

At a glance

Looking into the life of one of the most beloved biblical figures, we find Moses was used by God for His redemptive purpose.

# Beyond Bulrushes

People of all ages hear stories about the baby in a basket, the voice from a burning bush, Pharaoh and the plagues, parting of the Red Sea, and the Ten Commandments. Even Hollywood has chosen this man's life for the production of movies that have captured the attention of audiences worldwide.



Perhaps the routine nature of the teaching lends itself to incomplete understanding or at least missed details that could be helpful in an adult's walk with the God of the Bible.

We need to identify the top two characters in the narrative. These two will be the focus of this lesson. Moses, of course, is one and the other is God. Actually, the stories of Moses fall in the midst of the biblical narrative about God, His creation, His love for His creation, His holiness and other attributes, His desire and plan for reconciliation with the people He created, and how He chose certain individuals, and even an entire people group, to serve His redemptive purposes. Keep this in mind as you once again think about Moses.

### Early Life of Moses

You probably know how Moses' story begins, but if you want to review that part of the narrative, read Exodus 1:1-2:22 and Acts 7:17-29, which will carry your thoughts through 80 years of Moses' life. Moses was a special Hebrew baby, protected by his parents, privileged by adoption into the Egyptian pharaoh's family, educated in Egyptian wisdom, and seemingly powerful. The young man Moses (young at age 40) knew himself to be Hebrew, though we do not know who taught him this or how influential that understanding was on him during his formative years.

Stephen said Moses thought himself to be a leader and expected the Israelites to realize God was using him to rescue them (Acts 7:25). Disappointed by his people's rejection of his attempt at leadership and afraid pharaoh would execute him for killing an Egyptian, Moses fled to Midian, far from the luxuries of his privileged youth. There he settled down, married, became a father, and took a job as sheep-herder for his father-in-law, Jethro, priest of Midian. The years passed, and Moses grew old.

### Life Changes

Meantime, during all those years of the Egyptians' increasing oppression of the Israelites, God was aware and waiting for His time to deliver the people back to the land He had promised Abraham. While Moses was settled into his lifestyle in Midian, God heard the groaning of his people and took action that changed Moses' life forever.

Read Exodus 2:23-3:10. In your own words describe God's mission for this 80-year-old man. Would you have chosen Moses for the job? Was he really qualified?

## Qualifications for Spiritual Leaders

Choosing leaders for nations or spiritual leaders for churches and denominations is difficult, isn't it? A person aspiring to a new position or filling a particular position is expected to have certain traits or qualifications for the job. Moses was being assigned to a leadership position in the greatest sense of the word. There would be logistical matters, confrontations, disciplines, insurmountable obstacles, rebellious people, and spiritual concerns in his mission. Think through this list of qualifications to determine if Moses was qualified for the job.

- *Divinity school* (Moses had been formally educated in the best "secular" school of Egypt and in the "school of hard knocks" during his years as a fugitive and sheep-herder. Acts 7:22.)
- *Peer endorsement* (His fellow Hebrews had rejected and challenged him and his murderous behavior earlier in life. Exodus 2:11-14; Acts 7:23-28.)
- *Leadership experience* (He had led sheep, but not people. Exodus 3:1.)
- *Public speaking ability* (Although Stephen said Moses was powerful in speech, Moses said otherwise, or was that just one of his excuses? Acts 7:22, Exodus 4:10.)
- *Service willingness* (Actually, he tried to get out of the role God was giving him. Exodus 4:13.)
- *Youthful vigor* (He was old! When God spoke to him through that burning bush, Moses was already 80 years of age. Acts 7:30.)

So, qualified or unqualified? In spite of what we might think, Moses was qualified, but not by human standards. Moses at age 80 was confronted by God to deliver His people out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10). That was the mission, and the qualification was simply God's call. God was the real One who could and would lead the people to

freedom. Moses was the human instrument who would represent Him before Pharaoh and the Israelites in that mission.

How would you feel if when you become 80 years of age (or if you are already there), God miraculously appears and tells you He has a seemingly impossible mission for you to do? Would you be afraid? Would you look at your qualifications, or lack thereof, and remind God how you are the wrong choice for this assignment? Would you wonder just a little bit, if you were hallucinating? Perhaps you would even boldly say, "I'm the wrong person for this job. I'm old, I'm unqualified, I'm settled, and the people involved will not listen to me anyway. Choose someone else."

Yes, Moses was just like many of us. His responses were not so different from what you or I would probably feel and say. Let's look a little closer at those responses.

### Moses' Questions and God's Answers

Moses had some important and relevant questions to ask the One speaking from that flaming bush. To see how patient God was, and how he answered those questions, read Exodus 3:11-4:10.

In your own words, how did God respond? Moses asked...

"Who am I?" (Exodus 3:11-12)

"Who are you?" (Exodus 3:13-18a)

"What if they won't listen to me or believe you appeared to me?" (Exodus 4:1-9)

### Moses' Excuses and God's Responses

Yes, God allowed the questions and patiently answered. Then, along with explanations and promises, God gave him some miracles to use if and when needed to convince others of all this. Still, however, Moses made the excuse that he was not eloquent and was slow speaking (Exodus 4:10).

Moses pleads with God to send someone else (Exodus 4:13). Finally, God became angry with Moses. That's when he said he would use Aaron, brother of Moses, to accompany him and be a spokesperson for him. Do you find it interesting that Stephen said, in Acts 7:22, that Moses was "mighty in words and in deeds"?



Another Scripture translation gives this description, “Moses was... powerful in speech and action” (NIV). So, what was really going on here? Moses was making excuses to get out of this assignment. Perhaps his failure in the past, his age, his reason for not returning to Egypt, and the nature of the mission all led to his attempt to be excluded from God’s call, but God’s will prevailed.

If you need to review the rest of the story, read all of Exodus through Deuteronomy, or read the rest of Stephen’s words in Acts 7:30-44.

Beyond Moses, the story of deliverance went on, but Moses had to stay behind in the wilderness while Joshua led the people on into the Promised Land. Yes, Moses followed God, did what God told him to do, spoke on God’s behalf, and faithfully served Him through 40 years in a wilderness filled with rebellious and often angry people. Then something happened that brought more disappointment and change into Moses’ life and expectations.

## Failure and Disappointment

We read in Numbers 20:1-13 that toward the end of the 40 years of life and movement through the wilderness, Moses and God were still dealing with rebellious and angry Israelites. This was the next generation following the elders who had initially left Egypt, younger people who knew why the journey had taken so long, heard the stories of God’s powerful provisions, and experienced those provisions for themselves. Yet, they still failed to trust God, and lashed out at Moses. God gave Moses instructions for providing the needed life resource the people requested, but Moses disobeyed God.

For the most part, Moses had done just as God had told him, except for one little incident (Exodus 4:24-26). God’s expectations for the Israelites covenant sign (circumcision) had to be obeyed by their leader, too. Right? Beyond that time, Moses became the leader God ordained him to be. He lived in obedience and taught the people to do exactly what God said do. Read through the account of the wilderness journey.


The account in Numbers 20 gives the sad story of Moses failing and the resulting disappointment. What caused that final act of disobedience, the big one that brought on the consequence of not getting to lead the people the rest of the way? We might attribute some of it to raw emotions. Did you notice in your reading that Moses

and Aaron had just buried their sister, Miriam (Numbers 20:1)? No doubt they were grieving. Then when the people got angry and lashed out at Moses and Aaron, probably in his humanity, Moses had reached his final limit of patience and angrily struck that rock.

Why did God pronounce such a harsh punishment on Moses and Aaron? Moses did not honor God as holy in front of the people. God's character was at stake here. There were more battles to be fought in taking the land, and the people had much more to do as God's chosen "Kingdom of Priests" from whom all nations would be blessed. They had to live in obedience to Him. They needed to see He did not make exceptions, even for His chosen, faithful leaders.

What big life changes did Moses experience after finally settling down and growing old?

How did Moses respond to the changes and how did God work with him?

From this study, what principles can we take away when we encounter life changes in ways similar to those Moses experienced in his last 40 years? 

**About the Writer:** Having served in two ministry-related careers, mission work in Japan and teaching at Randall University, Janice (Jan) Banks, now retired, resides in Denison, Texas. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends, while occasionally helping younger women through mentoring and/or encouragement-focused friendships. She also enjoys being part of Clearview Church and participating in meetings for women or other special ministries beyond her local area.