

"ISRAEL'S DELIVERER"

I. Introduction

- A. Up to this point, Exodus has focused upon the Lord's preservation of his people while they were in Egypt.
 - 1. In chapter 1 we saw how God preserved Israel as a whole when they were threatened by the policies that Pharaoh established in hopes of reducing their size and eventually wiping them out.
 - 2. And in the first part of chapter 2 we saw how God preserved one individual, the infant Moses, when his life was threatened.
- B. As we turn now to consider the second half of chapter 2, we see that the focus shifts from the theme of preservation to that of deliverance.
 - 1. This passage begins by describing Moses' initial attempt to save his people from their oppressors, an attempt that ends in failure.
 - 2. Next, as a result of this failure, Moses has to flee to the land of Midian and live in exile.
 - 3. Lastly, these verses assure us that God has not forgotten his people or the promises that he has made to them.

II. A Rejected Deliverer

- A. Our passage begins by telling us that "One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people."
 - 1. We learn from Stephen's speech in Acts 7 that Moses was 40 years old at this point. (v. 23)

2. Forty years have passed since he was discovered in the Nile river by Pharaoh's daughter.
 3. From the time when he was weaned, he was raised in Pharaoh's household, where he was instructed in the wisdom of the Egyptians.
 4. Moses had the best education available and he enjoyed all the luxuries of Pharaoh's house, but he did not forget who he was.
 5. Two times in verse 11 we are told that it is the Hebrews, not the Egyptians, who are "his people" or, literally, "his brothers."
 6. Instead of remaining content with the life of pleasure and ease that could have been his in Egypt, he identified with God's covenant people because he shared their faith.
 7. As the writer of Hebrews tells us, "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." (Heb. 11:24-27)
- B. Our text tells us that when Moses went out to his people he "looked on their burdens."
1. He was not a detached observer here, but was deeply disturbed by what he saw.
 2. When he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew, he responded by killing and burying the Egyptian.
 3. This is the first of three instances in this passage in which we see Moses rushing to the defense of someone who was being mistreated by others.

4. This tells us that he was a man who had a zeal for justice and, consequently, a heart for those who were the victims of injustice.
 5. In Moses' mind, the action that he took here was not a matter of vigilante justice.
 6. As Stephen says in his speech in Acts 7, Moses "supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand." (v. 25)
 7. He expected his fellow Hebrews to see that God was sending him to bring about their deliverance.
- C. It did not take very long, however, before it became clear that Moses' brothers did not see him as their deliverer.
1. When he went out to his people the next day and confronted one Hebrew for mistreating another, the man said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"
 2. This was a foreshadowing of the kind of treatment that Moses would receive from the Israelites many years later, when he led them out of Egypt.
 3. He was sent by God, but he was rejected by his people on many occasions.
- D. What are to we to say about the way in which he tried to begin to save his people in this passage?
1. Was he doing the right thing when he killed this Egyptian?
 2. Well, on the one hand, he correctly understood his calling as the one through whom God would deliver his people.
 3. However, he tried to carry out his task in a foolish manner, trusting in his own strength rather than in the Lord.

4. Getting rid of Egyptians one at a time was not going to bring about true deliverance.
 5. On the contrary, it created more problems.
 6. Even if the body was never discovered, the Egyptians would soon realize that they were short one overseer.
 7. They would start asking questions among the Hebrews and put pressure on them to tell what they knew.
 8. Moses did not do the Hebrews any good by killing that Egyptian.
- E. One of the things that we can learn from this is the importance of trusting God to carry out his work by his appointed means instead of taking measures into our own hands.
1. This is a real temptation for us.
 2. We often get impatient.
 3. We want to see results.
 4. We think that we have to do something that will produce results.
 5. This passage shows us that when we take that approach, regardless of our intentions, we actually make things worse.
 6. As one commentator puts it, "in the work of God mere human effort, however well-intentioned, committed or influential, results in failure." [Motyer, 41]
 7. Moses' action in killing the Egyptian resulted in Israel having to wait forty more years before they would be brought out of Egypt.

8. Israel's deliverance was not going to be brought about by a "quick fix," and the same is true of the saving work that God continues to carry out in the world today.

III. A Sojourner in a Foreign Land

- A. When Moses learned that his deed was known, he realized that his life was in danger.
 1. Pharaoh soon heard about what had happened, and when he did he issued Moses' death warrant.
 2. So Moses fled from Pharaoh to the east, to the land of Midian.
 3. The Midianites were a nomadic people, so we don't know the exact location that is being referenced here.
 4. The passage tells us that in the midst of his flight, Moses sat down by a well.
 5. As he rested there, the daughters of a man who is identified as "the priest of Midian" came to the well to draw water for their father's flock.
 6. Now, drawing water from a well for a large flock of animals is a strenuous task.
 7. In this case, it was made even more difficult because the local shepherds waited until these girls drew the water and then drove them away so they could use the water for their flocks.
 8. Notice the parallel between this and what was happening to Israel in Egypt.
 9. Like the Israelites, these girls were being cruelly oppressed.

- B. When Moses saw this unfolding before his eyes, he responded in the same way as when he saw his brethren being oppressed in Egypt.
1. He defended the weak from their oppressors.
 2. He not only delivered them, he even watered the flock for them.
 3. And take note of the contrast between how Moses was received by his fellow Hebrews and how he was received by these Midianites.
 4. While Moses was rejected by his own people, he was received by these strangers.
 5. This prefigures Christ, who “came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (Jn. 1:11)
- C. We learn from Stephen’s speech in Acts 7 that Moses would spend the next forty years of his life in Midian. (Acts 7:30)
1. Forty is a significant number in the Bible.
 2. It appears in situations where God’s people are going through some sort of ordeal.
 3. It is often symbolic of testing
 4. Moses’ forty years in Midian foreshadowed the forty years that Israel would spend in wilderness, as well as the forty days of temptation that Jesus would endure in wilderness.
 5. God used this experience in Midian to prepare Moses for the role that he would play in the exodus from Egypt.
 6. From a practical standpoint, these years of living as a nomadic shepherd gave Moses the skills that he would need when he led Israel through the wilderness.

7. More importantly, this would have been a humbling experience for a man who grew up in the lap of luxury.
 8. This points to a broader principle that applies to all of us.
 9. God uses the humbling experiences in our lives to sanctify us, to cause us to depend upon him, to prepare us, and to prevent us from getting too attached to life in this world.
- D. Life as a shepherd in Midian was a few steps down from life in Pharaoh's palace.
1. Nevertheless, there was a sense in which life was good for Moses in Midian.
 2. Nobody was trying to kill him.
 3. The people that he delivered actually appreciated what he had done for them.
 4. Reuel gave Moses much more than the bread that he mentioned in verse 20.
 5. He gave him one of his daughters for a wife.
 6. And this wife gave birth to a son.
 7. Life was good in Midian, but Moses would not call Midian home.
 8. This is made clear by the name that he gave his son.
 9. He called the boy Gershom, which means "a stranger there."
 10. Moses knew he had not yet reached the goal.
 11. He was not at his final destination; he was not at his true home.

12. This reminds us that even when life in this world is at its best, as God's people we are always pilgrims here.
13. Like Moses, we "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one." (Heb. 11:16)

IV. The God Who Remembers His Covenant

- A. This brings us to the last section of the passage, where the focus shifts from Moses in Midian back to Israel in Egypt.
 1. It begins by telling us that the king of Egypt died.
 2. This is significant for a couple of reasons.
 3. First of all, it paves the way for Moses' return to Egypt.
 4. Once the Pharaoh who was trying to kill him was gone, he could begin to think about going back.
 5. As Moses' father-in-law tells him in chapter 4, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead."
- B. The death of this Pharaoh also had significance for the people of Israel as a whole.
 1. This was the Pharaoh who decided to oppress the Hebrews with forced labor, the Pharaoh who issued decrees that were intended to wipe them out.
 2. How do you think the Israelites responded when they heard that this Pharaoh had died?
 3. You would expect to see something like the scene in *The Wizard of Oz* after Dorothy's house lands on the wicked witch.
 4. But there was no such celebration.

5. This Pharaoh's death did not bring any relief to the Israelites.
 6. Their burdens remained as heavy as they had ever been.
- C. It was at this point that God's people finally cried out to him for help.
1. The first two chapters of Exodus have a lot to say about the heavy burdens that the Hebrews bore during their time in Egypt, but this is the first time that there is any mention of them calling upon the Lord in their distress.
 2. The fact that they did so shows us that God was at work in their hearts.
 3. Even though they experienced many years of cruel oppression, God had not abandoned them.
 4. God worked through the hardships that they experienced to cause them to see that they had to look to him for deliverance from their bondage.
 5. In the words of Matthew Henry: "Before God unbound them, He put it into their hearts to cry to Him."
 6. This is something that the Lord does in the hearts of all of his people.
 7. He brings us to the end of ourselves so that we can see that our only hope is in him.
 8. By causing us to taste the bitterness of our fallen estate, God enables us to savor the sweetness of the salvation that he brings to us in Christ.
- D. In verses 24 and 25, we find a string of verbs that describe God's response to Israel's cry for help: God heard, God remembered, God saw, God knew.

1. Let's take a brief look at each of these words.
 2. When the Bible speaks of God hearing the cries of his people it means more than just hearing.
 3. God hears everything.
 4. The point being made is that God is going to act upon what he hears.
 5. He is going to respond to his people's cries for help.
 6. In the words of the psalmist, "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles." (Ps. 34:6)
- E. The text also says that God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.
1. What does the Bible mean when it says that God remembers?
 2. It cannot mean that he nearly forgot something.
 3. God does not need to have his memory jogged.
 4. Instead, when the Bible speaks of God remembering it means that he is mindful of his covenant commitments and is going to carry them out.
 5. Moses is telling us that God is about to act on the promises that he made to the patriarchs.
 6. This underscores the fact that the deliverance that God was going to bring about for Israel was not due to anything that they had done.
 7. He isn't going to bring them out of Egypt because of the severity of their troubles.

8. He isn't going save them because of the sincerity of their cries for help.
 9. He is going to save them because he is always faithful to his promises.
- F. It is so important for us to keep this straight.
1. If you are a Christian, the ground of your assurance is not anything that you have done or anything that you promise to do.
 2. The ground of your assurance is that God always makes good on his promises.
 3. God has told us that everyone who places his or her trust in Jesus Christ will be saved.
 4. If your faith rests upon Christ, then you can know for certain that God will be faithful to what he has promised.
- G. The last verse tells us that "God saw the people of Israel -- and God knew."
1. "Saw" is the same verb that was used back in verse 11, where it said that Moses "looked on" the burdens of his people.
 2. This is not a detached kind of seeing.
 3. It means more than just seeing what was happening.
 4. It tells us that God was moved with compassion when he looked upon the afflictions of his people.
- H. In the same way, the phrase "God knew" tells us far more than that God was acquainted with the facts of the situation.
1. God knows everything.

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2. It is not as though he didn't realize what was happening to the Hebrews until they cried out to him for help.
3. Instead, this is telling us that God has intimate and personal knowledge of the trials that his people experience.
4. He is not distant from his people.
5. He is not a detached or unfeeling deity.

I. This truth is brought home to us by the fact of the incarnation.

1. Because Jesus took on our flesh and blood, you can know that God sees the things that trouble you.
2. He knows the difficulties that you face.
3. He hears you when you cry out for help.
4. He remembers what he has promised, and he will be faithful to those promises.
5. In the words of the writer of Hebrews, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:15-16)