Exodus 13-20, 32

As the “Great Exodus” began, Moses led his people out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, through the desert land of Midian and on to Mount Sinai. In this part of the journey and in the months and years ahead, God demonstrates His reasons for giving Moses a tri-cultural heritage. This new nation of Israel had a great need for him to be this kind of leader. All of Moses’ tri-cultural gifts were critical for this mass of refugees to become a nation and to survive as they lived in those unchartered, semi-barren lands.

1. Moses The Midianite Guide
Moses had guided his sheep for 40 years throughout the land of Midian looking for eatable vegetation and water. In the process he learned the routes, water sites, grazing land locations and weather patterns of the country. Midian became his home. He was safe there. As Israel entered into this desert area, Moses was their eyes and their guide for the four months it took to get to Mount Sinai.

As you read Exodus 15-19, it is clear that Moses is secure in the route they are following. However for the people, it is also clear that they feared what looks to them to be an unknown forsaken land. They cry out that this land could immediately destroy them all. Fear has taken hold of them. It does not look like Egypt. As far as they are concerned, Moses and God have taken them to this desert place to kill them and to bury them. There is no water. No bread. No meat. (15:24-27; 16:2-3; 17:1-3; 19:1-2; 32:1-6)

When God judges the people for their disobedience and they stay in the desert for 40 more years, the Israelites’ view of the land never changes. (Numbers 10:11, 29-34; 11:1-6, 31; 14:1-4; 16:1-14, 41-43; 20:2-6)

Israel failed to see God was providing for all their needs during this four month journey to Mount Sinai. They failed to see that God was totally protecting them and keeping them safe for all of those days. It was at Mount Sinai that God came down from heaven and met with them. They waited on the Lord at Mount Sinai for a whole year. But without Moses, the Midianite desert guide, they as a people would have been totally lost, not knowing where to go. No one else in all of Israel knew what Moses knew about the land they were in. This was Moses’ gift to them. God did not waste Moses’ 40 years of training as a Midianite shepherd.

Now instead of being a shepherd of sheep, Moses was shepherding a vast number of people. (I think being a shepherd of flocks of sheep was far easier for Moses than shepherding this people.)

2. Moses The Egyptian Administrator, Nation Builder
Those who left Egypt with Moses were a massive rabble of Hebrew slaves and anyone else who had reasons to escape from that nation’s oppressive rule and control. It was a mixed people who had been slaves for maybe 100 years or more. They had been oppressed, murdered, over worked,
brutalized and imprisoned. To Egypt, however, these people were a valuable national labor resource and they were essential for its economic growth and prosperity (1:8-14). The Hebrews were forced into slavery because the Egyptian leaders believed they might join their enemies and destroy Egypt.

So when freedom came, no leaders were prepared to run or administrate the needs of this new nation. No one had the knowledge of how to build a nation and create a government to oversee a people who were simply an undisciplined mob. The temptation in this situation is for many different groups to decide that they have the right to run this chaotic mess.

The confrontations between Moses and these different groups began early and continued over the next 40 years from the Exodus to when they entered the land of Canaan. These disputes were over the key power issues of who should lead this new nation. In the beginning years there was no real strong commitment to Moses or to God as the events around the creation of the Golden Calf reveal. Miriam and Aaron’s challenge to Moses’s leadership along with Korah and Dathan’s rebellion gives evidence of the problems. (Exodus 32; Numbers 12, 13, 16)

But Moses, by God’s design, was the one person among all of these people who had been trained for 40 years in how to lead a national government. He had the gifts to do this. He was the only one who could lead this people and develop a viable administration to govern the new nation. The days at Mount Sinai were God’s crash course for Moses in public affairs and organization. Moses’ 40 years in the Egyptian bureaucracy and its disciplines, along with this year of listening to the Living God at Mount Sinai - provided him with the instructions he needed to purify and create a godly people. Obeying God’s instructions served Moses well as he led Israel forward.

God gave Moses the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai. The principles for worship and forgiveness of sins were established. Legal statutes were handed down on how people should relate to each other: (New International Bible Dictionary, p 633)

- Laws regulating leaders
- Laws regulating the army
- Criminal laws
- Laws dealing with crimes against property
- Laws relating to humane treatment
- Laws about personal and family rights
- Laws about property right
- Laws about relating to other social behaviors

Only Moses had the gifts and understanding to build this nation out of an undisciplined and often ungodly mob who had no allegiance either to Moses or to the Lord God Almighty. God knew what he was doing in Moses’ life from his birth, to his life in Egypt and to his years of living in Midian.
3. Moses, The Loving Hebrew Leader

Moses, when God called at the age of 80, had no delusions of glory or arrogant visions of being a mighty “Messiah” who wanted to build his own personal empire. No, all that Moses wanted was to be identified as a Hebrew. He wanted to be part of the people of his birth. The most wonderful words he had ever heard had to be those spoken by God at the burning bush, “Moses … I am the God of your fathers … the God of Abraham … of Isaac … of Jacob.” (Exodus 3:4-6) Moses, who for 40 years desperately wanted to be known as a Hebrew, was always identified as an Egyptian. He said of himself, I am “a stranger in a foreign land” (2:22) called Midian. But now God speaks and fully accepts him as part of the Hebrew family. What joy he must have experienced as he heard these life giving words about him. The desire of his heart was fulfilled at that moment.

Moses saw his Hebrewness as a great gift and treasure. He was part of God’s special people and that was enough for him. God was his Lord. He was amazed that God placed him at the head of his people. It was not his right to possess them. Instead it was an honor to be respected and used only for God’s glory and for God’s purposes. He deeply loved this family of people. Exodus 32:7-14 demonstrates this unique and wonderful identification. God’s anger against Israel’s sin boils up into a deadly judgment at Israel’s creation of a god to worship, the Golden Calf god. In response God makes an offer to Moses,

“Moses … let Me alone, that My wrath may … consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.” - Exodus 32:9

But instead of agreeing, Moses pled with God to be merciful and forgiving to this sinful and evil people he loves, his people. He called on God to remember His promise to Abraham to save His people. Verse 14 is amazing, “So God relented.” Moses had no desire to make a name for himself. His heart was focused on serving his Lord and on serving his people in love (33:15-17). Again and again Moses pled for God to have mercy upon them. He loved the Israelites (Numbers 12:13; 14:11-25; 16:46-50).

His heart was one of thanksgiving to God for permitting him to be a part of Israel. And this protected him from being corrupted by power and position. Because of his identification with his Hebrew roots, the new nation of Israel was saved from total destruction due to them because of their grievous sins and rebellion against the Living God.

Summary

Moses the Egyptian-Hebrew-Midian tri-cultural man was mightily used by God.

What has God made you to be? What experiences has he brought you through? What ethnic heritages and cultures make up your unique story and personality? Are you rejecting part of who you are? Have you thanked God for His creative design in you?

The sin in us must be confessed and put to death. But who we are is to be joyfully affirmed and accepted. God’s desire is to use all of who we are. He wastes nothing in our lives.