

Divine Fingerprints

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[0 : 00] So if you want to join me at Exodus 1, the words will also be on the screen. It is a little bit longer scripture reading. It might be helpful to have your Bibles open, but we'll start right at Exodus 1 verse 1. We're going to get into chapter 2 a little bit this morning as well.

And we'll kind of see the turn that takes place between chapters 1 and 2. So overall in this series, we're going to see how God works in the lives of his people. He brings them out of slavery, out of Egypt, out of bondage, and then he brings them in, into his presence, and they have sweet fellowship in the wilderness.

But this is a little bit of a kind of a precursor to all of that as we start out the book. Starting in Exodus 1 verse 1. These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family.

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin. Dan and Naphtali. Gad and Asheram. The descendants of Jacob numbered 70 in all.

Joseph was already in Egypt. Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous so that the land was filled with them.

[1 : 30] Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. Look, he said to his people, the Israelites have become much too numerous for us.

Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous. And if war breaks out, we'll join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country.

So, they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor. And they built Python and Ramses as store cities for Pharaoh.

But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. So the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor and brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields.

In all their hard labor, the Egyptians used them ruthlessly. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shifra and Pua, when you helped the Hebrew women in childbirth and observed them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him.

[2 : 36] But if it is a girl, let her live. The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do. They let the boys live.

Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live? The midwives answered Pharaoh, Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women.

They are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive. So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous.

And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people. Every boy that is born, you must throw into the Nile.

But let every girl live. Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.

[3 : 43] But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him. You got to picture this. She put her in the house and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the river Nile.

His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe. And her attendants were walking along the river bank.

She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying.

She felt sorry for him. This is one of the Hebrew babies, she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?

Yes, go, she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. Got the baby's mother.

Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Take this baby and nurse him for me and I will pay you.

[4 : 55] So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son.

She named him Moses, saying, I drew him out of the water. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So to really get into this story, this fascinating story, what I want to do is go back and note the hands that we find here.

And the first hand we find is a hand that's clenched, a fist, a fist belonging to Pharaoh. It's clenched, ready to knock some people down.

And the people he wants to knock down are the people of Israel. They're descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They originally came to Egypt as refugees.

There was a famine in their homeland. And brother Joseph, well, he had risen to prominence in Egypt. And that's a whole other story. But they went to live there where Joseph was in authority.

[6 : 05] And life was good. And they had plenty to eat and plenty of land. And the Egyptians respected them and treated them well. Well, the pharaohs admired and appreciated Joseph.

And so they were happy to have Joseph's family there among them. And this went on for a number of generations. Things were good. And the family grew.

In fact, the original group of 70 turned into thousands. They multiplied, ate well, had their own space, freedom. Life was good. But eventually everything changed.

The Bible says a new king who did not know about Joseph came to power in Egypt. There was a new sheriff in town. And this new guy, he had no regard for Joseph.

He had no loyalty to the descendants of Joseph, to that family, to him. They were simply an inferior race of people. And they were just there as foreigners squatting on his land.

[7 : 12] And he eventually goes to the extreme. And he makes the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob into his slaves. He enslaves them. Was Pharaoh fueled by racism?

A disdain for the Jewish people? Was he looking for cheap labor to carry out his lavish building plans? Was Pharaoh just kind of feeling paranoid and having this large minority group living among him made him really nervous and paranoid?

He's paranoid of losing his power. Well, the answer, no doubt, to every one of those is yes. Yes, Pharaoh was a bad man who hated non-Egyptians.

Pharaoh was a proud man who wanted to expand his empire and build these massive store cities.

And he needed a lot of labor to do that work. He was also a paranoid man, bent on breaking the Israelites down, quashing them, draining them so they had no energy left to dream or to make any plans or collude with any other nation.

Slavery for Pharaoh, that was the answer. It was the answer to everything. It just seemed to help in every way. For this egomaniac, it just, well, it also just felt good to have his boot on the necks of the Hebrews.

[8 : 36] Bear his fist. Made him feel safer. Stronger. But the more important question here is, how did the Israelites feel and what was their experience?

Well, I find it a little hard to talk about or even read about what they went through. One Bible scholar talks about how the description that we're given here in Exodus 1, it's almost like the rhythm of a slave driver's whip.

There's this repetition of terms, this driving beat, just driving home how excruciating it was. So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor.

They built Python, Ramses, the store cities. The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread. So the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly.

They made their lives bitter with hard labor and brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields and all their hard labor. The Egyptians used them ruthlessly. Da-dun, da-dun, da-dun, da-dun.

[9 : 47] Da-dun, da-dun, da-dun.

Da-dun, da-dun. and eventually Pharaoh went even a step further than that. He ordered the killing of all the boy babies.

He was apparently afraid of the Israelites building an army, and so he decreed that all the males' Hebrew babies be killed, basically a preemptive strike. Pharaoh's was a reign of terror, and that's how the book of Exodus starts, with Pharaoh terrorizing these people, God's people, bearing his teeth, bearing his fist, really going after them.

And it wasn't just God's people, it was God himself, too. Here's how one author put it. Pharaoh is the very picture of a man in rebellion against God.

The Pharaoh of Egypt was not just a private individual, rather he represented the entire nation of Egypt, including their gods. To be specific, Pharaoh claimed to be the incarnate son of Ray, the sun god, who was the primary deity in the Egyptian pantheon.

[11 : 14] So Pharaoh enslaving the Israelites was not just a power trip thing or a political move. It was also a religious move. Pharaoh really was claiming sovereignty, lordship over Israel.

He was claiming to be lord, was stating his claim over his domain, his territory, and everything in it. It all belonged to him. That's actually what we're going to find throughout this book as we go on and study this book in this series.

There's this clash that keeps coming up, this clash between Pharaoh and God himself. It's not just between Pharaoh and Moses, not just between Israel and Egypt, between Pharaoh and God himself, even between Satan and God himself.

See this playing out. But for now, let's zoom back in. Let's zoom way, way in, if we could, and we'll find a different set of hands, some small hands, ten little fingers.

Just think for a moment. When a baby is born, when a baby is born, word travels fast, right? And I find it kind of fascinating how this goes, right? The baby's born, the news travels, and everyone that passes on the news of the new baby seems to follow the same template, right?

[12 : 39] Baby is born, the gender is first. It's a boy, it's a girl, and then the name, always with the middle name, right? You've got to include the full name.

Then the time the baby was born, and the baby's length and weight. I'm not sure why that's important, but that's always in there, too. And then there's always kind of a concluding, overall sort of statement.

Words like beautiful, precious. Baby is said to be healthy, doing well. One old tradition is to say that baby has all ten fingers and all ten toes.

It's kind of a way of saying, this baby's perfect. Just perfect. It's more than physical. It's more than saying strong and doing well.

Ten fingers, all ten fingers, all ten toes. As a parent, you say that, and it's kind of like, this baby's my all in all, my everything. He's picture perfect. Well, in the midst of the slave camp there in Egypt, a baby was born, born to an Israelite woman, a boy, a boy, with all ten fingers and all ten toes.

[13 : 56] Right away, he had her heart, this beautiful child, this healthy, strong, picture perfect baby. Exodus 2, verse 2, kind of points it out.

She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and she saw that he was a fine child. Now, to have a baby when you're enslaved is a very hard thing.

It's fraught, with all sorts of mixed emotions, as you can imagine, and fears and worries. To have a child when there's an edict out to kill that child is even harder yet. That was the reality.

And I don't know if she planned to bring a child into this situation, or really wanted to, but she did. God clearly wanted her to do it, so she did. And she did the best she could, given the situation.

And so this is the reality. The book of Exodus, it starts out in, it's all darkness. Slavery, and then infanticide.

[14 : 59] Things go from bad to worse. That's chapter 1. It's all darkness. And then we get to chapter 2. And there's a pregnancy.

And a birth. As we turn the page into chapter 2, there's a pregnancy and a birth. And even if you don't know the story, and you don't know what's coming, you can kind of feel it. There's just a little bit of a tone change.

There's a little bit of a sliver of light in the midst of the darkness. As we turn the page, and we come to read about the birth of Moses. It's the birth of our hero.

A deliverer. And we can't go on without noting, at this point, the birth of Moses and how it points ahead to another pretty significant birth.

Jesus, born in the darkness. His birth, a sliver of light. Hope for weary people. Hope for people enslaved in the dark.

[16:02] His birth. His birth. It brought hope for those facing death. And he himself, like Moses, Jesus, he faced death, was born under a death sentence.

In Jesus' case, it was Herod with the clenched fist. Herod who ordered all the male babies to be killed. And like Moses, Jesus was given a name that fit his purpose.

Moses means to be drawn out, to draw out. And God would go on to use Moses, to draw his people out of slavery, out of Egypt.

Well, Jesus, the name is significant too. It means the Lord saves. And God would use Jesus to save his people from the slavery of sin, from Satan, from death.

We read here that Moses was a fine child. All ten fingers, all ten toes, a fine child, mother's delight, picture perfect. Jesus was too.

[17:08] Right? Again, pointing ahead to Jesus, fulfilled in Jesus, the precious, perfect lamb of God who went on to offer himself as the perfect, spotless lamb sacrifice.

Sacrifice to end all sacrifices. So baby Moses points ahead to baby Jesus. And we're going to keep that in mind as we walk through this series as well.

Into the darkness, into slavery, God brings a baby, births a savior. And we see those little fingers and we just marvel at how God does it.

So God brought a baby. But as we know, babies, well, when they're still babies, they can't really do anything, much less save or deliver or really much of anything.

They're helpless. And that's especially a problem when you've got all of Pharaoh's henchmen out to kill you. So, enter five women.

[18:15] Here at the outset of Exodus, we meet five women and each one, in different ways, steps out and risks her life to save the life of another and to protect the life of this little child.

The first two were midwives, Shifra and Pua. You can kind of think of them as the head nurses.

When Pharaoh decided he wanted all the male babies dead, what did he do?

He brought in the heads of his nursing department, right? He brought in the head nurses and gave them some orders and the orders weren't complicated. They and their associates were to kill the boy babies.

Well, Shifra and Pua, they didn't follow the orders. And the text tells us why. It says it's because they feared God.

The midwives feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do. They let the boys live. Shifra and Pua, these Egyptian women, they knew all about the sanctity of human life.

[19:26] And they knew it because they feared God. And if you think about it, it's true, right?

Whenever a society doesn't fear God, there's always a real danger to human life, that human life will lose its value.

If there's no God, then, well, there's no image of God, right? And when there's no image of God, then, well, you can very quickly lose any notion of a human life being anything sacred or being anything special at all.

And some lives, eventually, they start counting a little less than other lives. Those who are bad or broken or different or not yet born or really old come to be seen over time as expendable.

people who don't contribute much of anything to society can be seen as expendable and various justifications are given. To Pharaoh, Israelite lives didn't count for much and they had no inherent value at all.

He didn't fear God. He set himself up as God and he was an Egyptian, so to him, only Egyptian lives mattered. Hebrew lives, well, they only had utilitarian value, no inherent worth.

[20:46] But Shephra and Pua, they knew better. They feared God, the true God, our creator, and because of that, they knew about the sanctity of human life, every human life. One author put it this way, these midwives understood the mind and heart of God even though they had not received the Ten Commandments, they knew better than to commit murder.

Perhaps they were familiar with God's words to Noah. Whoever sheds the blood of a man by man shall his blood be shed. For God made man in his image.

By refusing to follow Pharaoh's orders, Shephra and Pua became the first pro-life heroines. And the neat thing is, they wouldn't be the last.

In fact, right here in this very story, we have three more pro-life heroines. And one, of course, is Moses' mom. She's not named here in this chapter, but later we learn her name, Jacobed.

Just imagine for a moment what she went through. Those saintly midwives, they made sure that Moses' first day went well, but after that, it was up to Jacobed.

[22 : 01] But how can you keep a baby hidden? How can you keep a baby quiet? You really can't. Not for long. So Jacobed, she came up with a plan, and the plan was genius, and it was fueled by faith.

Even as good as the plan was, I don't think it would have been done and accomplished if it hadn't been for her faith. Fueled by faith, her fear of God, if she didn't believe God was looking out for her little boy, I don't think she would have did what she did, but she believed, and so ahead she went. Verse three, when she could hide him no longer, talking about little Moses, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch and placed the child in it.

Put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. And his sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. That was the plan, and that's what she did, the mom.

And she included Moses' sister in this. She's the next God-fearing hero in this story, probably just a girl. Moses' big sister, Miriam. And I don't know how old she was, but it's clear she had some wisdom and courage beyond her years.

[23 : 19] She was like Moses' babysitter and protector and advocate and guardian angel all rolled into one. And there she was, hiding in the bushes alongside the Nile, watching over that basket, guarding that life.

And then when the moment came, she stepped out and she stepped up to the plate and she advocated for her kid brother. And really, it's genius how she did it.

When Pharaoh's daughter finds the basket, discovers the child, Miriam, she steps out of the bushes. Verse 7, then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women, just some random Hebrew woman, to nurse the baby for you?

Not so random. Right? She and her mom had come up with this brilliant plan and she executes it here perfectly. And baby Moses ends up once again in the arms of his mom and back with his parents and his big sister, his life now protected.

And Moses, God's chosen one, he's able now also to get a good God-faring start to his life there with his parents and his big sister. Cool thing.

[24 : 37] There's one more pro-life hero here too, of course, that's the princess, Pharaoh's daughter. Might not be right, maybe, to call her a hero, but she did risk her life to save another and to protect the life of another.

She went against her father, risked the full force of his fury, and saved this little Hebrew baby. It's amazing, really, how God used an Egyptian to preserve the life of a Hebrew slave baby to raise up for his people a deliverer.

God used her, the princess, and it's pretty clear that God was at work for her to be there at that moment and for her heart to be moved in just that way and for her to listen to this young Hebrew girl named Miriam.

God was clearly at work. In fact, if you slow down to see it, you can see God's fingerprints all over this story. And that's, well, that's the next set of hands that we find here, the most important set of hands that we find at work in this story.

They're the most important and the most powerful, but they're not all that obvious. So the big obvious work of God, that's coming up yet, right?

[26 : 06] Once we get to the plagues, we'll see it. Once we get to the Red Sea and the parting of the waters and the exodus of the people and Sinai itself, we'll see it.

God's power, God's obvious work. But that's not what we have here. Here God's not even mentioned all that much. Here it's not God's powerful arm working.

You could say it's his finger. Doing delicate work. Behind the scenes, working in small ways, hidden ways. At first we can hardly see it. But then we zoom in a little closer and we see it, his fingerprints all over.

For starters, God's ancient promise was that his people would become numerous. A great nation. Now, no one imagined it would happen in Egypt.

But that's exactly where it happened. Chapter 1, verse 7. The Israelites were fruitful and multiplied. They multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous.

[27 : 08] So that was God at work all along, keeping his promise, blessing his people. And think back, also think back to that basket for a moment. Now, I don't care how good Moses' mom is with

weaving and with tar and pitch.

It's a precarious thing to put your baby in a basket out on the water. It's a precarious thing. Animals, soldiers, a leak, a little wave, anything could overturn that basket, could do him in, but God was there.

God didn't let it happen. And it's interesting that that basket, the Bible literally calls it an ark. So, the Hebrew word here, it only shows up twice in the Bible.

One is for Noah's ark, and the other is for this basket, this ark, Jacob's ark. That basket, you see, it was God's ark for Moses.

God used Noah to build an ark and save life. God also used Jacob to build an ark and to save life. And so we see it. God's hands at work, evidence of God's work all over.

[28 : 28] We see it too in Moses' upbringing, how he ends up getting a God-fearing upbringing in his own home after all that happened. And then he, in later years, goes to the palace and he gets a world-class education there at the palace and the combination of the two God uses to prepare him for his call, his life's mission, and what he had for him to do going forward.

Bottom line, God's fingerprints are all over this. In and through all this, he's there protecting and helping and preparing the way for salvation. Keeping all that in mind, there are two things I want you to go home with this morning.

And the first is kind of a warning. So, last week, we talked about sin, about the devil, about the world, about our own sinful nature, this three sworn enemies, sinful nature, the devil, the world, and the truth is that really those three, they kind of conspire together to get us fixating on our own hands, right?

Naval gazing, fixing on our own hands. The truth is, though, salvation is God's work from beginning to end. But we come to forget that.

We come to ignore that. We fail to trust in that. And we end up fixating each day on what we can do and the work of our hands. We might say that we trust God to save us, but we don't act like it.

[30 : 03] We often will just kind of go around every day frantically trying to prove ourselves in one way or another, earn for ourselves the love and approval of others and of God. God's work can be hard to see.

And so then we try and take over ourselves. So God's word comes to us this morning as sort of a warning against us trying to save ourselves and to put ourselves in that position of savior.

We can't do it. We'll die trying. It won't work. The best is to surrender to the Lord sooner rather than later.

That's the call. He's got the whole world in his hands and he's got us too. And with his mighty right hand, he's working salvation for us on our behalf. He's got things well in hand. That's the good news.

The other thing I want us to take home this morning, well, it might sound a little bit like a contradiction to what I just said, but it's not. What we do matters.

[31 : 09] What we do matters. What we do matters. God's at work and we can't save ourselves, but what we do matters. In fact, because there's a God and because he's at work, what we do matters.

So Moses eventually grows up. Spoiler. He grows up. He goes on and he writes some Psalms and Psalm 90 is one of those and in Psalm 90, he says this, may the favor of the Lord, our God rest upon us, establish the work of our hands for us.

Lord, establish the work of our hands. What we do matters. Even just in this story, right? We see God using the bloodied hands of those midwives.

We see God using a mother's boat building skills. We see him using some babysitting prowess and some bold words from big sister Miriam.

We even see him using an Egyptian, an Egyptian princess. As God-fearing people, we put our hands now at his disposal.

[32 : 17] As God-fearing people, we do what we can to help the image bearers of God all around us. And as God-fearing people, we just stand amazed at what our God does, how he works it all out and includes us and uses us in the process.

Thanks be to God. Let's pray together. Lord, our God, may your favor rest upon us.

We need your help. And we want to be helpful. So we open our hands to you. We pray that you will use us just as we are.

Use us, Lord, in some small way. As we rest in your care, in your grip, Lord, we pray that you would enable us to open our hands to others as individuals, as Covenant Church. Establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, establish the work of our hands. That's our prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.