

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 1: Israel Enslaved and a Deliverer Born -- Exodus 1:1–2:25

Picture a family reunion that fills a stadium. Four hundred years earlier, a single household of seventy people had walked into Egypt, hungry and grateful, welcomed by a son they thought they had lost. Now their descendants are everywhere, a sea of faces, a people so numerous that the text says the land was filled with them. God had made a promise to Abraham about descendants like the stars, and here, in a foreign country, the promise is quietly coming true. You can almost hear the noise of all those children.

Then comes a sentence that changes everything. A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. He looked at all those Israelites and did not see a blessing. He saw a threat. Fear has a way of turning gratitude into cruelty, and within a few verses the welcome has become a whip. Taskmasters, brick quotas, bitter labor, and finally an order so dark it is hard to read aloud: every Hebrew baby boy is to be thrown into the Nile. This is what the world does when it forgets God. It builds its security on someone else's suffering.

But notice who refuses to bow. Two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, women with names God thought worth recording when He left Pharaoh nameless, simply will not kill the babies. They fear God more than they fear the king, and God deals well with them. Then a mother hides her son for three months, and when she can hide him no longer, she does not surrender him to the river of death. She places him in a little ark and lets the same Nile that was meant to drown him carry him to a princess. Quiet courage, it turns out, is how God moves history.

By the end of these two chapters a deliverer has been born, raised in Pharaoh's own house, and then exiled to the back side of a desert, tending sheep, far from anything that looks like rescue. And the chapter closes not with a hero but with a sound. God heard their groaning. God remembered His covenant. God saw the people of Israel, and God knew. Long before Moses lifts a staff, the real story is that God has not forgotten. Hold on to that, because there are seasons in your own life when deliverance feels born but hidden, and the only thing you can cling to is that God still sees and still remembers.

Group Discussion: Where in this passage do you see God at work, even though His name is barely mentioned and no miracle has yet happened? What does that suggest about how God often works in our own lives?

Personal Reflection: Pharaoh acted out of fear, and fear made him cruel. Where is fear currently shaping the way you treat people or the choices you make, and what would it look like to fear God more than you fear your circumstances?

Read Exodus 1:1–2:25

Study Questions

1. Read 1:6–7. The text deliberately echoes God's words to Adam and to Noah, that Israel was fruitful, increased greatly, and filled the land. What does this growth reveal about God keeping the promise He made to Abraham (Genesis 15:5), even while Israel is far from the promised land and unaware of it?
2. The Israelites multiplied during years of relative ease and then faced bitter slavery. Think about your own walk with God. How do seasons of comfort and seasons of hardship each tend to shape your faith, and which one is shaping you right now?
3. Read 1:15–21. The midwives feared God rather than Pharaoh and refused to kill the babies. What does their example teach about the limits of human authority and about obeying God when a human command contradicts His will (compare Acts 5:29)?
4. Shiphrah and Puah did the right thing quietly, at real risk, when no one powerful was watching. Where is God asking you to do a quiet, costly right thing that no one may ever notice or applaud?
5. Read 2:1–10. Moses' mother placed him in an ark of bulrushes on the very river meant to drown him. How do you see God's unseen providence at work in the details here, arranging a princess, a sister, and even paying the true mother to nurse her own son?

6. Moses' mother had to let go of her son, trusting him to God and to the current of a dangerous river. What is something you are gripping tightly right now that God may be asking you to release into His care?

7. Read 2:11–15. Moses tried to deliver his people his own way, by his own hand and on his own timing, and it ended in a dead Egyptian and forty years in the desert. What does this teach about the difference between zeal for God's cause and doing God's work in God's way?

8. Moses spent forty years in Pharaoh's palace learning to be somebody, and forty years in the desert learning to be nobody. Where might God be using a slow, hidden, humbling season to prepare you for something you cannot yet see?

9. Read 2:23–25. Four times the text says God heard, God remembered, God saw, and God knew. Israel's deliverance had not yet come, yet everything turned on the fact that God had not forgotten His covenant. Why is the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises the true foundation of hope, both for Israel then and for us in Christ now (compare 2 Corinthians 1:20)?

10. Look back across these two chapters, from a groaning people to a hidden deliverer God was already preparing. Name one specific way this passage is teaching you to trust that God sees, remembers, and is at work in your life even when no rescue is yet in sight, and how Jesus, the greater Deliverer, makes that trust certain.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 15:13–14, where God foretold to Abraham both the bondage in Egypt and the deliverance to come; Acts 7:17–22, where Stephen retells these events and frames Moses as a deliverer; Hebrews 11:23–27, which praises the faith of Moses and his parents who feared God rather than the king; Romans 8:28, which assures us that God works all things together for good for those who love Him; Acts 5:29, where the apostles declare that we must obey God rather than men.

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