

**Moses -
Servant of God -
The meekest man in all the earth**

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Moses

1 – By Faith

In this series of Discovery talks we will look at the life story of one of the greatest national statesmen and leaders that the world has ever known. Moses was chosen, and appointed in a most unusual and dramatic way, to become in God's hands the deliverer of the nation of Israel. Moses' life spanned 120 years, in which he faithfully served God and His people. God's choices are always good ones, and His chosen servants do great exploits for Him.

Moses' story begins in the land of Egypt, and it is recorded for us in the Old Testament book of Exodus. In chapter 1 of that book we are told that the children of Israel had become slaves to the Egyptians and were suffering terribly at their hands. This was the situation into which Moses was born. He was the youngest son of a godly couple named Amram and Jochabed. They were of the family tribe of Levi that later would be appointed as priests to lead the people in their worship. Moses was born in the year 1571 BC. His name is interesting because it means "drawn out, or taken out of the water, and, as we shall see, this name was very appropriate.

Because the Hebrew people had become very numerous, Pharaoh was worried that they might join with Egypt's enemies and overthrow him and so he ordered that all Hebrew male children were to be drowned at birth. Knowing this and, like any parents, wanting to save their infant son's life, they hid him for three months and then placed him in a floating cot among the bulrushes along the river bank. Now it was not just fear for their child's life that prompted them to do this, as we read in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 23:

"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."

This was both an act of courage and an exercise of true faith and reliance upon the Lord their God. It has been recognised that Jochabed was one of the great spiritual mothers that we read about in the Scriptures. She was responsible for bearing and raising three of the foremost leaders of the nation of Israel - Aaron, Miriam and, of course, Moses. It is evident that in that family God was trusted and given His rightful place. This should be a reminder to all of us who have children or grandchildren of the responsibility we have to instruct them in the things of the Lord and how they should reverence Him. This we will only ever do by godly example lived out in our own lives.

After placing the infant Moses in his cot among the bulrushes, his mother and his sister, Miriam kept watch over him and tended to his needs. Before long we see the next step in the sovereign purposes of God for this special child. Pharaoh's daughter, a Princess of Egypt, went down to the Nile to bathe, and walking by the river she saw the cot, and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened the cot and saw the baby, who was crying. Moses' sister acted quickly and cleverly. She took the opportunity to speak to the princess and offered to get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child. Who did she get? None other than Moses' own mother! In this way the young child was brought up to know the things of God and the faith of his parents - the godly Amram and Jochabed.

We see the hand of God at work in this, making provision for the child's welfare and preserving his life, because in the purposes of God this child would become the leader of the Children of Israel - his chosen people. In these events God was working his purpose out for the deliverance of the Hebrews from their slavery under the Egyptians. What a picture this is of a loving and caring God. This same God even now desires the deliverance of all who live in slavery to their sin and He has made provision for this through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

So Moses, the infant child was nursed and cared for by the one who loved him most, his mother. The Bible tells us further, that when the child was older his mother took him to Pharaoh's daughter, the Egyptian princess, and he became her adopted son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water." Moses lived and grew up in Pharaoh's palace and was educated and trained as a prince of Egypt.

In our study of his life, we will discover that it divides conveniently into three equal periods of 40 years each:

40 years living in Pharaoh's palace as a prince - learning to be SOMETHING.

40 years living and working as a shepherd in Midian - learning to be NOTHING. 40 years travelling in the wilderness as Israel's leader - learning that God is EVERYTHING.

Before we close this study, we need to remember that, like every great servant of God, which he turned out to be, Moses was a man of faith. This we will see was demonstrated throughout his long life. In Hebrews Chapter 11 verses 1 and 2 we read, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for." They were commended for their absolute trust in God and His word. It would be good if that could be said of each of us who is a Christian believer.

Like all His great servants, Moses had a very intimate relationship with God. It has been said that "Moses' position was unique, as no other person of his time, and no other leader after him, had the face-to-face relationship with God that Moses had", We pause here to recognise the importance of all of us in the present day, having such a relationship with God on an individual basis. This only becomes possible as we realise the fact, that we were born sinners, and it is sin that separates us from God who is righteous and holy.

The Bible teaches, in 1 John chapter 1 verse 9, that if we confess our sins, "God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." When that takes place, we become sons and daughters of the living God and members of His great family for eternity. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 he says "For it is by grace you have been saved (from your sins) through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God". And in Romans chapter 10 verse 17, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

My prayer for you as a listener to the "Discovery" programme is that, if you have not already done so, you will respond in faith to the good news of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, and see God work in your life as He did in the life of Moses.

Moses

2 – God's Purposes Revealed

As we continue to discover the lessons to be learned from the life of Moses, we remind ourselves that in the story so far. After being rescued from certain death by the actions of his sister Miriam and his mother Jochabed, he has been taken into the household of Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt, as the adopted son of the king's daughter. This would be his situation for the first forty years of his life.

We are going to look this time at Moses' education and training that was to last in all for some eighty years. It has been well said that in God's school, when He educates, He does so in a manner worthy of Himself. God will not have a novice to do His essential work. The true servant of God has to learn many a lesson, undergo many an experience, pass through many a trial and conflict as the Lord prepares him for His service.

We are told in Stephen's address to the Sanhedrin, recorded in Acts chapter 7, that Moses was "educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and became powerful in speech and action." This was stage one of his development. Being educated by the finest of tutors in a royal court, where authority, order, protocol and dignity ruled, Moses would be fitted to eventually become a ruler and leader in Israel. Also, by having his education in such a learned court, Moses would be fitted to write as an historian. He was later credited with having written the first five books of the Bible, Genesis to Deuteronomy, called The Pentateuch. In addition, being educated as an Egyptian, Moses would be fitted to become in God's time an ambassador to the court of Pharaoh.

In all his time in the Egyptian court, Moses never forgot that he was a Hebrew by birth and as such belonged to the people to whom God had given His promise of blessing through their ancestor Abraham. His experience as a prince of Egypt ended when he was forty years old, after which he entered the second phase of God's dealings with him. Knowing through his own family, the plight of his fellow Hebrews, he went out one day to where they were working and watched them at their hard labour. On seeing an Egyptian slave-master beating one of them, Moses immediately reacted. Glancing around and seeing no one was watching, he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. Moses was soon to discover, that this was a very wrong course of action. Pharaoh on hearing about it tried to have him killed for his crime, but Moses fled and went to live in obscurity in the land of Midian.

This shows us very clearly that Moses still had lessons to learn by bitter experience. God's timing is always perfect; man's timing can be disastrous. We must act in God's time and never before. Moses would have judged Egypt there and then, and sought to deliver his brothers immediately. He was to discover, however, that God's time and his would come in due course. In our service for God, we need to learn that it is the servant of God, working within God's will and at His time, who is in a position to act with heavenly wisdom, and that divine intelligence will be his guide.

In God's purposes Moses was destined to live a very varied and productive life. Under God's direction he would fulfil a number of important roles. They would be as:

First, an Historian: He wrote a detailed and accurate record of all God's dealings with the nation of Israel during his leadership. In the book of Numbers chapter 33 verse 2 we read that at the Lord's command Moses recorded each stage in Israel's journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Second, as a Prophet. A prophet is one who speaks as the accredited messenger of Almighty God. We read in Deuteronomy chapter 34 verse 10 "Since then no prophet had vision in Israel like Moses whom the Lord knew face-to-face. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel." In the New Testament, Jesus said "Moses wrote of me". Someone commenting on that said: "Moses prophetically saw all the greatness and worth of the promised Saviour of the World - Jesus Christ".

Third, as a Legislator given the Ten Commandments directly from the mouth of God, he was ordered to administer ceremonial and civil law for the nation of Israel.

Fourth, as a Diplomat, Leader and Statesman. Following the Exodus, Moses led over one million people through the wilderness to the threshold of the Promised Land.

His was really a remarkable life and there is much more that we are going to learn from it. In particular we will see that, just like his parents before him, Moses was a man of faith. We read in Hebrews chapter 11 verses 24 to 27 the following testimony concerning him: "By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be ill-treated 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 far greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."

This reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 to 21: "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." In a world where so much attention is given to material possessions, this is sound teaching for us all.

Moses left Egypt under the threat of death, but it is evident from the following comment in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 27 that fear was not the overriding reason: "By faith he left Egypt not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible." Already Moses was beginning to understand that God had plans for him to bring about the liberation of the Children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. But, as we have seen, it was not yet God's time. Moses had another forty years to spend in preparation in God's school of learning. He had learned to be a "someone", a prince in Egypt, now he would have to learn to be a "no-one", a shepherd in the land of Midian.

Moses

3 – Moses in Midian

We continue our study of the life and work of Moses the servant of God.

Having completed the first forty years of his life in the palace of Pharaoh, we read in Exodus chapter 2 verse 15 that Moses having killed a man who was ill-treating a fellow Hebrew, had to flee for his life from Pharaoh, who was intent on putting him to death. We read that because of this Moses fled and went to live in the country of Midian. We finished last time by noting that fear was not the overriding factor in Moses' leaving Egypt. Although his life was in real danger, it is evident that Moses was already conscious of the fact that God had plans for him where the liberation of his fellow Hebrews was concerned. We are told in Hebrews chapter 11 that it was "by faith" that he left Egypt to go to the land of Midian. The Midianites were a nomadic people, who lived in tents, kept sheep and travelled on camels. They mainly inhabited the dry barren lands on the western edge of the Arabian Desert. It is obvious that God guided him to this place, to live with people who were of the family of Abraham. These were God fearing people who dealt kindly with this runaway.

On his arrival in Midian we are told that Moses sat down by a well. He was, no doubt, tired and thoughtful, and very much on his own. What a contrast with his previous station in life! Here was no royal palace. Now Moses was thrown entirely upon God. This second stage in his life was to be one of great importance. Egypt had made him a scholar, prince and soldier which would fit him to rule Israel eventually. Midian, however, would teach him how to commune directly with Almighty God. This was in readiness for the day when he would converse with God at Horeb. He was to discover that while his forty years in Egypt were valuable, the second forty years in Midian would prove invaluable.

Someone has said: "Nothing can ever make up for the lack of secret communion with God in solitude, or the special training and discipline of his school". All of God's substantial servants in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible have had to pass through training with God alone. For example we have Elijah at the brook Cherith in 1 Kings chapter 17, where God communicated with him directly. We also have Ezekiel at Chebar. Here this great prophet of the Lord heard the voice of God saying to him, "Son of man stand up on your feet and I will speak to you to tell you that I am sending you to the rebellious nation of Israel as my messenger." Then in the New Testament, we have the Apostle Paul in Arabia. For a few years following his amazing conversion, God, it is believed, instructed him directly for his future service as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Finally, we see God's perfect servant, our Lord Jesus Christ and note that the time He spent in private was nearly ten times as long as that spent in public ministry. He spent much time in prayer and in communion with his Father, away from the crowds and in quiet places.

In all this we discover that the hand of man can never mould a vessel suitable for God's use. God alone can prepare individuals for His purpose. Here we can all learn a lesson if we are to become useful in God's service. Our preparation must centre upon God's work manual - the Holy Scriptures. Before Jesus left His disciples to return to His Father, He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit who would teach His followers all about Himself and the work they were to do for Him. We should, as followers today, make time in our lives to read and

meditate upon God's precious word. It is that "which will thoroughly equip the man of God for every good work", as Paul wrote in his Second Letter to Timothy chapter 3 verse 17.

When Moses arrived at Midian he was led by God to meet the family of Jethro, a God fearing man who had seven daughters. Moses met the daughters first when they came to the well, where Moses was resting, to draw water for their sheep. His first act was that of a gentleman when he drove off some shepherds who were harassing the young women. Afterwards, Moses was invited into their family home. He was well received and offered hospitality. Eventually he was given one of Jethro's daughters as his wife. Her name was Zipporah and she later bore him a son whom Moses named Gershom, saying, "I have become an alien in a foreign land". Moses in turn became a shepherd working for Jethro. In tending and caring for the sheep, Moses learned some of his sweetest and most enduring lessons in preparation for what lay ahead.

It is interesting to note that in Scripture some of God's greatest servants were shepherds. Looking after sheep is one of mankind's oldest occupations. Shepherds often lived a hard, tough life battling against the elements and protecting their flocks from wild animals and other dangers. Perhaps the most famous biblical shepherd is King David whose experiences as a shepherd boy prepared him for his later battles and service. Out of his shepherd experience he was able to write his Psalm of praise and confidence in the Lord who was his shepherd - Psalm 23. David was, of course, the ancestor in his human family of the Lord Jesus who described Himself as "The Good Shepherd." We read this in John's Gospel chapter 10 verse 11 where he says: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Later, in verse 14, He says, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."

The Lord Jesus is comparing himself with bad shepherds who are only hired men and care little for the flock because the sheep do not belong to them. This good shepherd cares so much for His flock that He is prepared to lay down His life for the sheep. Jesus in His love for you and me offered up His life for our sins on the cross. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah, in chapter 53, puts it like this, "We all like sheep have gone astray, each one of us has turned to His own way; and the Lord has laid on Him (the Lord Jesus) the iniquity of us all." The good shepherd knows who are His Sheep and his Sheep know Him. Do you know Him? Have you, by faith, accepted Him as your Saviour and Lord?

So Moses, formerly an Egyptian prince, educated in all the wisdom of ancient Egypt, became a lowly shepherd. He remained in Midian for forty years before he completed this second stage in his development for the future leadership of Israel.

Moses

4 – An Encounter with God

In our discovery of the life of Moses, perhaps one of the most famous national leaders in history, we have reached the second stage in God's preparation of him. The first forty years of his life had been spent as an adopted member of the family of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. There he had been highly educated and trained as a prince, all this being part of God's plans for his future role in the deliverance of the Hebrew people from their slavery. After running away from Egypt because of his hasty action in killing an Egyptian slave-master, Moses was taken in by a God-fearing family in the land of Midian and eventually employed by them as a shepherd. During that time he married a daughter of that household and they had a son born to them whom they called Gershom. This was a play on words because the name sounds like the Hebrew for "an alien there." We are told that Moses gave his son that name "because I have become an alien in a foreign land."

Moses worked faithfully as a shepherd for his father-in-law Jethro for the next forty years of his life. Nearing the end of this period, leading his sheep one day to the far side of the desert, he came to Horeb, known as the mountain of the Lord. There he had a most amazing experience. He saw a bush on fire and yet it was not consumed. In the middle of the flames, the angel of the Lord appeared to him. As he approached the bush God called to him, twice repeating his name. Moses replied, "Here I am." He was then cautioned to draw near, but not too near. In other words, he was to express reverence in God's presence and be ready to obey. God then said, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." God's holiness was declared, which demanded respect and submission on Moses' part. He was then reminded, by the voice from the bush, that God was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the fathers of the nation of Israel. These were the patriarchs, men with whom God had communicated directly in the past. These men were each very different in personality, character and faithfulness, but not withstanding this God dealt very graciously with them and was pleased to be known as their God. Now he is about to reveal His purposes for this new servant of His, and for the nation of Israel itself. At this we are told Moses hid his face because he was afraid.

There followed a tremendous statement of intent from God himself: "I have seen the misery of my people. I have heard their crying out. I am concerned about their suffering." What encouragement God's people in every age can take from this! Nothing in relation to His people who trust in Him is overlooked by an all seeing, compassionate God. We then note the promise of action which God intended to take: "I have come down to rescue them and bring them up from the hand of their oppressors, and take them into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Forty years earlier Moses had tried to take matters into his own hands, but it was not God's time. Now the time had come. God had spent eighty years training this man for the great task He had for him. God said further, "I am sending you, Moses, to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt." Moses was obviously overcome by all this, and said to God, "But who am I (he had learned humility in the school of God in the wilderness) that I should go to Pharaoh? That I should bring them out", God replied immediately, "I will be with you".

It is very encouraging to note that God then made a promise to Moses saying, "This will be a 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". Moses again showed his uncertainty about going to his fellow countrymen with this message from God, saying, "When they question me as to who commissioned me, whom shall I say is sending me, what is his name?" God's reply was immediate, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. "I am" has sent me to you. This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation".

Every Christian believer can identify with these words, our trust and faith is in the unchanging, ever faithful promise-keeping Jehovah. As His servants we, like Moses, are privileged to live and work for such a God who commissions and equips us for His service. We can take to heart Paul's personal testimony in Philippians chapter 4 verse 13, "I can do all things through Christ Jesus who gives me strength".

God's final word to Moses from the burning bush was this "Gather together the elders of Israel and inform them of my promise to bring you up out of Egypt and your misery there, and take you into a new land, the land of the Canaanites - a land flowing with milk and honey" - milk speaking of sustenance, and honey of sweetness. Here is a picture of how God provides for His people in every age. One of God's Bible titles is Jehovah Jireh, which means the Lord will provide, and He certainly does.

As we consider God's intention for His people, out of love for them, to provide deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, it serves to remind us of His goodness and grace in providing for our salvation from slavery - the slavery of sin. Down through the ages He worked out His purpose culminating in the precious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Saviour of all who will by faith receive Him into their lives. All this because He is a God of love whose love encompasses all people. This is summed-up for us in the First Letter of John chapter 4 verses 9 and 10: "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is what love is, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." And not only this, but the believer has the promise of Christ's presence to help and to sustain. He has promised that He will be with His servants right through to the end of this day of grace and until He returns to take them home to be with Him in glory.

The promise of the divine presence is all that a sent servant of the Lord will ever need. Paul wrote centuries later to the Roman believers, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" In all that happened at the burning bush, Moses was made aware of the concern, the compassion and finally the commission of his God in relation to his people.

We shall see next time that Moses still needed more convincing before he would eventually return to Egypt to begin the final stage in God's purposes for him.

Moses

5 – Moses is Commissioned

Moses is about to enter what we might call the third phase of his life. For the first forty years he lived in the court of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and was educated as a prince, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. During that time he remained in touch with his own family who as Hebrews remained faithful to the true and living God. The second forty years of his life were spent in the land of Midian where he married, had a son, and worked as a shepherd for his father-in-law Jethro. Towards the end of that period he had his first direct encounter with God who spoke to him from a burning bush. It was then that God told Moses that he was being sent back to Egypt because God was going to set His people free from their slavery and take them to a land of their own.

Last time we noted that Moses was instructed to inform the elders of Israel of God's plans. He was assured by God that the elders would listen to him. God's further instruction was that Moses, accompanied by the elders, would go to Pharaoh to inform him directly of God's intentions. However, God also told Moses that Pharaoh would not be prepared to comply with his command to let the people go unless a mighty hand would compel him. God said further, "I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders I will perform among them. After that Pharaoh will let you go."

Thinking about the seriousness of this, we are reminded of the statement found in the New Testament, in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 31, where we read, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God in judgement". This was something the Egyptians were about to experience.

We discover next that Moses reacted in a disappointing way by saying to the Lord, "What if they do not believe me or listen to my voice"? God answered, "What is that in your hand?" - speaking of the rod or shepherd's crook he was carrying. This was a symbol of Moses' shepherd calling, and at best but a poor weapon, either of offence or defence. However, Moses was to learn that even a rod was quite enough for God if it was put at his disposal. He, the Almighty, could so transform it into a living thing of power and action that it would bring about His divine purpose. The lesson for us all to learn from this is that God's appointments and God's apportionment's are always equal. God is always prepared to take what a man or woman has and use it for His own witness and work. The challenge to us in our day is that we have all that is necessary within us to make a contribution to the witness and work of the Lord.

There are many examples in scripture of seemingly insignificant things being used by God to bring about His purposes. For example, in Judges chapter 7 verse 16, we read of empty jars being used by Gideon to win a great victory, and in 1 Kings chapter 17 verse 13, one cake of barley meal used to feed many hungry people. 1 Samuel chapter 17 verse 49, a shepherd's sling and five smooth stones in the hand of David, brought down a giant warrior, and as a result Israel prevailed in battle.

Someone has said "little is much if God is in it". Moses was instructed by God to throw his shepherd's rod on the ground, and in an instant it became a snake that Moses shrank from.

So the Lord told him to take it by the tail, he did this and it turned back into his rod. This said the Lord is so that Pharaoh will believe that the Lord has appeared to you.

The second sign was that Moses' hand became leprous when he put it inside his cloak. On returning this hand inside his cloak it was restored as it was before. The Lord then said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground." The river Nile was the life stream of Egypt, which would become a judgement against them. This underlined the danger in refusing to bow to God's demands and the evidences of His power.

Sadly, all this failed to satisfy Moses, and he started to make excuses to the Lord, saying, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, I am slow of speech and tongue". God answered, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him his sight or makes him blind? Is it not I the Lord? Now go, I will help you speak, and will teach you what to say". Moses still resisted saying, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it". Moses, great man though he was, greatly tried God's patience, but God was gracious towards him and said, "What about your brother Aaron, he can speak well, he is already on his way to meet you. I will help both of you to speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you."

Throughout the Old Testament we have other examples of men who were called by God to do some service for Him, but who were reluctant to commit themselves or were unsure of themselves. We can think of men like Gideon who needed a sign from the Lord before going out to battle Israel's enemies. Then there was Jonah who ran away when God called him to preach to the evil city of Nineveh. And then there was Jeremiah who, on being called to become the Lord's prophet to the people of Judah, said : 'Ah, sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.' But the Lord replied, "Do not say I am only a child. You must go to everyone I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of anyone for I am with you and will rescue you." Then we read that the Lord touched the lips of Jeremiah.

This was a lesson that Moses also learned, that no unclean lips can carry the message of the Lord. This is a lesson for us today, that all who would witness for the Lord, whether by preaching or personal testimony, must do so with clean lips; lips that are cleansed from all dishonesty or unseemly talk. God deals graciously but firmly with those whom He calls, just as He did with Moses. The lesson he had to learn was to trust completely in God and not in his own abilities. Those whom God calls, He enables and supports.

Moses

6 – The Return to Egypt

In our consideration of Moses we have reached the end of the second period of his life.

You may recall that we discovered earlier that his life can be divided into three periods of forty years. The first was spent in Egypt as a member of the royal household learning all the arts of leadership and diplomacy as an adopted prince. All through that time he never forgot that he belonged to the Hebrew people - God's own special people, the Israelites. The second period was spent in the land of Midian working as a shepherd for his father-in-law, Jethro.

It was at the end of this period that God revealed Himself to Moses through a bush that burned but was not consumed. It was there that the Lord told him that He had plans to deliver the Hebrews, from their enslavement in Egypt. Moses was to go back and confront Pharaoh and demand that he allow God's people to go free. At first Moses was very reluctant to accept what God was commissioning him to do. However, after his queries, misgivings and excuses before God in which he experienced the patience, grace and understanding of the Lord, Moses returned home to Midian. There, no doubt, he informed Jethro, a God-fearing man, of his experience at Mount Horeb. After this, in obedience to God's purposes, he returned to Egypt with Jethro's blessing and good will. He took with him his family and his shepherd's crook, which some have called the staff of God. We are told that God then said to him, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do".

On his journey Moses was made to realise that he must obey all the commandments of the Lord and circumcise his son as a sign and recognition that he too belonged to the covenant people of God. This would teach us, yet again, that obedience to all of the Lord's requirements is required of all who would serve him. This was to be the first priority for Moses, and he sought to maintain this throughout his life.

As Moses moved on, God prompted Aaron, his brother, to join him in the desert. Moses then told Aaron of all that God had communicated to him from the burning bush, and of all that God was sending him to say to Pharaoh. In addition, he recounted the instructions about the miraculous signs God had commanded him to perform. Then the two brothers called together all the elders of Israel, and Aaron informed them of everything that God had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. Best of all, he stated that God was concerned about his people and had seen their misery. In response to this, they bowed down and worshipped the Lord. It is a good thing for us as believers today to constantly to bow in worship as we reflect upon the greatness, goodness and grace of our God towards us in the gift of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Saviour and redeemer.

Another important lesson for us to learn is seen in Moses' second priority. This is the application of God's word and obedience to it in all that we do. We are privileged to have God's word in full in the Bible, which has been preserved for us through the centuries. Many great servants of God have given their lives so that the Holy Scriptures might be freely available for all to read. We thank God for such diligence and dedication on their part. This

in itself should make us value the scriptures highly, and motivate us to read from them daily. It is from the word of God that we receive our spiritual food, which in turn helps us to grow to be more like our Saviour and Lord.

Moses and Aaron then made their way to Pharaoh's palace. On being shown into the king's presence they told him what their God required of him in relation to the Israelites, his people. Pharaoh's reaction was to say, "Who is this Lord? I do not know him and will not let them go, but rather will give them more to do". This distressed Moses considerably. It frequently happens that the first result of courageous obedience appears to be failure. Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he increased the workload of the Israelites. Worse was to follow because the people blamed Moses for what was now happening.

Moses reacted to this new situation by turning to God in prayer, the third priority in Moses' life. He posed a question to the Lord, "Why have you brought trouble upon my people? Is this why you sent me on this mission?" This was not at all an expression of unbelief, but rather of confidence. Moses was so sure that God had sent him that he was quite unable to accept failure as the ultimate outcome of his obedience. To refuse to believe that God has made any mistake, even when everything appears to have gone wrong is real faith. We honour God when we trust Him, and ask such questions as these.

The true servant of God clings to the fact that God's purpose is greater than his own understanding. So Moses has no hesitation in asking "Why"? Just as any parent welcomes the questions of the child who trusts him, so does God make each obscure thing a stepping-stone to higher and further knowledge for those who would serve Him faithfully, although they may sometimes find things difficult to understand. The Lord says, "trust me!" To such questions, God's answer is often the one He gave here to Moses: "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh; because of my mighty hand he will drive my people out of Egypt and let them go".

God also gave Moses a tremendous series of promises: "I am the Lord the Almighty, the covenanting God of your fathers. All my resources will be diverted at bringing my promises to Israel to pass". This can be summed up in three great promises or predictions concerning his purposes for Israel:

1. I will bring you out from bondage - that is EMANCIPATION.
2. I will redeem you with a stretched out arm - that is REDEMPTION.
3. I will bring you into the land which I promised your fathers - that is REALISATION.

The purposes of God in salvation have never changed and what He was about to do for the people of Israel He is doing for people today. It is wonderful to know that the good news, which Jesus taught his disciples to preach after he returned to heaven, offers to sinners like you and me freedom from the sin that holds us captive - that is EMANCIPATION. It also tells us that Jesus paid the price upon the cross for our sins - that is REDEMPTION, and finally that Jesus one day will come back again to take us home to glory - that is REALISATION.

Have you placed your faith in this unchanging God?

Moses

7 – Judgement and Salvation

We are continuing to discover some key lessons from the life of Moses the Servant of God.

Moses has returned to Egypt at the command of the Lord to seek the release of the Hebrew people from their slavery. He has confronted Pharaoh with God's demands, but has been met with point blank refusal to let the people go. The judgements, which God promised would take place because of Pharaoh's indifference, took the form of nine terrible plagues the details of which are described in Exodus chapters 7 to 10.

It is interesting to note the words of Exodus chapter 12 verse 12 where God says, "Against all the gods of Egypt I will bring judgement." We see this borne out in each separate plague. For instance, they worshipped the River Nile - which was turned to blood. They also worshipped the Sacred Beetle - the Scarab. They worshipped birds and cats and bulls - the Sacred Appis Bulls whose giant tombs can still be seen today.

The sun, moon and other heavenly bodies were also an important part of ancient Egyptian worship. It is on these that God's judgement plagues fell. Pharaoh and the Egyptians must be taught the folly of their idolatry and unbelief. They must either separate from their idols or perish with them.

God's moral law remains to this day and is still binding. We note the words of Exodus chapter 20 verse 4:

"You shall not make for yourself and idol in the form of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

This, of course, was one of the ten commandments given to Moses, Israel's leader, sometime later. Sadly, Israel as a nation did not always obey the words of God, and they suffered much as a result. It is because the sinful nature of mankind has made it impossible for everyone born into the world to obey these commands of God that there is the evil and sadness and despair that we see around us every day. God's moral law is the standard that He requires of us, but, as the Bible teaches us, we have all sinned and fall short of that standard and as a consequence are spiritually dead because of our disobedience.

The Bible also tells us that this law was given to highlight our inability to please God of ourselves and to drive us to Him for forgiveness. But there is hope for all as declared in these words in Romans chapter 6 verse 23:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

We recall that Jesus said one day during his time on earth, quoted in John chapter 17 verse 3, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent".

What an important statement this is, showing us that God in Christ offers each one who will believe, a personal relationship as well as the gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

Judgement awaits all who refuse to heed what God says, as Pharaoh was soon to discover.

Following the nine plagues described in Exodus chapters 7 to 10, we note that Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship your Lord, even take your women and children with you, only leave your flocks and herds behind". This was not possible because the livestock would provide the necessary sacrifices for the worship of the Lord. This in turn caused Pharaoh to go back on his promise and not allow the people to go. In a rage he said to Moses, "Get out of my sight, make sure you do not appear before me again. The day you see my face you will die". "Just as you say", Moses replied, "I will never appear before you again". As a result of this we read in chapter 11, that God said to Moses his faithful servant, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and Egypt. After that he will let you go from here, and when he does he will drive you out completely".

The final judgement was to be directed against the first born son of every family in the land. Including the first born son of the king down to the first born son of the slave girl. This judgement would also fall upon their cattle. Inevitably it would leave in its wake great sorrow and crying. We must never lose sight of the fact that God is sovereign and all that He does is just and right. We are reminded here, yet again, of the severity of God's judgements that result from ignoring his commands.

It is important to observe what the Lord communicated to Moses concerning this final plague that He was going to bring upon Pharaoh and all the people of Egypt. The Lord told Moses that so as to be safe from the judgement that was coming, on the tenth day of the month each Israelite man was to take from the flock an unblemished lamb for his family, one for each household. The lamb was to be kept for four days and then killed. The blood of the lamb was to be smeared on the sides and top of the door-frames of their houses. On that night the judgement of God would fall on the Egyptians and all the first born would die. The significance of the blood on the door posts of the Israelites is seen in God's words to Moses: "I am the Lord: The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood I will pass over you and the destructive plague will not touch you."

There is an important principle for us to discover in all this. God was warning his people that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness for sins. An innocent, perfect lamb was sacrificed - its blood shed - so that the sins of the Israelites would be atoned for and they would come under the protection of the Lord when the Egyptians came under his judgement for their sin and disobedience. When we come to the New Testament we have the words of John the Baptist who, as he was preaching one day, saw the Lord Jesus approaching and cried out: "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He was speaking of the time when some three years later Jesus would be nailed to a cross to be, by the shedding of his blood, the sacrifice for our sins. It is that shed blood, that perfect life laid down, which cleanses the believer from all sin. Later, when writing to the Christians

in Corinth, the apostle Paul would remind them that "Christ, our Passover Lamb has been slain for us."

Moses was further told that the month in which these things would take place was to be the first month of a new year for the people of Israel. That day was to be commemorated for generations to come, and is celebrated as a festival to the Lord even in our time. It is called "Passover", and serves as a reminder of the deliverance of those who followed to the letter God's instructions.

Friend, are you still under the judgement of God for your sins, or have you by faith taken heed to his word and placed yourself under the protection of the shed blood of Christ?

Moses

8 – The Journey Begins

As we continue this discovery of Moses' life we have reached a key point in the purpose of God to have Pharaoh, king of Egypt, release the Hebrew people from their slavery and let them leave the country. Nine times Pharaoh has hardened his heart against God, although this had brought disaster on his people and his country in the form of dreadful plagues.

The final judgement, in which, in one awful night, the first born child of every Egyptian family died, caused great sorrow and mourning throughout the land. The Hebrews had been saved from this awful judgement because they had obeyed God's instructions that each family was to sacrifice a lamb as atonement for their sins and sprinkle its blood on the sides and tops of the door frames of their houses. During that night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and his brother Aaron and said to them, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites. Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go, and also bless me." The ordinary Egyptians urged the people to leave because they were afraid that they would all die. They were so afraid that they were happy to help the Israelites on their way with gifts of silver and gold and clothing and whatever they asked for. And so began what is known to this day as "The Exodus", when God delivered his people from the slavery they had experienced for so long, just as He had promised He would. On that momentous day Israel began a journey towards the land that God had promised them long ago through their ancestor Abraham. It was a journey that would, because of their unbelief and rebellion, take almost forty years.

This was a day and a deliverance they must never forget. In Exodus chapter 13 verse 3 we are told that Moses said to the people: "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand." So began the memorial feast called "Passover" because the Lord had said, "When I see the blood I will pass over you." It was because God loved them that He delivered them by his mighty power and through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Here is a graphic picture of the great work of salvation made possible by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Because of his great love God gave up his only begotten Son to die for us so that we might be delivered from the slavery of our sin and be released from the fear of death. Many years later Paul in writing to Christians could say, "Christ our Passover Lamb has been slain for us." The people of Israel had good cause to remember and celebrate their great deliverance. How much more should we who are God's people today be grateful for so wonderful a salvation and regularly come to the Lord's Table to remember these things as He asked us to.

As they set out on their epic journey, God promised through Moses that He would constantly go ahead of them to guide them on their way. In the day-time He would lead them in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire. Having brought them out of Egypt and delivered them from slavery God was going to be with them on all their journey to the land of the promise. It is just the same for God's people today, those who are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have his promise recorded in John chapter 8 verse 12, "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Having saved us, God does not leave us alone to find our own way along the Christian

pathway, but promises to be with us and by his Holy Spirit within us to be our constant companion and guide.

In Exodus chapter 13 verse 17 we read that when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the country of the Philistines, though that was a shorter route, for God said that if they face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt. Instead he instructed Moses to lead them in the direction of the Red Sea. It was here that they were to face the first test of their trust in God. It was a traumatic experience because soon they realised that they were now being pursued by Pharaoh and his army. Pharaoh had again changed his mind about allowing the people to leave. The Israelites were terrified and cried out to the Lord. At the same time they began to blame Moses saying, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?'" How that must have tested Moses' patience! But he said to them, displaying his own absolute trust in God, "Do not be afraid. 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." What a word that is for us today when faced with overwhelming circumstances. "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!"

Too often we try to get ourselves out of situations instead of standing still as it were and trusting the Lord to deliver us in his own time and in his own way. As Christians we may face seemingly impossible situations or determined enemies, but we need to remind ourselves of the statement made by the apostle Paul in the New Testament, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" And, of course, the answer is "no one!"

With the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's army behind them, God instructed Moses to tell the people to move forward. The pillar of cloud that was in front of them moved behind them hiding them from the pursuing army. Ahead of them Moses, at God's command, raised his staff and the waters of the sea parted and by this miracle the Israelites crossed through unharmed on dry land. Moses and the people obeyed God's instructions. This resulted in deliverance for them once again. In Hebrews chapter 11 verse 29 we have a summary of what happened: "By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land: but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned."

I referred just now to Moses' own faith and we surely see it here as he leads the people forward as God told him to. Someone has said that "Moses' faith laid a firm hand on his God's mighty power and God vindicated that faith in a miraculous way. Moses was here giving proof of his leadership qualities. We read in Exodus chapter 14 verse 31, "And when the Israelites saw the great power of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses his servant."

At the beginning of chapter 15 we have the great song of praise that the people, led by Moses, brought to the Lord. There was a time of rejoicing and dancing as they worshipped and gave thanks for their great deliverance. But soon there was to be another test of their faith and their obedience. Moses led the people from the Red Sea into the desert. They travelled for three days without finding water. Finally they arrived at a place called Marah where there was water, but it was so bitter that they could not drink it. Once again they grumbled against Moses. Once again he turns to his God for help and with a piece of wood

thrown into the water it is made sweet for the people to drink. On their epic journey the people of Israel were to discover that the bitter and the sweet are strangely joined in the experiences of every individual.

It is a common mistake to imagine that a life of faith in God must necessarily be one of unclouded brightness and unmixed sweetness. In reality Marah is a halting place on every Christian pilgrim's journey to which all come sooner or later. Grief and sorrow, disappointment and loss, sadness and suffering are part of everyone's experience. However, for our spiritual enrichment, it is in such Marah-like circumstances that new revelations of God's power become realised. As Moses cried out to the Lord, so the Lord heard him and turned the situation around for the good of his people. After this they journeyed on and came to an oasis called Elim with palm trees and twelve springs of water and there they enjoyed more of the Lord's bountiful provision.

Moses

9 – Moses the Intercessor

Under the guiding and protecting hand of God, Moses has led the people out of Egypt and they have set out on their journey to the land God has promised to them. Already they have experienced evidences of God's care and provision for them as He has delivered them from the pursuing Egyptians at the Red Sea, turned bitter water into sweet water and brought them to a place where they could camp in safety and with plenty more water.

As time passed they ran out of the supplies they had brought out of Egypt and were in need of food. Where were they to find food in a desert? Again we see God's amazing provision for them, in spite of their constant complaining to Moses. Every morning He provided them with manna for bread and every evening quails for meat. Such was the grace of God towards an ungrateful and grumbling people.

All this reminds me of the words of Psalm 103 verses 7 to 10: "The Lord made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbour his anger for ever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities." Surely, such gracious provision for the needs of the people was a constant confirmation of God's working on their behalf. This provision lasted until they reached the borders of Canaan some forty years later. They had been brought out of Egypt by divine purpose, and having saved them the Lord was going to preserve them.

The Lord Jesus taught his disciples to ask their heavenly father for their daily bread, to trust Him for the necessities of life, and Christians still do this. We recall the words of the Saviour on another occasion when He described himself as the bread of life, the living bread which came down from heaven. He is the source of spiritual life for a spiritually starving world. He is the food for God's pilgrim people on the way to heaven as they read and think about Him in his word the Bible. If we as Christians do not feed upon Him in this way then we will starve spiritually and fall away.

Moses was proving to be a great leader. He led by example, but his task would never be easy. The people of Israel proved time and again to be ungrateful, disobedient and difficult. In spite of this Moses was able to cope with his responsibilities extremely well, whatever the circumstances, although his patience, and God's patience, was often tried to the limit. How and why was he able to do this? I believe there are three reasons:

1. He was a genuine man of God who had a remarkable, personal relationship with his Lord. Such was this relationship that God often spoke directly with him.
2. He was a man of prayer, particularly on behalf of God's people - the people he had been called to lead. Moses was a great intercessor. The dictionary defines intercession as: "Entreaty in favour of another, especially a prayer in petition to God on behalf of another." As we follow the life of Moses we will often see him interceding before God on behalf of his wayward people.

3. Moses had a large heart of love for his often unlovable people. He was taking God's love for the children of Israel as his example.

So here are the three reasons why Moses succeeded as a leader under God: He had a personal, real relationship with God. He was a man of constant prayer, and he had a genuine love for the people of God. Christian leaders, pastors, and elders can, and need, to learn from Moses this way of godly leadership. They need to put into practice these qualities in their service in Christ's church and among God's people today.

Now we come to the next stage in Israel's journey towards the Promised Land. They have left the oasis of Elim where the Lord supplied them with water and have travelled across the desert towards Mount Sinai. Travelling from place to place as the Lord commanded them, they have arrived at a place called Rephidim. Once again their faith in God is tested because they find that there is no water for the people to drink. It was a situation they had already faced some months before. Again they blame Moses for their predicament and seemingly forget that up to then God had supplied all their need. Moses says to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?" The situation became such that Moses feared for his life thinking that the people were about to stone him. He cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people!" You can almost hear the frustration in his voice! The Lord answered his servant at once, giving him the instructions we find in Exodus chapter 17 verses 5 and 6:

"Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the River Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock of Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."

Obedient servant that he was, Moses did as the Lord commanded him and the people were given an abundant, continuing supply of fresh water to drink. We are told in verse 7 that Moses called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'" Once again we see the kindness of God towards these rebellious people; kindness shown because of his love for them and because of the faithfulness of his servant Moses.

It was at Rephidim that the people were to experience their first encounter with an opposing army. We read in verse 8 that "The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim." These people were a race of wild, desert nomads who were scattered in an area from the far south of Canaan across the Sinai peninsula. They were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob, distant relatives of the Israelites, and were to be a constant enemy before they entered Canaan and even after they had settled in the land. They continued their bandit-like raids until Saul became the first king of Israel. Eventually the race died out. Here at Rephidim they proved to be a strong and determined enemy.

It is at the time of this first battle that we are introduced to a young fighting man called Joshua. He was a true man of God like his leader Moses. His name means "Yahweh (or Jehovah) saves". It was already in God's mind that this young warrior, Joshua, should serve an apprenticeship under Moses and eventually follow him as the overall leader of Israel. In the Aramaic language of New Testament times "Joshua" is the same as "Jesus". You will remember that in Matthew's account of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the angel said to

Joseph, "...you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. "

We have already noted in this talk that Moses was a man of prayer, and we see the evidence of this again as the Israelites fight their enemies. The account of the events that day are found in Exodus chapter 17 verses 8 to 15. Moses instructed Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." What was Moses going to do? He was going to pray that the Lord would give his people victory over the enemy. He took with him Aaron and another man called Hur.

It is an amazing story, for as long as Moses held up the staff of God the Israelites overcame the Amalekites. When Moses lowered his arms the enemy prevailed. The battle continued until sunset and as Moses became tired his companions held up his arms, and so the Israelites won the battle and their enemy was defeated. To commemorate this great victory Moses built an altar and called it "The Lord is my banner". He said, "For hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord."

The lifting up of Moses' hands was an act of intercession on behalf of the fighting men. Unable to fight himself, Moses exerted a powerful influence on the issues of the battle by his prayer. At all times, the Christian man or woman who brings the power of heaven into human affairs does most toward deciding them. Unnoticed by the fighting men, Moses is yet the most conspicuous figure in that day's struggle. Prayer of this sort is never an easy task to be accomplished without effort. The uplifted arm of prayer involves weariness and watchfulness, and it is not to be wondered at that the intercessor is often faint and in need of support as Moses was that day. This is what makes the union of God's people in prayer so necessary and so vital as we confront the enemies we face as believers.

May we learn from the example of Moses the great intercessor before the Lord.

Moses

10 - The Commandments Given

In our discovery of the life of Moses we come this time to the events described in Exodus chapter 19. Three months have passed since the people of Israel were brought out of slavery in Egypt. With a demonstration of his great power God has delivered them from the army of Pharaoh and provided for them on their journey through the desert. Last time we saw how God delivered them from their Amalekite enemy by the intercessory prayer of Moses.

Moving on from Rephidim, the site of that victory, Moses and the people journeyed through the desert to the region of Mount Sinai, also known as Horeb. This was a very significant place in the story of Moses. It was there that God first met with him at the burning bush and gave him His special call to service and the future leadership of Israel. It was also at Sinai that God established his first covenant with the people and it was there that they were to stay for about one year.

During that memorable year two significant things happened: first, Israel was given the Law of God; and second, the multitude that had escaped from Egypt was unified into the beginnings of a nation. This period is of great importance for understanding the will and purpose of God as it is revealed in the rest of the Old Testament. The record of Israel's year at Sinai and the giving of the Law occupies the remainder of the book of Exodus and continues through Leviticus and into the early chapters of Numbers.

In the opening verses of Exodus chapter 19 we are told what happened when Moses and the people arrived at Sinai:

"....Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and to tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

So we read that Moses went back and delivered this message to the elders of Israel and faithfully set before them all that the Lord had commanded him. The response of the people was immediate. They said, "We will do everything the Lord has said." Sadly, as time went on, it became clear that the people of Israel did not realise all the implications of their vow to the Lord. How much better it would have been if they had from the start admitted their inability, in their own strength, to do all that was asked of them. How much better to have placed themselves in the hands of their God to work out his gracious purposes.

As God prepared to reveal his law to Israel, He gave a terrifying display of his divine power, warning the people not to approach the mountain. There would be death for any who even touched it and so disobeyed the Lord's command. God told Moses that He was going to

come down on Mount Sinai in a dense cloud and the people would hear Him speak with his servant. It was to be an awesome occasion for which the people had to be prepared; they must wash their clothes and be set apart to God by Moses and be ready on the third day. There had to be a cleansing before God visited his people. This teaches us never to underestimate the holiness and awesomeness of Almighty God. It is only by his grace, and in the way He has appointed, that sinners can approach Him and come into his presence. Today we can come before God only through the Lord Jesus Christ. We can come boldly, yet with reverence, before Him only as we have been made clean through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

On the third day Moses and his brother Aaron were allowed to ascend the mountain and there God revealed his perfect Law to them. This revelation that the Lord gave to Moses and Aaron we know as The Ten Commandments. We find these commandments in Exodus chapter 20 verses 1 to 17. They can be divided into two groups: the first four covering love for God, and the remaining six love for one's neighbour. They were to have no other God other than the Lord. They were not to make idols to worship. They were not to misuse God's name - and how we need to be reminded of this in our day. They were keep one day each week holy to the Lord. Regarding their relationships with those around them, they were to honour parents; they must not murder, commit adultery, steal or give false testimony against their neighbour; and finally they must not covet anything belonging to someone else. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ summed-up God's Law in this way: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength and mind and your neighbour as yourself.

God's Law contained in these commandments was given to show the standard of behaviour God required of his covenant people. Someone has said, "It was given solely to the people of Israel and was in force for the period of history from Moses to Jesus. However, as an expression of the character and will of God, it operated on principles that are relevant to people of all nations and in every age." What the Law did show was the extent of man's sinfulness. It showed just how short we have fallen from God's righteous standards because of sin. The apostle Paul underlines this in his letter to the Romans chapter 3 verse 23 where he writes, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

Writing to the Galatian Christians in chapter 3 Paul explains that the purpose of the law was to show up sin for what it really is and that the whole world is its prisoner. He says in verse 24, "The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith." No one can be justified before God by the keeping of the law because no one can perfectly keep it. Salvation and forgiveness comes, not through law-keeping, but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel tells us that when a sinner acknowledges his sin and turns in repentance and faith to God, then God, by His grace and wonderful love, receives him, saves and forgives him. The Scriptures teach us that the Lord Jesus Christ has fulfilled the law for us. He is the sinless Son of God, the only one who has lived a perfect life according to God's Law given to Moses. The old hymn says, "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in." He died as our substitute and saviour on the cruel cross at Calvary. Believers in Him are freed from the curse of the law which is death for all who do not perfectly keep it.

Friend, have you been set free in this way? Set free from trying to please God by keeping his law and living by the "Golden rule"? None of us has or can please God or be justified before Him in that way. The purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith in his death for us. It is by God's grace we are saved, through faith in Christ. The Christian believer no longer has to try to keep the Law of God so as to be justified before Him, but the Lord Jesus who kept this law is now our example. By the power of his Holy Spirit within, we seek to love the Lord our God with all our heart, strength and mind, and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. The lesson for us is that this should be our daily endeavour.

Moses

11 – Face to Face With God

Throughout this series on the life and work of Moses we have seen that he was a man of outstanding faithfulness. He was a man worthy of trust and he was totally reliable. These qualities are essential and expected of a true man or woman of God. Sadly, this could not be said of many of Moses' compatriots as they continued their journey towards the Promised Land. So often their behaviour dishonoured their God who was so faithful to them. We see an example of this following Moses' audience with God on Mount Sinai. This was the time when he received the Law of God, ten commandments defining his requirements for the people of Israel. They set out what should be their relationship with the Lord and their relationship with one another if they were to live lives pleasing to Him. These commandments are recorded for us in Exodus chapter 20. In chapters 21 to 23 God gives Moses instructions as to how these commands were to be put into practice in their daily lives.

Later Moses is called to another audience with God on the mountain. This time God gives him details as to how the people should worship and what offerings they should bring by way of sacrifice to the Lord. You will find all this in chapters 25 to 31. We are told that on this occasion Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. He was away from the people for a long time.

There followed what was probably the most trying and difficult experience for Moses in all his time as leader of the Israelites. Before Moses had gone up the mountain the second time, he had read the Book of the Covenant to them and the people had responded again as they had previously, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." While on the mountain God warned Moses that in his absence the people had made themselves an idol in the form of a golden calf and they were worshipping and sacrificing to it. This was an act of direct disobedience to the second commandment and a breaking of the vow that they had made only weeks before. In his anger God threatened to destroy the people and make a great nation through Moses himself. But Moses, by now almost heartbroken and thinking more of God's glory than his own renown, successfully pleaded with God not to destroy the rebellious and disobedient people. Nevertheless, a righteous and holy God could not just ignore Israel's sin and the result was that many of them were struck down by a plague.

We have already discovered that Moses was a man of prayer, especially on behalf of the people. Here again we read in Exodus chapter 32 verses 11 to 13 his plea for them:

"O Lord why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? 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'? Turn from your fierce anger, relent and do not bring disaster on your people."

Moses asks God to remember the promise He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to make their descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and to give them the Promised Land. In verses 31 and 32 we see more of Moses' love for the people of God when, having seen for himself what the people have done, he goes back to God and pleads for them saying: "But now please forgive their sin - but if not then blot me out of the book you have written."

Because of Moses' intercession we read that the Lord did not bring on the people the disaster He had threatened. I sometimes wonder if we pray as earnestly as we should for those whom we know who are unbelievers and who face the judgement of God in a coming day. The example of Moses is a challenge to us all to have a heart of loving concern for those who are lost in their sin.

In chapter 33 of Exodus we see Moses again pleading with God for the people in response to the Lord's statement that He would not go with them to Canaan. Moses' prayer was answered and he was promised the continuing presence of God. Listen to what the Lord said to his faithful servant: "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." What an encouragement that must have been to this sorely tried man!

In this chapter we also see God revealing his character more and more to his servant Moses. Moses wanted to understand better the nature of God. He clearly wanted to know more about the God he loved and served. We see this in verses 18 to 23 of this chapter as Moses asks the Lord to show him His glory. The response he received teaches us much about the sovereignty, holiness and character of our God. He said to Moses:

"I will cause my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

And we are told that the glory of the Lord passed by as Moses was hidden in a cleft in a rock and he saw only a fleeting view.

Following this, Moses went up again to the mountain to speak with the Lord and to make new stone tablets containing the Law of God. Moses in his distress at the idolatry of the people had broken the original stones. For another forty days and nights Moses speaks with God. He pleads again for the sinful people and again the Lord confirms his promise in these words: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you." You can read about this in Exodus chapter 34.

The result of this further face to face encounter with God was amazing. "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and the Israelites saw Moses they were afraid to come near him." The result of this was that Moses had to cover his face with a cloth when he was among the people, but when he went into the presence of the Lord to speak with Him, he removed the covering. What a wonderful picture this is of the effect that close communion with the Lord can have on the life and demeanour of Christian believers. It soon becomes very evident when someone is walking closely with God. It is often seen in their faces and in the way they speak often of their Lord.

Israel's disgraceful behaviour on so many occasions could have had a detrimental effect on Moses and made him wish that he had never been called to lead such a difficult people. It

was to his credit that he remained faithful and stuck to his task, all the time relying upon his God. He was never hot-headed or self-assertive. He remained humble, but was also a strong and decisive leader who led by example. Great lessons can be learned by Christian leaders today from these qualities that Moses displayed. Doing any work for God, either great or small, will never be easy because the people we lead differ in all kinds of ways; they will differ in personality, in expectations, in abilities and in motivation.

These were some of the problems that Moses faced as he led a million or more people through the wilderness. He was diligent and faithful because he knew that God would never fail him.

Another great quality of Moses was his courage. It has been rightly said that courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to disregard and overcome it. Moses was no stranger to fear and yet he showed great personal courage before both God and men. It still takes great personal courage to be a true follower of the Lord; and it takes courage to be a faithful and strong leader in Christ's church today. May we all learn these encouraging and challenging lessons from the life of Moses the servant of God.

Moses

12 – The Tabernacle

We are coming towards the end of this series discovering the life of Moses, a man described as "the meekest man in all the earth." We have followed his story from the time when as a baby he was saved from an untimely death at the hand of Pharaoh of Egypt by the care of his parents and sister. In the overruling providence of God he was taken into the household of Pharaoh's daughter and brought up in the royal palace and educated in all the wisdom of that land. Later he was to spend forty years as a shepherd, before God eventually called and appointed him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and towards the land promised to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For Moses, leading these people was no easy task. They were rebellious and ungrateful and slow to recognise the hand of God in their deliverance from Egypt.

In their journey the people have arrived at Mount Sinai and we discovered last time that it was on that mountain that God revealed himself to Moses and gave to him and to the people His Law - the Law that we know as The Ten Commandments. These commandments set out God's requirements for their relationship with Him and with one another. It is in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers that we are given the details of all that God required of the Israelites for their daily routine, health and well-being and, most importantly, for their approach to and worship of the Lord their God.

It was during the forty days that Moses spent in the presence of God on Sinai that he was given special instructions on the construction of what was to be a portable worship centre or sanctuary where God would meet with his people. It was to be known as the Tabernacle or the Tent of Meeting. You will find all the significant details concerning this in Exodus chapters 35 to 40. Note also that Moses was instructed to follow these instructions to the letter.

The Tabernacle was to be a tented structure that could be carried with the people on their journey to the Promised Land. Someone has called it "a prefabricated shrine" where God would live among his people and show that He was at the very centre of their national life. It was called the Tent of Meeting because this was where God would meet with them. It was also called the Tent of Testimony because within, in a beautiful box called the Ark of the Covenant, would be placed the stones on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed.

Moses was given detailed instructions for the making of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. The pattern given by God was to be followed exactly; nothing was to be left to chance or to human ingenuity. The divine plan extended down to the smallest details. It was not necessary that Moses should understand all their meaning, although each part was significant. To him the important thing was implicit obedience to all that God showed him. So, "He did all that the Lord commanded him." Here is a lesson for God's servants today. When He calls us to a work we cannot pick and choose what we would like to do, or decide the way in which we will do it. Like Moses, we must do just as the Lord commands us, even though at times we may not fully understand the significance of what we are doing. When it was all completed, the purpose and meaning of the Tabernacle and its furnishings became clear to Moses as God revealed it to him, and it became the place where God's presence

among his people was evident. Moses was learning as his leadership continued, that "loyalty to the Highest brings life to the lowliest." Because of his obedience in every detail he had the joy of seeing God's project come to completion under his direction.

The Lord told Moses that the materials required for the building of this Tabernacle should be provided by his people. Each was required to bring an offering to the Lord as their hearts prompted them. In Exodus 35 verses 4 to 9 we are told what they were required to bring items including gold, silver and bronze; various kinds of fabrics and animal skins; acacia wood, olive oil and precious stones. Note that the Lord laid out exactly what was needed for the building of the Tabernacle, but there was no compulsion on the people to give. They were to bring these items willingly, each man as his heart prompted him.

Here we see the principle of the freewill offering. As Christians we have the privilege of bringing our offerings to the Lord so that his work might prosper and not be hindered through lack of resources. The Lord loves those who give cheerfully, that is willingly from the heart, just as the children of Israel did. Some brought small things, some larger things. Some brought things that of themselves were of little value, but which may have cost the giver much; others brought costly, precious things like gold or silver. The controlling motive in their bringing was their willingness out of appreciation for what the Lord had done for them. God had been gracious and merciful and loving towards them in spite of their often waywardness and disobedience.

The wonderful result of this giving can be summed up in one word - abundance. In commenting on this someone has said, "Not often in the history of God's people has it been necessary to restrain further giving because every need has been met". Such was the position here that we are told in Exodus chapter 36 verses 5 to 7 that Moses gave an order that no one was to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary because what they had brought was already more than enough to do all the work.

What an example was set here by the people of God for Christians today in this matter of our bringing our offerings to the Lord. The apostle Paul in his second letter to the believers in Corinth, at chapter 9 verses 6 to 8, says: "Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." The Lord is no man's debtor and will honour those who honour Him in giving from a willing, generous heart for the work of his kingdom.

In Exodus chapter 35 verses 30 to 36 we read that Moses said to the Israelites "See, the Lord has chosen Bezaliel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah and He has filled him with the Spirit of God with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.... and he has given both him and Oholiab of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. At the beginning of chapter 36 we are told that these two men and every skilled person to whom the Lord had given skill and ability were to carry out the work of building the Tabernacle just as the Lord commanded. Not only were the materials for the job provided, but the Lord also provided the men with the necessary skills so that the work could be completed

competently and to a high standard that would honour Him. The men who would oversee this important work were chosen and gifted with the necessary skills by the Lord Himself.

This principle is the same among God's people today. To the church the Lord has, by his Holy Spirit, given gifts of those who are able to lead, able to teach, able to care for his people. He has given those who are able to administer and to look after practical things, all so that his work may be conducted in a manner worthy of Him. Moses gained great respect for the way in which he responded to God's requirement of him to ensure that the work of building the Tabernacle was carried out and ultimately completed. The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses then inspected the work and blessed the people. This surely is a lesson for us in our service for the Lord. Moses' total obedience and faithfulness was exemplary.

In Exodus chapters 36 to 39 we have the details of all the work that was carried out and then, in chapter 40 verses 33 and 34, we have these unforgettable words, "And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." As the people journeyed on, the cloud of the Lord remained above the tabernacle by day, and by night the fire was in the cloud to remind them constantly of the presence of God with them. If the cloud did not move, the people made camp and stayed there until it moved on. Moses continued to be leader of God's people in all their travels through the wilderness, but it was God who, by the cloud was their guide on their journey to the Promised Land.

Moses

13 – God's Faithful Servant

The children of Israel camped near Mount Sinai for one year, and it was there that God gave them His law and instructions for making the Tent of Meeting or tabernacle. Under Moses' godly leadership everything was completed just as God had commanded, and at the end of that year they carried on their journey to the Promised Land. It was a journey that would eventually take them thirty-eight more years before they arrived at the plains of Moab and the borders of Canaan. The journey took so long because of the people's unbelief, disobedience and constant complaining against God and against His servant Moses.

There are very important and practical lessons for Christians to discover from the experiences of the children of Israel. When we first trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, we commenced a spiritual journey through the wilderness of this world, and by faith we accepted His authority and the leadership. The many and inevitable trials and difficulties Israel encountered may also be the experiences that believers face today. We, like them, may suffer from enemies who try to hinder our journey and prevent us making progress in our walk with the Lord.

On several occasions during their journey there were those among their own ranks who stirred up dissension and caused the people to doubt or to disobey the Lord. This was the enemy within. Christians too have enemies like this and they are perhaps the most dangerous of all, causing us to waver in our faith or to take some path that would lead us away from our God. However, like the children of Israel, we have a caring and ever loving God and heavenly Father. Because of this we are discovering every day that His grace is abundant and never fails us. We are assured that all the resources for living the Christian life and facing up to the enemies we encounter are to be found in Christ our Saviour and Lord.

It has been well said that we need to learn from the mistakes that God's people made as they journeyed through the desert to the Promised Land. We need to learn from their mistakes and endeavour not to repeat them. We have the Old Testament record of all that happened to them as examples to us and to show us how God dealt with His ancient people. The apostle Paul, writing to the believers in Corinth touches on this in chapter 10 of his first letter. In verse 6 he says, "Now these things occurred as examples, or types, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." In Romans chapter 15 verse 4 he says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

The children of Israel also had with them at all times the visible symbols of God's presence. By day the pillar of cloud, and by night the pillar of fire, guided them on their journey. But besides this, the Ark of the Covenant was carried before them as they marched. By this they were reminded of God's law for them as His chosen people and of His promise to meet with Moses there and give him commands for the people. You can read about this in Exodus chapter 25 verses 10 to 22. Thus equipped they were able to set out able to face any enemy and any eventuality.

Let us remember that we also journey through this life with God's precious promises before

us. Peter reminds us of this in first Peter chapter 1 verses 3 and 4:

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

We have, too, the promise of His continual presence through His Holy Spirit who is in us as believers: Ephesians chapter 1 verses 13 and 14:

"Having believed you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of His glory."

Sometimes our trials come from those closest to us. Moses' leadership was often questioned and criticised by the people in general but there came a time when the criticism came from within His own family. Moses' brother and sister, Aaron the High Priest and Miriam, questioned his leadership and wanted to share it. Aaron said, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't He also spoken through us?" When Moses learned of this he did not try to vindicate himself, as perhaps many of us would, but he trusted in God who had made him the leader of Israel. We read in Numbers chapter 12 verses 2 and 3, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." What a commendation that was! What a lesson for us when we are opposed, especially by those of our own families. A lesson that we should not retaliate or seek to justify ourselves, but that we should trust in the Lord to vindicate us, just as Moses did.

God could not ignore this challenge against the authority of Moses. He commanded Moses, Aaron and Miriam to come out to the Tent of Meeting. There He spoke directly to Aaron and to Miriam showing them that it was Moses, and Moses alone, whom He had chosen to be His servant and the one through whom He would speak to the people. God said that there was no one else like Moses. He said, "With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord." Then came this piercing question, "Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

Here, then, was a very serious situation. Not only were Aaron and Miriam questioning Moses' authority, they were in effect questioning God. We read that "the anger of God burned against them" and Miriam was struck down with leprosy. Aaron was horrified by what he saw and admitted that they had both sinned foolishly. Moses cried out to the Lord for his sister, and the Lord promised that after seven days she would be healed and could be brought back into the camp.

The lesson we should take from this is that we must always keep in mind that those whom God appoints to be leaders are to be respected. Elders and pastors among his people are to be supported and prayed for as they carry out their often difficult responsibilities. More harm can be done to the work of the Lord by those within the church who are not faithful to their God appointed leadership than by the opposition of those without. Earlier in this series looking at the life of Moses we discovered that Moses had a unique relationship with God. In Psalm 103 verse 7 we are told that God "made known His ways to Moses, His deeds

to the children of Israel." A Christian writer commenting on this verse wrote, "The Israelites got to see what God did, but Moses understood why He did it." Moses' appreciation of God was very real. He had an extensive knowledge of the Lord that he had acquired partly through direct revelation and partly by personal experience. God clearly condescended to reveal Himself to His servant in a very intimate way. Because of this relationship, Moses understood that God was the God of truth whose word can be trusted. He knew Him as the God of Anger who cannot ignore sin, but deals with it justly. Moses knew God to be the God of forgiveness who constantly shows His mercy and grace to those who repent of their sins. He knew, too, through his experiences in leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, that God is the God of great power. All through his life he was learning about God. The gaining of this knowledge was the secret of Moses' success in leading God's people.

In the light of Moses' example, we need to ask ourselves this question: "Are we seeking daily to get to know the Lord our God more and more?" We do this by reading His Word each day and by trusting Him in every situation in which we find ourselves. So, like Moses, we will build a wonderful relationship with the Lord by revelation and by experience.

As we near the end of Moses' story we need to see that, like all men, he was not perfect. You will remember that at the beginning of his story he killed an Egyptian thinking that in that way he might do something to help his people. Now, towards the end of his life we find an occasion when this normally patient man lost his patience with the people. This happened at a place called Meribah which actually means quarrelling. The people complained that they had no water so Moses and Aaron came before the Lord. The Lord gave Moses clear instructions as to what he should do, but Moses, because he had lost patience with the people, acted in anger and did something different. God in His grace still supplied the people with the water they needed, but, because of his disobedience and rash words, Moses was denied the privilege of leading the people into the Promised Land of Canaan. You can read about this in Numbers chapter 20 verses 1 to 13. Moses in humility accepted God's sovereignty. Joshua had already become Moses' "right hand man" and commander of Israel's army, and he was God's choice to succeed Moses as leader of the people. Moses' main concern was that God's people would be led by a godly leader.

We read the account of Moses' death and the succession of Joshua to the leadership in Deuteronomy chapter 34. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old and his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone when he died. He was buried on Mount Nebo in the land of Moab on the borders of Canaan. The inference is that he was buried by the tender hand of God Himself. Moses died neither of old age or sickness, but when it was God's will for it to happen. He died when his work was finished. No better conclusion to Moses' story can be found than the words of Deuteronomy chapter 34 verses 10 and 11:

"Since then, no prophet has arisen 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 all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel."

So ends our study of this great, faithful and amazing man of God, servant of Jehovah. The only man who met God face to face.