

## Exodus 2:1-22

### Overview

The first four chapters of Exodus present a series of events in the life of Moses that anticipate the more detailed experiences of Israel in chapters 4-40 (Table 1). In Chapter 1, we considered the first two elements in the first panel, which cover nearly three hundred years (Figure 1).

This extended period allows the Hebrews to become absorbed into Egyptian culture. Yet, as we saw with the midwives, some people still remember the promise of God to the patriarchs, and we will see in this chapter how this memory leads to their deliverance.

Theme	First Panel, 1:1-4:17	Second Panel, 4:18-40:38
Entering Egypt	1:1-7, The eleven tribes go to Egypt and multiply	4:18-31, Moses returns to Egypt with his family
Oppression	1:8-22, Pharaoh oppresses Israel	5:1-23, Pharaoh increases the oppression
Leaders raised up	2:1-4, Moses born	6:1-27, Moses and Aaron commissioned by God
Moses in Pharaoh's Palace	2:5-10, Moses in Pharaoh's palace as the son of Pharaoh's daughter	6:28-13:16, Moses in Pharaoh's palace as deliverer
Travel to Horeb	2:11-15, Moses flees from Egypt to Midian	13:17-17:7, Israel travels from Egypt to Sinai
Conflict	2:16-17, Moses overcomes the shepherds	17:8-16, Moses overcomes Amalek
Moses and Jethro	2:18-22, Moses' Midianite family	18:1-27, Moses' Midianite family
Encounter with God at Horeb	2:23-4:17, Moses called to serve God "upon this mountain," 3:12	19:1-40:38, At Horeb, Israel enters covenant with God

Table 1: Moses as the Forerunner of Israel

### 2:1-4, Birth of Moses

Chapter 1 ended with Pharaoh's three efforts to suppress the Hebrews: work them to death, secretly kill the male children, and finally, openly murder Hebrew boys. Chapter 2 begins with one family's efforts to evade this persecution.

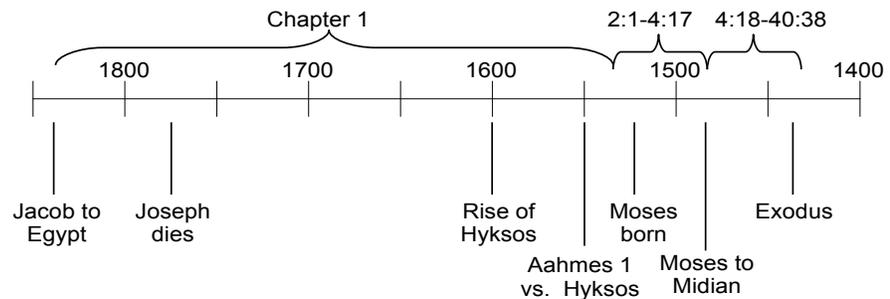


Figure 1: Internal Timeline of the Egyptian Sojourn

**1 And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.<sup>1</sup>**—This chapter focuses on the birth of Moses, the great law-giver. We later learn (4:14; 6:20) that Aaron, the head of the priestly family, is his elder brother.<sup>2</sup> Exod 6:20 also tells us that the father's name is Amram, and the mother's name is Jochebed.

- 1 Cassuto and Childs note the unusual syntax, אַתְּ בַת לֵוִי, implying that this is the only daughter of Levi left. But HALOT gives these examples of אַתְּ with undetermined noun: Ex 21:28; Nu 21:9; Qoh 3:15. The use of this particle is extremely convoluted (Waltke-O'Connell 10.3), so we should be cautious about Cassuto's conclusion. One possible meaning of the particle is emphatic, which would fit well here.
- 2 4:14 identifies him as Moses' brother. He dies at the age of 123 (Num 33:39), while Moses is still alive, and Moses later dies at the age of 120 (Deut 34:7), so Moses is at least three years younger than Aaron.

Exo 6:20 And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses:

And we will learn that his older sister is Miriam:

Exo 15:20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, ...

But at this point Moses suppresses this detail. He wants to emphasize that both parents are Levites, validating the later priestly functions fulfilled by their children.

The story continues with some striking parallels with the early chapters of Genesis, suggesting that we are intended to compare the history of the human race with the history of Israel.

**2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child,**—Literally, “she saw that he was good,” an echo of the refrain of Genesis 1 (4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

Gen 1:31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, **it was very good.**

In the original creation, God saw that Adam was good. Now Moses is declared good.

**she hid him three months. 3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch,**—The word “ark” (תֵּבָה *tēbah* H8392) appears only in this story and in the flood narrative, Genesis 6-9. (The “ark” of the covenant is a different Hebrew word.<sup>3</sup>) Noah’s ark, like Moses’, also had a waterproof coating:

Gen 6:14 Make thee an **ark** ... and ... **pitch it within and without** with pitch.<sup>4</sup>

Both had a covering or lid, and the person who opens it next engages in observation:

Exod 2:6 And when she had **opened** it, she **saw** [ראתה *ra-ah* H7200] the child

Gen 8:13 Noah **removed** the covering of the ark, and **looked** [*ra-ah*]

The history of Genesis describes the origin and preservation of a group of people (the human race). Now God is defining a new group of people, the people of God,<sup>5</sup> and preserving Moses as he preserved Noah.

**and put the child therein; and she laid [put] it in the flags by the river's brink.**—In fact, she is complying with Pharaoh’s command in 1:22, but instead of “throwing” the baby into the river (1:22), she gently places the child in the ark, and places the ark in the river.

**4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.**—Moses’ sister and mother must have had frequent contact with the baby, who at three months would still need to be nursed, as Miriam declares and as Pharaoh’s daughter realizes (2:7, 9).<sup>6</sup>

Jochebed probably selected the location in the river to be close to her dwelling, so that she could come frequently, when Miriam saw that the coast was clear, to nurse the child. But in the providence of God, she chooses the very place that Pharaoh’s daughter comes to bathe. We see the same providence here that we did with Ruth in picking a field in which to glean (chart):

3 ארון *arōn* H727

4 The verb in Genesis (כָּפַר) means simply to coat or cover, but HALOT cites W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, Wiesbaden 1965–, to support the meaning “pitch” or “bitumen” for the noun. The difference in vocabulary may be due to the Akkadian original that may lie behind the Genesis account, per Wiseman, *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis*.

5 Recall discussion of “Hebrew” in 1:15.

6 See also Stuart, citing Gruber, *JANES* 19 (1989) 61-83.

Rut 2:3 And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and **her hap was to light** on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

God guides her, as he later guides Ruth, to accomplish his purposes.

## 2:5-10, Moses in Pharaoh's Palace

**5 And the daughter of Pharaoh<sup>7</sup> came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. 6 And when she had opened it, she saw the child:**—The picture of Moses as a second Noah continues with the opening of the ark, and a critical observation.

**and, behold, the babe wept.**—Pharaoh's daughter probably came along just about when the baby needed to be fed and changed, which sets the stage for Miriam's suggestion in v. 7.

**And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.**—She recognized the baby immediately as a Hebrew. Why would a member of the royal household have compassion on a child of the race that Pharaoh had doomed to extinction?

The answer lies in an expression that appears only in the history of Israel in Egypt: “God gave X favor in the sight of Y.”<sup>8</sup> For example,

Gen. 39:21 But **the LORD** was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and **gave him favour in the sight of the keeper** of the prison.

Solomon realized,

Pro 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

We do not need princes to protect us from tyrants. The Lord can control them to protect his people, if that is what brings him the greatest glory.

**7 Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?**—Miriam, Moses' elder sister, shows herself a woman of remarkable resources and diplomatic skill. With a woman's intuition, she recognizes the compassion that Pharaoh's daughter shows to the crying baby, and addresses her with the utmost courtesy. “To thee” is the same Hebrew expression translated “for thee” (לך) (Cassuto). She presents herself as seeking to help the princess, not protect Moses.

The word “nurse” means “wet-nurse.” The use of wet-nurses in antiquity is well documented,<sup>9</sup> and if Pharaoh were having any success killing male Hebrew babies, we can imagine that there were numerous bereaved Hebrew women who could serve in this capacity.

**8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. 9 And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.**—God has completely reversed the situation that Pharaoh intended. Not only is Moses protected by the very royal house that sought to destroy him, but his

7 See note for possible identification with Hatshepsut.

8 נתן חן בעיני , also in Ex. 3:21; 11:3; 12:36. Related expressions found later are נתן להסד לפני (Dan 1:9) and נתן רחמים לפני (Gen. 43:14; 1 Kings 8:50; Psa. 106:46; Dan. 1:9; Neh. 1:11).

9 M.I. Gruber, “Breast-Feeding Practices In Biblical Israel and In Old Babylonian Mesopotamia.” *JANES* 19 (1989), 61-83.

mother is paid to raise him. Ironically, the Hebrew women whom Pharaoh spared are the ones who overturn his plan.

**And the woman took the child, and nursed it. 10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son.**—How long was Moses with his mother? We are accustomed to weaning children at six to twelve months, but in antiquity, and in some non-western cultures today, length of nursing could be “three, or seven, or ten, or even fifteen years of age.”<sup>10</sup> An Egyptian text contemporary with Moses<sup>11</sup> describes the period of nursing as three years. A good example to keep in mind is Samuel, whom his mother surrendered to Eli’s care after he was weaned:

1Sa 1:21 And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. 22 But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up **until the child be weaned**, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and **there abide for ever**.

Hebrew tradition says that Samuel was two years old when he went to live with Eli; he could have been four or five. He must have been old enough to function independently of his mother.

We may be sure that Jochebed was not in any rush to surrender her son to Pharaoh’s daughter, and would have prolonged the weaning as long as possible. Before Moses left his mother and father, he would have been able to talk. They would certainly have taught him the history of his people, describing God’s promises to them and his care for them in the time of famine. This sense of his identity, taught him by his parents, is foundational to what follows.

**And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.**—His deliverance from the dangers of the Nile would later become an encouragement to David of God’s ability to rescue his people from danger:

Psa. 18:16 He sent from above, he took me, he **drew me out** of many [great] waters.<sup>12</sup>

## 2:11-15, From Egypt to Midian

**11 And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown,**—Stephen in Acts 7:23, following a Jewish tradition<sup>13</sup>, sets Moses’ age at this point at 40 years.

**that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens<sup>14</sup>:**—The knowledge of his identity as a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob leads Moses to seek out his brethren, and he learns of their oppression.

**and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren.**—Note the relations among them. To the Egyptian, the man being smitten is a Hebrew, a foreigner. To Moses, he is a brother.

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10 Gruber, 67, with references.

11 The Instruction of Ani, vii.12, motivating a young man to honor his mother: “Thou wert born after thy months, (but) she was still yoked (with thee, for) her breast was in thy mouth for three years, continuously” (ANET 420d), dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty (1550-1292).

12 With parallel in 2 Sam 22:17, these are the only other uses of this root in the OT.

13 Exodus Rabbah 1:27 ([https://www.sefaria.org/Shemot\\_Rabbah.1.27?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Shemot_Rabbah.1.27?lang=bi)), which indicates some uncertainty between 20 and 40 years for this event.

14 This form, always plural, appears only in Exodus (1:11; 2:11; 5:4-5; 6:6-7), though סָבַל describes the Egyptian bondage in Ps 81:6 (MT 7).

**12 And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man,**—What was Moses seeking? We naturally assume that he was looking to be sure that he was not observed. But there is another possibility.<sup>15</sup> The expression “he saw that there was no man” appears one other time in the OT (chart):

Isa 59:14 And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. 15 Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. 16 **And he saw that there was no man**, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. 17 For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. 18 According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence.

Isaiah predicts that when the Lord sees injustice in the world, and finds that no one else will intervene, he arms himself and brings judgment, a prophecy of the Messiah. Isaiah may have the phrase in Exodus in mind, suggesting that Moses, outraged at the cruelty of the overseer and finding no official ready to intervene, takes the responsibility on himself.

This reading reveals Moses’ strong sense of justice, something we will see repeated when he tries to mediate a quarrel between two Israelites the next day, and again in Midian when he delivers the daughters of Reuel from bullying shepherds (Fretheim). God is shaping him to be the vehicle through which he will give and interpret his law to the nation.<sup>16</sup>

**he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.**—We’re not told what happened to the Egyptian’s victim. He probably fled when Moses distracted the Egyptian. But the next verse shows that he knew the outcome of Moses’ struggle, and shared it with his fellow slaves.

**13 And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow (עַר re-a H7453)?**—Moses discerns who started the fight, further emphasizing his innate sense of justice.

**14 And he said, Who made thee a prince (שַׂר sar H8269) and a judge over us?**—Ironically, throughout Exodus and Numbers, Moses was to be their judge (chart):

Ex. 18:13 And it came to pass on the morrow, that **Moses sat to judge the people**: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.

He described the situation to Jethro, using the same word that is translated “fellow” in 2:13:

Ex. 18:16 When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I **judge** between one and **another (עַר re-a H7453)**.

And though he is not called a prince (*sar*), he appointed princes over them, to help him judge:

Ex. 18:25 And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, **rulers (sar)** of thousands, **rulers (sar)** of hundreds, **rulers (sar)** of fifties, and **rulers (sar)** of tens. 26 And they **judged** the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they **judged** themselves.

<sup>15</sup> Greenberg, from *Shemot Rabbah* 1.29

<sup>16</sup> In Exodus 21-23, God dictates the interpretation of the ten commandments to Moses. But Deuteronomy is an extended sermon, expounding those laws, composed by Moses.

Throughout the journey to Sinai, and the wilderness wanderings that follow, we see this same rebellious spirit on the part of the children of Israel.

**intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?**—Apparently, the slave whom Moses saved from death has told his fellows. But instead of being grateful, they resent his position.

**And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.**—Moses fears that the ungrateful slaves will not protect his secret. And he is correct:

**15 Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses.**—Pharaoh learns of the fight between Moses and the overseer, and seeks to kill him.

**But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian:**—Midian was a half-brother of Isaac and Ishmael, born to Keturah, a slave<sup>17</sup> whom Abraham married after the death of Sarah (chart):

Gen 25:1 Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. 2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and **Midian**, and Ishbak, and Shuah.

To avoid conflict with Isaac, Abraham sent his other seven sons away to the east:

Gen 25:5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. 6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and **sent them away from Isaac his son**, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

The Midianites lived to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba (Figure 2, chart), though their caravans ranged throughout the levant, one of them bringing Joseph from Dothan to Egypt:

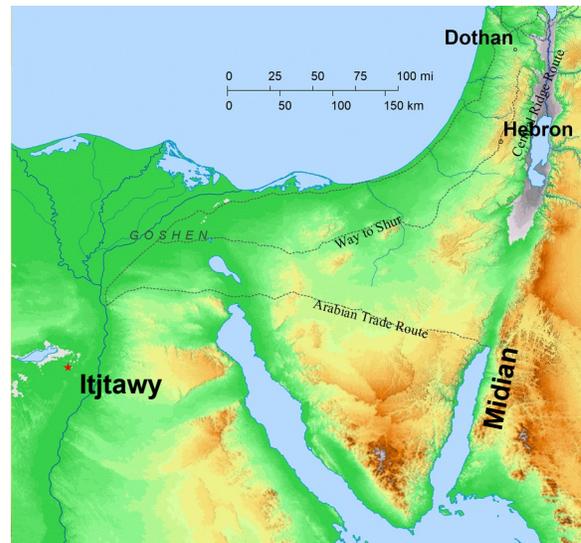
Gen 37:28 Then there passed by **Midianites** merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

**and he sat down by a well.**—Twice before in the Bible, a man, far from home, meets a woman at a well. In Genesis 24, Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, meets Rebekah at a well:

Gen 24:10 And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. 11 And he made his camels to kneel down without the city **by a well of water** at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water.

And in Genesis 29, Jacob, fleeing Esau, arrives at a well near Haran, where he meets Rachel.

Gen 29:1 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east. 2 And he looked, and **behold a well in the field**, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying



*Figure 2: Location of Midian (Itjtawy was capital of Egypt in 1855, when Joseph arrived, and where he would have entered Pharaoh’s court)*

<sup>17</sup> She is described as his concubine, or slave wife, in Gen 25:6.

by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth.

So we expect a romance, and we will not be disappointed (see note).

## 2:16-17, Conflict

**16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters:**

—We will consider this man's title of "priest" when we turn to the discussion of Moses' new family in vv. 18-22. For now, what matters is his daughters.

**and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.**—This architecture is used to this day (Figure 3, chart).



Figure 3: Goats being watered at troughs around a cistern in the wilderness of Judea (Van and Anita Parunak, June 1975)

**17 And the shepherds came and drove them away:**

—Most of the shepherds whom we meet in the Old Testament are male. Shepherding could be dangerous. David told Saul of his need to defend the flock from a lion and a bear (1 Sam 17:34-37). When Jacob arrived in Haran (Gen 29), those he found waiting at the well were male (based on the verb forms and pronouns), though apparently too weak to remove the stone from the well. Rachel brought Laban's sheep there (29:6), as the daughters of Reuel come now. But they would be at a physical disadvantage in a competition with male shepherds for access to the well.

**but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.**—As with the overseer in 2:11 and the conflict between Israelites in 2:13, Moses' sense of justice is evident. He cannot stand by and see injustice done.

## 2:18-22, Moses' Midianite Family

Moses' father-in-law is introduced as a priest, in v. 16. Let's pause to consider this office (chart).

**16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters:**—Exodus will have much to say about priests descended from Moses' brother Aaron, so it is interesting that the first priest in the book is not a Levitical priest, or even an Israelite, but a Midianite. In fact, the first "priest" in the Bible is not even a descendant of Abraham:

Gen 14:18 And **Melchizedek** king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the **priest** of the most high God (אל עליון *el elyōn* H410+H5945).

Hebrews tells us the main function of a priest:

Heb 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, **that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:**

People have always felt awkward in their relation to God. The law of God written in their hearts (Rom 2:15) shows them that they fall short of their creator's expectations. They try to make up for this shortcoming by bringing him offerings, and especially blood sacrifices.<sup>18</sup>

18 Gifts (δῶρον *dōron* G1435) is generic, including both bloody and unbloody sacrifices, while offerings (θυσία *thusia* G2378) are specifically bloody sacrifices. Westcott associates "for sin" only with the sacrifices, but the

While Melchizedek is the first person called a priest, the priestly function of bringing gifts and offerings for sin goes back to Eden.<sup>19</sup> Originally, heads of families performed this role:

Gen 4:3 And in process of time it came to pass, that **Cain** brought of the fruit of the ground an **offering** unto the LORD. 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto **Abel and to his offering**:

Gen 8:20 And **Noah** builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and **offered burnt offerings** on the altar.

Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto **Abram**, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an **altar** (מִזְבֵּחַ *mizbēach* H4196 “place of slaughter”) unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

Job 1:5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that **Job** sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and **offered burnt offerings** according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

But the terror of confronting a holy God led people to seek specially qualified individuals to intercede for them. Even Abraham recognized the priority of Melchizedek. Egypt had many priests (Gen 47:22, 26), one of whom was Joseph’s father-in-law (chart):

Gen 41:45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of **Potipherah priest of On**.

What god did the priest of Midian serve? As a descendant of Abraham, he would have known of Abraham’s God, El Shaddai:

Gen 17:1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the **Almighty God (El Shaddai)**; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

Abraham may also have passed on the name of El Elyon, which he learned from Melchizedek.<sup>20</sup>

Moses’ father in law would have learned from Moses that they both were descended from Abraham, and after the Lord revealed himself to Moses as YHWH in Exodus 3, Moses would certainly have related his experience to his father-in-law. When they meet again in Exodus 18, his father-in-law acknowledges the power of YHWH.

Exo 18:10 And Jethro said, Blessed be the LORD, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.

So it is likely that, like Melchizedek, he worships the true God.

The rest of Exodus will greatly refine the concept of priesthood, by introducing the Levitical priesthood. It is important for us to remember that the Lord Jesus has come as our great high

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law provided for meal offerings for sin for the poor (Lev 5:11), and the tight bond marked by τε καί suggests to most commentators that “for sin” is associated with the verb “offer,” not just with “offerings.”

19 See note for further discussion.

20 There is no evidence that Abraham himself worshipped God under this name. It appears in the Pentateuch only in Gen 14:18, 19, 20, 22, but resurfaces in Ps 78:35, describing Israel in the wilderness, under chastisement, remembering that “אל עליון” was their redeemer.” The Psalmist thus identifies the God on whom Israel called in distress with the one who met Abram after his war with the kings.

priest, and replaced all these intermediaries. Now we need no other humans to stand between us and God. There is now only one mediator between God and man, himself both God and man, our Lord Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). He is both priest and sacrifice. Hebrews describes him as the better high priest, who supersedes all others:

Heb 7:15 ... after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, 16 Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. 17 For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. 18 For there is verily a **disannulling of the commandment going before** for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.

Melchizedek, the first priest, points to Christ, the final priest, thus rounding off the institution. As a priest, the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus offers is his own life, as he taught:

Jhn 10:17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because **I lay down my life**, that I might take it again. 18 No man taketh it from me, but **I lay it down of myself**. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

But at this point in history of the book of Exodus, Christ has not yet come, and other priests continue to represent people before God with temporary, symbolic offerings, pointing to his future, final offering of himself on the cross.

Thus the Lord provides for Moses' spiritual development. First, the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter gives him several years of instruction by his parents. Now, Pharaoh's hostility drives him to the home of another worshipper of the God of the fathers.<sup>21</sup>

**18 And when they came to Reuel their father,**—Reuel is his family name. Later, in Exodus 18, he will be called by his personal name, Jethro.<sup>22</sup>

He has two questions for his daughters.

**he said, How is it that ye are come so soon to day?**—He is surprised at their soon return.

**19 And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds,**—Note the articles: “an” Egyptian (someone they don't know, and have not met before), but “the” shepherds (those rowdy boys who always make trouble for us). They are regularly delayed because the shepherds insist on watering their flocks first, but today someone has intervened.

**and also drew water enough for us, and watered the flock.**—They were drawing water when the shepherds interrupted, but Moses finished the work for them.

**20 And he said unto his daughters, And where is he? why is it that ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread.**—His second question is a mild rebuke: after this act of kindness, how could you leave him standing by the well? Go get him, and bring him home.<sup>23</sup>

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- 21 Unfortunately, Jethro's sympathy with the Israelites and his recognition of their God did not spread among his people, for in Num 22:3-4, the Midianites join with the Moabites to fight against Israel, and it was a Midianite woman who seduced Zimri in sacred prostitution (Num 25:1-6).
- 22 “Reuel” is the name of Jethro's father, Num 10:29, where Hobab is a younger brother to Jethro. “Jethro” is from the root meaning “abundance,” while “Reuel” means “God is my friend” or “God is my shepherd.” The family name may be used here to emphasize the protection and direction that the Lord is giving Moses.
- 23 It is interesting that Reuel sends the girls to get Moses. Laban went to the well to welcome both Eliezer (Gen 24:29) and Jacob (Gen 29:13).

Eliezer and Jacob found a ready welcome in Haran because of their family connections, but Moses' only credentials are his actions, guided by his sense of justice.

**21 And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter.**—Moses' previous efforts to right the wrongs he sees are met with rejection, not only by the Egyptians (Pharaoh in 2:15), but even by his brethren (2:14). But now a Midianite receives and supports him.

**22 And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom:**—In naming a baby, parents often pick either a family name or a name with special meaning. Moses does both.

Levi's three sons were Kohath (from whom Aaron and Moses were descended), Merari, and the firstborn Gershom (chart).<sup>24</sup>

1Ch 6:16 The sons of Levi; Gershom, Kohath, and Merari.

Moses, feeling strongly his family bonds to the people far away in Egypt, picks the name of the eldest son of the head of his tribe for his own eldest son. But through a pun, the name also has a special meaning:<sup>25</sup>

**for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land.**—The Hebrew word for “stranger” is גֵר *gēr* H1616, and *šom* is very close to שָׁם *šām* H8033, an adverb meaning “there.” So the name can be understood as “a stranger there.”

This explanation of the name is so important that it is repeated in 18:3, and is probably intended to remind us of earlier references to “stranger” in the Pentateuch. The word *gēr* only occurs twice before this. When he named his son, Moses probably had in mind the later instance, when Abraham negotiates with the sons of Heth to purchase a sepulcher for Sarah:

Gen. 23:4 I am a **stranger** and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

Abraham was also a stranger, though in a land that had been promised to him, but Moses finds himself a stranger in a strange land.

But as he writes Exodus years later, the flow of the book shows that he also recalls the earlier instance of the word. God used it when he made his covenant with Abraham:

Gen. 15:13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a **stranger** in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; 14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. 15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

At the time of the covenant, God outlined the history of Abraham's descendants. We have already seen their journey to “a land that is not theirs,” and the fulfillment of “they shall serve” them (using the root עָבַד *abad* H5647 that was so prominent in chapter 1). Now the 400 years are almost over, and we are about to learn how God will fulfill Gen 15:14.

24 Final ׀ appears in 1 Chr 6:16, 17, 20, 43, 62, 71 [Hebrew 6:1, 2, 5, 28, 47, 56]; 15:7; גֵרֶשׁוֹן Gen 46:11; Ex 6:16f; and elsewhere.

25 This explanation follows Cassuto.

## Notes

### Who was Pharaoh's Daughter?

An intriguing possibility is that this person later took the throne of Egypt as Hatshepsut.

If we date the Exodus at 1446, Moses' birth 80 years earlier would be 1526, and he would have left Egypt for Midian 40 years later, in 1486. From Wikipedia, the Pharaohs over this time period were:

Regnal Dates	Pharaoh	Descent	Relation to Moses
c. 1550	Ahmosé I	Expelled Hyksos	
1526-1506	Amenhotep I	Son of Ahmosé I	Birth
1506-1493	Thutmose I	Unclear	Exile to Midian
1493-1479	Thutmose II	Son of Thutmose I	
1479-1458 (b c. 1505)	Hatshepsut	Dtr of Thutmose I	
1458-1425	Thutmose III	Son of Hatshepsut (cogegent from 1479)	Exodus

It looks as though she was born too late to take the throne. A daughter of Pharaoh at the time of Moses' birth would be a daughter of Ahmosé I or Amenhotep I. If either had been alive at this time, she would have succeeded Amenhotep.

### Encounters at Wells

Reference	Man	Woman	Man's Role	Obstacle	Supporters	Marriage
Gen 24:11-67	Eliezer	Rebekah	Asks for a drink	Uncertainty	God, Laban	Isaac
Gen 29:1-20	Jacob	Rachel	Rolls away the stone; waters her flock	Heavy Stone	Laban	Jacob
Exod 2:15-21	Moses	Daughters of Jethro	Defends from Shepherds; waters her flock	Shepherds	Jethro	Moses
John 4:5-42	Christ	Woman of Samaria	Asks for a drink; offers her water	Disciples?	Samaritans	Christ

*Table 2: Encounters at Wells*

Table 2 summarizes the four meetings of a man with a woman at a well.

### Notes on Priesthood

How could there be priests in Exod 19:22, before their consecration is defined in Exodus 28?

## Sacrificial Role of Elders

A major role of priests is offering sacrifice:

Heb 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, **that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins**:

Before the institution of the Levitical priesthood, others performed this function:

Gen 4:3 And in process of time it came to pass, that **Cain** brought of the fruit of the ground an **offering** unto the LORD. 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto **Abel and to his offering**:

Gen 8:20 And **Noah** builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and **offered burnt offerings** on the altar.

Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto **Abram**, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an **altar** (**מִזְבֵּחַ** *mizbēach* H4196 “**place of slaughter**”) unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

Gen 31:54 Then **Jacob offered sacrifice** upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount.

Gen 46:1 And **Israel** took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and **offered sacrifices** unto the God of his father Isaac.

Job 1:5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that **Job** sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and **offered burnt offerings** according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

Job 42:8 Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and **offer up for yourselves a burnt offering**; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.

Exo 3:18 And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the **elders** of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, **that we may sacrifice** to the LORD our God.

Ex. 24:5 And he sent **young men** of the children of Israel, which **offered** burnt offerings, and **sacrificed** peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. *It is noteworthy that this happens after the entire nation is described as priestly, in 19:6. In earlier times, it would be the elders who would serve this role.*

## כהן as “chief ruler”

2Sam. 8:18 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and **David's sons were chief rulers** **כהֲנִיִּים**.

2Sam. 20:26 And **Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler** **כהֲן** about David.

1Kings 4:5 And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and **Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer** **כהֲן**, and the king's friend:

## Evolution of the term within Exodus

Exodus is a bridge between the patriarchal worship recorded in Genesis, and the Levitical ritual expounded in Leviticus. This transitional role is particularly clear in the uses of the word family  $\sqrt{\text{כהן}}$  (Figure 4).

- The first references are to the non-Israelite Reuel/Jethro, recalling the first priest in Genesis, Melchizedek.

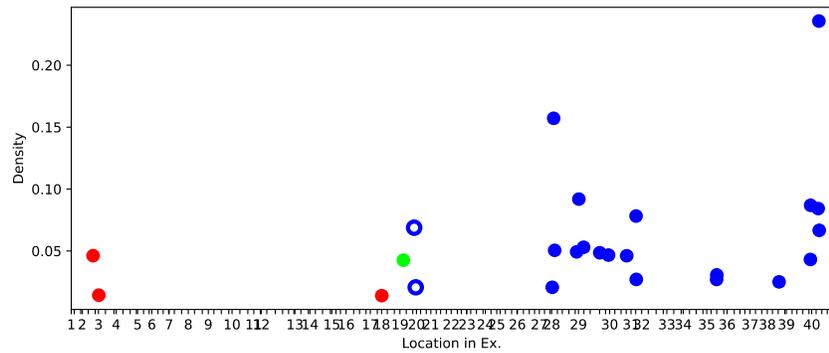


Figure 4:  $\sqrt{\text{כהן}}$  in Exodus. Red: Reuel/Jethro. Green: the nation. Hollow: pre-Levitical Israelite priests. Blue: levites.

- Then, after a reminder that the entire nation has a priestly role (19:6), we are reminded that there were priests among the people (19:22, 24) even before God ordained the Levites.
- Only after this introduction does God set apart the sons of Aaron to serve the tabernacle.