

The Birth and Preparation of Moses

Exodus 2

Exodus 2 – *“And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. ² So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. ³ But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank. ⁴ And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. ⁵ Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. ⁶ And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?”*

⁸ And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go.” So the maiden went and called the child’s mother. ⁹ Then Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰ And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, “Because I drew him out of the water.” ¹¹ Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. ¹² So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, “Why are you striking your companion?” ¹⁴ Then he said, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”

So Moses feared and said, “Surely this thing is known!” ¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well. ¹⁶ Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. And they came and drew water, and they filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. ¹⁷ Then the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. ¹⁸ When they came to Reuel their father, he said, “How is it that you have come so soon today?” ¹⁹ And they said, “An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and he also drew enough water for us and watered the flock.” ²⁰ So he said to his daughters, “And where is he? Why is it that you have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.”

²¹ Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. ²² And she bore him a son. He called his name Gershom, for he said, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land.” ²³ Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. ²⁴ So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.”

Background Notes

At the end of Exodus 1 Pharaoh issued an edict of infanticide. All the Hebrew baby boys were to be thrown into the River Nile and drowned. In Exodus 2 we see how God caused Satan's plans to backfire in a most ironic way! Pharaoh ordered all the male babies to be drowned in the Nile, but baby Moses was placed in the Nile and preserved! In fact, it was Pharaoh's own daughter who rescued baby Moses from the River Nile! Thus Moses, who eventually brought Egypt to its knees before God, was raised in Pharaoh's household and educated at Pharaoh's expense. How wonderful and fascinating are the ways of God!

Moses' parents were Amram and Jochebed, and his sister was named Miriam. The wicker basket or "ark of bulrushes" in which baby Moses was placed was probably made of papyrus, and the reeds in which the basket was hidden were the papyrus plants that still grow along the Nile River today. Most likely "Pharaoh's daughter" who saw the basket floating in the Nile and had pity on baby Moses was the daughter of Thutmose I, who eventually became the great Queen Hatshepsut. (By the way, an Egyptian guide once told me how to pronounce Queen Hatshepsut's name. She said, "Just think of a person in a hat and a cheap suit. Hat-cheap-suit is how you pronounce the name!") We know from history that Hatshepsut did not have children of her own, and she probably wanted to raise Moses as her own son to eventually become king over Egypt. However, Hebrews 11 tells us that that Moses gave up all the power, wealth and glory of Egypt -- to live for the glory of God.

Doctrinal Points

1. God prepared Moses forty years in Egypt.

There are two specific passages in the New Testament that deal with the early years of Moses' life. One is Acts 7, and the other is Hebrews 11. Acts 7:18-22 – *"Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was powerful in speech and action."* Notice that Moses was well educated – *"Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians"* he had attained quite a reputation in Egypt. All this was part of God's preparation of Moses for the job God would call him to do.

The other New Testament passage dealing with the early years of Moses is Hebrews 11:23-26. *"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw that he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He*

regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.” Notice that Moses was a beautiful baby – he was *“no ordinary child.”* By faith his parents risked their lives to hide him from Pharaoh’s death squads. For 40 years Moses lived in the royal courts of Egypt, but he gave up the power and prestige and the pleasures that could have been his if he had denied his relationship with God’s people and claimed his rights as an Egyptian. Moses gave up all these pleasures and treasures of Egypt to identify with the oppressed people of God.

Now the big question for us is: “Would I have given up all of these things to identify with the oppressed people?” Most Christians cannot resist the pleasures and treasures of this world, especially when they are available for the taking! Sadly, these Christians fall short of all that the Lord wants to do in their lives, for His glory. By faith Moses refused and resisted the snare of these pleasures and treasures -- and so should we! All the years of education and experience in Pharaoh’s palace was part of God’s plan for Moses, preparing him for his job as God’s chosen leader for Israel. God prepared Moses forty years in Egypt.

2. God prepared Moses forty years in Midian.

After forty years in the royal palace of Egypt, Moses was still not ready to lead God’s people in their exodus from Egypt. Moses reacted too quickly and violently to the persecution of a Hebrew slave. He killed an Egyptian and had to escape to the land of Midian. Moses would now spend 40 years in Midian, learning patience and learning the ways of God. Did you realize that Moses was eighty years old when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt? That should be an encouragement and challenge to older believers who might think they’re too old to serve the Lord!

Again, Acts 7 and Hebrews 11 tell us about this second 40 years of Moses’ life. Acts 7:23-29 – *“When Moses was 40 years old he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’ But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you king over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.”*

In reference to this period of training in Moses’ life, Hebrews 1:27 says, *“By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.”* Notice that when Moses fled from Egypt, it was by faith. Faith, by definition, is *acting on what God has revealed.* So we believe that God must have revealed to Moses that he was to go to Midian. In the land of Midian, Moses met a “priest of Midian,” whose name was Ruel, also called Jethro in Exodus 3.

Since verse 16 describes Jethro a “*priest of Midian*,” here’s an interesting question for you: Was Jethro a pagan priest or a priest of God? I believe that Jethro was a priest of the One True God, like Melchizedek, king of Salem, who ministered to Abraham (Genesis 14). The knowledge of the One True God certainly existed in the ancient world. Ruel, or Jethro, had seven daughters, and Moses married one of them whose name was Zipporah. In Exodus 3 we’ll see that Moses worked as a shepherd for Jethro, his father-in-law, just as his forefather Jacob had worked for Laban, his father-in-law. I’m sure that Moses must have reflected on this parallel.

You learn a lot of lessons in the school of God in a forty-year period, don’t you? All these experiences – even watching sheep in the wilderness – were part of God’s preparation of Moses to be leader for His people Israel. (People are a lot like sheep!) And think about how much Moses learned about living in the wilderness as he watched those sheep. Moses was raised in the royal courts of Egypt and needed some wilderness training for the job ahead! God prepared Moses forty years in Midian.

Practical Application

Remember, God is in charge of circumstances.

Ephesians 1:11 says that God works all things after the council of His will, and that certainly includes the “circumstances” -- the circumstances in the life of Moses, and the circumstances surrounding you and me as well.

Many people would say that it was just coincidence that Pharaoh’s daughter found Moses in the river, and it was just coincidence that he had the privilege of being educated in all the learning of the Egyptians. Well, I hope that’s not what you believe! God arranged all the circumstances of Moses’ life to prepare him for his unique role in Israel’s history.

Notice how quickly the circumstances changed in a positive way for Moses and his family. Moses’ mother was actually paid out of Pharaoh’s treasury to care for her own baby! Do you think this was coincidence? No way! God can change your circumstances in a positive way as well -- even overnight! Remember, God is in charge of circumstances.