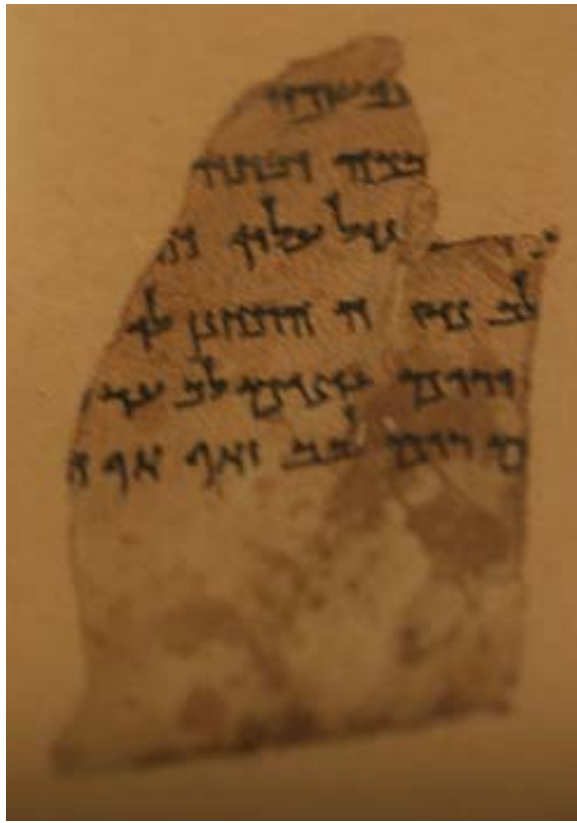


*The Covenant Pulpit*



# EXODUS

*Possessing the Promises*

“WAITING”  
EXODUS 2&3

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Surely a line from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* could have been written about him: "The two most powerful warriors are patience and time."

He was 7 years-old when his family lost their Indiana farm. He had to drop out of school and go to work to help them pay off their debts. Two years later his beloved mother died, leaving him heartbroken.

When he was 22 years-old he started a business. Within a year, it went belly-up. Then he ran for the state legislature, and lost. Someone hired him to run a store, but fired him a few months later. So he applied to law school, only to be rejected. A sympathetic friend loaned him some money so that he could again try his hand at business. Within a year he filed for bankruptcy. He spent the next 17 years paying off his debt.

Again he made a run at politics. He finally got a rare taste of success. The year he took his seat in the state legislature, he got engaged to the only woman he would ever love. It seemed like fortune was finally smiling on him. But shortly afterwards, she died of typhoid fever and he plunged into suicidal despair. He spent the next six months in bed. He would suffer debilitating bouts of depression for the rest of his life.

He recovered enough to get back into the political game, running for Speaker of the State House. But he was defeated. Two years later he ran for Elector and again lost. His friends tried to cheer him up by pushing him into an arranged marriage. Her emotional instability and constant nagging would plague him for the 23 years of their loveless life together.

He ran for U.S. congress and lost again. Then his three year-old son Edward died. After a season of deep despair, he made another stab at politics. This time he finally won a congressional seat, only to lose his bid for reelection. When he limped home from Washington DC, he applied for a job as a land officer in his home state—only to be rejected.

Five years later he ran for the U.S. Senate and lost. Sympathetic colleagues nominated him for Vice President at his party's national convention. He only received a handful of votes, finishing in last place. Two years later, he picked himself off the floor and ran for the U.S. Senate a second time. Again he was defeated, giving him the dubious distinction of being the biggest loser in the history of American politics.

It is one of history's miracles that two years later he somehow found the courage to run for the highest office in the land. In 1860, after decades of repeated political failures and personal setbacks, Abraham Lincoln became the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

But his euphoria was short-lived. As the country careened toward Civil War, he was vilified across the South. Newspapers lampooned him as the "Gorilla from Illinois." When the Union dissolved, there were calls for his impeachment. His generals refused to obey his orders.

Members of his cabinet plotted against him. His 11 year-old son died in the White House and his wife roamed the hallways crazy with grief. In the end, he was denied the pleasure of savoring his greatest triumph when he was assassinated only six days after the Civil War ended.

When they emptied the pockets of his bloodstained coat, they found a yellowed and worn newspaper clipping. It reported a speech by John Bright who called Lincoln "one of the greatest men of all time." The clipping was almost falling apart from being folded and unfolded. There is something pathetically poignant about Lincoln finding comfort by daily reading and rereading praise from a British politician during those dark years when his own nation ridiculed him.

As he stood by Lincoln's deathbed, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton whispered, "Now he belongs to the ages." Two days after his death on Good Friday, preachers across the country eulogized him as the savior of his nation. As his funeral train carried his body to its final resting place, millions gathered to weep along the route. Today he is revered as America's greatest leader. His dogged determination proved Tolstoy's line: "The two most powerful warriors are patience and time."

History shows that true greatness is never seized, but comes to those who wait. When someone asked a younger Lincoln for the secret to his perseverance, he responded, "I keep preparing in the hopes that someday my chance will come." Before Moses was ready to lead the Exodus he had to spend 40 years on the backside of a desert. Before the Jews could enter the Promised Land they wandered in that same desert for 40 years. Here's today's principle for those on an Exodus to eternity:

### **God's time is not our time, but it's always the right time.**

Maybe you are discouraged today. You have waited for finances to improve, illness to go away, a marriage to get better, a son or daughter to come to Jesus, or victory over some addiction. But your patience is wearing thin. Waiting on God may be the hardest of all spiritual disciplines. Humorist Barbara Johnson probably speaks for all of us when she writes, "Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you are stripping your gears." For those of us who don't want to strip our gears, here are five truths that we learn about waiting from the life of Moses:

#### **1. Transformation takes time.**

Just before St. Stephen was martyred, he preached a sermon about Moses to his killers. In Acts 7:20&21 he says, "...Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and actions." When we see him in Exodus 2, Moses is 40 years-old—a prince crafted in a palace. He is Grade "A" steel, finely-honed and razor-sharp. He walks with a swagger and speaks with authority. By the standards of

this shallow world, he is ready to seize the day. But he is not yet ready for prime time. Here's the problem: Moses' outward swagger masks an inner schizophrenia. There are two people battling within Moses:

### 1) *Abraham in Moses*

The Pharaoh ordered all newborn Jewish boys to be drowned in the Nile. But his Hebrew parents put Moses in a reed basket and sent him down the river, believing that God would keep him safe. God rewarded their faith by guiding the basket into the bathing pool of Pharaoh's daughter. Though her father ordered this infanticide, God softened her heart toward this baby. She adopted Moses, and turned him over to his birth mother for nursing. Every day this slave woman not only gave the baby her milk, she also fed him her faith. She told her boy about the God of the Israelites and the covenant he made with Abraham. In those years before he was weaned, little Moses knew he was a child of Abraham.

Exodus 2:11 says, "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." Moses didn't just stumble onto this scene. In Acts 7:25, Stephen says that Moses *purposely* went out there to rescue his people. He believed that God had called *him* to liberate them. When Exodus 2:11 says that he "watched them at their hard labor," the original Hebrew language has the sense that he is studying the situation and formulating a plan in his mind.

You can bet that, when she was nursing little Moses, his Jewish birth mother told him about a prophecy that God had given Abraham in Genesis 15, some 500 years earlier: his descendents would be slaves in a strange country, abused for 400 years. But they would come out of this land of slavery with great possessions, and afterwards seize their Promised Land. Moses did the math. When he was 40 years old it had been almost 400 years since the twelve grandsons of Abraham settled in Egypt. He must have reasoned that it was time for God's prophecy to be fulfilled, and he was going to be the one to get the ball rolling.

So he chose to walk away from the privilege and pleasures of a palace and throw his lot in with a brutally-oppressed slave people. That choice is celebrated in Hebrews 11:24-26:

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of the Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 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."

Stand in awe of this decision. Moses was potentially in line to sit on the throne of the greatest superpower on planet earth. But he was

gripped by a bigger vision that a nameless slave woman had given him some 35 years earlier; the same dream that God had first given Abraham: that a great Son would come from his lineage; that this man would bless the whole world, bringing salvation to people from every tongue, tribe, and nation until the spiritual descendants of that old patriarch were as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

We know that Son to be none other than Jesus Christ! His resurrected majesty eclipses the god-kings of Egypt whose mummies rot beneath the sifting sands of North Africa. His everlasting Kingdom dwarfs the ancient Egyptian Empire in size, duration, and authority. Its riches make the decaying treasures of an Egyptian palace look like tarnished trinkets. Moses understood what missionary Jim Elliott wrote in his diary a few days before his martyrdom: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

Fourteen hundred years before the first Christmas, he may not have known Christ with the clarity we know him 2,000 years later. But he knew enough to walk away the temporary pleasures of this world, even if it meant suffering the disgrace of Christ. In that sense, Moses was a far better person than most of us. He was truly a son of Abraham when he walked away from that palace for the last time.

Moses' story ought to encourage every parent and grandparent. That nameless slave woman only had a few hours with her son each day for maybe 5-7 years. It wasn't much time compared to the 35 years that Pharaoh had to craft him in the Egyptian palace. But she didn't waste a single moment of her precious time. When Moses left his infancy and walked away from his birth mother for the last time, his faith was set.

No matter how much time you have with your children, they will end up in Pharaoh's clutches—whether it's the public schools, or university, or the pervasive media of this world, or a thousand other voices in the marketplace that will impact their thinking. But take heart! Godly instruction when your children and grandchildren are babes is more powerful than all their later years in the courts of the Pharaohs. Abraham Lincoln's mother died when he was 7 years-old, but during those dark years of the Civil War he said, "My mother's prayers have always followed me. They have clung to me all of my life."

## **2) The *Pharaoh* in Moses**

Moses may have been a son of Abraham, but he was also the adopted grandson of a Pharaoh. Even if our faith is set when we are children, our original sin nature is further corrupted in the courts of the Pharaohs. Two men wrestle for control of Moses' soul: Abraham and Pharaoh. It is the faith of Abraham that drives him to liberate his people. It is the influence of Pharaoh that causes him to go about it in an ungodly way. Exodus 2:12 says, "Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he

killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” Any righteous person would want to stop a slave driver who is beating a man half to death. That’s the *Abraham* in Moses.

But it’s the *Pharaoh* in Moses who acts. When you read, “Glancing this way and that and seeing no one,” you might recall the words of the Pharaoh in Exodus 1:9&10, “The Israelites have become too numerous for us. We must deal *shrewdly* with them...” The Hebrew word *shrewdly* means to deal strategically, to calculate carefully, to act with cunning, and to angle for safe outcome. That’s what Moses did when he made sure no one was looking, and then buried the evidence of his murder in the sand. When you read, “...he killed the Egyptian...” you see the murderous heart of the Pharaoh who orders the killing of Jewish boys. When Moses plays God and takes vengeance into his own hands, you see the arrogance of the palace. Moses may have his birth mother’s faith, but he plays by his Egyptian grandfather’s rules.

It’s possible to try to achieve godly ends in ungodly ways. We Christians do it all the time. The way of Abraham (and his great Son, Christ) is described by the Apostle in 1 Peter 5:6: “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that *he* may lift you up in due time.” Moses is anything but humble at this point in his life. Nor is he willing to wait on God’s timing. So he jumps the gun 40 years too soon. The way of the Pharaoh—whether it is played out in the ancient palaces of the Egyptians or the halls of the U.S. Congress—is always the same: human shrewdness and strength. But the only liberation that ever lasts comes from God’s wisdom and power.

Beneath our swagger, we all battle with the spiritual schizophrenia of Moses. God created the first human from the dust of this earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The human is both the dust of this earth and the breath of heaven. We long for the things of this fallen world, and we have an inescapable hunger for God. Even after we come to Christ, the new spirit and the old flesh (the faith of Abraham and way of Pharaoh) war within us. Like Moses, it’s as if we have two souls battling for control. So God must unify our soul into one whole.

### 3) Unifying a heart

The half-brother of Jesus said in James 1:8, “...a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” The original Greek could be translated, “a man with two souls...” Moses is both *Abraham* and *Pharaoh* at the same time. As you can see in Exodus two, that makes him very unstable. Others see his “double soul.” The next day, when he comes out to kick-start the liberation movement, one of the Jewish slaves responds in verse 14, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me the way you killed the Egyptian?” He is saying, in effect, “We’ve already been under the rule of killer Pharaohs for almost 400 years. Why should we exchange an Egyptian Pharaoh for a Jewish Pharaoh?” On

the other hand, we read in verse 15, "When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses." He now knows that 35 years in the palace hasn't exorcised the *Abraham* that lurks in the breast of his adopted Jewish grandson. Instead, he has only managed to craft a skilled revolutionary who now poses a clear and present danger to his nation's stability.

Because Moses is *both* Abraham and Pharaoh, in the end he is neither. The Jews can't follow him because of the *Pharaoh* in him, and the Pharaoh can't trust him because of the *Jew* in him. Jesus said, "I wish you were either hot or cold, but because you are lukewarm I will vomit you out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:16) Double-minded people are *unstable* because they haven't decided who they are. They shift with the changing tide of public opinion. People won't long follow leaders who aren't centered. That's why Moses has to wait 40 more years. Verse 16 says, "...but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian." Like Abraham Lincoln and the rest of us, he has to be laid on the anvil of failure and loneliness, and pounded until he has become a single, unified godly person. It's never easy to wait in the desert, but a line from a poem by a homosexual friend who struggled to find his identity in Christ has always stuck with me: "Whom the Lord royally elects, those he ruthlessly perfects."

## **2. Patience rewards time.**

Again, Tolstoy's words: "The two greatest warriors are patience and time." Time develops patience, and patience rewards time. They always work in tandem. It couldn't have been easy for the Prince of Egypt to spend the next 40 years on the backside of a desert. He who commanded men now herds sheep. He who dined with Pharaohs now travels as an alien among a ragtag band of African nomads. Of those 40 lost years when Moses trekked aimlessly across the backside of the Sinai, verse 23 says, "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out..." The clock is ticking, and Moses is now an 80 year-old man. His oratory skills are gone. Sheep are not good conversationalists. His strength has diminished with the advancing years. All the strategic skills he was taught by the management gurus of Egypt have rusted. Some of you know what Moses feels like. Your dreams have been dissipated by seemingly-wasted years. But Abraham Lincoln said about his "wasted" years, "In the end, its not the years in your life that count, but the life in your years." We will look at these truths more closely next time, but, if you will grab hold of them now, your perseverance will be strengthened.

### **1) The issue is God's glory, not our pleasure.**

Sin's deception is so subtle. Hebrews 11:25 says that Moses walked away from "the pleasures" of Pharaoh's palace. But, he didn't walk away from the pleasures of spiritual pride. He still wanted to do God's work in his own way, according to his own timetable. Sometimes there is more sin in God's house than in Pharaoh's palace. It is worse for the

fact that it hides behind the self-serving mask of “god” language. During the Civil War both Southerners and Yankees said that they were fighting for a holy cause. Someone asked President Lincoln which side God was on. He famously replied, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side, but whether we are on *his* side—for God alone is right.” When I live for God’s pleasure rather than my own, I will no longer say, “What did I ever do to deserve this shoddy treatment?” Instead, I will sing the words of an old hymn, “Whate’er my God ordains is right!”

## **2) Usefulness is shaped in the desert, not the palace.**

At age 40, the Prince of Egypt saw leadership as the exercise power. That’s how palaces everywhere—from the banks of the Nile to the banks of the Potomac—see leadership. No wonder Egypt is now a country where tourists visit the ruins of failed Pharaohs. Will busloads of tourists one day come to see the ruins of failed U.S. presidents? It is not at Harvard, or West Point, or even Evangelical Seminaries where greatness is forged. It is found on the desert, where an 80 year-old shepherd (who once known as *Prince*) sees the glory of God and says in Exodus 3:11, “Who am I have I should go to Pharaoh...” In short, who am I that I should dare do the work of the Great *I AM*? And for the rest of his life, he will say, “We will not go unless your *Presence* goes with us.” (Exodus 33:15). The palace creates tin men without hearts, but the desert strips us of pretence and reduces us to depend on God’s heart.

## **3) There are no wasted moments in God’s time.**

Moses surely thought the prime of his life had been wasted on the Sinai. Forty years dulled his *palace* edge. But he also learned how to lead sheep across a wilderness. He needed that training because he would lead 3.6 million cantankerous Jewish sheep across the same desert. At the end of those “wasted” years he knew the Sinai like the back of his hand: every star, ever water hole, the patterns of the seasons, the migrations of the desert tribes, and every inch of the most desolate moonscape on planet earth. God was preparing him for the greatest assignment of his life. God doesn’t waste time—not his nor ours. Every failure, every setback, and every disappointment was preparing Abraham Lincoln for the Civil War. Thank God for his wasted days. What would America look like if Abraham Lincoln hadn’t persevered through his desert years to prepare him to lead our nation through the wilderness of Civil War? In the same way, God is preparing you to lead others across the same deserts that you have crossed. Don’t you dare give up on one of the greatest doctrines of the Reformation: the *perseverance of the saints*! Keep your eyes on Jesus who persevered to the end with a single heart to please his Father!