Study 1: Moses, God’s Tri-Cultural Man
Exodus 1 - 4

The book of Exodus reveals a very different situation for Jacob’s family then we observed at the end of Genesis. In Genesis Joseph was the Pharaoh’s right hand man in ruling the nation of Egypt. As a result Jacob’s family was in a very privileged and safe position in the land. All was looking very positive.

In Exodus the situation is utterly reversed and instead of privilege, there is slavery, death and despair. Maybe 200-300 years have passed since the days of Joseph. It appears that the ruling elite of that day has been replaced by another power within Egypt. Everything has changed for the descendants of Jacob who are called Hebrews or Israelites.

A key to understanding this deadly twist of fortune is found in the brief words of Exodus 1:8, “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.”

If the new king did not know of Joseph, the implication is he did not know Joseph’s Creator God, the Lord God Almighty, either. We are not told how this happened. But we do know that for the Israelites their world abruptly changed as a brutal suppression came from the Egyptians as the new rulers sought military security and economic gain as they led their nation. The new elite saw these foreign Hebrews as threats to their reign and they would take no chances with this growing minority group in their midst. Slavery was the means to make sure these people were controlled and to make them useful to the Pharaoh and his leaders.

Just before Moses was born there was a population explosion among the Israelites that greatly concerned the government. In response they tried murder. A decree was issued that every Hebrew male newborn child must be put to death. It was into this deadly scene that Moses entered the world. It was a world that held a death sentence over his life at its very beginning.

Through God’s protection, his mother’s creative actions and the gentle heart of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses was miraculously raised as the adopted grandson of the Pharaoh himself. It is this Pharaoh who issued the death sentence for the male babies. And now Moses is being raised by him in the court of the Egyptian superpower. It is an amazing story of God’s love and care for Moses and the descendants of Jacob.

Joseph may have been forgotten. But God through Moses was not going to be forgotten in Egypt. God the Almighty was going to reveal Himself afresh to the Egyptians even if the Pharaohs’ did not want to know Him or acknowledge Him. God would make a new name for Himself in this land.

As we look at Moses we find there are three distinct periods that make up his life. Here are some of the things that we learn about him. A follow up question is this, how do these life experiences influence or affect his identity? Who is this man that God calls and uses?
Moses the Egyptian spent 40 years in the Egyptian court of his grandfather the Pharaoh.

Moses the Midianite lived for 40 years as a refugee in the land of Midian after failing in an attempt to lead a revolt against his grandfather and set his people, the Hebrews, free.

Moses the Hebrew spent the last 40 years of his life being used by God to build a viable nation out of a mob of slaves just released from an awful oppression.

It is my conviction that Moses was not simply an Israelite who just happened to have spent the first 40 years of his life in the Egyptian halls of power. Instead Moses was combination of all that he had lived through. He was an Egyptian-Midianite-Hebrew tri-cultural man who cannot be separated and forced into only one part of his identity. Moses asks a good question when God met this 80-year old man at the burning bush.

"Who Am I?"

I believe we miss a great truth if we do not see this as an honest question. This is an identity question, “Who am I?” Moses was confused about his identity when God calls him to lead the Hebrews (Israelites) out of their slavery in Egypt to the promised land. 40 years before he had tried to save his people and he failed. 40 years of shepherding sheep in Midian had blotted out the memory of those years of political and military power in Egypt. After that failure and escape with his life, all he had wanted in Midian was to be accepted as a Hebrew, the people of his birth. But he realized that the Hebrews in Egypt has rejected him. He was a failure as a Hebrew too. So he gave himself to having a family and being a sheepherder for his father-in-law in Midian. All of his former dreams were gone. Now he was just an old man maybe simply waiting for his death and having his bones buried in this desert land

But unknown to Moses, God had used these years to make him into a tri-cultural man who would never be all that God meant him to be until he fully accepted his unique Egyptian-Midianite-Hebrew identity. This shift in Moses’ view of himself happens half way through those terrible plagues that God used to judge the sins of Egypt.

Moses’ unique identity was used by God in the following ways.

Moses the Egyptian was the only person in this mob of freed slaves who understood what it would take to build a real nation. He had been trained in Egypt to be an elite government leader as a prince in the nation. He knew how to develop administrative structures so a nation could be ruled and led. He had the best college education that Egypt could provide. He understood how nations worked with each other. He had probably been trained in the use of the military as well. None of this was foreign to him. And Egypt’s teachers had invested 40 years in making him the man that he had become during his palace years.
Moses the Midianite was the only one who was not threatened by this seemingly deadly waterless desert through which they traveled. For Moses, the Midianite shepherd guide, the desert was home. He had wandered over it for 40 years and another 40 was not a big deal. He knew the land well. He had simply traded in sheep for people. And for Moses the sheep were far easier to work with than the Israelites.

Moses the Hebrew was a godly loving servant leader who loved his people and desired God’s best for them. Power and position never seduced Moses even when God offered to create a new nation out of his descendants. Moses’ reply to God was simply that these were His people and not Moses’ possession. He told God that He could not destroy them because “You” promised to love and protect them. This new nation of Israel was saved because of Moses’ total identification with them.

Maybe Moses had seen what absolute power does to a person when he walked in the halls of the Egyptian court. It could be that the years in the desert had impressed on him that there had to be another way to lead than the one being used among the world’s leaders. After Moses died and Joshua stepped into leadership, God called Moses His servant. Maybe leadership that lasts is one that is lived in total obedience to God with a heart of service to those you lead.

Moses the Egyptian-Midianite-Hebrew was God’s instrument to build a people, a nation, for God out of a mob of ungrateful sinful individuals. It was only when he accepted the multiethnic gift of his identity and personhood that he was effectively used by God to create this new nation.

The life of Moses is a great affirmation for our day where so many women and men are bi-cultural and tri-cultural in their ethnic heritages. They have unique gifts that God can use for a world that contains a growing multitude of refugees numbered in the millions. God know what He is doing. God uses all of who we are, not just part of our identity.