

MOSES

FAITHFUL SERVANT OF GOD

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Copyright © 2016 by Stephen J. Lennox
Published by Wesleyan Publishing House
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: 978-0-89827-906-1
ISBN (e-book): 978-0-89827-907-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lennox, Stephen J.
Moses : faithful servant of God / Stephen J. Lennox.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-89827-906-1 (pbk.)
1. Moses (Biblical leader)--Biblical teaching. I. Title.
BS580.M6L46 2016
222'.1092--dc23

2015026175

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Introduction



In the opening chapters of the book of Hebrews, the author developed his theme of Jesus' superiority over all forms of revelation that had come before. The writer began by showing how Christ is greater than the angels. Then in chapter 3, the author turned his attention to Moses.

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly

to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. (Heb. 3:1–6)

In verse 5, we meet the descriptive phrase that will serve as the focal point for this book: “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house.”

A SERVANT



The writer of Hebrews identified Moses’ role as that of a servant to highlight the contrast between a servant in the house and the builder of the house (3:3), and between the servant in the household and the son who owns the household (v. 6). Although Moses and Jesus were both God’s servants (v. 2), Jesus is greater than Moses for he has built the house that is God’s church, and he is the son and heir of the Master, God himself.

As great as Moses was, Christ is greater. Moses was an instrumental part of that house—like its foundation and walls—but Christ is the builder of the house. Moses had seen God in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai, but Jesus is God, “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (1:3). Moses received the law on Sinai and transmitted it to the people, but Jesus fulfilled the law, both perfectly obeying it and superseding it. As Gareth Cockerill has written, “Moses bore witness to what God would reveal through his Son.”¹ Moses established the Old Testament priesthood, ordaining the first priests and instructing them in their duties, but Jesus came as the great High Priest who resolved the issue of sin once for all time in his own sacrifice. Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood enabling him:

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (7:25–28)

The author of Hebrews summarized his point: “We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being” (Heb. 8:1–2). The priesthood established by Moses is fulfilled and surpassed by the priestly work of Christ.

The apostle Paul went one step beyond the author of Hebrews, though in a direction wholly in line with the understanding of the latter. Paul identified Moses as an Old Testament model or pattern of Jesus. We might call Moses a “type” of Christ, typifying aspects of the Lord’s character and actions that would be more fully revealed in the incarnation. Paul revealed this thinking in writing to the church at Corinth: “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:1–4).

The nineteenth-century divine Andrew Murray drew out the correlations between Moses and Christ: both suffered at the hands of

their fellow Israelites and were rejected by them; both exercised great zeal and sacrificed greatly for God; both interceded on behalf of others; both enjoyed unparalleled fellowship with God; and both offered their lives for God's people—God declined Moses' offer but accepted that of Jesus.² "As the one who led God's people through the wilderness toward the Promised Land," observes Cockerill, "Moses foreshadowed the Son as our pioneer who brings us into the heavenly homeland."³

IN GOD'S HOUSE



What does the writer of Hebrews mean by the phrase "God's house" (3:5)? This term is not original with this writer but is a paraphrase of Numbers 12:7, where God spoke of Moses as "faithful in all my house." In fact, this entire passage from Hebrews 3 relies heavily on Numbers 12:6–8. The house to which God referred in the Numbers passage is not a physical structure but a household with himself as the head, the Israelites as God's servants (see Lev. 25:42), and Moses as the chief servant appointed to manage it. While it would also be correct to speak of Moses and the Israelites as God's children, the master-servant analogy is used more often throughout the opening books of the Old Testament.

Moses' appointment as servant had taken place at the burning bush (Ex. 4:10). Although initially reluctant, Moses accepted the challenge and grew into the role. The Israelites were reluctant to accept his leadership but seem to have done so after crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 14:31). Even so, they challenged his leadership many times and tested his patience many more times before his service ended and that responsibility passed to Joshua.

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All of this—the appointment of Moses, the deliverance of the Israelites, the travel through the wilderness, the preparation for crossing into Canaan—was part of God’s redemptive plan. God began this plan with Abraham, calling him from Mesopotamia and making a covenant with him. In this covenant, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation and bless all other nations through him. Much of Genesis describes the slow outworking of God’s plan as this elderly couple produced a son, who in turn produced two sons. One of these, Jacob, became the father of a dozen sons. By the end of Genesis, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah numbered seventy, and they lived in Egypt.

When the suffering of Abraham’s descendants in Egypt became severe, God appointed his servant Moses to lead the rest of his servants out of Egypt and into Canaan. On the way, they received the law on Mount Sinai. This law explained how those in God’s household must live with each other and with those in the community and how they must honor their Master in worship. Through the law, God was reshaping their identity: no longer were they Egyptian slaves; now they were servants of Yahweh, the living God. Their journey to Canaan, which would ordinarily have taken less than a fortnight, lasted forty years due to their rebellion. The members of God’s household wandered for four decades until he determined they could enter the Promised Land. Moses would lead them to the land and would see it from Mount Nebo, but he would not enter. A new head servant, Joshua, would take his place. Moses’ work was a matter of “bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future” (Heb. 3:5), that being the unfolding of God’s redemptive plan.

God’s plan called for the Israelites to conquer Canaan, establish a kingdom, build a temple, and become a guiding light for other nations. However, God’s servants stumbled due to a lack of faith, just as they had done in the desert. But God remained faithful,

restoring them as a nation and bringing forth the Messiah from that nation. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God’s plan was consummated. The church—a continuation of the earlier household but now expanded to include Gentiles—was given the responsibility to carry out God’s work in the world, guided and equipped by God’s Spirit. Much of the New Testament describes the beginning of this expansion and anticipates its final expression in the book of Revelation. One of the closing scenes in that final book describes a great and marvelous sign, the victorious servants of God standing beside the sea, holding harps given to them by God. They “sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb” (Rev. 15:3), a single song written about two faithful servants in God’s house.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT



Moses’ story is just one part—though a very important part—of the story of God’s redemptive plan unfolded among humanity. Moses is not the main character, even in his own story; that role belongs to God. There is, however, a long tradition of seeing Moses and other Old Testament characters as examples to follow. Hebrews 11 contains a well-known example of this, what some call the Hall of the Heroes of Faith. Although our circumstances may differ from the biblical heroes catalogued there, we learn much from them, especially Moses.

The Bible was not written primarily to provide instructions for how to be a faithful servant in God’s house, yet we glean important life principles from its pages. We serve the same God as did those original servants, and his character does not change. We are all called to be God’s servants (see 2 Tim. 2:24; 3:17; Rev. 19:10); some are

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even called, like Moses, to serve by leading other servants (see Eph. 3:7; 6:21). It stands to reason that by observing how Moses prepared for his role, how he served, what challenges he faced, how he was punished, and how he prepared the people for a transition to a new leader, we can understand something of what it means for us to become faithful servants in God's house.

Some of these lessons are apparent in Hebrews 3. First, we see that God's servant is not self-appointed; no one applies for this job. God appoints faithful servants, even as he appointed Christ to his role (v. 2). In the opening three chapters of this book, we will look closely at how Moses was prepared for his role and then called at the burning bush.

Next in Hebrews 3, we note that God's servant participates with God in his work; the servant is not self-employed. Moses' specific role was "bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future" (v. 5). In other words, the message was God's not Moses'. Moses did not originate this plan but accepted his role in it and faithfully executed the work assigned. So it is with all faithful servants: They are busy about their Master's business. In five chapters of this book, we will observe Moses doing God's business, leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness. We will consider how he served under pressure and how he continued to serve God up to the very end of his life.

Third, we see that God's servant receives both the great blessing of encountering God and the great responsibility of passing along what he has learned to others. Moses met with God more than once, initially at the burning bush but more intensively at Mount Sinai. His relationship with God was so close that God described them as relating face-to-face (more literally, "mouth to mouth"), enabling Moses to understand God "clearly and not in riddles" (Num. 12:8). While this degree of closeness may have been unique

to Moses among God's servants, each of us has the privilege of encountering God.

These encounters bring great blessing but the purpose is to equip us to better serve him by making him known to others. Moses did this when he told the Israelites God had met with him at a burning bush and wanted to set them free from slavery and when he passed along God's instructions regarding Passover. However, the most significant instance of Moses encountering God and sharing the fruit of that experience took place at Mount Sinai. There God inscribed his revelation on tablets of stone, and Moses carried them down to the people to explain in detail what God had commanded. Through the written law, God revealed a clearer picture of the moral law written on the heart of every person. He used the law to turn a large group of slaves into a nation he could use to further his plan. The nature and purpose of this law and Moses' role in its reception and distribution are the focus of two chapters of this book.

Moses is a wonderful example of a faithful servant because he executed his responsibilities to the good of the people and, more importantly, to the glory of God. Moses put the needs of others above his own. We see this in his willingness to leave the safety of his life tending sheep to shepherd God's people. It is apparent in his begging God to pardon the Israelites, even after God promised to make Moses the new Abraham. We see Moses putting others ahead of himself when he appealed for his sister, even after she rebelled against his authority. And Moses was faithful when it was necessary to correct the Israelites in order to instruct them.

Moses' faithfulness to the people for God was an act of faithfulness to God. God's honor was uppermost in Moses' mind. When Pharaoh refused to allow the people to go free, Moses grew "hot with anger" (Ex. 11:8) at how the king was dishonoring the King of Kings. When God threatened to destroy the Israelites, Moses

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reminded him that it would reflect negatively on Yahweh's honor. There was, however, one occasion when Moses failed to honor God above himself, a mistake for which Moses paid dearly. This exception only proves the rule: The faithful servant must honor God.

Given Moses' faithfulness, it is no surprise that God showed full confidence in him. He allowed Moses to speak for him to Pharaoh, he worked miracles through his servant, and he allowed Moses to be honored by the Egyptians. More than once God changed his plans in response to Moses' intercession. Yahweh defended Moses against all challenges to his authority and buried Moses with his own hands. Because Moses was faithful to God, God was faithful to Moses. Indeed, "no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:12).

CONCLUSION



Through the pages of this book, we will take a closer look at Moses, faithful servant in all God's house and at the Master he faithfully served. Our study begins with events prior to Moses' birth, then turns to his miraculous preservation as an infant and his upbringing in Pharaoh's court. We consider his failure as a savior and his flight from Egypt, then his call at the burning bush and his role in the exodus. We follow Moses and the Israelites through the wilderness, observing his development as a servant through the challenges he faced up to his final days.

Through our study, we seek to learn more about the character of the Master and the nature of faithful service so that we, too, can be faithful servants of God. Faithfulness to God, after all, "is the spirit

MOSES: FAITHFUL SERVANT OF GOD

of God's house, the mark of being of his household. It was so with Moses the servant. It was so with Christ the Son. It must be so through the whole household. Be it so with us: Faithful to God.”⁴

Preparing the Faithful Servant



EXODUS 1–2

The story of Moses begins well before his birth. For decades prior, forces had been at work that would shape Moses into a faithful servant, forces directed by a sovereign hand—God’s, not Pharaoh’s. The first two chapters of Exodus recount the Egyptian oppression of the Israelites and the beginning of God’s plan to deliver his people. By the end of these chapters, God’s servant would be prepared to enter God’s service, although the path to preparation was far from what we might have expected.

TRANSITION FROM GENESIS TO EXODUS



To set the stage for what God would do through Moses, the narrator of Exodus began the story well before Moses’ birth and miraculous preservation as an infant. He began with the sons of Jacob who came from famine-ravaged Canaan to find relief in Egypt. The narrator

listed these sons according to their mothers, beginning with the sons of Leah, then Rachel, Bilhah (Rachel's maid), and Zilpah (Leah's maid). He mentioned Joseph last because he was already in Egypt, thanks to his brothers (Ex. 1:5).

We learn that Joseph, his brothers, and all that generation had died, since as many as four centuries had passed (see Ex. 12:40–41; Gen. 15:13, 16). By this time the Israelites had multiplied greatly. Exodus 1:7 describes that growth using five verbs and two adverbs: “were fruitful . . . increased abundantly . . . multiplied . . . waxed exceeding mighty . . . the land was filled with them” (KJV). By emphasizing their growth, the narrator demonstrated that God was fulfilling his promise to make a great nation out of Abraham's descendants (see Gen. 12:2). The narrator also anticipated the looming conflict with their host nation, Egypt.

EGYPTIAN OPPRESSION OF THE ISRAELITES



The narrator next described how the conflict began. A new king had come to Egypt's throne, one who did not know about Joseph (Ex. 1:8). Although it is possible that the Egyptians literally forgot about Joseph, this seems unlikely given his status as a high-ranking official in their government and their penchant for keeping careful records. More likely, the phrase refers to this pharaoh's decision not to acknowledge Joseph's role in preserving Egypt, now that the Israelites had become a threat. Such ingratitude is more understandable given that Joseph was not a native-born Egyptian, and xenophobic attitudes ran deep in Egyptian history. The narrator did not mention the name of this pharaoh. However, if we accept an early date for the exodus, it would likely be the founder of the Eighteenth

Dynasty, Ahmose (1552–1556 BC), while a later date makes Seti I (Sethos I) (1294–1279 BC) of the Nineteenth Dynasty the likely candidate.

Egyptian fear of the Israelites arose for several reasons. The Egyptians were already suspicious of foreigners and had only recently broken free from decades under foreign rulers. Israel appeared to be a growing internal threat. Should another nation threaten Egypt, Israel could align themselves with the invaders and turn on their hosts, defeating the Egyptians. The Egyptian fear that the Israelites would “leave the country” (1:10) does not refer to a fear of lost slave labor, since they had not yet enslaved the Israelites. They were afraid the Israelites would decimate and plunder them, and then depart the country, the Egyptians being too weak to stop them. Perhaps the greatest source of Egyptian fear was the remarkable reproductive rate of the Israelites, suggesting the favor of Israel’s God. Such supernatural support called for Egypt to “deal shrewdly with them” (v. 10), that is, with wisdom.

Egyptian Plan A involved forcing the Israelites to work on several large-scale building projects (vv. 11–12). To this the Egyptians added the indignity of forcing the Israelites to build storage cities in the very country their ancestor, Joseph, had been instrumental in saving through a system of grain storage. The Egyptian plan failed, however, for the harder they worked the Israelites the more they reproduced. Two terms are reused in 1:12 that appeared in the initial description of Israel’s population growth in verse 7: *multiplied* and *spread*. The Egyptians’ dread of the Israelites signals their conclusion that this growth was divinely produced. And this dread is a more serious reaction than before, something closer to “horrified” or “alarmed.”

So the Egyptians implemented Plan B, stepping up their oppression of the Israelites (vv. 13–14). The word *ruthlessly* appears twice in these verses and captures the essence of this plan. They subjected

the Israelites, more literally, to “toil that breaks.” This hard labor was just what God had predicted (see Gen. 15:13), and its bitterness would be remembered later through the bitter herbs of the Passover meal (Ex. 12:8).

Although no mention is made of the outcome of Plan B, its failure is implied in the execution of the still more desperate Plan C (1:15–21). Now Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all male babies born to the Israelites, allowing only female babies to live. They were probably told to do this secretly, before anyone knew whether the infant was stillborn or alive. There must have been more midwives than just these two, who are likely mentioned as heads of a guild. (Note the reference to other midwives in v. 19). Pharaoh instructed them to observe the gender of the newborn and then kill the males, but the midwives feared God instead.

When Pharaoh challenged the midwives for failing to carry out his commands, they lied. Some scholars fault these women for their deception even while applauding their obedience to God. Others point out that truth telling in the ancient world may have had more to do with loyalty to one’s god than strict adherence to the facts. God oversight of the midwives’ deceit can be seen in two ways. First, God allowed them to establish homes and families. Aside from the joy of having their own children, such a blessing demonstrates God’s intention to give the Israelites a future. Second, God allowed the narrator to reveal their names while the pharaoh who threatened them remains anonymous. Naming a figure or leaving a figure unnamed were literary devices practiced in the ancient Near East to show honor or disgrace respectively. Thanks to the faithful midwives, Plan C fails as well (v. 20). This brings the desperate pharaoh to Plan D, authorization for all Egyptians to kill all male Hebrew babies (v. 22).

God was not absent from this chapter, though the circumstances seem to indicate otherwise. His people were suffering, oppressed

by the Egyptians who had forgotten the debt of gratitude owed to Joseph and were apparently forgotten by the God who had promised to bless them. Their situation grew continually more difficult, escalating from forced labor to infanticide.

Yet we see God at work. He is ultimately responsible for the remarkable population growth among the Israelites, a growth rate the Egyptians were powerless to slow. Even they recognize that something awe inspiring, perhaps even dreadful, was at work. We see God's blessing in the favor shown to the faithful midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. God's attention to these relatively obscure individuals conveys to the reader that God's watchful eye was on this whole situation.

If God was watching, why wasn't he working on behalf of his people? He was by allowing Israel time to develop from a family into a nation capable of occupying the Promised Land of Canaan. The hardships themselves are further evidence of God's work. Israel's deliverance was approaching, but how many would be willing to leave Egypt, the only land they had known for generations, to go to another, currently occupied by powerful nations? Few indeed, unless life in Egypt was unbearable. And the Israelites were not the only ones shaped by these experiences. The Egyptians were beginning to see their long-term guests in a different light. No longer could they view them as ignorant, odd, immigrant peasants — not after recognizing something supernaturally at work in them. Eventually, this recognition, reinforced by the ten plagues, persuaded the Egyptians that the Israelites had to go. So the process of extricating the Israelites from Egypt began well before the plagues with the very hardships described in the first chapter of Exodus.

God was at work in another way as well: raising up Moses. Beginning with Exodus 2, the narrator shifted his attention from the nation's troubles to the man called by God to deliver his people from their troubles.

THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF MOSES



Exodus 2 is a carefully crafted piece of literature. It begins and ends with a marriage and the birth of a son. At the end of the first and third minor sections, this son is named and his name is explained. Throughout the chapter are repeated references to daughters. The first chapter of Exodus transitions smoothly to the second: Pharaoh's grave command is the backdrop that prompts Moses' mother to take the drastic step of placing her son in the crocodile-infested waters of the Nile River.

The opening ten verses of Exodus 2 describe Moses' birth and rescue. Although well-known to even the youngest student in Sunday school, this story gives rise to many questions and surprises. One question is why God chose to bring Israel's deliverer from the tribe of Levi (2:1) rather than one of the other tribes. Both Moses' mother and father were Levites. One commentator rightly suggests that this is meant to highlight Moses' priestly, intercessory role on Israel's behalf.¹ Another reason may be the prominence of the tabernacle and sacrificial system in the law Moses would receive on Mount Sinai, a system in which the tribe of Levi would play a central role.

Another question concerns the meaning of Moses' mother's statement that "he was a fine child" (v. 2). The Hebrew word for *fine* is "good" and could have any number of meanings. The author of Hebrews suggests "good" here means handsome or beautiful (11:23 ESV). In the ancient world, as in our own, one's physical appearance was understood to have a bearing on one's success in life. The NIV renders "good" as "no ordinary child" in this verse. All parents consider their children special, but perhaps Moses' mother noted something unusual about him. Perhaps "good" is

meant to suggest that Moses was a healthy boy who would likely survive, so long as the Egyptians didn't discover him.

Just what was Moses' mother trying to accomplish by placing her son in a basket made of papyrus and coated with pitch? She seemed to have hidden him in their home for as long as she could. To avoid detection, she put him in the basket and placed it among the reeds along the riverbank. There among the flowing water and rustling reeds, the baby's cries would be harder to detect. Although the reeds would keep the basket from floating downstream, they would also make the child more vulnerable to crocodile attack, but some risks had to be taken. In effect, Moses' mother trusted her son to God's providence. She had done all she could to preserve this boy's life; his survival was ultimately up to God.

That a kindhearted daughter of Pharaoh happened to choose this location to bathe and that she happened to locate the basket (Ex. 2:5) suggests God had taken up the responsibility for protecting Moses. The princess recognized immediately this baby was an Israelite, perhaps because he was (presumably) circumcised or because there could be no other reason to place one's son in a basket in the river other than to spare his life. Maybe God even used the child's cries to soften her heart and prompt her to adopt him. Her split-second decision played into God's long-term plan to provide Moses with the very best of Egyptian culture, an investment that would pay dividends throughout his leadership of the Israelites.

The story of Moses' deliverance is told with irony and deep significance. Several terms appear here that connect this story with earlier events or which will figure prominently later. The word rendered "basket" (v. 3) is only used one other time in the Old Testament, to describe Noah's ark (Gen. 6:14). Noah's version of the ark may have been larger, but God used both to preserve these men from destruction for the sake of the greater good. The word rendered "tar"

in Exodus 2:3 has already been used in 1:14, in describing the Israelites' forced labor with mortar and bricks. The basket was placed among the "reeds" of the Nile (2:3); many years later the Israelites would cross the "Sea of Reeds."

Pharaoh had intended the Nile to be a place of death (see 1:22), but it plays a significant role in Moses' deliverance. Pharaoh had allowed the Israelite daughters to live, and it was an Israelite daughter (Moses' sister) who helped arrange for Moses to be kept with his family for two to three years until he was weaned. It was none other than Pharaoh's own daughter who adopted Moses, permitting not just any Israelite male to live but the very one who would liberate all Israelites. What is more, this liberator was raised and educated at Pharaoh's expense. How ironic that the king's desperate Plan D (1:22) actually fostered Israel's deliverance. How ironic that those who had spoiled the mighty Pharaoh's most extreme plans were all women: the midwives, Moses' mother and sister, and Pharaoh's daughter. Earlier we noticed that the narrator provided the midwives' names but not Pharaoh's (1:15). We see a similar phenomenon in this story as well. All the characters go unnamed until the end of the story when we are told the name of the little boy but no one else. The names of the others, at least of Moses' mother and sister, are known and are provided later (see Num. 26:59). The one character whose name we never learn is the daughter of Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the ancient Near East.

There is irony, too, in the name given to Moses. It is an Egyptian name meaning "son" or "one who is born" and forms other names like Thutmose and Ahmose. This name also sounds very much like the Hebrew word for "drawn out" (*mashah*), an apt description of the moment his life was providentially preserved for greater service. Throughout his life, Moses would carry about this dual citizenship as he employed the education and life skills he had developed at

Egypt's expense on behalf of his true people. He would one day need to choose which identity to embrace—that of his birth or of his foster family. The latter offered the best of culture and comfort; the former afforded an opportunity to participate in God's plan to redeem humanity but only if he was willing to embrace the service and suffering this required.

MOSES' FIRST ATTEMPT
AT DELIVERING ISRAELITES



At some point Moses became aware that he was a native Israelite. That awareness may have sprung from early memories, hearing his parents discuss God's ancient promises to their ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps the details of his rescue had become more widely known. There were probably many in the king's court who were quick to remind Moses he was not really Egyptian.

How Moses learned of his true heritage remains unclear, but at some point he chose to investigate matters more intently. Exodus 2:11 pictures him going out to see where the Israelites were forced to work. The repetition of the phrase "his own people" (literally "his brothers") implies that Moses had a keen interest in the fate of his kinsmen. Upon witnessing a graphic instance of an Israelite being mistreated, Moses struck and killed the offending Egyptian. That he first looked about to make sure there were no other witnesses indicates he intended his blow to kill. That he buried the corpse shows awareness of his guilt. Moses' motive may have been good—to deliver this beleaguered brother—but his actions betrayed a violent, power-driven mind-set.

The next day, when Moses encountered another example of violence, this time Israelite on Israelite, Moses once again intervened on behalf of the weaker party. The aggressor's reply stung and startled Moses. His authority, both as a member of the king's royal family and as a fellow Israelite, was rejected. Furthermore, Moses' misdeed had already become known, making him no more than a criminal himself. The man's challenge—"Who made you ruler and judge over us?" (v. 14)—would be repeated more than once by the Israelites against Moses in the years to come. Although the man's words were meant to wound Moses, they also warned him, allowing him time to flee Egypt (v. 15).

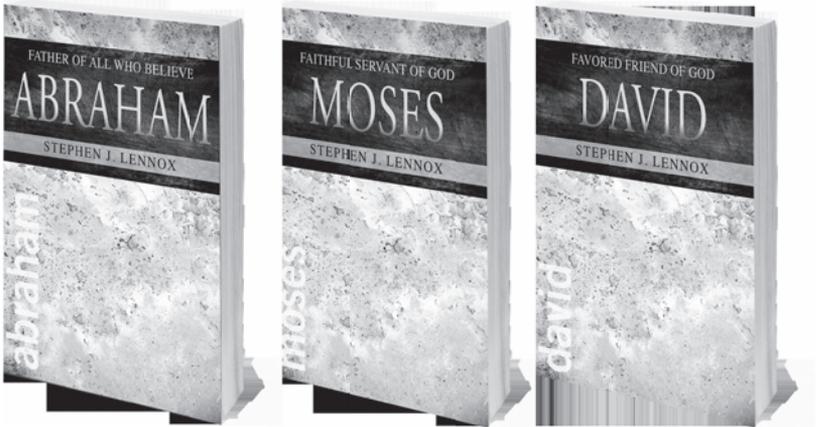
MOSES IN MIDIAN



Moses sought refuge in Midian. This geographic term refers to various locations, all to the east of Egypt, but west, north, and east of the Gulf of Aqaba. Canaan was closer, but the shortest route there would have taken him by fortified Egyptian outposts along the way of the sea. Canaan was also under Egyptian control while Midian was autonomous.

One day, while sitting near a well, Moses noticed several shepherd girls filling water troughs for their flocks. As soon as the troughs were full, other shepherds pushed the girls aside. At this point, Moses intervened, chased off the bullies, and then watered the girls' flocks. Here again we see Moses' desire for justice exercising itself with sufficient force to chase off the oppressors who outnumbered him. The narrator described Moses' deliverance of the girls using a verb rich with significance for his future role: he "came to their rescue" (2:17). Here he rescued—literally "saved"—a few helpless individuals, but later God would use him to save a nation (14:30).

Life Lessons from the Patriarchs



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