

# Portrait of Moses

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Is it really necessary in the time we have before us to spend it looking at a portrait of Moses? After all, he is hardly an unfamiliar figure. We already have many vivid pictures of him recorded in our minds: a crying baby anxiously being quieted by a desperate mother; a little woven basket sealed with pitch floating in the reeds along the shore of the Nile; an awestruck yet reluctant shepherd standing in the wilderness of Sinai looking at a bush which is burning, but not burning up; a man and his brother standing as the champions of slaves before the great god-king of Egypt making their outrageous demands; a tired leader standing on a hill holding up his hands in blessing while his people fight for their lives in the valley below; an angry prophet striding down the mountain hurtling two tablets of stone down in front of him, his eyes all the while fixed on a statue of a golden calf; or an old man staring out from the heights of Mt. Nebo over the land of Canaan stretching out in front of him to the west. This list is already long enough, but it does not exhaust the possible portraits which you or many of the members in your congregations could paint of Moses. So what's the purpose of our efforts here today and tomorrow?

I guess the best answer to that question is that he is so important to students of the Bible that we simply cannot be satisfied with what knowledge we may have of him. He is important not because of who he was, but rather, as is always the case in the family of God, because of what the LORD accomplished through him. Consider what we look to him for. He is the most important writer of history who ever lived. Without the first volume of his work we would be ignorant of such important matters as how the world came into being, how the gracious LORD reacted in faithful love to the first and continuing rebellion of his foremost creatures, and how patiently step by step he fashioned his redemptive plan and carried out his saving will through the seed of Abraham. Humanly speaking, without Moses, Israel, if it ever managed to become a nation at all, would have been without a national constitution or a religious heritage. Without his spiritual leadership I can hardly imagine the Israelites escaping the wrath of God for their unfaithfulness. They would not have made it out of the wilderness, and they would not have managed to reach the borders of Canaan. Later, after his death the authority of his divine message is mightily in evidence, and Joshua makes ample use of it. His teaching (Torah) caused at least two reformations: the one under King Josiah in 621 BC after the book of the law was discovered in the temple, and the other led by Ezra the scribe after the Babylonian exile. Jesus greatly honored Moses by quoting his words and acknowledging him as Israel's greatest teacher. His name is mentioned almost 80 times in the New Testament and almost half of those instances must be credited to the Savior himself. Jesus and the apostles often refer to Moses concerning both Law and Gospel. Such a man and the work, which God did through him, are worth all the attention we can give them. I dare say, there is always more that we can learn.

I hope, that in the time we have, we can go beyond the obvious. We do face one drawback, however. The LORD has not seen fit to supply us with all the facts that we might like to know. Without engaging in speculation we cannot supply those facts either. Maybe we can deduce certain things, but other questions will have to go begging. Nevertheless, our intent where possible is to add some meat to the biography of Moses, even if we are not working with a complete skeleton on which to hang it.

# Presentation # 1: Moses and His Times

## I. The Historical Figure of Moses

In this first installment we will deal mainly with introductory material, beginning with the historical figure of Moses. It is hard to imagine anyone doubting the historical reality of Moses. His presence in both Old and New Testament is so great. Yet since the heyday of radical historical criticism in the nineteenth century such has been the case. In the year 1906 Eduard Meyer, a well-known historian remarked, “After all, with the exception of those who accept tradition bag and baggage as historical truth, not one of those who treat him as a historical reality has hitherto been able to fill him with any kind of content whatever, to depict him as a concrete historical figure, or to deduce anything which he could have created or which could be his historical work.” We can appreciate the man’s problem. What he says is true. If you are going to ignore the Scriptural account of Moses, his times and his work, you are left without a shred of evidence that the man ever lived, much less that he did anything of note. What evidence archaeologists have been able to uncover to date, especially in Egypt, is totally silent about Moses or Israel at the time of the exodus. Everything we know about Moses comes from the Bible. At best, archaeological discoveries can give us only peripheral information, which as we will see later, helps us fill in some of the background.

Since the time of Julius Wellhausen in the late 19th century it has been popular to criticize the historical figure of Moses. Wellhausen considered much of the material and all of the composition of the Pentateuch to have originated at the time of and after the exile. That made these five books completely unreliable from a historical point of view as far as he was concerned. He then turned to those books which he considered the oldest writings in the Old Testament: Judges, where Moses’ name is mentioned four times in three separate chapters, and Samuel and Kings, where his name appears twelve times in seven different chapters. He also looked at what he considered to be the pre-exilic prophets and found him mentioned there by name only twice, once in Jeremiah and once in Micah. He concluded that if Moses really had played the predominant role ascribed to him in the Pentateuch, his name would have appeared much more prominently in later works. He speculated that Moses’ dominant position in the Pentateuch was the result of the piety of later generations. He felt that if they had not actually created the figure of Moses, they certainly magnified his importance and pictured him in such a way as to derive sanction for their own practices and values.

[As an aside we might give one critic’s reaction to the view that Wellhausen and his school espoused: “The infrequent mention of Moses outside the Pentateuch (especially in pre-exilic sources) may be due to forces of a very different sort. The cult of heroic personalities is unable to gain a foothold in Israel’s faith. Since Yahweh is the primary actor in every event, it is to him, and not to his human agent, that faith is attached once the event has occurred. Human agency is not insignificant in the OT understanding of God’s ways, but no historical or human pattern can dictate the future.”]

After a few decades during which the view of Wellhausen ruled the scholarly world of Pentateuchal criticism, the form-critical school of Herman Gunkel and his followers challenged that supremacy. They said that the traditions recorded in the Pentateuch had a much longer history than the source critics would allow. They asserted that the stories of Moses and others existed in oral tradition long before they were written down. But the real Moses does not seem to have fared much better in the oral traditions of form criticism than he did in the written sources of source criticism. Hugo Gressmann, who applied the form critical method to the book of Exodus, came to the conclusion as far as Moses was concerned that the stories about him had an original kernel of truth in them, but that kernel was overlaid with all kinds of legendary miracle stories and other supernatural events so that what we have recorded in the Pentateuch really isn’t history at all, but simply pious fairy tales, “wonder tales,” Gressmann called them.

It remained, however, the dubious privilege of Martin Noth, the radical German Bible historian, who was born in the first decade of the past century and who died unexpectedly in 1968, to dispose of the person of Moses completely for all practical purposes. Following the lead of Gerhard von Rad he divided the content of

Exodus through Numbers into four major themes: the exodus, Sinai, the wilderness wandering, and the entrance into the Promised Land. According to Noth these four themes originally had no integral connection. They were separate stories brought into later Israelite literature by various disparate elements that eventually made up the Israelite nation. When these varying themes were brought together and united into one common history of Israel, a unifying element was necessary. That element was the figure of Moses. Hence everything that is said about him is to be considered secondary. In fact, Noth claimed that the only thing that is historically reliable in the entire pentateuchal account of Moses is what he called the “grave tradition.” Some nomadic tribes which later become incorporated into the nation of Israel passed by the grave of this desert chieftain on Mt. Nebo, and somehow his existence passed into their traditions. In other words, according to Noth all we really know about Moses is that he died, a rather safe assumption to make concerning just about anybody. Since Noth’s time the pendulum has swung back and forth, giving the figure of Moses greater or lesser credibility, but nothing like what the Pentateuch and other parts of the Bible have to say about him.

Fortunately, we are not dependent on the rationalistic schemes of modern scholars to evaluate our sources for the life of Moses. We have a whole host of witnesses inspired by the Spirit to verify the testimony of the Pentateuch, both as to the works and words of Moses. Let’s look at some of the facts of Moses’ life to which the rest of the Bible outside the Pentateuch testifies. First of all, concerning his family I Chronicles, chapter six, assures us that Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were of the household of Amram, and chapter twenty-three states that Moses’ children were Gershom and Eliezer. In the book of Judges, in both the first and fourth chapters, it is affirmed that Moses’ in-laws were Kenites, and that his brother-in-law’s name was Hobab. Then when speaking about his birth, Stephen in his account of Israelite history in Acts, chapter seven, reveals that Moses was a goodly child, and the writer to the Hebrews says that he was hidden for three months after he was born. We might add here that Stephen describes the education of Moses as including all the wisdom of the Egyptians. In addition, the writer to the Hebrews mentions the faith in the coming Christ which filled Moses’ heart when he chose to renounce his Egyptian citizenship and cast his lot with the Hebrew slaves resulting in his flight from Egypt. (We will look at Acts and Hebrews more closely later.)

The work which Moses did is also amply mentioned outside the Pentateuch. Psalm 77 describes the LORD’s care for his people through Moses’ leadership when it says, “You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” 2 Kings refers to the incident of the brazen serpent when it relates the destruction of that image at the hands of Hezekiah, following an idolatrous use of it in his day. Jesus, of course, also mentions the brazen serpent when he says in John, chapter three, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” Joshua indicates that it was Moses who led the battle against the Midianites at Baal Peor in Transjordan shortly before Israel entered the land because the Midianites had led the Israelites into idolatry. We are also told in Joshua that Moses divided up the Transjordan among the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. 1 Chronicles, chapter 21, reveals that Moses built the tabernacle according to the LORD’s instructions. Psalms 105 and 106 summarize much of the history that is recorded in the Pentateuch, and they speak of Moses, especially when he stood before Pharaoh and predicted the plagues, or when he pleaded for Israel’s forgiveness at Sinai after the golden calf incident, and when he had to deal with the rebellious Israelites calling for water at Meribah. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul refers to the passing through the Red Sea under Moses’ leadership. In 2 Timothy he speaks of Jannes and Jambres as the magicians who opposed Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh. In 2 Corinthians Paul speaks of the veil which covered Moses’ face after the reading of the law. Both Jesus in Mark 12 and Stephen speak of the time that Moses stood before the burning bush. The Savior again speaks in John 6 of Moses as the one through whom his Father gave manna to Israel.

As you might expect, the books of the Bible which follow the Pentateuch save their most notable witness for Moses’ greatest work, that of his writing. Of the Old Testament writers I mention only Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah because of their claim that the Torah (Greek; *nomos*), the teaching or instruction, came to God’s people through Moses. They also refer to the fact that certain parts of that Law were recorded for Moses by God on tablets of stone.

Jesus surpasses even these Old Testament witnesses in crediting the Law of God to Moses. Again and again the phrases, “Moses said,” and “Moses wrote,” occur in his speech. Most of these references deal with the commands which God gave his people through Moses. Honoring parents, marriage, purification laws, circumcision, to mention a few, are all mentioned by Christ as being part of the content of Moses’ words. Although Jesus himself does not say it, the Gospel content and the prophetic nature of the Mosaic Torah are also mentioned in John 1 when Philip testifies to Nathaniel, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Jesus ascribes the entire Pentateuch to the authorship of Moses. He puts these words into the mouth of Abraham speaking to the rich man in hell: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” When the risen Christ teaches his disciples behind locked doors on Easter evening, he says, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). The apostles at the Council of Jerusalem also testify to the entire body of Mosaic writings when they say in Acts 15, “For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

The list could go on and on for Moses is referred to in just under 200 verses found in 108 separate chapters of the Bible outside the Pentateuch. We may have no witness to the man Moses and his work outside the Bible, but it would be a gross distortion of the truth to say that his name and work are limited mainly to the Pentateuch. All of Scripture testifies to his importance and the reliability of the Pentateuch in reporting his life and accomplishments. In fact it would be safe to say that even if the Pentateuch had been lost after it had been used as a reference work by later Bible writers, much of the material which it contains would still be available to us, and the importance of Moses and his work could still be appreciated. The historicity of the figure of Moses and the value of his work may be questioned in modern scholarly circles, but the inspired writers of the rest of Scripture do not join in that activity. We follow the Biblical writers when painting our portrait of Moses.

## **II. The Age of Moses**

I think we would all agree that any person is influenced and shaped, positively or negatively by the times in which he lives. This is also true of those people whose lives are revealed in the pages of Scripture. Abraham, for instance, was influenced by the different ways in which an heir could legally be provided for a childless couple. His adoption of Eliezer of Damascus and then his willingness to turn to a secondary wife, such as Hagar, are cases in point. Jacob was influenced by the superstitions of his generation involving the breeding of sheep and goats as he showed by placing cut twigs before the mating animals. The Israelites in Canaan all too often showed themselves to be people of their day as they lustily and frequently took part in the immoral religious practices of the nations around them. As a final example we might refer to the Jews of Paul’s day who came to faith in Jesus Christ, but were led astray by the prevalent attitude of the Jewish church of the time in regard to circumcision and the temptation to attach conditions to the free, unconditional promises of the Gospel.

Must we not also assume that the same was the case with Moses. He and the Israelites certainly were influenced by the Egyptian culture in which they lived for so long. In fact in Moses’ case we don’t even have to guess about the influence. Stephen tells us in Acts 7 that “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.” That seems clear enough. Moses was a man of his age and the culture in which he was raised, even though part of the greatness of the man was his willingness and ability to rise above it.

So what were times like in Egypt when Moses was growing up? What was the wisdom he learned? That depends on two related questions. The first one, the one about which we can be most sure of the answer, is: “What were the years which Israel spent in Egypt, and when were those years terminated with the exodus?” Traditionally scholars have always looked to the middle of the 15th century for the answer to that question. The reason is that this is the direction in which the Scriptures themselves point. Two passages are pertinent. The first one is 1 Kings 6:1 which reads, “In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of

Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD." According to 1 Kings then the fourth year of Solomon's reign equals the 480th year after the exodus.

Of course, that date is an unknown unless we are sure of the date of Solomon's fourth year. Earlier Bible scholars who were misled by their interpretation of the numbers in the books of Kings and Chronicles set the reign of Solomon too early by about fifty years. As a result the date for the exodus was off by the same amount. Within the last thirty-five years, however, the monumental work of E. Thiele on the numbers of the Israelite and Judean kings has helped us establish with a reasonable amount of certainty that the fourth year of Solomon's reign was 967 BC. Simple arithmetic then takes us back to 1447 BC as the date of the exodus. (See sheet on chronology.)

The second date of importance is recorded in Exodus 12:40-41: "Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord's divisions left Egypt." When we add these years to 1447, we arrive at the date 1877 as the year when Jacob and his family stood before Pharaoh and received the choice land of Goshen to pasture their flocks. The dating of the LXX which cuts this time in Egypt in half is unlikely, especially in view of Genesis 15:13 where the LORD prophesies to Abraham that his descendants will spend 400 years in a foreign land.

These are the dates for Israel's sojourn in Egypt following the most straightforward interpretation of the relevant verses. Most modern Bible scholars, if they accept the fact of an exodus involving all the tribes of Israel at all, usually reject these dates. They feel that Israel would have been involved in the building of the city of Rameses during the 19th dynasty in Egypt, in which many of the Pharaoh bore the name Ramses. This dynasty was in power during the late 14th and the 13th centuries. Furthermore, these scholars believe that the time when the Semitic Hyksos ruled Lower Egypt (ca. 1730-1570) is a far more favorable time for Joseph to have risen to power in Egypt and for his family to have found a ready welcome. It is also pointed out that the pharaohs of the 18th dynasty had their capital at Thebes in Upper Egypt. They seldom lived in the delta region where the Israelites were located, and the kind of contact that Exodus describes as taking place between Moses and the king of Egypt would have been difficult. For these reasons many scholars ignore or try to reinterpret that Biblical data and prefer a date for the exodus sometime in the 13th century.

Besides preferring the LXX rendering of Exodus 12, such reinterpreting takes the passage from 1 Kings 6 and understands the numbers as referring to generations in round numbers of 40 rather than actual years. We might consider this interpretation except that it then conflicts with the span of years mentioned in Judges 11:26. There the judge Jephthah states, "For three hundred years Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, the surrounding settlements and all the towns along the Arnon. Why didn't you retake them during that time?" If there are three hundred years between the time Israel arrived in the Transjordan and the days of Jephthah, a late date for the exodus puts Jephthah into the 10th century BC and leaves no time for Samuel, Saul and David. There is hardly enough time for all the events which the Bible records during this time even with the early date for the exodus. A late date only compounds the problem.

The dating of the exodus isn't the only problem involved in establishing the date of the age of Moses. The dating of Egyptian history also rests on uncertain ground. The dynasties, names, and years of reign for the Egyptian kings rest chiefly on the writings of an Egyptian priest, Manetho, who lived over a thousand years after the time under consideration. Problems abound with this material. First of all, his original work is not extant even in copied form. Our only evidence of its existence are quotations in Julius Africanus, Eusebius, and Josephus. How accurate are the quotations? How accurate was Manetho's material in the first place or the records which he used? What we do have is sometimes vague and open to a variety of interpretations. The result is a good deal of uncertainty and differing dates for the Egyptian pharaohs.

The second basis for dating is astronomical calculations based on the mention of phenomena in the skies as reported in Egyptian records. Again there are a lot of questions. Are the reports accurate? Do they refer to the events which we think they refer to? When the Egyptians refer to stars as they often do in their calculations, do we know for sure what stars they are talking about? Do we fully understand the Egyptian calendar and the

seasons to which the records refer? Scholars differ as to the amount of confidence with which they answer these and other questions. Again the point is made. It is not so much that the presently construed chronology for Egypt is wrong as it is uncertain. The problem for the question in front of us is obvious.

What are the dates for Egyptian history? Manetho's calculations evidently were fantastically high, often as much as four times higher than what is generally accepted today. The definitive work of the past generation on the history of Egypt accepted 3400 BC as the beginning of the first dynasty. The third edition of the Cambridge Ancient History (CAH) uses 3100 as the starting date. For the sake of our presentation, we are going to take the Biblical dates for a 15th century exodus and set them alongside the dates for Egyptian history as found in the 1973 updating of CAH.

If we follow this method, we have Jacob and his family coming to Egypt in 1887 BC. This would place the beginning of the time in Egypt at the end of the Middle Kingdom. Egypt at that time would still be practicing the policies prevalent in both the Old and Middle Kingdoms, that of splendid isolationism. It is not that Egypt had no contact with the world around it. It carried on trade throughout the eastern Mediterranean world. Its pharaohs at times conducted punitive military expeditions into Nubia to the south and Syria to the northeast. But it was not interested in domination except through the superiority of its culture. It allowed the Semites from the east to settle in the delta region, but kept a healthy distance from these foreign and "inferior" elements. Such a background would help explain the way Joseph coached his brothers on what to say before Pharaoh. "When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, 'What is your occupation?' you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians" (Gen. 46:33-34). The same kind of thing is referred to in Genesis 43:32 where it is related that the Egyptians would not eat with the Hebrews, a detestable thing to do.

Exodus 1:8 tells us that following the time of Joseph and his family "a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt." The first time that such a statement would fit is when the Hyksos invaded Egypt around 1730 BC, after the growing nation of Israel had been in Egypt for 147 years. That would mean that the oppression of the Israelites really began under these foreign kings. Some commentators point out also that the king's words in vv. 9-10 make better sense in the mouth of a Hyksos, "Look... the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." It seems more likely that Hyksos kings would be worried about elements of people in Egypt, even foreign elements like the Israelites, becoming too numerous in the delta region and joining the native Egyptians who were trying to muster enough strength in Upper Egypt to drive the Hyksos out.

It has also been suggested that the building of Rameses might have been labor which the Hyksos forced on Israel. Often the name of this city, which is equated with the Hyksos capital of Avaris, is relegated to later centuries when dynasties had kings with this name. But evidence does point to the possibility of this name having been used by the Hyksos in the delta much earlier, since the later pharaohs who did use the name Ramses may have had some ancestral relationship with the Hyksos. It also makes sense that the Hyksos would have Israel building in the delta since that is where their seat of power was located.

How the rest of chapter one of Exodus fits into Egyptian history is rather difficult to say. Who was the pharaoh or was it a series of pharaohs who increased the oppression of Israel and finally tried to destroy the entire nation by killing the male children and absorbing the female children into the Egyptian nation. Perhaps these events belong in that time following about 160 years of foreign domination in Egypt. Powerful noble families from Thebes in Upper Egypt finally succeeded in driving out the Hyksos and reuniting Egypt under the 18th dynasty. Were they also determined as much as possible to rid themselves of other Semitic elements dwelling in their midst by the final solution which they tried to force on Israel?

At any rate Moses was born in 1527 BC. This would be about the time that Thutmose I ascended the throne. He was the third king of the 18th dynasty. He does not seem to have been of high birth within the royal family. He was not directly descended from those families which had liberated Egypt, but his wife was.

Therefore, the legitimacy of his claim to the throne rested mainly on his wife in the eyes of Theban nobility. That marriage produced only one child who survived, a girl named Hatshepsut. Because of her mother's blood coursing through her veins, she was considered by many as having the most legitimate claim to the throne of her father, and this in spite of the Egyptian aversion to having a queen ruling the nation.

When Thutmose I died about 1512, Moses would have been about 15 years old. If Hatshepsut was the daughter of Pharaoh who found Moses, this means that for 12 or 13 years he had been dwelling in the palace under her protection. The successor of Thutmose I, Thutmose II, was a sickly son born of a lesser wife. His claim to the throne was strengthened by his marriage to his half-sister, Hatshepsut. He ruled for only five to seven years when he died because of his poor health. This left his son, Thutmose III, still a minor and unable to ascend to the throne. Hatshepsut became the regent for her son or possibly stepson, and very quickly after that she assumed the reins of power for herself. Thutmose III was cast into the shadows, a position he hated. Hatshepsut, this extremely talented and determined woman (and possibly Moses' protector), was the sovereign as her temple and obelisk inscriptions bear ample witness. She died when Moses was around forty, and Thutmose III came to power with a vengeance. He was determined to wipe out the name of his step-mother who had suppressed him so. He plastered up her obelisks and chiseled her name out of inscriptions. Her party of supporters fled for their lives in many cases. Could all of this have been taking place as Moses fled for his life out of Egypt? At least the possibility exists.

If all of this harmonization stands up, then Thutmose III would be the pharaoh who wanted to kill Moses and whose death is recorded in Exodus 4:19. He died around 1450 BC. Moses was 77 at the time. This would make the son of Thutmose III, Amenhotep II, the pharaoh before whom Moses and Aaron stood and demanded on the LORD's behalf, "Let my people go!"

What kind of men were Thutmose III and Amenhotep II? These were imperialistic empire builders. No nations with all their petty gods ever successfully resisted the onslaught of their armies for any period of time. Thutmose I already had led expeditions into Phoenicia and Syria. His grandson, Thutmose III, built on that effort, extending the power of Egypt to the east of the Euphrates River. In the years that he ruled by himself he stretched the borders of Egypt from southern Nubia in Africa up to the Euphrates River in the northeast. He was the greatest empire builder that the world had seen up to that time. He also put considerable effort into organizing and strengthening the administrative setup of his country. He truly was one of the most capable and energetic rulers of the ancient world.

Thutmose's son, Amenhotep II, evidently was a fitting heir of the great king. He was a bigger man than his father. A comparison of their mummies shows that. He boasted of his great strength and claimed that nobody in the Egyptian army could draw his bow. True, he didn't conduct as many military expeditions as his father did, but the reason seems to be that he didn't have to. The power of Egypt was too widely respected for anybody to get out of line. He claims, however, that the expeditions he did undertake were successful.

These pharaohs were sons of the gods, sons of Amon and gods in their own right. Now pharaohs of the Old and Middle Kingdoms had been considered divine as well. The difference, however, between earlier pharaohs and those of Moses' age was that the divinity of earlier pharaohs was a dogma of the Egyptian religion. The men of the 18th dynasty not only had religious teaching on their side, their raw power proclaimed their place in the pantheon. We should not be surprised at their arrogance. We can understand the contempt they heaped on Moses and the LORD with the words, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2).

Isn't it amazing when the LORD decides to act? At the time when Egypt was the strongest, when her power was uncontested, the LORD calls a humble shepherd and begins to implement his plan of deliverance.

## Presenation #2: Moses, the Pupil

Nobody argues with the assertion that if a person is planning to enter upon a vocation that requires wisdom, skill and maturity, he needs some time of preparation. He will be well served by a formal education in those disciplines that provide him with the knowledge that he will be called upon to use later. He will benefit from some practical experience, on-the-job training if you will, to show him how the knowledge he has gained should be wisely used. Moreover, he needs time to grow up, to mature to the point where his judgment is sound and sober, rather than superficial and rash. How long should a person devote to this preparatory time of his life? A third of his years? That seems to be the thinking among us when we train a future pastor in most cases until his 25th or 26th year, and then send him out to serve for a period of time which, if the Lord wills it, may be double that of his preparation.

But now consider the time which the LORD used in preparing Moses. Moses lived for 120 years; so says Deut. 34:7. The time that he spent as leader of Israel was 40 years. Num. 14:34 says, “For 40 years – one year for each of the forty days you explored the land – you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.” Deut. 2:14 indicates that Israel received credit for time already served on that sentence when Moses says, “Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh-Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley.” If you add those thirty-eight years to the two years which Num. 10:11 says Israel spent at Mt. Sinai, you come up with the years which the LORD said they would wander in the wilderness.

It is something we all know, and yet it amazes me every time I consider it: Moses was 80 years old when God called him to his life’s work. I don’t know if you expect to be active in the ministry or even alive and kicking by your eightieth birthday. Imagine just getting started at that time the way Moses did. Surely the time of preparation which the LORD granted Moses helps us appreciate the awesome responsibility which he was laying on Moses’ shoulders. That point may escape our people if we do not point it out to them. After all, the events of the first 80 years of Moses’ life are covered in just the second chapter of Exodus. The many remaining chapters of the Pentateuch are devoted to his final 40 years.

The question might be asked, “Is it really fair to call Moses a pupil all those years?” His time under the protection of the daughter of Pharaoh is the only period of his life which is described as a time of formal education. The word, “pupil,” is a fair one to use if we mean by it a time of preparation. Stephen tells us in Acts 7:23 that Moses’ Egyptian period lasted for forty years. How much of this time was spent in formal education we do not know, but all of those years certainly helped to prepare him for a leadership role. The next period of time which also lasted forty years (see Acts 7:30) was spent in the wilderness areas in which the tribe of Midian roamed. But surely these years were part of Moses’ education whether he realized it or not, There he received practical training in a most difficult aspect of his future work. If leading a nation of some two million people was difficult enough under ideal conditions, leading it while moving back and forth through the wilderness of Sinai was much worse. Moses needed all the training beforehand that he could get. The LORD in his wisdom and goodness provided it.

So we turn our attention to Exodus 2 and attempt to flesh out the long period of time from Moses’ birth to his call at Sinai under the theme: Moses: The Pupil.

### I. The Birth of Moses

The events of Exodus 1 reveal an escalating oppression of the Israelites, the climax to which is the birth of Moses. First, we are told that the Egyptians oppressed them with forced labor. That really didn’t single out the Israelites. Other minority groups and Egyptian peasants themselves experienced years of forced labor building the glorious structures and defenses of Egypt. But things got worse. The more the Israelites were oppressed, the more the protection and blessing of the LORD was in evidence as they multiplied and spread. The Scriptures report that the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly. But even this didn’t control the growth or national cohesiveness of Israel. So, the pharaoh turned to more drastic measures. He called in two Hebrew mid-wives,



who may have been the leaders of a guild of such women, and he said that they were to kill the male Hebrew children as they were born. When these women told him that it simply wasn't humanly possible for them to carry out this order, Pharaoh made his will known nationwide. The order he gave to all his people is recorded in Exodus 1:22: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." He turned the nation of Egypt into a police state where every citizen was encouraged to report any illegal or even suspicious action of his neighbor, maybe with the promise of reward. This state of affairs made the native Egyptians the enemies of all Israelites, and surely must have encouraged Israelites to betray each other. What a most unlikely time for the future deliverer of Israel to be born. What chance did he have of surviving his infancy, much less the adulthood the LORD had planned?

And yet Stephen says, "ἐν καιρῷ," at just the right time, the favorable time in the LORD's eyes, Moses was born. Looking at the tremendous power of Egypt at that time, at the height of its political glory, and looking at the severity of the persecution, we might be tempted to ask, "Did the LORD make a mistake? Wouldn't there have been a more favorable time?" The LORD, however, was not acting according to our wisdom, but rather according to his wisdom which all the more accentuates his might and glory, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:27, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." At just the time when Egypt was using its considerable resources to the maximum to destroy Israel, God caused the man to be born who would perform exactly what they were trying to prevent.

Exodus 2 begins, "Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son." Again the LORD surprises us. The tribe of Levi isn't exactly the place from which we would have expected the deliverer to come. After all that tribe hardly had distinguished itself in the past. Its ancestor, along with Simeon, had treacherously destroyed the inhabitants of the city of Shechem. Perhaps the reason for the attack was understandable, resulting as it did from the rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah. The uncontrollable rage and the way that rage took the law into its own hands, however, was unacceptable to the LORD as he indicated through the prophetic blessing (really a curse) which Jacob spoke on Levi and Simeon in Genesis 49:7: "Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel." The fact that this dispersing would later become a blessing for Levi was unknown at Moses' birth. At this time the question certainly had to be asked, "What good can come out of Levi?" Israel would not have looked for its national savior there. Again the LORD's wisdom prevails.

Who were this man and woman of the house of Levi? Exodus 6:20 seems to give a clear answer: Amram married his father's sister, Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses." Both Numbers 26:59 and 1 Chronicles 23:13 say the same thing. But there is a problem here. In all three of the above-mentioned Scripture passages Amram is mentioned as third in line of descent from Levi. That would make him Levi's grandson and Moses Levi's great-grandchild. Are four generations enough to cover the 430 years which Israel spent in Egypt, especially in view of the fact that in 1 Chronicles 7:23-27 eleven generations are listed between Ephraim, a generation behind Levi, and Joshua, a younger contemporary of Moses?

The other part of the problem has to do with the number of the Kohathites who were living during Moses' lifetime. Kohath would have been Moses' grandfather according to Exodus 6:18. When the Israelites were numbered in the wilderness, Numbers 3:27-28 reports, "To Kohath belonged the clans of the Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites and Uzzielites; these were the Kohathite clans. The number of all the males a month old or more was 8600...." Following strict chronological ancestry in Exodus 6 would mean that these were all Moses' brothers, uncles or first cousins.

This evidence shows that we probably have a genealogy with generations skipped in Exodus 6 rather than a chronological list. Perhaps Moses' father's name was Amram, but he had to be a later descendent of the Amram from whom the clan of the Amramites descended. Perhaps he was named after his forefather from whom his clan took its name. At any rate, Moses followed Levi at a much greater distance than the fourth generation. There are at least two possible reasons why only four generations are mentioned in Exodus 6. First of all the words in Exodus and elsewhere may be following a pattern established by the LORD's words to

Abraham recorded in Genesis 15:16, “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites’ has not yet reached its full measure.” To Abraham God could speak of four generations. Since Isaac hadn’t been born until Abraham was 100 years old, Abraham could identify one generation with one hundred years. Four generations would then approximately equal the 430 years that Israel spent in Egypt. The generations of Moses’ time covered a shorter period of time. However, by mentioning only four generations the record is testifying that the advent of Moses and what he accomplished was the fulfillment of the LORD’s promise to Abraham. Genealogies often are constructed in such a way as to teach a lesson. The lesson here is that the LORD was faithful to his word. The deliverance from a foreign land promised to Abraham was about to take place.

A second possibility for the form of Moses’ genealogy is that people were often introduced and identified by their tribe (שֵׁבֶט), clan (מִשְׁפָּחָה), and family (בֵּית אָבִי) [cf. Joshua 7:16-17]. This method thoroughly defined a person’s place in the chosen nation. If that is the case here, Moses is being introduced formally as a man from the tribe of Levi, the clan of Kohath, and the family of Amram.

Moses was his parents’ third child. They already had a son three years old and a daughter at least nine or ten. What joy must have filled their hearts as they saw their newborn son. But this child also brought a special burden and anxiety into their lives. Since their other children had been born, the terrible decree had gone into effect: “All Israelite male children are to be killed.” With the situation as it was, they must have felt that the very walls themselves had eyes and mouths, seeing and getting ready to report to the authorities that an Israelite male child had been born. Of course, the first reaction of these parents was the reaction that any parent worthy of the name would have: protect the child from the terrible fate decreed for it.

But there was more to the actions of this husband and wife than just parental concern. The writer to the Hebrews says, “By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because... they were not afraid of the king’s edict.” Why weren’t they afraid? Did they have a special revelation from God indicating that this child was someone special, that he was under the LORD’s protection because the LORD had a special task for this child to perform? That is what Josephus thought. He claimed that the LORD spoke to Moses’ parents as follows:

That child, out of dread of whose nativity the Egyptians have doomed the Israelite children to destruction, shall be this child of yours, and he shall be concealed from those who watch to destroy him; and when he is brought up in a surprising way, he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they are under from the Egyptians. (*Antiquities*, Book 9)

Such a revelation would not be uncharacteristic of God. He did so announce the birth of Samson to Manoah and his wife, also telling them what his mission in life would be. Of course, there is also the example of the angel announcing the Savior’s birth to Mary.

Such a solution is not necessary, and the Scriptures do not suggest it, but Moses’ parents did know something. First of all, there were the promises that we have already mentioned which the LORD made to Abraham. After 400 years the deliverance would come and Israel would be relieved of its suffering. With Moses’ birth the end of that period of time was only fifty years away. Then there was the confidence displayed by the patriarchs, Jacob and Joseph. They both insisted on being buried in Canaan because that is where their descendants would be living. Surely these promises of the LORD and the examples of the men who believed them were preserved and were part of the spiritual heritage that supported the faith of this persecuted people.

Then, too, both Exodus, Acts, and Hebrews indicate that the reason why the parents were willing to disobey the law of the land and take such extraordinary precautions to save their son was because they saw that he was a “fair child.” So the NIV translates the Hebrew, “טוֹב,” or “no ordinary child,” so the NIV renders the Greek, “ἀσταιος, acceptable, well-pleasing, well-formed”, of both Stephen and the writer to the Hebrews. These verses seem to express more than just the natural reaction of parents to their child, that he was the most

beautiful child ever born. Whether by divine revelation or not, these parents saw a child who was special, acceptable to God, which seems to be the understanding of the Greek word, especially when it appears with the phrase, “τῷ θεῷ,” Whether they knew the specifics or not, they seemed to sense that the LORD was going to use this child for something special. They would do what was necessary to preserve him, and the LORD would bless their efforts to do so.

Don't you also get the same feeling about Moses' mother when after three months she realized that she could no longer successfully hide her son in her house? What did she do? She got a small papyrus basket and placed her son inside. Then she laid it in the reeds along the shore of the Nile and posted her daughter to see what would happen. I hope it is not just because I know what actually did happen that makes me feel this way, but it seems to me that Moses' mother did not actually expect her son to perish. She maybe didn't know what the LORD had in mind, but she was certain that he would be saved. Otherwise her actions were hardly a solution to her desperate situation. Miriam's offer to Pharaoh's daughter to find a wet-nurse also seems like something that Miriam and her mother had planned to do as soon as it was clear how the LORD was going to act.

If the actions of Moses' mother were in a sense a way of asking the LORD what his plans for her son were, she didn't have to wait long for the truly amazing answer. If the LORD was going to protect this child, what better way than to put him under the protection of a daughter of Pharaoh, perhaps even the great daughter of Pharaoh, Hatshepsut herself. If that same LORD was going to use this child to deliver Israel, what better way to ground him in the knowledge of who he was and where he really belonged, than by leaving him with his mother during those early, formative years. Maybe Pharaoh's daughter even allowed Moses' mother to visit him after he had been taken to the palace to live. It is possible he knew she was his birth mother.

One more point demands our attention from these very early days of Moses' life. Exodus 2:10 says, “She [Pharaoh's daughter] named him Moses, saying, ‘I drew him out of the water.’” This verse indicates that Moses received an Egyptian name, and yet the significance which is attached to it in the Bible is definitely a Hebrew one. As in so many of these questions there is no definitive answer. But that does not mean that these words ought to be dismissed as a hopeless corruption or contradiction either. The form of the name certainly is Hebrew. It is the Qal active participle of מִשָּׁה, which occurs only in 2 Samuel 22:17 and its parallel in Psalm 18:16. It means to draw out of water. What is that word doing in the mouth of an Egyptian princess?

First of all, we can speculate that if this princess was not Hatshepsut, she may have been a Semite. Thutmose III boasts about the many hostages including women and children whom he carried away from his successful campaigns in Syria. Certainly some of these women, especially those of royal blood found their way into Pharaoh's harem and bore his children. To some daughters of Pharaoh, Canaanite may have been a first language. That could also explain the way her heart went out to a baby who was obviously Hebrew.

The name may also have an Egyptian source. Josephus felt that it came from an Egyptian root that like the Hebrew meant, “saved from the water.” Many modern scholars turn to the component in so many Egyptian names, “mose” or “mosis.” In such names the component means, “born of.” Perhaps Moses was only part of his Egyptian name, and maybe it was in a different form. Then, when he identified with the Israelite cause, he changed the name slightly. At any rate whether this Egyptian princess intended it or not, the name she gave her adopted son reminded her of her experience in finding Moses, and later it served the same purpose in the Hebrew language.

Martin Buber in his work entitled, “Moses, the Revelation and the Covenant,” suggests that later on the name took on further significance, referring not only to what happened to Moses, but also to the deliverance God brought about through Moses. He refers to Isaiah 63:11 in which the phrase “מִשָּׁה עַמּוֹ” occurs. The NIV, translates this phrase, “Moses and his people,” but there is no conjunctive vav. Buber suggests that it is a play on Moses' name and actually means the one who drew his people out of the water, using the rescue at the Red Sea as representative of Moses' entire mission of deliverance. At any rate Moses' name was very meaningful both to his stepmother and to the nation of Israel.

## **II. The Egyptian Prince**

Exodus only suggests that Moses was educated in the court like any other member of the royal family. Stephen, however, states it directly when he reports in Acts 7:22, “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” What does that brief comment all imply?

As a little child Moses may very well have played in the same way as children of noblemen are depicted as playing on tomb paintings which often display scenes of everyday life. They had toys such as tops. One scene shows a little child playing with a row of dancing dwarfs on a platform, probably made out of wood, who jumped up and down by means of a string.

When he got older, he probably was trained to hunt and use the weapons of war. This especially meant practice in archery and the use of the chariot, two things that had become very popular in Egypt both for war and recreation since their introduction by the Hyksos.

Most important, however, was the formal education which Moses no doubt received. First of all and foremost, he learned how to write. Hieroglyphics and several cursive variations of it were popular. Primitive letters of the Phoenician alphabet have also been discovered from about this time at the turquoise mines run by Egypt in Sinai, and manned by Semites who were either slaves or hired men. The consonantal alphabet may have been coming into use at this time in Canaan. Although it never caught on in Egypt, it may be that Moses became acquainted with such writing from Semites living in Egypt. Whatever the case may be, Moses did learn to express himself in writing, a skill which was to become so important later on.

The student Moses no doubt would have studied the wisdom literature from the golden age of Egyptian literary development in the Middle Kingdom period. He probably knew the story of Sinuhe, an Egyptian courtier who left his homeland and spent many years among the Bedouin of the Syro-Palestinian region. He stayed there until he reached old age and then was welcomed back to the wonderful land of Egypt.

Mathematics also would have been an area of study for Moses. He could have become familiar with the Egyptian calendar of 365 days. He could have studied the principles involved in monument building and the mathematics involved in reestablishing the property boundaries which were wiped out every year when the Nile flooded. Other mathematical principles such as the Pythagorean theorem seem to have been known and applied in Egypt.

In many ways Moses no doubt was an Egyptian. He must have practiced what he learned for Stephen says (Act 7:22) that he was “powerful in speech and action.” This sounds like he was an orator of note and something like a general in the army [cf. intertestamental writings and the movie, “The Ten Commandments”]. His dress also must have identified Moses as an Egyptian for the Midianite women later mistake him for one.

## **III. Moses, the Israelite Fugitive**

But all of this was destined to change. Stephen reveals (Acts 7:23) that when Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. We don’t know why he had this urge. Perhaps it was the training and identity which his mother had given him in his earliest years. Perhaps it can be attributed to some ongoing influence that she had on him, but regardless of what caused it, Moses took this drastic step. What he was actually doing by visiting the Israelites was casting his lot with them. The writer to the Hebrews describes it this way, “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 pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26). Moses’ identification with the Israelites then was not simply the unfortunate result of a rash action involving the killing of an Egyptian overseer. It was a conscious choice which Moses made because of the faith that the LORD had instilled in his heart.

Moses was ready for action. He was a man of destiny who would deliver his people from bondage. Perhaps the scope of the deliverance was unformed in Moses' mind, but he obviously felt that God had chosen him to be a rescuer, and why not considering the position God had granted him within the nation of Egypt. Now the 400 years revealed to Abraham were only ten years from completion. Surely, the time for deliverance had come and Moses was the deliverer. With that confidence he jumped into action. The killing of the overseer was the initial blow. But the fullness of time had not come as yet. The people certainly were not ready for deliverance. If asked, I'm sure they would have voiced their desire to escape oppression, but they were not ready to take action and follow a leader. Stephen says in Acts 7:25, "Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not." Furthermore, God had not sanctioned this particular act of Moses. Murder was not going to be his way, and 1487 BC was not his time. He had another plan, one that would unfold very slowly over the next forty years. Moses had the right idea, but the wrong time and way. Therefore, Moses' actions came to naught. Even his oppressed people rejected him. One of the Israelites who were fighting the next day after the killing had a good point when he asked Moses, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" (Acts 7:28).

This raises the question, "If Moses was so willing to act as deliverer of his people at this time, even risking his own life, why does Exodus 2:14 describe him as being afraid?" The case of Peter on Maundy Thursday provides some answers. Peter was more than willing to stand by Jesus, defend him and even lose his life for his master. This was the case as long as he could do things his way and accomplish goals that he thought were worthy of the Christ. But when Jesus revealed that rash displays of force were not his way, Peter's resolve turned to jelly, so that later in the evening he couldn't even confront a maidservant successfully. So it was with Moses. Once he realized that his plan was not going to fly, that neither the LORD nor the people were supporting him, we are told in Exodus 2:14, "Then Moses was afraid and thought, 'What I did must have become known.'" What a blow to Moses' self-confidence! No wonder he was more than a little reluctant to answer the LORD's call when it finally did come. Moreover, Moses' youthful zeal was gone, and the way in which God intended to accomplish his purpose simply didn't appeal to Moses as an effective way of carrying out the deliverance.

In this connection we should look at Hebrews 11:27 which reads, "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger." There seems to be a contradiction here. Exodus says Moses left Egypt in fear. Hebrews makes a point of saying that he was not afraid. If the writer to the Hebrews is following strict chronological order here, then this fearless departure from Egypt is referring to the first time Moses left and not the second because the next verse talks about celebrating the Passover. But Hebrews may not be following the chronological order here. A few verses later the fall of Jericho is mentioned, and that is followed by the actions of the prostitute Rahab as she welcomes the spies, an activity that actually preceded the fall of Jericho.

(Lenski on this verse in Hebrews: Patristic exegesis thinks of the flight to Midian, and it has some following. But this was a flight; and it was due to fear; and there was no steadfastness about it. To say that Moses went to Midian in order to bide his time until Israel's deliverance, is to controvert the facts; for Moses fled in discouragement, and when the time of deliverance came, God had to compel him to return as the deliverer.

*κατέλιπεν* means that Moses left Egypt behind never to return. This did not occur when he fled to Midian but when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt. "Not fearing the anger of the king" means that this time he did not fear as he did when he fled to Midian full of fear.)

So we have to assume that Moses' fearless departure from Egypt took place at the head of the nation of Israel leaving Egypt after the Passover. But now at the age of forty, a willing and able deliverer leaves Egypt in disgrace, thoroughly disillusioned and perhaps a little bitter.

Not much is said about the forty years which followed Moses' flight. The people who remained in Egypt continued to be trained in the LORD's furnace of affliction. They may not have been ready to accept a deliverer in the time and manner of Moses, but in the years that followed their desire for deliverance grew. At the end of Exodus, chapter 2, the words are recorded for the first time, "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God."

Meanwhile, Moses entered upon the second forty years of his training. He fled to the Midianites, a nomadic desert tribe also descended from Abraham through the wife he married after Sarah's death, Keturah. Their wilderness range at that time included the western and northern portions of the Arabian Peninsula and the eastern regions of the Sinai Peninsula. The fact that Exodus 3:1 reports that Moses led his flocks to “אֶרֶץ הַמִּדְבָּר,” (KJV – “the back of the desert,” NIV – “the far side of the desert”) indicates that Sinai was on the western edge of the territory in which they roamed. For “אֶרֶץ” can be translated “the west side” of the desert.

Here Moses became thoroughly acquainted with the nomadic life; and here he married one of the daughters of the priest of Midian, Zipporah. Maybe after a time Moses became content to lead the nomadic life, out of contact with his people; but at least in the early years of this exile he was dissatisfied, for he gave his firstborn son the name Gershom, because he said, “I have become an alien in a foreign land” (Exodus 2:22).

As we close this portion of the presentation, we should look at the state of the faith of Moses and the Israelites. Things could not have been perfect. There must have been some accommodation to or in some cases complete allegiance to Egyptian religion. Joshua told the people at the end of his career in Joshua 24:14, “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.” If the golden calf incident showed Egyptian influence, then that worship was adopted quite smoothly for a people who had kept themselves totally separate from Egyptian religion. And yet, there are indications that for the most part the Israelites remained faithful to the LORD throughout their 430-year stay in Egypt. They had God's promises made to the patriarchs as we indicated before. Acts and Hebrews make it clear that at least Moses' parents acted the way they did out of faith in the LORD's goodness and a confidence that he would be faithful to his promises of deliverance. Unless there was a mass circumcision of Israelites in Egypt right before the exodus, which is unlikely, the report of Joshua 5:5 indicates that they were practicing that most important rite during the years in Egypt. That verse reads, “All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not.” This is important because circumcision was more than just a divinely mandated ritual. It was the visible sign of Israel's faith in the covenant promises that the LORD had made with his people (See Gen. 17:9ff).

The New Testament witnesses also indicate that Moses acted the way he did out of faith, at least as long as he was in Egypt. His spiritual conduct in the desert is a closed book. We don't know anything about the religion of the Midianites. Perhaps it was a corruption of the worship of the true God. After all, they could call Abraham their ancestor. Some remnants of the truth may have remained. Circumcision was not practiced, however. Exodus 4:24 reports that Moses was negligent in not circumcising his son; and the implication of that report is that his negligence was due to the objections his wife had about circumcision. The practice was barbaric as far as she was concerned. The promises made to Israel that were connected to it do not seem to have been important to her. This was a matter that had to be resolved before Moses was qualified to serve as leader of God's people.

It took a long time, eighty years of preparation. But in God's eyes every year of that time was necessary. The Israelites may have been tempted to despair during that time, when the time was right, that period ended, the bush began to burn. God was ready.

## **Presentation #3: “Moses, the Prophet”**

“The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him.” With these words the inspired writer Hosea (12:13) describes the position into which the LORD placed Moses and the way in which he used Moses to carry out his will concerning his people. Moses may have been many things as he marched at the head of the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt: a returned exile, a champion of the oppressed, a savior and liberator, a charismatic leader, but he was first of all and foremost a prophet, yes the prophet supreme of the one true God, the LORD God of Israel. It is that aspect of Moses’ life that we wish to consider in this presentation, taking most, but not all, our material from the book of Exodus.

I admit that it may be something of an artificial division to try to separate Moses the prophet from Moses the political leader which we will discuss in the next session. There will be some overlap, for instance, in his call which we will speak of now. Then the LORD called Moses to be his prophet-leader without trying to divide between the two aspects of his position. However, in order to appreciate the different aspects of Moses’ work, we will attempt to make the division. Please understand if at times we stray a little for the sake of continuity from one sphere to the other.

### **I. The Reluctant Prophet**

How different that person was who stood in front of the burning bush from that rash self-appointed champion who fled from Egypt 40 years before. He was in the region of Sinai on this day simply because he was doing a nomad’s work, tending the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. Over 40 years the dissatisfaction at being “an alien in a foreign land” must have died down. The liberator’s fire which had shone in his eyes was gone now. At the age of 80 the grand plans of his youth had faded away,

Again we might be tempted to second guess the LORD and advise him that he was making a mistake. At one time, half a lifetime earlier, Moses might have been suitable material out of which to mold a deliverer for Israel. But now the opportunity to use this man was gone. However, it is at this unlikely time that the LORD decided to act.

The curiosity which brought Moses to take a closer look at the burning bush quickly turned to fear when the Angel of the LORD introduced himself: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). (NOTE: The Being who speaks to Moses is both the messenger of the LORD and the LORD himself. No wonder teachers in the church have identified him with the pre-incarnate Christ.) If Moses still felt anything for his oppressed people, however, that understandable fear of the holy God must have turned to joy when the LORD revealed his purpose for appearing: “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians” (Exodus 3:7-8). “GOOD!” Moses must have thought, “the LORD isn’t blind and deaf after all. Finally he is going to do something for a nation which he claims as his people.”

It is the next statement that both surprised and stunned Moses. “So now go,” the LORD said. “I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). His words quickly brought a reply to Moses’ lips.

The attitude which Moses displayed in reacting to the LORD’s call is often used as an example of the typical lack of enthusiasm and confidence with which God’s people face the responsibilities and opportunities for service which the LORD lays in front of them. Although the application may be valid, let us not forget that this reaction of Moses was not just typical indifference or a lack of trust in the LORD’s willingness to help. It had a history behind it. Moses could hardly believe what he was hearing. Why would God decide to act now and in the way in which he was planning to operate, when Moses had had a better time and a better way 40 years earlier?

It's no wonder that Moses responded the way he did: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). "Remember me? I'm the one who willingly gave up my position, fame and fortune and cast my lot with my people. I even struck a blow for freedom. And what did you do? You left me out on a limb. You rejected my efforts, and you as much as said that you were not ready yet. Well, if I wasn't the right person in the right place at that time, I'm certainly not now. If you couldn't profitably use me as an influential Egyptian prince (here Moses would have reminded the LORD of whatever Stephen was referring to when he described Moses as powerful in speech and action), how do you expect to successfully use me as an aged shepherd from the wilderness?" (It is somewhat like jumping into a 1959 army tank which was put into storage at that time because it wasn't an adequate piece of equipment anymore and saying, "Now, let's go out and win a war.")

"And what about the people? What if they do not listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'? (Cf. Exodus 4:1). After all, they didn't listen or accept me the last time I offered my assistance to them. Why would they act differently now in even more difficult circumstances?"

"And don't forget," Moses reminded the LORD, "I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." (Exodus 4:11) Here Moses exaggerated if we are to believe the testimony of Stephen. Moses seems to have been quite eloquent in Egypt before his flight, but the space of 40 years and perhaps the disappointment that his considerable gifts were not used at that time caused Moses to speak as he did. As he stood before the LORD in Sinai, Moses may very well have had a point. One hardly increases his oratorical abilities lecturing for nearly a half century to sheep (the real kind, not the kind you speak to). The rustiness of his skills added to the low ebb of his confidence at this time and made his words more truthful than he might have wished them to be.

But the LORD was not to be denied. "I will be with you," he teaches Moses. With these words the LORD really got at Moses' basic problem. Moses was constantly focusing on what he had to offer. Looking at what he was and what he could do earlier in his life, Moses was confident of success. He was now equally certain of failure for the same reason. Moses looked at himself and he wasn't very impressed with what he had to offer. The LORD wanted Moses to realize that the LORD's presence and his blessing is always what makes the difference between success and failure. Sending Moses at this time would make that truth all the more evident, and God would have the glory. The LORD assured Moses that he would not be going alone. He promised his presence, miraculous signs of confirmation, the mouth of Aaron, and success in bringing Israel to Sinai to worship the LORD.

Promises are just words coming from many lips, but coming from the LORD they are certainties. Moses had exclaimed, "Who am I?" He asked this with good reason, for he was nothing. He would accomplish nothing. In contrast the one true God declared himself to be "אֱלֹהֵי אֲשֶׁר אֱלֹהֵי". This was the independent, sovereign God who was speaking to Moses and encouraging him. He would deal with his people in free and faithful grace which would flow out of him. This would not be the case because the people had earned it or called it forth with their pleas, but simply because he is who he is. The cause for his love rests within him. Moses had no need to fear that this LORD would ever forsake him. To do so would be to deny himself, an absolute impossibility. In fact in carrying out this great deliverance the LORD would add new meaning to his name. To Israel the "Tetragrammaton" would signify more regarding his sovereign grace than the patriarchs had ever dreamed of. So the LORD consoled Moses in Egypt after his first appearance before Pharaoh. That appearance hadn't worked out so well. In fact, it had made matters worse. So the LORD reminded him, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites; 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will, redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment'" (Exodus 6:3-6).



Referring to his career as the LORD's prophet which would span the rest of his life, the LORD assured Moses, "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:42). Moses' answer was hardly an exemplary one: "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." That was when the LORD became angry, not when Moses doubted himself, but he doubted the LORD, that he would keep his word. The next thing we see is Moses going back to his father-in-law's camp to pack his bags and say good-bye.

Moses had received his call as the LORD's prophet-leader, and he had been imposed upon to accept it, reluctantly. He went, but his lack of confidence had not as yet disappeared, for even in Egypt after his first abortive attempt to convince Pharaoh of the wisdom of releasing the Israelites, we hear him complaining, "if the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips" (Exodus 6:12). If we had watched the real Moses (and not Charleton Heston) stand before Pharaoh and make his request, we might have agreed with him. He really wasn't the right man for the job, too tentative, not forceful enough.

But a faithful God did not forget his word. He did not forsake his prophet. Certainly that was clear to Moses when the LORD laid the ultimate sign before him. That sign was not found in the miracles which Moses was able to perform with his staff or hand. It wasn't even found in the powerful plagues which Moses was able to announce and which then came without fail. Rather the LORD had assured his prophet, "...this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). We do not know exactly how long a time elapsed from the time Moses left Midian until the time when Israel followed Moses out of Egypt. At best guess it was between nine months and a year. At any rate, Moses did not have to wait long for the evidence the LORD promised to provide. He tells us, "in the third month after the Israelites left Egypt – on the very day – they came to the Desert of Sinai." (Exodus 19:1)

## **II. The Confrontational Prophet**

Let us now look at the prophetic career of Moses. Rather than doing that chronologically which you can do for yourself by simply reading, especially the books of Exodus and Numbers and to some extent the book of Deuteronomy, let's look at the various aspects of this part of Moses' life. We will see that in some respects it was similar to the careers of other prophets who succeeded him, and in other ways it was unique.

The first thing that strikes us is that Moses was given prophecies which brought the Word of God directly to the enemies of Israel. Moses is hardly unique in that he spoke against the hostile nations around Israel. Many other prophets did the same. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Zechariah immediately come to mind. But excluding the mission of Jonah and some of the words of Jeremiah, it is questionable whether those prophecies ever reached the ears of those against whom they were spoken. Moses' prophecies surely did.

"I am sending you to Pharaoh," the LORD proclaimed. Moses knew the staggering implications of these words. The LORD was sending him to the most powerful nation in the world at the height of its political glory. He was to confront the most secure and mighty of rulers who considered himself the equal of the gods of Egypt or of anywhere else, and he was to say, "Thus says the LORD." No prophet was ever asked to do more.

Then add to this the fact that Moses' words were such that Pharaoh and his officials could hardly afford to ignore them. If Moses had come with a message similar to the messages which many of the prophets later brought against the nations of the area, Pharaoh simply could have laughed it off. Doom? Destruction? Against Egypt? Yeah, right!! Who needs to pay attention to the words of some lowly shepherd prophet?

But this was not the thrust of Moses' message. Yes, destruction would follow disregarding the LORD's command, but chiefly Moses' message was a challenge. It demanded action from Pharaoh. It suggested rebellion. The words could be just powerful enough to awaken the suppressed spirit of the Israelites and incite them to make trouble for the Egyptians. That is why Pharaoh not only scoffed at Moses' words with his well-known answer, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go," but he also took immediate steps to convince the Israelites that they would be best off ignoring this prophet's provocative words and his

rebellious leadership. It would only make their situation worse. This certainly is what made Pharaoh decide that heavier demands must be made of the Israelites, that they must be given less time to sit around complaining, dreaming and conspiring. No wonder that Moses approached his first encounter with Pharaoh rather tentatively, and why he was quite disheartened with its outcome. The ability of his message to arouse civil disobedience and disorder was great. That put Moses' life in danger and threatened to be the straw that broke the camel's back as far as the burden upon Israel was concerned. It isn't any wonder that the LORD had to encourage and reassure his prophet after this first, unpromising meeting.

### **III. The Rejected Prophet**

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you....” So Jesus lamented in the last week of his ministry on earth. Rejection and hardness of heart were the stone walls that most of the prophets encountered. Moses was no different. He, too, faced rejection and the refusal to listen. Pharaoh's rejection is no surprise. We would hardly have expected him to act any differently. And the LORD prepared Moses for this situation. He warned Moses that Pharaoh would scoff at his words and balk at his demands. In fact God tells Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart so that in the end, as a result of his unbelief, he would be incapable of receiving Moses favorably. For this rejection Moses was well prepared, and after the initial hesitancy we do not see him worrying about it anymore.

What was surprising and devastating to Moses was the rejection he endured at the hands of his own people. Maybe we can understand it at first, when it looked like Moses' return was only going to increase the troubles of the nation. Even Moses appreciated that, for he cried out to God, “O LORD, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all” (Exodus 5:24-25). (Jeremiah wasn't the only prophet of Israel who could address the LORD with strong and accusing words.)

But after the LORD had faithfully fulfilled his word, after he had brought the people out of Egypt with “an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment,” after the Israelites had seen, what was left of the Egyptian army scattered dead on the shores of the Red Sea, then the rejection is quite a bit harder to understand. Yet this is what Moses encountered.

The complaining of Israel on the shores of the Red Sea is typical of the kind of opposition Moses faced. The Israelites said rather sarcastically, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.” (Exodus 14:11). A distortion of the past and a rejection of all promises for the future characterized their complaining.

This complaining did not end when the threat of the Egyptian army was gone. When the Israelites couldn't see where their next meal was coming from, when a necessary drink to quench their thirst was not immediately in sight, similar words flowed freely from their mouths. For Moses that rejection at the hands of Israel was not contained in mere words. At times even his life was in danger. “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me” (Exodus 17:4), Moses cried out at Meribah on the way to Sinai. Pharaoh wasn't the only one who endangered Moses' life.

Scripture makes clear to us the reason for this rejection of Moses. The LORD revealed to Isaiah what the effect of his prophesying would be. He said, “Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (6:10). Unbelief would greet the prophet's message. A hardening of heart would be the result brought on by divine justice. Such was the case with Isaiah; such was the case with Moses. So the writer of Psalm 95 revealed as he warned the people of his day about rejecting the LORD's revealed grace. He said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry

with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest’” (vv.7-11).

But certainly the most painful rejection which Moses experienced was at the hands of his own family. Miriam and Aaron also rejected the office of prophet which Moses held, or at least they rejected its uniqueness. The outward reason for this rejection was the fact that Moses had married a Cushite [cf. Numbers 12]. Zipporah may not have been at the center of this strife. It is questionable whether Zipporah from Midian could have been called a Cushite, unless they were using a derisive racial term from Egypt which might be applied as an uncomplimentary name even to somebody who wasn’t racially a Cushite. Then Moses’ siblings were simply calling Zipporah names. Furthermore, we would have expected any objection to her within Moses’ family to have been raised much earlier. Zipporah may well have died by this time since we do not hear of her again. Moses might have taken a new wife either from some tribe of Cushites in the wilderness, or what is more likely, she was part of the mixed multitude which came out of Egypt with the Israelites. Moses’ relatives felt that because Moses had married this inferior, he didn’t deserve a position over them.

This woman was the excuse Miriam and Aaron put forth to question Moses’ prophetic authority, which was the thing that really bothered them. They were the ancient version of the church member who questions the authority of the call to the public ministry on the basis of the universal priesthood. “We all are ministers,” such a person might say. Or, maybe more exactly, they resemble called workers in the church who are jealous or resentful of the scope of the pastor’s call in the congregation. “Hasn’t he (the LORD) also spoken through us?” they complained. The gist of their complaint was, “we are just as important, just as necessary, and just as honored by the LORD as our brother is. He is nothing special.” Of course, with such complaining may go the implication: “and his call and his message isn’t that special and important either.”

What was Moses’ reaction to such unwarranted rejection especially since the rejection was aimed at his office as much as his person? To answer that question we might look at a passage which has often troubled commentators of the Pentateuch. Numbers 12:3 reads, “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.” Some commentators have simply dismissed this passage as the gloss of a later, admiring scribe. The NIV whether it means to do so or not, I feel, lends credibility to this understanding by putting the verse into parentheses. We might add that the possibility that this verse is a gloss always exists. The only trouble is that we have no textual evidence that would allow us to so explain the words, so that such an interpretation remains in the area of speculation. Historical-critical scholars have used this verse as one bit of evidence to deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Moses never could have written these words about himself, they say. If he did, then he revealed himself to be the exact opposite of what the words say about him.

We can understand these words as coming from the mouth or pen of Moses, however, if we look a little more closely at them and the context. These words describe Moses as he faces a challenge to his leadership and to his right to act as the prophet of the LORD among the people. Couldn’t this statement be understood as a restatement of Moses’ first question to the LORD at Sinai, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh,” only now stated as an expression of his own unworthiness, rather than as an expression of fear and doubt? Didn’t the maturing trust of Moses speak in a similar way in Exodus 16 when the Israelites were grumbling about the lack of food in the wilderness? There Moses made clear to the Israelites whom they were really grumbling against and how insignificant he really was in God’s dealings with his people. “(The LORD) has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us? ... You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.” (vv 7-8) So Moses felt in connection with the rejection by Aaron and Miriam. “Why are you complaining about my authority or my office. Your business is with the LORD who called me. By myself I am nothing.” These are instances of the spiritually mature Moses speaking who finally understood how God was using him. He learned to confess as Paul did later on, “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor. 15:9).

#### IV. The Unique Prophet

What is equally important in considering Moses as God's special prophet is not what Moses had in common with other prophets of Israel, but the ways in which he was unique. The first thing that comes to mind is the special, close relationship which Moses had with the LORD. The closing chapter of Deuteronomy asserts, "...no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." In Numbers 12 the LORD confronted rebellious Miriam and Aaron and elaborated on the unique position Moses had with the LORD. "Listen to my words: 'When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD'" (vv.6-8).

Such statements do not mean that Moses actually saw and comprehended God in all of his glory. For when Moses was seeking the assurance of the LORD's presence after the golden calf incident, he asked without thinking about it too much, "Now show me your glory," to which the LORD said, "...you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:18ff). Yet Moses in some limited way did regularly behold the face of God. What kind of direct manifestation it was we do not know, but it was more direct than any other prophet who followed him experienced. The writer to the Hebrews testifies that only in Christ did a greater prophet come to God's people. He points out that whereas Moses was faithful in God's house, Jesus was faithful over God's house (cf. Hebrews 3:1ff).

Another unique aspect of Moses' prophetic activity was the amount and the scope of the revelation that he received. To analyze all of that material goes far beyond what we are able to do in these sessions. And yet we can at least describe it in its general outline. Through Moses the LORD revealed to his people the entire Sinaitic covenant with all of its numerous stipulations. This covenant was headed by the Ten Commandments (עֲשֵׂה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים) where God outlined his moral will in statements which already were Old Testament applications of that will [see Exodus 20]. In the following chapters specific applications of the general principles are set forth. Called (מִשְׁפָּטִים, "judgments"), they deal with all different aspects of Israel's social and religious life from the handling of slaves to the protection of life and property, to the Sabbath laws and the establishment of Israel's church year. According to a pattern that the LORD showed Moses on Mt. Sinai he designed the tabernacle and all of its furnishings, plus the garments of the priests who would officiate there.

All the regulations governing sacrifice and the conduct of the priest, along with the Holiness Code which make up the book of Leviticus were revealed to the people through Moses. And lest we think that Moses' prophecy dealt solely with laws and ceremonies, let us not forget the great Gospel promises of the prophetic activity of the Savior of which Moses spoke, "...the LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deut. 18:15). Humanly speaking without Moses and the way the LORD spoke to him, there would have been no Old Testament Israelite religion or nation, no promise of the Savior preserved. That cannot be said of the words of any other prophet. The evangelist John stated it simply and clearly when he said, "...the law (νομος or Torah, that is instruction and teaching) was given through Moses" (John 1:17). All of this would be impressive enough. Add to it the entire account of creation and early world history, the first sin and the first Gospel proclamation, plus the history of Israel's ancestors in the book of Genesis and you have an amazing amount of material that God revealed through one man. We do well to separate Moses from the rest of the prophets and speak of the Old Testament authors as Moses and the prophets.

Not everything the LORD revealed to Moses may have been directly given to him. Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy make it clear that Moses often got what he wrote directly from the LORD, or that he was an eyewitness of the events he recorded. In Genesis, however, there is nothing wrong with assuming that Moses used sources, both oral and written. Surely such things as the promises that the LORD made to Abraham in connection with circumcision were known to the Israelites before Moses wrote and were cherished and preserved by them. Since we have heathen, grossly-polytheistic accounts of the creation and Flood preserved in the literature of other nations which go back beyond the time of Moses, there is no reason to believe that Israel

did not also have her traditions of mankind's earliest history preserved before Moses came along. How pure these pre-Mosaic sources were and what kind of editing, if any, the Holy Spirit led Moses to perform, we will never know. Nor is it necessary that we do. Suffice it to say that it was Moses whom the LORD chose as his instrument to record his truth for us.

Not all laws that the LORD revealed to Moses in the wilderness were new either. Some things such as sacrifice, the celebration of the Sabbath, and circumcision were already being practiced or observed by Israel in some form. These practices were included and elaborated on in the revelation given to Moses. Other Israelite customs such as the law of the levirate referred to in the account of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 were modified and controlled by God's revelation to Moses.

The fact that God revealed these divine codes of conduct to Moses does not mean that they were unique to Israel either. A study of Near Eastern law codes such as that of Hammurrabi indicates that many laws for social conduct and the punishment of law breakers given through Moses to Israel were also being practiced in a similar, but not always identical way in other nations living in the Fertile Crescent. Unique to Israel, however, was the reason the laws were given, and why they ought to be kept. In Israel these were the laws of the LORD revealed through his chosen prophet and meant to glorify the LORD as the divine Lawgiver. In other nations the point was emphasized that they were the laws of the king whose rule was being established and glorified by such laws.

Nowhere in the Pentateuch is Moses proclaimed as the author of all its content. Our knowledge of that comes from other books of the Bible (e.g. Luke 24:44 and Acts 15:21). Moses' writing activity is mentioned several times, however. The first occasion in Exodus 17 is after the Amalekites were defeated on the way to Sinai. Moses' description of that event was to carry with it a reminder that the treachery of the Amalekites should never be forgotten, but punished at a later time. In both Exodus 24 and 34, and in Deuteronomy 31 Moses describes himself as recording the commandments and laws which the LORD had entrusted to him. In Numbers 33 the LORD commands him to record the stages of Israel's journey through the wilderness.

What an immense amount of revelation! What a prolific writer Moses was! When we consider Moses, the prophet, we will have to concur with the writer of the final chapter of Deuteronomy, "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses."

## **Presentation #4: “Moses, the Political Leader”**

In this session we will be looking at the leadership role which Moses played in the wilderness as the children of Israel made their way from Egypt to Sinai, and from Sinai to the land of promise. As we saw in our last session, Moses was the prophet supreme who enjoyed a more intimate relationship with the LORD than any of those who followed him in that office. At the same time Moses was Israel’s political leader, its judge and king. He gave them their laws and administered justice in accordance with those laws. He dealt with the economic problems of the nation which included some unique ones in the wilderness. He established the direction the nation would take as it traveled through the wilderness, and he conducted its foreign policy. Admittedly, all these things were done at the LORD’s bidding, at his direction and through his power. Yet that does not detract from the role Moses played as the LORD’s instrument. As he towers over all the prophets who followed him in that office, so he is the great national leader of Israel to whose shining light even the great king David must bow.

### **I. The Confident Leader**

The first thing we notice about Moses the national leader is the confidence he displayed in that position. This may not have been true at his inauguration, but it was certainly a characteristic of his as he matured in office. We have already discussed Moses’ early life and his call at Sinai. Here we need only remind ourselves that Moses started out rather brashly. On his own he presented himself to the slave nation of the Israelites as their deliverer, and he was totally rejected. When he fled from Egypt, he didn’t see himself as embarking on the second period of his training. He, no doubt, looked upon it as a waiting period, and when that period stretched to 40 years, he felt that it had lasted too long. He was no longer up to the task of leading Israel to freedom.

Why didn’t the LORD make Moses his chosen leader sooner? Certainly part of the answer rests with the Israelites. They weren’t ready to be led out of Egypt. Moses wasn’t ready to lead either. He needed the maturity, wilderness experience, patience and humility which he learned during his stay in Midian before the LORD was ready to use him. Only when he could honestly say, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11), was he the kind of servant that the LORD was looking for. Here now was a man who once he did regain his confidence would realize that his power, his authority and his success all came from the LORD who had appointed him.

And this is just the kind of confidence that the mature Moses displayed. He never doubted the success of his leadership because he did not doubt that the LORD would be true to his word and bless him and the nation which he was leading. When Israel stood with quaking knees on the shores of the Red Sea as the Egyptian army approached, wishing they had never followed Moses out of Egypt, the confidence of Moses revealed itself. “Do not be afraid,” he said. “Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exodus 14:13-14).

In similar circumstances as the Israelites stood terrified and frustrated on the southern border of Canaan some two years after they left Egypt, Moses gave the same comforting reassurance. He revealed this as he recounted to the second generation of adult Israelites what happened to their fathers. “Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place’” (Deuteronomy 1:29-31).

Moses’ substitute for “Forward, March!” every time that Israel broke camp and went on the move also displayed a lot of confidence, properly placed in the LORD: “Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you” (Num. 10:35).

Moses knew his mission would be successful because he trusted in what the LORD had to tell him in his word. The LORD treated Moses as he treats us. He revealed his promises in his word and then encouraged Moses to cling to those promises. The LORD would not fail, therefore, Moses could not fail.

The LORD had assured Moses of the success of the first part of his mission when he said at the burning bush, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain” (Exodus 3:12). At the same time, the LORD assured Moses of the success of his overall mission. Eventually he would accomplish his final purpose. The LORD said, “So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites” (Exodus 3:8). When the Israelites stood in fear and complaining anger in the shadow of the walled cities and the huge inhabitants of some of those cities in southern Canaan, Moses not only could point to the promise given directly to him, but he could remind the Israelites of even more ancient promises the LORD had given to their forefathers, the patriarchs. Surely Moses must have had in mind the grumbling, questioning Israelite nation when he wrote as he did in Genesis 12:6-7, “The Canaanites were then in the land.” The LORD had often predicted the success of Moses’ task, beginning with Abraham and concluding with assurances directly to Moses. The fact that success did come was no surprise to him and, he felt, should have been no surprise to the people he led either.

This picture of Moses’ confidence should not lead us to assume that he never wavered, however. Moses had his bad days too. As Israel left Sinai, Moses heard them grumbling that they never saw anything but manna, and it finally got to Moses, as it surely would have gotten to us. We hear his complaint in Numbers 11: “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now – if I have found favor in your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin.” He sounds an awful lot like Philip before the LORD fed the 5000 when he said, “Here I am among 600,000 men on foot, and you say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’ Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?” But when the LORD responded with the assurance, “Is the LORD’s arm too short? You will see whether or not what I say will come true for you,” Moses regained his confidence and gathered the people to receive quail from the LORD’s hand.

## **II. The Angry Leader**

Moses was a leader who could get very angry. Often that anger was justified. We think especially of the incident of the golden calf. His anger is vividly described. He threw the tablets out of his hand. He ground the golden calf into dust and made the people drink it. He rallied the Levites to his side and led them as they put down the rebellion against his authority, an action that ended up taking the lives of about 3000 people. Then he took his tent called the “tent of meeting” where he received revelation from the LORD and moved it outside the camp to visibly show Israel how their acts forced the LORD to remove his presence from them. This anger was justified. It welled up in a man who was zealous for the LORD’s honor. He saw the LORD’s name blasphemed and his authority blatantly rejected, and he responded with anger.

Moses’ anger was not always so pure and justified, however. When the Israelites were complaining for the umpteenth time about a lack of water at Kadesh south of Canaan, we are told that Moses went as he often did to the LORD for advice. In effect, the LORD told him to speak kindly to the grumblers. The LORD wanted to win them over with his gracious kindness. He commanded Moses, “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink” (Numbers 20:8). But

Moses was angry. He was in no mood to speak kindly to these ingrates. The people didn't deserve the LORD's love, and so he proclaimed the Law rather than the Gospel. "Listen, you rebels," he shouted, "Must we bring you water out of this rock?" The fact that he struck the rock, twice rather than just speaking to it, as the LORD had commanded, may also indicate the angry mood he was in. The anger of Moses was not justified. It was a personal and spiteful anger. That in itself made it wrong.

But even more serious, he had misrepresented the LORD by his actions. The LORD responded quickly and decisively. "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Numbers 20:12). To whom much is given much shall be expected, Let any person in a leadership role over God's people whether in the church or in the family, who thinks that misrepresenting the will, especially the gracious will of God, is not a serious matter, take note of the way the LORD dealt with Moses.

### III. The Loving Leader

Moses could be an angry leader, but more often than not we see him as a patient, loving leader who often found himself in the role of pleader and intercessor on behalf of those in his charge. (This aspect of Moses' leadership could just as well have been covered under Moses, the prophet.) We may well remember Moses' anger at Sinai when he saw the golden calf. Can we forget the patient love he also displayed? As soon as he heard from the LORD what was happening below the mountain and found out how the LORD intended to punish this sin, he began to plead for mercy. First of all, he reminded the LORD of his honor. "Why should the Egyptians say, 'it was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?'" He followed that with a plea upon the Gospel promises delivered to the patriarchs, "Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever" (Exodus 32:11-14).

Then Moses went down from Sinai, disciplined the erring and punished the rebellious; but his work as mediator was not finished. "You have committed a great sin," Moses said to the people, "But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sins" (Exodus 32:20). What national leader ever prayed for his people the way Moses did at this time: "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (Exodus 32:31-32).

The prayerful activity which follows this amazing request reminds one of Jacob's wrestling with God at Penuel or Abraham praying to the LORD concerning the righteous, if there were any, in Sodom and Gomorrah. The LORD says that he will not destroy the nation, but at the same time indicates the damage this sin has done to his relationship with Israel. "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised an oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way" (Exodus 33:1-3). But Moses was not satisfied with such a partial blessing from the LORD. He responded, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (Exodus 33:15-16). Moses knew how to pray in loving concern for his people. The results were those that always come about when the gracious LORD hears the prayers of his people. The LORD said, "I will do everything you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name" (Exodus 33:17).

This is not the only time we hear of Moses praying for the people. On the way from Sinai to southern Canaan fire from the LORD consumed some people on the outskirts of the camp because of their constant complaining. Moses prayed and the fire died down. When the LORD threatened to destroy the entire nation on



the occasion of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against the leadership of Moses and the priesthood of Aaron, once again it is Moses who prays. He might have been insulted by the lack of confidence in his leadership. He could have said, "Let them have what they deserve." Instead he prayed, "O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?" (Numbers 16:22). Again the LORD listened to Moses, and the nation escaped disaster. Actually it is hard to imagine any generation of Israelites ever having been able to reach Canaan successfully without the prayers of faithful Moses accompanying them along the way. In fact Psalm 106:23 says as much: "So he said he would destroy them – had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them."

When stern punishment was called for, it was meted out swiftly and heavily. Moses was no bleeding heart. Ask, if you could, the idolaters at Sinai, the blasphemer whose stoning at Moses' command is mentioned in Leviticus 24, the rebels just mentioned above, or those Midianite women captured in the war Israel waged against that tribe because of the immoral and idolatrous seduction of Israel at Baal Peor in Transjordan. They would tell you what a stern judge Moses could be. But those actions certainly do not characterize Moses' years of leadership. Especially when the welfare of the entire nation was jeopardized, Moses was on his knees pleading in spite of it all for the LORD to be merciful and deliver his people.

In closing this section we ought to remember when we consider Moses, the greater intercessor for his people, that in the end his intercession wasn't enough. In answer to his offer to have his own name blotted out of the book the LORD had written, the LORD responded, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book" (Exodus 32:33). That is the just voice of the Law speaking. Sin merits death in the LORD's divine courtroom. His sentence on the sinner is clear, "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4). There can be no substitutes, not even Moses, because the price is too high. "No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him — the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough — that he should live on forever and not see decay" (Psalm 49:7). Thanks be to God that the Antitype far surpasses the Type. The empty tomb proclaims that the Father's answer to his Son was far different from the one he gave Moses. Of him St. Paul could say, "...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:19 & 21).

#### **IV. Leading Under God**

Since Moses was the leader of the nation of Israel, we would expect him to have been responsible for the direction which Israel took in its wilderness travels. This, however, was not the case. The first time that we have a route of travel discussed, it is clear that it is God who is giving Israel directions, not their earthly leader. The LORD led. To Moses fell the task of defending the way the LORD had chosen, and so he made the way his own. Let us look at Israel's route in connection with Moses' leadership.

The first choice of routes that is mentioned in Exodus is explained in some detail. Exodus 13:17-18 reads, "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.' So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea." There were three main ways out of Egypt to the east. The first and probably the most traveled took the shortest route to Canaan along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This is what Exodus calls the road through Philistine country. The second ran to the south of it to Kadesh in the Negev and eventually turned north either to the highland ridge running through central Canaan or to the so-called "king's highway" running north through the Transjordan. A spur off this route also swung south to Ezion-geber at the head of the Gulf of Elath. Then there was the southern road that went south along the Red Sea. Egyptians used this route to get to the mines which Egypt operated in the Sinai.

The most obvious route for Israel to take along the sea is rejected by God and the reason is given, to avoid war. Since this route is called the way through Philistine country, many commentators have been led to assume that it was war with the Philistines that was being avoided. Historical-critical scholars then dismiss this

account as an anachronism which shows the late date of the Pentateuch. They reason that archaeological evidence points to the Philistines who were later known for their military prowess as arriving in Philistia during the time of the judges. Even if you allow for a people called Philistines dwelling in the area at this time as Genesis reports, they were hardly the warlike people which the nation of Israel would have to avoid. The situation could, of course, have changed in 400 years. Maybe these older tribes were more to be feared now as was generally true of the tribes dwelling in Canaan. But the other possibility may be that it wasn't the Philistines at all whom Israel was to avoid, but the heavily fortified Egyptian fortresses along this road. Egyptian opposition might have discouraged the Israelites from going farther. The name, Way of the Philistines, may then have been named after the predecessors of the later Philistines, or it may have been a later designation for this road which made the route more understandable to later readers of the Pentateuch. The reason besides the danger of war for Israel not taking this route, of course, was that they had a date with the LORD at Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 14:18 reports, "So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea." Every time the Red Sea is mentioned, beginning with Exodus 10:19 the NIV includes the footnote: Hebrew Yam Suph; that is, the Sea of Reeds. The implication of this is that the word designates "the upper end of the Gulf of Suez, extending into the Bitter Lakes, a shallow and marshy area" (cf. BDB, p.693 under  $\eta\iota\sigma$  = reeds). The blame for equating the term with the body of water we call the Red Sea is placed on the LXX which translated the term  $\theta\alpha\lambda\alpha\sigma\sigma\alpha \acute{\epsilon}\rho\upsilon\theta\rho\alpha$ . The way the term is used in the Pentateuch, however, it definitely is broader than just the tip of the western arm of the Red Sea, usually called the Gulf of Suez. Although it is not mentioned in Exodus, the Numbers account of the encampments in chapter 33 states, "They left Elim and camped by the Red Sea" (v.10). This is far from the northern tip of the gulf, but is still designated Yam Suph. Perhaps even more noteworthy is the use of the term in Numbers 21:4. Here it refers to the other, eastern arm of the Sea, usually called the Gulf of Aqaba. That is a long way away from the Suez Canal area. Actually, the term might not mean "Sea of Reeds" at all. If  $\eta\iota\sigma$  is pointed as  $\eta\iota\sigma$ , the term means "Sea of the End." Since the Egyptians knew that the Red Sea was an arm of the Indian Ocean, they may have thought of this body of water as part of that ocean which in their minds extended to the end of the earth. The term certainly does not favor the idea that the Israelites didn't cross the Red Sea, but rather a marsh as the NIV footnote might make some Bible readers think.

Besides actually leading Israel on a route through the wilderness Moses saw to it that the advance was an orderly one which would prevent quarreling over positions of honor on the march or the most favorable camping spots when the march was halted. In the camp the Levites were to set up their tents around the central position occupied by the tabernacle, so, as the LORD revealed to Moses, "Wrath will not fall on the Israelite community" (Numbers 1:53). Then to the east of the tabernacle under the standard of Judah were Issachar and Zebulun. On the south under the standard of Reuben were Simeon and Gad. On the west under Ephraim's banner were Manasseh and Benjamin, and finally on the north under Dan's leadership were Asher and Naphtali. The march was also well ordered. When Israel left Sinai, it is reported that the tribes under Judah broke camp and set out first. Then the tabernacle was taken down and the clans of Levi who were to carry its parts, Gershon and Merari, set out. The tribes under Reuben followed them. Then came the Levitical clan of the Kohathites who carried the holy items which furnished the tabernacle or were used in its services. Finally, the tribes under Dan's banner set out. This whole procession followed Moses and the priests from the family of Aaron who were carrying the ark.

We will briefly mention the fact also that through Moses the LORD solved the economical problems that faced Israel. They were very basic problems, just the very important questions: "Where are we going to get enough food to eat and water to drink in order to keep us alive?" The solution went beyond the power of any earthly leader including Moses. In Deuteronomy 8:3-5 Moses reminded Israel: "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man

disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.” The buck stopped with Moses as with any leader. But just as he was blamed for the LORD’s unpopular decisions, his leadership must have benefited from the LORD’s gracious gifts.

When it came to the foreign policy of Moses, it is hard to find fault with success. Overlooking the well-known success of his methods with Egypt (again really the LORD’s methods) his first encounter with a foreign nation is with the Amalekites on the way to Sinai. Israel was unprepared for war. True, they had a leader who might have displayed some talents for leading an army in Egypt before his exile to Midian. Among the Israelites there may have been some who had been mercenaries in the Egyptian army, and weapons no doubt were among the plunder which Israel took out of Egypt. Yet humanly speaking, they were no match for a desert-hardened tribe like Amalek. Moses’ plan of action was simple and failsafe. “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites,” Moses told Joshua. “Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands” (Exodus 17:9). His confidence, of course, rested on the LORD and his might. The lesson Israel learned there on the desert floor that day was the same lesson their children learned at Jericho. The battle belongs to the LORD. With the LORD fighting for them no odds would stand in the way of victory. Later toward the end of the 40 years of wandering Moses successfully led Israel against the king of Arad in the Negev when that king attacked Israel. More success followed when he led Israelite armies against Sihon and Og and conquered the Transjordan north of the Arnon River for Israel.

Enemies didn’t only come with force of arms against Israel. Sometimes they came with the lure of immoral heathen religious practices which fit in so well with Israel’s natural sinful desires. When that happened in the Transjordan with the Midianites, Moses again went to war. Here we also get an insight into the thorough way in which Moses dealt with idolatry. “Moses was angry with the officers of the army – the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds – who returned from the battle. ‘Have you allowed all the women to live?’ he asked them. ‘They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the Lord’s people. Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man’” (Numbers 31:13-17).

Moses was successful in every military campaign that he undertook in the wilderness except one, and that one he opposed. After the report of the spies had been given to the people as they stood on Canaan’s southern border, Moses was ready to lead the nation in. The people, however, were not ready to go. They rejected Moses’ leadership much the way they had earlier when he was a young man in Egypt. But this time Moses’ way was the LORD’s way, and Israel’s rejection of Moses was a rejection of the LORD’s firm promises to give them the land. Moses confronted the people and told them that their punishment for not entering the land would be 38 more years in the wilderness. Then the people decided to attack. Moses advised against it. The LORD was not with them. But the people went anyway. Moses had matured to the point where he could accept the LORD’s chastening hand; the people had not. As a result Israel was soundly defeated and shoved back into the wilderness,

War was not Moses’ way of dealing with every problem that arose with foreign nations. Edom and Moab blocked the nation’s path when it became clear to Israel that their access to the land lay to the east across the Jordan, rather than to the south. This resistance meant a long detour around Edom and Moab. The resistance of Edom was not something that Israel had provoked. Their request of the Edomites couldn’t have been more polite. “Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king’s highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory” (Numbers 20:16-17). Still the answer was “No!” But Moses refused to attack. The same was the case later with Moab. He gives the reason why in Deuteronomy. Moses was again following the LORD’s directions. Edom and Moab were brother tribes of Israel. Yet that alone could not have been the reason. Amalek also was a brother tribe of Israel, descended from Esau through a concubine. Amalek, however, had attacked a wandering Israel. Edom was amassing her forces in defense of her borders, The LORD considered this a legitimate defense. The LORD told Moses, “Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot

on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own” (Deuteronomy 2:5). These nations were not part of the chosen people, but they were under the LORD’s protection. They had received blessings as part of the family of Abraham. As such they were to serve as object lessons on the LORD’s faithfulness to faint-hearted Israel.

We might also mention in this connection that Moses’ dependence on the LORD did not prevent him from making plans and decisions for the welfare of the nation. The LORD was leading Israel away from Sinai with his cloud, but Moses still engaged Hobab, his brother-in-law as a scout because he knew where the best campsites were located. The governing of God’s people involved both the human and divine element. Moses laying his plans and making his decisions did not deny God’s leadership, but complimented it and served under it.

## **V. The Administrative Leader**

Before closing any discussion of Moses, the national leader of Israel, we must look at Moses as lawgiver and administrator of justice. Through Moses Israel received its national constitution and its laws. They were received for the most part at Sinai although laws concerning the Passover and the redemption of the firstborn were already spelled out in Egypt. A discussion of the laws governing the nation of Israel as Moses received them would in itself be a topic for a series of papers. Here we only note that Israel received its law through Moses.

Moses also was the supreme judge of the nation. That should not surprise us. Later judges and kings of Israel performed the same function. The work was overwhelming as we can well imagine among a people numbering close to two million. Moses needed help, but the idea of delegating some of the work never seems to have occurred to him. It takes his father-in-law Jethro to put the idea in Moses’ mind. “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone,” Jethro told Moses. “But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you” (Exodus 18:17-18, 21-22). Moses took Jethro’s advice, not right away but when the people were ready to leave Mt. Sinai. As such Moses serves as a good example for every parish pastor who has more work than he can possibly handle and also has been blessed by the presence of very capable, but perhaps untrained, laypeople in his congregation.

Many different words and emphases can be used to describe Moses, the national leader. But certainly the outstanding features of his leadership were unfailing trust in the LORD’s gracious faithfulness and a loving concern for his people. Every Christian in a leadership role would do well to emulate this man of God.

## Presentation #5 – “Moses, the Preacher”

Moses was a preacher. The book of Deuteronomy amply displays the truth of this statement. It is a different book from the others that make up the Pentateuch. It is not historical narrative although there is much history recorded in it. It is not the record of a new code of laws although there is much expounding of the law to be found there. Basically, it is a series of sermons or hortatory addresses preached by Moses at the end of his life and at the end of the long period of Israelite wandering in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy is so different that historical-critical scholars for over 150 years have thought that its author must be somebody entirely different from the man or men who authored the Pentateuch. Nobody has ever decided who that author might be. He has simply been called the Deuteronomic historian, or he has been multiplied into a number of individuals who supposedly formed the Deuteronomic school. These people were credited with writing their unique history of Israel's beginnings recorded in Deuteronomy, and then it was theorized, they gathered later traditions of Israelite history and edited them to give them a Deuteronomic flavor. This history is recorded in Joshua through 2 Kings and is called by some the Deuteronomic history.

Besides finding a different source for Deuteronomy historical-critical scholars have looked for another date for its composition. Ever since the beginning of the 19th century that search has been narrowed down to the reign of Josiah and his religious reforms as recorded in 2 Kings 22. There we are told, “In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Neshullam, to the temple of the LORD... Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.’ He gave it to Shaphan, who read it” (2 Kings 22:3 & 8). Beginning with Wilhelm Martin Leberecht DeWette (1780-1849) that book has been identified with the book of Deuteronomy.

Critics have felt that Josiah's priest did not rediscover an old book from Mosaic times, but at the king's direction saw to it that a new book was created at that time to back up Josiah's reforms. This would make the date of its composition about 621 BC. This, of course, would make the book basically a lie, being put into the mouth of Moses as it is. In fact DeWette did call it a “pious fraud.” Scholars put forth several reasons for their contention for the late, non-Mosaic authorship of the book. First of all, as we have already pointed out it differs in tone, vocabulary and, the critics claim, in theology from the rest of the Pentateuch. Secondly, it contains much prophecy that was fulfilled in later Israelite history and at the time of the exile. It speaks for instance of rules for kings, and of certain loss of the land and exile if the people are unfaithful to the LORD. Such thoughts could only be expressed, it is felt, when kings actually ruled the land and exile was all but a foregone conclusion. Finally, there is the 12th chapter of Deuteronomy in which the following words occur: “You must not worship the LORD your God in their way. But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go.... Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name – there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD... Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you” (Deuteronomy 12:45,11,14). Critical scholars have consistently thought that these words in Deuteronomy 12 are a veiled reference to temple worship in Jerusalem and were penned in Josiah's time to support his effort to rid the land of the heathen high places and to centralize the true, orthodox worship of the LORD in Jerusalem. Most scholars today, almost 200 years after DeWette, would still consider this theory about the book of Deuteronomy one of the most certain results of OT critical scholarship,

Recent research, however, has begun to put holes into this theory. Perhaps most telling is the structure of the book. It is not just a random collection of three orations attributed to Moses with several appendices hooked on the end. Actually its structure resembles Hittite suzerainty treaties which archaeologists have recently discovered. Such treaties from the end of the 2nd millennium BC usually began with a preamble in which the suzerain identified himself. This corresponds to the first five verses of Deuteronomy. The preamble is followed by a historical prologue which matches the first oration of Deuteronomy, from 1:6-4:43. Then come the covenant stipulations explicitly stating the duties of the vassal toward his sovereign. This can be compared to

Moses' expounding the law in the second oration, 4:44-26:9. Next comes a series of blessings and curses that are found in Deuteronomy 27-30. The treaty is closed with a guarantee of safe deposit and regular public reading followed by a list of witnesses. This corresponds roughly to the final chapters of Deuteronomy. Such evidence points to or at least allows for the composition of Deuteronomy during the time of Moses and not during the first millennium and the time of Josiah in the 7th century.

But to us who are willing to take the book at face value the message itself provides convincing testimony to Mosaic authorship, and most importantly for our purposes here today it fills in a part of Moses' portrait that is not nearly as developed in the rest of the Pentateuch. Earlier we saw in Moses a man who could eloquently and earnestly plead for his people. Now we see him as one who could just as earnestly plead with them. At the time when the words of Deuteronomy were written Moses was 120 years old. He had experienced the amazing grace and the loving faithfulness of the LORD God of Israel. He also had seen what devastation unbelief and unfaithfulness had brought to the nation. With this background and with a thorough knowledge of the truths that the LORD had revealed to him and through him for forty years, Moses preached his final encouragements and admonitions to a second generation of Israelites, as they stood east of Jordan, poised to enter the land of promise. These young Israelites desperately needed to hear what their aged leader had to say; so do we today. This fact alone, plus the rich store of homiletical material in Moses' sermons ought to make the book of Deuteronomy one of the favorite books of all the Bible for today's preacher.

We must remember when discussing Moses the preacher that Moses did not live and speak to his people in the NT age. He did not see God's salvation brought to its completion in the person of Christ. Although he had complete confidence in the LORD's free and faithful love, and he beautifully and amply proclaimed it, he did not see its greatest manifestation in the incarnation of the Son of God. He saw more than the patriarchs had. The LORD told him that when he said at the beginning of Moses' career, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them... I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians" (Exodus 6:3 & 7). But he did not see as much as the disciples did, or as much as we have of the LORD's amazing love. His knowledge of the extent of the LORD's gracious love was limited by the age in which he lived, an age in which the progression of God's Gospel revelation was still in its early stages. We, looking back on NT fulfillment of OT prophecy and type, are in a more favored position than even the greatest of God's OT prophets. What Jesus said of John the Baptist, really the last of the prophetic heralds of the OT age, can also be said of Moses, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). This must be kept in mind when looking at Moses the preacher and the content of his message.

All of this is not to say, however, that Moses was ignorant of the plan of salvation which the LORD intended to carry out in the world. He himself was privileged to record the first promise the LORD ever made in the Garden of Eden. He also knew, because it wrote about it, that the promises made to the patriarchs included much more than just the assurance of numerous descendants and a good land in which to dwell. There was a blessing there for all people. They all would share in God's redeeming love through what he would accomplish through Abraham and his descendants. He said as much in the final verse of his song recorded in the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy where he penned the words, "Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people" (v. 43). St. Paul thought these words bore a clear enough message to the Gentiles that he quoted at least the first part of them in Romans 15 where he speaks of the Gentiles also glorifying God for his mercy revealed in Christ Jesus.

Throughout the period of time from the giving of the law at Sinai to the successful completion of Christ's mission on earth, the nation of Israel was really under two covenants. This, of course, included the time of Moses' ministry. One was a covenant of pure grace. This was the unilateral covenant Israel had inherited from the patriarchs. It simply stated the LORD's determination to establish his eternal kingdom among all

families of the earth by acts which he would perform. It set forth no conditions which Abraham or anybody else would have to comply with before the LORD would act. It simply called for faith to be expressed in the outward act of circumcision.

The second covenant was the one given at Sinai. It had only a temporal purpose. St. Paul says it was there until the time of Christ. It gave Israel a civil and religious charter which served both to hedge Israel in and keep them as a fitting vehicle for the LORD to use for his purpose. It also cast a shadow across the centuries between Moses and Christ pointing to the culmination of God's saving truth in Christ. The Sinaitic covenant was a conditional, bilateral one. Israel's obedience was necessary if it was to remain in force, and its integrity would be preserved against the ever-present reality of sin by a ceremonial holiness, obtained in the shedding of the blood of properly designated animals. Moses' proper and faithful proclamation of both covenants to his generation form the content of his sermons.

In spite of the different setting in which Moses found himself, he still preached in a way which continues to set an example for us. Moses proclaimed the holy will of God (the Law), and he used it to forcefully confront the people with their sins and the need for repentance. He beautifully set forth the love of God (the Gospel), and he used it to reveal God's grace, to convert, and to motivate. And he faithfully called for obedience, the fruit of faith which the LORD looks for in the lives of those whom he has called to be his own.

Let us look at each of these aspects of Moses' message in a little more detail. Moses applied God's law in its main function as a mirror to the special manifestations of sin in Israel. As a nation Israel's pet sin was grumbling and complaining about the way the LORD and Moses his representative was treating them. "You tested the LORD at Massah," Moses reminds his listeners in Deuteronomy 6. "You rebelled against the command of the LORD your God," he says in chapter 1, describing their behavior after the spies returned from Canaan. Moses accuses them of displaying an ever-increasing lack of trust, and of nurturing a questioning of the LORD's goodness. He warns them that such nurtured sin destroyed the faith in the hearts of their fathers as the years of wandering in the wilderness had destroyed their bodies. Then, of course, there was the greatest sin of all, idolatry. "Remember this and never forget how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD. At Horeb you aroused the Lord's wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you" (Deuteronomy 9:7-8). Moses minced no words about the terrible sins of God's chosen nation. If they weren't already aware of it, if time had in any way dimmed their memory, Moses summed it up pretty well for his people when he says of them, "You have been rebellious against the LORD ever since I have known you" (Deuteronomy 9:24). As preachers when we proclaim the law, we are encouraged to denounce specific sins which will convict and crush the hearts of those who hear us, not just sin in general. If that is how the law ought to be preached, then Moses knew how to preach the law.

Moses also taught his hearers how the repentant sinner approaches God by vividly describing his pleading on their behalf at Sinai: "I lay prostrate before the LORD those forty days and forty nights because the LORD had said he would destroy you. I prayed to the LORD and said, 'O Sovereign LORD, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin. Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say, 'Because the LORD was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the desert.' But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm' (Deuteronomy 9:25-29).

Moses was not just an expert preacher of God's law, however. He also faithfully proclaimed the good news of God's undeserved love. We know this not only because the writer to the Hebrews says so, "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did;..." (4:2), but because again Moses' words in Deuteronomy bear ample witness to it. Let us emphasize for a moment the word "undeserved." Why did the LORD act so generously toward Israel? Because they deserved it? Hardly! If that is what Israel thought, Moses soon deflated their egos. "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples" (Deuteronomy 1:7). Not only weren't they a great nation

numerically, their social position was hardly enviable either. What glory could come to a God who adopted an oppressed nation of slaves as his own? Yet this is what he did. He made them what they were.

Nor was the nation to look to its future successes against the Canaanite nations and figure that somehow they deserved the singular blessings they were receiving. He warns them, “After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, ‘The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.’ No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Deuteronomy 9:4-6).

Nor were they to look at the prosperity they were about to enjoy in Canaan and be tempted to say, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me” (Deuteronomy 8:17). Rather he says, “...remember the LORD your God for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today” (v.18).

The Israelites then were to look to the LORD and see in him two reasons why he was so bountifully blessing them. First of all, there was the Abrahamic covenant and the promises he had made to the patriarchs. Secondly, they were to look at the LORD’s great love. Moses declares, “ ... it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:8). He loved them. That is why he brought them out of Egypt. That is why he protected them from the considerable dangers in the wilderness. That is why he was opening the land of Canaan to them. And that is why he would faithfully bless them within the land. Could anything be simpler to understand and at the same time more comforting to believe?

Moses could really get excited about the message of the LORD’s love which he was proclaiming. He speaks of the amazing and unique acts which the LORD performed on behalf of his people. “Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?” (Deuteronomy 4:32-34).

When men in our homiletics department are reviewing sermons which the students write, we are looking for “specific gospel,” not just general statements about God’s love. We are looking for specific and detailed accounts of what God has accomplished for the sinner in Christ. The Gospel should be spelled out so that the listener knows exactly where his comfort and assurance lie. Such beautiful proclamations of our God should never be taken for granted. Again Moses serves us as a model proclaimer of the grace of God. The form of his message may not always fit the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the content surely does.

Of course, Moses did not begin proclaiming the LORD’s gracious love in the addresses of Deuteronomy. At Sinai the LORD told Moses, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself’” (Exodus 19:3-4). Already in Egypt Moses used the institution of the Passover to teach the people that blood shed at God’s command could protect them from his wrath. Moses proclaimed the Gospel in the sacrifices that he had instituted in keeping with the law. Here Israel learned that the shedding of blood reestablished or preserved the relationship they had with the LORD. Or they could look at the visual aid that Moses provided, again at the LORD’s command, in the brazen serpent. Here, too, Moses had the opportunity to proclaim to a repentant Israel God’s forgiving love and he could encourage them to look to the unfailing promises of his word. The point is simply this: Moses’ beautiful Gospel preaching did not begin in the Transjordan. It was a continuation of the message he had been privileged to proclaim throughout his career.



We also ought to look at Moses' call to sanctification which rings out so clearly in Deuteronomy. We would expect this emphasis because obedience was so essential to the preservation of the Sinaitic covenant. This is not to say that Moses proclaimed a different motive for godly living. "We love because he first loved us," the Apostle John tells us. Moses taught the same thing. God had already revealed that truth to Israel at Sinai when he proclaimed to the whole assembly immediately before he gave his commandments, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). Moses continued to proclaim the love of God for them as the power by which to obey God's will.

God's gracious love had the power to transform their stony hearts into hearts warm with devotion to him, therefore Moses calls out, "To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affections on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer" (Deuteronomy 10:14-16).

Because the LORD had loved them, Moses called for a similar response from his people. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). God's love for them was also to serve as an example for the way they would love their neighbors. "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10,17-18).

The LORD's great blessings were to produce a thankful people. "...the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you" (Deuteronomy 8:7-10). Moses knew how to preach sanctification.

We like our sermons to be applicable to the people of today. We want our listeners to identify with what we are saying. Again the sermons of Moses serve to teach us. In Deuteronomy Moses was no longer speaking to the generation who left Egypt as adults. They had perished in the wilderness. Moses was now speaking to their children. So we are told in the opening chapter of Deuteronomy: "East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law..." (v.5). As we do with our texts, Moses was taking an existing word of God and applying it to the generation before him. One good example of such application comes when Moses teaches concerning the Third Commandment in 5:12-15. In Exodus the LORD had mentioned the six days of creation followed by the day of rest. This was to be a model for Israel's week. Here in Deuteronomy he makes a new application: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath Day" (5:15). This was not different and contradictory tradition concerning the reason for the Sabbath as critics so often have contended. It was simply a new application of an old law for a people who did not remember, at least not as adults, the terrible conditions which they or their fathers had suffered in Egypt. The way they rested themselves and the rest they gave to their servants was to remind them of the fact that the LORD had delivered them from slavery and had given them rest in Canaan. Moses knew how to make God's Word live for those who were listening to him.

Moses also knew that the key to Israel's faithfulness in the future lay in continued proclamation. Teach the next generation, he urged them. Apply the covenant at Sinai to yourselves. Remember, "it was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today... These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). The wisdom of Moses' words were learned the hard way only two generations later when Moses' advice was not followed. The book of Judges reports, "... another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel." The results were disastrous. "They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the people around them. They provoked the LORD to anger because they forsook him" (Judges 2).

Moses knew how and what to preach. We are all the richer for it that the Holy Spirit caused that preaching to be preserved.

We cannot close a series on a portrait of Moses without dealing with his death. It is recorded for us in the final chapter of Deuteronomy. This is the one part of the Pentateuch that may not have come from the pen of Moses. God could have revealed the details of his death to him, and he could have written what we find in Deuteronomy 34, but it certainly is not necessary, nor is our understanding of inspiration upset by it. The pertinent facts are spelled out for us. Moses died because the LORD took him. Even at 120 years, old age had not caught up with him, nor did he run out of steam. His work on earth had been accomplished. We are told, “Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.”

The final words of Deuteronomy are a fitting closing comment to Moses’ life: “Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”

