

# Israel's Deliverer

By Brad Allison on 6/22/2003

Scripture Reference *Exodus 2*

We're studying the book of Exodus this summer, and I pointed out last week how the theme of this book is service. This theme is introduced in 1:14, where it says literally, "And the Egyptians cause the sons of Israel to serve with harshness, and make their lives bitter in hard service, in clay, and in brick, and in every kind of service in the field; all their service in which they have served is with harshness." And then, curiously, the same word, service, is used for the worship of God. When Moses approaches Pharaoh, he tells him that God has spoken, and he has said, "Let my people go, that they might serve me." Here's how one commentator summarizes the book.

The book of Exodus moves from slavery to worship, from Israel's bondage to Pharaoh to its bonding to Yahweh. More particularly, the book moves from the enforced construction of buildings for Pharaoh to the glad and obedient offering of the people for a building for the worship of God. Exodus advances from an oppressive situation in which God's presence is hardly noted in the text to God's filling the scene at the completion of the tabernacle (Terence Fretheim, p. 1)

In other words, everybody is serving someone or something. The only question is are we serving a master who makes our lives bitter or are we serving the true God. True freedom is not a freedom from all restraints, but the living of one's life in the service of God. We all need the liberation described in this book, from the service of harsh taskmasters to the service of the true God, from the bondage of Pharaoh to the service of God.

Perhaps you read in the news about the videotape of a girls' "powder puff" football game at a suburban Chicago high school. The tape showed girls being beaten and smeared with feces and garbage by their classmates. It was part of a hazing ritual. Why would someone allow herself to be treated in such a degrading manner? Interestingly, Alfred University did a national survey in which they discovered that 24 percent of youth group members experience hazing in order to join a church youth group. Also, almost "half of the students hazed for church groups were expected to engage in illegal activities" (*Christianity Today*, July, 2003, p. 13). Again, why do people allow themselves to be treated like this? Because there is something to which they are enslaved, and in their case it is the acceptance of their group. God delivers us from the bondage of Pharaoh and liberates us to serve God instead.

Why would a man keep a job he hates and that is slowly killing him? Because it happens to pay well and he is enslaved to a healthy paycheck. God delivers us from the bondage of Pharaoh and frees us to serve him. Why would a woman go from one abusive relationship to another? Because she thinks she must have the love of a man, and she finds men who "need" her so that they will then love her. She is in bondage to Pharaoh, and Exodus is all about our deliverance from this bondage.

The chapter before us today is a pivotal one, describing the beginning of God's deliverance of Israel. It teaches us two things about God's deliverance: the kinds of circumstances God uses and the kinds of people God uses.

## I. The Kinds of Circumstances God Uses

Moses' parents were faced with a devastating set of circumstances. Under the weight of Pharaoh's edict to destroy all the male Jewish babies, this Levite woman whose name we learn elsewhere got pregnant. I wonder if she prayed for a baby girl during her pregnancy. In any

case, God gave her a beautiful son, one who was strikingly attractive. In addition to the normal difficulties of dealing with newborns, the added burden of hiding her baby was placed upon her.

Illustration: I read recently of a documentary exploring the life of a remote tribe that was ruled by a powerful medicine man and by superstitions he promoted. One of these superstitions required that things happen in a certain way when a child is born, or the child had to be taken by the elders of the tribe and fed to the crocodiles in a nearby river. A woman who was a member of this tribe gave birth to a child whose top teeth happened to come in before her bottom teeth, an abnormality which their superstition required should lead to the baby being fed to the crocodiles. The mother tried to hide the fact from other members of the tribe until her baby's bottom teeth could come in. But one day the baby smiled, and one of the other women in the tribe saw the child's teeth, and reported it to the medicine man, with the result that the elders came and took her baby from her to be fed to the crocodiles.

Jochebed, Moses' mother, lived with such a threat hanging over her. At three months of age, probably because of the baby's size, it became too risky to continue trying to conceal him. So she devised a plan of leaving the baby beside the river, a place where detection by a woman would be likely. Women were the ones who usually came to the river, for purposes of bathing or washing, and it was probably her hope that feminine compassion would prevent the cruel murder of her child. As you know, her plan worked better than she could have hoped, with the result that she was hired to nurse her own baby, after which she would turn him over to Pharaoh's daughter.

This story is filled with irony. For example, Moses is saved when his mother does exactly what Pharaoh had ordered—that male babies be cast into the Nile. Jochebed is paid from the treasury of Pharaoh for doing the very thing she most wanted to do—nursing her baby boy. The thing Pharaoh most fears, an Israelite uprising, he helps to promote by raising and training the man who would lead it. But the biggest irony of all is that the one who seems to get everything he wants, Pharaoh, ends up getting destroyed, while the ones who seem to have everything against them, the Israelites, get delivered. The people who get liberated and are able to serve God are the ones who seem to have the most difficulties. There are two lessons in this for us. The first one is that we need to be aware of the danger of getting everything we want. A sub-theme of this book is the judgment of God. One of the common forms of God's judgment is to give people what they want. Pharaoh wanted the males thrown into the river, and they were. But it was this very edict that led to Moses being raised by Pharaoh's daughter and given the best education available in Egypt, equipping him perfectly to be the leader who would successfully lead the Israelites out of Egypt. One of the greatest spiritual dangers we face occurs when we get what we want.

Illustration: An article in the most recent *Christianity Today* made this very point. It was entitled "Suburban Spirituality" and described the different spiritual challenges of living in the suburbs, where exactly 50% of the population lived according to the 2000 census. The basic challenge of living where most of us live is simply that the suburbs are the place where you can have pretty much whatever you want. If you don't like the church you've been attending, there are fifty other ones that will have what you want. Multiple choices exist for us at almost every turn, including grocery stores, restaurants, department stores, youth sports leagues, schools and neighborhoods. The cumulative effect of this profusion of choices is that we are only rarely in a position where we are faced with the kind of situation where we have no choice but to trust in God.

Does this mean that we are supposed to ask ourselves what we most want and then choose the thing we most don't want? No, it doesn't, but it does lead to our second lesson, which is that the things that are most against you are actually part of your deliverance. That was the case here. In the providence of God, it was precisely this set of difficult circumstances that produced a deliverer for Israel. There would have been no Moses had there been no cruel edict from Pharaoh.

What are the things against you? Perhaps you are married to a really obnoxious person who is a daily trial to you. Or maybe you have some health problem that won't go away. Some of you are chronically short of money almost every month. Others have jobs that are a daily trial to you. What should be done with these difficult circumstances? Two things should be done. First, you should prayerfully try to change the difficult circumstances where doing so wouldn't violate the word of God. But there are many situations that remain unchanged after

such attempts. In those cases, this passage teaches us to trust God. In the providence of God, the very thing that seems most against you is the thing God is using to bring deliverance to you. God is using your suffering to lead you out of serving some harsh taskmaster and into the glorious freedom of serving God. The problem is you can't see it, just as Moses' parents couldn't see what God was doing. But let's think about this. Is it possible for God to do good things that we don't see? Or to word it differently, if we don't see the good that God is doing, does that mean it's not there?

When we believe God is doing a good thing with our difficult circumstances, even when we don't see it, that is called dependence on God. There is a great picture of dependence here. The word translated "basket" in verse 3 is the same word used for Noah's ark. An ark is something like a barge rather than a ship. Its only function is to float, rather than to be steered. The occupants of an ark are completely at the mercy of the elements. Wherever the current takes them is where they go. Actually, this places them at the mercy of God. I would invite you to think of your difficult circumstances in this way. You are an occupant of an ark, and its direction is completely at the mercy of God. But be encouraged that God directs every turn, and he will lead you through to the path designed for your deliverance from Pharaoh.

## II. The Kinds of People God Uses

God uses weak people to bring deliverance to others. One of the things commentators point out is the number of women in these first two chapters and the way God uses them to carry out his purposes. Women in this culture were in a position of weakness, and yet they are the ones God uses. He uses the two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. He uses Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter. Moses is the one person of strength in the story. He has received all the benefits Egypt could give to one of its princes, including the best military training. At forty years old, he is at the height of his physical and mental faculties. But this one man we would expect God to use lasts exactly two days on the job of deliverer. God had stirred in his heart a concern for his people, the Hebrews. So he goes out to see about their condition. On his first day, he sees an Egyptian striking a fellow Israelite to the point that he was about to die. Moses intervenes and kills the Egyptian. On his second day, he sees two Hebrews fighting with one another, and once more he intervenes. But the one who was being abusive challenges Moses, claiming that he had no right to be a judge in this case. Then he asks him a question that fills the heart of Moses with dread. "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses had thought that no one had seen his act of the day before, but now he discovers otherwise. Pharaoh eventually finds out and Moses is forced to flee for his life to the desert. Forty years of training and preparation to be Israel's deliverer, and he lasts two days.

What did Moses do wrong? He did the same thing we tend to do when confronted with a need and when we think we know the answer. He became a fixer. Do you know what I mean by that? Wendy and I were talking this past week about our tendency to do this. Someone comes to you, for example, and says that they are lonely and need a friend. A fixer responds by saying, "Okay, let me look at my calendar and see when I can get together with you, and I will be your friend." Now maybe God desires such a thing and maybe he doesn't, but the fixer doesn't stop to consult God on this. He simply sees a need and jumps in to fix it. What's wrong with that? Fixers lack humility because they want to take God's role of deliverer. If Moses was going to be used of God to be the human instrument of God's deliverance of Israel, he would have to learn humility. He would have to learn not to be a fixer. God taught him this by sending him into the desert to tend sheep for forty years. Dwight W. Moody summarized Moses' life as follows: "Moses spent his first forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent his second forty years learning he was nobody. He spent his last forty years discovering what

God can do with a nobody.” This prince of Egypt undertook the job of shepherd, an occupation that was despised in Egypt (Genesis 46:34). He learned the leadership skills needed to be a deliverer in his forty years in Egypt. But it took him another forty years to learn the humility needed for God to use him in this role.

## CONCLUSION:

I want to close with an application with which this chapter closes. During most of the first two chapters, the name of God is almost completely absent. But now, at the end of chapter 2, God’s name is mentioned repeatedly. Notice the verbs of which God is the subject in the final two verses of the chapter. “God *heard* their groaning, and God *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God *saw* the people of Israel—and God *knew*.” God hears, remembers, sees and knows all about our needs. It is typical in the Bible to speak of God’s awareness of these things to mean the same thing as God’s action. In other words, for God to know of his people’s needs is to act to meet those needs. The application is simply to cry out to God as the children of Israel did here, asking him for deliverance from your taskmaster. God, and not some modern-day Moses, is our Deliverer. God may use a Moses in your life, but deliverance comes from God. Each one of us is ultimately about as needy as baby Moses in that basket, drifting wherever the current would take him. But we know the Lord of the river, and nothing can touch us but by his will. So call out to the one who delivers.

Let me remind you that Jesus is the true Moses. Just as Moses went into the heart of the kingdom of evil and grew up in Pharaoh’s household, so Jesus has gone into the heart of darkness by becoming sin for us. Just as Pharaoh got everything he wanted but ended up losing, Satan got everything he wanted when Jesus died. But it was this very death that caused him to lose completely. So call out to Jesus for deliverance from your taskmasters. He always hears.