

Moses - 2 - Continuing Education

When Moses chose ill treatment with the people of God he expected quick results for Israel's deliverance from Egypt. He supposed that they were ready to be delivered and that it would only take something like this to move them to rise up. God would then help them since they had that promise.

*And seeing one (of them) suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian: 25 and **he supposed that his brethren understood that God by his hand was giving them deliverance; but they understood not.** Acts 7:24-25*

When Israel rejected Moses offer, and God remained silent, Moses was forced to flee

*And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' 27 **But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?'** 28 Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' Acts 7:26-29*

*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; "Ex. 2:11-15*

*"This **Moses whom they rejected**, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' **is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer** by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. Acts 7:35-36*

Trying to put all the pieces together is difficult since much is left unrevealed, but we have enough information to make some observations. When the people failed to understand he wanted to deliver them, Moses was left in a dangerous position. Pharaoh became aware of what he had done and intended to slay him. So Moses was forced to flee. But though the account in Exodus reveals he felt initial fear when his role in the death of the Egyptian was made known he soon mastered it with his faith

*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. Ex. 2:14-15*

*"By **faith** he forsook Egypt, **not fearing** the wrath of the king." Heb. 11:27*

This creates an interesting question to consider. Did he flee by faith because God told him to go or as his parents long ago did he simply trust in the providence of God? In any case, Moses left Egypt either knowing the people had rejected God's purpose to use him, or he left knowing Israel had rejected his own offer to deliver them. Stephen seems to lean a little toward the former, but not enough to be certain.

For the next forty years Moses lived in obscurity in Midian keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Nothing is said about learning, great deeds or renown. He simply lived.

*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." Ex. 2:21-22*

*Now **Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian.** And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Ex. 3:1-2*

*And **Moses was eighty years old** and Aaron eighty-three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh. Ex. 7:7*

What did Moses learn during these forty years? What did this "continuing education" do for his character? Whatever initial zeal and reasoning Moses had for putting himself forward as God's deliverer were lost during these forty years. It appears that he also lost whatever worldly pride and confidence in his being "mighty in word and deed."

At the burning bush God revealed to Moses that the desires and dreams he had held at forty were now within his grasp and would soon become a reality. Yet though Moses had been convinced of his ability when he was forty, now at eighty he no longer felt competent. His responses to the angel of Jehovah reveal a very different self-image than the one he possessed when he first chose to share ill treatment with the people of God. Moses had clearly lost all confidence in the abilities he had gleaned while becoming "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians."

When God appeared in the burning bush, Moses' aspirations to be God's deliverer were forgotten. Though God told Moses he was going to deliver Israel out of Egypt and intended to use Moses to "bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt." (Ex. 3:10) Moses response revealed both caution and humility. He now understood his own insignificance in this life. When God revealed his plan Moses responded:

Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? Ex. 3:11

As an vessel now emptied of worldly pride and confidence, he was fully prepared to be filled with the wisdom that God gives by faith. At this time even God's promise to be with him and bring Israel out with His mighty power which should have comforted Moses, was not enough. Whether it was discouragement or too much humility, both would soon be removed, but at this time he did not feel up to this responsibility.

Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'" Ex. 4:1

With great longsuffering and gracious compassion, God promised to allow him to do signs and wonders to prove his veracity. Moses response again revealed a lack of confidence in his own ability. While Stephen said he was mighty in word and deed, Moses had lost that during his forty year of continuing education.

"O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Ex. 4:10

God then reminded Moses to whom he was talking. God had made Moses mouth and clearly knew his abilities better than Moses did. Obviously God would not offer him an opportunity he was unable to perform. God then promised Moses that he would "teach him what he should speak." (4:11-12) This appears to be the promise of inspiration, which later came to Moses aid again and again.

This last exchange is difficult to assess because we can't hear the tone of voice. It could have been open rebellion or just such deep humility and lack of ambitious pride that he still felt unworthy.

But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send." Ex. 4:13

God's anger revealed that whatever it was in Moses heart at this point was either a lack of faith or an inability to put God's will above his own. God already knew what we will learn later. Aaron was not strong enough to stand up against the wickedness of the people. The rest of the people would die in the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb were still young and unprepared. Moses was the only man.

So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. Ex. 4:14-16

Clearly, in his own eyes, Moses was no longer "mighty in word and deed." He was no longer eager to put himself forward. His rejection by Israel and his forty years as a shepherd had taught him humility. A little over a year after the Exodus(Num 9:1) God revealed:

"Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth. Num. 12:3

What a wonderful tribute to Moses. By 80 years old he was the most humble man on the face of the earth. But Moses still had more to learn. On his way to Egypt, God was forced to teach him more about submission and obedience.

*And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that **the LORD met him and sought to kill him.** 25 Then **Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet**, and said, "**Surely you are a husband of blood to me!**" 26 **So He let him go.** Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!" — because of the circumcision. Ex. 4:24-26*

Moses had not circumcised his son and obviously Zipporah was deeply opposed to it. Up to this point he had taken her feelings and placed them above God. After God revealed the serious nature of this offense she obeyed the command, and whatever trap or danger God had placed Moses in was removed. Since Zipporah is back with her father when Moses returned to Sinai, it is possible that at this time she left Moses and returned.

*Then Jethro, **Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back**, 3 with her two sons, of whom the name of one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land") 4 and the name of the other was Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"); 5 and **Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons***

and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God. Ex. 18:2-6

Moses Began his work as Deliverer

When Moses arrived in Egypt, his initial encounter with Israel was very encouraging. They believed the signs God had given and bowed in worship to God.

Then **Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders** of the children of Israel. 30 And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then **he did the signs in the sight of the people**. 31 So **the people believed**; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then **they bowed their heads and worshiped**. Ex. 4:29-31

The first encounter with Pharaoh did not go well at all. Not only did Pharaoh not comply with God's command, but he turned on Israel in fury and made their lives much more difficult.

Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" 2 And Pharaoh said, "**Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.**" Ex. 5:1-2

So **the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters** of the people and their officers, saying, 7 "You shall **no longer give the people straw to make brick** as before. **Let them go and gather straw** for themselves. 8 And **you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before**. You shall **not reduce it**. For **they are idle**; therefore they cry out, saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' 9 **Let more work be laid on the men**, that they may labor in it, and **let them not regard false words**." Ex. 5:6-9

But he said, "**You are idle! Idle!** Therefore you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' 18 Therefore go now and work; for **no straw shall be given you**, yet **you shall deliver the quota of bricks**." 19 And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, "You shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota." 20 Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, **they met Moses and Aaron** who stood there to meet them. 21 And they said to them, "**Let the Lord look on you and judge**, because **you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh** and in the sight of his servants, to **put a sword in their hand to kill us**." Ex. 5:17-21

God's Purpose was more than just Delivering Israel from Egypt

Once again, if Moses thought he would get quick results, his hopes were dashed. He had to learn that God's ways are not man's ways and God's purposes can take more than one goal. In this case, not only did God want to deliver Israel, but he also wanted to make His power known and punish Egypt for their idolatry and wickedness against Israel.

So **Moses returned to the Lord** and said, "**Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me?**" 23 For **since I came to Pharaoh** to speak in Your name, **he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all**." 1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "**Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh**. For with a strong hand **he will let them go**, and with a strong hand **he will drive them out of his land**." Ex. 5:22-6:1

And **I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel** whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and **I have remembered My covenant**. 6 Therefore say to the children of Israel: '**I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments**. 7 I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. Ex. 6:5-8

It was for this purpose that God had chosen this man to be Pharaoh. He knew this Pharaoh would resist and fight to the end. This would make it much more difficult for Moses and for Israel, in the short term, but the long term goals were all met. God revealed to Pharaoh that He could have simply destroyed them all in a pestilence, but God had different plans.

Now **if I had stretched out My hand** and **struck you and your people with pestilence**, then you would have **been cut off from the earth**. 16 But indeed **for this purpose I have raised you up**, that **I may show My power in you**, and that **My name may be declared in all the earth**. 17 As yet you **exalt yourself against My people** in that you will not let them go. Ex. 9:15-18

1. Moses learned patience and endurance.
2. Israel had the opportunity to develop their faith and also gain endurance.
3. Pharaoh learned by bitter experience the utter folly of resisting or fighting against God.
4. Egypt learned their gods were truly powerless against the one true and living God.

5. God's power was shown and His name declared in all the earth.

When Pharaoh removed the straw and forced Israel to gather it themselves, it was a bitter blow. Far from success the first encounter seemed to end in worse than utter failure because things we made so much worse for them. Moses was deeply distressed, feeling that his words at the burning bush were being fulfilled. Yet God encouraged Moses that in the end Pharaoh would submit. God promised to deliver Israel from Egypt and lead them to the promised land. When Moses took these promises to Israel, they were too crushed by Pharaoh's tyranny to even listen.

*So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but **they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.** Ex. 6:9*

As God prepared Moses to return a second time to Pharaoh, Moses again expressed his misgivings about his abilities.

*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 11 "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land." 12 And Moses spoke before the Lord, saying, "**The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?**" Ex. 6:10-12*

God again patiently revealed to Moses how he would be successful(7:1-7). In the days that followed Moses gained the confidence that we see throughout his final 40 years as leader of Israel. When God defended Moses against the charges of Miriam and Aaron, his own assessment was clear:

*Then He said, "Hear now My words: **If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.** 7 **Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8 I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?"** Num. 12:6-8*

*Christ Jesus, 2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, **as Moses also was faithful in all His house.** 5 **And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant,** for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, Heb. 3:1-2, 5*

Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth. Num. 12:3

What a wonderful opportunity for each of us. Moses was forty when he cast off Egypt. His first attempts at service to God met with failure and for 40 years it appeared he would do no more for the Lord than just live a good life. Then at eighty God called him to serve. Humility and faith appear to be the wonderful virtues that led God to choose Him. When we "trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding," and we empty ourselves of our own will and seek to do only the will of God, God can fill us with His wisdom and His will. We should all pray that we might be more like Moses.