

Moses' Early Life

Birth and Education of Moses; Flight from Egypt; Life in Midian

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Ex. 2:1–10. Birth and Education of Moses.—Whilst Pharaoh was urging forward the extermination of the Israelites, God was preparing their emancipation. According to the divine purpose, the murderous edict of the king was to lead to the training and preparation of the human deliverer of Israel.

Ex. 2:1, 2. At the time when all the Hebrew boys were ordered to be thrown into the Nile, **“there went* () contributes to the pictorial character of the account, and serves to bring out its importance, just as in Gen. 35:22, Deut. 31:1) a man of the house of Levi—according to Ex. 6:20 and Num. 26:59, it was Amram, of the Levitical family of Kohath—and married a daughter (i.e., a descendant) of Levi,”* named Jochebed, who bore him a son, viz., Moses. From Ex. 6:20 we learn that Moses was not the first child of this marriage, but his brother Aaron; and from v. 7 of this chapter, it is evident that when Moses was born, his sister Miriam was by no means a child (Num. 26:59). Both of these had been born before the murderous edict was issued (Ex. 1:22). They are not mentioned here, because the only question in hand was the birth and deliverance of Moses, the future deliverer of Israel. *“When the mother saw that the child was beautiful” () as in Gen. 6:2; LXX (), she began to think about his preservation. The very beauty of the child was to her “a peculiar token of divine approval, and a sign that God had some special design concerning him” (Delitzsch on Heb. 11:23). The expression Θ in Acts 7:20 points to this. She therefore hid the new-born child for three months, in the hope of saving him alive. This hope, however, neither sprang from a revelation made to her husband before the birth of her child, that he was appointed to be the saviour of Israel, as Josephus affirms (Ant. ii. 9, 3), either from his own imagination or according to the*

belief of his age, nor from her faith in the patriarchal promises, but primarily from the natural love of parents for their offspring. And if the hiding of the child is praised in Heb. 11:23 as an act of faith, that faith was manifested in their not obeying the king's commandment, but fulfilling without fear of man all that was required by that parental love, which God approved, and which was rendered all the stronger by the beauty of the child, and in their confident assurance, in spite of all apparent impossibility, that their effort would be successful (vid., *Delitzsch ut supra*). This confidence was shown in the means adopted by the mother to save the child, when she could hide it no longer.

Ex. 2:3. She placed the infant in an ark of bulrushes by the bank of the Nile, hoping that possibly it might be found by some compassionate hand, and still be delivered. The *dagesh dirim*. in serves to separate the consonant in which it stands from the syllable which follows (vid., *Ewald*, § 92c; Ges. § 20, 2b). a little chest of rushes. The use of the word ()ark) is probably intended to call to mind the ark in which Noah was saved (vid., Gen. 6:14). , *papyrus*, the paper reed: a kind of rush which was very common in ancient Egypt, but has almost entirely disappeared, or, as *Pruner* affirms (*ägypt. Naturgesch.* p. 55), is nowhere to be found. It had a triangular stalk about the thickness of a finger, which grew to the height of ten feet; and from this the lighter Nile boats were made, whilst the peeling of the plant was used for sails, mattresses, mats, sandals, and other articles, but chiefly for the preparation of paper (vid., *Celsii Hierobot.* ii. pp. 137ff.; *Hengstenberg*, *Egypt and the Books of Moses*, pp. 85, 86, transl.). , for with mappik omitted: *and cemented* (pitched) *it with bitumen*, the asphalt of the Dead Sea, to fasten the papyrus stalks, *and with pitch*, to make it water-tight, *and put it in the reeds by the bank of the Nile*, at a spot, as the sequel shows, where she knew that the king's daughter was accustomed to bathe. For “the sagacity of the mother led her, no doubt, so to arrange the whole, that the issue might be just what is related in vv. 5–9” (*Baumgarten*).

The daughter stationed herself a little distance off, to see what happened to the child (v. 4). This sister of Moses was most probably the Miriam who is frequently mentioned afterwards (Num. 26:59) for . The infinitive form as in Gen. 46:3.

Ex. 2:5. Pharaoh's daughter is called *Thermouthis* or *Merris* in Jewish tradition, and by the Rabbins . is to be connected with , and the construction with to be explained as referring to the descent into (upon) the river from the rising bank. The fact that a king's daughter should bathe in the open river is certainly opposed to the customs of the modern, Mohammedan East, where this is only done by women of the lower orders, and that in remote places (*Lane*, *Manners and Customs*); but it is in harmony with the customs of ancient Egypt,³ and in perfect agreement with the notions of the early Egyptians respecting the sanctity of the Nile, to which divine honours even were paid (vid., *Hengstenberg's Egypt*, etc. pp. 109, 110), and with the belief, which was common to both ancient and modern Egyptians, in the power of its waters to impart fruitfulness and prolong life (vid., *Strabo*, xv. p. 695, etc., and *Seetzen*, *Travels* iii. p. 204).

Ex. 2:6ff. The exposure of the child at once led the king's daughter to conclude that it was *one of the Hebrews' children*. The fact that she took compassion on the weeping child, and notwithstanding the king's command (Ex. 1:22) took it up and had it brought up (of course, without the knowledge of the king), may be accounted for from the love to children which is innate in the female sex, and the superior adroitness of a mother's heart, which cooperated in this case, though without knowing or intending it, in the realization of the divine plan of salvation. *Competens fuit divina vindicta, ut suis affectibus puniatur parricida et filiae provisione pereat qui genitricem interdixerat parturire* (*August. Sermo 89 de temp.*).

Ex. 2:9. With the directions, *"Take this child away* () for used here in the sense of leading, bringing, carrying away, as in Zech. 5:10, Eccl. 10:20) *and suckle it for me,*" the king's daughter gave the child to its mother, who was unknown to her, and had been fetched as a nurse.

Ex. 2:10. When the child had grown large, i.e., had been weaned () as in Gen. 21:8), the mother, who acted as nurse, brought it back to the queen's daughter, who then adopted it as her own son, and called it *Moses*: () "*for,*" she said, "*out of the water have I drawn him*" .() As Pharaoh's daughter gave this name to the child as her adopted son,

it must be an Egyptian name. The Greek form of the name, M (LXX), also points to this, as *Josephus* affirms. "Thermuthis," he says, "imposed this name upon him, from what had happened when he was put into the river; for the Egyptians call water Mo, and those who are rescued from the water Uses" (*Ant. ii. 9, 6*, Whiston's translation). The correctness of this statement is confirmed by the Coptic, which is derived from the old Egyptian.⁴ Now, though we find the name explained in the text from the Hebrew , this is not to be regarded as a philological or etymological explanation, but as a theological interpretation, referring to the importance of the person rescued from the water to the Israelitish nation. In the lips of an Israelite, the name *Mouje*, which was so little suited to the Hebrew organs of speech, might be involuntarily altered into *Moseh*; "and this transformation became an unintentional prophecy, for the person *drawn out* did become, in fact, the *drawer out*" (*Kurtz*). Consequently *Knobel's* supposition, that the writer regarded as a participle *Poal* with the dropped, is to be rejected as inadmissible.—There can be no doubt that, as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses received a thoroughly Egyptian training, and was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, as Stephen states in Acts 7:22 in accordance with Jewish tradition.⁵ Through such an education as this, he received just the training required for the performance of the work to which God had called him. Thus the wisdom of Egypt was employed by the wisdom of God for the establishment of the kingdom of God.

Ex. 2:11–20. Flight of Moses from Egypt to Midian.—The education of Moses at the Egyptian court could not extinguish the feeling that he belonged to the people of Israel. Our history does not inform us how this feeling, which was inherited from his parents and nourished in him when an infant by his mother's milk, was fostered still further after he had been handed over to Pharaoh's daughter, and grew into a firm, decided consciousness of will. All that is related is, how this consciousness broke forth at length in the full-grown man, in the slaying of the Egyptian who had injured a Hebrew (vv. 11, 12), and in the attempt to reconcile two Hebrew men who were quarrelling (vv. 13, 14). Both of these occurred "in those days," i.e., in the time of the Egyptian oppression, when Moses had become great () as in Gen. 21:20), i.e., had grown to be a man. According to tradition he was then forty years old (Acts 7:23). What impelled him to this was not "a carnal ambition and longing for action,"

or a desire to attract the attention of his brethren, but fiery love to his brethren or fellow-countrymen, as is shown in the expression, "One of his brethren" (v. 11), and deep sympathy with them in their oppression and sufferings; whilst, at the same time, they undoubtedly displayed the fire of his impetuous nature, and the ground-work for his future calling. It was from this point of view that Stephen cited these facts (Acts 7:25, 26), for the purpose of proving to the Jews of his own age, that they had been from time immemorial "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" (v. 51). And this view is the correct one. Not only did Moses intend to help his brethren when he thus appeared among them, but this forcible interference on behalf of his brethren could and should have aroused the thought in their minds, that God would send them salvation through him. "But they understood not" (Acts 7:25). At the same time Moses thereby declared that he would no longer "be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:24-26; see *Delitzsch in loc.*). And this had its roots in faith (). But his conduct presents another aspect also, which equally demands consideration. His zeal for the welfare of his brethren urged him forward to present himself as the umpire and judge of his brethren before God had called him to this, and drove him to the crime of murder, which cannot be excused as resulting from a sudden ebullition of wrath.⁶ For he acted with evident deliberation. "*He looked this way and that way; and when he saw no one, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand*" (v. 12). Through his life at the Egyptian court his own natural inclinations had been formed to rule, and they manifested themselves on this occasion in an ungodly way. This was thrown in his teeth by the man "in the wrong" () v. 13), who was striving with his brother and doing him an injury: "Who made thee a ruler and judge over us" (v. 14)? and so far he was right. The murder of the Egyptian had also become known; and as soon as Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses, who fled into the land of Midian in fear for his life (v. 15). Thus dread of Pharaoh's wrath drove Moses from Egypt into the desert. For all that, it is stated in Heb. 11:27, that "by faith () Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king." This faith, however, he manifested not by fleeing—his flight was rather a sign of timidity—but by leaving Egypt; in other words, by renouncing his position in Egypt, where

he might possibly have softened down the kings' wrath, and perhaps even have brought help and deliverance to his brethren the Hebrews. By the fact that he did not allow such human hopes to lead him to remain in Egypt, and was not afraid to increase the king's anger by his flight, he manifested faith in the invisible One as though he saw Him, commending not only himself, but his oppressed nation, to the care and protection of God (vid., *Delitzsch* on Heb. 11:27).

The situation of the land of Midian, to which Moses fled, cannot be determined with certainty. The Midianites, who were descended from Abraham through Keturah (Gen. 25:2, 4), had their principal settlements on the eastern side of the Elanitic Gulf, from which they spread northwards into the fields of Moab (Gen. 36:35; Num. 22:4, 7; 25:6, 17; 31:1ff.; Judg. 6:1ff.), and carried on a caravan trade through Canaan to Egypt (Gen. 37:28, 36; Isa. 60:6). On the eastern side of the Elanitic Gulf, and five days' journey from Aela, there stood the town of *Madian*, the ruins of which are mentioned by *Edrisi* and *Abulfeda*, who also speak of a well there, from which Moses watered the flocks of his father-in-law *Shoeib* (i.e., Jethro). But we are precluded from fixing upon this as the home of Jethro by Ex. 3:1, where Moses is said to have come to Horeb, when he drove Jethro's sheep behind the desert. The Midianites on the eastern side of the Elanitic Gulf could not possibly have led their flocks as far as Horeb for pasturage. We must assume, therefore, that one branch of the Midianites, to whom Jethro was priest, had crossed the Elanitic Gulf, and settled in the southern half of the peninsula of Sinai (cf. Ex. 3:1). There is nothing improbable in such a supposition. There are several branches of the Towara Arabs occupying the southern portion of Arabia, that have sprung from Hedjas in this way; and even in the most modern times considerable intercourse was carried on between the eastern side of the gulf and the peninsula, whilst there was formerly a ferry between *Szytta*, *Madian*, and *Nekba*.—The words "and he sat down" () i.e., settled) *in the land of Midian, and sat down by the well,*" are hardly to be understood as simply meaning that "when he was dwelling in Midian, he sat down one day by a well" (*Baumg.*), but that immediately upon his arrival in Midian, where he intended to dwell or stay, he sat down by the well. The definite article before points to the well as the only one, or the principal well in that district. *Knobel* refers to "the well at *Sherm*;" but at *Sherm el Moye* (i.e., water-bay) or *Sherm el Bir*

(well-bay) there are "several deep wells finished off with stones," which are "evidently the work of an early age, and have cost great labour" (*Burckhardt*, Syr. p. 854); so that the expression "*the* well*" would be quite unsuitable. Moreover there is but a very weak support for Knobel's* attempt to determine the site of Midian, in the identification of the M or M (of *Strabo* and *Artemidorus*) with *Madyan*.

Ex. 2:16ff. Here Moses secured for himself a hospitable reception from a priest of Midian, and a home at his house, by doing as Jacob had formerly done (Gen. 29:10), viz., helping his daughters to water their father's sheep, and protecting them against the other shepherds.—On the form for vid., Gen. 19:19; and for the masculine suffixes to and , Gen. 31:9. for , as in Job 5:12, cf. *Ewald*, § 198a.—The flock of this priest consisted of nothing but , i.e., sheep and goats (vid., Ex. 3:1). Even now there are no oxen reared upon the peninsula of Sinai, as there is not sufficient pasturage or water to be found. For the same reason there are no horses kept there, but only camels and asses (cf. *Seetzen*, R. iii. 100; *Wellsted*, R. in Arab. ii. p. 66). In v. 18 the priest is called *Reguel*, in Ex. 3:1 *Jethro*. This title, "the priest of Midian," shows that he was the spiritual head of the branch of the Midianites located there, but hardly that he was the prince or temporal head as well, like Melchizedek, as the Targumists have indicated by , and as *Artapanus* and the poet *Ezekiel* distinctly affirm. The other shepherds would hardly have treated the daughters of the Emir in the manner described in v. 17. The name)*Reguel*, friend of God) indicates that this priest served the old Semitic God *El*.() This *Reguel*, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses, was unquestionably the same person as *Jethro* () the of Moses and priest of Midian (Ex. 3:1). Now, as *Reguel's* son *Chobab* is called Moses' in Num. 10:29 (cf. Judg. 4:11), the Targumists and others supposed *Reguel* to be the grandfather of Zipporah, in which case would mean the grandfather in v. 18, and the granddaughter in v. 21. This hypothesis would undoubtedly be admissible, if it were probable on other grounds. But as a comparison of Num. 10:29 with Ex. 18 does not necessarily prove that *Chobab* and *Jethro* were the same persons, whilst Ex. 18:27 seems to lead to the very opposite conclusion, and , like the Greek , may be used for both father-in-law and brother-in-law, it would probably be more correct to regard *Chobab* as Moses' brother-in-law,

Reguel as the proper name of his father-in-law, and *Jethro*, for which *Jether* (*praestantia*) is substituted in Ex. 4:18, as either a title, or the surname which showed the rank of *Reguel* in his tribe, like the Arabic *Imam*, i.e., *praepositus*, *spec. sacrorum antistes*. *Ranke's* opinion, that *Jethro* and *Chobab* were both of them sons of *Reguel* and brothers-in-law of Moses, is obviously untenable, if only on the ground that according to the analogy of Num. 10:29 the epithet "son of *Reguel*" would not be omitted in Ex. 3:1.

Ex. 2:21–25. Moses' Life in Midian.—As *Reguel* gave a hospitable welcome to Moses, in consequence of his daughters' report of the assistance that he had given them in watering their sheep; it pleased Moses () to dwell with him. The primary meaning of is *voluit* (vid., *Ges. thes.*). for : like in Gen. 4:23.—Although Moses received *Reguel's* daughter Zipporah as his wife, probably after a lengthened stay, his life in Midian was still a banishment and a school of bitter humiliation. He gave expression to this feeling at the birth of his first son in the name which he gave it, viz., *Gershom* ,) i.e., banishment, from to drive or thrust away); "for," he said, interpreting the name according to the sound, *"I have been a stranger* () in a strange land." In a strange land he was obliged to live, far away from his brethren in Egypt, and far from his fathers' land of promise; and in this strange land the longing for home seems to have been still further increased by his wife Zipporah, who, to judge from Ex. 4:24ff., neither understood nor cared for the feelings of his heart. By this he was urged on to perfect and unconditional submission to the will of his God. To this feeling of submission and confidence he gave expression at the birth of his second son, by calling him *Eliezer* () God is help); for he said, *"The God of my father* (Abraham or the three patriarchs, cf. 3:6) is my help, and has delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh" (Ex. 18:4). The birth of this son is not mentioned in the Hebrew text, but his name is given in Ex. 18:4, with this explanation.⁷ In the names of his two sons, Moses expressed all that had affected his mind in the land of Midian. The pride and self-will with which he had offered himself in Egypt as the deliverer and judge of his oppressed brethren, had been broken down by the feeling of exile. This feeling, however, had not passed into despair, but had been purified and raised into firm confidence in the God of his fathers, who had shown himself as his helper by delivering him from the sword of Pharaoh. In this state of mind, not only

did "his attachment to his people, and his longing to rejoin them, instead of cooling, grow stronger and stronger" (*Kurtz*), but the hope of the fulfillment of the promise given to the fathers was revived within him, and ripened into the firm confidence of faith.

Ex. 2:23–25. Verses 23–25 form the introduction to the next chapter. The cruel oppression of the Israelites in Egypt continued without intermission or amelioration. "*In those many days the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the service*" (i.e., their hard slave labour). The "*many days*" are the years of oppression, or the time between the birth of Moses and the birth of his children in Midian. The king of Egypt who died, was in any case the king mentioned in v. 15; but whether he was one and the same with the "*new king*" (Ex. 1:8), or a successor of his, cannot be decided. If the former were the case, we should have to assume, with *Baumgarten*, that the death of the king took place not very long after Moses' flight, seeing that he was an old man at the time of Moses' birth, and had a grown-up daughter. But the greater part of the "many days" would then fall in his successor's reign, which is obviously opposed to the meaning of the words, "It came to

pass in those many days, that the king of Egypt died." For this reason the other supposition, that the king mentioned here is a successor of the one mentioned in Ex. 1:8, has far greater probability. At the same time, all that can be determined from a comparison of Ex. 7:7 is, that the Egyptian oppression lasted more than 80 years. This allusion to the complaints of the Israelites, in connection with the notice of the king's death, seems to imply that they hoped for some amelioration of their lot from the change of government; and that when they were disappointed, and groaned the more bitterly in consequence, they cried to God for help and deliverance. This is evident from the remark, "*Their cry came up unto God,*" and is stated distinctly in Deut. 26:7.

Ex. 2:24, 25. *"God heard their crying, and remembered His covenant with the fathers: "and God saw the children of Israel, and God noticed *(them.*" "*This seeing and noticing had regard to the innermost nature of Israel, namely, as the chosen seed of Abraham*" (*Baumgarten*). *God's notice has all the energy of love and pity.* Lyra* has aptly explained thus: "*ad modum cognoscentis se habuit, ostendendo dilectionem circa eos;*" and *Luther* has paraphrased it correctly: "He accepted them."