

Moses

Read Exodus 1-11

The story of Moses begins where Genesis ends with a baby in a basket, life in a palace, a murderer, a shepherd, and a voice from a burning bush. That's quite a resume for the man who wrote the first five books of the Bible. But there's more, much more!

Talking Points

- A new king rose to power in Egypt. He had the traditional title of "Pharaoh." It had been about 400 years since Israel, his sons, and their families had immigrated to Israel during a regional famine. The new Pharaoh did not know Joseph, what he had done for Egypt, or Joseph's family's importance.
- Numerically, the Hebrews began to rival the population of the Egyptians. In fear, Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews. When slavery did not quell their population growth, Pharaoh commanded that all males born to Hebrew women be killed at birth. Israelite midwives disobeyed the command.
- Moses was born during this period. He was placed in a pitch-lined basket and placed in the River Nile, where he was found by one of Pharaoh's daughters and raised as her son. He lived in Pharaoh's household for the first 40 years.
- During the second 40 years of Moses' life, he lived in the Sinai wilderness, where he found a wife and became a shepherd.
- On Mt. Horeb, Moses heard the voice of God in a burning bush. He received the Lord's commission to return to Egypt and demanded that Pharaoh release God's people from slavery.

Background

During a time of regional famine, Jacob's family of seventy immigrated to Egypt, where Joseph's family lived. Despite Egyptian efforts of Hebrew population control, in 430 years, Israel grew into a great nation of several million people.

God preserved mankind through an ark that Noah built, larger than a soccer field. He saved the nation of Israel with an ark the size of a hand-basket.

Moses was born into the tribe of Levi. There was nothing special at that time about the descendants of Levi. As a result of the incident in Shechem concerning Dinah, Levi's progeny was cursed by Jacob, prophesied to wander among Jacob's other sons' descendants (Genesis 49:7). This fact had implications for the Levites when Israel took the Promised Land under Joshua's command.

There are several possibilities for the meaning of the name "Moses." The Hebrew word "*mashah*" means "drawing out, rescued." Genesis 2:10 records that Pharaoh's daughter gave Moses his name after rescuing him from the Nile River's waters.

This godly man towers over everyone else in the Old Testament. He was God's instrument for introducing the covenant of Law to Israel. He acted on behalf of God to create an eternal nation, functioning as a prophet, judge, author of the Torah, intercessor, military leader, worker of miracles, and a tireless shepherd of the unruly Israelite tribes. By the time Moses died, his people had become a highly efficient military force that would occupy the land promised by God to Abraham (Genesis 12:7).

Moses Commissioned

The Book of Exodus divides Moses' life into three forty-year segments. The first period deals with his birth in Egypt and his education as a prince in Pharaoh's court. The second occurs in Midian, where Moses was exiled after murdering an Egyptian (Exodus 2:15).

The last third of Moses' life saw him liberating the enslaved Hebrews, establishing God's covenant with them in the Sinai desert, and leading them to the Promised Land's borders. The Scriptures reveal that two-thirds of Moses' life served as preparation for the crucial final third.

While Moses may have learned about his ancestral God from his mother and sister in Pharaoh's palace, his first engagement with the Lord occurred at Mount Horeb. There he observed a bush burning with fire and heard God's identification of Himself as the God of Moses' ancestors by a name: "I am who I am." Moses was to tell the Hebrews that "I Am" had sent him.

God's name points to His eternal existence, self-sufficiency, and continued activity in the storyline of human history. Dynamic in nature, the Name transcends and fulfills all other forms of being. The revelation of God's name buttresses an additional disclosure of his name, "YHVH" (Exodus 6:3). So sacred is this name that its pronunciation has not survived.

At Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai, Moses was commanded by the great "I Am" to return to Egypt and lead captive Israel out of slavery into the Promised Land. His encounter with the Lord sustained Moses for the rest of his life. It empowered him to stand firm before Pharaoh and secure the liberation of his kinsmen, the Hebrew slaves. Moses' conflict with Pharaoh ends following Passover's first observance and the deaths of Egypt's firstborn sons (Exodus 12:29).

Bible Conversations & Questions

- Outside the Promised Land, God's people lived as slaves by command of the world's supposed ruler. What similarities are there between what Israel thought of her position and what many people think of theirs today?
- Repeated themes are established throughout the Bible's events, from beginning to end. Think about Moses being "drawn out" of dark and chaotic water. Are there other places in the Bible where this imagery is found? What connecting ideas does this theme produce?

- What does Acts 7 tell us about the timing of Moses' life?
- Why do you think God pursued Moses back to Egypt to "kill" him?
- Why would Moses' wife, Zipporah, call him a "bridegroom of blood?"