

Exodus – Lesson 4

The Biography of Moses

Read Exodus 2:1-22

1. According to v. 1, from what *tribe* was Moses' family? Why is this *significant* in the history of Israel?

Moses was from the tribe of Levi. His brother, Aaron, also from the tribe, would serve as the first priest and the “father” of the priesthood that would come from the same tribe. The Levites would not receive a parcel of land to call their own, but would sojourn amongst the other tribes serving as their covenant mediators and their ambassadors for God (i.e. as priests serving in the tabernacle). Their livelihood would come from those whom they served, and would not have to till the land to grow crops or raise money in other ways. All of this would be an honor for them, having descended from the line of Levi. In many ways, Moses was a “prototype” of the priests, having served them as a mediator before God.

2. (a) How did Moses' mother *disobey* the decree of Pharaoh? In what way could it be said that she “obeyed” his decree (note 1:22)?

Moses' mother refused to toss him into the Nile per the Pharaoh's instructions, but chose, instead, to spare his life. However, when she could no longer hide the child from possible danger, she placed the child into a basket and placed him in the Nile. So, in effect, she “obeyed” the king's command by putting him in the river. Obviously, the king intended his command to kill all Hebrew boys, but God moved Moses' mother to find a way to “obey” the king without harming the child.

- (b) Why do you think that Pharaoh's daughter took the Hebrew baby and protected it as her *own child*?

There is no reason given in the biblical text as to why this princess of Egypt decided to keep a Hebrew child for her own. It is clear that she knew the origin of the child, given that she sought out a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby until it could be weaned and placed in her house permanently. Some possibilities, however, might be: 1) she was unable to have children of her own and saw this as an opportunity to raise a child (a likely scenario), 2) she disagreed with the edict of the king and used this as an opportunity to defy him in a very real sense, or 3) she was afraid of what might happen to the child if it was left in the river and decided it was better to raise the child than to let it die. The clear message of the text, however, is that *God* ordained this woman to act as Moses' surrogate mother, thus working out the plan of God for Moses to be raised in the court of Pharaoh and to be educated, something that would come in handy later.

- (c) How might Moses' mother *feel* nursing her own son for another woman?

Undoubtedly, the natural mother of Moses would feel a number of conflicting emotions at the same time: gratitude that her son had been rescued and would live, in spite of the Pharaoh's edict; and a sense of awe that her son was being adopted by the daughter of the king. However, she also probably felt a deep sorrow that the child would not grow up in her house, and that she might never (actually) see him again as he faded into Egyptian society.

- (d) In what way might this *parallel* the events recorded in Matthew 1:18-25?

When Joseph, Mary's husband-to-be, discovered that she was pregnant with a child that was *not* his, he determined to “put her away” (i.e. to quietly “divorce” her) by breaking the engagement and leave. However, God appeared to Joseph and instructed him to take the child as his own and to raise it as his own. Just like the princess of Egypt, God entrusted the care of his own (in this case, his Only Begotten Son) to a human agent that was not directly related to the child.

3. (a) According to v. 11, did Moses *know* his true heritage? From vv. 14-15, did the *Pharaoh* know about Moses' real heritage? Why might this be *significant* in the plan of God for Moses' life?

It would appear that Moses knew his own heritage; the text says that when he saw the conditions "of his people," he was moved to action. It is very possible that the princess who raised him revealed to him who he really was, but instructed him to remain silent about it until the right time (i.e. when he ascended to power). However, it is *unlikely* that Pharaoh would have known about Moses' background, given his position as a royal Egyptian, his distaste for foreigners, and his edict designed to control the Hebrews (see also 3b below). In the sovereign plan of God, this scenario allowed for God to give Moses a background and training that would serve him well later: he would learn how to govern and lead others and receive an education that would train him to read and write. All of this would come in handy as he led the Israelites in the wilderness and as he penned the Pentateuch.

(b) What is Pharaoh's *response* to Moses killing an Egyptian? Why would he *have* such a reaction, given that Moses was being raised as his daughter's son?

The Pharaoh, upon discovery that Moses had killed an Egyptian, sought to kill him (i.e. to bring him up on charges of murder and have him executed). The reaction is probably more about the revelation of who Moses was (i.e. a Hebrew) than it was about the killing of an Egyptian. After all, if Moses was (in fact) living in the household of Pharaoh and was treated as a prince of Egypt, then the killing of another Egyptian would not warrant such a response. More than likely, Pharaoh is deeply angry that a *Hebrew* would rise to power within his kingdom, given that the XVII Dynasty had worked to expel the Hyksos kings.

(c) Read Hebrews 11:23-28. For what *reasons* did Moses repudiate his Egyptian upbringing?

The author of Hebrews gives two (2) primary reasons why Moses eventually repudiated his Egyptian upbringing: 1) he felt that being connected by lineage to the Hebrews was better than the "fleeting pleasures of sin." In other words, Moses eventually came to understand that the power and prestige of living the "royal" life had less value than being associated with a people who, although enslaved, enjoyed a better existence under the blessings of God. However, 2) his primary reason was because he was looking forward to the "reward" that comes in Christ. He believed that his heritage as a Hebrew entitled him to participate in the plan of God given through Abraham and promised to all of those who were descended to him through Isaac and Jacob.

(d) What does Hebrews 11:26 mean as it describes the *faith* of Moses in the promise of God made to Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18?

The writer of Hebrews recognizes that Moses understood the promise made to Abraham that "all the nations of the world" would be blessed through a "seed" coming from his descendants. To Moses, this was a far better reward than any temporal pleasure he could gain in the court of Pharaoh, and it was appropriated by faith given that Moses, like all Old Testament saints, did not know the *name* of the One who was coming. This text, given where it sits in Hebrews, reminds us that Moses, like everyone else in God's plan, must be drawn by Him out of the enslavements of this world (including power, money, and prestige) to the greater and eternal reward that is Christ.

4. (a) Compare Deuteronomy 34:7 with Acts 7:30. How *old* was Moses when he left Egypt? How *many* years did he spend in the Midian wilderness?

Moses was 40 when he left Egypt and spent 40 years in the Midian wilderness; he then spent the last 40 years of his life leading the Israelite people to the Promised Land. Moses' life was divided up into three parts: a period of *basic* training, a period of *continued* training, and a period of *active work* for God. God used two-thirds of Moses' life to prepare him for the task of leading the Israelites.

(b) Why was this period *necessary* in Moses' life (see also Matthew 4:1-2 and Galatians 1:15-18)?

The 80 year period of training was necessary for several reasons: 1) he needed education and expertise in reading, writing, and leading, all of which he got in both Egypt and Midian. He was trained in Egypt to act as a leader, to read and write, and to understand the operations of politics and military action. In the Midian wilderness he was taught patience and resolve, how to trust in and serve others who were greater than him, and the operations of a nomadic, Semitic life, all of which would come in handy as he led the Israelites in the wilderness. *Both* Jesus and Paul were put through similar periods of training: Jesus spent the first 30 years of his life learning an agrarian lifestyle and the submissiveness of working in a carpenter's shop, and then spent 40 days in the wilderness learning obedience through the testing of the Holy Spirit. Paul, after his conversion, went into Arabia (i.e. Tarsus) for as long as 14 years to "unlearn" much of his works-based Judaism and how Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promises in the Old Testament. It was only *after* these periods of training that Moses, Jesus, and Paul were ready to do the will of God, and it is important that we, also, see this order in whatever work God calls *us* to do.

Read Exodus 2:23-25

5. Explain the phrase "*and God knew*" in 1:25.

At the end of the chapter, in vv. 23-25, Moses summarizes the reality of the Hebrews at this point: the king dies, the people of Israel continue to languish under the bonds of slavery, even as a new king arises, and they continue to cry out to God for deliverance. But, even in the midst of all of this God "*knows*": he knows the plan that he has in mind, a plan that has been sovereignly established for this people for about 600 years, back to the time of Abraham. He "*knows*" not in a passive sense of simply hearing the cry of the people and deciding to act. No, he "*knows*" because his plan to rescue them is just one step on the long road of him building a nation through which his Son would come. God *acts* by virtue of the fact that he *knows*: his knowledge is active in the world; what he knows comes to fruition because he knows it.