

## **The Long and Winding Road Moses and the Exodus**

There are hundreds of characters in the Jewish prophetic writings called the “Old Testament” by many, but called the *Tanak* in Judaism. One character stands out above all others, both in the amount of space dedicated to him as well as the role he played in the foundations of the faith. That man was Moses. King David is the only other person who comes close, but David is not the prophet that Moses was, nor did David lay out the law that served as the building blocks for the nation of Israel as well as its faith. “The Law,” or “*Torah*” in Hebrew, is even another name for The Books of Moses.

When one considers the Five Books of Moses chronologically, as they are ordered in books as opposed to separate scrolls, the first book is Genesis. It laid the foundations or beginnings necessary to understand the story of Moses. The second book begins the story of Moses directly. In English Bibles, that book is called “Exodus,” from the Greek word *exodos* - ἐξοδος, indicating “going out.” This book tells the story of God delivering his people from captivity in Egypt, as they “go out” from there into the Promised Land. (In Hebrew Scriptures, the book is called “Shemot” or “names,” after the first core word in the scroll.)

The third book, “Leviticus” in English or “*Vayikra*” (“He called”) in Hebrew, gives insight into the work of the Levites or priests, including rules of worship and sacrifice, rules of cleanliness, and various instructions of holiness. The fourth book, “Numbers” in English or “*Bemidbar*” (“in the wilderness”) in Hebrew, recounts the number of Israelites that become a nation at the foot of Mount Sinai, attempt to enter the Promised Land, but the first generation is consigned to wander in the wilderness for forty years because of a lack of faith (chaps. 1-25). The rest of Numbers explains the rise of the second generation, the generation of hope, who will hear Moses’ final sermon and go into the land. The final book is “Deuteronomy” in English and “*Devarim*” (“the words”) in Hebrew. This book contains speeches and final instructions of Moses to the people.

It is in the final book of Moses, that Moses delivered an important prophecy to the people. He promised them that,

A prophet like me – from your midst, from your brothers – the LORD your God will cause to arise before you, and to him you must listen (Dt. 18:15).

This signal promise is made the focus of the final verses of the final book of Moses when, after recording the death of Moses, the prophet adds the comment,

And no prophet like Moses has arisen in Israel since. Moses knew God face to face, was sent by God to Egypt and Pharaoh doing signs and wonders to

Pharaoh's servants and lands, and did awesome and great deeds before Israel in God's mighty power (Dt. 34:10-12).

Israel was to look for such a person, but as of the final prophetic editing of the Books of Moses, no such person had arisen.

The next section of the Hebrew Bible will harken back to these words. In the next chronological scroll or book ("Joshua" in English, "Yehoshua" in Hebrew), the people of Israel were instructed clearly to keep meditating on and living by the books of Moses.

Don't let this book of law leave your mouth. Meditate on it day and night. Keep it, watch it, preserve it, so that you can do all that is in it. For then your paths will lead you to success and you will become wise and understanding.

The instructions would give them insights into life. It would give them direction. They would not only know how to live day-by-day, but would always be attuned to look for the one that Moses promised, the one who would know God intimately, would do signs and wonders before the world, and would manifest God's mighty power, shown in delivering God's people from bondage.

Reading each Old Testament page after these, one finds some amazing prophets, but never one who was like Moses in these ways. For that, one needs to read past the Old Testament into the pages of the New Testament. In Jesus, we find the one whom Moses spoke of. The power of Jesus as the fulfillment of this prophecy is seen in the ways that Jesus worked powerfully on earth, and especially in the awesome power of God displayed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The imagery of the story of Moses is woven throughout the ministry and work of Jesus. Moses reflects the life and ministry of Jesus in remarkable depth.

### **The Background Storyline**

The Genesis story sets up the story of Moses in every way necessary. It not only explains the big questions of life: "What are we doing here?" "What is the purpose of living?" "How do we explain the moral dilemma of humanity?" Why do we feel like there must be more to life?" "Why are we driven to fill in the void that seems to come as a part of living?" "Is there something greater than us, something beyond nature?" "What difference does God make in life?" "How do we best relate to him?" Genesis also carries a storyline of God's promises to restore a lost intimacy and relationship with people.

The Genesis storyline begins a narrow focus on a race of people that descend from Abraham. Abraham's offspring are a people of promise. God is set to use those people as the source of one who is going to bless all nations. This one is going to set aright what sin destroyed. He will restore the right relationship with God.

Genesis then follows the promise through Abraham's son, Isaac. From there the promise rests on Isaac's son Jacob. Jacob, later in life re-named "Israel," has twelve sons. These become known as "the twelve tribes of Israel," for each produce offspring that rapidly proliferate into great numbers.

Those twelve brothers had a tumultuous relationship. Sibling rivalry is too mild a phrase. The brothers came from four different mothers, and of those four, only two were primary wives of Jacob. The two primary wives were sisters, one of whom Jacob wanted, the other was foisted upon him.

Each wife jockeyed for Jacob's affection, and the fruit of their mission as wives was to bear Jacob sons. The lesser liked wife, Leah, was able to bear children and she did so readily. The preferred wife Rachel seemed barren and used her attendant as a substitute. Rachel's attendant became the mother of several of Jacob's sons. Not to be outdone, once Leah's fertility waned, Leah also gave her attendant as a substitute to bear Jacob's children.

Finally, Rachel bore Jacob a son, Joseph. Not surprisingly, just as the mothers competed for Jacob's affection, so did the sons. Joseph grew up to be Jacob's favorite, and Jacob made no pretense of hiding his favoritism. It stoked a hot anger in the other brothers, and Joseph's actions added fuel to the flames.

Joseph was a dreamer. He dreamed dreams that had his older brothers, their families, and even Joseph's parents, bowing down and paying homage to Joseph. At one point, the brothers had had it. Finding a good opportunity to bring Joseph down, they thought about killing him, but decided instead to make some money off of him, selling him into slavery. Then they led their father to believe Joseph was dead.

The story of Joseph in Egypt takes up a good bit of the final chapters in Genesis. This storyline explains the presence of the Hebrews as a huge group of people in Egypt. In the midst of life's ups and downs, the hand of God was on Joseph, and he became second to Pharaoh in Egypt. Famine struck the land, and it was Joseph who had prepared the famine to work to the benefit of the Egyptians, and the great benefit of Pharaoh.

The famine also afflicted Jacob and his family in Canaan, and they made trips to Egypt to get necessary food for survival. Unknowingly, at first, they were bowing before Joseph whom they failed to recognize. The decades and cultural changes made Joseph unrecognizable to them. As recognition finally sunk in, Joseph was restored to his family, and the larger family all came to live and prosper in Egypt.

Genesis draws to a close with the family of Jacob and his sons in Egypt. Joseph dies toward the end of the book, but not before reminding the reader of a core promise from God. God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them the land of Canaan. This promise

is a constant drumbeat accompanying the promise of an offspring who would fix the problems started in Eden. Joseph reminds his family of God's promise, and makes his brothers swear that they will take Joseph's dead body back to the promised land when God's time is right.

For four hundred years the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived and proliferated in Egypt. In this time frame, the second book of Moses begins.

### **The Moses Storyline**

For a time, the Egyptians favored the Israelites, but with regime change came a change in status. The Israelites became slaves to a new set of Pharaohs. Harsh years of slavery and bondage came, and yet the Israelites continued to grow in number. To combat this growth, a certain Pharaoh decided to reign in breeding. The Pharaoh's solution was to kill all male children born to the Israelite women.

Into this particularly cruel time, a woman from the tribe of Levi gave birth to a son. She desperately wanted her son to live, so she made a basket out of bulrushes (the Hebrew uses the word "ark," the same word used for Noah's rescue vessel). She placed the newborn into the basket and had it set in reeds on the banks of the Nile. With the older sister watching safely from a distance, the mother soon learned that the infant was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter who found it while bathing in the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter named the boy "Moses," a common Egyptian name translated "boy-child," yet also one that fortuitously sounds like the Hebrew verb one would use for drawing something out of the water.

Through the older sister's resourcefulness, Moses' mother was chosen to be nursemaid during his infancy. Moses was raised, however, as one of Pharaoh's own household, his Hebrew lineage kept secret by Pharaoh's daughter. Not much more is told about Moses, but when Moses became older, he became inflamed over seeing an Egyptian beat a Hebrew. Moses lashed out, killing the Egyptian.

Nothing happened in a vacuum. God was not blind or ignoring anything that occurred. As humanity made their choices, each decision fit into the plan of God, who was working toward fulfilling each promise he made.

Under the rubric that "no good deed goes unpunished," Moses' sticking up for the life of his Hebrew kin, backfired. Other Hebrew witnesses let the word out about Moses and suddenly Pharaoh targeted Moses for death. Moses fled into the wilderness, finding a new life as a shepherd.



Moses went out among his brothers and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers... and he killed the Egyptian.” (Exodus 1:13, 2:11-12)

In the wilderness, Moses meets the family of Jethro a shepherd, and eventually marries Zipporah, one of Jethro’s daughters. Moses begins a family, and his life seems to run on a separate track from where he started.

Meanwhile, in Egypt the Pharaoh died, and the slavery continued. The people were crying out to God for rescue, and God’s timing was right for deliverance.

On the slopes of Mount Sinai, Moses was taking care of the flocks when he saw a bush on fire, but not burning up. Moses went to investigate. Before Moses could get to the bush, a voice came forth instructing him to take off his shoes, for he was on holy ground. This was an encounter with God.

On Mount Sinai today, at the oldest continuous monastery still thriving (St. Catherine’s), the monks will show visitors the bush that tradition establishes as the original. Although one might not believe the bush to be the authentic one, and some question even if the location of Sinai is correct, some principles behind the current bush are worth noting.

Our family toured the monastery in the summer of 2010, led by Father Justin, a Greek Orthodox monk who is the librarian at the monastery (“St. Catherine’s Monastery”).



God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am (Ex. 3:4)

Father Justin showed us the bush, which is unusually bushy by now! I asked him what kind of bush it was. He answered that it was a part of the bramble family, related to the American blackberry. It was not, however, a fruit bearing plant.

The bush was not the feature point of the monastery. In fact, it was almost tucked away in a back area, somewhat hard to find. When I commented on the near obscurity of the bush, Father Justin explained that the bush should not be a focal point, the focus should be on the revelation of the LORD God.

Father Justin asked our family why we think God appeared in a bush. Before we offered any answer, he explained that the Israelites coming out of Egypt were easily prone to idolatry. God spoke from a bush because it was so ordinary and unimpressive it would never be elevated to idol status. Had God spoken from a great tree, he reasoned, the Israelites would have worshipped great trees. Had God spoken from an animal, the Israelites would have likely worshipped the animal.

Instead, God spoke from a lowly, non-fruit bearing bramble bush. Something so homely and weed-like in appearance would never be ascribed any grandness to it for idolatrous worship. Father Justin then explained the point carried through the New Testament and into today. We elevate not *how* God said something, but *what* God said. The message is the key. He saw a parallel in the continued work of the Holy Spirit today. He explained that the focus should always be on God's message, and we should never idolize or glorify the means by which the message is delivered.

Father Justin's views on the bush, and its representative lessons for the church, stem from an approach to the exodus that finds expression in the New Testament, in the early church, and throughout Christian history. The exodus story is replete with events that foreshadow the life of Christ, the walk of the believer, and the practice of the church.

### **The Passover**

God called Moses to return to Egypt and demand that Pharaoh let the Israelites leave. Moses was reticent, viewing himself unequal to the task. God explained that God was the deliverer, not Moses, and eventually Moses chose to do as God instructed.

Moses returned to Egypt and confronted Pharaoh, but to no avail. Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. Moses announced God's plagues on the land, and the plagues began, one at a time. Sometimes Pharaoh seemed to relent, but ultimately, through the course of nine plagues, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the Israelites go.

Moses pronounced a tenth plague on the land and its people. About midnight, God was going to move throughout the land and take the life of the first born, from Pharaoh's own son to the firstborn of a slave girl. Even the firstborn of the cattle would die (Ex. 11:4).



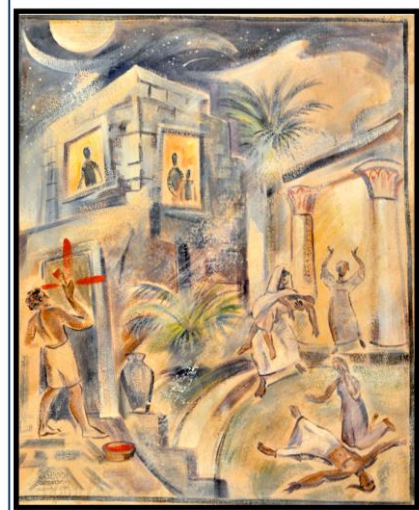
The only exception to this sweeping death would be for the Israelites who followed certain instructions of God. For these Israelites, the memorial feast was known as the “Passover” for as God passed throughout the land striking the firstborn dead, he passed over the houses of Israelites who followed his instructions.

The Israelites were to kill a male lamb without blemish, take his blood, and place it on the doorposts as well as the lintel of the houses where the families gathered together to eat the Passover meal. God specifically noted that,

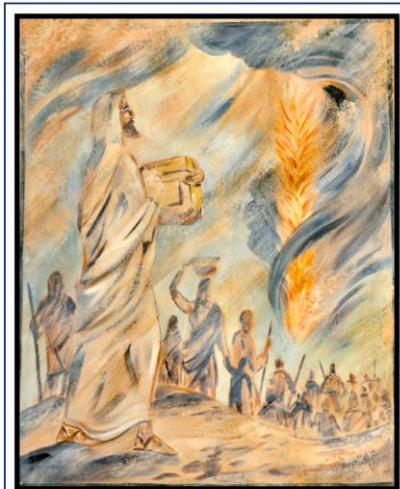
When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt (Ex. 12:13).

As the plague took place, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron that very night and released the Israelites from their slavery. God instructed Moses that from that time on,

The first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine (Ex. 13:1).



“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn.” (Exodus 12:12)



By day in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21).

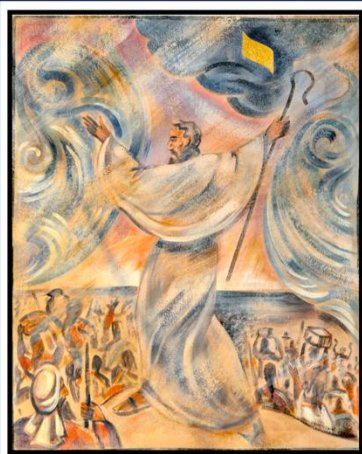
The people left Egypt by a route God set, taking the bones of Joseph, fulfilling a promise made four hundred years earlier, and closely tying the story of the Exodus to the promises made centuries earlier.

God led the Israelites by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

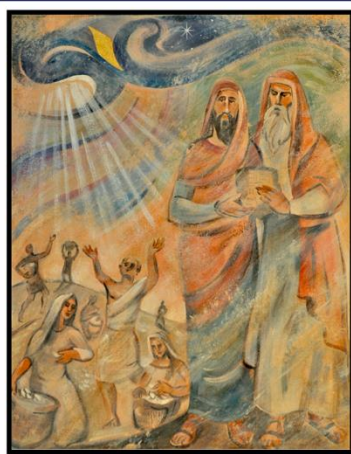
Before long, Pharaoh’s heart hardened and he sent 600 chariots in pursuit. The chariots caught up with the Israelites before the Re(e)d Sea where an apparent slaughter was set to take place. While the Israelites panicked, God held off the Egyptians long enough for an amazing miracle.

As the Israelite people were in a panic, God instructed Moses to lift his staff, stretch out his hand, and divide the sea. The Israelites then crossed, while the Egyptians who followed were swept into the sea, drowning.

The Lord led Israel through the wilderness, providing good water to drink and manna to eat. Israel learned lessons of relying on the Lord in battle and Moses learned lessons of delegating responsibility. Eventually, Israel came to Mount Sinai where the Lord called Moses up on the mountain to deliver an invitation to covenant.



"The waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground." (Exodus 14:21-22)

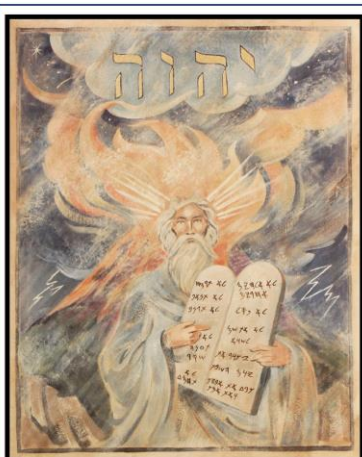


"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you.' (Exodus 16:4)



"Strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink." (Exodus 17:6)

Then after some purifying preparations, the Lord descended on Mount Sinai in a cloud with thunder and lightning. God then called Moses up the mountain and delivered to him the Ten Commandments.



"And I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction." (Exodus 24:12)

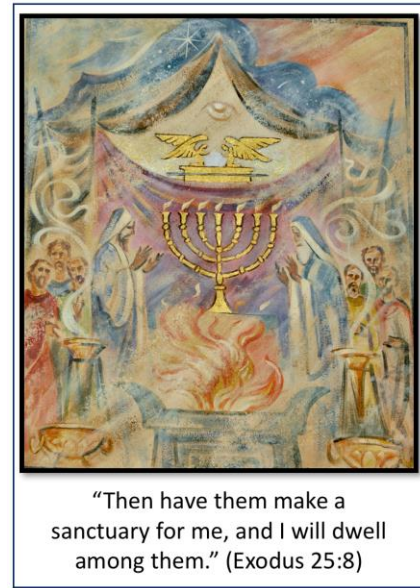
The people stayed afar, both out of fright and because God had instructed them to do so through Moses. God then delivered other laws to Moses, starting with laws concerning his own character and the building of altars. Significantly, his next set of laws dealt with the treatment of slaves, a sensitive point to these people just released from a lifetime of bondage. Following that, the laws covered a myriad of categories from torts to loaning money.



God gave Moses instructions for building the Ark of the Covenant and the other tabernacle matters. He consecrated priests from the family of Aaron. He set up taxes and called special people to do special craftsmanship on items associated with worship.

During this time, Moses was somewhat delayed in returning to a restless people. The Israelites demanded that Aaron fashion “gods who shall go before us” (Ex. 32:1). Aaron relented, making a golden calf with an altar. To this, the people professed to each other, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 32:4).

God expressed the gravity of this sin to Moses, threatening to deliver the destruction that the people deserved. Moses implored God to relent, and his intercessory prayers were answered. Moses then descended the mountain carrying the Ten Commandments written on stone by the hand of God.



When Moses actually saw what the people were doing, the idolatry and carousing angered him so much he threw down God’s tablets breaking them. Moses ground the golden calf into powder, mixed it into water, and made the Israelites drink it. Moses called out those who would obey the Lord, and the Levites answered. Moses had them slay the rebellious and then ordained the Levites for God’s service.

As Moses continued to serve the Lord and serve as his intermediary with the people, Moses was moved to ask a favor of God, “Please show me your glory” (Ex. 33:18). The Lord did not let Moses look upon his glory, but did let his goodness pass before Moses and let Moses behold his back. God then wrote the commandments on a new set of tablets Moses cut from the stone.

Moses came down from Sinai with the new set of tablets and Moses did not realize how brightly his face glowed from talking with God. The people were afraid, and Moses wore a veil to cover the brightness while talking to his people.

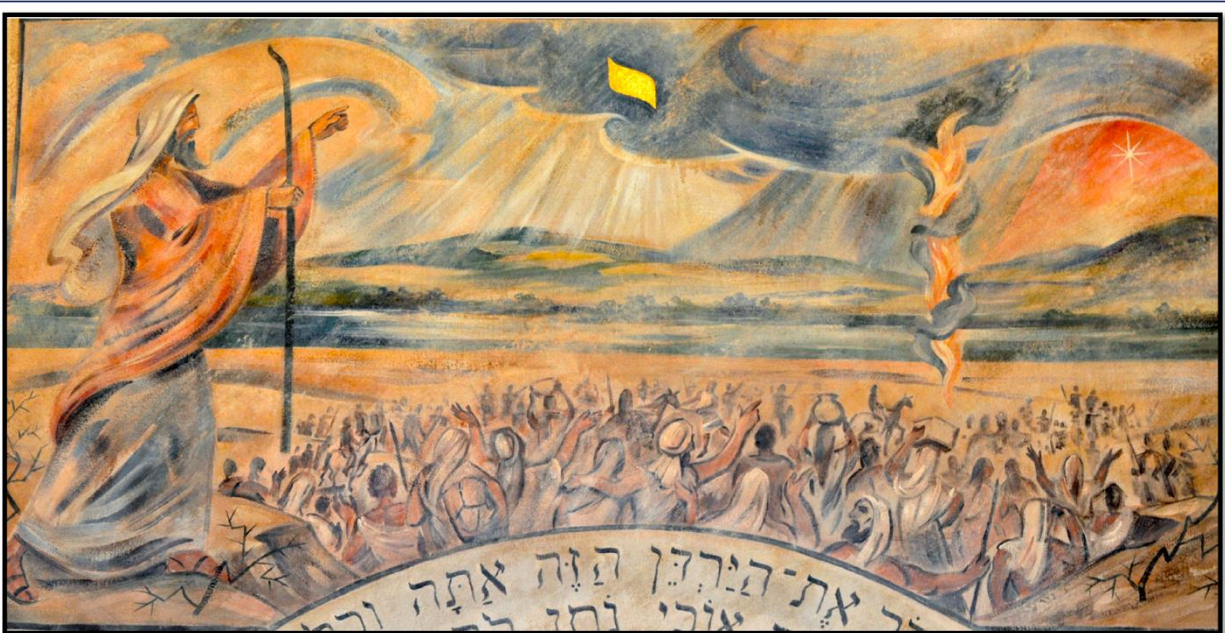
The book of Exodus ends with the tabernacle built and set up. At that point,

The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34).

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy carry forth further adventures of the Israelites as they are taught more law, attempt to enter the Promised Land, suffer the wilderness for forty years for their faithless fears, and live in the tug of war between belief and rebellion. One notable example is Numbers 21:4-9 where the people begin to grumble anew over the

provisions of God. (“We loathe this worthless food [manna]” Num. 21:5). So, the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, biting and killing many. This brings the people to repentance, and at God’s instruction, Moses makes a bronze serpent and puts it on a pole. Anyone bit by a serpent would live if they looked up at the serpent on the pole.

The Books of Moses end with the people leaving Moses to die while they venture forth to conquer and dwell in Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But before it ends, the people are assured that God has not completed his redemption. The people are not in the land simply to live out the future in God’s covenantal care. The promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was not only of land. It was that through their offspring would come one who would bless all people. This coming promised one would deliver God’s people from the bondage of sin and death, set in motion in Eden in the beginning.



“Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.” (Joshua 1:2)

### **The Promise Fulfilled**

The pages of the Hebrew Scriptures close without a Messiah having come to fulfill all of God’s promises. The pages continue to look forward. Each section of the Hebrew Scriptures projects forward this promise, linking the future to the time that has passed.

This is shown in the first section of the Hebrew Bible where the pages of the Law (or the Books of Moses) end with the prophetic promise one would come like Moses. The next section of the Hebrew Bible is commonly called “the Prophets,” and it begins noting that the Israelites were to study and focus on the Law. As the people did this, they would

naturally have their attention drawn to the promise of a coming Messiah, one who would be like Moses in many ways.

This second grouping of Hebrew scriptures, “the Prophets,” ends much the same way. The last “book” in the grouping called “the Prophets” ends looking back toward the Books of Moses, the first grouping, and reiterating the coming Messiah who would not only be a priest like Moses, but also a prophet reminding the people of the great prophet Elijah.

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction (Malachi 4:4-6).

The Messiah hasn’t come yet. The promised one who would set aright the destruction and downfall from sin hasn’t yet arrived. But more clues to him are given. One like Moses, a priest, and one like Elijah, a prophet. Yet there is still more.

The third and final grouping of Hebrew Scriptures are called “the Writings.” This section begins with Psalms and ends with Chronicles. Like the sections before, both the beginning and ending of this group reinforces the storyline of the Messiah. The Psalms begin the section calling blessings on those who meditate on the first grouping of Scriptures, the “Law.” These are the books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy. These books set out all of the issues and promises noted earlier. So, there is a blessing on meditating and being attuned to the message of Moses.

The Chronicles chart through the history of Israel with its kings. The greatest king was David, and there is great competition for who might be considered the worst. Eventually, God sends his people into exile in Babylon for several generations, but true to his word, God doesn’t leave them there. After seventy years, God stirs the pagan king’s heart and the people are told they may return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. This section notes it is a fulfilling of the prophecies of Jeremiah (2 Chron. 36:22).

Jeremiah would also be one pointing the people forward to God’s ultimate Messiah and deliverer.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach

his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).

The third section of Hebrew Scriptures, the “Writings,” keeps the eyes forward toward a Messiah as the people of Israel return to the land. They get to build the temple. They get to live in their land. They are only missing a king. But God had always said he was their true king, and the eyes of the people should be set accordingly. The coming Messiah, the priest, prophet, will also be king.

With the close of Hebrew Scriptures, comes the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The followers of Jesus didn’t understand how he fulfilled the pages of the Hebrew prophetic Scriptures until Jesus explained it, and the Holy Spirit illuminated their minds and hearts. But once that occurred, the world has never been the same.

It began on Pentecost, fifty days after Passover and the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus had ascended into heaven, but promised his followers that staying in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit would come upon them. They would then be poised to go into the whole earth and bring the blessings of God to the world.

One of Jesus’ main disciples was a fisherman named Peter. After being blessed with the Holy Spirit, Peter was God’s vessel for some amazing miracles, including healing a lame man. After doing so, Peter addressed a crowd in Solomon’s Portico. In his comments, Peter held Christ up as the prophetic fulfillment of the life and writings of Moses.

Citing the long-awaited promise from Deuteronomy, Peter explained,

Moses said, “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you” (Acts 3:22).

Peter wasn’t the only one who explained Christ as the Messiah, fulfilling the promises of the Books of Moses. In writing to the believers in Rome, Paul explained that Christ has set humanity free from the bondage of sin (Rom. 6). He taught that Christ was the meaning of the mercy seat in the Ark of the Covenant. As the mercy seat, Christ becomes the meeting place between God and man as set out in Exodus 25:21-22. Paul also wrote extensively about the “blood of Christ” as the true meaning of the sacrificial system Moses gave the people in the law. Paul invoked the veil Moses wore as symbolic of the veil over the hearts of unbelieving Jews who refuse to gaze upon Jesus as the true glory of God (2 Cor. 3).

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul found teaching symbols in the exodus account for baptism (parting of the sea), spiritual nourishment (manna), and Christ as the spiritual sustenance of water from the rock in the wilderness.

The writer of Hebrews began his book contrasting the voice of God through the prophets with God speaking through Jesus whom he appointed “the heir of all things” (Heb. 1:1-2). Within its pages, one reads of Jesus as greater than Moses (Heb. 3), and as the ultimate High Priest, a role Moses originally set out (Heb. 4). Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of the tabernacle, of the priestly system, as well as the sacrifices Moses installed (Heb. 8-10).

The Gospel of John goes into great detail on the ways that Jesus is found throughout the Old Testament stories of Moses and the Exodus.

### *Jesus: Moses as PLUS*

John begins his Gospel with a hearty reminder, echoing the books of Moses. Both John and Genesis begin, “In the beginning...” chapter after chapter, Jesus is explained as a fulfillment of the Mosaic promises. It starts early as the apostles are being chosen.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (Jn. 1:45).’

It continues as Jesus explained that Moses and his writings were a witness to Jesus, recorded for the sake of the people who refused to believe it:

For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me (Jn. 5:46).

It is so replete in the gospel of John, that it is fair to say that Moses is actually one of the main characters of the gospel. A running theme underlying many passages is the superiority of Jesus to Moses. It is not done simply in a “Jesus is greater than Moses” style, but is done in a sense that Jesus fulfills the models or events surrounding and involving Moses. In this sense, Jesus was greater because Moses was a part of the prophecy about which Jesus was the fulfillment. If Moses was a taste, Jesus was a feast!

One sees this plainly in passages like,

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (Jn.1:17).

Before Jesus, Moses, receiving from God the law and then imparting that law to the people of Israel, was the pinnacle of human interaction with the divine. When Moses received the law, it was more than a legal code. Moses received the words of God, explaining and preserving them for the Israelites. Ten of the commandments of God were even written by God himself upon stone.

This Mosaic experience gives the depth of meaning to Jesus Christ who, as John has already said, was the *incarnate* word of God. No longer were God’s words of law written on stone



or told to the people; Jesus was the fleshly manifestation of God's word. Jesus embodied not just the truth of the law, but the grace and truth of God.

Moses carries more comparisons to Christ in the fourth gospel. Some of these comparisons center on the actions of Moses. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus used an action of Moses prophetically in reference to salvation:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (Jn. 3:14-15).

This recognition by Jesus showed a greater fulfillment of the role of Moses as intermediary for the people. Moses intervened after God sent the poisonous serpents to punish the Israelites' grumbling. God had Moses make and lift up the bronze serpent to save the *physical* life of the people. Jesus was lifted up to save the eternal life of the people.

### *Jesus as the Manna*

Like many of the events of the exodus, the reality in Christ exceeded the original in the exodus, even though the original itself was spectacular. Nowhere is this more evident than in the parallel between the manna in the wilderness and the reality of Jesus as God's real nourishment. The people were at risk to starve without adequate food for their wilderness wanderings. God sent them daily manna for food.

John recorded Jesus feeding the 5,000 with bread and fish. It brought him an instant following! Jesus seized the moment to teach his role, using the terms and experiences of the wilderness wanderings of Israel, especially pertaining to God feeding the people with manna.

Jesus first pointed out that God was the manna maker, not Moses. He then added the fuller explanation of what happened.

Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven (Jn. 6:32).

To this last comparison of the wilderness manna, Jesus added,

I am the bread of life; whoever believes in me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst (Jn. 6:35).

This sets out the manna not simply as a foreshadowing of Christ, but shows again the way Christ exceeds the prophetic foreshadowing. The manna was God's daily provision for the wandering Israelites (save the Sabbath), whereas one who "consumed" Jesus would not hunger or thirst again. Jesus explained this more fully later in the John 6 passage noting,

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh...Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever (Jn. 6:49-58).

One should note that John inserted into this narrative of Jesus as the manna, the story of the disciples rowing through a stormy Sea of Galilee. Jesus came to them “walking on the sea” (Jn. 6:19). The comparison to the Israelites and Moses should not be missed. When the Israelites were in trouble, Moses parted the sea and they walked on dry land. Jesus did not need to part the sea. He walked on top of it!

### *Jesus as the Tabernacle*

Sometimes John’s language that placed Jesus within a framework of belonging to or fulfilling the exodus story is not so obvious. Of course, John’s gospel was in Greek while the original exodus story was in Hebrew. But a careful read of the two shows John’s message. Consider the early prologue passage where John wrote,

And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us (Jn. 1:14).

“Dwelt” is the Greek word *eskenosen* (ἐσκήνωσεν), a verb form that more literally means “the Word became flesh and ‘pitched its tent’ or ‘encamped’ among us.” The verb in its basic form (*skenoo* - σκηνόω) has a related Greek noun (*skene* - σκηνή), which was used over 90 times in the Greek translation of the exodus account (the “Septuagint”). It is the Greek word assigned to the “tabernacle of the Lord” (Ex. 25:9ff). In John 1:14, even though the English may not make it evident, one sees John extending the Lord’s presence among the Israelites in the tabernacle as mirroring the ultimate presence of God dwelling bodily among us in Jesus Christ.

John continues to echo the Old Testament story as he adds,

And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14-15).

This passage brings out words and events from several stories of the exodus. First, in Exodus 16, the people indirectly “saw the glory of the Lord” (Ex. 16:7) which they then beheld as “the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.” Moses later sought to truly see God’s “glory” (Ex. 33:18). God stated that he would show his “goodness,” but Moses did not behold the face of the Lord.

Yet, when Jesus “tabernacled” among humanity, the people actually “beheld his glory.” The people of the exodus had release from bondage by the mighty outstretched arm of the Lord, but never saw his glory. In Jesus, the glory of God, the way he saved with his outstretched arm, the release from sin’s grasp, was manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Here was the true glory of God—seen by human eyes.

### *Jesus as Both Law and Lawgiver*

Not coincidentally another interpretive incident occurred during the “Feast of Booths” (Jn. 7). Moses set out this feast at God’s instructions as a reminder of the way the people lived in booths during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land (Lev. 23). Jesus went up to the temple in the middle of the feast and began teaching. Jesus brought up the issue that many Jews had over his healing on the Sabbath. Noting his own walk in comparison to Moses’, Jesus said,

Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s body well? (Jn. 7:22-23).

Moses gave the people God’s rules to live by; Jesus was God, and by definition he lived God’s rules.

One of the more interesting stories that showed Christ in the Old Testament exodus account is found in John 7:53 to 8:11, the story of the woman caught in adultery. While there is a strong debate over whether this story was in the original Gospel of John, that debate is not set out here. Whether or not the story was in John’s first writing of his Gospel, the story itself certainly reflects John’s theme of Christ within the significance and meaning of the exodus story.

In the story, Jesus is brought a woman caught in adultery. Her accusers set Jesus up with the law of Moses saying,

Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say? (Jn. 8:4-5).

The reaction of Jesus is most interesting:

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, ‘Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.’ (Jn. 8:7).

The reader is not told what Jesus wrote, but simply that he wrote—and that he wrote with his finger! This points out that the significance was not the words Jesus was writing. When Jesus wrote with his finger, he was repeating the action of God himself before Moses. Exodus makes it clear that God wrote the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets. It was the hand of God writing, not Moses.

When the Scribes and Pharisees start quizzing Jesus on the implications of the Law of Moses on the adulterous woman, there is a certain level of absurdity. Jesus wrote the Law of Moses. God's hand was the *Scribe*. Jesus did not need anyone to quote him his own law!

Similarly, the language Christ used, which John reported, when instructing his disciples before the arrest and crucifixion becomes meaningful in this context.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn. 13:34-35).

Jesus not only is "commandment" or "law" giver, he is able to give a new commandment.

### *Jesus as God's Messenger*

In a sense, this point is made earlier in the gospel where Moses is credited with the law while Christ brought grace and truth, but it comes again in John 9 with the healing of the blind man. The healing took place on the Sabbath and involved Jesus "making mud." Both the healing itself, as well as the task of making mud, were considered violations of the Sabbath rules as enforced by the rigid Jewish legal community.

While cross-examining the blind man, the Jewish leaders were emphatic that Christ was a sinner for his deeds. The blind man refused to agree with the judgment, merely noting,

Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see (Jn 9:25).

After a rather sarcastic interchange over why the leaders keep pestering the man, the leaders finally proclaim,

You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from (Jn 9:28-29).

The healed man provides the contrast. He points out the absurdity of "knowing" that God had spoken to Moses, but refusing to listen to a man whom in the name of God has worked a remarkable miracle—bringing sight to the blind. Jesus then ends the story by noting that the real blindness belonged to those who refused to see him as the Son of Man.

The story underlines that Moses carried God's message to the people. No one disputed that, including Jesus or the blind man. Yet there was another man who not only had God's ear, but was God's arm as well. Jesus worked the miracles of God and, by implication, was just as fully God's messenger as Moses was.

### *Jesus as the Sacrificial Lamb*

Early in John, one reads a testimony to the role of Christ by John the Baptist. While people had peppered John with questions about his identity and role (Was he the Messiah? Elijah? Who?) John took on the prophetic label of Isaiah 40:3.

He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (Jn. 1:23).

In contrast to his own limited role in God's drama, upon seeing Jesus, John declared:

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me" (Jn. 1:29-30).

Being termed the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" sets Christ out in a role that finds meaning in the sacrificial system Moses laid out for the people of the exodus.

In Leviticus 16, God was emphasizing the rare approach that must be made in a very particular manner when the priest came into the Holy of Holies and before the mercy seat where God would appear in a cloud. Part of this approach involved selecting two male goats as a sin offering for the people. One was slain, the other driven from the camp symbolically carrying away the sins of the people. This occurred annually on a day of atonement for the people.

Additionally, a provision was given through Moses for "unintentional sins." These sins required a blood sacrifice as well. Leviticus 4:32 explains the role of the blood of a lamb in this atonement or compensation for sins.

But these were not the first sacrifices Moses told the people to perform. Before the people ever received the law at Sinai on the night of the Passover, Moses gave instruction for sacrificing a lamb. This was the lamb whose blood was spread on the posts and over the lintel of the doorways.

This point is emphasized in John's relating of the Last Supper. John makes the point that the supper events occurred around "the Feast of the Passover" (Jn. 13:1).

Jesus as "Lamb of God" is the lamb that is set before God, in a meaningful sacrifice, rather than the symbolic sacrifices of Moses. But Jesus is also "Lamb of God" in the sense that



he comes from God. He is the sacrifice that God provided, not one garnered from the flocks of man.

Both gospel writer John and John the Baptist understood and made the point that Jesus was the embodiment of the sacrificial system. Jesus made sense of the system. He offered a real life in sacrifice for others, so they might have real life.

## **Conclusion**

In the story of Moses and the Exodus, one finds countless expressions of God's promises set out in history in ways that would give people insight into Jesus as the promised one. Jesus was the redeemer of mankind. He is the solution to the sin of Adam and Eve, the male offspring of woman who would conquer the work of Satan at a personal price and would come through the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## **Points for Home**

1. *"The LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt."* (Ex. 12:29).

Plague after plague, Pharaoh's hardened heart would not grant release to his slaves. Deliverance did not come until God killed the firstborn. Layer upon layer of this exodus story is seen in the life of the believer and church. We should not fail to see the truth behind this action.

From the time of the curses announced in the fall, God had promised redemption would come by his hand, through the offspring of woman. That was a promise of life, in contrast to the death of sin. Yet the life could not come without the death. This is the consistency of an unchanging God. Sin brings death.

For the believer, the death need not be! God himself chose his own first born to die in the stead of those who choose to be covered in the blood of the lamb. We should never neglect so great a salvation!

2. *"When he sees the blood...the LORD will pass over."* (Ex. 9:7).

The same God that protected the Israelites protects us today. Where do you need protection? Take a moment and tender that area to God. Set it before him and ask his protection.

As we do so, we are remiss if we fail to note God insisted that those who wanted his Passover protection were to follow his instructions. Too often we are tempted to live outside God's rules and instructions and yet still seek his protection. Crisis should drive us to stop and reassess. We should repent of transgression, place

ourselves under God's care, and trust him to protect us as we live wisely before him. God's protection was not just for Bible characters. It is not just for those serving on mission fields. God's protection is real and an everyday event for his people living under his care.

3. *"For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me."* (Jn. 5:46).

I do not know if you spend much time reading ancient works. There are not many works extant that reflect writing of a time as ancient as the exodus. (This is true even if you "late date" the story as a seventh century BC creation.) There are simply no other writings like it! There is a complexity to the story line that keeps the narrative going while also setting out forms and rituals for centuries of practice.

In the process of this storyline and its accompanying instructions, comes a movement born out of a life whose echoes are unmistakably found in this ancient piece. Now some might wonder whether the story of Jesus was sculpted to fit this ancient work, but that in itself would be a minor miracle. Maybe with the literate 21<sup>st</sup> century world, with the Internet, with computer research and word processors, such might happen. But in a backwards culture, in an out-of-the-way corner of the Roman world, without any such technology or resources, to have events that within a generation turn the world upside down is stunning.

Yet, this is the truth of history. I fear we lose sight of this as we transport our own abilities, resources, and mental faculties into the biblical world. We are at risk to fail to appreciate the miracle that is the church and faith today. May we stop, think about this breadth and scope of God's mighty work, and in humble amazement, praise him!