

Moses

Recap One of the greatest figures in the OT mentioned 767 times and 79 times in the NT. His life can be divided into 3 segments of 40 years, 40 years growing up in Egypt, 40 years tending sheep in Midian and 40 years leading the Israelites in the Exodus from Egypt. He took a group of Hebrew slaves and with God's help and guidance moulded them into a nation – God's chosen people. All this happened probably around 1250 BC.

In the first part of his life he was saved by God from drowning in the Nile (where his mother had placed him in a reed basket to technically comply with Pharaoh's edict that all male Hebrew children should be thrown into the Nile). He gained the benefit of a first class education, but he jumped the gun and let his sympathy for the Israelites run away with him and got ahead of God's plan by killing an Egyptian overseer who was oppressing his people. One day he went out to visit his people and to observe their treatment, for the cruel measures taken against them by Pharaoh at the time of Moses' birth had not been lifted. Seeing an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, Moses in great anger killed the Egyptian and buried him. He thought the deed had gone unnoticed until the next day when he encountered two Hebrews fighting with each other. When he tried to act as peacemaker, they both turned on him and accused him of murder: "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" (Ex 2:14). Acts 7:25 adds: "He supposed that his brethren understood that God was giving them deliverance by his hand." Aware that being a member of Pharaoh's household would not exempt him from punishment now that the deed was known, Moses fled for his life to the land of Midian.

So, to avoid punishment he fled into exile and spent the second part of his life tending the sheep of his father in law. This was a period of spiritual training in the desert to counterbalance his secular education in Egypt. One day while Moses was taking care of the flocks of his father-in-law, he led them to Mt Horeb (known also as Sinai) where God appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush that burned, yet was not consumed. Moses approached to observe the strange sight more closely and heard God speak to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" Moses replied, "Here am I," but before he could come any nearer, God said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex 3:5). He further identified himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He assured Moses that he was aware of the cruel afflictions of his people and had heard their cries. Then he told of his plan to send Moses to Egypt to deliver his people from their bondage (v 10).

Faced with a challenge that seemed beyond his capabilities, the aged Moses began making excuses for not accepting the task. To his excuse, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" God assured Moses that he would be with him (Ex 3:11, 12). To his excuse that he would not be able to give an answer if the people asked him the name of the God he represented, God revealed his name in the cryptic statement, " 'I am who I am' ... say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you' " (vv 13, 14).

Moses then argued that the people would not believe him when he told them that God had sent him to deliver them from Egypt. In response God gave him three signs: when he cast his shepherd's rod to the ground, it became a serpent; when he put his hand to his bosom, it became leprous; he was also told that when he would pour water from the Nile upon the ground, it would become blood (4:1–9). Even armed with these powerful evidences of the presence of God with him, Moses raised still another objection, "Oh, my Lord, I am not

eloquent ... I am slow of speech and of tongue" (v 10). God told him that he would teach him what to say but despite such assurance, Moses asked God to send someone else. In anger mingled with compassion, God made Moses' brother Aaron the spokesman, but said his instructions would still be given directly to Moses.

So Moses set out for Egypt and met up with Aaron, which brings us to the final part of Moses's life.

Soon after his return to Egypt, Moses, accompanied by Aaron, went to Pharaoh and repeated the demands of the Lord, "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness" (Ex 5:1). Pharaoh rejected the demand with the observation that he had never heard of this God of Moses. When one realizes that Egyptian kings considered themselves to be gods, the affront to Pharaoh becomes even more acute. Not only did he reject Moses' demands, but he intensified the burdens of the Hebrews. Their work had up until then required them to make brick using straw provided for them, but now Pharaoh said they would have to gather their own straw and still produce the same number of bricks. The Hebrews turned in anguish and anger to Moses and said, "You have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh" (v 21). Even Moses could not understand the turn of events and complained bitterly to God, "Why hast thou done evil to this people?" (v 22). God reassured Moses that he would deliver the Hebrews from their bondage, and, moreover, he would bring them into the land he had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (6:8). He then instructed Moses to return to Pharaoh and repeat the demand to release the Hebrews upon threat of severe reprisal if the demand were ignored.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, Pharaoh continued to reject the demands to let the Hebrews go and God inflicted them with plagues of ever increasing severity designed to humiliate and show the uselessness of the Egyptian pagan gods. Eventually after the tenth plague in which all the firstborn of Egypt were killed, but the firstborn among the Hebrews were spared Pharaoh did indeed let them go. The Hebrew firstborn were spared by following God's instructions and killing an unblemished lamb and smearing its blood on the doorposts of their houses – a pointer to Jesus the lamb of God who would shed his blood for us all. This was called the Passover – because God's destroying angel passed over the houses of the Hebrews and God commanded them to make this Passover an annual festival to remind them. This festival endures to today.

We also need to remember that Jesus himself alluded to the significance of this event when he instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist at the Last Supper with his disciples – which was a Passover meal.

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."'" (Mt 26:26-29 NIV)

Anyway, going back to Moses, he led the people out of Egypt in what we now call the Exodus – from which the book of the Bible gets its name. As they left the Egyptian army pursued them under orders from Pharaoh (who had changed his mind about letting them go) and they were trapped against an arm of the Red Sea. God delivered them mightily by

opening the waters so that they could cross and then drowning the Egyptian army which attempted to follow them.

In spite of having seen God's great act of deliverance so recently, the faith of the Israelites was not strong. Three days later they came to a place where the water was not fit to drink, and they began complaining against Moses. The Lord showed Moses how to purify the water, and the people's needs were satisfied (Ex 15:22–25). When they reached the wilderness of Sin, they complained again, this time because of lack of food. God met their need by supplying manna, a breadlike substance that would serve as their food until they came to Canaan (16:1–21). Later, camped at Rephadim, the people complained again, this time for lack of water. Once again God met their needs by supplying water from the rock at Horeb (17:1–7). The Amalekites attacked them while they were still camped at Rephadim, but God gave a great victory to the Israelites (vv 8–13).

Eventually they reached Sinai and God called Moses up the mountain to receive the Law of the Old Covenant, the Sinai Covenant. The Israelites agreed to keep all God's Laws but never did so. Indeed, the people lost no opportunity to rebel against God and made an image of God in the form of a bull calf and worshipped it. God told Moses what was taking place below and angrily declared that he was going to destroy the people but would make a great nation of Moses and his descendants. Moses immediately interceded on behalf of the people, and God's wrath abated. Moses descended the mountain, carrying the two tables of stone on which the Law had been written, but when he entered the camp and saw what was taking place, he could not restrain his anger. He threw the stone tablets to the ground, ground the golden calf to powder, mixed it with water, and forced the people to drink it. He turned angrily to Aaron and demanded an explanation for the great sin that had been committed. Aaron lamely tried to shift the blame by minimizing his own role: "I threw it [the gold] into the fire, and there came out this calf" (v 24). Moses called for volunteers to carry out God's judgment on the people for the great sin they had committed. Men of the tribe of Levi responded and executed about 3000 men. Later they were commended and rewarded (Dt 33:9, 10). Moses again interceded for the people, requesting that he be destroyed with the rest if God could not forgive them. God relented and promised Moses that the angel of the Lord would go with them still (Ex 32:34). Then Moses made a special request that he might be allowed to see the glory of the Lord. God instructed Moses to hew out two more tables of stone like the ones he had destroyed and to return to the top of the mountain the next day. There the Lord passed before him and proclaimed his name: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (34:6). Moses remained on the mountain another 40 days, where he received renewed warnings against idolatry and further instructions from the Lord together with another copy of the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. When Moses came down from the mountain, he was not aware that the skin of his face shone as a result of talking with God. At first the people were afraid to come near him, but he called them together and repeated all the Lord had said to him on the mountain. Afterward, he covered his face with a veil which he removed only when he went into the presence of the Lord. Paul said the purpose of the veil was to prevent the people from seeing the heavenly light gradually fade from Moses' face (2 Cor 3:13).

In addition to receiving the OT law, Moses also received instructions to make a tabernacle (the forerunner of the Temple and instructions on how they were to live and how God was to be worshipped (including the sacrifices that were to be offered) and also instructions for establishing the priesthood.

But the people didn't go straight from Sinai to the Promised Land, all in all they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. Where God miraculously provided food for them and also water.

As the Israelites approached the territory of Sihon, king of the Amorites, they sent messengers asking permission to pass peaceably through his land. Instead of granting the request, Sihon gathered his army together and fought against Israel. He was killed in the battle, and his land and cities were taken and occupied by the Hebrews (Nm 21:21–25).

After their victory over Sihon, the Israelites set out again and encamped in the plains of Moab on the east side of the Jordan River facing Jericho in full view of the Promised Land. The Moabites were terrified by the presence of these people because they had heard what happened to the Amorites. Their king, Balak, hired a magician named Balaam to curse the Israelites. Three times Balaam attempted to curse them, but each time God turned his words into a blessing (Nm 22–24). Though unable to curse the Israelites, Balaam was responsible for an even greater calamity. He advised the Moabites to entice the Israelites to sacrifice to their gods and bow down to them (25:1–3; 31:16; 2 Pt 2:15; Rv 2:14). While the people were worshiping the Moabite deity, Baal of Peor, God's anger was kindled against them, and he sent a plague that killed 24,000 of their number (Nm 25:9). It was Israel's first encounter with the seductive allurements of licentious idolatry and an ominous foreview of what would happen after they settled down in Canaan. Their continued attraction to idolatry would be their final undoing.

After the plague, God instructed Moses and Eleazar to take another census of the people like the one almost 40 years earlier. A whole generation of Israelites had died in the wilderness, but they had been replaced by an almost equal number, so that now there were 601,730 men 20 years and older who were able to go to war (Nm 26:51). Not a man remained of those who had been counted in the first census except Caleb and Joshua (vv 64, 65).

The Book of Deuteronomy has often been called Moses' valedictory speech to the people for in it Moses is not merely the chief speaker but the only speaker. With the congregation of his people gathered before him, he rehearses all that God has done for them since leaving Sinai, and he reminds them of their failure to enter the Promised Land 38 years earlier (Dt 2:14). He recalls his plea that God would let him cross the Jordan and see the land that was to be the home of the people, but God responded that Moses would only be allowed to view the land from the top of Pisgah. Moses then exhorts the people to obey the statutes and ordinances that have been given to them in order to experience God's blessings in the land. He especially emphasizes the importance of religious instruction in the home (6:4–9) and reviews the laws and statutes that the people should carefully observe (chs 12–26). He warns them of false prophets (ch 13), gives instructions for conduct in war (ch 20), and sets out regulations for divorce (24:1–4). He concludes with a lengthy exhortation to live by the terms of the covenant. He tells the people they will be blessed if they obey God and cursed if they disobey (chs 27–30).

Moses is among the Bible's most complex and vivid characters. This is partly because varying accounts of his life and teachings have been fused. To some extent Moses is idealized: he is the epitome of pious humility (Num. 12:3) and functions as prophet, priest, judge, and king. Later figures may be depicted as Moses-like—Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, Josiah, Jesus—yet Moses remains a unique phenomenon, not so much by his internal greatness as by

his unparalleled intimacy with God (Exod. 33–34; Num. 12:6–8; Deut. 34:10). He is father of his people—and arguably mother, too (cf. Num. 11:12), assuaging the wrath of Israel’s Father in heaven. Moses twice forgoes the supreme honor of begetting a new nation (Exod. 32:10; Num. 14:12) and instead is condemned to die in the wilderness for his people’s sins (Deut. 1:37; 3:27; 4:21), buried in an unknown, unvisited grave (34:6). Moses is even described as a god to Aaron and Pharaoh (Exod. 4:16; 7:1), and, by one interpretation, his face shines with divine splendor (34:29–35). Still, in all sources Moses is a flawed character. Throughout his career his faith wavers; he is given to mood swings, is inconsistently obedient to Yahweh, and is a somewhat reluctant leader.