

Exodus, Chapter 2, Verses 1-15

1. וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת-בַּת-לֵוִי:

2. וַתַּהַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי-טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months.	A man from the house of Levi went and took [to wife] a daughter of Levi. The woman became pregnant and bore a son. She saw him — that he was goodly, so she hid him, for three months.	And a man from the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi. And the woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. And she saw him, that he was good, and she concealed him for three months.	And a man from the house of Levi went and took a Levite daughter, and the woman conceived and bore a son, and she saw that he was goodly, and she hid him three months.

Verse 1

Fox:

a man ... a daughter: Moshe's parents are anonymous, unlike the usual king and queen of the hero myth found in other cultures. The namelessness of all the secondary characters in this chapter—sister, Pharaoh's daughter and her maids—helps us to focus on the protagonist and on his name.

Friedman:

Took: This verb is commonly used in biblical Hebrew for taking a wife, even when "wife" is elided, as here. It is worth translating literally because the verb is echoed in the woman's "taking" the wicker ark (verse 3) and in the Egyptian slavegirl's "taking" the ark (verse 5.)

Verse 2

Fox:

he saw him—that he was goodly: The parallel in Genesis is “God saw the light: that it was good” (Gen. 1:4).*

goodly: Handsome (so Ibn Ezra, among others), although others interpret the Hebrew *tov* as “healthy,” given the context. What is important is the Genesis connection just mentioned.

three months: Another “perfect” number, which will recur with the Israelites’ three-month trip to Mount Sinai (see 19:1).

Friedman:

gave birth to a son. Moses is profoundly a lone figure. Although he has a family, Exodus is not about family relations and does not develop them in Moses' case. Coming on the heels of Genesis, with its long stories of families, this is striking. We learn little of Moses' mother and less of his father. The most central family relationship is between Moses and his brother Aaron, yet it plays no role in the story. Aaron need not be Moses' brother for the sake of the development of the story; their interactions usually do not depend on it at all. And Miriam, when she is first identified by name, is identified as "the sister of Aaron," rather than of Moses (15:20), and she and Moses are never pictured exchanging any words. Family members play a part in the birth story of Moses, but the account establishes, after all, not a relationship but the distance between Moses and his family; it is about his being raised by others, from another people. Moses has a family of which he is husband and father, but this just further demonstrates the point, because the text merely reports that he has a wife and sons. They play no role. There is no story about them except the strange story of Zipporah's circumcising their son, and it is only three verses long (4:24-26), and it is incomprehensible. (See the comment on 4:24.)

3. וְלֹא־יָכְלָה עוֹד הַצִּפּוֹרָה לְהַחְכֹּחַ לוֹ תַּבַּת גִּמְאָ וְתַחְמָרָה בַּחֲמֹר וּבִבְנֹפֶת וּתְשֹׁם בָּהּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וּתְשֹׁם בְּסוּף עַל־שִׁפְת הַיָּאָר:
 4. וַיִּתְצַב אַחֲתוֹ מֵרֶחֶק לְדַעַה מֶה־יַּעֲשֶׂה לוֹ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him.	And [when] she was no longer able to hide him, she took for him a little-ark of papyrus, she loamed it with loam and with pitch, and placed the child in it, and placed it in the reeds by the shore of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself far off, to know what would be done to him.	And she was not able to conceal him anymore, and she took an ark made of bulrushes for him and smeared it with bitumen and with pitch and put the boy in it and put it in the reeds by the bank of the Nile. And his sister stood still at a distance to know what would be done to him.	And when she could no longer hide him, she took a wicker ark for him and caulked it with resin and pitch and placed the child in it and placed it in the reeds by the banks of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance to see what would be done to him.

Verse 3

Fox:

little-ark: The term used to designate the little basket/boat, *teiva*, has clearly been chosen to reflect back to Noah's ark in Genesis. The implication is that just as God saved Noah and thus humanity from destruction by water, so will he now save Moshe and the Israelites from the same.

papyrus: A material that floats; it was also used in biblical times for writing, including biblical texts.

in the reeds: Another foreshadowing; when Moshe grows up, he will lead the liberated people through the Sea of Reeds. The word *suf* (reeds) appears to be a loan-word from Egyptian.

Friedman:

the Nile: The same river that means death for all the other male newborns means life for Moses.

Alter:

she took a wicker ark... and caulked it with resin and pitch. The basket in which the infant is placed is called a *tevah*, ark, the same word used for Noah's ark. (It may be an Egyptian loanword. Such borrowed terms abound in the story, giving it local color. The most prominent is the word for "Nile," *ye'or*.) As numerous commentators have observed, the story of Moses begins with a pointed allusion to the Flood story. In Genesis, a universal deluge nearly destroys the whole human race. Here, Pharaoh's decree to drown every Hebrew male infant threatens to destroy the people of Israel. As the ark in Genesis bears on the water the saving remnant of humankind, the child borne on the waters here will save his imperiled people. This narrative recapitulates the Flood story, itself a quasi-epic narrative of global scope, in the transposed key of a folktale: the story of a future ruler who is hidden in a basket floating on a river has parallels in Hittite, Assyrian, and Egyptian literature, and approximate analogues in many other cultures. Otto Rank sees the basket as a womb image and the river water as an externalization of the amniotic fluid. Psychoanalytic speculation apart, it is clear from the story that water plays a decisive thematic role in Moses's career. He is borne safely on the water, which Pharaoh had imagined would be the very means to destroy all the Hebrew male children. His floating among the reeds (*suf*) foreshadows the miraculous triumph over the Egyptians that he will lead in the parting of the Sea of Reeds (*yam suf*). His obtaining water for the thirsting people will figure prominently in the Wilderness stories.

Verse 4

Fox:

To know: Better English would be "to learn." This first occurrence of the Hebrew word *yado'a* foreshadows the later theme of the Egyptians' and the Israelites' coming to "know" (or "acknowledge") God's power. For the moment, and in the story that follows, the issue is one of revealing information—Moshe's fate (2:4) and the discovery of his crime (2:14).

5. וַתֵּרֶד בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לָרְחוֹץ עַל־הַיָּאֵר וַנַּעֲרֹתֶיהָ הִלְכֹת עַל־יַד הַיָּאֵר וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־הַתַּבָּה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אֲמָתָהּ וַתִּקְחֶהּ:
 6. וַתִּפְתַּח וַתֵּרְאֶהוּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וְהִנֵּה־נֹעַר בְּכָה וַתַּחְמַל עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר מִי־לִדֵי הָעִבְרִים זֶה:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, "This must be a Hebrew child."	Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe at the Nile, and her girls were walking along the Nile. She saw the little-ark among the reeds and sent her maid, and she took it. She opened [it] and saw him, the child — now here, a boy weeping! She pitied him, and she said: One of the Hebrews' children is this!	And the Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe at the Nile, and her girls were going alongside the Nile, and she saw the ark among the reeds and sent her maid, and she took it. And she opened it and saw him, the child: and here was a boy crying, and she had compassion on him, and she said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."	And Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the Nile, her maidens walking along the Nile. And she saw the ark amidst the reeds and sent her slavegirl and took it. And she opened it up and saw the child, and, look, it was a lad weeping. And she pitied him and said, "This is one of the children of the Hebrews."

Verse 5

Fox

Pharaoh's daughter: Her station is important, for it enables Moshe to be saved and to be brought up in the Egyptian palace (useful both for his political future and for literary irony of situation)

Verse 6

Fox

She opened ... boy weeping!: The emphatic, halting syntax of the narrative brings out the visual drama of seeing, taking, opening, and identifying.

One of the Hebrews' children: How does she know that? The simplest explanation lies in the situation itself and not in any identifying marks. Who else but a Hebrew, under the threat of losing her baby, would set such a child adrift?

is this: Or "must this be."

Alter:

and saw the child. The Masoretic text has "she saw him, the child," but other ancient versions show "saw" without the accusative masculine suffix.

and, look, it was a lad weeping. "Lad," *na'ar*, is more typically used for an older child or a young man, but it may be employed here to emphasize the discovery — "and look," *wehineh* — -that this is a male child. (It might also be relevant that *na'ar* occurs elsewhere as a term of parental tenderness referring to a vulnerable child.) The fact that this is a male child left hidden in a basket would be the clue to the princess and her entourage that he belongs to the Hebrews against whom the decree of infanticide has been issued. Nahum Sarna notes that this is the sole instance in the Bible in which the verb "to weep" is used for an infant, not an adult.

7. וַתֹּאמֶר אֶחָתוֹ אֶל-בֵּת-פַּרְעֹה הַאֵלֶּף וְקָרָאתִי לָךְ אִשָּׁה מִיִּנְקוֹת מִן הָעִבְרִית וְתִינֵק לְךָ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד:

8. וַתֹּאמֶר-לָהּ בֵּת-פַּרְעֹה לְכִי וְתֵלְךְ הָעֵלְמָה וְתִקְרָא אֶת-אִם הַיֶּלֶד:

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother.	His sister said to Pharaoh's daughter: Shall I go and call a nursing woman from the Hebrews for you, that she may nurse the child for you? Pharaoh's daughter said to her: Go! So the girl went and called the child's mother.	And his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nursing woman from the Hebrews for you, and she'll nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." And the girl went and called the child's mother.	And his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and summon a nursing woman from the Hebrews that she may suckle the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." And the girl went and summoned the child's mother.
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Verse 7

Fox

Go: In biblical Hebrew, a verb repeated from a question is the equivalent of "Yes," for which there was no other expression.

9. וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ בֵּת-פַּרְעֹה הַיְלִיכִי אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה וְהִנְקָהוּ לִי וְאֲנִי אֶתֵּן אֶת-שְׂכָרָךְ וְתִקַּח הָאִשָּׁה הַיֶּלֶד וְתִנְיָקָהוּ:

10. וַיַּגְדֵּל הַיֶּלֶד וְתִבְאָהוּ לְבֵת-פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי-לָהּ לְבֵן וְתִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן-הַמִּים מְשִׁיתָהוּ:

<p>And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."</p>	<p>Pharaoh's daughter said to her: Have this child go with you and nurse him for me, and I myself will give you your wages. So the woman took the child and she nursed him. The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She called his name: Moshe/He-Who-Pulls-Out; she said: For out of the water <i>meshitihu</i>/I-pulled-him.</p>	<p>And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse him for me, and I'll give your pay." And the woman took the boy and nursed him. And the boy grew older, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and she said, "Because I drew him from the water."</p>	<p>And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Carry away this child and suckle him for me, and I myself will pay your wages." And the woman took the child and suckled him. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became a son to her, and she called his name Moses, "For from the water I drew him out."</p>
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Verse 10

Fox

grew: His age is not mentioned, but weaning may be inferred (cf. Gen. 21:8) as the appropriate boundary, and hence the child was probably around three.

he became her son: A formulaic expression for legal adoption.

Moshe/He-Who-Pulls-Out: Trad. English "Moses." *Mss* is a well-attested name in ancient Egypt, meaning "son of" (as in Ra'amses—"son of Ra"—in Ex. 1:11). Thus it is quite appropriate that Pharaoh's daughter names her adopted son in this manner. However, there is an explicit irony here, as Buber (1988) and others have pointed out. The princess, in a Hebrew folk etymology (one based on sound rather than on the scientific derivation of words), thinks that the name Moshe recalls her act of "pulling out" the baby from the Nile. But the verb form in moshe is active, not passive, and thus it is Moshe himself who will one day "pull out" Israel from the life-threatening waters of both slavery and the Sea of Reeds.

Alter

And the child grew. The verb clearly indicates his reaching the age of weaning, which would have been around three. This might have been long enough for the child to have acquired Hebrew as his first language. The same verb "grew" in verse 11 refers to attaining adulthood.

became a son to her. The phrase indicates adoption, not just an emotional attachment.

Moses. This is an authentic Egyptian name meaning "the one who is born," and hence "son." The folk etymology relates it to the Hebrew verb *mashah*, "to draw out from water." Perhaps the active form of the verb used for the name *mosheh*, "he who draws out," is meant to align the naming with Moses's future destiny of rescuing his people from the water of the Sea of Reeds.

Friedman

Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. The story so intriguingly similar to the legend of the Mesopotamian king Sargon, found in Assyrian and Babylonian texts, in which a priestess places her infant son in a basket of rushes with pitch on its exterior and casts him into the river, and a water-drawer retrieves the baby and rears him as his son. This and other literary parallels to the birth account of Moses suggest how enigmatic the biblical story is. Freud observed that such stories generally invoke three steps: (1) a child is born of noble or royal lineage, (2) the child comes to be brought up as a commoner, and (3) the child grows up and eventually arrives back at his rightful place in a royal house. Freud noted that such stories were conceived etiologically, composed as justifications of cases in which commoners rose to thrones. The historical truth in such cases lay in the second step: the king really came from commoner roots. The story was composed to legitimize his kingship, as an answer to those who would deny his royal blood. Freud considered the birth story of Moses against this background and suggested the possibility that here, too, the truth behind etiology lay in the second step, that Moses was an Egyptian, and that the birth story was composed to explain how an Egyptian had come to be the leader of the Israelites. Freud's interest (on this particular point of his larger study) was primarily historical, and his hypothesis has never been proved or disproved; but it is also important because it indicates what the Torah and its audience valued. In the Israelite story, the values are reversed. The royal house is step two, the aberration, rather than the prized position. Moses' royal placement simply is not what is important. There is no information about his early life in the Egyptian court. We are informed that he is nursed by his own mother, but we are not certain what this report is supposed to establish. We cannot even be certain that it means that Moses thus knows that he is Israelite. Later the text says that he "went out to his brothers and saw their burdens", but this wording, too, is not definitive as to whether he knows that the Israelites are his kin. There is even ambiguity in his killing of an Egyptian taskmaster whom he sees striking a slave: is it because of his bond with the Israelites or his sense of justice? In a curious parallel to the deity Himself, Moses' background and motives are mysterious.

she called his name Moses. Even learned people often recall this story out of order, imagining the Pharaoh's daughter naming Moses as she draws him from the water, but she does not in fact name him until after he has grown and his mother brings him to her. What was he called until that time? Classical and recent commentators have not addressed this. Since the text does not tell us, we must assume that the concern is to explain the origin of the name Moses and that there is no interest in pursuing whether there was any prior name given by his parents. Presumably the only name known in tradition and history was Moses, and so the author was not free to make up any other. And the story had to ascribe the naming to the Pharaohs' daughter because she was the one in power, the one who would present him to Egyptian society, and so on. Still, we can hardly resist wondering why the parents would not be pictured as giving their son a name. If he is with them until he is waned, that may be several years, and we can hardly resist imagining what the parents would call him. I imagine -- this is my midrash -- that they do not give him a name. They call him "the child" (Hebrew *hayyeled*.) When they talk to him they call him "my child" (*yaldi*). And this gives those years a mysterious, portentous quality. They know that his naming simply is not in their power. And so his fate is not in their hands either. Count how many times you call your child by his or her name in a day, and you will know how many times these parents are reminded of their unique situation: thankful that their son alone is spared from death but sad and frightened that he will be raised by others, from the very household that is their enemy, and worried that he will not know who his real people and family are. From the perspective of Jewish

history, this is not a singular experience. In the twentieth century Jewish parents in Europe gave their children to non-Jewish families to save them during the holocaust.

Because I drew him: The naming of Moses argues both for and against the story's historicity. On one hand, there is the unlikelihood of the idea that the princess would know Hebrew, let alone choose to derive the baby's name from a Hebrew etymology. And in fact the name Moses is not Hebrew. It is Egyptian, meaning "is born," as in the name Ramesses, meaning "Ra (the sun god) bore him." On the other hand, the fact that the great leader of the Israelites has an Egyptian name (as do other early priests: Phinehas, Hophni) is evidence that Israelites did indeed live for some time in Egypt. Names are valuable evidence in tracing a community's origins and history. One might suggest that the Egyptian name Moses was just made up to make the story sound authentic. But we can be fairly certain that the Israelites did not make it up, precisely because they told the story about the princess calling him Moses "because I drew him" - which shows that the Israelites were not conscious of the name's Egyptian meaning!

11. וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל־אָחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסֻבְלָתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מַכֶּה אִישׁ־עִבְרִי מֵאָחָיו:
 12. וַיִּפֶן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּךְ אֶת־הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.	Now it was some years later, Moshe grew up; he went out to his brothers and saw their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, [one] of his brothers. He turned this-way and that-way, and saw that there was no man [there], so he struck down the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.	And it was in those days, and Moses grew older, and he went out to his brothers and saw their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, one of his brothers. And he turned this way and that way and saw that there was no man, and he struck the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.	And it happened at that time that Moses grew and went out to his brothers and saw their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brothers. And he turned this way and that and saw that there was no man about, and he struck down the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.

Verse 11

Fox:

some years later: Heb. *yamim*, lit. “days,” can mean longer periods of time, and often years. Here the narrative skips over what it considers unimportant, and we are presented with a young man, who already has strong identity and opinions.

his brothers: Occurring twice in this verse, this phrase can only mean that Moshe was aware of his background, and concerned with the plight of the Israelites (Heb. *r'h b-*, “see” with a specific preposition, indicates not only observation but sympathy).

Friedman:

Moses. Although Exodus is ultimately about God, Israel, and Egypt, the narrative attention is focused on Moses from its second chapter to the end. Thus, although Exodus is about nations and extraordinary divine interventions into the course of human affairs, it directs its readers to this dynamic through the lens of an individual man. Notably, even though Exodus is not about individuals in the way that Genesis is, it introduces a figure in whom character development reaches a new level, equalled by no other figure in the Hebrew Bible except possibly David. Moses is pictured at various stages in his life, expressing a variety of moods and emotions, changing, especially in the way in which he relates and speaks to God.

Verse 12

Fox

no man (there): Although some have interpreted this as “no man around to help,” the expression taken in context would seem to indicate that Moshe was afraid of being seen. This incident reveals Moshe’s concern and early leanings toward being a liberator, but also demonstrates his youthful lack of forethought. In fact, it will take God, not Moshe’s own actions, to set the liberation process in motion.

struck down: This is the same verb (Heb. *hakkeh*) that the narrator used in v.11 to describe the fatal beating received by the Israelite slave.

Alter

and saw there was no man about. Although the obvious meaning is that he wanted to be sure the violent intervention he intended would go unobserved, some interpreters have proposed, a little apologetically, that he first looked around to see if there was anyone else to step forward and help the beaten Hebrew slave. “About” is merely implied in the Hebrew. In any case, there is a pointed echoing of “man” (*ish*)—an Egyptian man, a Hebrew man, and no man—that invites one to ponder the role and obligations of a man as one man victimizes another. When the fugitive Moses shows up in Midian, he will be identified, presumably because of his attire and speech, as “an Egyptian man.”

13. וַיֵּצֵא בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁנִי וְהָיָה לְשְׁנֵי־אֲנָשִׁים עֲבָרִים נֹצְיִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְרִשָּׁע לְמָה תִּכֶּה רֵעִי:

14. וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שְׂמָךְ לְאִישׁ שָׂר וְשִׁפְט עָלֵינוּ הֲלִהְרַגְנִי אַתָּה אִמֵּר כַּאֲשֶׁר הִרְגַתְּ אֶת־הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּירָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר:
 15. וַיִּשְׁמַע פְּרַעֲהַ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַיִּבְקֹשׁ לְהַרְגוֹ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וַיִּבְרַח מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי פְרַעֲהַ וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־מִדְיָן וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הַבְּאֵר:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
<p>When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?" He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known! When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh. He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well.</p>	<p>He went out again on the next day, and here: two Hebrew men scuffling! He said to the guilty one: Why do you strike your fellow? He said: Who made you prince and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian? Moshe became afraid and said: Surely the matter is known! Pharaoh heard of this matter and sought to kill Moshe. But Moshe fled from Pharaoh's face and settled in the land of Midyan; he sat down by a well.</p>	<p>And he went out on the second day, and here were two Hebrew men fighting. And he said to the one who was in the wrong. "Why do you strike your companion?" And he said, "Who made you a commander and judge over us? Are you saying you'd kill me — the way you killed the Egyptian?!" And Moses was afraid and said, "The thing is known for sure." And Pharaoh heard this thing and sought to kill Moses, and Moses fled from Pharaoh's presence and lived in the land of Midian. And he sat by a well.</p>	<p>And he went out the next day, and, look, two Hebrew men were brawling, and he said to the one in the wrong, "Why should you strike your fellow?" And he said, "Who set you as a man prince and judge over us? Is it to kill me that you mean as you killed the Egyptian?" And Moses was afraid and he thought, "Surely, the thing has become known." And Pharaoh heard of this thing and he sought to kill Moses, and Moses fled from Pharaoh's presence and dwelled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by the well.</p>

Verse 13

Fox:

Hebrew men scuffling: A rhyme in Hebrew, *anashim 'ivriyyim nitzim*.

Alter

Why should you strike your fellow? The first dialogue assigned to a character in biblical narrative typically defines the character. Moses's first speech is a reproof of a fellow Hebrew and an attempt to impose a standard of justice ("*rasha*", "the one in the wrong," is a legal term).

Verse 14

Fox

Who made you prince ... : One hears here echoes of Moshe's later experiences with his "hard-necked" people, which commence in the book of Exodus.

judge: Or "ruler." I have retained "judge" here in order not to lose the connection with 5:21

Alter

Who set you as a man prince and judge over us? These words of the brawler in the wrong not only preface the revelation that Moses's killing of the Egyptian is no secret but also adumbrate a long series of later incidents in which the Israelites will express resentment or rebelliousness toward Moses. Again, "man" is stressed. Later, "the man Moses" will become a kind of epithet for Israel's first leader.

thing. The Hebrew *davar* variously means "word," "thing," "matter," "affair," and much else.

Verse 15

Fox

Moshe fled ... and settled: The details about what must have been a psychologically important journey are not spelled out, as the narrative rushes toward its first great climax in Chap. 3. More important than the journey motif is that of exile, brought out tellingly in v.22.

settled ... sat: Adding the "settle down" of v.21, we hear a threefold use of *yashov*, perhaps to stress Moshe's new life.

Alter

Midian. The geographical location of this land in different biblical references does not seem entirely fixed, perhaps because the Midianites were seminomads. Moses's country of refuge would appear to be a semidesert region bordering Egypt on the east, to the west by northwest of present-day Eilat.

sat down by the well. The verb *yashav*, "sat down," is identical with the previous verb in this sentence, where it reflects its other meaning, "to dwell" or "to settle." It makes sense for the wayfarer to pause to rest and refresh himself at an oasis as Moses does here. "The well" has the idiomatic force of "a certain well."