

A Protective Family

Lesson for October 2, 2022

Unit II: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Scriptural Background: Exodus 1:15-22; 2:1-10, 15-22

Printed Text: Exodus 2:1-10

Key verse: “And the woman conceived and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.”

Word Study

Hook

That great American hero, editor, schoolteacher, and Presbyterian clergyman Elijah Lovejoy left the pulpit and returned to the press in order to be sure his words reached more people. The Civil War might have been averted and a peaceful emancipation of slaves achieved had there been more like him. After observing one lynching, Lovejoy was committed forever to fighting uncompromisingly the awful sin of slavery. Mob action was brought against him time after time; neither this nor many threats and attempts on his life deterred him. Repeated destruction of his presses did not stop him. "If by compromise is meant that I should cease from my duty, I cannot make it. I fear God more than I fear man. Crush me if you will, but I shall die at my post..." And he did, four days later, at the hands of another mob. Not one of the ruffians was prosecuted or indicted or punished in any way for this murder. (Some of Lovejoy's defenders were prosecuted! One of the mob assassins was later elected mayor of Alton!)

However, note this: One young man was around who was deeply moved by the Lovejoy martyrdom. He had just been elected to the Illinois legislature. His name was Abraham Lincoln.

In today's lesson we see a similar rejection of injustice. The courageous defiance of Pharaoh's edict to kill male babies by Moses' family was the visible enactment of God's planning and protection of Moses' future and the fulfillment of His purpose for him and the nation of Israel.

Key Terms

1. **Beautiful** (verse 2) – pleasant; agreeable; good; fair; “goodly” (KJV); “fine” (NIV)
2. **Child** (verse 3b) – son; boy; lad; youth. This word has considerable latitude of meaning in Scripture.
3. **Hid** (verse 2) – treasured up; concealed; kept.
4. **Reeds** (verse 3) – rushes; weeds; “bulrushes” (KJV). Green herbage growing in marshy places. The reed of Egypt and Palestine is the *Arundo donax*, which grows to the height of 12 feet, its stalk jointed like the bamboo, "with a magnificent panicle of blossom at the top, and so slender and yielding that it will lie perfectly flat under a gust of wind, and immediately resume its upright position."
5. **Stood** (verse 4) – set or stationed oneself; took one's stand; stood forth.
6. **Walked** (verse 5) – went; came; “were walking” (NIV).

Lesson Background

Exodus relates the story of freedom for God's people from slavery and the beginning of national identity. The book is strategically important to both Old Testament history and a proper understanding of Hebrew customs and institutions. It is a vital connecting link between the age of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph), and the remaining books of the Law (Leviticus and Deuteronomy). It relates how God fulfilled His promise to Abraham by multiplying his descendants into a great nation (Genesis 12:2), and then redeeming them from bondage (Genesis 15:13-14). The deliverance from bondage was a crucial event in the experience of the Israelites. The deliverance serves as a beautiful type of the sinner's redemption from the bondage of sin.

The Exodus marked the end of a period of oppression for Abraham's descendants (Genesis 15:13) and constituted the beginning of the fulfillment of the covenant promise to Abraham that his descendants would not only reside in the Promised Land but would also multiply and become a great nation (Genesis 1-3, 7). The purpose of the book is to trace the rapid growth of Jacob's descendants from Egypt to the establishment of the theocratic nation in their Promised Land.

In today's lesson the great challenges that Moses' family are facing include being pressured by the possibility of losing a dear child! Threat for their lives! Injustice and discrimination! Grinding poverty and hard labor! How did they get there?

The following biblical narrative describes their situation:

Exodus 1:6 In time, Joseph and each of his brothers died, ending that generation.

Exodus 1:8 Then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done.

Exodus 1:9 He told his people, "These Israelites are becoming a threat to us because there are so many of them.

Exodus 1:15 Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah:

Exodus 1:16 "When you help the Hebrew women give birth, kill all the boys as soon as they are born. Allow only the baby girls to live."

Exodus 1:17 But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king and allowed the boys to live, too.

Exodus 1:22 Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Throw all the newborn Israelite boys into the Nile River. But you may spare the baby girls."

This is where we begin this week's lesson.

Lesson In Depth

I. Defying Social Injustice (Exodus 2:1-4)

Social injustice is when actions are taken that infringe upon a group's rights, marginalize their opportunities, or treat them unfairly. Like Jesus in a manger, the birth of Moses tells us much about the nature of God and his willingness to identify with the marginalized.

And there went a man of the house of Levi and took [to wife] a daughter of Levi: This is speaking of the mother and father of Moses. It was very important to these Hebrews to not marry these worldly Egyptians. This was an honorable man and woman. They were both Levites. Levites were descendants of the tribe of Levi, one of the patriarch Jacob's sons. Later, Levites will have a special status among the tribes of Israel as priests and assistants in worship. By introducing Moses this way, the writer suggests that Moses's Levitical status is fitting for a future leader and lawgiver of Israel.

So the woman conceived and bore a son: The baby Moses opened his eyes to an unfriendly world. He was born in a powerful nation, but was of a foreign, oppressed race during a time when all babies such as himself were under a royal death sentence. Nevertheless, Moses had something special in his favor: he was the child of believing parents.

when she saw him that he [was a] goodly [child], she hid him three months: "Goodly" (beautiful) means "favored". For Moses' parents to hide him for "three months" until he was in safe hands was an act of faith lauded (in Hebrews 11:23).

This mother is proud of this healthy, handsome child that she bore. She stands against the powers of Egypt to keep him. She, as well as all the other mothers, was told to kill their boy children when they were born. Here we can look at these 3 months that he was hidden as if he were dead to symbolize the three days that the body of Jesus lay in the tomb as dead. She could look on this son and see his strength and his character. We do not read that she knew at this time that he was sent of God to deliver his people from great bondage.

She hid him three months: The parents of Moses did not do this only because of the natural parental instinct; they did it also out of faith in God. Hebrews 11:23 describes the faith of Moses' parents: *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.*

And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein: The word "Ark" in this case, a floating basket), alludes to Noah and, as in his day, served here as a vessel of divine deliverance.

Laid it in the reeds by the river's bank: In a literal sense, Moses' mother did *exactly* what Pharaoh said to do: put her son into the river (Exodus 1:22). However, she took care to put him in a waterproofed basket and strategically floated him in the river. The basket was placed securely "in the flags" by the bank of the Nile where the current was slight, so it would not wash

out to sea. It was also placed where the women of the palace would see it when they came to dip in the waters of the Nile as part of their religious ritual.

This mother's great love for her child brought her to the point of being willing to give him up, just so that he might live. She was aware of the bathing of the Egyptian maidens there. This was no accident she placed her son there. We can see similarities in this ark of safety made for Moses to the ark of safety of Noah. This mother put the baby in the ark. God sealed Noah in the ark for his safety. Here we see God's handiwork. He (God) puts the thought in this mother to do this special thing to save Moses for His purpose.

And his sister stood afar off: Presumably Miriam, the only sister of Moses mentioned elsewhere (Exodus 15:20-21; Numbers 26:59) was actually guarding this ark to see that no harm comes to her brother. A child would be inconspicuous. She would carry the message back to her mother of the fate of Moses.

II. A Baby's Cry (Exodus 2:5-10)

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash [herself] at the river: The etymology of "Moses" is "he who draws out," which hints at Moses's future role (drawing the Israelites out of Egypt).

It was not unusual for the Pharaoh's daughter to go and bathe in the Nile. The Egyptians thought this river had special powers. They felt bathing in the river brought back their youth. Actually, water was not plentiful in Egypt. When the rains filled the Nile, they had good crops; and during drought periods, there were very bad crops. They were so dependent on the Nile that they began to worship it.

She probably had four to five girls in attendance to her because of her prominence as a princess. Her maid spoken of here was probably the one who helped her dress and was very close to her. These flags mentioned here were just weeds that grew near the bank in the water. They were probably very similar to water lilies.

And when she had opened [it], she saw the child: The princess opened the ark herself; perhaps suspecting what was inside, perhaps out of mere curiosity.

The babe wept: Through hunger, or cold, or perhaps general discomfort. An ark of bulrushes could not have been a very pleasant cradle.

She had compassion on him: In God's guidance, Pharaoh's daughter found baby Moses. She was conditioned by her culture and upbringing to reject the Hebrews, but the cry of baby Moses melted her heart. The baby's tears moved her to pity; and her pity prompted her to save it. She must have shown some sign of her intention, perhaps by taking the child from the ark and fondling it before Miriam could have ventured to make her suggestion.

This is one of the Hebrews' children: The circumstances spoke for themselves. No mother would have exposed such a "goodly child" (Exodus 2:2), to so sad a death but one with whom it was a necessity.

We can see God's hand in all this; Pharaoh's daughter being at the river at the precise time, Moses' mother floating the babe in the ark at the exact time, and the baby crying at just the right moment to touch the daughter's heart. This was part of God's plan to save Moses for the work God had ordained him for.

Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women: His sister, Miriam, had bided her time. She had still kept in the background, but had approached within hearing distance; and when the princess observed that the babe must be "one of the Hebrews' children," was prompt with the rejoinder, "Shall I not fetch thee then a Hebrew mother to nurse him?" If the child was to be nursed at all, if he was to be brought up; a Hebrew nurse would be the fittest.

God had this beautifully planned for the deliverance of both Moses, and eventually for the people of Israel. He skillfully guided the parents of Moses, the currents of the Nile, and the heart of Pharaoh's daughter to further His plan and purpose.

And the maid went and called the child's mother: Miriam knew where to find her and brought her quickly to the princess.

Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give [thee] thy wages: The princess adopts Miriam's suggestion; the child is to be nursed for her and is to be hers. Here we see the miraculous hand of God. Not only did the mother save the baby's life, but she now had her baby back. Even more amazing was that the mother would now be paid to raise her own baby. God rewarded the faith of Moses' mother, both as she trusted Him in hiding Moses for three months, and also as she trusted God by setting Moses out on the river.

God always has the perfect plan, if we will just stand back and let Him do it. Remember, all the Hebrews were now slaves and just barely have enough to get by on, but Moses' mother was earning wages raising her own child.

It helped the entire family. It appears that in the early part of Moses life, he was at home with his natural parents; and yet, Pharaoh's daughter had adopted him as her very own. Moses was probably just brought into her house and given all the privileges of a son.

And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter: No doubt it was in these early years that Moses learnt of the 'God of the fathers' (Exodus 3:15) and realized that the Hebrews were his fellow countrymen (Exodus 2:11).

and he became her son: The position of "son" undoubtedly granted Moses special privileges belonging to nobility, but none of these persuaded Moses to relinquish his naïve origin. Rather, as the New Testament advises, his spiritual maturity was such that when he came of age, he "refused to be called the son of pharaoh's daughter" (Hebrews 11:24). Certainly, he was raised

with both the science and learning of Egypt. Acts 7:22 says, *Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds*. Egypt was one of the most academic and scientific societies among ancient cultures. It is reasonable to think that Moses was instructed in geography, history, grammar, writing, literature, philosophy, and music.

Since he was of the royal family, we expect that as Moses went anywhere, he went in a princely chariot and his guards cried out “bow the knee!” If he floated on the Nile, it was in a magnificent ship with musical accompaniment; he lived the royal life. We also know that Moses’ Hebrew mother had an influence on his life, so he was certainly raised in the Hebrew heritage of his mother.

Lesson Summary

Today’s lesson provides a wonderful account of a “Protective Family”. Before the parents act by faith, the family has three major problems, security, poverty and keeping the baby alive. They act in faith by letting God move and do His part.

Jochebed knew Pharaoh’s order to kill the first born was evil but was unable to do anything about it. However, it was that small still voice from God who inspired her to place him in the basket. She trusted God with the life of her newborn son. Jochebed, Moses’ mother trusted God with the most important thing in her life. Are we prepared to do the same? God never let her down even though what was to happen must have far exceeded any expectation she may have had. What a reminder that God has a plan and purpose for all of us, even if we don’t realize it at the time.

Jochebed was not the only family member God used in this lesson. Miriam, Moses’ sister seized the opportunity and bravely approached the royal princess, resulting in Moses not only being reunited with his mother but also Jochebed would receive a generous allowance for nursing her own child. Special opportunities may come our way unexpectedly. Don’t let the fear of what might happen cause you to miss an opportunity. Be alert to the opportunities God gives you and take full advantage of them.

Pressured by the possibility of losing a dear child! Threat for their lives! Injustice and discrimination! Grinding poverty and hard labor! They found the answer by following God’s leading. Moses was God’s chosen one and would be instrumental in freeing the slaves and leading them towards the promised land. Social justice is one of the fundamental issues in the Bible. God created the world and humankind, and the life and happiness of all His people are His deepest desires. The tyrannical oppression of the people of Israel in Egypt is the archetype of politically motivated, social injustice. God perceives it with utmost sensitivity. “Social injustice, whether systemic or intentionally blatant is a reality. This lesson reminds us that God is aware of the injustices faced by His people and will deliver according to His sovereignty and timing” (Sunday School Publishing Board, 2022).