



The Story Of Salvation
NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010
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Moses, the People of God and the Exodus

Moses

By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded (Hos 12:13).

Despite Moses' extraordinary achievements, he is not presented as a conventional hero. He did not sit on a throne. He was sent as a prophet and not as a general plotting great strategies for war to liberate God's people. He was unsure of himself and not eloquent (Ex 3:13–4:17). But Stephen tells us that he was powerful in his words and deeds (Acts 7:22). Presumably he was a great scholar (Acts 7:22). He left no important sons and no monument to remember him by, but lived on in the hearts of the people until this day. He did not act on his own devices but only at the instigation of God. He was a very humble and devout man (Num 12:3).

Moses not only saves Israel but also embodies Israel at times. His rescue from the river water prefigures the nation's salvation from the sea water. His escape after the death of an Egyptian is a prelude to the Israelites' flight after the death of all the first born Egyptian sons; his experience in the desert for forty years foreshadows the same for Israel; His divine encounter before the burning bush anticipates Israel encounter before the fire at Horeb.¹

God reveals his name to Moses (Ex 3)

The greatest gift which God gave to Israel was his holy name. In this one gift he included all the other gifts which he ever offered to his people. When God gave his name to the Israelites, he gave of himself to them, for by his name they had access to him personally . . . They could approach him and address him; they could gain his attention and communicate with him. In his name they could represent him and speak for him as he himself determined. In short, since they had been given his name, they had him as their God.²

Moses the Great Leader and Saviour.

The dramatic story of the Exodus is the story of God through Moses, freeing Israel from bondage and bringing them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. He receives a divine calling and divine revelation (Exodus 2 & 3). Moses' calling by God in Exodus 3 & 4 is for the express purpose of the liberation of the people. It is Moses who says to Pharaoh: "Let my people go". He functions as a shepherd of his people.

Moses the Teacher.

He proclaims or declares the divine law (Torah). He is the brilliant communicator of the word

¹ Dempster, Stephen G., *Dominion and dynasty. A theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT # 15, (Apollos, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 94.

² 'What's the Use of Naming God?' by John W. Kleinig published in 1992 in the *Lutheran Theological Journal*, vol. 26, pp. 27–34.

of God. His most significant task is to be Israel's teacher. The Lord speaks the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances to Moses. Moses in turn teaches them, spelling them out, explaining them as clearly as possible, interpreting what they mean for Israel. The word of God is revelation for God's people (Deut 1:1, 3. 5; 6:6). Not only does Moses teach God's word but also constantly teaches God's miraculous acts. Moses reveals who the Living God is by what He has said and what He has done. Although the New Testament speaks of the law of Moses the meaning is not the law given by Moses but the law given through Moses. As the teacher of the word of the Lord Moses is not just communicating information and explanations – a code of rules; it is teaching to do!

Moses the Exemplary Prophet.

Moses is a man of the Spirit of God upon him (Num 11:17; Deut 18:15, 18; Hos 12:13). True prophets are persons of the Spirit of God and speak only whatever the Lord says to them (1 Kings 22:14). Moses is recognised by God's people to be God's spokesman (Deut 5:27). God came to Moses' aid and defended him on the occasion when Aaron and Miriam had spoken against Moses challenging his unique authority as a prophet and spokesman of the word of the LORD,

When there are prophets among you, I the LORD make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the LORD (Num 12:6–8).

There is a very special and intimate and affectionate relationship between God and Moses. We see this especially as God himself buries Moses (Deut 34:6). Moses is the prophet *par excellence*, not only because the great signs and wonders that the Lord empowered him to do but primarily because of his faithful speaking of the word and will of God to God's people (Deut 34:10–12).

Moses the intercessor/mediator

But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written” (Ex 32:32).

A very important dimension of Moses' leadership is his role as mediator/intercessor. Time and again Moses, confronted by the people's need, cries out to the Lord on their behalf (e.g. Ex 15:25; 17:4, 16). Intercession turns to strategic pleading and, eventually, passionate identification as time goes on. When the Lord became aware of the idolatrous revelry at the foot of Mount Horeb, He expresses his anger to Moses, “Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation” (Ex 32:10; Deut 9:14). Moses reacts by questioning how God could have brought the people out of Egypt only to let them die. What would that make of Yahweh's reputation in Egypt (Ex 32:11–12; Deut 9:28)? But Moses' final appeal is to the promises made to the patriarchs (Ex 32:13; Deut 9:27). In response Yahweh relents.

Although Moses shares the anger of God towards his people in the scene that follows, something has changed. At the very moment in their journey when Moses might have seized his role as God's messenger of judgement to the people, he is captivated by a sense of identity that makes him simultaneously their representative before Yahweh: “On the next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin” (Ex 32:30; Deut 9:18–21). The Psalmist sings,

Therefore he said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them (Ps 106:23).

His prayer for their salvation is extraordinary: “So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have

written” (Ex 32:31–32; Deut 9:19–20). But the Lord replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; see, my angel shall go in front of you (Ex 32:33–34).

Previously Moses’ prayers were for “this people” ((Ex 17:4; 32:31; 33:12) but now his prayer is for *us*: “If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with *us*. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon *our* iniquity and *our* sin, and take *us* for your inheritance” (Ex 34:9). He has absorbed their destiny into his own. For the rest of his life he keeps on pleading for the lives of God’s (and his) people.³

The Book of Exodus.

The link to Genesis.

The book of Exodus starts by linking it to Genesis. The 70 members of Jacob’s family had dramatically multiplied (Deut 10:22). This indicates that the great number of the Israelites fulfils the plan of history inaugurated at Creation. This blessing is seen as an unacceptable political curse by the Egyptian government. Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph, told his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we” (Ex 1:8–9). He then started a program of genocide what we would call “ethnic cleansing” today.

Then in the opening verses of Exodus Joseph’s name is mentioned 3 times. As Abraham’s great grandchild he is a link to the promises of Genesis 12:1–3 of God’s plan to bring blessing to the families of the earth. The long history from Abraham to Moses was a time of trust that the promises would be fulfilled. The bones of Joseph kept in Egypt for all those years remained a witness that one day God would come to his people and bring them back to the land that he swore to their fathers (Gen 50:24–26; Ex 13:19; Heb 11:22).

The program instituted by Egypt’s authorities to annihilate Israel is not just a political issue but must be seen in its wider context of the Scriptures. It really is a clash of two kingdoms. On the one hand is Egypt, representing the seed of the serpent or the kingdom of the evil one and on the other the people of God representing the seed of the woman or the kingdom of God. Israel is not just one ethnic group amongst many others. It represents a new humanity destined to restore creation blessing to the world in the Promised Land and ultimately through a Saviour and the new heaven and earth.

Yahweh is the Saviour of His people.

I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3:8).

When the Israelites groaned under their slavery in Egypt, they cried out to the Lord for help and their cry was heard and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them” (Ex 2:23–25). God is going to reveal himself as Redeemer and Saviour through historical acts. So the LORD planned to rescue Israel from oppression (Ex 3:7–8) and to free his “firstborn son” from slavery (Ex 4:22–23). At the time of delivery from slavery the Passover is instituted. The Passover rite suggests substitutionary death. A male yearling sheep or goat is slain and its blood smeared on the doorposts and lintels of an Israelite dwelling in order to save the firstborn child from death. The firstborn son of Pharaoh was destined to rule but instead it is the firstborn son of Yahweh who will have dominion. The Passover is the climax in a battle that is waged between Yahweh the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt.

³ Laniak, Timothy S., *Shepherds after My own Heart*, NSBT #20, (Downer’s Grove; InterVarsity Press, 2006), pp. 88–90.

Yahweh is the Shepherd of His people.

He led out his people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid (Ps 78:52–53).

The God of Israel is physically manifest in the glory-cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and the pillar of fire by night, to give them light (Ex 13:21). Moses tells God's people on the plains of Moab that during the wilderness journey for nearly four decades "you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you travelled until you reached this place" (Deut 1:31). Then in the song that Moses taught God's people they were reminded that it was God alone who guided them and how God sustained them in a howling wilderness waste and cared for them and guarded them as the apple of His eye (Deut 32:10–12). Then at a crucial moment when God threatened that he will no longer lead His people but instead send an angel to lead them because his continued presence would be deadly "for you are a stiff-necked people." But Moses the intercessor and mediator boldly said to God,

"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (Ex 33:15–16 NIV).

"Israel's identity was inextricably tied to the presence of God, first demonstrated to the patriarchs and then to his chosen people in the wilderness sojourn"⁴

The tabernacle was where God dwelled with his people,

I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect (Lev 26:11–13).

The ark of the covenant became the visible centre of the community at rest and moved at the head of Israel when they marched.

Many chapters are devoted to the planning and building of the Tabernacle. God alone is the architect of the tabernacle and all its furniture, but it is the people of God who did the building under the leadership of Spirit filled foremen (Ex 25:8–9; 35:30–35). It was where God dwelt with his people and until the building of the temple was the most important place of worship for hundreds of years. The last chapter of Exodus is exclusively devoted to the erection of the tabernacle and the correct placing of the holy furniture. We read how Moses 'took the covenant and put it into the ark . . . and set the mercy seat above the ark and brought the ark into the tabernacle' (vv. 20–21). Immediately the cloud of the glory of Yahweh covers and fills the tabernacle. This is a definite sign that God is indeed with them. God's glory descends as the Ark of the Covenant is installed. This indicates that Yahweh is the guardian of the Ten Words. Just as wonderful is the mercy seat above the ark. God's glory and goodness are his mercy (Exod. 33:18–34:7). The mercy seat means that Yahweh can continue in fellowship with his people, even given their transgressions of the Ten Commandments. Yahweh deals with his people through the lens of his mercy. The Israelites firmly believed that Yahweh had chosen 'to put his Name' (NIV) first in the tabernacle and later in the temple,⁵ so that he could make his residence there. God dwelt there as his name dwelt there. The name was actually present at the temple in Jerusalem. By his name he was present with his ears to hear prayer, with his eyes to receive his people, and with his heart to respond to their needs (1 Kings 8:27–30). By his name his presence was given. The nations will see that Israel is close

⁴ Laniak, p. 79.

⁵ Deuteronomy 12:5, 21; 14:24; 1 Kings 9:3; 11:36; 2 Kings 21:4, 7; 2 Chronicles 6:20.

to Yahweh and that he is definitely and decisively with Israel (Deut. 4:7; 1 Kings 8:57–60).

Yahweh is the Protector of His people.

For the LORD your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you (Deut 23:14).

When the Egyptian army tried to recapture their former slaves, God's fiery cloud moved to the rear of the congregation to create a barrier. The Divine Warrior threw this mighty Egyptian army into confusion. They are drowned beneath the waters of the Reed Sea while their slaves emerge on the other side unscathed, a people created by God (Ex 15:16).⁶ God's power is emphasized with reference to his "outstretched arm" and "mighty hand" of deliverance, "...has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him (Deut 4:34–35). See also Ex 13:9; 15:6; 32:11; Deut 7:8 and many more.

Throughout their wanderings in the wilderness the promises of Gen 3:15 and to Abraham were contested by Israel's enemies (Num 21). As a ritual Moses was to say whenever the ark set out, "Arise, O LORD, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you" (Num 10:35). Deliverance from the hands of Amalek is attributed to the LORD fighting on their behalf (Ex 17:14–16). Success in battle is explained simply, by the promise that the Lord has given them into your hand (Num 21:34).

When Joshua and Caleb came back after spying out the land of Canaan they said to frightened Israel that they must not fear the people of the land because we will eat them like we eat bread. Furthermore the Canaanite protection is removed from them and *the LORD is with us* (Num 14:7–9).

After about 40 years in the wilderness Israel is found on the plains of Moab about to enter their promised Eden. Satan again tried to prevent Israel from entering Canaan and so ruin the plan of God for salvation for all mankind. His plan was to annihilate Israel before they entered Canaan. He uses king Balak of Moab and a well-known seer Balaam. Balak realised that Israel seems invincible—unbeatable—a supreme nation and is in fear of them, "This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field" (Num 22:4). Balaam practised divination and is a pagan (Josh 13:22). Barak hires Balaam to use his supernatural powers not just to thwart Israel but to curse it into oblivion. But remember the promise to Abraham,

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:2–3).

All attempts to curse Israel would fail. All the curses are transformed into blessings. This pagan Balaam even makes wonderful statements like, "The LORD their God is with them" (Num 23:21b NIV), and "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel" (Num 23:23), and "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth" (Num 24:17 NIV). This last prophecy of Balaam places the hope of Israel in a future ruler, who will crush the skulls of its enemies. Sounds like Genesis 3:15! Satan failed to foil God's plan of bringing salvation to the world by wanting to destroy Israel before they even have set foot in the promised land.

⁶ Dempster, Stephen G., *Dominion and Dynasty. A theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT # 15, (Apollos, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 99-100.

He could not do it with the help of Balaam and his curses, instead this Balaam turned around and foretold his demise!⁷

Yahweh is the Provider of His people.

*Surely the Lord your God has blessed you in all your undertakings; he knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; **you have lacked nothing** (Deut 2:7).*

The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years (Deut 8:4).

I have led you forty years in the wilderness. The clothes on your back have not worn out, and the sandals on your feet have not worn out (Deut 29:5)

“You have lacked nothing” is an amazing statement. Why? Because by definition a desert or wilderness is a place where there is lack of everything. It is Yahweh who brought them out of Egypt. It is Yahweh who will lead his people and bring them into the land of Canaan. It is Yahweh who will feed his people every day for 40 years. This action of Yahweh is one of the greatest wonders in history and surely of the same order as the deliverance from Egypt. It is one of God’s “mighty deeds” (Deut 34:12).

This was never forgotten in the prophetic tradition. Hosea writes,

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son...Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them (Hos 11:1, 3–4).

This echoes Exodus 19:4, “You have seen...how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself”.

Wilderness should have been a place of death, but life is given. Wilderness should have been a place of weariness, sickness, poverty, and disease, but Israel is sustained and kept well. Israel has no tattered clothes, no sore feet. It is subjected to the worst thinkable conditions and is kept well. The place of all lacks, because Yahweh is present, is where nothing is lacking...Israel lives only by miracle...and because Yahweh is there, gifts are given, healings emerge, newness governs, and nothing grows old.⁸

The most significant food in the wilderness was the Word of the Lord.

Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deut 8:2–3).

Yahweh gives the Ten Words at Horeb

Sinai or Horeb is central to the Torah. Israel stays there for 11 months in real time and 57 chapters in narrative time. This is important given the fact that 68 chapters precede Horeb and 59 chapters follow it. Israel is given the Ten Words from God. They were communicated by sound, not by sight. According to Deuteronomy the central purpose of the law is to hear

⁷ Dempster, pp. 113–116

⁸ Brueggemann, Walter, *The Land. Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, Second Edition, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002), pp. 40–41.

God's words, so that Israel may learn to fear Yahweh. The fear of the LORD is a gift from God to enable us to reverence and honour him. Israel's obedience will be its wisdom and discernment. Obedience to the commandments opens the way to the worship of God, for them and their children. Israel had been chosen to be the one nation to show the world the worship of the true God and not idols. The people of God learn that in obedience to the law they may achieve that the chief aim of human life is to glorify and enjoy God forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism). What took place at Horeb was the most central and defining moment in Israel's history. It was there when Israel became the people of God, a nation under God. It cannot be emphasised too much that it was the Lord who spoke directly to His people from the midst of the fire. There was a voice heard but no form, figure or image was seen. The covenant declared was for God's people to observe. God, in speaking directly, was revealing Himself to His people by proclaiming His Ten Words.

Each generation through the covenant would be in communion with God and would hear God's Ten Words loud and clear again and again. Whilst the law was written on the stone and could be called 'hard copy', yet it was God directly speaking. Only the word that is spoken directly from God can be true law. This was so in Eden and this is so for God's people on the threshold of recapturing Eden, the Promised Land. "Only in communion does the true nature of law come through. God's special mode of giving and Israel's covenantal receiving are essential for true law understanding".⁹

Immediately after proclaiming the Ten Words the commanding voice of Horeb tells this new generation of God's people that their entry into the land is possible only by hearing and doing the Ten Words. But "since the law is the word ('the ten words') of God it must be known in personal relationship with God. The moment we detach the law from God we make it not His word, but a block of rules which has an entity of its own, and a formidable entity at that".¹⁰

Israel is unique!

"Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? (Deut 4:5–8).

In these verses Israel's uniqueness is shown in its Torah. By keeping the law Israel will have a reputation of being a wise and discerning people and a great nation. Is there any other people with a God so near? Is there any other people with a law so just? Israel is God's special possession, His crown jewels, a priestly nation among all the nations (Ex 19:4–6).

The nations will "look on in amazement at Yahweh's love for Israel. They are the audience before whom the drama of election and redemption is played out". The life of God's people is an open book to the world and that even the voices of the nations are added to encourage Israel to live God's way in the world.¹¹

Some more verses to tell of Israel's uniqueness,

"I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people (Lev 26:11–12).

⁹ Bingham, Geoffrey, *The Law of Eternal Delight*, (Blackwood: New Creation Publication Inc., 2001), p. 30.

¹⁰ Bingham, p. 31.

¹¹ Millar, J. Gary, *Now Choose Life. Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy*. NSBT #6, (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), p. 149.

The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. All the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord (Deut 28:9–10a).

Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of my splendour that I had bestowed on you, says the Lord God (Ezek 16:14).

That Israel is unique is emphasized by Moses three questions to Israel in Deut 4.

For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of? (Deut 4:32)

Answer: No! To Israel alone! Nothing like the Exodus, Covenant, Wilderness and Conquest events have happened before or elsewhere!

Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? (Deut 4:33)

Answer: No! To Israel alone! Never has another people experienced this anywhere! God has spoken personally to them!

Has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?(Deut 4:34)

Answer: No! To Israel alone! No other god has made such a people in such a way, ever! Only Yahweh took such a disorganised, dispirited group of slaves, who were military inexperienced from the dominion of the greatest super-power of that time. He alone is Israel's divine Shepherd and strong Leader who conquered with his mighty hand and outstretched arm. No such event! No such people! No such God and so near! No such just law! These questions scan all of creation from one end to the other, for all times since creation of mankind. There are no parallel cases anywhere, ever.¹² Only Israel has been chosen as God's treasured possession. Only Israel has a vocation to be to God a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). Only Israel is God's partner. "As there is one God, so there is one people, and this people is marked not only by the peculiar presence of Yahweh, but by the peculiar gift of Torah, which gives identity to Israel".¹³ No one has ever heard or seen of greater things than what God had done for his people. It is through these specific events that Israel has discovered who and what kind of person Yahweh is. He is revealed as Creator, Revealer, Giver of the Ten Words, Redeemer and the Lord of history.

¹² Brueggemann Walter, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, Deuteronomy, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), pp. 57–58.

¹³ Brueggemann, Walter, *Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 581.