

Drawn Up Out of the Water  
Exodus 2:1-10  
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### **Introduction: Names Have Meanings**

I don't know what your criteria were for naming your children, but if you were like we were, the top priorities were finding a first name that goes well with the last name, but also one that both the husband and wife like. So we named our firstborn Miles because it goes well with Dorst and because we both like it; but we also found out that it means "gift from God" in Hebrew, but that was kind of bonus. My daughter, Alayna, reminded me the other day that her name means "beautiful." Natalie refers to the birthday of our Lord, so Christmas, which doesn't make much sense since she was born in May; we just liked the name. With our second oldest, he was two weeks early so we didn't totally have a name picked out. We had a short list, so when one of the nurses asked what his name was going to be in the hours after he was born, we admitted that we hadn't decided yet and told her the choices. She picked Wesley because she really liked it, so there's the deep reason for his name – because a random nurse liked it.

So, sometimes kids names aren't picked for their meanings. Other times kids are given names that are deeply significant to their parents, or for things that their parents hope they will live up to. My twin brother and I were named David and Jonathan, not necessarily for what those names mean individually, but because the David and Jonathan in the Bible were best friends, and that's what they wanted for us. I'm thankful that desire was fulfilled.

We see places all over Scripture where names are significant.<sup>1</sup> Either the name is assigned because of circumstances that happened around the birth of the child, or it is given because of something that will happen later in the person's life.

### **There are the names that described the circumstances of the birth:**

- The first birth and naming in Genesis 4:1 is Cain, which means "gotten or acquired" because Eve said, *'I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.'*
- Genesis 4:25 – *"And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, 'God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.'" Seth means "appointed."*
- Ishmael in Genesis 16 is the baby born when Abram tried to make God's promise come true by having a baby with Sarai's maidservant. You might think the name would mean "bad mistake" or "untrusting," but it doesn't – it means "God hears" because the angel tells his mother, Hagar, that the Lord listened to her affliction (Gen. 16:11).
- Of course when Abraham and Sarah finally conceive, do you remember the boy's name and meaning? Isaac means "laughter" because both Abraham and Sarah laughed when they were told they would conceive at their sprightly young ages of 90 and 100.
- Then Isaac's twins are Esau and Jacob – Esau means "hairy," and Jacob means "he takes by the heel" because he was holding Esau's heel when they were born. It also means "supplanter" or "he cheats," which is how he will live his life. So his name is actually both a description and a prophecy.

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<sup>1</sup> See this website for explanations of Biblical names: <https://www.behindthename.com/names/usage/biblical>

### **Then there are the names that prophesied a person's future:**

Abram means "high father." Job means "persecuted." Solomon means "peace." Nehemiah means "Yahweh comforts." Timothy means "honoring God." Barnabas means "son of encouragement." All of those fit their lives, personalities, and roles. And, of course, Jesus is a form of Joshua, which means "Yahweh saves."

Well, it's time to meet the main human character in Exodus. Of course, God is the hero, the true main character in the story. But after a chapter setting the scene for the whole book, we meet Moses. He doesn't do a lot here; all the action revolves around three women. And at the end of the verses he receives his name, one that summarizes the circumstances around his birth, but perhaps also hints at what is to come. If you're taking notes, I'll split the text into three main points: 1) Moses is hidden, 2) Moses is discovered, and 3) Moses is adopted. Then we'll conclude by drilling down on some of the practical and theological ideas raised.

#### **I. Moses Is Hidden (2:1-4)**

*<sup>1</sup> Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup> When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. <sup>4</sup> And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.*

My wife was born in September of 1972 and I was born in June of 1973. That's only nine months apart, doesn't seem like that big a deal, we were in the same grades all through school. But something happened between her birth and mine that changed America and made the circumstances of my birth a little bit different than hers: Roe v. Wade happened in January of 1973 and abortion was suddenly legal all across America. Now, neither set of our parents were abortion-minded, but it would have been perfectly legal for my parents to abort me, whereas it would have been illegal for Kath's parents to abort her. Thank God our parents welcomed us as gifts of God in their lives.

Back in Egypt, a harsher law than Roe vs. Wade had been passed. If you've been following along in our sermon series, you know that Pharaoh has passed a national law that Hebrew boys are to be thrown into the Nile in order to weaken the Israelite population. So here comes this baby to a Hebrew couple that they find out is a son. We find out later that the parent's names are Amram and Jochebed. Verse two says that the mother hid the child for three months. There's a phrase in v. 2 that gets translated in the ESV and the NIV as: "*when she saw that he was a fine child.*" Does that mean if he had been an ugly child, she would have gladly given him to an Egyptian soldier to throw into the Nile? No, the Hebrew is an idiom that means something more like "to care about" "to be fond of" or "to long to keep." It's actually the same phrase used in creation "and God saw that it was good."<sup>2</sup>

But what do we make of these parents who are so afraid of the king's edict that they hide the child in a basket on a riverbank? Are they heartless and cruel, not caring what happens to the baby? Are they cowardly, not having enough faith that God would keep the child safe in their home? Hebrews chapter 11 is nicknamed "The Hall of Faith" because it is a long list of people who showed faith and acted upon that faith. Guess who shows up in verse 23? Moses' parents: "*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not*

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Exodus (Vol. 2)* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), p. 87.

*afraid of the king's edict.*" So it's by faith and not fear that this couple did what they did, trusting God would protect their son.

If you think about it, there is a sense where this mother is actually carrying out the law to put her baby boy in the Nile. "You said put the baby boys into the Nile, that's what I did." The Hebrew word used for basket in verse 3 is *tebah* (tay-baw), which is only used one other way in the Old Testament: to describe Noah's ark. That's fascinating, isn't it? There's an old joke that is more of a trick on the person answering, kind of like the "where did they bury the survivors?" joke where you have to listen carefully: "How many of each kind of animal did Moses put on the ark?" And when the person says "2," ha, joke's on them because Moses didn't have an ark, it was Noah. But here Moses gets put on his own tiny ark that will keep him safe from the water. One commentator noted that, "This is another example of the Torah communicating that the Exodus... begins a new creation. Just as God saved Noah in a *tebah* set in the water, He will save Moses in a *tebah* set in water. Just as in Genesis, God started a new world with Noah, He is, in effect, starting a new world with Moses and the Jews."<sup>3</sup>

One more detail that we tend to rush right by that is actually significant: the text says that both of the parents are from the tribe of Levi. This doesn't have a lot of significance at the time Moses was born, it's just one of the twelve tribes of Israel, indicating which son of Jacob he was descended from – Levi the third born. (If you're wondering, Levi means "attached" because in Genesis 29:34 Leah thinks that now that she has born Jacob 3 sons he will have to be attached to her, even though he had favored his other wife, Rachel, more. But that's a rabbit trail). The tribe of Levi will have a glorious calling later in the life of Moses. God sets them apart to be the priestly tribe. Numbers 9:19 explains it well: "*And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the people of Israel, to do the service for the people of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement for the people of Israel.*" So, both Moses and his brother Aaron are members of the Levite tribe, with Aaron being the first high priest of Israel and Moses functioning as a priest, a mediator, as the one who would stand between God and His people.

In verses 5-8, the couple's daughter, whose name we find out later is Miriam, watches from a distance while her brother is discovered in his ark, his basket.

## **II. Moses is Discovered (vv. 5-8)**

*<sup>5</sup> Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. <sup>6</sup> When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." <sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" <sup>8</sup> And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother.*

What a contrast we see between Pharaoh and his daughter. Pharaoh has given the heartless, ruthless order to have all the baby boys drowned in the river in order to protect his kingdom. His daughter takes a child left in the river and restores it to a home. Even though she recognized that the baby was a Hebrew one, and therefore marked out for execution, her protective, mothering instincts kicked in. We don't know how old this princess was, but old enough to begin caring for a baby, at least with help. Pharaoh probably had dozens of children from many wives [Alan Cole says that "if the pharaoh is

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis Prager, *Exodus: God, Slavery, and Freedom* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2018), p. 21.

question was Ramses II, he had close on sixty daughters.”<sup>4</sup>], so this might not have been a huge item of news in the palace. You might have this picture of Pharaoh yelling at his daughter “Why have you defied me?”, when actually he might have had no clue for a long time.

What at first looks like a disaster – the baby has been found by an Egyptian and might now have to die despite the careful precautions and protections of his parents - instead turns into the greatest blessing! The child has gone from having the royal decree of execution hanging over its head to having the royal protection granted to it. How shrewd of Miriam to just wander over and be available with helpful advice for the princess: “I could go find a Hebrew woman to nurse her,” knowing she would go and bring her mother, the child’s real mother, back with her.

I don’t think you can read these early chapters of Exodus without remarking how the godly, important little acts of faith are done by women. This very powerful man, Pharaoh, has decreed this brutal, awful death sentence. But then we have the midwives and a common Hebrew mother and daughter, and Pharaoh’s own daughter all living their lives making choices that make a huge difference. They show boldness, love, courage, godly defiance, faith, resourcefulness, shrewdness, and wisdom. I know a lot of godly women who carry on that legacy.

### **III. Moses is Adopted (vv. 9-10)**

<sup>9</sup>And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. <sup>10</sup>When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

Not only did Jochebed get to raise her son with no fear that he would be killed, but she got paid for it! Of course, she had to turn him over to be raised in the palace at a certain age, probably between ages 4 and 6. And it’s unclear whether they told him that he was their son or not, but most likely they developed in him a heart for his true people. And perhaps he lost all contact with his birth family after that, but later in life he knows Aaron and Miriam, so probably not.

So we come back to Moses’ name. In Egyptian, Moses means “son,” but it has a double meaning since it’s clear that Pharaoh’s daughter, who must have known some Hebrew, named him Moses because he was drawn up out of the water. But, as we saw at the beginning, could this also have been a name that prophesized or described something later in his life? How about when Moses leads his people through the Red Sea, walking through while God parts the waters and leads them to dry ground before closing the waters on the Egyptian army? Yes, Moses was drawn out of the water both soon after his birth and at the high point of dramatic deliverance later in life.

So Moses is raised by Pharaoh’s daughter. We don’t know much about Moses’ experiences in Egypt, and in the next few verses that we’ll cover in next week’s sermon he will be leaving Egypt. Acts 7:22 says, “And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.” How ironic that the man who will eventually greatly anger the Pharaoh by taking his people away was educated, nurtured, and fed in Pharaoh’s own household. But more than the irony, it’s God’s providence that Moses grows up with a foot in both worlds because later in his life he is going to have to advocate for the Israelites while understanding Pharaoh’s court and way of life. He is uniquely equipped

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<sup>4</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), p. 64.

among all the people at the time to know both the Egyptian and the Hebrew ways of life. No one else could have been fully part of both worlds, they would have been an outsider to one or the other.

## Conclusion

Just as Moses was uniquely equipped to be the deliverer of his people because of his dual identity, so we have a greater Deliverer who is uniquely equipped to save us because of His dual identity. Jesus is fully God, 100% divinity, having existed for all eternity and a part of the Trinity; but also fully man, having the full range of human experiences. To quote the Heidelberg catechism #16's answer to the question "Why must Jesus be a true and righteous man?" – the answer is: "He must be a true man because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin. He must be a righteous man because one who himself is a sinner cannot pay for others." And the answer to #17's question "Why must Jesus also be true God?" – the answer is: "So that, by the power of His divinity, He might bear the weight of God's anger in His humanity and earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life." Jesus needed both natures to serve as our great Redeemer.

The other interesting thing that I see in this passage is the concept of adoption. Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses because she saw a helpless child that, as far as she knew, would die if no one took it in. She looked upon a small, helpless child and had pity on him. Some translations use the word "compassion" because the Hebrew word *khamal* is not simply pity or sorrow; it's deeper than that.<sup>5</sup> Compassion is empathy moved to action; it is a tangible expression of love for those in need or suffering.

Adoption is a beautiful act of compassion. It is not always an easy thing, it is not always smooth and as obviously rewarding as one would think. But for a couple to open their home to a child that they did not conceive who is in need of a mother and father is an incredible act of faith. I read a story of a couple named Jon and Misty who live in Denver, CO.<sup>6</sup> They had heard a program on Christian radio asking if they would be willing to adopt and they had prayed about it even though they already four kids between ages 6 and 13. They ended up adopting Shon and Cory, two young boys whose biological mother could not take care of them. After the initial difficulties of having the boys adjust to their new family, new home, and new life, they found out that their mother had given birth to a girl who was born at 24 weeks and weighed less a pound. They had to decide whether they would adopt her as well, despite all the medical complications. They did. Two years later, the county asked if they would take another girl, this one with brain injuries. They said yes. The article describes their crazy life with 8 kids, 3 of whom have medical or psychological issues. Money is tight, they don't eat out, they don't go on vacation, their kids are jammed into bedrooms, it's usually chaos. Misty says, "There are days when I'm completely overwhelmed, and I wonder if I made the right decision... but I would do it over and over again... God doesn't make mistakes."

That's right, God doesn't make mistakes. God knits our families together, He gives parents grace and strength to love and shepherd their kids, whether born to the mother or brought in later. But God also does some adopting of His own. Turn with me to Romans 8:14-17a – "*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as son, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself bears witness*

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<sup>5</sup> James K. Bruckner, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Maggie Jones, "God Called Them To Adopt. And Adopt. And Adopt." The New York Times: Nov. 14, 2013, found at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/17/magazine/god-called-them-to-adopt-and-adopt-and-adopt.html>

*with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”*

Part of what God does in saving a person, besides forgiving their sins, declaring them just in His sight, and giving them a new heart and nature is that He adopts them into His family. Adoption tells us that we can go from being an enemy of God with a decree of execution on our head to being a member of His family! Why does God adopt us? Did we earn it? No. Do we deserve it? No. Did we do anything to merit His love and His grace? No to all of those things. He adopts us and loves us simply because He sets His compassion on us. For His mysterious, divine reasons and pleasure, God calls helpless, hopeless sinners to be part of His family. Just like Pharaoh’s daughter had compassion on a helpless child that she had no compulsion to love and bring into her family, so God sees us and adopts us. And before He brings us into the palace of heaven, He has us raised in the church, learning His ways, educated in the ways of the Scriptures, and growing in our love for His chosen people.

God doesn’t make mistakes. When He adopted you, He set His love fully on you as His son or His daughter. You are not an orphan anymore, you have total security, you will never be kicked out of God’s family. Your brothers and sisters are your fellow believers. You have all the blessings of your royal family, all the spiritual blessings in Christ. Amen!

Benediction

Galatians 4:4-5

*“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”*