



PART 5 – MOSES: GOD’S LAW

- How can we know what is right and wrong?
- How would Abraham’s family become a great nation?

God raises Moses to lead Israel

Genesis ends with Israel in Egypt under Joseph’s protection. **Exodus 1** tells how, after Joseph died, a new Pharaoh (Egyptian king), feeling threatened by the growing Israelite population, forced them to work as slaves. As God foretold to Abraham, this would last 400 years (Genesis 15:13-16). The Israelites lost hope in God’s promises, but God had not forgotten them. He planned to deliver His people from slavery, to take them to the land of Canaan, and to remind them how to worship Him through sacrifice. The man He would use to accomplish all of this was Moses (born around 1526 BC), whose 120-year life comprised three 40-year periods:

Growing up as an educated Egyptian – birth to age 40 (Exodus 2:1-10)

Born in Egypt at a time when the Pharaoh wanted to kill every male Israelite baby, Moses was hidden by his mother for three months until he was adopted by a princess and raised in the Egyptian palace as a prince.

Living in the Desert as a shepherd – aged 40-80 years (Exodus 2:11-25)

Moses never forgot his Israelite identity. Aged 40, he murdered an Egyptian who mistreated an Israelite and fled to the desert to avoid punishment where he lived for 40 years working as a shepherd and starting a family.

Leading the nation of Israel – aged 80-120 years (Exodus 3 – Deuteronomy 34)

Aged 80, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush on Mount Sinai, calling him to lead His people. Moses felt inadequate to speak to Pharaoh, but God confirmed His power by performing miracles and used Moses greatly.

God delivers His people

Faith in God’s promises restored (Exodus 3; 4:27-31)

God revealed Himself to Moses, showing him His unchanging nature in the image of a burning bush that was not consumed and explaining the meaning of His covenant name (Yahweh – ‘the LORD’ in English versions), which derives from the phrase ‘I AM’, indicating God’s eternal existence and absolute self-sufficiency (3:13-15). The Israelites struggled to believe God was speaking again, so He performed miracles through Moses as signs to confirm He had sent him and reminded the Israelites of His covenant promises and the richness of Canaan (3:8).

Judgement and sacrifice restored (Exodus 7-12)

Pharaoh refused to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. God gave nine powerful signs to show His power over all the ‘gods’ of Egypt with their supposed spheres of control, but Pharaoh refused to listen and “hardened his heart” against God. God warned He would give one last sign and judgement on Pharaoh and Egypt, killing the firstborn son in every family. To be spared, the Israelites must kill a lamb without physical defects and sprinkle its blood on their door frame before eating its meat dressed ready to travel. God spared people in every house with blood on the door frame (Exodus 12:12-13) – His destroying angel ‘passed over’ these homes. ‘Passover’ became the most important annual festival for Jewish people and the basis of their calendar (Exodus 12:2).

God delivers the people through the sea (Exodus 13:17-14:31)

Pharaoh finally allowed Moses to lead the Israelites towards the land of Canaan but changed his mind and sent his soldiers to pursue them. The Israelites were trapped between mountains on either side, a sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind. Using a powerful wind, God formed a dry pathway for them to walk through, raising the water into walls on either side, and returned the water on top of the Egyptians when they followed. With Passover, this was God’s great deliverance of Israel, which they would always remember.

God gives His Law through Moses

After leaving Egypt, Moses again met God on Mount Sinai. God gave Moses the Law that would form Israel into a nation under His rule. It contains over 600 individual commandments and prohibitions including: principles for personal behaviour; regulations for sacrifices to be conducted by priests (who would come only from the descendants of Moses’ brother, Aaron) in a special tent called the Tabernacle; and instructions for life together as a nation, including how infringements should be punished. The Hebrew word usually translated

'Law' is *Torah* and literally means 'instruction'. Faithful Israelites received it gladly as God's loving guidance for them. God's Law for the Israelites served three purposes:

1. **Revealing God** – the Law shows that God is "The God of compassion and mercy ... slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). He is holy and just, so cannot tolerate sin, yet He wants people to know His love for them. The Tabernacle, located in the middle of their camp, represented God's home at the centre of the nation ruling over them (this position was usually for a king's tent). By obeying the Law the nation of Israel could also fulfil its calling to be a kingdom of priests, making God known to the other nations and bringing them to Him (Exodus 19:6). Other nations would observe how Israel lived in response to their vastly superior Law and realise the God who gave it them was great (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).
2. **Guiding behaviour**– the Israelites were expected to live together in harmony on the basis of the law and its standards would make them into a nation of justice and compassion. The Law is an expression of God's love for His people, guiding them away from harmful behaviour and to live as a reflection of His character.
3. **Revealing sin and offering forgiveness** – no one could read the Ten Commandments honestly without realising they fall short of God's standard. The Law showed individuals their sin and called them to respond in faith. God lived among them, but their sin still separated them from Him. The Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle, where God's throne was on top of the ark of the covenant (a special box containing stone tablets bearing the Ten Commandments) could only be entered once per year by the High Priest, on the Day of Atonement, bringing a sacrifice for the sins of the nation (Leviticus 16). The sacrifices reminded them that sin deserved death and could only be forgiven through shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22).

After Moses gave God's Law to the Israelites they promised to obey it. Moses sprinkled them with the blood of a sacrifice to mark this occasion (Exodus 24:3-8), renewing the covenant with Abraham through sacrifice.

The most famous portion of the Law is found in **Exodus 20:1-21**. Having reminded the nation of their deliverance from Egypt (19:3-6), God calls them to obey Him in response to His love for them. He gave Ten Commandments, which can be separated into two groups: four regulate their relationship with God, calling them to worship Him alone without idols, revere His name and commit one day per week to focus on Him; the other six regulate relationships between people, forbidding sins like lying, murder and adultery. The tenth commandment is noteworthy, because it forbids coveting (desiring in a faithless and discontented way) of neighbours' possessions, showing that the issue of sin is not only in actions, but also in attitudes. The two groups of commandments hold together two basis responsibilities: to love God and to love others (Jesus summarised the Law in these two principles in Matthew 22:24-40). As we have seen, sin is wrong worship leading to wrong actions, but **the Law commands right worship resulting in right actions**. We cannot love others until we love God first, but we cannot claim to love God if we do not love others.

Forty years in the desert (Numbers and Deuteronomy)

The journey from Egypt to Canaan should only have taken a few weeks, but the people who left Egypt refused to trust in God and repeatedly complained against Him. When twelve spies sent by Moses reported back about the inhabitants of Canaan, most were intimidated by these enemies. The people did not trust God, so God said they must wander in the desert until all the adults who had left Egypt were dead. The only exceptions were Joshua and Caleb – the only two spies who remained faithful to God (Numbers 13-14). Even Moses was forbidden from entering Canaan because he disobeyed God (Numbers 20). The generation who came out of Egypt thanked God when He did great things for Him but complained and rejected Him, even asking to return to Egypt, when they were hungry and thirsty, even though God provided food and water in supernatural ways (water from a rock and bread-like 'manna' and quails to eat). Their faith was never genuine (Hebrews 3:7-19).

Moses led the people for 40 years wandering in the desert until he died in around 1406 BC. His last words challenged the new generation to obey God's Law when they entered Canaan, saying God would bless them for faithfulness and curse them for disobedience, ultimately by removing them from the land (Deuteronomy 28-29). This generation, unlike their parents, trusted God. **True faith trusts and obeys God even when situations are difficult, remembering what God has done and His promises**. God calls us to surrender our lives to His rule, not to come on our terms and simply for our own benefit.

SUMMARY: God formed Israel into a nation by redeeming them and giving His Law

- Moses was God's leader to bring Israel out of Egypt and to receive God's Law for their national life
- The Law reveals God's perfection and human sin as well as God's love and the way of sacrifice