meet a woman at a well and discuss marriage with her in a New Testament encounter that has important implications pertaining to the bride of Christ, the Church (*Jn 4:7-26*).

The significance of Moses' marriage to Zipporah easily can be lost on a modern reader. Trying to keep all the families in Genesis and Exods straight can be a confusing task, but it matters in this case because Zipporah's father, Reuel (also called Jethro later in the book of Exodus) is a priest of Midian. The Midianites are a tribe of people descended from Keturah, Abraham's wife after Sarah's death (*Gen 25:1-6*). Moses is marrying into a tribe that worships the God of Abraham, as do the Israelites. But the Midianites have intermarried with the Canaanites, and the Canaanites worship false gods. In a tribal culture, a person doesn't just marry another person, he or she marries into the other person's entire tribe, or family. This means that Moses is marrying into a tribe that's compromising the covenant God made with their ancestor, Abraham (*Gen 15:1-21*). This will lend particular significance to God's reaction to the plight of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt: "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (*Ex 2:24*).

## Catechism Connections

- Moses is prefigured by Noah. For more information about the covenant God made with Noah, see CCC 58.
- CCC 845 explains how the Church is prefigured by Noah's ark.
- In CCC 1219, the Church teaches that Noah's ark also prefigures the sacrament of Baptism.
- The first commandment is related to God's first call—that humans accept him and worship him. To learn more, see CCC 2084.

## Rome to Home

Pope John Paul II frequently wrote about the connection between God's gift of freedom and the gift of identity.

Freedom from slavery [for the descendants of Israel] meant the gift of an identity, the recognition of an indestructible dignity and the beginning of a new history in which the discovery of God and discovery of self go hand in hand. The Exodus was a foundational experience and a model for the future. Through it, Israel comes to learn that whenever its existence is threatened it need only turn to God with renewed trust in order to find in him effective help: "I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me" (*Isa 44:21*).

—*Evangelium Vitae*

## Summary

### In Exodus 2:1-25, we observed that:

1. The second chapter of Exodus introduces Moses' important connection with the Christian understanding of salvation, particularly as it relates to Baptism.
2. Water figures in the baby Moses' being saved from death, just as it does in the story of Noah and the flood—both Noah and Moses undergo a type of Baptism.
3. Moses' name indicates he's a member of the Egyptian royal family, but it also sounds similar to the Hebrew word *mosheh*, which means “to draw out.”
4. Moses isn't just “drawn out” of the Nile River, he's drawn out of Egypt itself. Later, he'll draw the people of Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea.
5. Moses' Hebrew background probably was of diplomatic importance to Pharaoh in his dealings with the wealthy Hebrew slaves, who were numerous and posed a potential political threat to the Egyptian rulers.
6. By intervening in the affairs of the Hebrews, Moses stood to lose everything—his freedom, wealth, citizenship, and status as a member of the royal household.
7. In the Bible, wells frequently are associated with marriage betrothals, and Moses meets his Midianite wife-to-be, Zipporah, at a well.
8. The Midianites are a tribe of people descended from Keturah, Abraham's wife after Sarah's death, so Moses is marrying into a tribe that worships the God of Abraham, as do the Israelites.

*No portion of these materials may be reproduced in any form without written permission from Catholic Scripture Study, Copyright 2007.*