

**Introduction:**

- A. Illus.: Katerina had a really close call last weekend. She had an ectopic pregnancy and very nearly bled to death. It was only through some “divine coincidences” that Stamati got her to the hospital in time. But now she is so, so weak. Katerina is usually a very energetic, upbeat, in-control kind of person, and now she can hardly hold her eyes open. It is hard and discouraging, and scary. When I called her, we commiserated over how confusing these times can be spiritually. We wonder, *Did I do something wrong? I wish I was better at trusting God? What lesson am I supposed to be learning?* And it seems that in times like these, sometimes God is strangely silent. *I pray and try to listen but I don’t know what God is doing. I don’t know what he’s telling me.* I suspect you’ve had times like that, too.
- B. As I talked to Katerina I had **Exodus 2** open before me. The Israelites were suffering as the oppressed slaves of Egypt and they had no idea what God was up to. They hardly knew God at all. Remember: they had no Scriptures. No prophet or priest. In fact, they hadn’t heard a word from God in over four centuries. All they had was the hand-me-down promise of God’s covenant with Abraham that he and all his descendants would be blessed and one day possess their own land. Each generation told the next what God had told Jacob, “*I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again.*” But God was silent, their slavemasters were powerful, and they didn’t know what to think. **They were helpless and hopeless.**
- C. They didn’t know that God was at work. It’s like that often. God works but we don’t see it so we struggle. Turn to **Ex. 2** and let’s get to know our God better.

We read a terrible thing at the end of **Ex. 1**. You’ll remember that the Pharaoh—the king of Egypt—had decided that there were too

many Israelites in his land for him to control and he had enslaved them all. Then, when they continued to multiply anyway, he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every baby boy. And when they didn't, he ordered infanticide: **1:22**, *"Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.'"* Rachel wept for her children.

In the midst of that terror, this: **2:1-7... Did you see God in that story?** His name isn't mentioned, but he certainly left fingerprints. And the thing is, God doesn't just overrule Pharaoh but he *uses* the very devices of the wicked Pharaoh against him.

**I. TO SAVE HIS BELOVED PEOPLE GOD HIJACKS THE ENEMY'S DEATH-DEALING SCHEMES (2:1-7)**

- A. Pharaoh was a pawn of Satan and Satan hates God. He wants to destroy what God has created and lay claim to those whom God loves. He wants to rob God of glory. He never gives up. He is as intent on destroying God's people now, one way or another, as Pharaoh was then.
- B. But one of the great themes of the Bible is that God cannot be thwarted in his plans to save those whom he loves. God doesn't just outsmart the wicked, he hijacks their plans. He co-opts—diverts—**repurposes** Satan's schemes. In fact, **God uses Satan's plans as the fulcrum to leverage his salvation.** Just look here:
  - 1. Pharaoh commanded the baby boys be thrown into the Nile and, in a manner of speaking, his mother does just what Pharaoh commanded—cast him into the Nile River—and that is how he is saved! The boy's mother used a basket coated with pitch so it would float. The Heb. word for 'basket' is translated one other way back in Genesis: *ark*. She made a little ark to protect her son from the deadly water. Sound familiar? Almost like a baptism.
  - 2. Then, of all things, who should show up at just that spot at just that time but Pharaoh's own daughter!

What are the chances? And—*oh no!*—the baby starts crying, bawling! *Shhh! Oh, please be quiet. Shhh!* But she hears him and they pull the little ark from the water and when she saw him crying... “*she felt sorry for him!*” What!? Even though she knew he was one of the Hebrew babies? Can’t you see her with that 3-month old cuddled in her arms, his fingers curled around hers, her attendants all crowding around, cooing and making faces? She *wasn’t* going to kill that baby. Pharaoh’s own daughter rescues the Hebrew son who would bring the whole dynasty down.

3. Pharaoh wanted the Hebrew boys killed because they grow up into soldiers. But he wasn’t worried about the Hebrew girls. Yet here’s the baby’s sister who has the chutzpah to arrange for the baby’s own Hebrew mother to nurse him *and get paid for it by Pharaoh!*
  4. Then, when the boy is weaned, Pharaoh’s daughter raises him as her own son. So this Hebrew boy, condemned to death at birth, who grew up to be the Pharaoh’s worst nightmare, was raised in the safest place in all of Egypt—Pharaoh’s own palace!
  5. And one more thing: Pharaoh’s daughter names the boy Moses. A good royal name. Perhaps you’ve heard of the Pharaohs named Ramesses. Do you see the ‘moses’ in that name? Ramesses means ‘*drawn out—birthed—by Re, [the sun God]*’. She named the baby Moses because she thought, “*I drew him out of the water.*” But when his name is brought into Hebrew Moses means “*One who draws out of the water.*” Like a midwife, or a lifeguard. Not a bad name for the man who led Israel through the Red Sea!
- C. Do you see how God repurposed Satan’s evil plans in order to save the life of Israel’s future deliverer? That’s how God works. That’s what God did in Jesus. God *used* Satan’s own schemes against him time after time. The ultimate

example was the cross, where Satan accomplished the death of Christ, but God accomplished the salvation of sinners. He used Jesus' death to cancel the death sentence upon sinners. *"Having disarmed the powers and authorities [Satan and his forces], he [God] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."* [Col 2:15]

- D. When we're in the dark about what's going on we need to remember that's how God still works in our lives as well. Joseph told his conniving brothers, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good... the saving of many lives."* [Gen 50:20] God told the suffering Paul that the thorn in his flesh—that *"messenger of Satan"*—would only display God's strength and grace more clearly. And Paul assured us in **Rom 8** that *"in all things God works for the good of those who love him."* Satan is devious and dangerous. He brings suffering, darkness and death, but **1 John 4:4** says, *"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."*

Moses grew up. We're told in Acts 7 that, *"Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action."* But the education that he needed most was yet to come. We learn a lot about God and what's important to him from Moses' life.

## II. GOD RAISED UP AND PREPARED THE DELIVERER HIS PEOPLE DESPERATELY NEEDED (2:8-22)

Moses was about 40 years old when this story picks up: **vv.8-15a**... Wow! That's a messy story. That's a train wreck! But one thing is clear—and surprising:

- A. Moses had a God-given love for the Israelites. Twice in **v.11** there is the phrase, *"his own people."* Remember, Moses had been raised in Pharaoh's house since he was weaned—two or three years old, I assume. He had an Egyptian education. And Egyptian mindset. He was a prince of Egypt. We learn later that he *looked* like an

Egyptian. Egyptians absolutely despised their slaves. Yet here is Moses, identifying with the Israelites. How'd he learn that? How did he learn about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

Despite his Egyptian upbringing Moses had a laser focus on who he was and what he was to do. When **Heb. 11** catalogs the heroes of the faith we read that Moses was acting out of a clear trust in God: **11:24-26**, *“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”* Moses didn’t know about Jesus, but he did know that the Israelites bore *“the stigma of God’s Anointed”* [NEB] and he saw that stigma—that disgrace—as the second of God’s riches and reward.

- B. But when at age 40 he steps up as Israel’s deliverer—well, it all goes south! **Acts 7:25** explains, *“Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.”* Instead the very first Hebrew he tried to help said, *“Who made you ruler and judge over us?”* And Pharaoh put his picture on a Wanted Poster. Nobody wanted Moses. He was *persona non grata!*
- C. His heart was in the right place, but the problem was that Moses, for all his admirable faith, was not yet ready for God’s prime time. So here’s what happened: **Ex. 2:15...** Midian is on the far side of the wilderness east of Egypt. It was a long way across lots of hot, arid, rugged nothing. **Vv.16-22...** Still no mention of God, but again, God’s fingerprints. Again, Moses’ sense of justice comes to the fore in the defense of Midianite sisters, which was as amazing as his coming to the defense of Hebrew slaves.

God used that sense of justice to direct Moses' steps.

The father, Reuel, was a priest whose name meant "friend of God." A good guy for a fugitive like Moses to meet. One of those seven daughters became his wife and they had a son named Gershom. The name means "a foreigner there," but to Moses it meant, "*I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.*" The previous story ended with a name pregnant with meaning, and now it happens again. Moses' legacy to his son was being a man without a country. "*Let's call the boy Homesick, for short.*" Gershom is what we are, too: foreigners in a foreign land, "*looking ahead to [our] reward... longing for a better country—a heavenly one.*"

- D. **Ex. 2:23** begins, "*During that long period, the king of Egypt died.*" Another 40 years passed. Moses grew old. **But he changed.** This one-time prince of Egypt became a shepherd with a shepherd's heart, a quality he would need to lead God's people. He learned the ways of the wilderness. He would need that, too, over the next 40 years. **But the main thing he learned was humility. Suffering and weakness will do that to a person.** In fact, in **Num 12:3** it says, "*Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.*" Now he was ready to do what he'd been born to do—"*to rescue Israel.*"
- E. Our deliver Jesus Christ was more humble. He made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant and became obedient even to death on a cross. [Phil 2:7-8] He "*learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*" Moses became Israel's savior (small s). Jesus became the Savior of the world.
- F. Among its many benefits, suffering re-sculpts our hearts in humility and faith. Peter told suffering believers, "*after you have suffered a little while, he himself will make you strong, firm and steadfast.*" An unknown poet wrote:

*When God wants to drill a man,  
And skill a man  
And fill a man,  
When God wants to mold a man  
To play the noblest part,  
When He yearns with all His heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world will be amazed,  
Watch his methods, watch his ways.  
How he ruthlessly perfects whom he royally elects,  
How he hammers him,  
And hurts him,  
And with mighty blows converts him  
Into trial shapes of clay which only God understands  
Till his tortured heart is crying  
And he lifts beseeching hands.  
How He bends but never breaks  
When His good He undertakes  
Then He uses whom He chooses  
And with every purpose fuses him  
By every act induces him  
To try His splendor out.  
God knows what he's about.*

Now, 80 years later, we get back to the Israelites: **vv.23-25...**

**III. GOD ALWAYS ATTENDS TO HIS SUFFERING PEOPLE (2:23-25)**

- A. All who suffer groan. Israel's groans became cries for God's help. Countless times I've heard believers tell me about their groaning to God in hard times. When we hurt, we pray. It may be the only time we get around to it! But when our hearts ache, our souls reach out to God, "O Lord, help me!"
- B. And those prayers "went up to God." They rose like incense. Groans became messages that were carried all the way to the high, bright, peaceful presence of the God

of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is hard to pray when there's no sense of God's hearing, but faith tells us that **God not only hears, but hears with the heart of the Savior. Rom 8:26** says, "*We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*"

- C. In vv.24-25 there are four different verbs describing what God did: "*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.*" God's concern is anchored in that ancient covenant to bless his people and to bring them into their own land. And that is why he is concerned for you, too. Because Jesus has brought us into the people of God. I read those words to Katerina the other day. **God hears our groans. He remembers his covenant with us through Christ. He looks upon us, face shining with blessing. And he is concerned. The word means he knows. The way a mother knows and the way a father cares.**