

Moses' Identity Crises

By Mark E. Benjamin

Moses The Man

Of all the different main people that the Bible tells us about, Moses is certainly one of the more interesting ones. The study of this one man is endless. His importance, not only to the Hebrew nation, but also just history in general, is difficult to surpass.

In regards to Passover, Moses was the key instrument in informing the sons of Israel about God's commands. To understand Passover we need to look at its beginnings, the first Passover. To get a better understanding of the first Passover it is important to understand the events that led up to that pivotal day. Therefore, since you cannot learn of the history preceding Passover without learning about the man that was so integrated with the events, let's take a look at Moses.

First off, even though Moses may have been one of the greatest men that ever lived, he was still just a man. He had countless strengths, but he also had weaknesses. In these weaknesses is where we can see just how God can use those that allow themselves to be directed by His leading.

Who Are You

And you are...? Ever have that question asked of you? How do you answer a question like that? Do you give your name, your family background, your nationality, your vocation, or what? Moses had that same issue to deal with. Who, exactly, was he? What was his identity? He was identified by many different titles.

He was Hebrew. We know that first off by his birth, but someone very important to him at the time knew it as well. **Exodus 2:6** has Pharaoh's daughter identifying Moses as a Hebrew baby. How did she know this? Quite simple. I believe there are two main reasons. First, most likely the look of him. I'm sure his mother would not have laid him in the ark without anything on. But the clothes of a slave family would have been easily noticed as different than that of the Egyptian rulers. The other and more obvious reason is that he was taken out of the Nile River. Just six verses earlier we see that Pharaoh had ordered that the male Hebrews be tossed into the same river. Not to be morbid, but the Nile would have had quite a lot of babies floating in it. But the difference is that the others would have been dead. For obvious reasons to the Egyptians, the Nile was a life giving god. It is crucial to a desert nation to have a source of water like the Nile. Also, the Nile was considered to be the actual blood stream, or life source, of the god Osiris. So when Moses was pulled out of the Nile, he was life coming out of the life-giving god. No small or overlooked matter to the pantheistic people of the times.

An Egyptian calls him a Hebrew, now daughters of Midian call him Egyptian. The scene is a well and after a confrontation there, Reuel asks his daughters why are they back so soon. **Exodus 2:19 (NIV)** They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us... How did they know he was Egyptian? Most likely again because of his look, what he wore, but we don't know for sure. It could also be from the direction of travel, assuming they saw him come up to the well. The Bible does not give the reason on how they know, but they knew he was Egyptian.

After being tossed in a river, called a Hebrew, chased out of Egypt by Pharaoh, and now called an Egyptian, no wonder Moses makes this statement in **Exodus 2:22 (NIV)** ...**"I have become an alien in a foreign land."** Not only do others determine him to be of one race or another, but he too is having a rough time figuring out who exactly he is. Moses seems to not

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know how to identify himself. God steps in here and straightens the mess out. He identified Moses and informed him of whom he was by listing out his genealogy. After many verses listing the lineage we have **Exodus 6:26 (KJV) These are that Aaron and Moses,...** by doing this, it puts to rest the identity of Moses. His identity wasn't by what clothes he wore or by what land he was coming from or in at the time. It was by his heritage. His lineage going back to his forefathers of many generations before. We see this kind of identification all through the Bible. The importance of genealogy has been lost in many societies of the modern world. It certainly isn't the most important thing to know, but it must be more important than what we give it – the Bible treats it as such.

Who Do You Think You Are

Moses, who do you think you are? That was the exact question asked of him at one of his major changes in his life. This is paraphrased, but still the essence of the question in **Exodus 2:14**. It isn't that the man didn't know who Moses was. The slaves of Egypt would have known the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, especially since it meant one of their own had found favor in the ruling class. There would have been both jealousy and adoration towards Moses. They knew who he was but they were questioning who he thought he was. Look at the verse; **Exod 2:14 (NIV) The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?"** The question is not one of identity but of authority.

Once again, Moses asked this same question about himself too. Let's jump ahead to his calling from God. **Exod 3:11(NIV) But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"** I'm sure that a big part of why he questions his own authority is because of what took place some forty years earlier. You don't quickly forget when you killed someone and then run for your life because the Pharaoh is trying to kill you. Going back there was not number one on Moses' list of things to do. He also would not have easily forgotten that those he is being called to deliver, rejected his first attempt at doing so and questioned his authority.

Again, God steps in to handle this authority question by giving Moses the authority over all. **Exodus 7:1 (KJV) And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh...** God makes Moses as a god. This is not to say that Moses was a god or became a god, but he now had the authority and status of being a god. The Egyptian nation had many gods at this time in their history and it would not have been a very big leap of faith for them to see Moses as one. He was taken from the Nile, an indication of deity, and he was about to perform some very powerful miracles. Moses now not only has authority – he is authority.

What's In A Name

With identity and authority put to rest, there is now that matter of name. Moses' own mother never gave her son a name. It was the daughter of Pharaoh that named him **Exodus 2:10**. Moses knew his own name, one of the only things he had right as far as his self image. But, someone else of much more importance knew his name. At the burning bush, we see that God calls Moses – literally. He called him by name, his name. **Exodus 3:4 (NIV) ... God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"** Of course, the God of the entire universe knows all

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that is in it. But it's sobering to hear God call you by your name. He knew who Moses was and He called for him. Just as He knows who you and I are and calls for us. And He calls for us by name.

The issue here isn't about Moses' name. God knew Moses, but Moses didn't know God. Moses asks God for His name. He makes it seem that it's to identify God to the people back in Egypt, but I bet he was curious as well too. Moses grew up with many gods and all of them had names, it would be natural for him to wonder about the name of the God that was calling him. God answers him in the next verse, **Exodus 3:14 (NIV) God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."**

Become Who You Really Are

Moses has one more hurdle to jump over before he is finally ready to do God's will. The question of capability. Moses sees himself as inadequate to carry out the task set before him by God. He tries several excuses to get God to leave him alone and pick someone else. **Exodus 4:10 (NIV) Moses said to the LORD, "O 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."** Of course, God will have none of it. And God gives him a helper, Aaron, and a few miracles to show Pharaoh.

Moses saw himself as inadequate but God saw him as the instrument needed to deliver the slaves in Egypt. Moses obviously completed the mission, but many years later look what is said about him. **Acts 7:22 (KJV) And Moses was ... mighty in words and in deeds.** Moses thought he was unable even to talk, but we see he really was mighty in his words. When we look in the mirror, I am sure there are many things that we see as inadequate about ourselves. Many things that we think we cannot do, that we don't have the skill or ability. God sees us all as another Moses. He sees us as the very device that He needs to complete the job He needs to have done. We must stop making excuses, like Moses tried to, and start completing God's work. We will end up as the instrument of God, mighty in words and deeds. Just like Moses.