

MOSES AND THE OLD LAW

by Phillip Eichman



21ST CENTURY
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Table of Contents

1. God Chooses Moses to Deliver His People	5
(Exodus 3:10)	
2. Moses and the Plagues of Egypt	11
(Exodus 12:33)	
3. The Ten Commandments and the Covenant	17
(Exodus 19:5)	
4. Mount Sinai and the Golden Calf	23
(Exodus 32:1)	
5. Priests and Levites	29
(Exodus 28:1)	
6. Sacrifices and Offerings	35
(Leviticus 1:2)	
7. The Tabernacle	41
(Exodus 25:8)	
8. Clean and Unclean	47
(Leviticus 11:44)	
9. The Passover	53
(Exodus 12:14)	
10. The Day of Atonement	59
(Leviticus 16:30)	
11. The Sabbath and Other Special Days	65
(Leviticus 23:2)	
12. The Law and Everyday Living	71
(Leviticus 19:2)	
13. Jesus and the Law of Moses	77
(Matthew 5:17)	

Introduction

Moses was one of the most important characters in Jewish history. He is remembered for the plagues of Egypt and also for the Law he brought from God to the children of Israel. We usually call this collection of commandments the Law of Moses. The Jewish people have followed this Law for centuries. Jesus, the apostles, and the earliest Christians were born and lived under the Law of Moses. Since the coming of Jesus, this Law is no longer binding, but there is much that we can learn from the Law of Moses that will help us to understand the New Testament.

About the Author

Phillip Eichman has been a teacher most of his adult life. He holds master's and doctoral degrees in biology and was a biology professor for more than thirty years. He also completed master's degrees in Bible and ministry at Harding University and has taught Bible courses in Christian schools and served as a Bible class teacher and part-time minister. He is now retired and lives with his wife, Nancy, in South Carolina where he enjoys spending time studying and writing. Phillip is also the author of other titles in the *FLEX* Adult Bible Study series.



Lesson 1

God Chooses Moses to Deliver His People

Exodus 1:1–3:15

Key Verse:

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10).

WARM UP



Moses and the Exodus make an exciting story and several movie versions, some dating back to the earliest days of silent film, have been made dramatizing these events. The younger generation may be more familiar with the animated movie *The Prince of Egypt*, but when many of us think of Moses, we are reminded of Charlton Heston's portrayal of Moses in Cecil B. DeMille's epic movie *The Ten Commandments*.

None of these movies, however, are any more exciting than the account of Moses' life found in the Bible. Moses' life began as a special child whom God had chosen for specific tasks. He was to be the one to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery, but more importantly, he was to bring God's law to His people. Moses' path to deliverer and lawgiver, however, was marked by twists and turns that make his story so interesting.

**The oppression of the Israelites (Exodus 1:1–14)**

The book of Exodus is a continuation of the story that begins in Genesis. In the later chapters of Genesis (37–50), we read about Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, but through God’s help became a great ruler in Egypt. Eventually, Joseph was reconciled with his brothers, and his family moved to Egypt where they remained for several generations.

In time, two things happened. First of all, the Egyptians forgot about Joseph, who had saved them from a terrible famine. The second was the increase in the number of Israelites from the extended family of Jacob to a great multitude. So great had the number of Israelites become that the Egyptians were afraid that they would join with their enemies to defeat Egypt. Rather than seeking a peaceful resolution with the Israelites, the Egyptians forced them into slavery.

Slave labor was common in the ancient world. Wall paintings of slave masters have been found in some of the Egyptian tombs. The great palaces, temples, and even the pyramids of Egypt were all built by enslaved peoples like the Israelites. Verses 11–14 give a clear picture of the situation. Words like *afflict* or *oppress* are used in these verses to emphasize the plight of the Israelites. They were treated “ruthlessly” by the Egyptians. (That word is used twice for emphasis.) Other versions use expressions like “harshly,” “relentlessly,” and “without mercy” to describe how they were treated.

The expression “made their lives bitter” (v. 14) summarizes the plight of the Israelites under the oppression of the Egyptians. To this day Jewish people eat bitter herbs with the Passover meal to memorialize their treatment (Exodus 12:8).

Pharaoh’s initial attempt to control the Israelites failed. Slave labor

and ruthless treatment did not decrease the number of Israelites. So the Egyptians next tried to control them through a selective genocide by killing the male babies.

The birth of a special child (Exodus 1:15–2:10)

Pharaoh's next attempt to reduce the number of Israelites was through the midwives. Only two are mentioned by name. There must have been others. Perhaps these two supervised all of the midwives. It appears that none of the midwives followed Pharaoh's command to kill all male babies. Verse 17 tells us that they feared God. Because of this, God "dealt well" with them (v. 20) and "gave them families" (v. 21).

It is interesting that we have the names of the midwives, but not of Pharaoh. This reminds us that God is more interested in obedience than in power or authority.

Pharaoh's final attempt to limit the growth of the Israelites was to command "all his people" (v. 22) to throw into the Nile every boy that was born. There must have been many male babies born during this time, but we only know the fate of one of them. His mother hid him for as long as she could and finally placed him in the river in a small papyrus basket. Discovered by Pharaoh's daughter, this child was adopted and named Moses.

The presence of Pharaoh's daughter, her sympathy for the child, and Moses' mother nursing him all point to God's providence and plan for Moses and the Israelite people.

The prince of Egypt becomes a shepherd (Exodus 2:11–25)

As the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses would have been highly educated, accustomed to living in luxury, and truly a prince of Egypt. But when he was about 40 years old, an interesting thing happened. Moses went to watch "his own people" in their hard labor. There is no explanation given of how he learned about this or why

he became interested in these unfortunate people. Neither is there any explanation of why he suddenly killed an Egyptian for mistreating a Hebrew slave.

Moses' actions were rash and impetuous. When Pharaoh learned that Moses had taken the side of his enemies, he sought to kill him. Fleeing for his life, Moses went far into the desert to the land of Midian. Verses 15–22 condense about 40 years of Moses' life in the desert (Acts 7:29–30). Obviously, Moses was not quite ready to become God's leader and spent his time in the desert learning how to be the person that God wanted to deliver His people.

Inserted in the account of Moses' life are verses 23–25, which are actually the key to the rest of the story. It is here that we see God becoming actively involved in the plight of the Israelites. There are four consecutive verbs that describe God's actions regarding the Israelites: God *heard*, God *remembered*, God *looked on*, and God *was concerned*. Verse 24 is especially important because it connects what God is about to do for these Israelite slaves with the covenant that he had made with their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moses meets the Lord (Exodus 3:1–15)

This is the well-known story of how God manifested Himself to Moses in the burning bush. We are, however, so accustomed to special effects in movies today that we might not be too impressed with a bush that burned but was not consumed. Moses, however, was baffled by the strange sight. And when he got closer, God spoke to him.

In verse 6 God identified Himself with the great patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In verse 7 God told Moses that He knew of the suffering of His people in Egypt. In verse 8 we see an especially interesting expression: "I have come down." This expression is used elsewhere in the Old Testament and always refers to God doing something. The something that God was going to do was to rescue

the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and deliver them to the land that God had promised long ago to Abraham. To accomplish these tasks, God told Moses, “I will send you” (3:10).

Moses initially suggested that God send someone else, but God was not moved by his excuses. Still trying to find a way out, Moses said that he didn’t even know God’s name. In reply to his request, God said, “I AM WHO I AM,” or simply “I AM” (3:14). The name that God gave to Moses comes from an active verb, not a noun. It does not just identify God; it describes Him as a living, active being. As we look at the rest of the story, we will see that only the I AM could have the strength to rescue the children of Israel from the power of Pharaoh.

COOL DOWN



Anyone who has either visited the King Tut exhibition that traveled around the country or looked at photographs of the contents of his tomb or other Egyptian artifacts will realize the wealth of those who lived in ancient Egypt. The gold, precious stones, and fine workmanship of these objects are amazing.

Egypt was one of the most powerful nations in the ancient world. As a son of pharaoh’s daughter, Moses was well aware of the power and wealth of the Egyptians. He could have lived his entire life in a style that was known only to a few. We are reminded in the book of Hebrews, however, that Moses gave up all of that to become a member of the mistreated people of God (Hebrews 11:24–25).

Discussion Questions

1. What had happened to change the way that the Egyptians regarded the Israelites?
2. What did Pharaoh do to limit the military threat of the Israelites? Why did these not work?
3. Moses' parents were from which tribe of Israel? How is this important later?
4. In what ways was Moses a special child? What other examples of special children can you recall from the Bible?
5. How did Moses' first attempts to help the Israelites turn out?
6. Why did Moses ask God His name? Why are names so important?