

**Exegetical Notes, Exodus 2:11-25**  
**“A Stranger Here”**

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**Exodus 2:11-25**

(This story is also told in Acts 7:23-29 and in Hebrews 11:24-27.)

**Verse 11**

*One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.*

- According to the Book of Acts, Moses was 40 years old when these events took place. He had grown up as a child of privilege in Pharaoh's palace as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. But he knew that he was a Hebrew by birth. Hebrews implies that he also knew that he had a special part to play in leading God's children out of slavery in Egypt.
- On the day about which the Scripture speaks, Moses left the palace and went out to observe the Hebrews working on some project. There, he saw an Egyptian officer beating a Hebrew slave. As slaves were simply property, and Pharaoh had given orders to drive them hard, no one would have thought the Egyptian to be acting in any way improperly.

**Verse 12**

*Glancing this way and that, and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.*

- Moses' behavior indicates that he knew that his action would be considered wrong, even for a prince of Egypt. However, believing himself to be unseen, he murdered the Egyptian.
- This was a monumental moment in Moses' life. By doing what he did, he cast his lot with the Hebrews. However, his tactics are questionable and, clearly, his actions were not ordained by God.

### **Verse 13-14**

***The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?” The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.”***

- The day after Moses had killed the Egyptian, he came across two Hebrews who were fighting with each other. He asked them why they were fighting. Notice that Moses addresses the man who had done wrong, thereby taking the side of the man who was wronged. The man revealed to Moses that they knew he had killed the Egyptian and hidden his body in the sand. This meant that what Moses thought he had done in secret was now generally known. Someone, perhaps the Hebrew the Egyptian had been beating, had told the story, at least among the Hebrews. Moses’ secret was not a secret.
- Actions taken outside of the will of God often have far reaching consequences. Since Moses is known as a lawbreaker among the Hebrews, who may not have known of his secret identity as one of them, the two slaves who were fighting, and with them all of Israel, reject him as their leader. They do not expect that he will act in their best interest since they saw him kill the Egyptian.
- Moses was afraid because the Hebrews knew what he had done to the Egyptian. Hebrews 11:27 says that Moses feared what would happen when Pharaoh learned of his actions. He correctly understood that, since the news of his action was out, he was in trouble.

### **Verse 15**

***When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.***

- Scholars are generally agreed that a change in Pharaoh had occurred during the first 40 years of Moses’ life. So this Pharaoh was not the father of the woman that raised Moses but, most likely, her brother. He would, then, have been a contemporary of Moses who, perhaps, resented Moses’ presence in the palace.
- Since this Pharaoh was set against him, and the Hebrews did not want him, Moses ran away to the land of Midian, a place located in the southeastern corner of the Sinai. There, he hoped to escape Pharaoh.

### **Verse 16**

***Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock.***

- As Moses was sitting near a well in Midian, the seven daughters of a local priest came to water their father's sheep.
- It is hard to say what god "a priest of Midian" served. In Exodus 18:10-12, the text indicates that Reuel/Jethro came to know that YHWH was the supreme God. That would imply that he did not serve YHWH at the time Moses met him.

### **Verse 17**

***Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.***

- Other shepherds allowed the daughters of the priest to fill the troughs with water. Then they pushed the girls away so that they could water their own sheep first.
- What Moses witnesses was unfair treatment. The other shepherds were taking advantage of the priest's daughters in much the same way as the Egyptians were taking advantage of the Hebrews. Again, he took the side of the abused. He interceded on behalf of the women and made the other shepherds wait their turn.

### **Verse 18**

***When the girls returned to Reuel, their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"***

- Apparently, what Moses witnessed at the well on that day was regular practice. Every day the other shepherds took advantage of the priest's daughters in the same way. It was so much a part of their routine that, when it did not occur, they got home early. Early enough for their father to ask what had happened to allow their early return.
- In this passage the priest of Midian is named Reuel. In Exodus 3:1 he is called Jethro. The name Reuel means "friend of God." Jethro is probably a title similar to "your excellency."

### **Verse 19**

***They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."***

- Notice that Reuel's daughters identify Moses as an Egyptian. But remember that he is not an Egyptian. He is a Hebrew. This

identification highlights Moses' problem. He is a man without a country. In Egypt, the Egyptians do not accept him nor is he accepted by the Hebrews.

### **Verse 20**

***“And where is he?” he asked his daughters, “Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.”***

- However, in the land of Midian where Moses is a stranger, he discovers people who care for him and extend to him hospitality.

### **Verse 21-22**

***Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, “I have become an alien in a foreign land.”***

- Since Moses was homeless, he settled with the family of Reuel. He married Zipporah, Reuel's daughter. They had a son. Moses named the baby Gershom which means “an alien there.” The baby's name sums up Moses' feeling about his life at that time. He was a man without a home.

### **Verse 23-24**

***During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.***

- The Pharaoh had a long reign and during that entire time, the Hebrews in Egypt were oppressed with harsh conditions as slaves.
- They groaned under the pressure put on them by the Egyptians and cried out to God for help.
- God heard their prayers and their groaning. Because of the promise that he had made to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he was concerned about them.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *A Stranger Here*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)