



The biggest events in history sometimes turn on the smallest hinges. Kaiser Wilhelm II was the king of Prussia and the last German emperor. He ruled from June 1888 to November 1918. He was ambitious and volatile, and his aggressive policies (many historians say) were at least partly to blame for World War I, which most historians think was an entirely avoidable war.

Back in 1889, when he had only been on the throne for a year, there was a special event taking place in Berlin: “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show”, which was touring through Europe. We in America like to send our very finest products all over the world, and Wilhelm was a big fan. At one point in the show, as was the custom, Annie Oakley would do all sorts of tricks with her Colt .45.

At one point in the show, she’d ask for a volunteer to hold a cigar—or, perhaps, put it in someone’s mouth—and she would pace off her steps and **she would shoot off the ashes of the cigar!** This was a joke line, and people didn’t volunteer. So people would laugh, and then her hapless husband would always come out and hold the cigar.

But on this particular day, after making the humorous announcement, an important man from the royal box walked into the arena and volunteered to hold the cigar. It was Kaiser Wilhelm! He was a fan, and maybe he wanted to show what a brave man he was. German policemen tried to stop him, but he waved them off. He wanted to hold the cigar. At this point, Annie Oakley felt like, “I can’t back out of this now. I’d lose face.” So she paced off her usual distance and prepared to shoot.

Here’s what one historian says: “Sweating profusely under her buckskin, and regretting that she had consumed more than her usual amount of whiskey the night before, Annie raised her Colt, took aim, and blew away the ashes from Wilhelm’s cigar.” The historian goes on to wonder how the world might have been different if she had missed the cigar and creased his head instead—not that he wanted an innocent person to be shot, of course, but wondering (as historians do) if we might have avoided World War I if she had been a worse shot on that day—just a little more whiskey, perhaps. Years later, after World War I had begun, Annie wrote to Wilhelm asking if she could take a second shot! God bless America.

The biggest events sometimes turn on the smallest hinges. In the 1930s, a portly English man walking late at night in New York City was hit by a cab driver. What if Winston Churchill had died instead of just sustaining injuries? How might World War II have been different? Sometimes the biggest events in history turn on the smallest hinges: just a few more degrees here, or a little different shot there.

We see that here in Exodus. Why is this story here? Most likely, the original audience for this book are the second generation of Israelites, who wandered in the wilderness because the first generation grumbled and complained. The first generation would die off before the Israelites went into the Promised Land. So Moses is compiling these books to retell their story. Surely they knew of Moses. Surely his story was widely known. This tells them where this special boy came from. He was a special baby with a special birth.

But there’s a larger point to the amazing story of Moses’ birth. It’s what the Israelites needed to know in the wilderness, and it’s what you and I need to be reminded of today as we wander in the world: God always has a plan, and he can use anybody to carry it out.¹⁰

¹⁰ Kevin DeYoung, “Three Women and No Funeral,” sermon on Exodus 2:1–10, University Reformed Church, September 13, 2015, <https://www.universityreformedchurch.org/sermons/three-women-and-no-funeral/>.

ICEBREAKER

Looking back over your life, what is one event that didn't make sense at the time but later became obvious that God was using it for your good!

READ IT

Read Exodus 2:1–25

EXPLORE IT

1. Why did Moses' mother hide him, and what did she eventually do when she could hide him no longer?
2. How did Moses' sister help preserve his life?
3. What role did Pharaoh's daughter play in God's plan?
4. Why did Moses flee Egypt?
5. What did Moses do during his years in Midian?
6. According to verses 23–25, what four things does God do after hearing Israel's cries?
7. What does the chapter reveal about God's activity even before Israel recognizes it?

- 11. Taking Luke 22:31-32 into consideration, how can our spiritual failures strengthen us and be used to strengthen others?**

God is in the business of using people who have failed. The Bible doesn't paper over the failures of its heroes. Noah got drunk and exposed himself. Abraham lied twice about his wife being his sister. Isaac did the same. Jacob deceived his father and cheated his brother out of the birthright. David sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered. The disciples all abandoned Jesus at His crucifixion and then doubted the resurrection. Peter denied Jesus and later waffled on the gospel out of fear of the Judaizers. Mark bailed out on the first missionary journey. And in our text, Moses murders an Egyptian, is rejected by his countrymen, flees for his life, and lives in the desert for the next forty years. This story gives us hope that God can use us even after we've failed.

D. L. Moody said, "Moses spent his first forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent his second forty years learning he was a nobody. He spent his third forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody."¹²

- 12. Moses spent forty years in Midian before God called him back to Egypt. What do you think God was accomplishing in Moses during those years, and how might God use seasons of waiting in our own lives?**

- 13. Many people avoid silence and solitude, filling every moment with activity or entertainment. What keeps us from spending intentional time alone with God, and what blessings do we miss when we neglect this spiritual discipline?**

¹² Steven J. Cole, "How God Uses Failure (Exodus 2:11-25)," *Bible.org*, January 28, 2018, <https://bible.org/seriespage/2-how-god-uses-failure-exodus-211-25>.

The closing verses provide one of the most comforting descriptions of God's heart toward His people.

"God heard... God remembered... God saw... God knew."

None of those statements mean God had previously forgotten Israel. Rather, they remind us that God is fully aware of our suffering and acts according to His covenant promises.

God's silence should never be confused with God's absence.

Just because we cannot see Him working does not mean He is inactive. God is always working behind the scenes.¹³

14. How does remembering God's covenant faithfulness strengthen your faith during seasons when He seems silent?

15. Identify two specific ways you will actively hold on to God's promises in an area where you are tempted to feel forgotten.

16. How can our small group encourage one another to rest in God's providence during seasons of uncertainty?

¹³ Author's Note.