

## The Making of Moses

Jonathan K. Dodson | Exodus 2:11-25 | May 8, 2021

We all experience stages of life, stages in which one author says we struggle to a) get our lives together b) give our lives away c) give our death away. Each stage gives us an opportunity to be uniquely formed. It's also true of Moses. These three passages follow the arc of Moses' maturity: Early Moses, Midlife Moses, Late Moses.

### Early Moses

Our passage picks up forty years after Moses birth, [One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people](#)" (11). Although he was born to enslaved, Hebrew parents, Moses was raised by Egyptian royalty, in the heart of kingdom power, the palace. We're told he was *"instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds* (Ac 7:22). Moses acts, speaks, and dresses Egyptian, has all the privileges of Egyptian culture, but he feels a conflict with his Egyptian upbringing. He ventures out of the palace and sees an Egyptian beating "one of his people." A phrase repeated twice to emphasize his desire to identify as Hebrew. So in an act of solidarity with his oppressed people, Moses delivers a fatal blow to the Egyptian. Calculated act or crime of passion? It's hard to say. He's certainly aware of the moral complexity of what he's done: acting on behalf of the oppressed, while looking this way and that; committing murder but hiding the body in the sand. The next day he ventures out, emboldened, comes across two fighting Hebrews. He intervenes but this time in speech. He says to the one in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" The word in the wrong is a judicial word that assigns guilt. The Hebrew responds, [Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian](#) (14)? Moses inner conflict resurfaces, but this time he's deflated, rejected by his people. To make matters worse, his manslaughter is now out in the open. Tension over *identity*: Am I Egyptian or Hebrew? *Action*: Just or unjust? His people see it as an act of murder, presumably rat him out, but Acts 7 describes Moses as "defending the oppressed." From the Egyptian, it was no problem to kill a Hebrew, but reversing the action was an act of treason! Pharaoh puts a bounty on his head. Rejected by both groups Moses experiences

his own mini-exodus. Like Israel, he's at odds with Egypt, persecuted under pain of death, and expelled into the wilderness. But is he just? Is he right? Next Moses.

### **Midlife Moses**

Moses flees his adoptive, bloodthirsty, superpower dad and goes to Midian. There in the Sinai wilderness he encounters a new people, the Midianites, distant relatives of the Hebrews. If the Hebrews won't accept me, maybe the Midianites will? He sits down at a well. Wells were like town squares, a place where conversation, meetings, and work all took place. There he encounters seven Midianites shepherdesses who have come to water their father's flock. Shepherding was typically a male responsibility, and fell to women only when there were no sons. The male shepherds try to take advantage of the situation bully the women away from the well *but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock* (17). Moses' personal sense of justice moves him to stand up, literally, for the oppressed. But his social justice has mellowed. He doesn't murder the abusive shepherds. His actions are less extreme and more effective. He not only saves the women but takes the time to water their entire flock, Now enough sheep to require seven women, and *culturally*, this would have been beneath him. The Midian women recognize him as Egyptian. It was also *socially* unacceptable. After defending them, the women should have offered to serve him, but Moses beats them to it. *Here we get a glimpse of midlife Moses*. Choosing to serve, rather than be served. Sound familiar? Like Jesus, who came not be served but serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Like Jesus Moses uses his power to serve others. How can we apply this? *Make a habit of spending time with people in need.* Move toward need not away from it. A new visitor trying to connect with the church. The person who needs a follow up after CG. A married couple in conflict. A single. Someone in our mercy ministries, a child who needs extra attention. *Use your resources to serve others*. Here we have a more mature Moses: tempered in justice, servant-hearted in action. He even seems to be settling down. The text says, he was content to dwell with them, so content he marries a Midianite, becomes a shepherd, and has a son. *But* he names his son, Gershom—why?—"I have been a sojourner in a foreign land" (22). Even he's been welcomed into a God-fearing family (Ruel: friend of God), mid-life Moses is still unsettled. A new people, new family, new home, even a new job *and it's not enough*, which brings us to late Moses.

## Late Moses

It's said in Numbers that Moses was the humblest person on the face of the earth (12:3). Hard to imagine at this point, but it's not a comment on *early Moses*—too brash and conflicted. Nor is it *midlife Moses*—servant-hearted but still listless. It's a comment on *late Moses*, well into leading Israel in the wilderness. How did he become so humble? V. 23: [During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.](#) Up to know we would have thought Moses is the central character but here we find the true protagonist, how Moses became humble. Two observations. 1) **God's identity:** [During those many days the king of Egypt died](#), even the most powerful die, but not the king of the cosmos. God is eternal. Israel cries and groans for rescue, and their cry goes, not to Moses, but up. Why up? [From his temple he heard my cry](#) (Ps 18). Up is where God lives, in his cosmic throne room, in charge of everything and everyone. God is omnipotent. He can be trusted with your cries, with your trials, your sorrows. Why? Well, God has something Moses does not—eternal power—and *the wisdom to wield it*. If Moses had that power, he would have foolishly started a revolution, murdered more than one. But God knows best and his encounter with the God—the I AM—causes him to hide his face. It humbles him. You see something greater than your trial is here. 2) **God's action.** But it's not just who God is; it's what God does. God says, ["I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them](#) (3:6) Moses sees a single Egyptian beating a Hebrew, but God sees all the Hebrews. Moses delivers seven women, but God delivers 700k men, women, and children. God sees better, hears better, and *delivers better*. His capacity for compassion, his wisdom when to intervene, and his power to deliver are not just better; they're kinder. God doesn't want to just get you through suffering; he wants to get something in you. Humility, yes, but by way of his holy presence—seeing more of *him*. And it takes humility. God judges the proud (pharaoh) but gives grace to the humble (Moses). Late Moses chose humility. He followed the cries up. And God came down to deliver. Late Moses finds his identity not as an activist, though he sought justice; not as a great servant leader, though he was exemplary, not as family man, though he raised his kids, but as a

*humble worshipper*. That's when he finally came home. Are you home? Are you living close to God? Or have you misplaced your identity? In your people, sense of justice, servant leadership, schoolwork? Put your worth there and, like early and midlife Moses, you'll wander from high to low. Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom, a redemption, a *deliverance* for many. Come home to Jesus. Let him deliver you from your sins. Put your worth, yourself, your life, in the hands of Jesus Christ, and he will come down and lift you up to worship in the temple of his eternal presence.