

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 12

Moses

As I look back over my life, I marvel at the unlikely path that has led me to where I am today. I remember attending an interview prep class with other soon-to-be-graduate engineers from Georgia Tech. At the end of the class, one of the students leaned over to the rest and asked, “I still don’t know what an engineer does, do you?” As funny as it sounded, most of the students agreed!

Now, over thirty years later, I am a consulting engineer who often testifies as an expert witness in petroleum engineering cases. My job as an “expert” is to objectively evaluate “what happened” and then testify in court as to the causes of the event.

There are no undergraduate or graduate courses on being an “expert witness,” and certainly, there are not any university degrees awarded for it, although some experts I meet seem to think they hold one! However, every course and every experience I had were necessary not only for that moment, but also in enabling me to do my job today. Some of those courses and experiences were fun, and some were downright unpleasant. But, the pattern was clear: prepare then use, prepare then use, prepare then use. The process keeps repeating itself because you never fully “arrive,” there is always more to learn, see, and do.

On many levels, it is really the same process with our Christian walk. Every experience, every success, every failure (good or bad) God uses individually to shape us into who He wants us to be – both for that moment and the future. Sometimes, what we go through is wonderful, exciting, and awe-inspiring. But sometimes, it can be miserable and difficult to endure.

The problem really is not what we go through, it is our perspective of the One overseeing the journey. Simply put, God often works outside the things we can see with our eyes, touch with our hands, or understand with our minds, and that makes us feel that He must not be aware of our situation. If only God would offer an explanation for it. If only we understood the reason. If only we knew why. If only. Perhaps, you are there right now.

Israel had a deliverer who experienced a moment like that. It was actually more than a moment; it was years of moments. Enslaved by the Egyptians, the nation of Israel had toiled in terrible conditions for decades. Then, God brought the

deliverer, or so it seemed until things went terribly wrong.

We know of him as Moses, the man who led the nation of Israel out of Egypt and met with God on Mt. Sinai. He was fiercely dependent upon God even when the rest of the Israelites turned their backs on God. We know the big picture story, but we often miss the fact that for two-thirds of his 120-year life, Moses was seemingly on the back burner, being prepared for the future. Yet, during the final third of Moses' life, we read, "The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend."¹

What made Moses the man of God that he became? What did he experience and why? What, if anything, does that mean for our own walk with God?

SETTING THE STAGE

Our story begins in the Old Testament book of Exodus. Exodus takes its name from the Latin Vulgate through the Greek Septuagint. In both languages, the word has the meaning of "departure," "a going," or "way out."²

The Hebrews had moved to Egypt under the care and protection of Joseph, settling in the area known as Goshen. Many years passed and all of the characters of the last sixteen chapters of Genesis had died, including Joseph, his eleven brothers, and the Pharaoh who had elevated Joseph to ruler of Egypt. Several more centuries have passed and the Hebrews multiplied greatly in number when suddenly Scripture interrupts with the statement, "Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph."³

This Pharaoh is worried that the people of Israel are too many, yet he also has a dilemma – he does not want them to leave the land because they are an economic asset! So, Pharaoh counsels with his people to "deal shrewdly" with the Hebrews so that they do not join with Egypt's enemies and fight against them and "escape from the land." The Hebrews are oppressed and forced to build the store cities of Pithom and Raamses for Pharaoh, yet the Hebrews continue to multiply so greatly that the Egyptians begin to dread the people of Israel!

¹ Deuteronomy 34:10

² Unger, Merrill F., *Unger's Bible Handbook*, (Moody Press, 1966), at 83.

³ See *Lesson 11 – Joseph-Moses: Archeology and Egypt*, Old Testament Survey, at www.Biblical-Literacy.com for a discussion of the identity of the "new king."

The king decides to eliminate the perceived threat from the Hebrew people by ordering the Hebrew midwives to kill at birth every male child. However, the midwives discreetly refuse to carry out Pharaoh's commands, and Pharaoh moves to Plan B – he commands by decree that all his people are now required to throw every son born to the Hebrews into the Nile! We can only imagine the fear the family of a newborn felt when their baby cried, or when they had to go out with the infant in public!

It is into this fear-swept environment that we are introduced to Moses, his older sister Miriam, his older brother Aaron, and his parents, Amram and Jochebed.⁴ Jochebed bore Moses and hid him for three months. Then, she put Moses in a basket waterproofed from the outside with bitumen and pitch, and placed the basket in the reeds by the riverbank with Miriam watching from the distance. Shortly after, Pharaoh's daughter approached the Nile to bathe,⁵ saw the basket and sent her servant woman to retrieve it. As she opened the basket, the Princess saw the baby crying and took pity on him. At this point, Miriam approached the Princess and offered to find a Hebrew woman who could nurse the child for her. Pharaoh's daughter agreed and Miriam went and brought back Jochebed, whom the Princess then instructed to care for Moses for pay!

There is a common perception that Moses' mother had placed him in a basket in the river hoping for the best but having no real expectations of a long-term rescue. However, one of the examples in the "Hall of Faith" passage in Hebrews 11 speaks directly to this story:

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.” (*Heb. 11:23*)

This was not an act of desperation; it was an act of faith. “She didn't merely push it out into the current, singing ‘*Que sera, sera*, whatever will be will be...’ she positioned that little basket precisely where she wanted it...Jochebed had a plan.”⁶

Although not specifically stated in Scripture, it seems likely that Jochebed did have a plan. Perhaps she had spent time observing the bathing habits of Pharaoh's

⁴ Neither Moses' sister or parents are introduced by name until Ex. 15:20 and Ex. 6:20, respectively. Moses remains unnamed until Ex. 6:10 when he is named by Pharaoh's daughter. Aaron, older than Moses by three years, is not mentioned at all until his appearance in the family genealogy in Ex. 6:20.

⁵ It is unknown whether Pharaoh's daughter was coming for spiritual cleansing (because the Nile waters were considered sacred), or for routine washing.

⁶ Swindoll, Charles R., *Moses*, (Thomas Nelson, 1999) at 24.

daughter, and then placed the basket in the reeds where it would have a good chance of being found by the Princess. Such a plan would likely include stationing Miriam nearby to be ready to offer to find a wet nurse as soon as the basket was discovered. Regardless of the amount of actual planning Jochebed did for Moses' rescue, it is clear that God worked to preserve the life of the future deliverer of Israel.

MOSES' FIRST FORTY YEARS

Jochebed nursed her own child under the safety and security of a royal order! Nothing could be better – until the time finally arrived to return the child to Pharaoh's daughter. We are not told the age of Moses when he was returned to the Princess, but many assume it occurred in his early boyhood years. It was at that time, the Princess adopted him as her son and gave him the name Moses.⁷

We can hardly think of an equivalent comparison in today's world – even a child from the gutters of Calcutta being adopted into a royal monarchy gives only partial sense of understanding. Beyond just the physical wealth of Pharaoh's court was the intellectual wealth of knowledge afforded to the young Moses. Swindoll describes the education that a member of royalty such as Moses would have received at the premier educational center, The Temple of the Sun:

The Temple of the Sun has been called by some “the Oxford of the ancient world.” The course of study...began with what we would call Hieroglyphics 101. Some have said that this language is the most difficult ever put into writing. It does not use characters; it uses pictographs—highly stylized symbols that represent complex ideas.

Moses began to learn the language of the Egyptians at the temple. He also would have plunged into the sciences, medicine, astronomy, chemistry, theology, philosophy, and law. He most certainly took the Egyptian equivalent of ROTC, studying the battles, combat tactics, and foes of that nation's proud military history. On top of that, he would have dabbled in the arts—sculpture, music, and

⁷ The popular etymology (undoubtedly *Moshe* is an Egyptian name, probably meaning “son”) “I drew him out of the water” (Ex. 2:10) should logically have required the form *mashui* (“one that has been drawn out”), not *moshe* (“one that draws out”). See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Ed., (Keter Publishing House, 2007) at 523. We are never told what name Moses might have been called by his own Hebrew family.

painting. The whole world of Egyptian literature was opened to him.⁸

Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, tells us that because Pharaoh had no son and no heir of his own, Moses was being prepared as successor to the throne⁹. He adds that Moses was also a skilled general, leading Egyptian troops against the invading Ethiopian army, defeating the enemy, capturing their principal city, and bringing home the spoils of war.¹⁰

In Acts 7, Stephen, recounting the great works of God toward the nation of Israel, summarizes Moses early life in a simple but complete way: “Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deed.”¹¹ Do not let that phrase “power in words and deed” escape you, for it provides great insight into Moses’ life during his second forty years!

In the small, white space between two verses of Exodus 2, we skip forward 30+ years. Moses is now about 40 years old and we read something interesting:

¹¹ One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. ¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³ When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, “Why do you strike your companion?” ¹⁴ He answered, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.”

Together with Hebrews 11, we begin to get a more complete picture of the man Moses:

²⁴By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

⁸ Swindoll, Charles R., *Moses*, Thomas Nelson (1999) at 38-39.

⁹ Josephus, Flavius, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, at Book 2, Chapter 9, para. 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, at Book 2, Chapter 10, para. 2.

¹¹ Acts 7:22

We might first ask how Moses knew so clearly that the Hebrews were his people. Was it a result of his infant and early childhood time with his family? Did Pharaoh's daughter provide him all the details of his adoption? Did Moses stay in continued contact with his family as he grew? While the exact source remains a mystery, the result is well known – Moses held a deep faith in God and identified personally with the oppressed Hebrews.

But here, another misperception about Moses arises – that he had no clue as to what God wanted from his life until his burning bush experience with God some 40 years later. We could not be more wrong! Again, Acts 7 provides insight to the Exodus 2 narrative:

²³ “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel.²⁴ And seeing one of them being wronged, he (Moses) defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.²⁵ ***He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand,*** but they did not understand.²⁶ And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?’²⁷ But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’²⁹ At this retort Moses fled and became an exile...

Forty years before his burning bush experience, Moses not only knew that he was a Hebrew, but he also believed that God wanted to deliver the nation of Israel by Moses' own hand! However, nowhere does the Scripture give any indication that Moses first sought God's direction about whether this was the time and means by which their deliverance was to occur. We only see Moses reacting to the moment by murdering the oppressing Egyptian and hiding his body, and the fact that he first “looked this way and that” before the murder indicates Moses knew that his actions were risky. Moses also evidences no sign of remorse or regret over these actions, as demonstrated by a repeat visit the next day, this time trying to mediate a dispute between two quarreling Hebrews.

Surely, if the murder of the Egyptian by Moses was common knowledge among the Hebrews, then it would soon be made known to Pharaoh! It was, and Pharaoh became angry and sought to kill Moses. Thus, Moses fled Egypt and took refuge in the land of Midian. Even though Moses was initially fearful when he realized his murderous act was publicly known, Moses did not leave Egypt out of fear of Pharaoh. Instead, we learn from Hebrews 11:27 that his departure was actually an act of faith, “By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured (καρτερῶ) as seeing (ὁραῶ) him who is invisible.” Moses' faith was

steadfast (καρτερεω) as he discerned with his mind (οραω) God’s presence in his situation.

MOSES’ SECOND FORTY YEARS

Moses fled to the land of Midian, which is located on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqabah in the Arabian Peninsula and (in Moses’ time) on the southern and eastern parts of the Sinai Peninsula. The geography of the area has often been likened to the surface of the moon. “Incredibly barren. Hot, arid sand and gravel, punctuated by craggy chunks of rock, with an occasional scraggly bush somehow clinging to life.”¹² The people known as the Midianites were descended from Abraham through his wife Keturah, whom he married after Sarah died.



After an unknown period of time from his arrival in Midian, Moses sat down at a well. There, he observed the seven daughters of a priest of Midian who came to the well to draw water for their father’s flocks, but they were chased away by shepherds. However, Moses came to their rescue, drew the water for them, and

¹² Swindoll, Charles R., *Moses*, (Thomas Nelson, 1999) at 48

watered their flocks. Moses was invited by the father, Jethro (also known as Reuel), into their home to live, ultimately marrying one of his daughters, Zipporah. We are not told much of the details of Jethro's faith, but we are given several clues: (i) he is a descendent of Abraham so the potential existed for exposure to the one, true God; (ii) Jethro was a priest, although we do not know to whom; (iii) the name Reuel means "friend or shepherd of God;" (iv) Exodus 18:8-9 says Jethro "rejoiced for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel." Thus, it appears that Jethro and his family may have already been followers of the Lord.

In Midian, the former prince of Egypt begins life as a shepherd taking care of someone else's flocks! What must Moses have thought about his new station in life? We see an indication of the loneliness he must have felt by reflecting on the name of his first-born son, Gershom – "I have become an alien in a foreign land." But, we also observe that God later healed this loneliness in Moses' heart by reflecting on the name of his second son, Eliezer.¹³ Exodus 18:4 tells us that Eliezer was given his name "For the God of my fathers is my helper, and he has delivered me from the hand of Pharaoh."

For almost 40 years, Moses does the same thing every day – he takes care of Jethro's flocks. Meanwhile, back in Egypt things are different, but they are also still the same. The old Pharaoh is dead, but the new one continues to enslave the Hebrews. The oppression has been intense for so long that the Israelites cry out for help to God, and their cry is heard. God is not deaf and he is not hard-hearted. In fact, Exodus 2:25 speaks plainly, "So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them." Hundreds of miles away, God begins to move! The Israelites in Egypt just cannot see it yet.

Meanwhile, back in Midian, Moses is out with Jethro's sheep. Exodus 3 records this moment when God stepped into the life of Moses to begin the rescue of the Hebrews. The Hebrew text begins in such a matter of fact way, as if to say "Here now is Moses, shepherding his father-in-laws flock of sheep and goats in Horeb."¹⁴ Moses is still tending Jethro's flocks. He has led them to the far side of the desert to Horeb,¹⁵ the mountain of God where he sees a bush that is on fire but does not

¹³ Eliezer ("God is my help") was born an unknown number of years after Gershom, but certainly before Moses burning bush experience with God (*cf.* Ex. 4:18-20) since both Zipporah and the sons initially set out with Moses on the journey back to Egypt.

¹⁴ See Kaiser section in Gaebelien, Frank, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Zondervan, 1990), v.2 at 314.

¹⁵ *הֹרֵב* (horeb, "Horeb") is a Semitic name that means "desert", "desolation," and an alternate name for Sinai (meaning unknown). Usually, it is identified with Jebel el-Musa (7,363 feet on the southeast side of the valley) or less often with Jebel es-Safsaf (6,540 feet, on the northwest side) or Jebel Katarin (about 9,000 feet, on the southwest side). *Ibid.* at 316-317.

burn up. The Hebrew word for bush means “thorny shrub.” There are probably a million of them in the wilderness. It is just a bush...until God begins to use it.

Apparently, this was not Moses’ first sighting of a bush on fire, but it certainly was his first where the bush was not consumed. He had to investigate! As Moses approaches, God calls to him by his Egyptian name – “Moses, Moses.” Moses gives a one-word answer “hinneh”(הנה) that we translate “here I am” or “it’s me.” God first tells Moses to take off his sandals for where he stands is holy ground, and then identifies Himself as the God of his father, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses responds by hiding his face because he is afraid to look at God.

Look at the personal concern God shares with Moses about the plight of the Hebrews!¹⁶

- I have seen the affliction of my people...
- I know their sufferings...
- I have come down to deliver them...
- I will bring them to a good and broad land...
- Their cry has come to me...
- I have seen the oppression by the Egyptians...
- I will send you to Pharaoh!

At that last statement, Moses begins to panic! He does not want this job! So, Moses gives four sets of excuses about why he should not be the one to go to Pharaoh to demand the release of the Israelites to leave Egypt, and God patiently answers each one:

Moses’ Excuse

God’s Answer

Who am I to do this? =>

You’re with me!

What if they want to know your name? =>

Then tell them! Just say:
He is “I AM,” the God of your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He has promised to bring you out of Egypt and into a good land!

They won’t believe you really appeared to me. =>

Then prove it with the miraculous signs I will show you!

I am not eloquent and I am slow of speech. =>

Don’t forget that I made man’s mouth! I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say!

¹⁶ Exodus 3:7-10

Look at Moses' last excuse, but recall how he was described while still in Egypt – he was a man of power in words and deed! Whatever Moses was before, it was not weak in speaking skills! This change gives us insight into the humbling loss of self-confidence that Moses must have experienced during his time in the wilderness.

Realizing that his excuses have been adequately answered, Moses replies with his final request: “Can’t you send someone else?” God, however, will have none of that and replies that he will send Aaron with Moses and Aaron will speak for the two of them, but it will be the words that God gives to Moses. So, Moses returns to Jethro and asks permission to return to Egypt to check on his brothers there.

As the journey to Egypt begins, Scripture records two interesting events. First, Moses is given a final set of instructions in which he is told that God will harden Pharaoh’s heart so that Pharaoh will not let the people go. When that happens, Moses will tell Pharaoh that God will kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son if he does not release the Hebrews.

Many people are troubled by this reference to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart by God.

To some people God’s hardening seems to preclude Pharaoh’s exercise of his own will. But Pharaoh also hardened his own heart (7:13, “became hard”; 14, “unyielding”; 22, “became hard”; 8:15,19 “was hard”; 8:32, 9:7, “unyielding”; 34, “hardened”; 35, “was hard”; 13:15, “stubbornly refused,” another Heb. word meaning “hardened”). The first two references to God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart (4:21; 7:3) were actually *predictions* that He would do it in the future. Then in the next seven references Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7) *before* God is said to have hardened it (9:12, 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8) God’s first hardening came after the sixth plague, and God hardened his heart after each of plagues 8-10. God confirmed Pharaoh’s defiant, willful obstinance by then judicially hardening his heart (cf. Deut. 2:30; Josh. 11:20).¹⁷

The second event is when God becomes angry with Moses for failing to circumcise at least one of his sons. It is unknown why Moses neglected to obey God’s command (Gen. 17:10), for certainly the patriarchal fathers were so familiar with this requirement that they even used it as a way to carry out revenge on the inhabitants of Shechem for the rape of their sister Dinah.¹⁸ Zipporah, however,

¹⁷ Walvoord, John F and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Victor, 1985) at 114.

¹⁸ See Genesis 34

recognizes the issue immediately and quickly circumcises the child, saving Moses' life!¹⁹

Why, we might ask, would God send Moses to Egypt as His messenger to Pharaoh, and then try to kill Moses on the way because of a rule about circumcision? There is no answer directly given in Scripture to this much debated passage. However, there are some insights we can gather.

The rite of circumcision was introduced in Genesis 17:10-14 where God had commanded Abraham to circumcise every male on the eighth day as a sign of the covenant; any uncircumcised male was to be cut off from his people, for he had broken God's covenant. However, in this case the father was suffering for his refusal to circumcise his son.²⁰

Why was the son not already circumcised? Had Moses been personally lax in following the commands of the Lord because he felt they did not apply to him in Midian, or had he simply given in to pressure from Zipporah, who apparently was repulsed by the very act of circumcision (cf. Zipporah's comment "bridegroom of blood, v. 26)? Either way, Moses failed to live up to his duties as the father in leading his family in following the Lord. The answer to our question of why God did this may lie in recognizing that for Moses to be effective in the upcoming confrontation with the ruler of all Egypt, that God must have first priority in Moses' life before the approval of man. In other words, Moses must be willing to obey the commands of God in the face of opposition, and the best place to begin was at home.

Moses continues on his journey, meeting Aaron at Mt. Horeb on the way, and together they arrive in Egypt. First, they meet with the elders of Israel, telling them what God had told them to say and showing them the signs God had told them to show. The people not only believed, but when they learned that God was personally interested in their affliction, they also worshipped Him!

¹⁹ From this point until the Israelites actually leave Egypt, there is no further mention of Zipporah. We know from Exodus 18:2 and 18:5 that sometime after this event, Zipporah and the sons are sent by Moses to live with Jethro until Moses returns with the nation of Israel. It is unknown exactly when Zipporah leaves, but many scholars believe that the need for physical healing of the son(s) makes this a logical time for the return to Jethro to have occurred.

²⁰ See Kaiser section in Gaebelien, Frank, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Zondervan, 1990), v.2, at 333.

MOSES CONFRONTS PHARAOH

On God's instructions, Moses' first task is to ask Pharaoh to let the people go three days' journey into the wilderness to worship God. This is the first and only "limited release" demand that Moses made to Pharaoh, and may have been designed to demonstrate the absolute unreasonableness of Pharaoh toward the Hebrews. After this, all of Moses' demands would require the full release of all of the people of Israel and their belongings. However, Pharaoh responds to even the limited demand with a question, which he does not realize he will soon personally be able to answer – "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and more over, I will not let Israel go."²¹ Instead, Pharaoh orders his people to stop providing straw to the Hebrews for the making of bricks. Now, the Hebrews must find their own straw in addition to meeting their daily brick quotas!

With this additional work burden upon them, the Israelites turn against Moses, blaming him for their worsened working conditions. How quickly they have forgotten the God they worshipped just a short while earlier! But Moses has forgotten something as well – that God had told him at the beginning of his journey that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened until Pharaoh's firstborn son was at least threatened with death! In his own discouragement, Moses again questions God about both the mission and the results. In gentleness, God encourages Moses not to give up – we've only just begun!

Moses and Aaron returned to Pharaoh, this time demanding the full release of the Hebrews. When Pharaoh asks for proof that the demand is from God, Aaron shows the sign of turning his staff into a serpent, but Pharaoh summons his magicians and they are able to turn their staffs to serpents by using their secret arts! Even though Aaron's serpent eventually swallows up the magicians' serpents, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not listen to Moses as God had predicted.

Now begins a sequence of ten plagues on the Egyptians, each one getting progressively more intense! A great number of analyses have been made regarding the structure and character of the plagues over the centuries—one of which dates back to 1158 AD. Some of these ideas are incorporated into the Plagues of Egypt chart below.

Although the Scriptures do not specify the time period over which the plagues occurred, it is likely that it was over a period of months, perhaps as many as nine. The ultimate number of months depends upon whether the plagues were separate and distinct from the routine of events of nature. For example, if the first plague is

²¹ Exodus 5:2

tied to the rising of the Nile, then it would require a date of July/August. Similarly, barley ripening related to the seventh plague occurs in January, prevailing east winds for the eighth plague (locusts) occurs in March/April, and the institution of the Passover for the tenth plague is in April. Thus, the total period of time might extend from July/August of one year until April of the next for a total of 8-9 months.

As to the structure of the plagues, Kaiser relates it as originally put forth by McCarthy.

The first nine plagues can be arranged into three groups of three plagues each. The first plague in each group was introduced by a warning delivered to Pharaoh early in the morning as he went out to the Nile (although the last group does not specify the Nile). The second plague in each group was also introduced by a warning, but it was delivered to Pharaoh at his palace. The last plague in each group commenced without any warning to Pharaoh.

Only the triplet grouping brings out the aim of the plagues and their sequence as recorded here. The initial plague in each triplet (1,4,7) has a purpose clause in which God sets forth for Moses his rationale and aim in bringing the hardships in that set:

- The first set (1-3): “By this you will know that I am the Lord.”
- The second set (4-6): “That you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land.”
- The third set (7-9): “So you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.”²²

Each of the plagues may also have been designed by God to show the impotency of the multiple gods of Egypt, as well as the impotency of Pharaoh as a god. A listing of the possible Egyptian gods/goddesses attacked by each plague is also shown in the attached Plagues of Egypt chart.

For Moses, the plagues were a faith-building exercise. With each passing plague, Moses’ trust in God grows, as does his boldness before Pharaoh. We ultimately see Moses personally carrying out the invocation of the plagues as originally intended by God, instead of going through his brother, Aaron. The Scriptures even record that by the ninth plague, Moses was highly esteemed by Pharaoh’s officials and the Egyptian people! The former prince of Egypt whom everyone rejected is now esteemed by all.

²² See Kaiser section in Gaebelin, Frank, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, (Zondervan, 1990), v.2 at 348.

After the ninth plague, God tells Moses that the end is finally near – only one more plague and Pharaoh will let the people go! If Moses’ memory is any good, he already knows which one this will be – the death of the firstborn of Pharaoh. But, this plague will not only bring heartbreak to Pharaoh, it will bring it to every Egyptian family with children, along with financial loss to every family with livestock. The firstborn of each of them would be taken in the stillness of the night.

This is clearly the most significant of the plagues on the Egyptians, not only because it resulted in the Israelites release from bondage, but also because of the very nature of the plague. To stay safe from the previous plagues required nothing of the Hebrews other than to stay in Goshen. This is because those plagues were geographically restricted in their reach. If you were in Egypt, then you were affected. If you were in Goshen, then you were not.

The tenth plague was completely different! To survive this plague, each person had to follow the specific instructions laid out by God: kill a lamb and place some of its blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and then stay in the house until the morning. “For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.”²³ If they follow the instructions, then they will live. If they try to do it their own way, then they will die.

But there is also a much deeper meaning to the Passover. It is a picture of salvation through Christ. It, too, is an individual decision of placing one’s trust in the sufficient sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. If we follow the instructions, then we will live. If we try to do it our own way, then we will die.

Before Moses warns Pharaoh and the Hebrews about the upcoming Passover plague, he speaks publicly to the people, telling them to ask for gold, silver, and clothing from the Egyptians. “And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.”²⁴

Moses then warns Pharaoh of the tenth plague. Moses concludes by predicting that Pharaoh’s servant will bow down to him and ask the Israelites to leave. Moses then leaves Pharaoh in hot anger.

The plague comes just as Moses had predicted, as are the consequences. Scripture tells us, “There was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone

²³ Exodus 12:23

²⁴ Exodus 11:3; 12:36

was not dead.”²⁵ Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and tells them to take everyone and go. The fulfillment of God’s first promise to Moses has finally arrived – “you will bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

So, the exodus from Egypt begins. It will ultimately be a long journey with many triumphs, disappointments, and detours. At last, it has begun. God has fulfilled his promise. As for Moses, his journey is just beginning.

CONCLUSION

Dwight L. Moody observed this about Moses: “Moses, spent his first forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent his second forty years learning he was a nobody. He spent his third forty years discovery what God can do with a nobody.”²⁶

Eighty years of preparation. We will never know if God would have delivered Israel earlier if Prince Moses had not killed the Egyptian earlier and fled to Midian. What we do know is that even when we fail, God does not forsake us. He continues to work in our lives, using even those failures to fashion us into the person he wants us to become.

God does not just give us an assignment and leave us on our own to accomplish. He works in our lives daily to equip and prepare us for the work of the moment, and the work to come. “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”²⁷

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “...*the thorny bush was on fire*... (Ex. 3:2).

There was nothing special, just a bush...until God stepped in. Then, it became holy ground and a life-changing encounter with God. Imagine what might have happened if Moses had ignored that small bush and kept walking past with his flocks. Are you waiting for God to appear in flashes of lighting with a voice like peeling thunder forcing itself upon you? God is not. He wants to meet you right where you are in your everyday “wilderness” of living. Be alert, willing to stop and listen to the voice of God calling you. Then answer, “It’s me”.

²⁵ Exodus 12:30

²⁶ Mears, Henrietta C., *What the Bible Is All About*, (Gospel Light Publications, 1966) at 33.

²⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:24

2. *“Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh...I am the Lord.”* (Ex. 6:1-2).

We often forget that our battles are really God’s to win. Our job is to recognize that He is Lord, trust Him, and obey. To do less, results only in discouragement. To do more, results only in getting in the way of God receiving the glory.

3. *“And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you...”* (Ex. 12:13)

Just like the nation of Israel, geography will not save you. Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian. Only by placing your trust in Christ, the perfect Passover lamb, can you experience the salvation of God.

WANT MORE?

Hello class, message from Mark here. Sorry to have missed what I am sure was a wonderful class by Steve. The written lesson certainly blessed my socks off! As I was reading it and the second point-for-home, I was reminded of a point made by Francis Schaeffer many years ago. So many of us must feel inadequate for the tasks God has put before us. When we do, this story needs to rise up in our faith and memory.

When Moses told God that he was not up to the task he was actually insulting the Lord. God never meant for Moses to go solo on this mission! God was going to work through Moses. I love God’s response to Moses. He has Moses throw down the stick, turns the stick into a snake, and then has Moses lift it again. God was saying, "Moses, you may not think you are enough for me to use on this mission, but your stick is. So all you need to do is carry the stick. The stick and I will get it done." And so Moses carries the stick, dips it in the Nile, spreads it across the land, and will ultimately put it in the sea to part the waters.

Your "Want More" assignment is this: Where do you feel inadequate for the tasks God has before you? Set them down on paper, in an email, or just verbally to the Lord in prayer. Pray for God to step in and use you to accomplish his plans in spite of your limitations. Then, walk in faith knowing that as long as you have as much on the ball as a stick does, God can get it done! As King David said, "Some trust in chariots and some trust in horses, but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God."

Blessings on you and see you next week!"

The Plagues of Egypt

Plagues	References	Possible Egyptian Gods and Goddesses of Egypt Confronted by the Plagues*	Warnings	Uses of Staffs	Pharaoh's Magicians	Pharaoh's Responses
<i>First cycle (irritations or loathsome plagues)</i>						
1. Nile turned to blood	Ex. 7:14-25	Hapi (also called Apis), the bull god, god of the Nile; Isis, goddess of the Nile; Khnum, ram god, guardian of the Nile; and others	Warning-to Pharaoh at the Nile in the morning	Aaron's staff	Did the same by their secret arts	Did not listen to the request that the Israelites be released
2. Frogs	8:1-15	Heqet, goddess of birth, with a frog head	Warning-to Pharaoh probably at his palace	Aaron's staff	Did the same by their secret arts	Agreed to let the people go if the frogs were taken away, then reneged
3. Gnats	8:16-19	Set, god of the desert	No warning	Aaron's staff	Tried but failed; told Pharaoh that this was the finger of God	Refused to listen to his magicians' suggestions
<i>Second cycle (destructions or painful plagues)</i>						
4. Flies	8:20-32	Re, a sun god; or the god Uatchit, possibly represented by the fly	Warning-to Pharaoh at the Nile in the morning	No staff used		Suggested the Israelites sacrifice in Egypt; later offer to let them go "not far way", but reneged
5. Death of livestock	9:1-7	Hathor, goddess with a cow head; Apis, the bull god, symbol of fertility	Warning- to Pharaoh probably in his palace	No staff used		Refused Moses' request
6. Boils	9:8-12	Sekhmet, goddess with power over disease; Sunu, the pestilence god; Isis, goddess of healing	No warning	No staff used		Refused Moses' request
<i>Third cycle (nature plagues)</i>						
7. Hail	9:13-35	Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops and fertility; Set, god of storms	Warning-to Pharaoh in the morning, possibly at the Nile	Moses' staff		Promised to let the Israelites go if the rain and hail were stopped, then reneged
8. Locusts	10:1-20	Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops and fertility	Warning- to Pharaoh probably in his palace	Moses' staff		Offered to let only the men go
9. Darkness	10:21-29	Re, the sun god; Horus, a sun god; Nut a sky goddess; Hathor, a sky goddess	No warning	Moses' hand; perhaps the staff was used		Agreed that the people could go but not their animals
<i>Culminating judgment</i>						
10. Death of the firstborn	11:1-12:30	Min, god of reproduction; Heqet, goddess who attended women at childbirth; Isis, goddess who protected children; Pharaoh's firstborn son, a god	Warning- to Pharaoh probably in his palace			Urged the people to go!

* Many scholars think a link exists between the Egyptian gods (who were numerous) and a purpose of the plagues. Others, however, do not believe the links are so clear, if at all.

Some gods and goddesses had more than one function or area of responsibility. Also, in ancient Egyptian religion many of the gods and goddesses who were worshiped in one city or location and/or at one period of time were believed to have assimilated the gods and goddesses of other areas and time periods. Their religion was thus often complex and at times even contradictory.

Sources: Walvoord, John F and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Victor, 1985) at 119 and 120.

Sources by reference: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, under the word "Egypt"; Lionel Casson, *Ancient Egypt* (New York: time-Life Books, 1965); Pierre Montet, *Egypt and the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).