

Birth & Early Life of Moses: the First 40 Years (Exodus 2)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review from Previous Lesson

- a. This is the second lesson in a new expository series covering the life and ministry of Moses, spanning from **Exodus** through **Deuteronomy**.
- b. In the last class we reviewed the background for the nation of Jews becoming slaves in Egypt.
 - i. Hundreds of years earlier, God had promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit Canaan, the Promised Land, but only after they served for 400 years in another nation.
 - ii. At the end of Genesis, Joseph is sold into Egyptian slavery by his jealous brothers. He rises to become second in command of Egypt under Pharaoh, after correctly interpreting a dream of Pharaoh's that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.
 - iii. During the seven years of famine, Joseph's brothers along with their families and their father Jacob, 75 people in all (according to Stephen in **Acts 7:14** and according to the LXX text of **Exodus 1:5**) travel to Egypt to find food, and end up settling there.
- c. From Stephen's speech in **Acts 7**, we learned that the 120-year life of Moses can be broken down to *three periods of 40 years each*.
 - i. **First 40 years** (age 0-40) growing up as a prince in Egypt;
 - ii. **Second 40 years** (age 40-80): in Midian, after fleeing Egypt; and
 - iii. **Third 40 years** (age 80-120): leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Wilderness, until dying on Mt. Nebo.
 1. From that point, Joshua will finish the mission and lead Israel into Canaan, the Promised Land.
- d. In **Exodus chapter 1** we learned:
 - i. A new Pharaoh arose in Egypt who "did not know Joseph" (**Exodus 1:8**). Things changed drastically for the Jews.

- ii. The Jews had multiplied in Egypt to the extent that Pharaoh and the Egyptians felt threatened by them. As a result, they dealt deceptively with the Jews and put them under difficult bondage and forced labor (including brick-making and work in the fields).
- iii. Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all the newborn Hebrew boys. The midwives feared God and did not obey Pharaoh.
- iv. Pharaoh then made a general order to all his people, to the effect that all the male Hebrew babies must be cast into the river (to drown).

II. The Family and Lineage of Moses

- a. Regarding the parents and family of Moses.
- b. Read **Numbers 26:57-59** (or **Exodus 6:16-20**).
- c. Lineage leading to Amram, the father of Moses
 - i. Levi (the son of Jacob from which all priests and Levites are descended) was father of Gershon, Kohath and Merari.
 - ii. Kohath was father of Amram.
 - iii. Amram was married to Jochebed (also a Levite; a cousin of Amram).
- d. Family of Amram and Jochebed
 - i. They had three children:
 1. Miriam, older sister of Moses who was involved in the scene with Pharaoh's daughter retrieving her baby brother from the basket by the river (**Exodus 2:4-9**).
 2. Aaron, who died during the fortieth year of the exodus at the age of 123 (**Numbers 33:39**) and therefore must have been three years older than Moses.
 3. Moses, who died in the fortieth year of the exodus, at the age of 120 (**Deuteronomy 34:7**)

III. Birth of Moses

- a. Read **Exodus 2:1-10**.
- b. As we will strive to do throughout this teaching series, we want to look at all three levels of the story (basic facts in the storyline, moral lessons for us, and foreshadowings).
- c. First, let us consider the basic elements of the storyline.

- i. Moses was born to Levite parents (who we know already had two children).
- ii. “Seeing he was a *beautiful* child...”.. they hid him three months.
 1. This strikes me as an unusual comment, where the Greek word from the LXX version is *asteios* (ἀστεῖος). That Greek word, often translated as “beautiful”, is repeated by when the story is retold in the New Testament, by Stephen in **Acts 7:20** and also in **Hebrews 11:23**.
 2. This word, translated “beautiful” in **Exodus 2:2** in the Orthodox Study Bible (OSB), which is based on the LXX, can also mean: graceful, charming or morally good.
 3. In **Acts 7:20** Stephen says he was “(beautiful/well-pleasing) *to God*”.
- iii. When no longer able to hide him, his mother puts him in a basket which she then coats with asphalt (to make it waterproof, presumably to keep the baby dry and to help it float), which is placed in a marsh adjacent to the river (Nile River).
 1. Some are reminded of the story of Noah’s ark, where Noah (also set apart by God to save God’s people) is instructed to build an ark and coat the outside of it with asphalt (**Genesis 6:14**).
- iv. Moses’ sister Miriam watches what is about to happen, from a distance.
- v. Pharaoh’s daughter goes down to bathe, with attendants, and discovers the basket. When they open it, they see the baby crying and recognize it as being one of the Hebrew children.
- vi. Miriam steps in and offers to find a wet-nurse among the Hebrew women. She gets her (and his) mother Jochebed to nurse the baby. Pharaoh’s daughter pays Moses’ mother for doing this.
- vii. Moses’ mother raises the baby up to a certain age, then turns him back to Pharaoh’s daughter. It is not clear at what age the handoff takes place.
 1. However, one way or another Moses is fully aware of his Jewish heritage when he reaches adulthood.
- viii. From that point Moses is raised by Pharaoh’s daughter, as a member of the Egyptian royal family. Stephen summarized the first 40 years of Moses’ life in Egypt:

1. “At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was *learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.*” (**Acts 7:20–22**, NKJV)
2. Moses had access to everything Egypt had to offer. He had the best education, and was a powerful speaker, “*mighty in words*”.
 - a. This is noted despite the fact that Moses would protest when God called him, that he was *not a good speaker* (**Exodus 4:10**).
- ix. Moses was given his name by Pharaoh’s daughter, with his name related to the fact that she drew him out of the water.

IV. Moses Flees Egypt (at Age 40)

- a. Read **Exodus 2:11-15**.
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Moses sees an Egyptian beating a Jew. Thinking no one sees him, he kills the Egyptian and buries him in the sand.
 - ii. The next day he goes out and finds two Jews fighting one another. He tries to intercede, and addresses the one who did the wrong, saying “Why are you hitting your neighbor?”
 - iii. The one accused is indignant and replies, “Who made you prince (ruler) and judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”
 - iv. Pharaoh becomes aware of what Moses did, and seeks to kill Moses. Therefore, Moses flees Egypt to Midian.
- c. Moral lessons for us, from this story (our “level 2” consideration):
 - i. Actually, the New Testament writers point to this story as the basis for teaching important lessons to Christians. Let us begin there.
 - ii. The predominant theme of **Hebrews** (and especially **Hebrews chapter 11**) is that “the just (the righteous) shall *live by faith*” (from **Habakkuk 2:3-4**). It must be a way of life that continues to the end, through all the various trials that will come.

- iii. Read **Hebrews 10:32-11:2**. Also read the conclusion of this discussion, in **Hebrews 11:39-12:3**. The points made in this text can be summarized as follows.
1. We Christians must live by faith, and persevere to the end.
 2. If we draw back and do not continue to live “by faith”, we will be destroyed in the end.
 3. In the Old Testament have been given dozens of wonderful examples of heroic men and women who “lived by faith” and persevered.
 4. We now also have the ultimate example of Jesus, who endured the cross for the joy set before Him.
 5. Now it is our turn. *We are now the ones in the arena*; the heroes of the past, who ran their races before us, are now in the great cloud of witnesses. We must throw off the sin and entanglements, and run our race to a victorious end.
- iv. In **Hebrews 11** we find important lessons from the example of *Moses’ parents* regarding what it means to “live by faith”.
1. Read **Hebrews 11:23**.
 2. Moses’ parents are held up as examples of the kind of faith we need to have, in order to make it to the end. “By faith” they disobeyed the order of the king, Pharaoh, and hid their child Moses for three months.
 3. Like the two midwives who feared God, these two parents risked their lives. They were more concerned with pleasing God than pleasing the ruler, Pharaoh.
 4. This is an upward call and great example to those Christians who are facing persecution from the governing authorities.
- v. In the early life of Moses, we see other aspects of the faith we will need to have in order to make it to the end.
1. Read **Hebrews 11:24-27**.
 2. Moses was born a Hebrew (a despised race of oppressed slaves) who knew his heritage; but he also was raised in the court of Egypt, known as a son to Pharaoh’s daughter. He was educated in all the knowledge of Egypt.
 3. Therefore, Moses had a dual heritage:

- a. privileged, royal Egyptian upper-class; as well as
 - b. despised, oppressed Hebrew slave-class.
4. When he came of age, it says that Moses “...*refused to be called* son of Pharaoh’s daughter”.
5. He chose to suffer affliction with his own people, the Hebrews, rather than enjoy the short-term pleasure he could have easily enjoyed by identifying as Egyptian royalty.
- a. He had keys to the “top 1%” lifestyle: wealth, comfort, prestige, pleasure, immoral lifestyle; yet threw it all away.
 - b. **Question:** *Why would anyone* in his right mind do that? Why would anyone reject their privileged identity and choose instead to identify with a race of despised and oppressed slaves?
 - i. **Answer:** He was looking for something greater than all the treasures of Egypt. He would rather suffer “the reproaches of Christ”, knowing it would lead to a greater reward later on.
 - c. This is the choice we are all faced with: short-term pleasure served up on a platter by Satan (immorality, greed, alcohol, drugs, etc.) or eternal life?
 - d. Esau sold his inheritance for a little short-term gratification of the flesh.
 - i. After calling us to pursue holiness, without which the Hebrews writer says “without which no one will see the Lord”, he continues...
 - ii. “lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”
(**Hebrews 12:16–17**, NKJV)
 - e. Moses is one of the greatest examples of resisting the temptations for short-term pleasures of this world, offered by Satan.

- i. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus warned his followers of the twin tests that they must be prepared to face.
- ii. The second soil: those who have faith initially, but who fail in the face of persecution because of the word.
 1. “But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.” (**Matthew 13:20–21**, NKJV)
 2. This is the primary challenge for Christians in one half of the world (China, India, Middle East, parts of Africa).
 3. We can look to the example of Moses’ parents here. They lived by faith and did not give way to fear of the ruler.
- iii. The third soil: those who have faith initially, but fail in the face of life’s worries, riches and pleasures.
 1. “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.” (**Matthew 13:22**, NKJV)
 2. “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.” (**Luke 8:14**, NKJV)
 3. This is the predominant danger to Christian believers here in the US and in the West: the danger of riches and pleasures choking us out.
 4. Here we can look to the example of Moses as a young man, who turned his back on

all the riches and treasures that Egypt had to offer.

- f. If we understand the motivation that drove Moses to persevere, this can help us toward the same end. If we want to live by faith like Moses did, we need to think like Moses. **Question:** What motivated Moses?
 - i. He was looking to a *greater reward than all the treasures of Egypt*. We need to fix our eyes on heaven, our goal and final reward.
 - ii. Paul reminds all of us of what we should be looking forward to. He wrote:
 1. “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’” (**1 Corinthians 2:9**, NKJV)
 - iii. Also read **2 Corinthians 4:7-18**.
 1. Paul said that our light and momentary affliction will work an *exceeding, eternal glory* for us!
- vi. There is one more secret from the early life Moses, on how to make it to the end.
 1. “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” (**Hebrews 11:27**, NKJV)
 2. Moses endured because *he saw* “Him who is invisible”.
 - a. *What in the world* does that mean?
 3. We know that God (the Father) is invisible.
 - a. “Now to the King eternal, immortal, *invisible*, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” (**1 Timothy 1:17**, NKJV)
 - b. Jesus is described to us: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” (**Colossians 1:15**, NKJV)

4. The Scriptures clearly teach that God (the Father) dwells “...in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see...” (**1 Timothy 6:16**, NKJV)
5. Moses asked to see God in **Exodus 33** but was turned down in no uncertain terms! God told him, “You cannot see My face; for no man can see My face and live.” (**Exodus 33:20**, LXX, OSB)
6. So what does it mean that Moses endured “as seeing One who is invisible”?
7. This reminds me of the famous Zen Buddhist koan, “What is the sound of one hand (clapping)?”
 - a. The idea of these puzzling impossible questions, in Buddhism, is that somehow by meditating on something that is impossible, supposedly you will somehow attain a higher level of enlightenment.
 - b. Many in the West are attracted to the fascination of Eastern religions such as Zen Buddhism and Hinduism, with their emphasis on mystery and deep spiritual understanding and enlightenment.
 - c. Actually, for those who seek a deep mystery, the Bible here has something that is *much more relevant* and also *much deeper* than anything in Buddhism or other Eastern religions.
 - d. **Question:** How do you see one who is invisible? Fortunately we have a wonderful clue in the Scriptures to point us in the right direction: *study the life of Moses*.
 - i. He could not physically see the form of God (the Father), but desperately wanted to, and even had asked to.
 - ii. He could “see” God in a different sense (in his understanding and knowing the real God).
 - iii. Since Jesus is the image of the invisible God, He said that anyone who has seen Him has also “seen” the Father (**John 14:9**).
 - iv. The Christian life involves seeking and even (in a sense) “seeing” God, according to what it says in **Hebrews 11**. In recounting the example of

Enoch who pleased God and lived by faith we are reminded,

1. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (**Hebrews 11:6**, NKJV)
 2. Note that this call to “seek God” was *addressed to Christians* who need to persevere in their faith. In context, it is clear that this was not written to admonish unbelievers that *they* should seek to find God.
- vii. The Christian life is much more than just following a list of rules and commands.
1. Some well-meaning believers can try to reduce the Christian faith to just identifying all the commands of Jesus, writing down those rules, and following them.
 2. Certainly if we love Jesus we must obey His commands; all of them (**Matthew 7:13-27, John 15:1-10, Hebrews 5:9, 1 John 5:1-3**, etc.).
 3. However, the Christian life is so much more than just following a list of commands. It includes loving God and seeking Him, as men like Moses and Enoch did, and persevering in that until the end.

V. Moses Stops at a Well, Gets a Wife

- a. Read **Exodus 2:15-25**.
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Moses flees to Midian, sits down by a well of water.
 - ii. Seven daughters of a Reuel (who is also called Jethro), a priest from Midian, are tending the flocks of their father.
 - iii. Moses rescues the daughters from bad shepherds and waters their flocks.
 - iv. Their father hears about this, and invites Moses to eat with them. Moses stays with them, and the priest gives his daughter Zipporah in marriage.

- v. Moses and Zipporah have their first son, Gershom.
- vi. The king (Pharaoh) who wanted to kill Moses dies.
 - 1. The stage is now set for God to call Moses to return to Egypt, to deliver His people.

VI. Now Let's Consider the Third Level (Foreshadowings)

- a. Recall from the prior lesson what Stephen (in **Acts 7:35-37**) had told the Jews in Jerusalem. Stephen said that those who truly desire to follow Moses will heed what he wrote regarding the Prophet who would come later (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**).
- b. God had told Moses to tell the Jews that he would "raise up a Prophet like Moses from among their brethren", and that they must heed whatever that future prophet said.
- c. This future Jewish prophet would be "like Moses". Both Stephen (**Acts 7:35-37**) and Peter (**Acts 3:17-26**) identify Jesus as that Prophet. Therefore, of all the prophets who followed after Moses, we should expect to find Jesus as uniquely "like Moses".
- d. Let's consider parallels between the lives of Moses and Jesus, based on what we have seen thus far from the first 40+ years of Moses' life. Let's take another look at the details from the life of Moses, from **Exodus chapters 1 and 2**:
 - i. The story begins with his conception and birth (**Exodus 1-2**).
 - 1. Similar to the account of Jesus' life (beginning in **Matthew 1-2** and **Luke 1-2**.)
 - ii. He was born to lead a mission to single-handedly deliver God's people from slavery.
 - 1. Recall how Jesus read from **Isaiah 61** in the Nazareth synagogue in **Luke 4:16-22**, where it said "He has sent me...to proclaim liberty to the captives...to set at liberty those who are oppressed..."
 - 2. Jesus taught that all who sin are slaves to sin (John 8:34). Paul explained that through Christ we have been set free from that spiritual slavery (**Romans 6:15-23**).
 - iii. A wicked king issues an edict that all the Jewish male babies must be killed. However, his parents dodge the wicked king's edict and he manages to escape (**Exodus 1:15-22**).

1. This is very similar to what happened following the birth of Jesus, when Herod issued a decree to have all the baby boys killed (**Matthew 2:7-18**).
- iv. He is in Egypt during his childhood.
1. Recall that Mary and Joseph took Jesus as a child down to Egypt to fulfill the prophecy, “out of Egypt I called my Son” (**Matthew 2:14-15**, with the prophecy referring to **Hosea 11:1** or possibly **Numbers 24:8**).
- v. As an infant, he is found in a rather unusual cradle.
1. The baby Moses was found in basket coated with asphalt (**Exodus 2:3**).
 2. Jesus was found by the shepherds in a manger, a feeding trough for animals (**Luke 2:16**).
- vi. His own people initially rejected him, saying, “Who made you ruler and judge over us?” (**Exodus 2:14**, quoted by Stephen in **Acts 7:35**).
1. In the Parable of the Ten Minas, the citizens (representing the Jews) hate the king (representing Jesus) and send a delegation to say “We will not have this man to reign over us.” (**Luke 19:12-14**)
 2. Also, **Psalms 2** speaks of how the rulers of this world will not want to have the Christ, God’s king, over them.
- vii. He gave up the opportunity for great riches of this world, and was willing to suffer instead, since he was looking for a greater reward (**Hebrews 11:24-26**).
1. Jesus was offered all the kingdoms of this world by Satan, but declined the offer (**Matthew 4:8-10**).
 2. Jesus relinquished His high position to become a bondservant, to serve and save others (**Philippians 2:5-11**).
 3. Jesus voluntarily endured the suffering and shame of the cross “for the joy set before Him” (**Hebrews 12:2**)
- viii. Moses went from his own native country to a foreign land, was alone, and sat down by a well. There he had a famous interaction with foreign women, and offered to provide them water to drink. The story of this interaction gets back to their father, who is a religious man (a Midianite priest). He urges Moses to stay with them. Moses is treated better by these foreigners than he is by his own people. He ends up

gaining a family (wife and child) through this interaction (**Exodus 2:15-22**).

1. Recall the famous story of the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, in **John 4**.
 - a. Jesus, alone in a foreign land (Samaria), sits down by a water well (**John 4:3-7**).
 - b. There Jesus has an interaction with a foreign (Samaritan) woman, where He offers her “living water” (**John 4:7-15**).
 - c. The woman and her people are religious, believing in God; even though they are not Jews (**John 4:19-25, 4:42**).
 - d. When the woman tells men among her people about the interaction at the Jewish prophet at the well, they approach Jesus and prevail upon Him to stay with them for a couple of days (**John 4:28-40**).
 - e. Jesus gained many followers from among the Samaritans. He was treated better by them than by His own people (**John 4:39-44**).
 - i. Regarding building a family, recall that Jesus had said, “For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” (**Matthew 12:50**, NKJV)
- e. We have found, in just the first 40 years of Moses’ life, several extraordinary parallels with the life of Jesus. Jesus was indeed the promised Prophet who would be “like Moses”.
 - i. We will see *even more* unusual parallels between the lives of Moses and Jesus as we continue through the rest of the life of Moses!
 - ii. Keep in mind that the events we have been reading in Exodus occurred about 1400 years prior to the birth of Jesus. Also, the LXX text that we are reading from was translated 200-250 years prior to the birth of Christ. Bottom line: there is *no way* that the Christians could have altered these writings of Moses.
 - iii. Also note that the prophetic foreshadowings we looked at here are spread across the gospels; they are not just in one. For example:

1. The account of the baby boys being killed and the childhood in Egypt is found *only in the gospel of **Matthew***.
 2. The account of the infant Jesus being found in an unusual cradle, the manger, is found *only in the gospel of **Luke***.
 3. The account of Jesus sitting down by the well in a foreign land, in Samaria, and having his encounter with the Samaritan woman and her people is found *only in the gospel of **John***.
- iv. It is amazing to see how the Holy Spirit has hidden so many specific details of the life of Jesus Christ within the story of Moses! Perhaps we can better appreciate what Paul said regarding the Jews:
1. (Speaking of the Jews) “But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But *even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart*. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” (2 **Corinthians 3:14–16**, NKJV)
 2. When most Jews read their own Scriptures, it is like a veil is covering their hearts. They are reading the story of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus; *but they don't realize it!*