

Moses: Unwanted Responsibility

By Bob Young

Background to Moses' Call (Exod. 1:1-2:25)

- *1 Problems arise for Israel when a Pharaoh not familiar with Joseph assumes power (Ex. 1:8). The issue of "knowing" is important throughout Exodus (esp. knowing God - Ex. 5:2; 9:14; 14:4,18,31)
- *2 Due to the excessive growth of the Hebrew population, the Pharaoh directs that all Hebrew boys be killed when they are born (Exod. 1:16)
 - 2a--In Egypt the promise to Abraham that he would become a great nation comes true
 - 2b--The two Hebrew midwives disobey Pharaoh and let the boys live; God blesses the midwives with children of their own (Exod. 1:17-20)
- *3 Birth and development of Moses (Exod. 2:1-25)
 - 3a--After Moses is born, his mother contrives a plan to save his life; Moses is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2:3-10)
 - 3b--His early years are the best of both worlds
 - Luxury and education of the royal court
 - His mother serves as his nurse; able to teach him traditions of his people/God
- *4 When Moses later sees an Egyptian foreman beating a Hebrew, Moses kills the Egyptian; unfortunately, there are witnesses and Moses must flee for his life (Exod. 2:11-15)

Moses in Midian (Exod. 2:16-23)

- *1 Moses flees to Midian
- *2 Shepherd for Jethro (also called Reuel); marries Zipporah, his daughter; has two sons
- *3 Time passes, God remembers His people (as He had earlier remembered Noah, Gen 8:1) and begins to prepare to deliver them (Exod. 2:24-25)

Moses' Call (Exod. 3:1ff)

- *1 Burning bush serves only to draw Moses' attention (Ex. 3:1-4) - the miracle is not that the bush burns without being consumed but that Moses hears, talks to God, and obeys Him
- *2 Who is God? (Exod. 3:13-15)
 - 2a--God identifies self to Moses as the same God whom the patriarchs worshiped (Exod. 3:6,15,16; 4:5). God is not a new god but the God who has already acted on behalf of Israel
 - 2b--"I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14)
 - According to Hebrew thought, knowledge of the name gave some degree of control over the person - by giving His name, God indicates His willingness to be called upon
 - Yet, the name is a mysterious one that can be translated in a variety of ways (e.g., "I am who I will be," "I am who I was," "I will be whom I choose to be," "I will cause to be what I will") - the name does not confine or explain God - He is still mysterious and beyond our comprehension - in the long run, we cannot control Him
 - 2c--YHWH
 - God's name is passed down only as the consonants YHWH
 - In the Hebrew Bible, whenever the consonants of God's name appeared, the vowels of the word *Adonai* ("Lord") were placed with the consonants to remind people to say *Adonai* rather than God's name and thus not use His name in vain
 - Later, some assumed the consonants YHWH with the vowels for *Adonai* formed the name of God and thus the name Jehovah came into being
- *3 Moses' task - all Moses had to do was go back to Egypt where he was wanted for murder and lead out a large group of slaves against the will of the king of Egypt (Exod. 3:10) - the task was impossible for Moses, but possible for God

Moses' Excuses (3:11ff)

- 3:11, who am I to do this task?
- 3:13, they will ask who sent me
- 4:1, they will not believe me
- 4:10, I am not eloquent
- 4:13, I do not want to go

Signs given to Moses (Exod. 4:1-9)

- *1 Three signs
 - 1a--His rod becomes a snake and then a rod again
 - 1b--His hand becomes leprous and the clean again
 - 1c--Water taken from the Nile River becomes blood when poured out on the ground
- *2 Problems
 - 2a--The Egyptian magicians could do the first (Exod. 7:11-12) and third (Exod. 7:22) - growing up in Egypt Moses might have seen the magicians do these things
 - 2b--Moses never showed the second sign to the Egyptians - they may not have been as concerned about leprosy as the Israelites
 - 2c--The third sign could only be done in Egypt; in the desert Moses could not know if that sign would work or not.
 - 2d--The signs are impressive to us because they are out of the ordinary, they seem not have impressed Moses; they do not provide evidence of the power Moses needed to fight Pharaoh

Reluctance of Moses (4:10-21)

- *1 Moses complains he cannot speak well - God answers that He:
 - 1a--Made Moses that way
 - 1b--Will send Aaron, Moses' brother to speak for him
- *2 Moses will tell Aaron exactly what to say. For Aaron, listening to Moses will be like listening to God (a great and unwanted responsibility for Moses)
- *3 Moses asks Jethro to allow him to visit Egypt to check on his family - he does not tell Jethro, a religious individual, the truth about his task
- *4 God assures Moses that those in Egypt who sought to kill him are dead - that fact probably makes Moses less apprehensive
- *5 God also reveals to Moses that He will harden Pharaoh's heart and finally kill the firstborn of Egypt - Moses knows his task will be exceedingly difficult

Experience on the way to Egypt (Exod. 4:24-26)

- *1 As Moses journeys to Egypt, God seeks to kill him
 - 1a--Why would God do this?
 - Probably his son or sons are not circumcised and he has not fulfilled God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17). Impression is that God cannot use anyone who has not embraced the covenant and its rituals
 - May have been intended to force Moses to realize the power of God
 - Moses was reluctant to face Pharaoh knowing his power and not knowing God's power - Pharaoh's power was supreme in Egypt - could God take him on in his land?
 - Moses knew Pharaoh held the power of life and death--his soldiers carried out his orders. Moses discovers God also held power of life and death and did not need soldiers--God could take Pharaoh on and win

Moses arrives and Israel believes (Exod. 4:27-31)

- *1 Moses shows the signs to the Israelites in Egypt and they believe
- *2 The Israelites bow down and worship God