

The Failure of Moses
Exodus 2:11-22
January 31, 2024

Context: The main idea of the book is seen in **6:6-8**

Question: What does our text show about Moses?

Question: What is the significance of the events in this passage? Think about this passage's relationship to the rest of the book.

The failed attempt of Moses to deliver his people (11-15)

11 “One day, when Moses had grown up...”

1. Forty years have gone by
 - **Acts 7:23** “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel.”

2. Moses received a royal education
 - **Acts 7:21-22** “and when he was exposed, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.”

3. His Egyptian education was part of God’s providential preparation of Moses. But other parts of his preparation were yet to come.

verse 11

“he went out to **his people**”

- Lit. **LSB** “his brothers”

“looked on their burdens”

- The burdens that the Egyptians had cruelly placed on them

“he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people.”

- Probably an Egyptian slave driver

Question: What does Moses seem to know about himself?

verse 12

Moses delivered his fellow Hebrew

This is a decisive moment in Moses' life (**Hebrews 11:24-26**)

The Bible does not say if Moses was right or wrong in killing the Egyptian. But it will become clear that Moses' efforts failed.

vv 13-14

Moses breaks up the fight, determines which man is in the wrong, and tries to bring about reconciliation.

The Hebrew who is in the wrong rejects Moses' efforts

“Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”

15 “When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses...”

1. Heard of Moses killing the Egyptian
2. Sought to kill Moses, not so much to avenge the death of the Egyptian as to deal with the discovery that Moses is acting as a friend and possible champion of the Israelites¹

15 “...But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian...”

1. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and his wife, Keturah
 - **Gen. 25:1-6** “Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, **Midian**, Ishbak, and Shuah.... All these were the children of Keturah. Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.”
2. Some of the Midianites may have retained the knowledge and worship of the God of Abraham
3. In a strict sense, the land of Midian was the land on the Arabian Peninsula that is along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, in modern-day Saudi Arabia
4. However, the Midianites were nomads and could be found over a considerable area on either side of the gulf, the western side being in the Sinai Peninsula²

¹ Walter Kaiser, “Exodus,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 2:312.

² Mackay, 60.

15 "...And he sat down by a well."

- The center of a Midianite community

Heb. 11:27 "By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."

Acts 7:23-29

In Exodus 2:11-15 we see Moses' initial attempts at delivering his people

1. Carried out in his own strength and by his own wisdom
2. Failed

Yet the outcome was in accordance with God's great plan

The Lord's preparation of Moses to deliver the Lord's people (16-21)

16 "Now **the priest of Midian** had seven daughters..."

vv 16-17

- Anticipates Moses' future work as the redeemer and leader of the Lord's people

vv 18-21

1. Reuel gave Moses protection, a place to stay, and even a wife, and presumably Moses served Reuel in return.
2. Though Zipporah appears here to be a Midianite, she seems to be called a Cushite in Numbers 12:1. Perhaps she was of both ancestries.

verse 22

1. NIV suggests the foreign land is the land of the Midianites
 - "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land."
2. ESV leaves open the possibility that the foreign land is Egypt
 - For all the status Moses had enjoyed in Egypt, he had not really belonged there³

Moses would live in Midian 40 years (Acts 7:30) working as a shepherd (Exo 3:1)

1. The second stage of Moses' training for his future role as the deliverer and leader of the Lord's people
2. Moses had no idea. From his limited perspective, he may have seen himself as a failure.
3. These 40 years were not wasted years, but times of further maturing and reflecting on the things of God.

³ Mackay, 63.

4. While Moses shepherded the flocks, God was preparing him to shepherd men.⁴

Conclusion

In this narrative, Moses went from prince in Pharaoh's house, to fugitive, to virtual exile in a foreign land.⁵

As the future covenant mediator, Moses needed to experience failure, rejection, exile, and suffering so that he would be able to identify with the people whom he would represent.⁶

Moses' failure showed that the salvation that would be given to the Israelites was of divine origin

The Bible shows us how God has worked over and over again through weak men and women, to accomplish His great redemptive purposes.

This does not mean preparation is unimportant. It means preparation is very important, and part of that preparation is learning humility and dependence upon the Lord.

Sometimes the preparation for ministry is longer than the ministry itself.

How have you responded to your failures?

While we must take responsibility for our sin and turn from it, we also need to recognize our failures to be part of God's sovereign preparation of us for future involvement in God's purposes. Failures are opportunities to learn and grow.

⁴ Davis, 65.

⁵ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, 78.

⁶ Mackay, 60.