

MOSES—THE SHEPHERD WHOM GOD USED TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE

Presented by

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As Tyler ended his sermon on Joseph, we learned that Joseph's father Jacob, along with his eleven sons, their wives, and all of their children had moved from Canaan to Egypt. For many years Jacob had thought that his beloved son Joseph was dead. But Joseph was far from dead. In fact, God had been working through him to bring about the salvation of the people of Israel during a time of terrible famine in their land. When Tyler said that "the story did not end there," he was absolutely correct. As the book of Genesis comes to end, we see how God had used one unlikely person—a 17-year-old old teenage boy—to get His people **to** Egypt. Now God was going to use another unlikely (and unsuspecting!) person to take His people **out** of Egypt. Here is what happened.

As the book of Exodus begins, we learn in verse eight of chapter 1 that "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." The new pharaoh saw how numerous the Hebrews were becoming in Egypt, and he began to fear that they would take over his country. So, the pharaoh decided to turn them into slaves. And, as Exodus 1:22 explains, to prevent the Hebrew nation from growing even larger, pharaoh issued a command to the midwives who helped Hebrew women give birth: "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive." Pharaoh was willing to allow the Hebrew baby **girls** to live. But he wanted the Hebrew baby **boys** killed so they could not grow into men and challenge his authority.

One Hebrew woman who had a baby boy during this time was a lady by the name of Jochebed. Exodus 2 tells us that in order to save her son, she built a small, waterproof basket in which to place him. She then hid the basket among the reeds along the Nile River. One day, pharaoh's daughter came to the River and stumbled across the basket. She decided to take the baby back to live with her in the palace, and named him "Moses," meaning "he who was drawn out of the water." Fortunately, Moses' sister, Miriam, had been watching over him to keep him safe. When she saw what was happening, she volunteered to find a Hebrew woman to take care of the baby for the princess. That woman, of course, was Jochebed, Moses' real mother. As Moses grew, he was taught the ways of the Hebrews. But, as the Bible tells us in Acts 7:22, Moses also "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."

At the age of forty, Moses witnessed an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave, and when he went to the defense of the Hebrew, he ended up killing the Egyptian. Exodus 2:15 tells us that because of this incident, "pharaoh sought to kill Moses." Moses left Egypt and went to live in the land of Midian, where he met a shepherd by the name of Jethro. Moses married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah, and helped Jethro tend his sheep. Then, after forty more years had passed, God spoke to Moses at Mount Horeb through a bush that burned but was not consumed. The Lord said, "I will send you to pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). The time had come for God to save the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. And He was going to use an humble shepherd to do it.

When Moses and his brother Aaron arrived in pharaoh's court with the message, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go,'" pharaoh's response was, "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" (Exodus 5:1-2). Because of pharaoh's stubborn refusal to obey God, Egypt suffered ten terrible plagues, which are discussed in Exodus 8-12.

- The Nile River turned to blood.
- Frogs invaded the Egyptian landscape.
- Lice afflicted humans and animals alike.
- Flies infested the land.
- Disease killed the Egyptians' cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, oxen, sheep, and other animals.
- Boils infected humans and animals throughout the country.
- Hail fell from the sky and crushed the Egyptians' crops.
- Grasshoppers arrived by the millions and devoured what was left of Egypt's harvest.
- Darkness fell over the land for three full days.
- And finally, God slew the firstborn child in every house of Egypt.

But while the Egyptians suffered, the people of Israel were protected by God from being affected by any of the plagues. Finally, as Exodus 12:31-32 tells us, pharaoh called Moses and Aaron to his palace and told them, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. Go serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, and be gone!"

After more than two hundred years of living in slavery, the Israelites were now free! But Moses' work had just begun. He now was in charge of an estimated two million people who had known only one thing for all of their lives: **slavery**. It was Moses' job to lead them out of Egypt, guide them across hundreds and hundreds of miles of open desert, and eventually take them to the brink of the land that God had promised—through their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give them.

Have you ever stopped to consider the challenge that faced Moses as he led an estimated two million people into the wilderness of the Sinai desert? I would like to ask you to consider the following facts.

First, Exodus 14 tells us that the Israelites crossed the Red Sea in **one night** as they sought to escape pharaoh's army. If the people had gone across in a narrow path, double file, the line would have been **800 miles long** and would have required **35 days and nights to get across**. So, God had to open a space in the Red Sea **3 miles wide** so that the people could walk **5,000 abreast** in order to cross over in a single night.

Second, every time the Israelites camped at the end of the day, a campground **two-thirds the size of the state of Rhode Island—a total of 750 square miles—was required**. That would comprise an area **25 miles wide and 130 miles long**. Think of how much space was needed just for nightly camping.

Third, all of those people had to be fed—which would have required a **lot** of food. According to the Quarter-Master General of the United States Army, to feed that many people, Moses would have needed **1,500 tons of food each day**. Just transporting that much food would have required **2 freight trains, each a mile long**.

Fourth, the people would have needed firewood to use in cooking their food—and remember: **they were in a desert!** This would have required an estimated **4,000 tons of wood**—and a few more freight trains, each a mile long—just for a single day. And they were **40 years** in transit!

Fifth, they would have to have water, too. If the people had only enough to drink and wash a few clothes, it would have taken **11,000,000 gallons each day**, and a freight train with tank cars stretching out more than 1,800 miles just to bring enough water for one day! A desert has no lakes or streams. So how were the Israelites supposed to get their water?

Do you think Moses stopped to figure out all of these things before he left Egypt? Of course he didn't! Moses trusted God, and knew that God was going to take care of all these things for him. Yet as the days, weeks, months, and years began to pass, Moses found himself having to deal with people who constantly were ungrateful for everything that God had done for them. He rescued them from centuries of slavery in Egypt, provided them with safe passage through the Red Sea, gave them manna to eat each morning and quail to eat each evening, and even prevented their clothes from wearing out on their long journey. Yet they continually bickered, complained, griped, grumbled, and whined. Worse still, on several occasions the Israelites so openly and stubbornly disobeyed God that He slew them by the thousands to teach them the lesson that they desperately needed to learn: **God says what He means, and means what He says!**

Moses and Aaron both died before entering the Promised Land, as did all of the people who were over twenty years of age when they had left Egypt, except for the houses of Joshua and Caleb. Eventually, however, Joshua led the people of Israel into Canaan, at which time they finally were able to inhabit the land that God had promised to give to Abraham and his descendants.

But who could ever have guessed the God would accomplish such amazing things at the hands of a simple shepherd? Perhaps now we can better understand what Paul meant when he said in 1 Corinthians 1:27 that “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty.” Pharaoh was mighty, and considered himself to be wise. Yet he and his world-class army were defeated by an humble shepherd who was willing to yield to the Creator of the Universe and obey His will. Surely there is an important lesson in all of this for us, too. That lesson is this: “I know that you, Lord, can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). Enough said.