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**Moses: God's Reluctant Shepherd**  
**Exodus 3:1 – 4:20**

Can you imagine what it must have been like for Moses?

Here he was on the backside of the wilderness tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, just as he had been doing for the past 40 years.

He was already 80 years old, and the second half of his life to this point had been very different from the first half. For 40 years he had been a member of the house of the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. At the time he was born, the Pharaoh was afraid that the growing population of the Hebrews in Egypt was a threat to national security. So he had ordered that every Hebrew baby boy that was born was to be thrown into the Nile River. The idea was that if you eliminate the next generation of Hebrew males, you eliminate the possibility of a Hebrew army of any consequence.

But when Moses was born, instead of throwing him into the Nile, his mother Jochebed hid him for three months, then lovingly set him floating on the Nile in a papyrus basket coated with tar and pitch to make it waterproof. Ironically, it was Pharaoh's daughter who had found the baby. She recognized him as a Hebrew child, but had compassion on him and decided to take him as her own son. His sister was close by watching to see what would happen. She offered to get a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for Pharaoh's daughter. And in another ironic twist, guess who his sister got—that's right, his mother! So Jochebed took care of her little boy for the first couple of years of his life. And she got paid for it!

When he was a little older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So from the time he was a very small child, Moses grew up in Pharaoh's court as his grandson.

But when he was about 40 years old, things changed drastically. Knowing that he was a Hebrew by birth, one day he decided to go out and watch his own people at work. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and to stop it, he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.

The next day he went out again and saw two Hebrews fighting. He tried to intervene in the dispute, but the one in the wrong asked him, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" (2:14).<sup>1</sup> Moses knew that somebody knew.

And when Pharaoh knew, he was ready to kill Moses. So Moses fled to the wilderness of Midian, where he met and helped Jethro's daughters and eventually married his daughter Zipporah. And for the next 40 years, this privileged Egyptian royal family adoptee was a simple shepherd.

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

So now, at 80, here he was on the backside of the desert tending sheep. But what was about to happen was going to change his life more than he could ever imagine!

### ***Meeting God in the desert***

Moses had led the flock to the far side of the desert and had come to Horeb, which the text describes as “the mountain of God” (3:1).

Something caught his eye—a bush that though it was on fire, it didn’t burn up. He decided he was going to investigate it, and went toward the bush.

And then it happened. “God called to him from within the bush . . .” (3:4). And he called him by name!

“Moses! Moses!”

And all Moses could do was to say, “Here I am” (3:4).

God told him not to come any closer and to take off his sandals because he was on holy ground. Then God told him, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (3:5-6). And now Moses really was terrified, to the point of hiding his face.

What the LORD said next must have astounded him, though. He told Moses that he had seen the misery of his people in Egypt and had heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and that he was concerned about their suffering and had come down to do something about it! “I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey . . .” (3:7-8).

And then he said, “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (3:10).

### ***Reluctance and objections***

Now all this must have been more than Moses could get hold of all at once. After all, 40 years or so earlier, he had *fled* from Egypt, even though he had been adopted into the royal family! And now God wanted him to *go back* and bring the Israelites out?

We can understand his reluctance, can’t we? We can probably sympathize with him—maybe *empathize* with him.

In his reluctance, Moses raised every objection he could think of . . . And God responded to every one of them!

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (3:11). God’s response was simple and to the point: “I will be with you” (3:12). In other words, God was saying, “Moses, it doesn’t matter who you are, because I will be with you. It matters who I am!”

Sort of hard to respond to that, isn’t it? God promised his presence, and gave Moses a sign. But notice that the sign would come *after* he had obeyed God, to show that it was indeed what God had called him to do.

So Moses took another tack—“Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” (3:13).

And without hesitation God answered, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (3:14). Then he added, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you’ . . .” (3:15).

Then God told Moses to go assemble the elders of Israel and tell them what God was going to do. He promised that they would listen to Moses, and they were to go to Moses to tell Pharaoh to let them go into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to him. He also warned Moses that Pharaoh would be stubborn and wouldn't let them go unless he was compelled to it by a mighty hand. But God would stretch out his hand to smite the Egyptians, and Pharaoh would let the Israelites go. And the Egyptians would be favorably disposed toward them, and would give them silver and gold and clothing as they prepared to leave, giving them resources for the future.

But Moses still had his objections.

He said, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?" (4:1).

The LORD told Moses to throw the staff that was in his hand on the ground. When he did, it became a snake. He did what many of us would do—he ran from it. But then the LORD told him to pick it up by its tail. And here's where Moses began to demonstrate some faith. He reached out and picked the snake up by the tail, and it became his staff again.

The LORD told him that this was a sign to show the Israelites that he had indeed spoken to him.

Then the LORD told Moses to put his hand inside his cloak. When Moses did it, then took it out, it was leprous. Then the LORD told him to put it in again, and this time when he took it out, it was fully restored.

The LORD told Moses to show this sign if they didn't believe the first one. Then if they still had their doubts, he was to take water from the Nile River, and when he poured it out on the ground, it would become blood.

Moses had one more objection: "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (4:10). The LORD responded by reminding him that he is the one who gave humans the ability to speak, and promised to help him.

Finally in desperation, Moses finally pleads, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it" (4:13). And finally, the LORD became angry. He told Moses that he knew his brother Aaron could speak, so he would send him with him as his spokesman.

And so at last, Moses took his staff that as the text describes it in 4:20 was now "the staff of God" in his hand, got his family together, and left for Egypt to do what God had called him to do.

### ***What about us?***

God was calling Moses to be the shepherd of his people to bring them out of bondage in Egypt and lead them to the land of blessing. *Moses was reluctant to obey God's call, but God answered every one of his objections.*

But do we react much better? Don't we come up with our own objections and excuses and loopholes to try to get out of obeying God's call on our lives?

Now the first and primary call is *the call to discipleship*, to follow Jesus as our Lord. That's the call for every person, and since he gave his life for us on the cross and rose from the dead, he certainly has the right to make that demand. Once we respond to that call, then within that call *God calls us to specific areas of service* in his kingdom. For Moses, it was to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

For me, it's the call to be a pastor, focusing on preaching and teaching God's word. For you it may be teaching or serving or giving or missions or evangelism or helping or doing acts of



*And so . . .*

And so what is God calling you to do?

Is he calling you to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord?

Is he calling you to focus on serving him in your daily walk and work?

Is he calling you to serve in some particular role in our church's ministry and mission?

Is he calling you to some kind of vocational ministry—preaching or teaching or music or some other kind of ministry?

Is he calling you to missions—to missional involvement here in our community or to volunteer missions or to career service as a missionary?

You can raise all the objections and give all the excuses you can think of. But there's only one acceptable response—faithful obedience. And you can do that! Because *when God calls us to a task, his presence and power enable us to accomplish it. Always.* Amen.

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