

The whole of this story leads us carefully towards its beautiful climax; through the vigilant placement of the child's sister, his own mother was called to look after him until Pharaoh's daughter felt it right to introduce him to court. It is a story with a happy ending! The happy ending was important and powerful enough for those involved at the time, but it shows that God's purposes are to bless, and not to curse. This passage in Exodus is the beginning of a long story which, by the power of God, will have a different happy ending through the deliverance of all the Hebrew people from slavery.

The final verses of the passage deal with the naming of Moses, which as Scripture says, is related to the idea of 'drawing water' (2:10). There is much dispute about the meaning of Moses' name, as the word itself does not bear the hallmarks of a genuine ancient Hebrew name (although, quite obviously, it is now). Exodus 2:10 connects the name to the Hebrew word 'mashah', meaning 'to draw out of water', but the nearest word to 'Moses' is a different Egyptian word for 'to bear a son', and because his name was given him by an Egyptian (Pharaoh's daughter) not his mother (2:10), some believe that the real meaning of Moses' name must be 'son'. It may well be best, however, to accept the Scriptural definition which comes from Hebrew, because the story uses it to point us towards the saving work of God; and this will indeed be done 'out of water', in the most dramatic moment of the book of Exodus, the crossing of the 'Red Sea' (Ex 14).

### Application

This story contains a wealth of spiritual guidance if we look just beneath the surface of the story. There is much in here about trusting God in the most extreme of circumstances, and the risks that we must sometimes take on the path of faith. If we were to place ourselves in the position of the young Levite mother, we could imagine her planning, her trust that God would save her child, her anticipation of her plan, maybe with some doubts about it, and perhaps some prayer. This is a considerable example of faith in action which was rewarded by God's use of the child, Moses, for the salvation of His people.

The story also tells us, as Scripture frequently does, that God is able to use even those outside His chosen people, in order to achieve His purposes. Here, He uses Pharaoh's daughter and her entourage. Indeed, we will find out next that God uses the Egyptian court to train Moses for tasks ahead. In our own lives, we should always expect to find that God has used or is using people around us to bring about what is good or right, or is in His will for the future, and that will sometimes require of us great trust. Imagine what it must have been like for Moses' mother to hand her son over! But from her point of view, at least he was saved; and from God's point of view, He was making a servant out of the child who would also have faith and do His will.

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. Which part of this story affects you most and makes you 'feel' what is going on?
2. Why do you think that God had to use Pharaoh's daughter in this way? Why could he not raise a child to deliver His people from within His people, excluding the Egyptians?
3. What motives might Pharaoh's daughter have for doing what she did?

### Discipleship

Stories like this in the Bible often challenge us deeply about the extent of our faith. This is particularly true when we read of people in extreme circumstances. Take some time to reflect upon some of the extreme circumstances of your own life, and ask yourself the question; 'have I exercised faith in this matter?' Sometimes we abandon faith, but at other times the greatest faith comes when we have no other options, and we turn to God with nothing left. We need to learn from both experiences.

### Final Prayer

Dear Jesus. You love all the children You have made, and You watch them as they grow and as they respond to the world around them. May we be sensitive to the needs of small children and seek to care for them in a manner that reflects Your love, so that one day, they may understand the truth of the Gospel. AMEN

### Prayer

Set a fire in our hearts, Lord God, which burns and never goes out. May it burn away the darkness of the world; may it burn with a zeal for the Lord's will; may it burn strongly with a flame of love which never despairs; and may it burn brightly to bring light to the world. Holy Spirit, set Your fire in our hearts which burns forever! AMEN

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: The Church Triumphant

The churches which we attend all had their origins in the work of the Holy Spirit amongst people who have long since passed on to glory. Do your best to read about these people and learn from their stories. Pray that the Lord will inspire young people and old alike by these stories, so that this generation will know its heritage and grow in the path of the Kingdom.

### Meditation

(A personal enquiry about prayer)

When do I pray?  
Every day? Every few days? From time to time?  
The Lord says: 'I'm open all hours'.

How do I pray?  
In a word? The odd sentence? Set words? Form the heart?  
The Lord says: 'Speak as you wish'.

Where do I pray?  
At home? By myself? Only with others? At Church?  
The Lord says: 'I'm always there'.

What do I pray?  
About me? About my family? My work? What I should do?  
The Lord says: 'Tell me all about it'.

### Bible Study - Exodus 2:1-10

<sup>1</sup> There was a man from the house of Levi who married a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup> She conceived and gave birth to a son, and when she saw that he was a healthy baby, she hid him for three months. <sup>3</sup> When she could hide him no longer, she obtained a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. <sup>4</sup> His sister placed herself at a suitable distance, to see what would happen to him.

<sup>5</sup> Now, Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe while her attendants walked beside the river, and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. <sup>6</sup> When she opened it, she saw the baby, and he was crying; so she took pity on him. She said; 'This must be one of the Hebrew babies.' <sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' <sup>8</sup> 'Yes, go on.' She said. 'So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the child and nursed it.

<sup>10</sup> When the boy grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because,' she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

### Review

This is the beginning of the story of Moses, the great leader of God's people, and chosen by the Lord to bring deliverance to His people. Within chapter 1, Exodus has already painted a bleak

picture of life for the people of Israel in the years after Joseph died, and emphasised the cruelty they experienced under the authority of a 'new king' (1:8). The story of the childhood and growth of Moses which now follows is set against this dire picture, but its details display tenderness and human warmth which contrast dramatically with the social setting, and show the essential humanity of those involved, both Hebrew and Egyptian. God's new saving work for His people began with the birth of a child; a powerful Biblical sign of the sovereign work of the Almighty in His world.

The story begins with drama. The young male children of the Hebrews were under sentence of death, and the Levite woman (who is unnamed in this passage) only did what we can imagine many others attempted. That is, to find a way to save her baby. Her maternal instincts for the salvation of her child are taken by the Lord and used in ways she could never imagine. The young child is not named straight away, and although the mother was presumably young, he had an older sister who played a crucial role in the story (2:4,7). Later on in Exodus, we will discover more about the names of Moses' family, but the story line of this passage is focussed on the baby himself and his escape from certain death.

The young child was placed in a watertight basket, using materials which were the same as those used by Noah to create the Ark (2:3)! Scripture often uses words in special ways like this to bring to our attention what God was doing. The mother may not have known how powerfully God was using her, but what she did was not a casual act; it was part of a carefully thought out plan. After being placed at the water's edge where he could be spotted, the child's sister stood nearby to ensure he came to no harm and also to take advantage of what might happen.

It is quite probable that the mother placed her child just where she knew the daughter of Pharaoh would come to bathe, and her plan worked. Pharaoh's daughter saw the child, was moved by his crying, summoned assistance, and the child's sister was then able to take the boy to his mother. He could now be weaned and raised by his mother until Pharaoh's daughter claimed him (2:9). The whole story is told with gentleness and compassion, and it has captured the imaginations of generations of Israelite people, and now, Christians. However, if we look at the narrative with care, it is something of a parody. God used an Egyptian member of Pharaoh's court to save, rear and train the child who would one day return to that court (Ex 5-11) and negotiate the deliverance of God's people from slavery, denying Pharaoh a major part of his workforce! In Old Testament times, the way that God used and manipulated Egypt and the court of Pharaoh for His own purposes was a subject of great interest, and it inspired the prophets. If God could manipulate the Egyptians to achieve His purposes, they believed that He could also use even Babylon, or the Persian Empire, (e.g. Isaiah 45:1f., Ezra 1:1f.) in order to do His will for His people, especially at times of suffering.

The explanation of Moses' name at the end of our passage today is the subject of some controversy (which we shall look at later), but it is clearly intended to tell us about God's work of salvation. To be 'drawn out of water' is an ancient way of saying 'to be saved'. Moses' name was a sign of what God would do through him, for his people and for all who follow in the ways of the Lord.

### Going Deeper

This touching story begins with the birth of a child and ends with a prophecy of deliverance contained within the child's name. Each part of it tells a very human story which has appealed to people throughout the centuries. There are many questions raised by the story, but it remains a powerful description of the way God works through even the strangest of events to bring about His purposes.

#### ***The Levite woman, the baby and the papyrus basket***

Moses was born to a Levite couple, that is, members of the tribe of Levi, son of Jacob. Because of the great importance of Moses to the whole history of God's people, the subject of his family was one of great intrigue in later generations. Exodus itself yields only a little interesting information about the family, and this fills out some of the human details which helps us to feel that we can relate to the story. In Exodus 6:20, Moses' parents are identified as Amram and Jochebed, though their exact genealogical connection with Levi is not given anywhere in Scripture. Many people have assumed that Moses was the firstborn son, but we can only guess at this. He may have been the first son, but he did at least have an older sister

who looked after him in this story. Tradition suggests that this was Miriam, Moses' sister (15:20, Deut. 24:9 etc.) who is described as a prophetess, singing a great song of deliverance after the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 15). However, we should be cautious about assuming too much. In those days, families were large, and there may well have been a number of sisters who could have fulfilled these roles. In addition, we know that Aaron was Moses' brother (or half-brother; the Hebrew text is not clear), and this should warn us to be content with what Scripture tells us, and no more.

It was the tradition of the people of Israel to name babies after 8 days, but the dire state of the people meant that such social niceties were not the main concern. Survival was all, and it is not too hard to imagine how a woman might plan what to do if they gave birth to a baby boy in these difficult social circumstances. Moses' mother hid the child 'for three months' (2:2), and she then put her plan into immediate effect (2:3). It had to work quickly, for a new-born baby would not have been able to survive long when left abandoned in a river like this. The details of the story in verses 3 and 4 add to the suspense of the story, and also the strong impression that it was highly planned; but that does not mean to say that God was not working powerfully through everything, in ways that the people involved may not have fully understood.

Scholars have always observed that there are strong literary connections between the papyrus basket made for Moses and the Ark made by Noah. For example, the papyrus basket made by the young woman is described with a unique Hebrew word 'tebah', which means 'box', and is used only here and with reference to Noah's Ark in Genesis 6:14. In both cases, the basket and the Ark are made watertight by 'pitch' (2:3 see also Gen 6:14); so these and other connections are Scripture's way of saying that God was working uniquely through these events to achieve His saving purposes.

Balancing this reference to salvation in the past, the passage also gives us something which points forwards, and not backwards. The basket was placed amongst 'reeds', a word for which the Hebrew is 'suph'; this is the same as the name of the sea which the people of Israel walked through 'on dry land' at Moses' command (14:15f.); literally, the 'yam suph'. This sea is traditionally reckoned to be the 'Red Sea', or some part of the upper reaches of it, but the Hebrew words 'yam suph' mean 'Sea of Reeds'! Again, it may be tempting to think that the connection is only casual, but Hebrew stories are frequently told using word patterns and connections such as this to bring out the story lines and themes.

#### ***Pharaoh's daughter, the sister, and Moses' mother***

As the story unfolds, there is a tender, feminine feel within the way it is told. Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe (presumably at some known or favoured spot), and saw the basket containing the young baby, sending her maid to investigate. In a simple but moving sentence, Scripture tells us that she immediately warmed to the small child who was crying (2:6). On the one hand, we can all imagine the scene quite vividly, but some of the power of the story lies in the emotive response that this evokes in us; for the cries and the helplessness of the baby have secured its safety. It was an entirely natural response from the child, but through it, salvation was secured and God's will was done. Moreover, Pharaoh's daughter knew full well what was going on. Her words, 'this must be one of the Hebrew babies' indicate that she knew the plight of the Hebrews, she was aware that babies were being thrown into the Nile, and she was rescuing one of them against the will of her father, Pharaoh.

We must not assume that this daughter of Pharaoh was necessarily very close to her father, though. As a daughter, she had privileges within the large extended family of Pharaoh and the court, but a great Pharaoh might have had large numbers of sons and daughters, and from what we know about their lives, it is likely they had little to do with most of their offspring except perhaps one or two favourites. This daughter was distant enough from her father to act against his will without fear of retribution, but sufficiently provided for to be able to command an entourage of servants and determine her own place and security at court. As a higher ranking Egyptian, she showed remarkable compassion by accepting the child, and apparently knowingly, asking for the child to be cared for by a Hebrew woman. She had, in effect, adopted him for reasons we are not told; but although we hear no more of her in the story, she clearly knew what she was doing.