

The Greatest Story Ever Told

Basic Biblical Stories and What we Can Learn from Them

The Early Story of Moses: God is Preparing Me

In the second chapter of Exodus, the Story of Moses begins, and we see how he was prepared by God for the great mission he would one day take up: that of delivering and leading the Jewish people to freedom and toward the Promised Land. But as we shall see, Moses' preparation is anything but uneventful. God must prepare him in a crucible of sorts and lead him to a greater humility prior to his great mission. It is not an easy preparation. Let's look to the purposeful preparation of the man named Moses.

Family situation

As Exodus opens, we read: *Now a man from the house of Levi went and took a wife, a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch; and she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink. And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him.* (Ex 2:1-4)

Thus, we have the dramatic opening of the birth of Moses, born with a death sentence over his head. Pharaoh had ordered the death of every Hebrew boy saying to the midwives, *When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live* (Exodus 1:16). Moses is thus slated to die on account of murderous greed, royal injustice, and the fearful assent of others.

But look again! And see the focus on the women and their initiative in this

chapter. Moses' mother, her sister and Pharaoh's daughter are all mentioned as standing in the gap against the injustice of their day. It is interesting that men are not mentioned!

This provides a key insight. In situations of oppression, it is often the weakest who show themselves most powerful, and that, in weakness, power often reaches perfection. Perhaps this is because the weak and powerless have the least to lose and are the least invested in the "way things are." And thus, Scripture says, *God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.* (1 Cor 1:27)



Note the strong stock from which Moses comes. His mother and aunt make a daring and risky move and prove themselves resourceful amid a depraved and wicked situation. They will resist evil by making what amounts to a daring raid, a stealthy incursion, into the very source of evil, Pharaoh's own household.

Moses' mother must have informed him of his Hebrew origins at some point for Scripture says elsewhere:

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt. (Heb 11:24-27)

We can imagine his mother, serving as his caretaker, in Pharaoh's palace teaching him: "Son, this is who you really are and don't you forget it. Don't be fooled by all this power and money, by all these trappings. Remember your people and consider that God has saved you for a reason and has a plan for your life.

Yes, even if we must read it between the lines, Moses had a strong and daring mother and family. Let's read on by returning to the infant Moses, floating in the Nile River.

Fantastic Sovereignty

Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river... When she opened it, she saw the child crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." Then her Hebrew maidservant said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So, the girl went and called the child's own mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.".... So, the woman took the child and nursed him. And Pharaoh's daughter named him Moses, for she said, "Because I drew

him out of the water." (see Exodus 2:5-10)

In some ways the action of these women shows both desperation and decisiveness. Floating Moses downstream is quite chancy, but notice the mother and daughter monitor the situation to see what will come and be able to respond to whatever occurs. Hence, they remain actors in the drama not merely hapless victims of the situation.

Note the list of ironies and divine sovereignty we can observe in this short passage:

- Pharaoh's chosen instrument of destruction (the Nile) is the means for saving Moses.
- The mother of Moses saves him by following Pharaoh's order (with a twist). Moses is cast into the water as ordered, but on the wood of a kind of ark or cross.
- A member of Pharaoh's own family undermines his policies and saves the very person who will ultimately defeat Pharaoh.
- Moses' mother gets paid from Pharaoh's own budget to do what she most wants to do (nurture her son).
- Pharaoh's daughter gives Moses a name that is prophetic: she drew from the water, but Moses would draw Israel out of the water too!

Yes, God has initiated through these women, a daring raid into the lair of evil, Pharaoh's palace, and placed an agent, a savior there who will be prepared by Pharaoh's own court for its eventual downfall. Indeed, though we know little of these years from the Exodus account, Scripture later tells us, *Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.* (Acts 7:20-22)

So, Pharaoh was teaching and preparing his own nemesis. He was preparing for his own downfall. You might call this the "fantastic sovereignty" of God.

False Start

Things are well underway for the deliverance of the Hebrews. But then comes a twist that warns us not to get out ahead of God. The text says, *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. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together; and he said to the man that did the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow?" 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." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.* (Ex. 2:11-15)

The problem here is that Moses appoints himself. The Hebrew man may be rude and in the wrong, but he speaks rightly, asking, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" And of course, the answer is, no one has. God has not yet called Moses as he will later do. Moses is out ahead of God. Moses tries to save his people without God. This is pride and presumption. This is at the heart of the matter. God will need to work with Moses for forty more years before he is ready!

This may seem strange to us. Moses, at age 40, is in his prime, eloquent, strong, and politically connected! Why wouldn't God call him now? His rash action of killing a man shows that he is *too* strong and too proud for God to use. God seeks the weak and

humble, those who will depend on him. Thus, Moses needs purification and preparation in the desert, where he must now flee. For forty years, God will work with him, and when Moses is finally weak and humble enough, not trusting in his own power, then God will finally call him. For now, he must stand down.

Formative Sojourning

And thus, Moses flees to the desert where God will purify and prepare him for something he cannot handle right now.

Moses will live humbly. He will have a desert experience. He will learn to shepherd. He will marry and raise a family. He will learn patience and, with age, his own limits.

The paradox of all this is that God seeks us in our humility more than our strength. Without humility we are dangerous, and God cannot use us. Finally, after forty years, when Moses is 80, leaning on a cane, and of stammering speech, God will finally say, "Now I can use you, for now you will rely on my power, not yours."

In all this, God has been silently at work. Moses the deliverer was snatched from the waters, educated and prepared in Pharaoh's own courts, by Pharaoh's finest. Moses has had his pride humbled, and his human strength replaced by divine dependence through a forty-year purification in the desert. And now the deliverer of Israel is finally ready.

We will continue his story in the next flyer, as God calls him. For now, recall the words of an old Gospel song: *God is preparing me for something I can't handle right now. He's making me ready...He's providing me with what I need to carry out the next matter in my life. He's maturing, training and tuning me; purging and pruning me for everything that will come in my life.*