

# MOSES: The Servant of God

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## CHAPTER SIX

### “TO EGYPT”

“**And Moses returned to the land of Egypt; and took the rod of God in his hand**” (Exodus 4:20).

THE fire faded from the bush; the light above the brightness of the sun died away; the voice was still; and Moses looked around on the browsing sheep and the mighty mountains with the strange wonder of a man awaking from a trance. It had been the supreme hour of his life; for which all previous years had been preparing, and from which all future ones would date.

#### I. FIRST STEPS TOWARD RETURN

Slowly, thoughtfully, perhaps painfully, he prepared to obey the heavenly summons. Gathering his flock together, he conducted it from the backside of the desert, with its stern grandeur, its unoccupied spaces, its intense silence, to Midian, the seat of his clan, where human voices and interests could reassert themselves. And Moses went and returned to Jethro, his father-in-law.

By inter marriage with the tribe of which Jethro was the chieftain, Moses had placed himself under those olden customs which still obtain, as unchanged as the world of nature around them, among the wild sons of the desert. One of these customs demanded that any member of the tribe should seek and obtain permission before starting on a distant errand, involving prolonged absence from the camp. This permission Moses sought. **“Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren which are in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive.”**

Probably he said nothing of the vision he had seen, or of the mission with which he had been entrusted; and it was a noble reserve. We conserve spiritual strength when we refrain from speaking of our dealings with the Lord. Of course it is sometimes necessary to speak of them, to explain our reasons for action or to lead other souls into the same experiences; but it takes the freshness and delicacy from our inner fellowship with God if we are always talking about it.

It is not the nature of the deepest love to unveil all its endearments to unsympathizing eyes. It is much more important that men should see and feed on the fruits and results of such intercourse, than that they should be admitted to study its inner secrets. So Moses only sought leave to depart by the way which he had come some forty years before.

The request must have involved surprise and pain to the entire family.

They never suspected that strong heart of yearnings for the distant land where his kinsfolk were slaves. He seemed to have become so entirely one with themselves. And his going would involve that of wife and boys and of the infant son, who seems to have been but recently born.

However, no obstacle was thrown in his way, and the permission he asked was granted in the laconic answer, **“Go in peace.”**

But even then he lingered. So utterly had the forty years done their work, that his impulsive, hasty spirit had died down; and he who previously had run before God now began to lag behind Him. He was in no hurry to be gone.

- Was it that he dreaded the turmoil and stir of the busy crowds of those teeming hives of population?
- Was it that he had commenced to feel the pressure of growing years, disinclining him from great exertion?
- Was it that he loved the hush of those desert solitudes, and the companionship of those mighty mountains, and was reluctant to tear himself away from them?
- Was it that he had misgivings about the safety of his person when exposed to the hatred of king and court?

We cannot tell the reason; our only point is to notice the marvellous transformation which had been wrought in his inner life, the deliberation, the self-possession, the reserve. For these qualities were so in the ascendant that it was needful for God to send a second summons into his life.

**“And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian: Go, return into Egypt; for all the men are dead which sought thy life.”**

Stirred up by this second summons, as Abraham by the second summons which came to him also when Terah was dead, Moses prepared to start for Egypt. It was a very simple cavalcade, reminding us of another which, in similar lowliness, but centuries after, was destined to travel through a part of that same desert towards the same goal.

Moses, however, went as the servant who was faithful in all his house; but the infant whom Mary carried was the Son who had builded the house, and was coming to live in it for ever.

Imagine, then, that setting-forth.

Zipporah sitting on the ass, perhaps nursing a little babe, new-born, whilst the husband and father walked beside. And in his hand was the sacred rod only a shepherd's crook, but now the rod of God destined to be employed for deeds of transcendent power, and always reminding him of what weak things could do when wielded by strong hands behind them.

Three things happened on that journey.

## II. A FURTHER REVELATION

“**And the Lord said unto Moses . . .**” (21).

And there followed a marvellous epitome of events which were to transpire within the next few months, from the making of the water into blood to the slaying of the first-born.

This was in harmony with one of the greatest principles in the moral and spiritual realm. We only learn as we endeavor to obey. Light is given to us to know what next step we should take just light enough and no more; a rim of light, hemmed in by darkness falling as a faint circle on our path. Shall we take that step? We hesitate, because we cannot see the step beyond, and the next beyond; or because we fail to see the reason, and are not satisfied to act on the conviction of known duty; or because we dread the awful pain which threatens to benumb us and turn our hearts sick. But so long as we refuse to act, that light cannot increase, but begins inevitably to decline. Obedience is the one condition for its increase, nay, for its maintenance at all.

It may be that you are in darkness like that which enveloped King Saul towards the end of his troubled reign, when the Lord answered him not, “**neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.**” It is long since you heard his voice, or saw his face. But as with Saul so with you, disobedience is the cause.

You have neglected to perform the Divine commandments; you have disobeyed the distinct word of the Lord. And you will never get back into the warm, blessed, circle of his manifested presence, where his face smiles and his voice speaks, till you have gone back to the place where you dropped the thread of obedience, and, taking it up where you left it, do what you know to be the word and will of God. Then, as you start to obey, the voice of God will greet you once more with the old familiar tones.

## III. A PREPARATORY RITE

In the caravanserai Moses seems to have been attacked by sudden and dangerous illness, and was on the point of death. What a strange and awful visitation! that the destined deliverer of Israel should die amid the hubbub and unrest of an Eastern Khan; his call cancelled; his wife returning to her people, a widow; his children fatherless; his people disenfranchised.

But amid the horror of that hour conscience did its work unmolested, and searched the secrets of his heart with her lighted torch. How often have we experienced a similar dealing at the Lord’s hands! We have lain all night in a bath of fire; we have suffered almost to the limits of sanity; we have gone down to the depths of the ocean of grief: and as we have raised our weary eyes to God, and asked the reason of discipline so searching, his answer has come back to us in the memory of some hidden sin or neglected duty.

It would seem that for some reason Moses had neglected the rite of circumcision for one of his children, perhaps the newly-born one. That reason may have been due to Zipporah’s dislike. He allowed her to have her way; but, as the head of the house, he was held responsible for its omission. We cannot shirk responsibilities placed on our shoulders by God Himself.

The husband cannot put them on the wife, nor the wife take them from the husband. And as he seemed to hang in the quivering balance, between life and death, this was brought to mind, and he was compelled to insist that the rite should be performed.

It was comparatively a trivial thing, insignificant in the eyes of man; and yet there are no trifles in a man's dealings with God. Great principles are involved in very insignificant acts, as ponderous bridges revolve on very small pivots.

The self-life is sometimes more strongly entrenched in a small thing than in a bigger one. And so he is kept waiting on the threshold of the great enterprise of his life, because this rite of circumcision had not been administered to a little babe. We may be conscious of having been sent to do a great work for God, and yet be shrinking from some small known duty; and disobedience here will impede our progress, as the stone in a traveler's shoe.

We can never learn the lesson too deeply, that our action in the commonplaces of life is deciding our destiny. What we are in them will affect all our future, making us either the emancipators of our people, or carcasses that bleach on the desert sand.

There is a very striking passage in the Minor Prophets, in which God says, "**You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities**" (Amos 3:2).

- The more dear we are to God, the more care will He expend on us.
- The more fruit-bearing qualities we possess, the more thoroughly shall we be pruned.
- The finest, rarest, metals are exposed to the whitest heat.

And it was because Moses was to be so eminently used, that he came into God's most searching discipline. Take heart, suffering child of God! He chastens because He loves, and is about to use you. Be careful to ascertain the evil thing which grieves Him, and put it away; or if it seem impossible to put it out of thy life, ask the Priest to cut it out, for, though touched with our pain, He holds a sharp two-edged sword to pierce to the very border-land of soul and spirit. Then shall God remove the stroke of his hand. "**So He let him go.**"

The exhibition of incompatibility displayed by Zipporah, when she had performed the rite, seems to have led Moses to feel that it would not be wise to take her with him; and, on the whole, it seemed better that she should abide quietly with her own people, until the act of emancipation was wrought.

And this was easier, inasmuch as God had so distinctly told him that he should bring the people through those very districts on their way to Canaan (Exodus 3:12). And it befell according to his faith; for in the after narrative we find this record, "Jethro, Moses father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God" (Exodus 18:5).

We are not always to follow this example in ridding ourselves of family ties in order to do God's work.

At the same time, a man must always move steadily forward on the appointed plan of his life, not swayed by, but swaying, the members of his home, and bearing them along with him in one common work. The circumstances must be very exceptional that invade the close ties of the home; but when such circumstances arise, they will be so evidently indicated by God's providence that there will be no reflection cast on the character of his servants.

#### IV. A BROTHERLY ALLIANCE

Recovered from his illness, but lonely, Moses, having sent back his wife and children, started again on his journey, threading his way through those corridors of red sandstone, by which he had passed some forty years ago. But how different all seemed! He was different. No longer a disappointed man, smarting with the sense of recent failure; but strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, conscious of a great mission, and of the presence of an angel beside him who would be equal to every emergency.

And he knew that the same power which brought him forward was bringing towards him the brother whom he had not seen for forty years. How the hearts of the two throbbed at the thought of meeting! How eagerly would each press forward! How earnestly would each scan the distant figure of the other in the long vista! And, finally, God so contrived it that they met in the Mount of God, where the bush had burned, and the voice of God had summoned Moses from shepherding a flock to become shepherd of a host.

- Then what greetings! "**He kissed him.**"
- What interchange of confidences! "**Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him.**"
- What questionings, as the exile would ask tidings of those whom he had loved!

So we shall meet. God knows where our Aarons are, our twin-souls whom we need to have beside us for the completion of our life-work. They may be far away now. But He is bringing them to us, and us to them. The Zipporah goes, but the Aaron comes. And we shall not miss each other, since He is Guide. Let us live on his providence and love; and He will so arrange it finally that we shall meet at the Mount of God, some consecrated spot, some bower of holy converse, some blessed trysting-place, selected by Himself. And the embrace, the joy, the kiss of welcome, shall in the ecstasy cause us to forget the forty years of exile, loneliness, and sorrow.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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