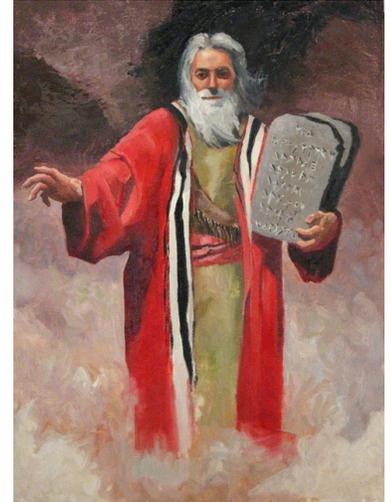


Moses the Man and His Mission

Childhood

According to the Exodus, Moses was born around the month of February/ March in 1391 BC. During this time, Hebrew were slaves in Egypt and as per the order of Egyptian Pharaoh, all newborn Hebrew males had to be drowned in the river Nile, so that no one could grow up and fight against him. Jochebed, the mother of Moses was reluctant to adhere to the wishes of Pharaoh. She hid him in a basket by the side of the River Nile. After about three months, when Jochebed could no longer hide the child, she put him in an ark and cast him on the waters of the Nile, thus abandoning young Moses to God's protection.

According to Biblical account, Moses' sister Miriam observed the basket until it reached the place where Pharaoh's daughter Thermuthis was bathing. Spotting the baby, Thermuthis asked her maidens to fetch it for her. She took Moses with her and kept him, as though he were her son. After a few unsuccessful attempts to nurse the baby, Miriam proposed if Thermuthis would like a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. This is when Jochebed was asked to nurse Thermuthis adopted baby, her own son. Eventually, he became Thermuthis' son and a younger brother to Rameses II, the future Pharaoh of Egypt.



Early Life

Though Moses grew as an Egyptian prince, he never forgot that he was a Hebrew. One day, while on his trip to the countryside, on seeing an Egyptian killing a Hebrew, he could not control his temper and killed the Egyptian. He buried the dead body in the sand. However, everyone came to know about it. Moses came to know that the Pharaoh was likely to put him to death for killing an Egyptian. To save his skin, Moses fled to Midian. There, he saved seven of Jethro's daughter from a band of rude shepherds.

Impressed by Moses' brave act, Jethro adopted him as his son and got his daughter, Zipporah, married to Moses. Moses was made the superintendent of his herds as well. For four decades, Moses stayed in Midian and lived as a shepherd. He was also blessed with a son, Gershom. One day, while Moses was leading his flock to Mount Horeb, he came across a burning bush. Coming closer to it, he realized a voice coming from it. It is believed that God spoke to him from the bush, revealing His name to Moses.

Egypt - Plagues and Exodus

God instructed Moses to return to Egypt and free the Hebrews from slavery. He also taught him to transform a rod into a serpent and also to inflict and heal leprosy. He also gifted Moses with the blessing that he could change river water to blood, by pouring on dry land. Moses was instructed to accomplish two goals - invite the Pharaoh to accept God's divine message and give salvation to the Hebrews. Moses left, along with his brother, Aaron, for Egypt. It is believed that the Pharaoh of the Oppression had been replaced by a new Pharaoh, known as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, as the former had died.

Moses and Aaron met Pharaoh and told him the wish of the God. They said that the Lord wanted him to permit the Hebrews to celebrate a feast in the wilderness. However, the Pharaoh did not pay heed to the proposal and rebuffed the idea. In his second meeting with the Pharaoh, Moses changed his rod into a serpent. However, this had no effect on Pharaoh, as his magicians did the same. Thereafter, God sent ten plagues to Egypt. Before each one, Moses warned Pharaoh what would happen, but the latter would not listen. In their third meeting with the Pharaoh, at the banks of river Nile, Moses asked Aaron to turn the river to blood (the first plague), but the effort went in vain.

In the fourth meeting, Aaron brought frogs (the second plague) from the Nile to overrun Egypt. Pharaoh got irritated with the frogs and asked Moses to remove them. Moses agreed to his wish on the condition that the Pharaoh would allow the Hebrews to observe their feast in the wilderness. The next day, all the frogs died, creating a big mess and emitting a strong, foul stench. Angered by this, Pharaoh took back his words and decided against letting the Hebrews leave, to observe the feast.

Egypt was invaded by lice and flies in the third and fourth plague, respectively. While the fifth inflicted a disease on livestock, killing them, the sixth caused incurable boils. The seventh plague led to thunderstorms and hails

and in the eighth, locusts covered Egypt. In the ninth plague, total darkness prevailed. The tenth plague was the most dangerous of all and caused death of the first-born male of all Egyptian families. Getting immensely upset on losing his son, the Pharaoh asked Hebrews to leave Egypt. All the ten plagues, stretching over 10 days, affected only the Egyptians and passed over the Hebrews, leaving them safe. The ten days are now celebrated as 'Passover' festival by the Hebrews.

Crossing of Red Sea

Hebrews had to rush from Egypt, before the Pharaoh changed his mind. While leaving in haste, instead of letting the bread rise, they took unleavened bread and started the journey. In the meantime, Pharaoh had changed his mind and ordered his army to get the Hebrews back. Though the army chased the Hebrews, a miracle happened at Red Sea and they were saved. The miracle was - following God's advice, Moses lifted up his rod on reaching the sea. As a result, the water of the sea parted, making a dry path for the Hebrews. After the Hebrews reached the shore, Moses lifted up his rod again and the path closed, drowning Pharaoh's army (which was trailing behind).

Years in Wilderness

The journey from Egypt proved to be very traumatic for the Hebrews. They reached Marah, where the water was very bitter. As a result, the group started blaming Moses for the trouble. In order to solve the problem, Moses cast a tree into the water, making it turn sweet. After several days, Hebrews ran short of food as well and started cursing Moses that they were better off in Egypt. However, God solved the problem by providing manna in the morning and quail in the evening (from the sky).

Hebrews moved forward to Rephidim and faced similar problems. Now, Moses struck a rock with his staff and water came forth, quenching their thirst. Soon, Amalekites, the native people of Canaan, Edom and Seir, attacked Hebrews. While Joshua led Hebrews, Moses stood with the rod of God in his hand. Surprisingly, till the time Moses held up his rod, Israelites dominated the fight. But as soon as he let it down, the Amalekites would start winning. When Moses got tired, Aaron and Hur made Moses sit on the ground, holding up his two arms. Finally, Hebrews won the battle against Amalekites.

Reaching Mount Sinai

The arduous journey of Hebrews, as commanded by God, ended when they reached Mount Sinai. While the people camped at the edge of the mountain, Moses went to the top, to meet God. Upon reaching the top, Moses received ten laws (Ten Commandments), which told people how to live. While he was at the top, the Hebrews went to Aaron and asked him to make God for them. Taking golden earrings from the people, Aaron made a golden calf and declared it as their God. As Moses returned, he was shocked to see the Hebrews dancing and worshipping the golden calf.

Moses, angered by what Aaron had done, destroyed the calf and rebuked him for the sin he had brought on people. Moses ordered the sons of Levi, gathered around him, to go and kill the idol-worshippers. Thereafter, as per the last chapters of Exodus, the Tabernacle was constructed, the priestly law was ordained, the plan of encampment was arranged - both for the Levites and the non-priestly tribes, and the Tabernacle was consecrated. Eight prayer laws were given to Moses, in regard to the Tabernacle, including light, incense & sacrifice. However, both Miriam and Aaron went against Moses, due to his marriage to an Ethiopian. Due to this, Miriam was punished with leprosy, for seven days.

Journey Continued

Moving forward, Hebrews left Hazeroth and pitched camp in the wilderness of Paran, south of Canaan. Then, Moses sent 12 spies into Canaan, including the famous Caleb and Joshua. The spies returned after forty days, bringing grapes and other produces with them, to prove the region's fertility. Though the spies agreed that the land was fertile and the resources spectacular, only Caleb and Joshua were interested in conquering it. Hebrews started crying and said that they wanted to return to Egypt. Getting angry, God caused the ones who had refused to enter Canaan and were aged twenty years or above, to wander in the wilderness for the next forty years. Their children were allowed to enter Canaan.

Realizing their mistake, Hebrews wanted to correct themselves and hence, became ready to take possession of Canaan. However, Moses snubbed off their idea. They did not adhere to his advice and invaded Canaan, but were revolted by the Amalekites as well as Canaanites. Led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the Tribe of Reuben, along with

250 Hebrew princes, accused Moses and Aaron of raising themselves over the rest of the people. At this, Moses asked them to meet him the next morning, with a censer for every man. However, Dathan and Abiram refused to come. This angered Moses, who went to the location where Dathan and Abiram's tents were.

After reaching Dathan and Abiram's tents, Moses spoke. As he did so, the ground opened and engulfed the tents. On the other hand, the 250 princes, with the censers, were consumed by fire. When Hebrews came and accused Moses and Aaron of killing the fellow Hebrews, they were struck with a plague that eventually killed 14,700 people. The plague ended only when Aaron went, with his censer, into the midst of the people. Leaving Sinai, Hebrews camped in Kadesh. There, they started complaining again, due to the lack of water. At this, Moses struck a stone twice, making water gush forth. (Both the places where Moses struck a rock to bring water were later named Meribah.

The entrance of Hebrews to Canaan was destroyed, as Moses and Aaron had not shown the Lord's holiness. Hebrews dumped the idea of attacking the people of Canaan. Instead, they headed towards Hebron, a city in the southern part of Canaan. They were required to pass through Edom, Moab and Ammon. As Moses was leading his people carefully along the eastern border of Edom, they complained about the manna. Following the death of people due to serpent bites, Moses made a brass serpent and mounted it on a pole. Those who had been bitten had to look at the brass serpent and they would not die.

Reaching Moab, Moses asked the Amorites (non-Hebrew Canaanic people) for passage. However, the latter refused, which resulted in an attack by Moses and Amorites' defeat. After acquiring the territory of Amorites, just north of Moab, Hebrews wished to expand their holdings and thus, set for conquering Bashan, a fertile territory north of Ammon, famous for its oak trees and cattle. They emerged victorious in their fight at Edrei, on the southern border of Bashan. They killed every man, woman and child of the city and took the spoils as their bounty. Threatened by the growing power of Israelites, the king of Moab and Midian, Balak, sent for Balaam, a powerful and respected prophet.

The prophet, however, declined to go, saying that he would only do what God dictates him. At the second attempt of Balak, Balaam set out with two servants. Nonetheless, an angel tried to prevent Balaam. The angel was first seen by the ass on which Balaam was riding, which then refused to go ahead. As Balaam started punishing the ass for not moving, it miraculously gained the power to speak to Balaam and complained about the latter's treatment. This is when Balaam saw the angel, who informed him that the ass was the only reason the he was not killed. After meeting Balak, Balaam performed sacrifices at seven altars, thereby receiving prophecies by God.

Balaam performed all the prophecies over the Hebrews, but each time, they resulted in the form of a blessing, frustrating Balak all the more. Thereafter, Balaam informed Balak that if the latter wished to overcome the Hebrews for a short interval, all he had to do was to seduce them to engage in idolatry. Following this, Midianites sent beautiful women to the Israelite camp, to seduce the young men to partake in idolatry. The plan proved to be successful. To stop idolatry, Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, went on to slay two of the prominent offenders and prevented the wrath of God.

Since Phinehas had turned away the wrath of God from Hebrews, he and his descendants were given everlasting priesthood. After the idolatry episode, the Hebrews got inflicted by a plague, leading to the death of about 24,000 people. Moses had instructed the Hebrew soldiers to kill every Midianite woman, boy and non-virgin girl, although virgin girls were to be shared amongst them. Killing Balaam and the five kings of Midian - Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba, Hebrews laid down the foundation of Israel. Thereafter, Moses appointed Joshua, son of Nun, to succeed him as the leader of the Israelites.

Death

After killing the five kings, along with Balaam, and appointing Joshua as the next leader, Moses left for the heavenly abode. Moses is believed to be 120 years old at the time of his death.