

# OpenTheo

## February 22nd: Exodus 2 & Matthew 9:1-17

February 21, 2020



### Alastair Roberts

Moses delivered from the water and settling in Midian. Jesus forgives sins and eats with tax collectors and sinners.

Some passages referenced:

Genesis 6:14-16 (the building of the ark); Genesis 11 (the story of Babel); Exodus 14-15 (the Red Sea crossing).

Matthew 4:13 (Jesus living in Capernaum); Hosea 6:6 (mercy not sacrifice); Matthew 5:7, 12:7, 23:23 (the primacy of mercy).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Exodus 2. Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. 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. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. him.

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. 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 Hebrew's children. 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? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. So the girl went and called the child's mother.

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. 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. One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hit him in the sand.

When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together, and he said to the man in the wrong, Why do you strike your companion? He answered, Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian? Then Moses was afraid and thought, Surely the thing is known. When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them and watered their flock. When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, How is it that you have come home so soon today? They said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock.

He said to his daughters, Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him that he may eat bread. And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God, and God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham,

with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew.

The story of the deliverance of the infant Moses in Exodus chapter 2 is a familiar one to us. We've all heard it many times. Even though some details have been exaggerated or changed for dramatic effect, it is a story that we remember well.

The story begins with a man from the house of Levi going and taking as his wife a daughter of Levi. She gives birth to a son and sees that he's a beautiful child. The beauty of Moses is a sign that he's well favoured.

He's one that is marked out already for a good destiny. We can see other examples in Scripture of people who have a striking physical appearance, Rachel or Joseph, or people like David. And these people are marked out for rule or for leadership or for some blessing by the symbolism of an attractive appearance.

This is not to say that God prefers people who are physically attractive. As we see in the context of the choice of David, man looks at the outer appearance, but God looks at the heart. So the heart is what matters.

Your physical appearance doesn't make you more or less loved by God, but yet a beautiful physical appearance is a sign of someone who's set apart in some way. And from the very beginning of his life, there is something that singles Moses out as different. Moses is bound for some remarkable destiny and his appearance is commented upon for this reason.

She hides him for three months. We've already noted periods of three in the book of Genesis. On the third day or in the third month or in the third year, it can be a time of testing, a time when things come to a head.

On the third day, Abraham arrives at the mountain with Isaac. On the third day, the chief baker and the cupbearer will be taken out of prison and face their fate. And in the third year, Joseph will be released from prison.

These sorts of events occur at the third period of time. And the three months here lead to a point where there is a crisis moment and she can't hide him any longer. So she takes a basket or literally an ark made of bullrushes and daubs it with bitumen and pitch.

Now, the word for ark here is the same word as we have used of Noah's ark. It's not the same word that we have used of the ark of the covenant or the chest of the covenant. This is a different word and it's a very unusual word within scripture.

We don't really see it used apart from in reference to Noah's ark and to this ark. Now, why might that be? Pharaoh is trying to drown the baby boys and here one baby boy is saved through the waters in an ark. Now, the mother of Moses is literally obeying the rule of Pharaoh.

She's casting the child into the water. But yet, she's doing so within an ark and he's going to be brought through the waters like Noah was brought through the waters and delivered. And the description of the ark is also similar.

It's covered with pitch and that preparation of the ark might also remind us of the story of Babel where Babel is this preparation of bricks and using bitumen as mortar. And the bringing together of bitumen and pitch here is interesting. On the one hand, the ark of Moses is like the ark of Noah.

He's going to be delivered through the waters in which others are drowning. It's also like a reversal of the Babel themes. In the context, there are great store cities being built.

The Israelites are being caught up in the task of making bricks. And here is a sort of brick being made. But yet, this brick is being used to rescue a child to form a different sort of kingdom.

Not the kingdom of Pharaoh's great building projects but a kingdom that will have a very different character to it. She places the ark among the reeds by the river bank and the sister stands at a distance to see what will happen to the child. And at this point, the daughter of Pharaoh comes down to bathe at the river and her young women are walking beside the river at this time.

She sends out her servant woman to take the ark and as she opens it, she sees the child. She sees the child crying and takes pity on it, declaring that it's one of the Hebrew's children. A few things to notice here.

First of all, that there are some similarities between the characters at play. So you have a symmetry between the daughter of Levi, Jochebed as we later find her name to be, the mother of Moses and the daughter of Pharaoh. And then the servant girl and the sister of Moses.

These characters have a symmetry to them. And the daughter of Pharaoh knows that it's one of the Hebrew children and yet still rescues the child. Rescues the child knowing that she's disobeying her father's command and rescuing one of the children that's supposed to be killed.

She sees the child and she sees that the child is crying. We don't have references to children crying within biblical narrative for the most part. This is something that's very rare.

The fact that the baby is crying is a matter of importance. What does it matter that the child is crying? Well the child is crying in part because his state of distress represents the state of his people more generally. And she takes pity upon the child but also recognises the state of the people from which this child comes.

It's one of the Hebrew's children. And the compassion that she takes upon the child is the first of a number of series of people in this chapter who see and take notice and have compassion and act. She is the first one to play out this pattern and others will follow.

At this point the sister of the infant comes up and speaks to Pharaoh's daughter and says, should she go and get a nurse for the child? Now don't presume that it was common for Hebrew children to speak so directly to a princess of Egypt. And the fact that she could suggests to me that Pharaoh's daughter knew that this was the sister. She wasn't just a random Hebrew child and she knew that in entrusting the child to this girl she was entrusting the child to the mother and saving the child for the sake of that family.

Without the courage of this one woman none of the rest of the story would take place. Her salvation of Moses sets the terms for what takes place afterwards. She's prepared to risk word getting out.

There are servants around her, there are other women around her. Any one of those could spread rumours within the palace and word could get back to her father and she could be in serious trouble. But her courage is seen in the fact that she goes ahead anyway.

When the child is weaned the child is brought to Pharaoh's daughter and she becomes the son of Pharaoh's daughter. At this point the child is named Moses because he was drawn out of the water. Now Moses in that sense is a Hebrew name but the Egyptian meaning would suggest that he's son or born.

He's born out of the water. He's the one who is the child of the water. He's her son as well.

We can think about the way that we have names like Ramses, son of Ra. The fact that Pharaoh's daughter gives Moses his name and that is Moses' name, not a name that he was given by Amram and Jochebed his parents, not a name that God gave him at some point but a name given to him by the daughter of the antagonist within the story, is remarkable. It's a sign of how remarkable Pharaoh's daughter is as a figure that she is the one who has the honour of naming the great saviour of God's people.

And the name he receives anticipates things that will happen in the future. In Isaiah chapter 63 verse 11 it speaks about Moses. Then he remembered the days of old of Moses and his people.

Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit? Moses leads the people up out of the sea. He draws them up out of the water. So he's not just the one drawn out of the water himself.

He is the one who draws out of the water. And the events that we have here are played out again in the story of the Red Sea crossing. Once again there is an event of threat from Pharaoh.

Once again there is this deliverance in the sight of the reeds. The Red Sea could also be translated as Sea of Reeds. It's the same word that we see here used for the reeds in which Moses is placed.

And Miriam is present again in both occasions as a witness. And that drawing out of the water, being associated with birth, is also something that's the case of Israel's deliverance in chapter 14 and 15. They are drawn out of the water and that's a birth experience for them too.

Moses was drawn out of the water. He was born out of the water. Israel will later be born out of the water.

And they will enter into the experience of Moses at that point. The text jumps forward some years here in Stephen's account in his sermon – 40 years. Moses has grown up and he goes out and he sees his people, looks on their burdens.

He sees their distress. Much as his mother, his adoptive mother, saw his distress and his sorrow and his crying. So he goes out and he sees his people and he takes compassion upon them.

He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and he intervenes. He intervenes also recognising that the Hebrew is one of his people. That there is a connection between him and that person no matter the difference in their status that he has been raised with in the palace.

That Hebrew is one of his people. And he strikes down the Egyptian and hides him in the sand. But the next day when he sees two Hebrews he discovers that the word concerning his action has come out.

It is known that he has killed the Egyptian. And the Hebrew is not prepared to recognise him as a ruler over them. Rather he is seen as an outsider.

He is seen as an Egyptian. And they reject him accordingly. When Pharaoh finds out he tries to kill Moses and Moses flees and goes to the land of Midian and arrives at a well.

Now we've encountered a number of wells in the book of Genesis. Wells are often associated with women. And at these wells there can often be significant encounters.

Rebecca was first met at a well. Rachel was first met at a well. And now Moses comes and he sits down at a well.

And the priest of Midian has seven daughters. Again there are women associated with

the well. And they come and draw water, fill their troughs to water their father's flock.

And they are assaulted by the shepherds who drive them away. And Moses stands up and intervenes and saves them and waters their flock. They go back to their father, tell him the news and he is obviously used to the fact that day after day they are driven away by these shepherds and harassed.

And it's surprising to him that they've come back so early on this occasion. Then he hears about this Egyptian who's intervened on their behalf and calls for him to come and have a meal with them. And Moses ends up dwelling with Rul and his family and becoming one of them.

He is given the daughter of Rul, Zipporah, as his wife. She gives birth to a son and he calls his name Gershom. He has been a sojourner in a strange land.

There should be a number of patterns that jump out to us here. First we've encountered a very similar story in Jacob. Jacob goes to this foreign land fleeing from a threat to his life, someone trying to kill him.

And he ends up arriving at a well, meeting the woman that he's about to marry, being invited in and welcomed into the family, serving with a new father-in-law figure. And this is what we see in the case of Moses. Rul is pretty much the same sort of character as Laban at this point.

But it also looks forward. Moses leaves Egypt, fleeing Egypt, and there's a threat to his life, pursuit, come to water and there's a threat at the water. The shepherds are trying to drive the people away.

And he intervenes and acts on their behalf, drives away the shepherds single-handedly, saves the women and waters the flock. Then he meets Rul, who's later described as Jethro, and ends up marrying one of his daughters. This is a very similar pattern to that which we find in Moses' later ministry.

He leaves Egypt with the people of Israel as Pharaoh tries to take their lives. At the waters, he stretches out his hand and delivers the people, saves them and delivers them from the hand of their opponent. And then he waters the flocks of God in the wilderness.

From then, he has an encounter with Jethro in chapter 18 of Exodus. And then there's a marriage, a marriage between God and his people at Sinai. And also the next thing that happens within the story here is an encounter with God at Sinai.

A similar pattern is playing out. The events of Moses' life are anticipating what will later happen to him and to the people that he leads. The Midianites are sons of Abraham by the concubine Keturah.

And they are seemingly God-fearers. They're presumably not circumcised. Moses does not circumcise his son while he's with them.

But they do seem to worship the true God. And later on, Jethro will lead Moses and Aaron in sacrifice. When we're reading the Old Testament, it's important to consider that the Jews weren't the only people that believed in and worshipped God.

There were other people out there who were God-fearers, people like Jethro. They had a genuine relationship with God, but they were not part of the special priestly people. You did not need to be an Israelite in order to be saved.

The chapter ends with the king of Egypt dying and Israel groaning because of their slavery and crying out for help. And just as we've seen the daughter of Pharaoh seeing the crying infant Moses and taking compassion on him, and Moses seeing the distress of the daughters of Reuel and taking compassion upon them and acting to save them, now we see God hearing and seeing his people and acting on their behalf. Their cry for rescue comes up to God and God remembers his covenant and promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

He sees the people of Israel and he knows. Two questions to consider. First question, what might seven daughters associate with a well remind us of that we've already encountered in the book of Genesis? Second question, what are some of the ways that Moses has described or in which he acts within this chapter that set him apart as a fitting leader of his people in the future? Matthew chapter 9 verses 1 to 17.

And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold some people brought to him a paralytic lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, take heart my son, your sins are forgiven.

And behold some of the scribes said to themselves, this man is blaspheming. But Jesus knowing their thoughts said, why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or to say rise and walk. But that you may know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

He then said to the paralytic, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and went home. When the crowd saw it they were afraid and they glorified God who had given such authority to man.

As Jesus passed on from there he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth and he said to him, follow me. And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

And when the Pharisees saw this they said to his disciples, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? But when he heard it, he said, those who are well have



no need of a position. But those who are sick, go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Then the disciples of John came to him saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them, can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment and a worse tear is made.

Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins and so both are preserved.

In Matthew chapter 9 we continue the sequence of miracles that we began in chapter 8. That sequence began with the cleansing of the leper, the healing of the centurion's servant, the healing of the fever of Peter's mother-in-law and then went on to the calming of the storm, the casting out of the two demons and now we get to the healing of the paralytic. These miracles come in threes. The first three are more private, less dramatic miracles.

The second three are more dramatic and come with the sense of authority and the response to these miracles is particularly highlighted. The first miracle of chapter 9 ends the second cycle of miracles, a cycle which places this emphasis upon people's reaction of fear and wonder to Jesus. The authority of Christ is emphasised and opposition starts to emerge and in the final cycle Jesus' fame spreads far further.

This block of miracles isn't just a grab bag of stuff that Jesus did but it's like the rest of Matthew. It's progressively presenting a case for the identity and the authority of Christ and moving the larger story forward. The healing of the paralytic occurs when Jesus returns to his own city from the land of the Gadarenes.

From chapter 4 verse 13 we know that the city is Capernaum. The paralytic is carried to him by others on a bed and Jesus responds to their faith by declaring the sins of the paralytic forgiven. We've already seen an association between faith and Jesus' work in the encounter with the centurion and in Jesus' challenging of his disciples for their little faith in the calming of the sea.

We see a further example later on in the healing of the woman with the issue of blood and the blind man. The faith in such cases is looking to Christ for deliverance. It doesn't come with any pretensions of its own or confidence in itself but just reaches out to him and in the centurion's case Jesus declared that such faithful persons would sit with the patriarchs in the kingdom and in this case Jesus declares the sins of the paralyzed man to be forgiven.

As in the case of the centurion it's noteworthy that Jesus is performing these miracles on account of the faith of someone other than the person who's receiving the healing. Faith is extremely important but it's not always the faith of the person who is delivered by the miracle. On some occasions like this it's someone else entirely.

Reading the story of the paralyzed man here we might be reminded of the benefit of praying for others, of bringing them before Christ even though they may be paralyzed in some way, that they may not be able to come before Christ themselves. We can carry them and that insistent bringing people before Christ might be part of the calling that we have been given. The scribes think that Christ is blaspheming, claiming a prerogative that is God's alone.

Only God can forgive sins but Jesus can read their hearts and he as a demonstration of his true authority heals the man. If he did not in fact have this authority to forgive sins God would not give the confirming sign of the healing that follows. It's a two-stage healing.

It's an inward healing, the forgiveness of his sins and then an outward healing. Jesus once again speaks of himself here as the son of man. He's acting in a particular office.

The son of man is a human figure of eschatological significance, a sort of uber prophet. We can think of the way that it's used in Ezekiel. The common argument that Jesus forgives sins as proof that he is God seems to me to short circuit the case that the gospels actually present for Christ's divinity.

The response of the crowd is important to notice here. They do not see this as proof of his divinity but proof that this is a truly remarkable prophet. This is a prophet like no other.

To whom does God give authority to forgive sins in this way? You can think about the authority that God gives to people like Elijah and Elisha. They act with authority. They can do great deeds without necessarily having to pray for them to occur.

They are invested with power to do certain acts but this Jesus of Nazareth seems to be invested with a far greater power than any of these former prophets. There's something about him that stands out and the more that we follow this through in Matthew the more that we'll realize that he is being given the full authority of God. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given into his hands and he acts with the authority of God's very name.

This is I believe how we'll arrive at a proper account of Christ's divinity. It's a longer route but it leads to a more decisive understanding. Jesus now calls Matthew.

Tax collectors were despised for their collaborations with the Romans but also for their injustice. Not only did they deal with Gentiles, they were dealing with the imperial

oppressor. The fact that Jesus would eat with such persons was scandalous to many observing Jews.

The setting is important. Jesus is reclining at a table in a house with these people. This is as it were a picture of Israel.

The picture of Israel of eating around the table and in Jesus' ministry, Jesus particularly in Luke's gospel but also in the other gospels, Jesus often teaches in the context of a meal. He teaches that Israel is being redefined and a meal table is a picture of that. And at this meal table all the wrong people are present.

It's not just the centurion who's a faithful person who will recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It's also tax collectors and sinners, the people who are not welcome within polite society. And here the Pharisees enter the picture as one of the key antagonists of Christ in his ministry.

They challenge Christ for his action, questioning his disciples. But Jesus hears it and he responds by drawing attention to the character of the law. He quotes Hosea chapter 6 verse 6 and the original context of that is God's restoration of his people.

This isn't just individual repentance. It's God restoring his people to fellowship with him. And this verse provides a framework for perceiving the entire law.

Jesus quotes it again in Matthew chapter 12 verse 7 where he's challenged concerning his practice on the Sabbath. Later on in chapter 23 verse 23 he'll talk about the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith. Earlier on in the Beatitudes he has said, Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

Christ is on a mission of mercy, a mission of righteousness that sets things right that have gone wrong. And this was what the law was always about. This is what God always wanted.

We've gone through Jesus' manifesto in chapters 5 to 7 in the Sermon on the Mount, an account of saving righteousness, of righteousness that restores and sets things right that are broken. And Jesus is teaching the same thing here. God desires that sort of righteousness, not just sacrifice and a multiplication of bulls and rams and goats.

God desires people to give their hearts. God desires people to show mercy and to heal and restore those that are lost. And yet as tax collectors and sinners seek to get close to Christ to find forgiveness and restoration, all the Pharisees and the scribes can see is a failure on Christ's part to keep himself fully separate.

Something has gone deeply wrong in the way that they see the purpose of God's law. After he has responded to the Pharisees, Jesus is approached by the disciples of John who ask him concerning fasting. Jesus' response is one that underlines who he is.

He is the bridegroom with his people. And when the bridegroom is around there should be joy and delight. It should be a time of feasting and celebration.

There will be a time when the bridegroom goes and at that time it will be appropriate to fast. But while the bridegroom is still there, they should be celebrating. Christ is the one who's restoring Israel.

He's also the bridegroom come to the bride. And as it were, he's inaugurating the great feast of the end of history in the middle of history. People are having a foretaste of what it's like to have the marriage supper of the Lamb.

This response further underlines the importance of what Jesus is doing in these meals and their symbolic significance. After the illustration of the bridegroom and the feasting associated with the wedding, Jesus gives a further illustration. An illustration of putting unshrunk cloth upon an old garment, followed up by another example of putting new wine into old wineskins.

The importance for Christ is that both need to be preserved. There are the practices of the law, the practices of the old order, but there's also the practices associated with fulfillment of the law. And those practices can't be contained by the structure of the law itself.

Those old wineskins will be burst by this new practice of the kingdom. But that doesn't mean that the old practices of the law are to be just rejected and dismissed and ridiculed. They have their place and they are to be preserved in their proper place.

But yet the order of the kingdom is one that goes far beyond them. The contrast here may be more explicitly seen in the difference between John and his disciples who are existing within those older structures and Jesus and his disciples who were the new wine that could not be put into the structure of the old wineskins. A question to consider.

Here and elsewhere Jesus uses meals and feasts as a framework within which to reimagine Israel and its identity and the order of the kingdom. What are some of the ways in which our practice of the Lord's Supper can reorder our societies in the light of the kingdom to come?