

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Lessons from the Lives of Old Testament Characters: Moses

Many a teacher will have looked at a class of children and wondered what was in store for each child. The potential is great yet, at the end of the life, what will have been achieved by each one? Our subject today is the character of 'Moses', a wonderful servant of God. It is noteworthy that God speaks of him as 'Moses, my servant' (Joshua 1:2, 7). It is accepted that he wrote the first five books in the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus confirmed this by referring to his writings. But it is more interesting to note the intimacy Moses achieved with God. We read in Exodus 33:11 "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend". So we find that the life of Moses is a remarkable and instructive one, full of help to those who study it.

Moses' history is covered in the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy. But it is also very helpful to read the letter to the Hebrews 11:23-29. Here Moses is clearly described as a Servant of God. Today, we can only summarise what the Scriptures tell us. We can summarise his life like this.

Moses lived for 120 years and he was as strong at the end as in his life (Deuteronomy 34:7).

- For 40 years he was learning to be someone. Perhaps we can say - the making of a servant.
- For 40 years he was learning to be no one. Again we can add - the breaking of the servant.
- For 40 years he proved that God was a God for everyone. Here we can see the practice of true service.

Do you want to be God's servant? Has He a work for you to do? Then take note of Moses. We will look at his life, then, in these three sections.

### Learning to be someone

We have probably all heard of the tremendous faith of Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses, and the gripping story of his birth (Exodus 2). Pharaoh, who had brought all Israel into slavery, had decided to weaken the nation by destroying all the boys at birth. But these parents looked on their new born son. How could their love for him allow him to die? More than that, they sensed that God had a special purpose for him so they hid him three months. But now he was growing and they must trust God implicitly, so they made a little basket of bulrushes, placed this in the river and waited to see what God would do. A wonderful answer soon came. Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe, saw the basket and decided to rear this baby as her son. But Moses' family still made themselves available to God. Their daughter, Miriam, was watching. "Do you want a nurse of the Hebrews?" she asked (Exodus 2:7). And so Moses' mother was not only given the responsibility to nurse her child but was paid for doing so! As a result of this, the infant was to get his early teaching at the hands of his parents, learning all the ways of God and having God's love planted in his heart in his early years. Parents, you can enjoy the same responsibility for bringing up your children in the fear of God.

As he grew, he moved to be with Pharaoh's daughter. In the palace he would be educated with all the knowledge of the Egyptians, perhaps being prepared for rule in Egypt one day? Clearly he was destined to be able to direct and control. He was to be truly great. He was spending his time learning to be someone! Now how did all this early education affect him? The letter to the Hebrews tells us, "By faith", here is the basis, "when he was come to years", that is, when he was old enough to decide for himself, "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward". Hebrews 11:24-26. You see, there are two things - refusing - the power and pleasures of Egypt which were not the things of God, and choosing - to be linked with the people of God which brings a far greater reward. Moses may have known little of it but this time of education was part of God's preparation of His servant.

But then Moses took matters into his own hand. He would serve God with his own strength. He killed an Egyptian one day to save an Israelite. But the next day, he tried to stop another fight between two Israelites. One of the contenders asked Moses if he was going to kill again? Moses realised it was no good. Someone was watching. He must leave! He feared the very fact that his action was known. He may have thought he was working for God but this was in his own way and he was not doing God's work. What a great difference there is between the two. So Moses fled into the land

of Midian. We can never do God's work when we set about it in our own way. Moses must have felt that his whole life of service was ended.

Hebrews 11 reminds us that what is described in that chapter took place 'by faith'. You see, nothing can be done for God, no work can be successful for God without faith. This must be the beginning. Faith depends entirely on God. Moses had faith but he was not using it in connection with his service then for God.

### Learning to be no one

We have very little written of the 40 years Moses spent in the land of Midian. God led him and allowed him to find rest, and contentment over the years. But, clearly, Moses had to realise that, just like everyone around, he could do nothing in the affairs of the Israelite nation. He lost his sense of destiny and may have felt that he must relinquish any thought of rising to the position for which he had been trained. His ability might be of use in safeguarding and caring for the sheep and that was about all! In those years, perhaps he even lost the sense of any work he could do for God. But God never loses sight of His servant. This, too, was necessary training. Moses must not depend on his own strength. He must only depend on the strength of the Lord. Do we ever learn this lesson? Paul had the same difficulty, too. He speaks in 2 Corinthians 12 of the thorn in the flesh he had, desiring that the Lord would remove it. Then he says a wonderful thing - verse 9, "He (i.e. God) said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness". Paul was ready to depend wholly on the strength of the Lord. Do you find yourself unable to do what you want to do? Place your helplessness in the hand of the Lord, in His leading and His strength. Then, like Paul, you will be thankful as was Paul, who goes on to rejoice that "the power of God may rest upon me".

### A God for everyone

The third stage for Moses concerned **learning that God was a God for everyone**. Now that Moses had learnt he could do nothing of himself, God knew he was ready for use as a servant. Let us just go over what we have already found.

1. Moses had learned how to act in the running of a nation
2. Moses had learned to be a shepherd

Now both these aspects were fully required if he was to lead Israel out of Egypt to the land promised to them. God knew what He would do but His servant needed to be trained for the work he had to do. God is always able to work through the person who has faith and a readiness to follow His will, often using the natural abilities the individual has.

There are three aspects of Moses' service which we can consider. These are:

1. Moses' appointment by God
2. Moses' acceptance by Israel
3. Moses' activities as a servant

#### 1. Moses' appointment by God.

While he was caring for the flock, Moses saw the bush which burned. He could not understand this surprising phenomenon. As he came to the place, he sensed the presence of God. God speaks "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Holy ground? Do we realise that the presence of the Lord is absolutely holy? Do we treat Him as Holy? Holiness was re-emphasised later when Moses was called to the mountain to receive the law (Exodus 19). This double emphasis is there to instruct us also.

There and then, God called Moses to service in the clearest way, indicating His work for Moses. Now we see the man, no longer strong in his own strength, no longer self confident, pleading to be released. But God knows that here is a servant now fit for the task.

When Moses remonstrates, God provides all the answers. You will find these in Exodus chapters 2 to 4:

- a **The source of power**  
"I AM THAT I AM", God says - ever existent, ever controlling, ever supporting the one sent by Him (Exodus 3:14).
- b **Authority**  
"They will not believe me", Moses says. "What is that in thine hand?" asks God. The rod Moses held was to be a powerful sign of his authority to be God's servant (Exodus 4:1-5).

**c Readiness of speech**

"I am not eloquent", says Moses. "Who hath made man's mouth?" God replies. "I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say". What better orator is there? (Exodus 4:10-12).

**d Even then Moses cannot see the way. O for someone else!**

"Aaron thy brother cometh forth to meet thee". Here is companionship and help for the path (Exodus 4:13-16).

If you are holding back from serving God, learn from these instances that God is the source of power. God gives authority, ability to communicate and help with companionship we need for the way.

**2. Moses' acceptance by Israel.**

Moses left his father in law peacefully. He needed to restore his standing in the sight of Israel and then he met Aaron. They called the elders of Israel together and gave them "the words of the Lord" (Exodus 4:30). What a wonderful answer was given to them; "And the people believed then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (Exodus 4:31). If a work is really being done for the Lord, the people's hearts will be drawn, NOT to the servant, but to the Lord Himself. The true servant sees God working, knows God's leading and seeks the Lord's honour, not his own.

Would Moses now expect the path ahead to be easy? Never! But every step ahead was governed by God. Every plague was sent by God, every answer was with His blessing (Exodus 7-12). Both Moses and the people needed to adopt, as a way of life, the clear understanding that God must be obeyed at all costs. And a servant should be only a mouthpiece for God!

Then, as part of His plan, God instituted the Passover. It was vital that the people then, and in future years as they looked back, must remember the way they were freed from slavery in Egypt by a slain lamb (Exodus 12). This is a tremendous illustration, used by John the Baptist, of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1). Israel must trust the work, the lamb slain, the blood put on the doorpost and lintel. We must trust the Lord Jesus similarly.

And Israel marched out of their slavery. In due time God provided the miraculous way across the Red Sea and Israel sang of their glorious Lord who triumphed (Exodus 14-15).

**3. Moses' activities as a servant**

So we come to Moses' activity, which was aimed at making the people become true followers of God. We can look at this in three ways:

- a. Provision for the people
- b. Performance of God's will
- c. Progress toward the land of promise

**a. Provision for the people**

First in Exodus 15. It was not long before the joy and peace were shattered. In the same chapter in which they sang, we read of the people murmuring and grumbling! Three days without water and the heat of the sun was overpowering, the waters they found were bitter, giving no refreshment, no cleansing. "What shall we drink?" they asked. Moses knew that he must go to God for the answer. We read that "He shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet" (Exodus 15:25). This was God's provision! Have you heard of the Tree which was cut down to form a cross? Jesus died on that tree to provide the water of life.

Then in Exodus 16 - once more, there was murmuring. "We are all going to be killed by hunger", they said. Again the Lord speaks to Moses- "I will rain bread from heaven for you" (Exodus 16:3-4). So quails were provided in the evening and what they called manna in the morning. Could Moses himself provide this? No! It was clearly God's provision for their need. This provision lasted for 40 years. How constant God is in His care and provision all along the way, and God's servant helped the people in this way. What food the Word of God provides. The servant of God is responsible for making clear the way of salvation and also in making clear the food - the Word of God.

In Exodus 17, the third time the people complained, again of lack of water. Would there be provision this time? Yes. God answers the cry of Moses by telling him to strike the rock in Horeb (Exodus 17:6). There was provision for all. God's provision once more, and Moses, His servant! The apostle Paul links his message to the Corinthians by an illustration of this story - 1 Corinthians 10:4, "that Rock was Christ". Christ was smitten at Calvary and from that smiting flowed the wonderful refreshment and life giving power for all.

We must briefly refer to another occasion, when Moses lost his self control. You will find this in Numbers 20. This led to God telling him that he would see the Promised Land but would not lead the people in. Note that, on this occasion, God told him to speak to the rock, but Moses struck it twice. We may well wonder why there was such a severe judgement. It was not just because Moses lost his temper; it was firstly because he disobeyed God and also because of the meaning attached to this incident. The Lord Jesus was only smitten once. The rock had already been smitten. All that was necessary was to 'speak to the rock' and water sufficient for every need was available. We can rejoice in God's great provision through His Son. The Lord has died once; no further smiting is necessary. We have the opportunity now to seek Him and He will supply the refreshing water of life through His Word.

#### **b. Performance of God's will**

Next, the performance of God's will. In a unique way Moses was called to the mountain to receive the law of God. We have already referred to the emphasis of God on His holiness. Moses was bidden to come as a servant coming into the presence of God to learn God's mind. This is so vital today. But the law of God was such that the Israelites had already broken it before Moses was able to bring it to them. These stones, on which the finger of God had written, were smashed and so God's law, symbolically and literally, had been broken. Yet this servant, with a deep sense of love for the people, comes before the Lord even then and begs forgiveness for them. Listen to his word as he pleads for them in Exodus 32:32 "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin - and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of thy book which Thou hast written". What a supreme sacrifice this servant of God was now ready to make. The law was broken! But the true servant could not leave it like that. He returns to the presence of God for the law to be rewritten. And from that time Moses was there to encourage both the learning of that law and the keeping of it. This was not just the Ten Commandments but the whole moral law which was to become a way of life for those people of God.

#### **c. Progress toward the land of promise.**

These people were changed from a disorganised group to an orderly nation by the time they reached the Jordan. What a servant! In all the varying circumstances, murmuring, rebellion, and sometimes joy, the servant of God was there bearing the burden, wanting to keep the nation following after God. How can we doubt what God does when He chooses a servant!

Do you have a work for the Lord, your Lord? He needs to be your Lord, if you are to serve Him. We may say that Moses was someone quite apart, clearly called of God for a special purpose. So were Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13. But Paul was active in the Lord's work long before that special call. What are you doing? In 1 Corinthians 12 the apostle sets out how the Body of Christ, made up of all believers, should be operating and then in verse 28 points to a number of gifts. Not all are to be seen in the Church today but note this one, the gift of 'helps'. This is something we can all do in the Church of God. Are we a help for our brothers and sisters in Christ? Are we a help to the Lord? We may say we do not know what to do. Earlier on, when Moses complained to God about being unable, God said, "What is that in thine hand?" (Exodus 4:2). Have you something to hand which God can use? Use it today. Use it while you have time. Seek to know the mind of the Lord for your life so that He can use you now.

Prayer:

Lord may we learn the lessons from the life of this great servant of the past, first to trust Thee and then to seek to follow and serve Thee in a way that will bring honour and glory to Thy Name. Amen.

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