

Stranger Things

Exodus 2:16-22

Pierre Cannings, Ph.D

I. On the Run v. 18-19

a. Midian

- i. In contrast, the connections between Moses and the Midianites are manifold, detailed, and remarkable (Exod 2–4, 18; Numbers 25, 31) and can hardly be explained on any basis other than historical fact. Upon fleeing from Egypt to somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula after killing the Egyptian overseer, Moses joined and then married the daughter (Zipporah) of a Midianite shepherd, variously named Reuel, Jethro, or Hobab. This Midianite shepherd was in later tradition promoted to the Midianite priesthood, doubtless because of the tradition in Exod 18:12, where we are told that Jethro offered a burnt offering and sacrifice, followed by a common meal with “all the elders of Israel.” Clearly the later tradition was unaware of the significance and social context of a typical *menseff*, which at that time may very well have been an implied covenant of peace between the two groups
- ii. Having prepared Moses in Egypt, having introduced him there to the agony of his people, having removed him to the land of his final preparation for his work as deliverer, the narrator begins to answer the question “Why Midian?” with an assertion placed in the mouth of Moses himself.
- iii. The account of the encounter at the well in Midian in vv. 16–19 tells several things about Moses’ character: his flight from Egypt had not blunted his instinct for intervening against injustice and righting wrongs; he was quick to act against oppression, even alone, isolated, and with the odds against him; he was sufficiently imposing and/or assertive to intimidate several shepherds; he was physically vigorous enough to chase off a group of shepherds and then do work that seven girls were planning to do; he was not easily cowed himself; he was generous and helpful to people he hardly knew, acting from principle rather than merely from personal loyalty; and he did not ask for a personal reward for what he had done. All of these characteristics are seen again in various ways as Moses responded to God’s call to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. In other words, the Moses we see here is basically the same Moses we have already seen as an adult in Egypt and whom we will see again throughout

the Pentateuch—a figure whom God continued to prepare for a great and daunting task yet for whom such a task, however potentially dispiriting, would not be something inimical to his basic nature.

- iv. The answer to these questions, of course, is to be given fully in Exod 3. Moses has come to a people who not only worship the God of the fathers, but are free to do so. Thus he is at home, because this God is his God. And as this God is also his people's God, Moses is soon to be directed to bring them to a place where they can worship him freely too. For such a narrative we now stand fully prepared

b. Priest of Midian –

- i. Jethro is shown here in a typically favorable light, as a gracious and diplomatic individual who found in Moses someone he could appreciate. When in chap. 18 Jethro's conversion is described (no small matter in light of his being a priest of another religion), his delight at Moses' role in his life is also obvious.
- ii. The fact that Moses' father-in-law is a priest in Midian is vitally important, for later (Exod 18:12) he, a pagan priest, will present offerings to the true God, the God of gods (Exod 18:11). The Heb. text places the fact of his priesthood first in the sentence
- iii. God had a place of refuge for his downcast leader, a virtual desperado at this time. Thus Jethro becomes a key player in the narrative of Exodus, for through him God's goal of touching and reaching the nations begins, as he brings the nations and his people into contact. While Moses' own people reject him and Pharaoh rejects him, a Midianite priest receives him and shows him hospitality.
- iv. Indeed, his priestly vocation is more clearly remembered than his name. For while Moses' father-in-law is consistently said to be a priest of Midian, his name is variously given as Reuel (v 18), a name assigned also to the father of Moses' father-in-law in Num 10:29; Jethro ("His Abundance," 3:1; 18:1, 2, and throughout the chapter); Jether ("Abundance, Preeminence") and Jethro in a single verse (4:18;

c. Early

i. Back So Soon

- 1. The seven daughters of this priest are depicted as being so excited by the gallant behavior of Moses at the well that they quite forget their manners and rush home to tell of their adventure without an appropriate response to their champion. They describe Moses to their father as אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם "an Egyptian man."

d. Delivered

i. Hand of the Shepherds

- 1. Moses delivered the daughters of Reuel from the shepherds—a providential event for the writer. Thereby Moses is endeared to Reuel, and many blessings follow from this act of kindness (cf. Exod 1:17; 2:6). Moses' act of violence in Egypt did not accomplish

anything of value in itself, but the writer parallels Moses' deliverance of Reuel's daughters to God's deliverance of Israel (cf. Exod 2:19; 18:8 for use of נצל). Moses watered their flocks in the wilderness and would later provide water for the people of Israel (cf. Exod 15:25; 17:5–7).

2. The second theme indicates that Moses' attempts to "rescue" people have improved; he is successful, his actions are on time, and his bravado and boldness are again present even after his flight from Pharaoh; he rose up to deliver them. But unlike his earlier attempt, God orchestrated this encounter.

e. Drew

i. He added

1. Drew Water
2. Watered the Flock

II. Stuck Around

a. Why Did You Leave Him There

i. Invite Him to Eat

1. Jethro's three questions represent a sufficiently extensive emphasis in this otherwise short account that he must have felt that his daughters had forgotten their manners in their excitement at having been paid such favorable attention by a prominent stranger.
2. "Call him" shows the respect that Reuel had toward Moses even before he met him. Moses' deeds had preceded him.

b. Willing to Dwell

c. Jethro Gave Daughter

i. Zipporah

1. Zipporah's name occurs twice is also no accident, inasmuch as the reader is now introduced to the woman who will have a prominent role in God's plans for Moses. It is not entirely incidental that this prominent attention is paid to Moses' marrying a non-Israelite; contrary to popular impression, the composition of the Israelites was simply not genetically/ethnically monolithic but rather a matter of faith as opposed to flesh.

ii. Had a son

1. He establishes immediately Moses' great pleasure or eager delight (ישב) in settling down and in remaining to live (יאל) with such a man. He demonstrates Jethro's sharing of that delight as he gives Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. The explanation Moses gives for the name of his firstborn son then summarizes what is taking place.

2. Midian, because Midian is home. A loving family is there—a wife and a son, a son whose name both sums up Moses' life to this point and augurs, by his past-oriented explanation, a new and better future. Moses in Egypt was a nonperson, a foreigner without status; here in Midian, where he belongs, and always has belonged, he is at home.

iii. Sojourner in a Foreign Land

1. Sojourner –
2. The nominal form of the root applies to someone who is not native to the area, and the verbal form means “to travel,” “to sojourn,” or “to stay in a foreign territory.”
3. Sojourner is used most often because it conveys the idea that the individual is not a permanent member of the community in which he or she lives. The term client is frequently employed to indicate that the individual does not have full rights within a community and thus is dependent on a patron for protection
4. This name, Gershom, occurs elsewhere in the OT (e.g., Judg 18:30; 1 Chr 6:1; Ezra 8:2) and is probably derived from גרש “drive, cast out” (BDB 176–77), signifying “one driven out or thrust forth.” The writer, however, has given us a pun and has explained Gershom's name as he did Moses' name (see *Comment* on 2:10), on the basis of assonance of the name with a word that carries the meaning he has in mind. Gershom is thus explained as though it were a compound of גר “stranger” (from גור “sojourn, linger in one's travels”) plus שם “there, thither.”
5. So the name is connected with “stranger” and “there,” and an explanation that connects it with both Moses' past and his new situation is given. The foreign land to which Moses refers must be understood to be Egypt, not Midian, as the commentators generally say. The statement of Moses is “a stranger I have been,” הָיִיתִי, not “a stranger I am,” אֲנִי. Egypt, the place of Moses' birth, has never been his home, any more than it has been the home of any of the Israelites.
6. and thus not a new name but one carefully chosen in light of Moses' circumstances. These circumstances are not entirely positive. From Moses' point of view, he was now permanently separated both from what he regarded as his homeland, Egypt, and also from the people he now identified with as his own, Israel. Consider, then, the spiritual challenge that was his. He was a failure as a deliverer of his people, a failure as a citizen of Egypt, unwelcome among either of the nations he might have called his own, a wanted man, a now-permanent resident of an obscure place, alone and far from his origins, and among people of a different religion (however much or little Midianite religion may

have shared some features with whatever unwritten Israelite religion existed at this time).

III. No Stranger to God

- a. Delivered the people
 - i. His character, as we have seen, was clearly that of a deliverer. His circumstances, however, offered no support for any calling appropriate to that character. It would surely require an amazing supernatural action of a sovereign God for this washed-up exile to play any role in Israel's future. Moses knew this, and his statement, "I have become an alien in a foreign land," resignedly confirms it
 - ii. God's providential care for Moses; 2. Moses' deliverance of the daughters, which is told first in the third person and then again in direct speech to Reuel by his daughters; and 3. the concomitant rescue of Moses by the daughters from a wandering existence. This is the *Leitmotiv*. The second time the daughters report Moses' action, saying "an Egyptian man delivered us," they use the same word (נָצַל) that describes God's deliverance of the Israelites in the exodus event (e.g., Exod 18:8), and in this context is synonymous with the "salvation" verb (נָשַׁע) of v. 17. The designation of Moses as an Egyptian adds to the feeling of alienation he now experiences from his people. Twice within these seven verses Moses' actions of deliverance are highlighted
 - iii. Moses successfully flees and, during his flight and rest at a well, he delivers the daughters of a Midianite priest, an act that suggests his future deliverance of Israel at the Reed Sea and in turn becomes the basis for his own rescue from wandering as a sojourner. God continues to watch over his chosen vessel by which he will rescue his people.
- b. Sojourners in the desert
 - i. These verses continue to recount Yahweh's protection and preparation of his chosen leader, who would bring his people out of Egyptian slavery, as God had indicated (cf. Gen 15:14). In spite of some serious setbacks and miscalculations by that chosen leader, God's deliverance will become a reality. Moses' actions and words in Egypt displayed compassion for his people; he identified with them and involved himself in their situations, even to the point of offending his fellow Israelites. His unfortunate killing of an Egyptian and his offensive behavior toward his own people made him a *persona non grata* both to his own people and to Pharaoh.
 - ii. Moses' intentions were correct, but his timing was off, according to the writer of Acts (7:25–29; cf. Heb 11:23–27), and the narrative in Exodus supports that observation. But God's grace and protection delivered Moses from Pharaoh's vengeance and the painful rejection of his fellow Israelites. Moses had sought them out to help them (Exod 2:11).

- iii. The author-editor of Exodus never loses sight of the purpose of the call of Abraham (cf. Gen 12:1–3; Exod 18:9–12). R. W. L. Moberly notes that Gen 12:1–3 is a key to interpreting the OT. Moses' time in Midian was difficult, as God awaited his time to deliver his people. It was a time of sojourning; Moses named his son Gershom ("a stranger there") to recognize that fact. As Israel sojourned in Egypt, their leader continued to sojourn in Midian for a long period. But Yahweh would see, and feel and act, in his own time (cf. Exod 2:23–25).
- c. Jethro Gave him Advice in the wilderness

Key Words

Priest of Midian

Land of Midian

Midianites in Early Biblical Tradition

Biblical tradition listed the eponymous ancestor, Midian, as one of six sons born to the patriarch Abraham by his second wife, Keturah (Gen 25:1–6). According to this account Abraham sent these sons away from Canaan to the ¹E country, a tradition that implies an origin in Canaan proper for these proto-Arabic tribal designations. This tradition is now powerfully reinforced by linguistic evidence that derives the pre-Islamic Arabic language and writing system from the Bronze Age Mediterranean coastal region (Mendenhall 1985: chap. 10).

The Midianites as a historically existent society are represented in the Joseph stories (Gen 37:25–36) as traders traveling by camel caravan between Gilead (²N Transjordan) and Egypt, and in this case dealing in slaves as well as “gum, balm, and myrrh.” The term Midianite alternates with the term Ishmaelite, probably to be explained by the fact that at the time the narrative reached its present form, the Midianites had ceased to exist as a distinct social group but were identified with an ethnic group later called Ishmaelites. The narrative certainly is not earlier than the monarchy, and there is no reason to believe that it is based upon any historical event. However, the narrative does evidently make use of historical memory concerning the Midianites, and the picture it yields is plausible in view of present information concerning the society and its culture.

In contrast, the connections between Moses and the Midianites are manifold, detailed, and remarkable (Exod 2–4, 18; Numbers 25, 31) and can hardly be explained on any basis other than historical fact. Upon fleeing from Egypt to somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula after killing the Egyptian overseer, Moses joined and then married the daughter (Zipporah) of a Midianite shepherd, variously named Reuel, Jethro, or Hobab. This Midianite shepherd was in later tradition promoted to the Midianite priesthood, doubtless because of the tradition in Exod 18:12, where we are told that Jethro offered a burnt offering and sacrifice, followed by a common meal with “all the elders of Israel.” Clearly the later tradition was unaware of the significance and social context of a typical *menseff*, which at that time may very well have been an implied covenant of peace between the two groups.

By his wife, Moses had two sons named Gershom (or Gershon) and Eliezer (Exod 18:3–4). In Exod 4:18–20, his wife and sons were taken with him to Egypt, but in Exodus 18:2 they are still with Jethro—a fact that is explained by the statement that Moses had “sent her away,” i.e., divorced her. Exodus 18 is the original and correct version, for the sons are repeatedly called “her sons.” This corresponds to the ancient customary law by which children born to a *ger* (i.e., a resident alien) normally remain with their maternal grandfather, as in the law of Exod 21:4, and implied also in the Jacob-Laban narrative. All of these Midianite names except Eliezer

¹E east (ern); or “Elohish” source

²N north (ern)

actually occur in pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions, together with most of the other names cited in biblical sources as those of Midianite or Moabite persons (Mendenhall 1984).³

Stood Up

Helped

Egyptian

Delivered

Willing to Dwell

Son "Sojourners of the Land"

SOJOURNER [Heb *gēr* (גֵּר); Gk *paroikos* (παροικος)]. A foreigner who is traveling through a land or one who has taken up residence in that land. The key is that the sojourner has no familial or tribal affiliation with those among whom he or she is traveling or living.

The Hebrew word derives from the root *gwr*. It is a common Afrasian root which appears in Egyptian and in the Semitic languages Phoenician, Ugaritic, Old South Arabic and Aramaic as well as Hebrew. In all of these languages, the meaning is generally agreed upon. The nominal form of the root applies to someone who is not native to the area, and the verbal form means "to travel," "to sojourn," or "to stay in a foreign territory." However, there is some variation in the way lexicographers have tried to capture the meaning of *gēr*, and suggestions have included "sojourner," "foreign resident," "stranger," "foreigner," "immigrant," "client," and "resident alien." Sojourner is used most often because it conveys the idea that the individual is not a permanent member of the community in which he or she lives. The term client is frequently employed to indicate that the individual does not have full rights within a community and thus is dependent on a patron for protection.⁴

is a man who (alone or with his family) leaves village and tribe because of war 2S 4:3 Is 16:4, famine Ru 1:1, epidemic, blood guilt etc. and seeks shelter and residence at another place, where his right of landed property, marriage and taking part in jurisdiction, cult and war has been curtailed⁵

³ George E. Mendenhall, "[Midian \(Person\)](#)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 815–816.

⁴ John R. Spencer, "[Sojourner](#)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 103.

⁵ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 201.

Commentary Studies

16 The priesthood of Moses' Midianite father-in-law is an important detail, and so it is established at the very first mention of the Midianites. Indeed, his priestly vocation is more clearly remembered than his name. For while Moses' father-in-law is consistently said to be a priest of Midian, his name is variously given as Reuel (v 18), a name assigned also to the father of Moses' father-in-law in Num 10:29; Jethro ("His Abundance," 3:1; 18:1, 2, and throughout the chapter); Jether ("Abundance, Preeminence") and Jethro in a single verse (4:18; Jether is apparently a textual slip in M⁶T); and Hobab ("Loving, Embracing One," Num 10:29; Judg 4:11).

This confusion is variously explained as reflective of separate sources (Johnson, "Jethro," *ID⁷B* 2:896); as indicative of textual misunderstandings (Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 183–84), or a mispointing of חתן, giving "father-in-law" instead of a correct "son-in-law" (Albright, *CB⁸Q* 25 [1963] 7); as the result of a mistranslation, "father-in-law" for "brother-in-law" (Moore, *Judges*, ICC⁹C [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895] 32–33); and as the taking of a clan-name, Reuel, to be a proper name (Albright, *CB¹⁰Q* 25 [1963] 5–6) or as the use of two or more names for the same individual (Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 47). None of these solutions is entirely satisfactory, and we are thus left with unexplained confusion in the transmission of the name of Moses' father-in-law (cf. Widengren, *Proclamation and Presence*, 28–30), though with no doubt about his priestly role. The name most frequently given to him is Jethro. Indeed, apart from v 18 here, Jethro is the sole name assigned to him in the Book of Exodus.

18–19 The seven daughters of this priest are depicted as being so excited by the gallant behavior of Moses at the well that they quite forget their manners and rush home to tell of their adventure without an appropriate response to their champion. They describe Moses to their father as אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם "an Egyptian man." There is no justification for the frequent assertion that they knew Moses to be Egyptian by his clothing. What the daughters say is rather the writer's attempt to link the two contexts of his narrative, and, as has been noted already, to contrast what Moses has seemed to be, to his own people in Egypt, for example (2:14), with what he really is.

20 Jethro's response to his daughters is a delightfully witty and realistic narrative touch. Three questions in quick succession depict his incredulity, his astonishment, and his shocked disappointment. Then, as though catching his breath, he barks out a command to the daughters to do what they should have done, with no need for prompting from him.

21–22 The narrator leaps from Jethro's invitation, presumably delivered by his daughters, through Moses' settlement, marriage, and fatherhood, to Moses' retrospective interpretation of it all in the naming of his son. He establishes immediately Moses' great pleasure or eager delight (יָאֵל) in settling down and in remaining to live (יָשָׁב) with such a man. He demonstrates

⁶MT Masoretic Text

⁷IDB Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible

⁸CBQ Catholic Bible Quarterly

⁹ICC International Critical Commentary

¹⁰CBQ Catholic Bible Quarterly

Jethro's sharing of that delight as he gives Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. The explanation Moses gives for the name of his firstborn son then summarizes what is taking place.

This name, Gershom, occurs elsewhere in the OT (e.g., Judg 18:30; 1 Chr 6:1; Ezra 8:2) and is probably derived from גרש "drive, cast out" (BD¹¹B, 176–77), signifying "one driven out or thrust forth." The writer, however, has given us a pun and has explained Gershom's name as he did Moses' name (see *Comment* on 2:10), on the basis of assonance of the name with a word that carries the meaning he has in mind. Gershom is thus explained as though it were a compound of גר "stranger" (from גור "sojourn, linger in one's travels") plus שם "there, thither."

The fact that this etymology is probably an incorrect one in no way lessens, however, its value as a key to the intention of the narrative sequence of Exod 2. Indeed, the manner in which such an explanation is given in the service of the writer's point adds to its usefulness for understanding this text far beyond the value of any correct derivation of Gershom's name. It is at least possible that the narrator knew the derivation from גרש (Cassuto, 26, thinks he "undoubtedly knew full well"). Whether he did or not, his real concern is theological assertion, and his choice of the event of Moses' most complete integration into his Midianite family as the setting for this assertion is an inspired one.

So the narrator declares that an invitation to dinner became in turn a visit, a sojourn, a settlement delightful to all parties, involving marriage and then the commingling of blood in the union of childbirth. And at that special moment, Moses gave to the child, a son, the significant summary name "Gershom," the meaning of which, like the meaning of the name of Moses himself, the author is not content to leave to our speculation. His point is far too important.

So the name is connected with "stranger" and "there," and an explanation that connects it with both Moses' past and his new situation is given. The foreign land to which Moses refers must be understood to be Egypt, not Midian, as the commentators generally say. The statement of Moses is "a stranger I have been," הֵיְיָתִי, not "a stranger I am," אֲנִי הֵיְיָתִי. Egypt, the place of Moses' birth, has never been his home, any more than it has been the home of any of the Israelites. There, Moses was a stranger, no matter how familiar to him were that land and the ways of its people. Here, Moses is at home, no matter how unfamiliar to him may be this land and the ways of its people. There, he had been rejected by the Egyptians and even by his kinsmen. Here, he had been received into the innermost circle of a people who had never seen him before. Moses, who had been a stranger there all his life, was here a stranger no longer.

Is it any wonder that Moses should want such a homecoming for his people, foreigners there in Egypt?

Explanation

With this third and climactic section of the narrative of Exod 2, we are brought to the threshold of the real subject of the Book of Exodus. Having prepared Moses in Egypt, having introduced him there to the agony of his people, having removed him to the land of his final preparation for his work as deliverer, the narrator begins to answer the question "Why Midian?" with an assertion placed in the mouth of Moses himself.

¹¹BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

Midian, because Midian is home. A loving family is there—a wife and a son, a son whose name both sums up Moses' life to this point and augurs, by his past-oriented explanation, a new and better future. Moses in Egypt was a nonperson, a foreigner without status; here in Midian, where he belongs, and always has belonged, he is at home.

But immediately another question rises: what makes this place the place of belonging? Moses' assertion comes at first glance from the warmth of his domestic happiness. But suddenly we are confronted with a larger context. What has brought about the amazing welcome, the total at-homeness, the "eager delight" of Moses to dwell with this clan among whom Jethro ministers as priest?

The answer to these questions, of course, is to be given fully in Exod 3. Moses has come to a people who not only worship the God of the fathers, but are free to do so. Thus he is at home, because this God is his God. And as this God is also his people's God, Moses is soon to be directed to bring them to a place where they can worship him freely too. For such a narrative we now stand fully prepared.¹²

2:16–19 The account of the encounter at the well in Midian in vv. 16–19 tells several things about Moses' character: his flight from Egypt had not blunted his instinct for intervening against injustice and righting wrongs; he was quick to act against oppression, even alone, isolated, and with the odds against him; he was sufficiently imposing and/or assertive to intimidate several shepherds; he was physically vigorous enough to chase off a group of shepherds and then do work that seven girls were planning to do;¹⁴¹³⁵ he was not easily cowed himself; he was generous and helpful to people he hardly knew, acting from principle rather than merely from personal loyalty; and he did not ask for a personal reward for what he had done. All of these characteristics are seen again in various ways as Moses responded to God's call to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. In other words, the Moses we see here is basically the same Moses we have already seen as an adult in Egypt and whom we will see again throughout the Pentateuch—a figure whom God continued to prepare for a great and daunting task yet for whom such a task, however potentially dispiriting, would not be something inimical to his basic nature.

These verses tell us a bit more about Moses as well. He was, though surely not yet romantically, attracted to the daughters of Reuel,¹⁴¹⁴⁶ the priest of Midian. Something about

¹² John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 22–24.

¹³¹⁴⁵ Some commentators have inferred that the shepherds drove the girls away after they had drawn the water (e.g., Childs, *Exodus*, 31), but the most direct reading of the text suggests that the shepherds arrived after the girls, simply refused to wait their turn, and attempted to take advantage of their strength as opposed to that of the girls to take over access to the well. Moses then drew the water that the girls had been planning to draw.

¹⁴¹⁴⁶ The sisters' father, eventually Moses' father-in-law, is usually called Jethro (3:1; 4:18; 18:1), but he also appears to bear the name (depending on the way the text is translated) of Reuel here and also Hobab (Judg 4:11). From Num 10:29 Hobab is sometimes thought to be identified as Zipporah's grandfather. W. F. Albright solved the confusion in his article, "Jethro, Hobab and Reuel in Early Hebrew

their looks and/or demeanor awakened his interest and concern. Perhaps, in light of his extensive education already in Egypt, he was well aware of the family connection between Midian and Israel and thus was warmly predisposed toward a group of Midianite women. He obviously knew that he was in Midianite territory and might already have been looking for a place to settle down. Additionally, it should not be surprising in light of his eventual betrothal and marriage to one of Jethro's daughters that he should be inspired to include in the narrative the details of how he met his wife. He was also recognizably dressed and presumably tonsured like an Egyptian; otherwise the girls would not have described him so readily as "an Egyptian."¹⁴¹⁵⁷ Although these Midianite women may not have spoken any Egyptian, it would not have surprised them that an Egyptian might speak a recognizable form of Semitic. The Egyptians, whose Hamitic tongue was not cognate to Hebrew or Midianite, had over the centuries sent armies, occupation forces, diplomatic representatives, and traders into Midianite regions, and thus the women would know what an Egyptian looked like and would not have been surprised that one would know their language. In addition to this, the opportunity was once again presenting itself for Moses to benefit from the intervention of women on his behalf, as the following verses indicate. He had rescued them; they in turn provided hospitality for him, eventually a living arrangement and marriage, and later one of them would save his son's life put in danger by his own neglect (4:24–26).

2:20–22 These three verses provide a fast summary that takes the reader through Jethro's invitation to dinner, Moses' settling down as part of Jethro's household, Moses' marriage to Zipporah, and the birth and naming of their first child. Thus Moses had become a permanent resident (emphasized by the last statement in v. 22) among the Midianites and an exile both from the land, Egypt, and the people of his birth, Israel.

Jethro's three questions represent a sufficiently extensive emphasis in this otherwise short account that he must have felt that his daughters had forgotten their manners in their excitement at having been paid such favorable attention by a prominent stranger. Jethro is

Tradition," *CBQ* 25 (1963): 1–11, essentially as follows: Jethro was the man's usual name, with the variant Jether (Exod 4:18); Reuel was his clan name (what we might call his "last" name today); whereas Hobab was Moses' son-in-law. The vowels of "son-in-law" and "father-in-law" are choices of Masoretic pointing for the consonants יתן, which both words share. Thus the confusion about Hobab is simply the result of a misunderstanding by the medieval Masorete who first pointed Num 10:29 as "father-in-law" rather than the proper "son-in-law." Cf. G. F. Moore, *Judges*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 32–33; M. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman, 1969), 47. A number of critical scholars, however, regard the name differentiation as evidence of different sources. Cf. M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1981), 183–84; R. F. Johnson, "Jethro," *IDB* 2:896; G. Widengren, "What Do We Know about Moses?" in *Proclamation and Presence* (Macon: Mercer University Press), 28–30. Yet another approach is taken by J. D. Hays ("Moses: The Private Man Behind the Public Leader," *BR* 16 [2000]: 16–26, 60–63), who suggests that Reuel was Zipporah's father-in-law and Jethro her brother and thus Moses' brother-in-law (with the word יתן meaning generally "in-law"). None of the three names (Reuel, Jethro, Hobab) has any special symbolic meaning for the narrative.

¹⁵¹⁴⁷ Egyptian art depictions of foreigners indicate different dress and hair styles for various ethnic groups, and it would have been important for people in ancient times to know the differences since there were so many enmities between the various groups. Cf. J. Osing, "Les populations asiatiques," *MDB* 41 (1985): 22–24.

shown here in a typically favorable light,¹⁴¹⁶⁸ as a gracious and diplomatic individual who found in Moses someone he could appreciate. When in chap. 18 Jethro's conversion is described (no small matter in light of his being a priest of another religion), his delight at Moses' role in his life is also obvious. The fact that Zipporah's name occurs twice is also no accident, inasmuch as the reader is now introduced to the woman who will have a prominent role in God's plans for Moses. It is not entirely incidental that this prominent attention is paid to Moses' marrying a non-Israelite; contrary to popular impression, the composition of the Israelites was simply not genetically/ethnically monolithic but rather a matter of faith as opposed to flesh.¹⁴¹⁷⁹

The naming of Gershom in v. 22 represents another instance of homophonous naming of a child (cf. 2:10), the name in this case suggested by its being similar in sound to the explanation Moses provided: *gēr* ("alien") and *šōm* (close in sound to *šām*, "there"¹⁵¹⁸⁰) combining to suggest the approximate meaning "an alien there." The name itself probably was preexisting¹⁵¹⁹¹ and thus not a new name but one carefully chosen in light of Moses' circumstances. These circumstances are not entirely positive. From Moses' point of view, he was now permanently separated both from what he regarded as his homeland, Egypt, and also from the people he now identified with as his own, Israel. Consider, then, the spiritual challenge that was his. He was a failure as a deliverer of his people, a failure as a citizen of Egypt, unwelcome among either of the nations he might have called his own, a wanted man, a now-permanent resident of an obscure place, alone and far from his origins, and among people of a different religion (however much or little Midianite religion may have shared some features with whatever

¹⁶¹⁴⁸ One must not rush to paint Jethro in too favorable a religious light—such as has commonly been done by advocates of the "Kenite Hypothesis," the theory that Moses must have picked up his ideas about Yahweh from Jethro and his Midianite/Kenite culture, then shaped them as he applied his understanding of Yahwism to the situation he eventually confronted in Egypt. By this theory, Jethro's influence as a priest (i.e., of Yahweh) and as Moses' benefactor and father-in-law would have provided the opportunity for Moses' indoctrination into Yahwism. The whole theory is highly speculative, looking at *ot* religion as a thing of human origin, not as a body of truth and practice revealed to humans. Cf. R. de Vaux, "Sur l'origine kenite ou madianite du Yahvisme," *Eretz-Israel* 9; W. F. Albright Volume (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1969), 28–32; G. W. Coats, "Moses in Midian," *JBL* 92 (1973): 3–10; H. J. Gunneweg, "Mose in Midian," *ZTK* 61 (1964): 1–9; J. C. S. Hommes, "Moses-*'vreemdeling'* in Midjan," *ACEBT* 10 (1989): 16–20.

¹⁷¹⁴⁹ This is emphasized in 12:38 and developed in its theological implications in such great passages as Rom 2:28–29.

¹⁸¹⁵⁰ The Hb. short *o* and long *a* were indicated by the same vowel marker (*qamets*) by the time of the medieval Masoretes, a phenomenon that may reflect the closeness of long *a* and *o* in earlier times; the so-called Canaanite vowel shift also presumably was occasioned in part by the virtual allophonic closeness of *a* and *o* in northwest Semitic pronunciation during *ot* times.

¹⁹¹⁵¹ The name Gershom is, however, actually attested only later, in Judg 18:30; 1 Chr 6:1; and Ezra 8:2, and may derive from גרש ("drive out/expel"). As pointed out earlier in connection with Moses' own name, Hebrew names often were not strictly etymological but were chosen because existing names were suggested by circumstances or words that attended or surrounded the birth. See Stuart, "Names, Proper," 3.483–88; cf. R. Nogah, "The Explanation of the Names 'Gershom' and 'Eliezer,'" *BMik* 35 (1989–1990): 257–60 [Hebrew]. For a somewhat different approach, cf. also J. Fichter, *VT* 6 (1956): 372; B. O. Long, *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament*, *BZAW* 108 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1968), 4ff.

unwritten Israelite religion existed at this time). His character, as we have seen, was clearly that of a deliverer. His circumstances, however, offered no support for any calling appropriate to that character. It would surely require an amazing supernatural action of a sovereign God for this washed-up exile to play any role in Israel's future. Moses knew this, and his statement, "I have become an alien in a foreign land," resignedly confirms it.¹⁵²⁰²²¹

2:16 The fact that Moses' father-in-law is a priest in Midian⁸²²⁷ is vitally important, for later (Exod 18:12) he, a pagan priest, will present offerings to the true God, the God of gods (Exod 18:11). The Heb. text places the fact of his priesthood first in the sentence (וּלְכֹהֵן מִדְיָן), the most emphatic position it could occupy. The priest's seven daughters are evidence that God has blessed him with fecundity. Whether his name was Jethro, Reuel, or some combination of these is puzzling but much less important than that he was a priest, for Moses' training in religious practices and his father-in-law's understanding and support of his mission are thereby enhanced and even furthered. His father-in-law was a devout man who recognized an act of kindness when he heard of it.

Contrary to what many have argued, it is clear that the religious influence of Moses on him was far greater than was his influence on Moses.⁸²³⁸ All of the Midianite "traditions" and

²⁰¹⁵² On the significance of the name Gershom as a kind of marker in the narrative of Moses' past and future countries, see J. C. Siebert-Hommes, "Mozes—vreemdeling in Midjan," *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese van de Bijbel en zijn Tradities* 10 (1989): 16–20.

²¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 99–102.

²²⁸⁷ See notes and comment. to v. 15 above.

²³⁸⁸ The so-called Kenite/Midianite hypothesis attempts to explain Moses' knowledge of Yahweh and his name by claiming that he got it from Reuel/Jethro but made important additions to the information received from him. But the author-compiler of Exodus did not share this hypothesis. A close reading of the Exodus text in chaps. 3, 4, and 18 (esp. 18:7, 11) clearly shows that Jethro is the learner, while Moses is the teacher and storyteller with respect to religious content. Cf. *NBD*, 2nd ed., 651–52. For a creative defense and presentation of the "K/M" hypothesis see H. H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 151–56. Rowley notes concerning the origin of Yahwism, "The 'Kenite hypothesis' does not pretend to solve it, but merely claims that Kenite Yahwism was the source of Mosaic Yahwism, until it was enriched and given a new quality through the prophetic personality of Moses. It is not necessary to suppose that the worship of Yahweh was previously confined to the Kenites, but only that Jethro was a priest of this God" (ibid., 156n1). After reviewing the evidence for the "K/M" hypothesis on the origin of Yahwism, N. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 195, observes, "Of course the opposite explanation is not impossible, namely, that Moses introduced Yahwism to the Midianites" (emphasis mine). If so, then the biblical traditions are clearly preferable for simplicity and historical probability. Cf. also J. Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing*, SBT (London: SCM Press, 1956), 127, for a good summary. S. Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times*, 2nd rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 75, prefers to understand independent traditions arising among the Midianites, Kenites, and Rechabites, for all attempts to find Yahwism originating from one of these tribes end only in hypotheses. Wells, 172, notes that a probable

“sources” indicate this fact, both in 2:16–4:23 and in chap. 18. Our author emphasizes that it was “in Midian” that Yahweh spoke to Moses and charged him with a task concerning Yahweh, Israel, and Pharaoh (4:29). Even if the *name* of Yahweh was known among the Midianites/Kenites, which is highly unlikely, the revelation Moses receives from Yahweh about himself is sufficient to make a totally new beginning, a new era of religious experience for the people who would follow Yahweh.⁸²⁴⁹ Hence the origin of Moses’ biblical monotheism is not Egypt, nor Mesopotamia, but the desert of Sinai. Of course Egypt and Mesopotamia added to Moses’ milieu, but the essence of Moses’ monotheism does not come from the so-called monotheist Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV, 1356–1340 BC)⁹²⁵⁰ or his father-in-law. Its roots lay in the practical monotheism of God’s revelation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Yahweh as the only sovereign whom they could recognize. While monotheism, the concept and idea, and perhaps its practice, appear to be very ancient,⁹²⁶¹ a new era dawns in Moses’ time when the character of Yahweh is revealed more fully—as holy and unique in his holiness, power, and purposes.

Women are central to the story again, seven of them. To have seven daughters was to have God’s full blessing of progeny and, according to Num 10:29, Jethro had a son. The phrase “seven daughters” (שִׁבְעַת בָּנוֹת) occurs only here in the OT. First Samuel 2:5 records that the one who was barren has borne seven children.⁹²⁷² This important point is the second major thought expressed in the first sentence of the verse in Heb., for from this abundance of seven daughters Moses is undoubtedly given the best one for a wife. Fertility, sons or daughters, was not taken for granted in the ancient world. Two ancient figures described in Ugaritic literature would have envied Reuel’s lot. The righteous king Keret suffered the death of seven consecutive wives and had no son to succeed him. Dan(i)el, probably a righteous patriarch, had no son and went through an incubation rite lasting seven days in order to be blessed with a son.⁹²⁸³ Kings of Egypt developed harems to assure the production of an heir to their throne.

The task that the daughters performed for their father provides the setting for Moses’ entrée and subsequent rescue, but also shows that these daughters were productive and

place for Midian, in the area of northeastern Arabia just east of the Gulf of Aqaba, is referred to as the “Land of the Shasu” in Egyptian texts, and the Shasu were Bedouin shepherds (or “wanderers”). The date of these references is ca. 1400 BC. The texts mention a god *yhw* who is in the land of the Shasu. This *could be* a form of Yahweh, the name of Israel’s God. Perhaps a god by this name was worshiped in this area, but would hardly qualify as the God now being revealed to Israel through Moses (cf. Exod 6:1–4). Jethro recognizes, even proclaims, Israel’s God in Exod 18:10–11 in a way that singles out the God of Moses and Israel. Moses had shared Yahweh’s actions (and the revelation of his name?) in his tent (Exod 18:7–8). Moses, called by Yahweh, his God, leaves Jethro his gods to return to his own people (Exod 4:18).

²⁴⁸⁹ See commentary and notes above on Midian in vv. 15–16. Note especially Gen 25:6 and its possible significance.

²⁵⁹⁰ For a critique of the so-called monotheism of Akhenaten see DOTT 142–43; cf. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 146–49; Wells.

²⁶⁹¹ See Kitchen’s discussion in *Reliability of the Old Testament*, 330–33, 395, 465.

²⁷⁹² The only thing that could top having seven daughters was having seven sons (Ruth 4:15). Job had seven sons and three daughters (1:2; 42:13). In 2 Sam 21:6 seven male descendants are a representative portion of Saul’s family given to the Gibeonites for punishment.

²⁸⁹³ J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), 20, 24, 26, 82–102, 103–22.

obedient to their God-fearing priestly father. It was customary for women who were young and strong, and preferably unmarried, to perform these kinds of humble duties (cf. Gen 24:11; 29:9–12; 1 Sam 9:11).⁹²⁹⁴

2:17 Moses delivered the daughters of Reuel from the shepherds—a providential event for the writer. Thereby Moses is endeared to Reuel, and many blessings follow from this act of kindness (cf. Exod 1:17; 2:6). Moses' act of violence in Egypt did not accomplish anything of value in itself, but the writer parallels Moses' deliverance of Reuel's daughters to God's deliverance of Israel (cf. Exod 2:19; 18:8 for use of נצל). Moses watered their flocks in the wilderness and would later provide water for the people of Israel (cf. Exod 15:25; 17:5–7).

2:18–20 Moses' act of kindness had ramifications that he did not expect, but the reader will recall that he had been a “favored baby” (2:2), a status that also applies to him as an adult. That special status is revealed powerfully in the functions God places on Moses, God's chosen leader. Reuel's magnanimous spirit is demonstrated when he shows his reciprocal hospitality and attitude toward Moses. His firm rebuke to his daughters, “What is the reason you have abandoned the man?” employs a strong verb, עזב, used twenty-six times in the Pentateuch to indicate the act of leaving a person or an animal behind when something should have been done to aid them. It is used in Exodus three times (9:21; 23:5), twice to indicate cruel abandonment of an animal to danger. “Call him” shows the respect that Reuel had toward Moses even before he met him. Moses' deeds had preceded him.

“When they came to Reuel” introduces the father of the daughters and the future father-in-law of Moses. His name has occasioned much discussion, since he is described in no less than seven different ways. The designation “Reuel” (רעואל) for this person is found only here and in Num 10:29.⁹³⁰⁵ It means “friend of God,” and Reuel himself amply demonstrates its significance in this passage by his attitudes and actions toward others. As a priest, the term may have served as an appropriate appellative or honorific title. He is called Jethro nine times in Exodus (chaps. 3, 4, and 18, in the “Midianite traditions”). He is called the priest of Midian in 2:16 and 3:1, Moses' father-in-law (3:1), the father of Hobab (Num 10:29),⁹³¹⁶ the Midianite/Kenite (Num 10:29; Judg 1:16), and the father of seven daughters (2:16, 17). While

²⁹⁹⁴ This was considered a lowly task, however. Cf. also Deut 29:11; Josh 9:21; Ruth 2:9.

³⁰⁹⁵ Cf. W. F. Albright, “Jethro, Hobab and Reuel in Early Biblical Tradition with Some Comments on the Origin of ‘JE,’ ” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 1–11. Cf. Hyatt, 67–68. Hyatt accepts Albright's solution to the multiple names seemingly attached to the man Jethro. But he notes that it is still only a theory.

³¹⁹⁶ In Judg 4:11 genealogical material about Jethro is recorded that claims that Hobab fathered Kenite descendants and was the חתן “father-in-law/brother-in-law” of Moses. The word חתן probably has a broad semantic range that indicates several possible “in-law” relationships. Cf. *HALAT* 1:350; *TWOT* 1:335; *NBD*, 2nd ed., 593; *NIDOTTE* 2:325–28. The *NIV* translates חתן as “son-in-law,” while the *NJPS* and *RSV* prefer “father-in-law.” If the latter translation is correct, Reuel bore yet another name, for it seems clear that the same person is involved (cf. also Num 10:29). The Kenites were evidently a subgroup (tribe?) of the Midianites, but their ancestry goes back before that of the Midianites in Scripture (cf. Gen 15:19; but Midianites later range in the area of Palestine and Moab). Cf. Gen 37:26–28, where the terms Midianites/Ishmaelites clearly overlap. Cf. W. S. LaSor, D. Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 109; *NBD*, 2nd ed., 651–52. For Kenites see Gen 15:19; 1 Sam 15:6; 27:10; 30:29; 1 Chr 2:55. In general they sustained a favorable position toward the Israelites and vice versa.

this is somewhat confusing, the way the writer combines the names in different places makes it sufficiently clear that he understood only one individual was involved.⁹³²⁷ Jethro may have been his common name (cf. Jacob/Israel),⁹³³⁸ but it too could have been an appellative or honorific title meaning “his abundance, overflow.”⁹³⁴⁹ It is interesting that all of his designations indicate relationships:

1. Reuel—friend of God
2. Father-in-law of Moses
3. Father of seven daughters
4. Father of (at least) one son
5. Midianite—from Midian (ethnic/geographical)
6. A priest—to Midianites and to God
7. Jethro—his abundance, excellence

The author knew a great deal about this man, possibly from personal acquaintance. He is pictured as one of the most magnanimous pagans in the Heb. Bible and a friend to God’s people.

The major themes of these verses are at least threefold: 1. God’s providential care for Moses; 2. Moses’ deliverance of the daughters, which is told first in the third person and then again in direct speech to Reuel by his daughters; and 3. the concomitant rescue of Moses by the daughters from a wandering existence. This is the *Leitmotiv**. The second time the daughters report Moses’ action, saying “an Egyptian man delivered us,” they use the same word (¹⁰³⁵⁰נָצַל) that describes God’s deliverance of the Israelites in the exodus event (e.g., Exod 18:8), and in this context is synonymous with the “salvation” verb (נָשַׁע) of v. 17. The designation of Moses as an Egyptian adds to the feeling of alienation he now experiences from his people. Twice within these seven verses Moses’ actions of deliverance are highlighted.

The second theme indicates that Moses’ attempts to “rescue” people have improved; he is successful, his actions are on time, and his bravado and boldness are again present even after

³²⁹⁷ The name Reuel is used of other individuals in the OT: one of Esau’s sons (Gen 36:4, 10, 13, 17; Num 2:14; 1 Chr 1:35, 37; 9:8); Israelites from the tribe of Gad (Num 2:14, but possibly Deuel here) and from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chr 9:8). For Jethro see Exod 3:1; 4:18 (here MT reads יֶתְרוֹ); and throughout chap. 18. It has been the tendency of classical literary critics to see different sources behind the various names used for this person. Ramban, 19–20, held that Reuel was the grandfather and Jethro the father who, after becoming a proselyte, underwent a name change to Hobab.

³³⁹⁸ Kitchen, *AOOT* 123, notes the fairly common usage of double names in the ancient Near East, esp. in Ugaritic literature. See *UT* 521–22 for a list of several names of gods with double names (e.g., *ktr-w-ḥss*); for personal names see *UT* 512. Both Assyrian kings (e.g., Tiglath-pileser III, “Pul”) and Egyptian kings (*sebek-khu=djaa*) bore double names. In the OT Jacob/Israel, Canaanite/Amorites, etc.

³⁴⁹⁹ Cf. *HALAT* 2:431–32. See Sarna, 12, who says the name means “His Excellency,” an honorific title. Cf. Gen 49:3 where יֶתֶר means “abundance, excellent, plenitude, fullness,” when describing Reuben as a יֶתֶר of honor, יֶתֶר of power/strength. Hence 3 + יֶתֶר m. sg. pronominal suf. could mean = “his abundance, excellence,” etc. The radicals are used on personal names in Ugaritic, while the root *wtr* is a common Semitic root: “rest, left over, remainder.” See *UT* 416 (nos. 1170, 1172, 1174, 1175).

³⁵¹⁰⁰ This important word occurs fourteen times in the book of Exodus (2:19; 3:8, 22; 5:23 [2]; 6:6; 12:27, 36; 18:4, 8, 9, 10 [2]; 33:6).

his flight from Pharaoh; he rose up to deliver them. But unlike his earlier attempt, God orchestrated this encounter.

Moses delivered seven daughters of a priest of Midian, an important point, but equally significant is that they are women. No fewer than six specific women have been mentioned up to this point in the text who are directly or indirectly responsible for Moses' survival (1:15; 2:2, 4, 5, 6), not to mention two groups of women who provided help in general, the midwives and the attendants of Pharaoh's daughters.

Moses' acceptance of the priest's offer of hospitality resulted in his establishing a permanent residence in the area. Reuel's hospitality was amply repaid in many ways. The author leaves the actions of the daughters unstated, for the next verse indicates that they must have called Moses.

2:21–22 The translation "firmly decided" is probably correct, but the Heb. word used from יָאַל is difficult to translate, since it appears in various contexts (e.g., Gen 18:27, 31; Deut 1:5). Some render it "Moses consented," but this seems to miss the strength and resolve indicated by its usage. Perhaps Moses "determined to," but absolute certainty is not possible.

At any rate Reuel gave his daughter to Moses. Her name, Zipporah (צִפּוֹרָה), means "bird," but its contextual significance, if there is any, is not clear. Perhaps the name is intended to indicate a ray of happiness and joy in Moses' life of flight into exile. Once again a woman improves Moses' life. More importantly, the writer supplies us with information about Zipporah's first son and thereby indicates that the fruitfulness of Moses' wife will continue the multiplication of the Israelites even outside Egypt.

A covenantal theological message is announced when Moses names the child. He names him Gershom (two appearances in Exodus, cf. 18:3), which in this context means literally "a stranger there" (see translation note). The author-editor gives the reason why Moses names his son Gershom, not necessarily the meaning of the name itself. Moses' perspective is important, for he considered himself to be a stranger in the land where he was dwelling. Was Egypt his homeland, like the Semite Sinuhe? No. He was estranged from his people and longed for them. Wherever his people were, that was his home. He had undoubtedly heard of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about a land that their descendants would inherit. This is not at all unreasonable to assume since he had visited his brethren when he was in Egypt. As far as Moses was concerned, he was now a sojourner in a foreign land. Therefore he named his son as he did. But even while he lived as a mere sojourner, his God provided him with a place of temporary residence. The two verses present a tension in the circumstances.

Biblical Theology Comments

These verses continue to recount Yahweh's protection and preparation of his chosen leader, who would bring his people out of Egyptian slavery, as God had indicated (cf. Gen 15:14). In spite of some serious setbacks and miscalculations by that chosen leader, God's deliverance will become a reality. Moses' actions and words in Egypt displayed compassion for his people; he identified with them and involved himself in their situations, even to the point of offending his fellow Israelites. His unfortunate killing of an Egyptian and his offensive behavior toward his own people made him a *persona non grata* both to his own people and to Pharaoh.

Moses' intentions were correct, but his timing was off, according to the writer of Acts (7:25–29; cf. Heb 11:23–27), and the narrative in Exodus supports that observation. But God's grace and protection delivered Moses from Pharaoh's vengeance and the painful rejection of his fellow Israelites. Moses had sought them out to help them (Exod 2:11).

Moses successfully flees and, during his flight and rest at a well, he delivers the daughters of a Midianite priest, an act that suggests his future deliverance of Israel at the Reed Sea and in turn becomes the basis for his own rescue from wandering as a sojourner. God continues to watch over his chosen vessel by which he will rescue his people. Women continue to be the supporters and protectors of Israel's future deliverer, as the daughters of Reuel (Jethro), the Midianite priest, report the help and hospitality they received from Moses to their father. Reuel in turn welcomes Moses and cares for him, even giving him his daughter, Zipporah, as a wife. God had a place of refuge for his downcast leader, a virtual desperado at this time. Thus Jethro becomes a key player in the narrative of Exodus, for through him God's goal of touching and reaching the nations begins, as he brings the nations and his people into contact. While Moses' own people reject him and Pharaoh rejects him, a Midianite priest receives him and shows him hospitality.

The author-editor of Exodus never loses sight of the purpose of the call of Abraham (cf. Gen 12:1–3; Exod 18:9–12). R. W. L. Moberly notes that Gen 12:1–3 is a key to interpreting the OT.¹⁰³⁶¹ Moses' time in Midian was difficult, as God awaited his time to deliver his people. It was a time of sojourning; Moses named his son Gershom ("a stranger there") to recognize that fact. As Israel sojourned in Egypt, their leader continued to sojourn in Midian for a long period. But Yahweh would see, and feel and act, in his own time (cf. Exod 2:23–25).

Application and Devotional Implications

Following God's calling is not always easy, nor is it always perfectly clear what God is doing through us and what he wants us to do—especially with regard to details such as timing. But failure as a person is attempting to be genuinely obedient is a time when God is still present. Both the OT and the NT are filled with examples of persons who hit rock bottom but still maintain faith in the Lord, although shaken. Elijah comes to mind in the OT (1 Kgs 19:3–6). The Lord Jesus Christ himself faced an excruciating time in the garden when he affirmed his decision to do the Father's will (Matt 26:36–46). Paul found that in the darkest times the Lord was present with him and gave him a place of refuge (Acts 27:24–25).³⁷

c. The marriage of Moses (2:15b–22)

³⁶¹⁰¹ R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 143–78.

³⁷ Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus*, vol. 1, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 165–172.

2:15b–22. One day in Midian while Moses was sitting **by a well** he met the **seven daughters** of Reuel (elsewhere called Jethro, 3:1; 18:1), **a priest of Midian**. Moses' benevolent act, protecting the daughters while they were securing **water**, was the third incident in which he sought to deliver others from harm (cf. 2:12–13). These incidents anticipated his future role as his nation's deliverer. This heroism on his part caused the girls' **father** to invite **Moses** (whom they called **an Egyptian**, perhaps because of the way he was dressed) to dine with his family. Moses subsequently married Reuel's **daughter Zipporah** (which means "little bird") and to them was born a son **Gershom**, whose name means "expulsion" or "resident alien there." It is probably related to the Hebrew verb *gāraš*, "to drive out or banish" (cf. 6:1). He was a child of Moses' banishment, that is, a child born while **Moses was an alien in a foreign land**.

For 40 years (Acts 7:30) Moses undertook the toilsome life of a shepherd in the Sinai area, thus gaining valuable knowledge of the topography of the Sinai Peninsula which later was helpful as he led the Israelites in that wilderness land.³⁸

³⁸ John D. Hannah, "[Exodus](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 110–111.