

40 DAYS OF FAITH 2005
Moses and the Journey of Faith

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Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

Over the next 6 weeks, we will study together some highlights from the life of Moses, one of the great heroes of the Bible. Even if you've never read the biblical accounts of the life of Moses, the story of Moses may be somewhat familiar to you. Some parts of his story—like the burning bush, the parting of the Red Sea, and the Ten Commandments—have become part of our culture's stock of common stories and even our language. And Moses has also been the subject of a couple of blockbuster movies: *The Ten Commandments*, starring Charlton Heston; and *The Prince of Egypt*, Dreamworks' animated feature. It's easy to see why Moses' story would have been taken up by Hollywood. There's a ton of great material for a movie here: a dramatic rescue of the life of an infant; a commoner raised as royalty; a showdown with the most powerful person in the world; great battle scenes—and let's not forget all the special effects possibilities with the burning bush, staffs turning into snakes, water turning to blood, the sea being parted, and more. It's a fantastic story about an incredible life.

As much as Moses' story seems larger than life, over the 40 days or so we're going to explore the possibility that one of the things that makes Moses' life a fascinating story is that it has many points of connection with each of our lives. Moses is, at the core, not such a different person from most of us; and we can see much in his life—though perhaps in an exaggerated scale—that helps us understand our own life, as it is and as we want it to be.

Each day's guide is broken into three sections:

1. **The story for the day.** Select passages of scripture from different points in Moses' life—found in the biblical books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—have been divided into 6 week's worth of daily stories. For your convenience, I've included the text of the story in the *New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996). I've found this translation to be in fresh, modern language that has really helped me to do what I most want to do: enter into the story myself. As you read the passage, try to read it from the perspective of Moses and the Israelites. Really get inside the story. What is it like to go through this experience with these people of faith?
2. **Points of Interest.** This section briefly explores aspects of the day's story that might be especially interesting or potentially confusing. It offers some historical notes and references that might help to interpret the story, frames some of the issues or questions addressed, and gives suggestions of ways to look at the story and what it might mean for us.
3. **Taking it home.** In this section, I offer some suggestions for how the day's reading might apply practically to our lives and the life of our church. Each day, we'll look at the passage from 3 different angles:
 - a. **For you—** We'll explore how we personally might identify with the story, and implications that it has for how we look at ourselves, how we approach our lives, and how we see our relationships with God.
 - b. **For your six—** In the Cambridge Vineyard, we encourage everyone to have a list of six people for whom they are *seeking spiritual blessing*. These six people are local friends, family members, colleagues, and acquaintances who aren't presently actively seeking God, but in whom we see some spiritual interest, or in whose lives we see God at work. Even if you aren't

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

quite sure there is a God yourself, we encourage you to expect and pray for spiritual blessing for your six, perhaps saying something like, 'God, I'm not even sure you're there, but if you are, please give more peace to my next door neighbors.' Then, watch and see what happens. It can't hurt. If nothing happens, no harm has been done. If something does happen, your six will have better lives, and you will have experienced an answer to prayer.

Over the course of this guide, we will be keeping an eye out for what the life of Moses has to say about our six and our relationships with them.

- c. **For our church**— The story of Moses and the Israelites does not just apply to individuals. It will also have things to say to our entire church community. Each day, we'll look for implications of the story for our church, and we'll pray that our church will experience God's best intentions toward his people.

There's also a special fourth section at the end of each week's guide:

4. **Family Devotional Ideas.** At the end of each week's Bible study guide you'll find a paragraph suggesting themes and ideas you can explore with your children, ages preschool through middle school, at home. They'll be divided into two mini-sections, one for kids approximately ages 2-7 and one for kids approximately ages 8-12. The ideas apply to the entire week's bible text, so to make the most use of these suggestions you'll want to read them at the beginning of each week.

Bibliographical Note: I am indebted to a few very helpful resources in the writing of this guide. I have used InterVarsity Press' *Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (2000) and *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (1998) as a reference for historical context; I make note of particularly direct references, but I'm sure that they have added to my knowledge in a more general way as well. Also, Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* (Michael Wiese Productions, 1998) is my source for most of the ideas about the hero's journey, which we will occasionally discuss over the course of the guide.

Monday, February 14th

Exodus 1:1-14

¹These are the sons of Jacob who went with their father to Egypt, each with his family:

²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, ⁴Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. ⁵Joseph was already down in Egypt. In all, Jacob had seventy direct descendants.

⁶In time, Joseph and each of his brothers died, ending that generation. ⁷But their descendants had many children and grandchildren. In fact, they multiplied so quickly that they soon filled the land. ⁸Then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. ⁹He told his people, "These Israelites are becoming a threat to us because there are so many of them. ¹⁰We must find a way to put an end to this. If we don't and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country."

¹¹So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves and put brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down under heavy burdens. They forced them to build the cities of

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king. ¹²But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more quickly the Israelites multiplied! The Egyptians soon became alarmed ¹³and decided to make their slavery more bitter still. ¹⁴They were ruthless with the Israelites, forcing them to make bricks and mortar and to work long hours in the fields.

Points of Interest:

- This first passage sets the historical context into which Moses is born, explaining who his family is and what the political situation in Egypt is.
- 'these are the sons of Jacob who went with their father to Egypt'—Jacob, also known as Israel, is the grandson of Abraham. Abraham and his wife Sarah were given some amazing promises from God: they would be the ancestors of a great nation; that nation would possess the land of Canaan (present day Israel and Palestine); and through their descendants all the nations of the world would be blessed. Jacob inherits these huge promises from his grandparents, but the reality of his life is much more modest. Jacob's twelve sons would eventually be the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel, but during their own lifetimes they are simply a small band of nomadic herders who eventually leave Canaan to escape a famine and settle in Egypt.
- 'a new king came to the throne'—we don't know exactly who this Pharaoh is, but we have strong reason to believe that what is being described here is a change of dynasty, not just the succession of a father by a son. Around the 16th century B.C. (which is generally thought to be when Moses lived), Egypt was temporarily ruled by a group of foreigners known as the Hyksos. This 'new king' is probably either the first of the Hyksos kings or the first of the native Egyptian ruling class after they regained control (*Bible Background Commentary* 77). Apparently, the Israelites were considered too loyal to the previous rulers to be trusted by the new regime.
- 'who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done'—Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob, had become, through an amazing set of circumstances, prime minister of Egypt; it was his wise policies that saved Egypt from the devastating effects of the famine that drove the rest of Jacob's family out of Canaan. In reward for Joseph's success, when Jacob's family first arrived in Egypt, they were welcomed as honored guests and even given their own land, a region called Goshen (Goshen, rather than the entire land of Egypt, is probably what is meant when v. 7 says that the Israelites soon filled 'the land'). But the passage of time (it's been about 400 years since Joseph) and the changing political situation (see above) see their status changed from privileged guests to dangerous foreigners.
- 'They forced them to build'—as is still apparent today from the incredible, massive pyramids, the Egyptian rulers liked to engage in huge building projects. They generally provided labor by using prisoners of war or by placing a tax on the time of their citizens; but when that proved insufficient, they would conscript the labor of unprotected minorities (*Bible Background Commentary* 77)

Taking it home:

- *For you:* God's promises to Abraham were a long time in coming; in fact, in this passage it seems like they are moving even farther away from ever being fulfilled. Have you received a promise of God that's been a long time in coming? Maybe it's been so long that you've forgotten it, or that you don't dare to believe it anymore. Or

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

maybe it seems to be getting farther and farther out of reach. Take a moment to remind God of his promise, and to ask him to fulfill it.

- *For your six:* We see from this passage that Moses' story doesn't start with him. He is born into a heritage. It's a heritage of promise from God, and one of barriers in the way of receiving those promises. This is true of your six as well: almost certainly, they have some heritage of relationship with God and blessing from him in their family histories; and just as certainly, there are circumstances and people in their family histories that have kept them away from God. Bring the family histories of your six to God's attention. Ask him to make any blessing from God that runs in the family bear fruit in the lives of your six; and ask him to remove anything that has historically kept their families away from the good things he has for them.
- *For our church:* As we move into a new neighborhood, it could be tempting to our neighbors to view us with suspicion as dangerous outsiders, or at least as a nuisance. Pray that God would make us instead a source of blessing for our neighbors—like Joseph was to the Egyptians. And pray for harmonious relationships between us and our neighbors.

Tuesday, February 15th

Exodus 1:15-2:10

¹⁵Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah: ¹⁶"When you help the Hebrew women give birth, kill all the boys as soon as they are born. Allow only the baby girls to live." ¹⁷But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king and allowed the boys to live, too.

¹⁸Then the king called for the midwives. "Why have you done this?" he demanded. "Why have you allowed the boys to live?"

¹⁹"Sir," they told him, "the Hebrew women are very strong. They have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time! They are not slow in giving birth like Egyptian women."

²⁰So God blessed the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

²²Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Throw all the newborn Israelite boys into the Nile River. But you may spare the baby girls."

¹During this time, a man and woman from the tribe of Levi got married. ²The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw what a beautiful baby he was and kept him hidden for three months. ³But when she could no longer hide him, she got a little basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the edge of the Nile River. ⁴The baby's sister then stood at a distance, watching to see what would happen to him.

⁵Soon after this, one of Pharaoh's daughters came down to bathe in the river, and her servant girls walked along the riverbank. When the princess saw the little basket among the reeds, she told one of her servant girls to get it for her. ⁶As the princess opened it, she found the baby boy. His helpless cries touched her heart. "He must be one of the Hebrew children," she said.

⁷Then the baby's sister approached the princess. "Should I go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" she asked.

⁸"Yes, do!" the princess replied. So the girl rushed home and called the baby's mother.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

⁹"Take this child home and nurse him for me," the princess told her. "I will pay you for your help." So the baby's mother took her baby home and nursed him.

¹⁰Later, when he was older, the child's mother brought him back to the princess, who adopted him as her son. The princess named him Moses, for she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Points of Interest:

- 'Hebrew'—another name for the Israelites, most often the name used by the Egyptians. Apparently, it means 'descendants of Aber,' who was an ancestor of Abraham (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary*)
- 'kill all the boys'—Pharaoh's fear of the Hebrews and his disdain for them bring him to the point of planning genocide. Now, not only are the Israelites in slavery, but they are in real danger of being completely wiped out as a people. Pharaoh is probably content with killing the boys for a couple of reasons: the boys are more likely to grow up to be warriors; and the girls could be married into other families, gradually diluting their identity as a people. We see in these first two passages the precariousness of the Israelites' situation as a relatively powerless minority in a foreign land: they are vulnerable to being overlooked and misunderstood; they are an object of suspicion; they are taken advantage of; they are treated harshly; and, eventually, they are almost eliminated. Because of God's general concern for justice, and in memory of the Israelites' treatment by the Egyptians, God later commands his people to make especially certain that they treat foreigners in their midst well (e.g. Exodus 23:9). But such good treatment of foreigners has very rarely been the case, either in the history of Israel or in world history in general. Pray that God would show mercy to our own country, forgiving us for the many times we've unjustly treated the strangers in our midst with suspicion, neglect, or abuse; and ask God to make our nation a truly welcoming place to those who are seen as different.
- 'because the midwives feared God'—here is the first sign that everything is not going to go Pharaoh's way. The midwives are more afraid of God than they are of Pharaoh. In faithfulness to God and out of a refusal to take part in Pharaoh's wicked plan, they make the risky choice to disobey and deceive Pharaoh—and as a result, they find themselves rewarded by God.
- 'she got a little basket'—in Hebrew (which was the original language of *Exodus*), the word used here for 'basket' is the same as 'ark,' as in Noah's ark, the boat Noah, his family, and the animals used to escape the flood. Moses' mother is trying to save her son from the destruction faced by most of the Israelite boys, just like God used the ark to save Noah from the destruction of the flood.
- 'laid it among the reeds along the edge of the Nile River'—Moses' mother puts him in the Nile, just like Pharaoh commands—except for the fact that he's in a basket.
- 'I will pay you for your help'—the way things work out, Moses is indeed saved; and, in fact, his own mother is paid to raise him.
- 'the princess, who adopted him as her son'—because the pharaohs had large harems, they would have many, many children; and the daughters especially would not necessarily have very high status in Pharaoh's court. So, there is no reason to believe that Moses or his adoptive mother would have had any influence over Pharaoh (or that Moses would be the best friend and nearly equal of the heir-apparent, as the movies portray). Nonetheless, living in the palace as a relative of the Pharaoh would have given Moses access to a level of comfort, luxury, and education available to only a very

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

few others in the world at the time. Moses has an extraordinary bi-cultural childhood: exposed to (and most likely aware of) his Hebrew roots, while at the same time living as part of the Egyptian elite.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* Shiprah and Puah, by bravely ignoring the command of Pharaoh, rescue many Hebrew families from tragedy; in response, they are given families themselves. Is there something you are hoping for from God? Is there a way you could help someone else get that very thing? Jesus promises that he notices and rewards even the smallest acts of generosity toward others. We can expect that if we give to others, God will generously give to us—perhaps even in the exact same area of our life, like he did for Shiprah and Puah.
- *For your six:* The Egyptian princess allows her heart to be touched by a baby's cry. We don't know much about what happened in this princess' life because of that choice, but we do know that that choice had huge, wonderful consequences for one family in particular, for an entire people, and for the world. Compassion is a powerful thing. Pray for more compassion in the lives of your six. Ask God both to give them hearts of compassion toward others and to make them the recipients of compassion from others. Pray that that compassion would have a powerful effect on their lives and the lives of the people around them.
- *For our church:* Pray that our church would be a place where marginalized people would be welcomed, treated well, and appreciated; ask God to make us a good example to our city and our country in our treatment of 'strangers.'

Wednesday February 16th

Exodus 2:11-25

¹¹Many years later, when Moses had grown up, he went out to visit his people, the Israelites, and he saw how hard they were forced to work. During his visit, he saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrew slaves. ¹²After looking around to make sure no one was watching, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.

¹³The next day, as Moses was out visiting his people again, he saw two Hebrew men fighting. "What are you doing, hitting your neighbor like that?" Moses said to the one in the wrong.

¹⁴"Who do you think you are?" the man replied. "Who appointed you to be our prince and judge? Do you plan to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?"

Moses was badly frightened because he realized that everyone knew what he had done. ¹⁵And sure enough, when Pharaoh heard about it, he gave orders to have Moses arrested and killed. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and escaped to the land of Midian.

When Moses arrived in Midian, he sat down beside a well. ¹⁶Now it happened that the priest of Midian had seven daughters who came regularly to this well to draw water and fill the water troughs for their father's flocks. ¹⁷But other shepherds would often come and chase the girls and their flocks away. This time, however, Moses came to their aid, rescuing the girls from the shepherds. Then he helped them draw water for their flocks.

¹⁸When the girls returned to Reuel, their father, he asked, "How did you get the flocks watered so quickly today?"

¹⁹"An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds," they told him. "And then he drew water for us and watered our flocks."

²⁰"Well, where is he then?" their father asked. "Did you just leave him there? Go and

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

invite him home for a meal!"

²¹Moses was happy to accept the invitation, and he settled down to live with them. In time, Reuel gave Moses one of his daughters, Zipporah, to be his wife. ²²Later they had a baby boy, and Moses named him Gershom, for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."

²³Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites still groaned beneath their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their pleas for deliverance rose up to God.

²⁴God heard their cries and remembered his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵He looked down on the Israelites and felt deep concern for their welfare.

Points of Interest:

- 'many years later'—we know from other references that Moses is 40 years old.
- 'he went out to visit his people, the Israelites, and he saw how hard they were forced to work'—we don't know why it took 40 years for Moses to see the plight of the Israelites: maybe he recently learned new information about his birth family; maybe he has been restricted in his movement by education, work, or security concerns; maybe he has been enjoying the life of the Egyptian upper class and hasn't wanted to see before then; and maybe he's seen this mistreatment many times before, but this is the last straw.
- 'After looking around to make sure no one was watching'—a sure sign that he's not very certain that what he's about to do is right.
- 'What are you doing, hitting your neighbor like that?'—perhaps Moses has a somewhat idealized view of the Hebrews. He can't believe that a Hebrew would mistreat a fellow Hebrew; he thought only Egyptians did that.
- 'Who do you think you are?'—a great question. Moses finds himself stuck between his two identities of Israelite and Egyptian. He's rejected by both groups: the Israelites consider him a spoiled Egyptian collaborator and resent him sticking his nose in their business; the Egyptians treat him as an ungrateful wretch who turned on them. Once he kills the Egyptian, his status quickly changes from privileged son of a princess to rogue Hebrew murderer who must be stopped. The Egyptians probably use Moses' murderous act as a defense of their racism, telling themselves that they never should have trusted one of those Hebrews to live among them in the first place.
- 'escaped to the land of Midian'—the Midianites were a semi-nomadic people group based in northwestern Arabia, found wandering throughout the desert border regions on the eastern side of Canaan and the Egyptian sphere of influence (*Bible Background Commentary* 78). The Midianites were fairly closely related to the Israelites; they were descended from Abraham through his second wife Keturah, whom he married after Sarah's death. It's possible that their culture and even their religion might have some close resemblances to the Israelites' culture and religion.
- 'daughters who came regularly to this well to draw water and fill the water troughs for their father's flocks'—apparently Reuel has no sons. Therefore, his daughters must do the shepherding, and find themselves the objects of bullying by other shepherds.
- 'Moses came to their aid'—in this passage, we start to get a glimpse of the kind of person Moses is. One thing we learn about him is that he has a passion for protecting people who are treated unjustly. Twice, he decides to come to the rescue of the people being treated unfairly. The first time around, he does more harm than good: he acts rashly and violently himself, murdering someone and then trying to cover it up; his actions are unappreciated by the people he was trying to save; he doesn't really better

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

their situation; and he is forced to flee from his home. The second time, things go much better: he is of genuine help; his help is received gratefully; and by it he gains for himself a new home.

- 'he settled down to live with them'—Moses is adopted into yet another people group, becoming part of Reuel's Midianite tribe.
- 'his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'—that would be the promise to make a great nation of their family, to give them the land of Canaan, and to bless all the nations of the world through them.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* What's a passion God has given you? Think of a time when that passion has been of genuine benefit to yourself or others. Have there also been times when that passion has been unappreciated, or when it's gotten you or others into trouble? If you've recently had a disappointment in pursuing one of your passions, ask God to quickly give you a second chance to see that passion really shine.
- *For your six:* When Reuel hears about Moses' kindness to his daughters, he doesn't want to miss an opportunity to make a friend with this man. So, he invites him to dinner. It seems that eating together is a universally recognized and approved way of building relationships. Are any of your six relatively unfamiliar to you? Pray that God would give you the chance to have coffee or dinner with them. Look for opportunities to invite them, or be prepared to say, 'yes,' if you get an invitation.
- *For our church:* Although we are not living under terrible political oppression like the Israelites were, we are living in a world and in a city where all is not as it should be. Like the Israelites, we've received promises from God that have not come true, promises that it would be in Boston like it is in heaven. Jesus tells us, "Whenever you pray, say, 'Your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'" Ask the Holy Spirit to give us the hope and endurance to keep praying this prayer for Boston until God hears and acts; pray that it would happen during our lifetimes.

Thursday February 17th

Exodus 3

¹One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he went deep into the wilderness near Sinai, the mountain of God. ²Suddenly, the angel of the LORD appeared to him as a blazing fire in a bush. Moses was amazed because the bush was engulfed in flames, but it didn't burn up. ³"Amazing!" Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go over to see this."

⁴When the LORD saw that he had caught Moses' attention, God called to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"Here I am!" Moses replied.

⁵"Do not come any closer," God told him. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground." ⁶Then he said, "I am the God of your ancestors--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he hid his face in his hands because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the LORD told him, "You can be sure I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries for deliverance from their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸So I have come to rescue them from the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own good and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

honey--the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites live. ⁹The cries of the people of Israel have reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians have oppressed them with heavy tasks. ¹⁰Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You will lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

¹¹"But who am I to appear before Pharaoh?" Moses asked God. "How can you expect me to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?"

¹²Then God told him, "I will be with you. And this will serve as proof that I have sent you: When you have brought the Israelites out of Egypt, you will return here to worship God at this very mountain."

¹³But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they won't believe me. They will ask, 'Which god are you talking about? What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?"

¹⁴God replied, "I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS, Just tell them, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵God also said, "Tell them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob--has sent me to you.' This will be my name forever; it has always been my name, and it will be used throughout all generations.

¹⁶"Now go and call together all the leaders of Israel. Tell them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors--the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--appeared to me in a burning bush. He said, "You can be sure that I am watching over you and have seen what is happening to you in Egypt. ¹⁷I promise to rescue you from the oppression of the Egyptians. I will lead you to the land now occupied by the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites--a land flowing with milk and honey. " ' "

¹⁸"The leaders of the people of Israel will accept your message. Then all of you must go straight to the king of Egypt and tell him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us go on a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.'

¹⁹"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go except under heavy pressure. ²⁰So I will reach out and strike at the heart of Egypt with all kinds of miracles. Then at last he will let you go. ²¹And I will see to it that the Egyptians treat you well. They will load you down with gifts so you will not leave empty-handed. ²²The Israelite women will ask for silver and gold jewelry and fine clothing from their Egyptian neighbors and their neighbors' guests. With this clothing, you will dress your sons and daughters. In this way, you will plunder the Egyptians!"

Points of Interest:

- 'was tending the flock'—Moses has taken over the shepherding duties from his wife and sisters-in-law.
- 'his father-in-law, Jethro'—in the previous passage, his father-in-law's name is Reuel. It could be that Moses' father-in-law simply has two names that he goes by. There could also be a translation difficulty. The word translated here as 'father-in-law' can be used for any male authority figure related to your wife (*Bible Background Commentary* 79). Perhaps 'elder-in-law' would be a more accurate translation, but it would sound a little strange in English; so the translators go with the more conventional 'father-in-law.' So, perhaps Jethro is Zipporah's grandfather, and Reuel is her father, or vice versa.
- 'Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You will lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt'—As Dave mentions in his 'User's Manual for the 40 Days,' during this year's 40 Days we're going to be looking at something called the hero's journey—the idea

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

that many of the world's great stories, across time and across cultures, describe a very similar path for their hero. We find this pattern in folk tales, in the great epics, in most novels, in many of Hollywood's most famous movies, and anywhere else you find a good story. It's thought that audiences find themselves attracted to this hero's journey again and again because it describes something fundamentally true about life, both what it's like and what it's meant to be.

In this passage, we find the classic beginning to the hero's journey. The hero is going about everyday life when he or she receives a call to adventure. Moses is going about his normal business of tending the flock, which we discover later that he has been doing for 40 years now, when something extraordinary—in this case, a burning bush—pulls him out of his normal path. God calls him to leave his ordinary world and to go on amazing adventure. Interestingly, the adventure to which God calls Moses (rescuing the Israelites from Egyptian oppression) was, at least at one point, a desire of Moses' own heart.

- 'But who am I to appear before Pharaoh?'—Moses was probably never important enough to treat directly with Pharaoh, any influence he ever had is long since gone, and, at best, he's an anonymous shepherd from the desert. If anyone does remember him, it is as a murderer and a fugitive from justice.
- 'And this will serve as proof that I have sent you: When you have brought the Israelites out of Egypt, you will return here to worship God at this very mountain'—interestingly, God's proof to Moses that he is sending him is a future event, predicated on Moses actually following God's instruction. God seems to like it when we step out in faith to prove his words. You almost get the sense here that God is anxious with anticipation of how awesome it will feel to Moses when he actually does return to this mountain with all of the people of Israel in tow.
- 'They will ask, 'Which god are you talking about?'—this probably does not mean that Moses thinks they will have no idea who he is talking about. Moses is essentially saying, 'If I tell people that God told me to lead them out of Egypt, won't they ask for some sort of identification?'
- 'The LORD'—actually, in Hebrew, what is translated 'the LORD' here is the same as what is translated 'I AM' earlier. It's a longstanding publishing tradition in the English language to render 'I AM' as 'the LORD' in all capital letters. Whenever all capital letters are not used, it is a translation of *adonnai*, the Hebrew word for 'lord.'
- 'I will lead you to the land now occupied by the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites'—you might wonder how the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites feel about this plan. We don't hear too much about it in the Bible, but apparently God has been in conversation with the people of Canaan for a long time, asking them to stop their wicked behavior and warning them that he'll give their land to someone else if they don't. In fact, God tells Abraham ahead of time that his descendants will spend 400 years in Egypt, to give the Canaanites enough of a chance to listen to God and change (see Genesis 15: 13-16).
- 'They will load you down with gifts'—they've been loaded down with heavy labor, but that's going to change. When they leave, they'll be loaded down with treasure. It's like their being awarded back pay, or like they're suing for damages for unjust treatment and they just won their case.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

Taking it home:

- *For you:* Over the years, Moses settled into a very comfortable pattern. There were probably things that he liked about his life and things he didn't, but overall he most likely just accepted it as the life he was living and was likely to continue to live. What is your ordinary world—the things you just accept as normal life? What are the familiar patterns of your day and week? What would it feel like to be called out of that life? What would be exciting? What would be frightening?
- *For your six:* Moses is walking along his normal path when something startling and inexplicable captures his attention. Ask God to give your six burning bushes that jog them out of the normal way of looking at things. Pray that they will be curious enough to take a closer look, and that God will introduce himself to them when they do.
- *For our church:* God is surprisingly committed to working through people. In this passage, it's God's plan to rescue the Israelites from Egypt. But rather than do it himself, he is sending Moses to do it. What are the implications of the fact that if God has plans for Boston, he's probably (hopefully) planning on accomplishing them through us? Pray that we as a church would have the ability to say, 'Here we are,' when God calls, and that we would have the honesty to ask the questions we have about that call.

Friday February 18th

Exodus 4:1-20

¹But Moses protested again, "Look, they won't believe me! They won't do what I tell them. They'll just say, 'The LORD never appeared to you.' "

²Then the LORD asked him, "What do you have there in your hand?"

"A shepherd's staff," Moses replied.

³"Throw it down on the ground," the LORD told him. So Moses threw it down, and it became a snake! Moses was terrified, so he turned and ran away.

⁴Then the LORD told him, "Take hold of its tail." So Moses reached out and grabbed it, and it became a shepherd's staff again.

⁵"Perform this sign, and they will believe you," the LORD told him. "Then they will realize that the LORD, the God of their ancestors--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob--really has appeared to you."

⁶Then the LORD said to Moses, "Put your hand inside your robe." Moses did so, and when he took it out again, his hand was white as snow with leprosy. ⁷"Now put your hand back into your robe again," the LORD said. Moses did, and when he took it out this time, it was as healthy as the rest of his body.

⁸"If they do not believe the first miraculous sign, they will believe the second," the LORD said. ⁹"And if they do not believe you even after these two signs, then take some water from the Nile River and pour it out on the dry ground. When you do, it will turn into blood."

¹⁰But Moses pleaded with the LORD, "O Lord, I'm just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me. I'm clumsy with words."

¹¹"Who makes mouths?" the LORD asked him. "Who makes people so they can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now go, and do as I have told you. I will help you speak well, and I will tell you what to say."

¹³But Moses again pleaded, "Lord, please! Send someone else."

¹⁴Then the LORD became angry with Moses. "All right," he said. "What about your

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

brother, Aaron the Levite? He is a good speaker. And look! He is on his way to meet you now. And when he sees you, he will be very glad. ¹⁵You will talk to him, giving him the words to say. I will help both of you to speak clearly, and I will tell you what to do. ¹⁶Aaron will be your spokesman to the people, and you will be as God to him, telling him what to say. ¹⁷And be sure to take your shepherd's staff along so you can perform the miraculous signs I have shown you."

¹⁸Then Moses went back home and talked it over with Jethro, his father-in-law. "With your permission," Moses said, "I would like to go back to Egypt to visit my family. I don't even know whether they are still alive."

"Go with my blessing," Jethro replied.

¹⁹Before Moses left Midian, the LORD said to him, "Do not be afraid to return to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead."

²⁰So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey, and headed back to the land of Egypt. In his hand he carried the staff of God.

Points of Interest:

- 'Look, they won't believe me'—Moses suspects that a little name-dropping might not be enough to convince Pharaoh, or even the Israelites, that he has been sent by God. So, God mercifully gives him some more demonstrable proofs. In some ways, these proofs are even more important for Moses now than they will be for Pharaoh or the Israelites later. As we will see tomorrow, it's not entirely certain that the Israelites would have required such signs. And these signs ultimately prove unconvincing to Pharaoh. However, for Moses, they give some indication that God has the willingness and the ability to equip him for his commission.
- 'it became a snake'—The fact that the staff becomes a snake is probably significant. The snake was a symbol for Pharaoh (the snake on the forehead of King Tut's headdress is probably familiar to most of us). So, symbolically, God is saying that he has the power to make and un-make pharaohs—and that he has put that power in Moses' hand. Blood in the Nile, which was the center of the Egyptian economy, society, and even religion, is similarly a sign of God's power over Egypt.
- 'I'm just not a good speaker'—apparently, despite the excellent classical training in rhetoric he probably received during his education, Moses suffers from the amazingly common malady, fear of public speaking. Even this barrier is not too big for God.
- 'Lord, please! Send someone else'—Moses has reached the end of his logical objections, and the real truth comes out: he just doesn't want to go. This is another typical element of the hero's journey: the refusal of the call. It almost always takes some coaxing, or even force, to convince the hero to heed the call to leave the ordinary world and go on the mission. When it gets right down to it, we often just don't want the adventure. We might like to dream of adventure. But the ordinary world is just too safe and familiar to leave, and the adventure is just too scary and unknown to embrace. God responds to Moses' refusal with a combination of nurture and tough love: he provides Moses with the companionship and help of his brother Aaron, specifically answering his fears of public speaking; and then he effectively says, 'Too bad! You're going anyway,' like a football coach shoving a frightened second string player on to the field. The combination of the two kinds of care does the trick for Moses, giving him both the support and the encouragement necessary to step out.
- 'He is on his way to meet you now'—sending Aaron was an afterthought or purely a response to Moses. God had already sent Aaron to Moses.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

- ‘be sure to take your shepherd's staff along’—over time, the desert has become Moses' ordinary world; but in some ways, it is actually the special world of adventure. In the hero's journey, some sort of threat to the ordinary world often motivates the hero to go on his journey. She goes on a search for a magic potion or weapon, and then returns with it to save her community (This element of the hero's journey is particularly obvious in fairy tales). At this point, Moses is returning to his original ordinary world, Egypt. When Moses left Egypt, he knew the Israelites were in trouble, but he lacked the ability to save them. Although it seemed like he was escaping to the desert in failure, he was actually being sent to the desert to be equipped with the ‘magic potion’ he needed to save the Israelites. The shepherd's staff is the perfect symbol of what he has gained in the desert. It represents the character he has developed over his time with the Midianites: he arrived as an angry and impulsive vigilante, but he leaves as a shepherd who has spent years faithfully guiding and caring for his flock. The skills and character he has gained by working with the sheep will come in handy when he is leading the people of Israel through the same desert. The shepherd's staff, with its ability to turn into a snake, is also represents the supernatural power with which God has equipped him for the task of rescuing the people.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* Have you ever said, ‘If only God would speak to me clearly, or send me some sort of sign?’ God does these things for Moses, but even a burning bush isn't quite enough to convince him of God's presence or his call. If we're anything like Moses, that fact says two things to us: we're harder to convince than we think we are; and God is more willing to do the work to convince us than we think he is. God generously enters into a give and take dialogue with Moses, providing him with the proof he needs. Spend a moment thanking God for his patience with you. And, if you need some proof of God's presence with you, step out boldly in dialogue with him. Is there something you need from him to show you he is with you? Ask God for it, and look for a sign and listen for his answer.
- *For your six:* For some reason, Moses doesn't tell Jethro the whole story of his encounter with God or his real reasons for going back to Egypt. Maybe Moses still doesn't quite believe it himself, and he's taking a ‘let's see what happens’ attitude. Maybe he's afraid of sounding crazy. Maybe he doesn't want to alarm Jethro. Maybe it just feels too vulnerable to share what happened to him quite yet. In any case, there's more going on for Moses than is apparent on the surface. That's probably true of your six as well. If you've been praying for your six for a while and haven't seen any visible results, don't be discouraged. Ask God to relate to your six in quiet, private ways; and ask God to give you patience to give them space.
- *For our church:* When Moses complains of his poor public speaking, God responds, ‘Who makes mouths?’ Moses' natural inability (if it even truly exists) is no impediment to God. He is perfectly able to equip us to do what he calls us to do—which is a good thing, because he often calls us to do the impossible. For example, one thing Jesus commands his followers to do is heal the sick—something very few of us can accomplish on our own. Ask God to give our church the power we need from him to obey his commands. Pray specifically that God would increase our ability to pray for the sick and see them made well.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

Saturday February 19th

Exodus 4:29-5:23

²⁹So Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt and called the leaders of Israel to a meeting.

³⁰Aaron told them everything the LORD had told Moses, and Moses performed the miraculous signs as they watched. ³¹The leaders were soon convinced that the LORD had sent Moses and Aaron. And when they realized that the LORD had seen their misery and was deeply concerned for them, they all bowed their heads and worshiped.

¹After this presentation to Israel's leaders, Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh. They told him, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, for they must go out into the wilderness to hold a religious festival in my honor.' "

²"Is that so?" retorted Pharaoh. "And who is the LORD that I should listen to him and let Israel go? I don't know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go."

³But Aaron and Moses persisted. "The God of the Hebrews has met with us," they declared. "Let us take a three-day trip into the wilderness so we can offer sacrifices to the LORD our God. If we don't, we will surely die by disease or the sword."

⁴"Who do you think you are," Pharaoh shouted, "distracting the people from their tasks? Get back to work! ⁵Look, there are many people here in Egypt, and you are stopping them from doing their work."

⁶That same day Pharaoh sent this order to the slave drivers and foremen he had set over the people of Israel: ⁷"Do not supply the people with any more straw for making bricks. Let them get it themselves! ⁸But don't reduce their production quotas by a single brick. They obviously don't have enough to do. If they did, they wouldn't be talking about going into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to their God. ⁹Load them down with more work. Make them sweat! That will teach them to listen to these liars!"

¹⁰So the slave drivers and foremen informed the people: "Pharaoh has ordered us not to provide straw for you. ¹¹Go and get it yourselves. Find it wherever you can. But you must produce just as many bricks as before!" ¹²So the people scattered throughout the land in search of straw.

¹³The slave drivers were brutal. "Meet your daily quota of bricks, just as you did before!" they demanded. ¹⁴Then they whipped the Israelite foremen in charge of the work crews. "Why haven't you met your quotas either yesterday or today?" they demanded.

¹⁵So the Israelite foremen went to Pharaoh and pleaded with him. "Please don't treat us like this," they begged. ¹⁶"We are given no straw, but we are still told to make as many bricks as before. We are beaten for something that isn't our fault! It is the fault of your slave drivers for making such unreasonable demands."

¹⁷But Pharaoh replied, "You're just lazy! You obviously don't have enough to do. If you did, you wouldn't be saying, 'Let us go, so we can offer sacrifices to the LORD.' ¹⁸Now, get back to work! No straw will be given to you, but you must still deliver the regular quota of bricks."

¹⁹Since Pharaoh would not let up on his demands, the Israelite foremen could see that they were in serious trouble. ²⁰As they left Pharaoh's court, they met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting outside for them. ²¹The foremen said to them, "May the LORD judge you for getting us into this terrible situation with Pharaoh and his officials. You have given them an excuse to kill us!"

²²So Moses went back to the LORD and protested, "Why have you mistreated your own people like this, Lord? Why did you send me? ²³Since I gave Pharaoh your message, he has been even more brutal to your people. You have not even begun to rescue them!"

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

Points of Interest:

- 'Let us take a three-day trip into the wilderness'—although they have bigger plans for the Israelites than just a 3-day festival, they don't unveil it all to Pharaoh right away. They start with a more modest—one might even say reasonable—request.
- 'And who is the LORD that I should listen to him and let Israel go?'—God says, 'Let my people go,' and Pharaoh essentially responds, 'Why should I let my people go?' Pharaoh sees no reason why God's desire to send the people to a festival should take priority over his desire to have them build his building. Pharaoh himself raises the stakes, treating this 3-day festival as an all or nothing contest between himself and the LORD. Pharaoh will not share time or loyalty with God. According to God's view of things, he is the god of both the Israelites and Pharaoh. According to Pharaoh's point of view, God is no god at all, and Pharaoh is the god of the Hebrews.
- 'May the LORD judge you for getting us into this terrible situation'—Moses experiences here what is called in the hero's journey a 'rough landing' (*The Writer's Journey*, 131). When the hero finally makes the decision to step out on the adventure, the first step can be sort of a shock; this first difficult experience serves as a test to see if the hero is really committed, and it serves as a reminder that the mission is not easy. Moses certainly finds that out here: he actually makes the situation worse, and the people quickly turn on him. Since Moses has already had a similar painful experience in his past—when he killed the Egyptian guard—it must have been all the more tempting for him to abandon the mission, and it is all the more important for him to stay the course.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* In this passage, Moses seems to feel a bit betrayed by God. He does what God asks, but the initial results aren't very promising: things get worse for the people, and he gets blamed. Have you ever stepped out in faith, responding to God's call, only to feel like a fool? Moses boldly brings his disappointment to God. If you haven't already done so, consider asking God your questions, and remind him of the promises he has made.
- *For your six:* God wants to bring freedom and happiness to the lives of your six, just like he wanted for the Israelites. And just like in the case of the Israelites, he may have to fight for it. Pharaoh is a physical picture of something the Bible states as a spiritual reality: there are powerful negative spiritual forces that try to keep us and our friends trapped in their power through lies, threats and accusations. Pray that God would show himself stronger, bringing freedom and abundance to your six.
- *For our church:* When the Israelites realize that their prayers have been heard, they respond in worship. It is indeed an amazing thing that the God of the universe hears and responds to the cries of his people. Praise God for all of the ways he has answered our prayers, and ask him to give us a greater spirit of worship in response to those answered prayers.

Sunday February 20th

Exodus 7:1-7:13

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pay close attention to this. I will make you seem like God to Pharaoh. Your brother, Aaron, will be your prophet; he will speak for you. ²Tell Aaron everything I say to you and have him announce it to Pharaoh. He will demand that

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

the people of Israel be allowed to leave Egypt. ³But I will cause Pharaoh to be stubborn so I can multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴Even then Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you. So I will crush Egypt with a series of disasters, after which I will lead the forces of Israel out with great acts of judgment. ⁵When I show the Egyptians my power and force them to let the Israelites go, they will realize that I am the LORD."

⁶So Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded them. ⁷Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron was eighty-three at the time they made their demands to Pharaoh.

⁸Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹"Pharaoh will demand that you show him a miracle to prove that God has sent you. When he makes this demand, say to Aaron, 'Throw down your shepherd's staff,' and it will become a snake."

¹⁰So Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh, and they performed the miracle just as the LORD had told them. Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his court, and it became a snake. ¹¹Then Pharaoh called in his wise men and magicians, and they did the same thing with their secret arts. ¹²Their staffs became snakes, too! But then Aaron's snake swallowed up their snakes. ¹³Pharaoh's heart, however, remained hard and stubborn. He still refused to listen, just as the LORD had predicted.

Points of Interest:

- 'Pay close attention to this'—an important figure in the life of any hero is the mentor. The mentor is usually someone who has taken a similar path before. He can help the hero know what to expect, and teach him how to respond to the challenges he will face. Here, God serves as a mentor for Moses. God gives him a step-by-step preview of the showdown with Pharaoh, letting him know what challenges to expect, interpreting for him what is going on, and giving him keys for success.
- 'I will make you seem like God to Pharaoh'—Pharaoh thought of himself as divine. But God refuses to treat with him as an equal. The Lord is going to show how much greater he is than Pharaoh by making Moses Pharaoh's equal—and more.
- 'I will cause Pharaoh to be stubborn'—this can be a somewhat unsettling notion. It provokes the question, 'Did Pharaoh have any choice in the matter?' It's somewhat comforting to note that God isn't by any means forcing Pharaoh to act against his nature: Pharaoh has already displayed his own stubborn tendencies. From what precedes this statement and from what follows, it seems clear that Pharaoh is not a mere puppet. He is at the very least complicit with God in sustaining his stubbornness: sometimes the Bible says that God makes Pharaoh stubborn; and sometimes it describes Pharaoh choosing to be stubborn. What seems to motivate God here is a desire to make absolutely clear that the release of the Israelites is his doing. God doesn't want Pharaoh to be able to claim that he is motivated by his own magnanimity when he finally lets the Israelites go. It's as if, Pharaoh having called God out in this contest, God wants to insure that they see it through to the very end—God wants it to be a good fight. He wants both the Israelites and the Egyptians to recognize it when he wins.
- 'Their staffs became snakes, too!'—these magicians are not mere frauds. They have genuine power too. Of course, they don't have as much power as God; God's snake defeats Pharaoh's—a clear foreshadowing of what is to come, but a sign that Pharaoh refuses to recognize.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week One

Taking it home:

- *For you:* A mentor is a valuable gift and a key to success as we respond to God's call on our lives. Spend a moment reflecting on mentors you have had. What have you learned from them? Praise God for their influence in your life. Are you facing any situations right now in which you are especially feeling the need for some guidance? Ask God to provide you a mentor, or to be one to you himself.
- *For your six:* We see here that a stubborn heart can be a dangerous thing. Pray for your six, that they would have soft hearts toward God, be willing to see him and recognize him when he reveals himself to them.
- *For our church:* Moses is not a lone hero here. He has the companionship and the help of his brother Aaron. Pray for our church, that we would experience more and more of the joy that comes with setting out on a journey of faith together.