

Moses Meets the I AM



The Israelites had become very numerous; they “were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.” Under Joseph’s fostering care, and the favor of the king who was then ruling, they had spread rapidly over the land. But they had kept themselves a distinct race, having nothing in common with the Egyptians in customs or religion; and their increasing numbers now excited the fears of the king and his people, lest in case of war they should join themselves with the enemies of Egypt. Yet policy forbade their banishment from the country. Many of them were able and understanding workmen, and they added greatly to the wealth of the nation; the king needed such laborers for the erection of his magnificent palaces and temples. Accordingly he ranked them with the Egyptians who had sold themselves with their possessions to the kingdom. Soon taskmasters were set over them, and their slavery became complete. “And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigor.” “But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.”

The king, angry at the failure of his design, made the command more urgent and extensive. The whole nation was called upon to hunt out and slaughter his helpless victims. “And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born (to Israelites) ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.”

While this decree was in full force a son was born to Amram and Jochebed, devout Israelites of the tribe of Levi. The babe was “a goodly child;” and the parents, believing that the time of Israel’s release was drawing near, and that God would raise up a deliverer for His people, determined that their little one should not be sacrificed. Faith in God strengthened their hearts, “and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.” Hebrews 11:23.

The mother succeeded in concealing the child for three months. Then, finding that she could no longer keep him safely, she prepared a little ark of rushes, making it watertight by means of slime and pitch; and laying the babe therein, she placed it among the flags at the river’s brink. She dared not remain to guard it, lest the child’s life and her own should be forfeited; but his sister, Miriam, lingered near, apparently indifferent, but anxiously watching to see what would become of her little brother. And there were other watchers. The mother’s earnest prayers had committed her child to the care of God; and angels, unseen, hovered above his lowly resting place. Angels directed Pharaoh’s daughter thither. Her curiosity was excited by the little basket, and as she looked upon the beautiful child within, she read the story at a glance. The tears of the babe awakened her compassion, and her sympathies went out to the unknown mother who had resorted to this means to preserve the life of her precious little one. She determined that he should be saved; she would adopt him as her own.

Miriam had been secretly noting every movement; perceiving that the child was tenderly regarded, she ventured nearer, and at last said, “Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?” And permission was given.

The sister hastened to her mother with the happy news, and without delay returned with her to the presence of Pharaoh's daughter. "Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages," said the princess.

God had heard the mother's prayers; her faith had been rewarded. It was with deep gratitude that she entered upon her now safe and happy task. She faithfully improved her opportunity to educate her child for God. She endeavored to imbue his mind with the fear of God and the love of truth and justice, and earnestly prayed that he might be preserved from every corrupting influence. She showed him the folly and sin of idolatry, and early taught him to bow down and pray to the living God, who alone could hear him and help him in every emergency.

She kept the boy as long as she could, but was obliged to give him up when he was about twelve years old. From his humble cabin home he was taken to the royal palace, to the daughter of Pharaoh, "and he became her son."

At the court of Pharaoh, Moses received the highest civil and military training. The monarch had determined to make his adopted grandson his successor on the throne, and the youth was educated for his high station. "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." Acts 7:22. His ability as a military leader made him a favorite with the armies of Egypt, and he was generally regarded as a remarkable character. Satan had been defeated in his purpose. The very decree condemning the Hebrew children to death had been overruled by God for the training and education of the future leader of His people.

By the laws of Egypt all who occupied the throne of the Pharaohs must become members of the priestly caste; and Moses, as the heir apparent, was to be initiated into the mysteries of the national religion. This duty was committed to the priests. But while he was an ardent and untiring student, he could not be induced to participate in the worship of the gods. He was threatened with the loss of the crown, and warned that he would be disowned by the princess should he persist in his adherence to the Hebrew faith. But he was unshaken in his determination to render homage to none save the one God, the Maker of heaven and earth.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, 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. Moses was fitted to take pre-eminence among the great of the earth, to shine in the courts of its most glorious kingdom, and to sway the scepter of its power. His intellectual greatness distinguishes him above the great men of all ages. As historian, poet, philosopher, general of armies, and legislator, he stands without a peer. Yet with the world before him, he had the moral strength to refuse the flattering prospects of wealth and greatness and fame, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Moses remained at court until he was forty years of age. His thoughts often turned upon the abject condition of his people, and he visited his brethren in their servitude, and encouraged them with the assurance that God would work for their deliverance. Often, stung to resentment by the sight of injustice and oppression, he burned to avenge their wrongs. One day, while thus abroad, seeing an Egyptian smiting an Israelite, he sprang forward and slew the Egyptian.

The whole matter was quickly made known to the Egyptians, and, greatly exaggerated, soon reached the ears of Pharaoh. It was represented to the king that this act meant much; that Moses designed to lead his people against the Egyptians, to overthrow the government, and to seat himself upon the throne; and that there could be no security for the kingdom while he lived. It was at once determined by the monarch that he should die; but, becoming aware of his danger, he made his escape and fled toward Arabia.

The Lord directed his course, and he found a home with Jethro, the priest and prince of Midian, who was also a worshiper of God. After a time Moses married one of the daughters of Jethro; and here, in the service of his father-in-law, as keeper of his flocks, he remained forty years.

In slaying the Egyptian, Moses had fallen into the same error so often committed by his fathers, of taking into their own hands the work that God had promised to do. It was not God's will to deliver His people by warfare, as Moses thought, but by His own mighty power, that the glory might be ascribed to Him alone. Yet even this rash act was overruled by God to accomplish His purposes. Moses was not prepared for his great work. He had yet to learn the same lesson of faith that Abraham and Jacob had been taught—not to rely upon human strength or wisdom, but upon the power of God for the fulfillment of His promises. And there were other lessons that, amid the solitude of the mountains, Moses was to receive. In the school of self-denial and hardship

he was to learn patience, to temper his passions. Before he could govern wisely, he must be trained to obey. His own heart must be fully in harmony with God before he could teach the knowledge of His will to Israel. By his own experience he must be prepared to exercise a fatherly care over all who needed his help.

“And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.” The time for Israel’s deliverance had come. But God’s purpose was to be accomplished in a manner to pour contempt on human pride. The deliverer was to go forth as a humble shepherd, with only a rod in his hand; but God would make that rod the symbol of His power. Leading his flocks one day near Horeb, “the mountain of God,” Moses saw a bush in flames, branches, foliage, and trunk, all burning, yet seeming not to be consumed. He drew near to view the wonderful sight, when a voice from out of the flame called him by name. With trembling lips he answered, “Here am I.” He was warned not to approach irreverently: “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. . . . I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” It was He who, as the Angel of the covenant, had revealed Himself to the fathers in ages past. “And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.”

As Moses waited in reverent awe before God the words continued: “I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. . . . Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt.”

A man will gain power and efficiency as he accepts the responsibilities that God places upon him, and with his whole soul seeks to qualify himself to bear them aright. However humble his position or limited his ability, that man will attain true greatness who, trusting to divine strength, seeks to perform his work with fidelity. Had Moses relied upon his own strength and wisdom, and eagerly accepted the great charge, he would have evinced his entire unfitness for such a work. The fact that a man feels his weakness is at least some evidence that he realizes the magnitude of the work appointed him, and that he will make God his counselor and his strength.

Moses thought of the difficulties to be encountered, of the blindness, ignorance, and unbelief of his people, many of whom were almost destitute of a knowledge of God. “Behold,” he said, “when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them?” The answer was—

“I AM THAT I AM.” “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”

The courage of God’s servant must not fail; for the Lord would make this the occasion to manifest His power before the Egyptians and before His people. “And I will stretch out My hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.”¹⁰

God brought the Israelites out of Egypt with a great display of power. They had cried unto the Lord and He delivered them from slavery. He is still the same today. He is ready to deliver those who call to Him for help just as He did in the days of Moses. He is still the great I AM.

What was a special characteristic of Moses?

Numbers 12:3

What special blessing is promised to the meek?

Matthew 5:5

What two characteristics does David mention of those who inherit the earth.

Psalms 37:9-11

Those who are meek are willing to wait on the Lord. We can see this in the way Moses led the Israelites. When a difficulty came up, he turned to God for the solution. Read the following stories and summarize what was the problem that Moses faced and how he responded.
Exodus 15:23-25

Exodus 17:1-6

Numbers 16:1-5

When Moses asked God about His name, what name did He give?
Exodus 3:13, 14

The prophet Isaiah predicted that a child would be born and be given some impressive titles. What are these titles?
Isaiah 9:6

This is a prophecy about the coming Messiah, Jesus. Isaiah calls Him “the mighty God.”

How did Jesus describe Himself to the Jewish leaders?
John 8:58, 59

They took up stones to stone Him. Why? They realized that He had just told them He was the “I AM,” the Great Creator God, and they hated Him for it.

How did Jesus introduce Himself to John?
Revelation 1:8, 11, 17

Verse 8 tells us the Alpha and Omega is the Lord Almighty. Verse 11 tells us that the First and Last is also the Alpha and Omega. Verse 17 tells us that Jesus is the First and Last.

As we can see from these references, Jesus was the Heavenly Being who appeared to Moses in the burning bush as the I AM. He appeared as the LORD (Jehovah) at various other times to the people in the Old Testament times. He had existed before Abraham and before the creation of the world. When He came to live among us for 33 years, He was fully God in a human body. (Colossians 2:9)

Have you met the Great I AM? He wants to be your Friend. Take time to get acquainted with Him by reading the Bible, His love letter to you.