

In The Face Of Adversity

*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.*

*By faith Moses, when he had grown up,
refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.
He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God
rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.
He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of
greater value than the treasures of Egypt,
because he was looking ahead to his reward.
By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger;
he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.
By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood,
so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.*

Hebrews 11:23-28

If you've ever seen the movie, *The Prince of Egypt*, or heard the stories about the Exodus from Egypt in Sunday school, you're probably familiar with the life of Moses. The children of Israel had come to Egypt many years before the birth of Moses. There had been a severe famine, but God had raised up Joseph as a wise leader to guide Pharaoh to prepare for the famine. Joseph's entire family moved to Egypt and was spared from the worst of the famine. But many years later, the Israelites were still in Egypt, and they had grown into a large group of people. The Egyptians feared them and forced them into slavery. Still, their numbers grew. A new pharaoh feared that the growing numbers of the Israelites would enable them to rebel, and so he passed an edict to kill all Hebrew-born boys. This was the time when Moses was born. His parents – at great personal risk – hid Moses. There came a time, though, when it was no longer possible to hide the baby. When she could hide him no longer, his mother placed him in a basket and set him adrift on the Nile, trusting his fate to God. The basket was found by Pharaoh's daughter, who took pity on him and raised him as her own son.

We don't know whether Moses was raised with the knowledge that he was a Hebrew or if he discovered this later on. What we do know is that as an adult he went to watch his own people at hard labor. While he was there, Moses witnessed an Egyptian who beating a Hebrew slave. Moses, believing that he was alone, killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. But,

someone apparently had witnessed the attack and news had spread. Fearing that he would be caught, Moses fled across the desert to Midian.

In Midian, Moses took up like as a shepherd, married, and had two sons before meeting God in the burning bush. At the burning bush, God directed Moses to return to Egypt, where he would be God's instrument for freeing His people from slavery. Moses argued with God, saying that he was not well-spoken enough and that no one will listen to him. But God provided him with his brother-in-law, Aaron, as a spokesman, as well as signs to convince Pharaoh and the Israelites that God had indeed sent him. Moses returned to Egypt, and performed many signs and wonders before Pharaoh. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go. Ten plagues fell upon the Egyptians, ending with the death of the firstborn. Only then did Pharaoh let God's people go... but a few days later he pursued them, only to have his army swallowed up in the Red Sea.

Read Exodus 14

Moses continued to lead the Israelites, through the desert where the Lord provided the people with manna and quail and water from the rock, to Mount Sinai, where Moses brings down the Ten Commandments and the Law. Although Moses was a great prophet, leader, and instrument in the hands of God, he was not perfect. Numbers 20 records that Moses and Aaron did not follow God's instructions and so the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." (Numbers 20:12, NIV)

Interestingly, we learn more about Moses' story and his great faith in Hebrews 11, where we will dig deeper into Moses' life today.

Moses Was No Ordinary Child

Moses' parents are never mentioned by name in Exodus; they are simply referred to as a man from the tribe of Levi and a Levite woman. And yet, their faith plays a huge role in the story of Moses – without their faith, their son would not have become the leader God intended. Hebrews tells us that Moses' parents "saw he was no ordinary child." (Hebrews 11:23, NIV) Exodus does little to explain what his parents saw in him, only saying that "he was a fine child."

(Exodus 2:2, NIV). In his speech before the Sanhedrin, Stephen (the martyr) describes Moses again as “no ordinary child.” (Acts 7:20, NIV)

What do you think Moses’ parents could have seen that made them know he was no ordinary child?

What did his parents see in him that caused them to defy Pharaoh’s edict to kill every Hebrew baby boy? There is no record of his parents being visited by an angel, or of any sovereign revelation about Moses. I don’t know what Moses’ mother saw when she looked at his face, what Moses’ father heard when his son cried out. Perhaps their motivation was the simple love of a mother and a father, the desire to protect life at whatever cost. And, of course, there was no guarantee that their efforts would be effective – surely, many parents lost their children to Pharaoh’s sword, despite their faithfulness. What we see, though, is that Moses’ faith was preceded by his parents’ faithfulness to protect him. I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been to hide a newborn boy for three months, let alone putting him afloat on the Nile in a basket, trusting desperately that God would provide for him. Even in the face of great adversity from Pharaoh, Moses’ parents’ faith was placed in the One who saves.

Moses Refused To Be Known As The Son Of Pharaoh’s Daughter

We’re not sure how Moses found out that he was Hebrew, not Egyptian. *The Prince of Egypt* paints it as a dramatic revelation, a shock that rocks Moses to his core. And the classic movie *The Ten Commandments* paints a picture of a long-held secret and sham perpetrated by his Egyptian mother to make it seem as if he were her physical offspring. But both of these are Hollywood extrapolations. We don’t know if he was raised openly as Hebrew or if he discovered his identity later in life. Whatever the case, though, Acts 7:22 tells us that Moses was educated and powerful in the eyes of the Egyptians, which makes it all the more intriguing that he identified so strongly with the Israelites when he was at least forty years old.

No matter at what point Moses learned of his Hebrew identity, it is obvious that he was raised with Egyptian privilege, and yet came to identify with the Hebrew brothers and sisters. I imagine that many people would have accommodated themselves to an Egyptian identity. Who, after all, would want to identify with slaves? And perhaps Moses tried to have it both ways – he

did, after all, kill the Egyptian in secret and presumably returned to his daily routine in the household of Pharaoh's daughter. But eventually, his faith led him to identify fully with his Hebrew heritage, and with the God of His people, leaving privilege to become an outcast and a sibling of slaves.

How easy would it be for you to leave all of that history behind at the age of 40?

Moses was in that situation in Egypt, regardless of when in his life he found out about his true heritage. But what Hebrews tells us is that he *refused to be known as the son of pharaoh's daughter*. Regardless of the riches that he was surrounded by, the prestige of his position and adopted lineage, and his loyalty to the family he knew, he left all behind. He walked away from it all, identifying instead with the Hebrew slaves, trusting that God would protect and lead him in the way he was to go.

Moses Chose To Be Mistreated Along With The People Of God

Hebrews also clues us in to something that *The Prince of Egypt* doesn't: Moses left his life of plenty and prestige to dig in the dirt and be mistreated with his people. I think we like to see Moses fleeing Egypt in all his golden finery, but in reality, he was probably fleeing Egypt wearing a burlap sack. Moses didn't just leave his place of power and finery for a desk job. He didn't get demoted but still work within the palace. He worked in the dirt, with the people he was a part of. From prince to slave, Moses took a big step down. He could have stayed in the palace, as an adopted Egyptian, and avoided all of this. But Moses' faith was bigger than his fear – because he knew that his God was bigger than Pharaoh. And so, he left it all behind to become a slave to the very people whom he once knew as family.

Does that remind you of anyone else? Jesus, perhaps? The One who left His throne above, left His Father, to become fully man, submitting Himself to a cruel death on the cross, all to save those who were lost? Moses experienced many of the same sentiments as Christ did – rejection, suffering at the hands of humans, and leaving everything behind to follow God's will.

Read Hebrews 11:25-26

Not only did Moses choose to be mistreated with his people, Hebrews tells us that he chose that *over* the fleeting pleasures of the Egyptian lifestyle, prestige, and power he had accumulated. Moses realized that what the Egyptians had wasn't going to last, but that faith in God was going to last. And to him, that was of greater worth than gold.

What fleeting pleasures of sin do we, in the 21st century, have to turn away from to follow God in faith? Which of these is most difficult for you to walk away from?

The next verse in Hebrews gives us a final clue to as to why Moses was willing to leave all of the Egyptian finery and prestige behind. Verse 26 says, "He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward." Moses had faith that the future God had planned was greater than the future that he had planned. The Lord promised that He would bring the people out of Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land, and Moses was one of the instruments that God used to carry out His plan. Moses wasn't perfect – he was a murderer, made every excuse in the book why he couldn't do what God commanded, and disobeyed an order from God that caused him to be restricted from entering the Promised Land. And yet, God still used this imperfect man and his incredible faith to bring about one of the Exodus.

Moses Left Egypt And Persevered

Read Exodus 2:11-25 and Acts 7:23-27. Why did Moses leave Egypt?

Moses fled to Midian, fearing for his life after murdering an Egyptian. But years later, when the threat on his life was gone, Moses returned to Egypt, persevering "because he saw him who is invisible." (Hebrews 11:27, NIV) Moses saw the burning bush, and heard the voice of the Lord, and his faith compelled him to return to Egypt when prompted by the Lord without fear. Moses' faith was again, bigger than fear.

Most of us will never have a burning bush experience as Moses did, and yet we are called to the same bold faith that he had. While it would be nice to get explicit directions and guidance on what God's will is for our life, we don't usually get it. But we live on the other side of the cross, where we have access to God at all times, and where we can see His will being played out in our lives. Though it may be hard to see how God is using particular circumstances in our lives at times, we know that He is working all things for the good of those who love Him, and that He is good. For blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed, whose faith is in the One and Only, the alpha and the omega, the first and the last.

Moses Kept the Passover

Moses' faith was instrumental in God's plan to save the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land. When Moses received the instructions from God regarding the Passover, he must have been a little confused.

Read Exodus 12:1-30

One year-old male lambs without defect? Spread the blood on the doorframe? And bread without yeast? Bitter herbs? That had to have sounded mighty strange, and probably evoked a little bit of fear in the Israelites: the Lord was going to pass through Egypt that night. And yet, in the face of such confusion, uncertainty, and probably some doubt (nine plagues and Pharaoh hasn't budged...why would we expect anything different from the tenth?), Moses kept the Passover meal – that night in Egypt and henceforth in the Promised Land.

Everything humanly possible was against Moses – at every turn Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and even after he let the Israelites go, his heart was hardened again and he pursued them. Moses gave every excuse in the book to God as to why he couldn't do what God asked. And then, when God gave him signs and wonders to perform and Aaron to speak for him, the Israelites were given a harder work load from Pharaoh. In the face of this great adversity, Moses' faith was still in the God who saves, the One who delivered his people from slavery.

Not many of us face the same type of adversity as Moses did, but we still do face adversity. Thousands of girls are sold into prostitution every year. Thousands of children work in sweat shops around the world. Many Christians cannot freely gather together to worship due to persecution, and some, even today, are martyred for their faith. In our own country there are people in poverty and homelessness. Some children never live to see the light of day due to someone's choice. There was slavery and suffering in Moses' day, and in ours. Unfortunately, faithfulness doesn't always mean that we will experience deliverance... at least not yet, not in this world. But we are still called to be faithful, and to raise our voices in defense of the oppressed.

Consider these words from 2 Corinthians 4: We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, NIV). Just like Moses, in the face of adversity, we must speak out for the powerless and work for their deliverance. We must persevere. We must place our faith in the One who delivered His people from the bondage of slavery, who fulfilled His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and who continues to be faithful through the ages.