



Moses - Introduction

The 120 Years of Moses' Life

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Introduction

If one were to peruse through the chapters of the book of Genesis, one might consider the time period between Abraham and Moses was just a matter of a few decades.

Abraham appears on the scene in Genesis 12 and is gathered to his people in Genesis 25. Yet the time period between these two men is considerable.

Abraham who at 100 begets Isaac who lived for 180 years (Genesis 35:28). Isaac had Esau and Jacob. Jacob lived for 147 years (Genesis 47:28). Jacob who had twelve sons one of which was Joseph. It is said of him that *"Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt."* Then one must figure in the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt. Much has happened between these two great men of faith.

Moses lived for 120 years. His life is conveniently divided into three sections of forty years a piece. The first forty years, Moses was instructed in the ways of the Egyptians by Pharaoh's daughter as well as in the ways of the Hebrews by his mother. Stephen said in Acts 7:23, *"Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel."*

The second period of forty years encompasses his flight from Egypt and his life as a shepherd in Midian. Again, Stephen said, *"And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai"* (Acts 7:30). Finally, from age eighty until his death at age 120, Moses guided the children of Israel, with God's guidance, through the wilderness. Stephen speaking of this time period stated, *"He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years"* (Acts 7:36).

The First Forty Years

The first forty years of Moses' life is encapsulated in just sixteen verses. In Exodus 2:1-15 there are only two events that are recorded. The first occasion was when Moses was hidden in the river in an ark of bulrushes to preserve his life from Pharaoh. These verses say more about the faith of his parents than it does about Moses himself.

Hebrews 11:27 states, *"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command"* (NKJV).

The second reported incidence of this first forty-year period is found in verses 11-15. At this time Moses is already grown. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moses

killed him and hid his body in the sand. The next day he encountered two Hebrews fighting one another. In an attempt to stop them he is rebuked by one who says, *“Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian”* (14). When the matter is known to Pharaoh, he sought to kill Moses. Moses instead flees to Midian where he spends the next forty years of his life.

Hebrew writer put it eloquently when he said in 11:24-27, *“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”*

The Second Forty Years

This second chapter of Moses’ life encompasses only two and a half chapters. This section also reports only two main events. As in the first, one at the beginning and one at the end of the forty years.

The first report is that of Moses delivering Jethro’s seven daughters who were shepherdesses from the hands of their male counterparts. In return, Moses is invited into the home of Jethro. In time, Jethro gave him his daughter Zipporah to wed. The name of their first son was Gershom.

The second event of this second forty-year period is perhaps one of the most memorable of Moses’ life. In chapters three and four, the Angel of the Lord appears to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush (3:2). It is then said that *“God called to him from the midst of the bush...”* (3:4).

These chapters are referred to as the *“Call of Moses”* in which God directs Moses to return to Egypt to confront Pharaoh and to tell him to let God’s people go. Moses is less than enthused about his commission and offers up four excuses for not going. When all these are answered, he simply asks God to find someone else to take his place. God refuses but insist that Moses take Aaron his brother and depart on the mission God had given him.

The Final Forty Years

The final forty years examines Moses’ return to Egypt as well as the events that follow their departure from captivity and what is called *“the wilderness wanderings”*. This period covers Moses’ life from age eighty until his death at 120.

Exodus chapters 5-12 examines Moses and Aaron’s encounter with Pharaoh. Pharaoh is less than thrilled with God’s plan to allow the children of Israel to depart. *“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'*" (5:2). With this, Pharaoh's heart is hardened and he would not let them go.

To show Pharaoh and the Egyptians the might of the one true God, God unleashes ten plagues upon the nation culminating in the death of the first born of all those who lived in Egypt. The only exception was on those who put the blood of the Passover sacrifice upon the two doorposts and upon the lintel of their houses (12:7). With this plague and the death of his own son, Pharaoh commanded that the children of Israel leave at once.

In Chapter 14, Pharaoh's heart soon reverted to its previous condition as the Israelites left and found themselves "trapped" in the wilderness adjacent to the Red Sea. Fearing their capture, the children of Israel began to complain against Moses. Yet, God knew the great deliverance He was about to perform. God commanded Moses to lift his rod and go forward. As he does, the waters begin to depart and the children of Israel escape the Egyptians by walking across the sea on dry ground. The ensuing Egyptians enter the sea and are thus drown when the waters come back upon them.

In chapter 15, the joys of victory are too soon overcome by grumbling and complaining. This chapter and the two following highlight the presumed hardships of the Israelites. In Exodus 15:22-27, the water is bitter. In chapter sixteen, they cry out for lack of bread. In Exodus 17, they cry out for lack of water. In each instance God shows His power and provisions towards them by turning the water sweet, giving them bread from heaven and bringing water out of a rock. As Pharaoh suffered from a hard heart, the Israelites suffered from a complaining tongue. Their complaining would undermine their faith in God until that generation passed away.

Exodus 19 to the end of the book focuses upon Israel's stay at Mount Sinai. There God delivers to them the Ten Commandments as well as many other laws that would govern their existence as a new nation. It is there, sadly, that the Israelites show their infidelity by making and worshipping a golden calf. As Moses would break the tables of stone, so their relationship with God was broken. These chapters show the transition from the Patriarchal Age, which began with Adam and lasted to Moses, to the Mosaic Age that would extend to the death Jesus and the establishment of His Church / Kingdom in Acts 2.

Upon leaving Egypt, God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:8). In Numbers 14, Moses led them to the very door of the promised land. Before they crossed, twelve spies were selected to cross over the Jordan to spy out the land. Their returning report was good and the produce they returned with were excellent examples of God's fulfilled promise. However due to the inhabitation of the land, ten of the spies discouraged the multitude and they refused to go in saying, *"We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we"* (13:31).

Only Joshua and Caleb stood faithful to God and encourage the children of Israel onward but to no avail. Because of their lack of faith, God condemned them to journey in the wilderness for forty years until that generation had passed.

One event that marred the life of Moses was his reaction to the children of Israel as they complained against him because of the lack of water in Numbers 20. God commanded Moses to take his rod and to speak to the rock instead Moses struck the rock twice saying, *"Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock"* (20:10)? Though seeming innocent, the matter was grave in the eyes of the Lord. God replied to Moses saying, *"Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them"* (12). Prior to his death, God took Moses up upon Mount Nebo to the top of Pisgah to allow him to look over into the promised land. Upon his passing, it is said, *"And He (God) buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished"* (Deuteronomy 34:6-7).

Conclusion

Considering the account of Moses' life from Exodus 2 through to the end of Deuteronomy, one may conclude that the latter end was better than the beginning. Among many lessons we can learn from the life of Moses, one is quite apparent, that being that God can use both young and old to accomplish His will and bring glory to His name.