

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

The Bible defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). In brief, it is belief in God’s existence, and that what He has promised He will perform (v. 6). With this explanation, the first of the prophets we need to examine is Moses. Although he was a great lawgiver and judge, he was an important prophet. Moses is spoken of as a prophet on several occasions (John. 5:46, Acts 3:22; 7:37; 26:22). He is so important, he can be likened to Christ. Notice particularly: “. . . Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold . . .” (Num. 12:6-8). “And the LORD said unto me [Moses], They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deut. 18:17-18). “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10).

The first question we need to ask is: Who was Moses?

Moses was a descendant of Levi, one of the sons of Jacob. He was removed only a couple of generations from Levi himself (Ex. 6:16-20). Israel had, by Moses’ time, been living in Egypt—the land of Goshen—for some period of time. Joseph had become the prime minister. A famine arose in the land and in order to survive the Egyptians were forced to sell their land to Pharaoh. They were reduced to serfdom and the result was feudalism. The Egyptians were forced to pay one-fifth of their income to Pharaoh in the form of taxes. This situation did not affect the Israelites, as they had great possessions and were experiencing a population explosion. In the course of time another dynasty arose which soon manifested resentment and envy toward the Israelites. Eventually they enslaved the Israelites.

The Bible account is as follows:

Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour (Ex. 1:8-14).

The next move by Pharaoh was to introduce population control. It was a brutal policy, akin to modern abortion.

And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiprah, and the name of the other Puah: And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live (Ex. 1:15-16).

Moses was born about this time, and his deliverance from death was absolutely providential. Here is the

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

account:

And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water (Ex. 2:1-10).

Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote that prior to the birth of Moses God appeared in a dream to Moses' father and told him that his son would deliver Israel out of the hand of the Egyptians (Antiquities of the Jews, II, ix, 2). The Scriptures now leap ahead 40 years. When Moses suddenly appears on the scene, it shows the concern he had for his brethren.

And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well (Ex. 2:11-15).

Stephen, in the book of Acts, gives us this account:

But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds (Acts 7:17-22).

Josephus tells of a war Egypt had with the Ethiopians. He says Moses was a general in the Egyptian army and the conqueror of Ethiopia (Ant. II, x). Stephen goes on to say:

And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

land of Midian, where he begat two sons (Acts 7:23-29).

Acts 7:25 implies that Moses was certainly aware of the dream of his father.

Moses' refuge in the land of Midian was the beginning of another 40-year period. He lived 40 years in the land of Egypt, and 40 years in the land of Midian. Exodus, chapter three, relates what took place after he was 80 years old. God now began to take a direct hand in the life of Moses.

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 3:1-10).

Moses knew he was talking with God. Stephen gives us the following:

And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt (Acts 7:30-34).

What was Moses' response when he heard the voice of God? ". . . And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God" (Ex. 3:6). Certainly Moses knew about God, and he knew why he had been born. This is seen by his attempt to begin the deliverance of Israel years before God intended (Ex. 2:11-12), yet when God appeared and informed him that the time had come, Moses was reluctant to do what God commanded. Nevertheless, he did obey and did so by faith. The Apostle Paul tells us: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:24-27).

As we continue in the Exodus account, we see the excuses Moses began to make (Ex. 4). He was doubtful he would be believed. He was not a good public speaker. Why not send someone else instead? Indeed, he was disinclined to go. Why did he make these excuses? Probably for a number of reasons. For one thing he was much older and had lost much of his worldly confidence. He was out of touch with the

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

cosmopolitan world of the day. He had not exercised a civic office for many years and had not spoken publicly for decades. Since the Israelites had not believed him years earlier, why should they believe him now? In brief, Moses did not feel adequate for the task ahead. But God knew better. When Moses ran out of excuses, God said: “. . . Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life” (Ex. 4:19). So, Moses did what God instructed. “And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand” (v. 20). God gave him this assurance: “. . . Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (Ex. 3:12). In addition, God provided a spokesman for him—his brother Aaron. As a result of the miraculous signs God manifested through Moses, and the abilities of Aaron, the people believed. “And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped” (Ex. 4:30-31).

Moses was now ready to begin the greatest challenge of his life. Exodus, chapters six through twelve give the details of the exodus out of Egypt. But let us go to chapter 14 to see what problems Moses had in handling the children of Israel. The first major difficulty took place when the Israelites were trapped near the banks of the Red Sea. As the Egyptian army closed in, many began to doubt and they questioned Moses' leadership.

And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Ex. 14:10-12).

These people had no confidence in God. As soon as the going got tough, they no longer believed His promises or what Moses had said. They blamed Moses for the perceived danger they were in. As we read in the book of Deuteronomy, they were a faithless generation—children in whom there was no faith (Deut. 32:20). They took out their abuse on Moses, but in reality were blaming God. Moses was a man who believed God. He had repeatedly witnessed God's hand upon the Egyptians. He knew God's power was unlimited. He had seen it manifested ten times. He believed God's promise that Israel would be delivered and made free. He knew what God was going to do next. The people didn't, even after witnessing the ten miracles God performed in destroying the land of Egypt. Moses said to the people: “. . . Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Ex. 14:13-14). God told Moses: “. . . Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea” (vv.15-16).

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left . . . And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore (Ex. 14:21-22, 26-30).

They now continued on their way—the way God directed them (Ex. 13:21-22). In spite of their persistent doubts when things did not go well, God delivered them. Time after time they continued to blame Moses when adversity struck. But God was understanding and compassionate. He did not punish them for their doubts or for their inability to comprehend what He was doing.

Another incident took place at Marah. “And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” (Ex. 15:23-24). They took out their abuse on Moses, but God understood there was a genuine need. Moses cried out to God and what did God do? “. . . the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them” (v. 25).

The next incident took place when the Israelites began to suffer food shortages. They complained about not having enough to eat. Along with ingratitude their doubting continued.

And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger (Ex. 16:1-3).

Many were hungry and in ill humor. They were not patient. Hunger tends to bring out the worst in human nature. God again saw the genuine need and took care of their needs. He gave them manna to eat and flesh in the form of quail (vv. 12-15). Though they did not realize it, their complaining against Moses was an accusation against God. In spite of this God was kind and patient.

Another example of their lack of faith is found in Exodus, chapter 17. They had by now arrived in Rephidim, but again there was no water.

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? (Ex. 17:1-3).

Their predicament was now desperate.

And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me” (Ex. 17:4). “And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (vv. 5-6).

Notice what the people had just done. “And he [Moses] called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

the LORD among us, or not?” (v. 7). No wonder the Bible says they were children in whom there was no faith. Moses and Aaron exercised profound patience in dealing with these people.

While God was understanding and patient, He was not necessarily pleased with their behavior. On more than one occasion, they went entirely too far. Notice Numbers, chapter 11. God led the people with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Num. 10:34-36). But some were not pleased with this arrangement. They wanted to set the travel schedule for themselves. “And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD . . .” (Num. 11:1). How did God view this arrogance? “. . . And the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them” (vv. 1-3).

Then the complaining about food began again.

“And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (Num. 11:4-6). “Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased” (v. 10).

These people were a sad lot. They were absolutely addicted to complaining. They did not know the meaning of gratitude. And what had influenced them this time? Strangers who were not even Israelites! Many appear to have acquired the habit of complaining. It was a destructive syndrome. The burden had become intolerable for Moses. He told God:

. . . Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness (Num. 11:11-15).

This attitude of complaining had begun to corrupt the entire camp. Something had to be done, and soon. So, God gave Moses help. He gave Moses 70 elders whom He would inspire with His Spirit (Num. 11:16-17). They were given to help Moses bear the load. Then God dealt directly with the complainers.

And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day’s journey on this side, and as it were a day’s journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibrothhattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted (Num. 11:31-34).

These people had no real reason to complain. God had supplied their needs, but they were not satisfied. When God granted them their wish, they gorged like wild animals. “They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel” (Ps. 78:30-31). This kind of behavior could not be tolerated.

Later, an even more dangerous situation developed. This took place after the spies, that had been sent to spy out the land of Canaan, brought back an evil report.

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt (Num. 14:1-4).

It should not be difficult to understand why God was displeased with this generation (Heb. 3:10), and why it never entered into the Promised Land. These people were utterly faithless and unbelieving. They were hopeless. They became so antagonistic against Joshua and Caleb for bringing a good report about the land that they wanted to kill them. This was now a full-scale rebellion against God and against Moses. God now took a direct hand.

. . . And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they (Num. 14:10-12).

Only the intervention of Moses prevented their destruction. He implored God to spare them. Nevertheless, God’s sentence against them was as follows:

Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it. . . Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me (Num. 14: 22-23, 28-29).

This first generation was cut off from receiving the promises, and the men who brought the evil report died by a plague shortly thereafter (v. 37). These were the people Moses spoke of when he wrote they were children “in whom is no faith” (Deut. 32:20), the ones God was grieved with (Heb. 3:10). This was God’s judgment upon this faithless generation.

The next serious crises came a little later. It was Korah’s rebellion and is recorded in Numbers, chapter 16. The situation was very critical because it involved a number of high-ranking leaders among the Levites and some of the Reubenites.

Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD? (Num. 16:1-3).

This was an example of professional jealousy. Two factors emerge here: (1) Korah was a Levite, and was,

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

no doubt, resentful that the priesthood had been given to Aaron. (2) Remember, Reuben had lost the birthright (1 Chr. 5:1), and it is reasonable to assume these Reubenites resented this. In some way they may have held Moses accountable. Also, there undoubtedly was bitterness because they had been cut off from entering the Holy Land. Moses was regarded as self-appointed, so they had an equal right to appoint themselves.

And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up: Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up (Num. 16:12-14).

Moses relied on God. He knew their charges were false, and that God is the One who chooses and makes the decisions. God once more took a direct hand. Moses said:

And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also (Num. 16: 28-30, 31-34).

These rebels had no understanding. They could not see the hand of God in what was happening to the nation. To them, the exodus was the work of Moses, not of God. Many of them wanted to officiate as priests. They had gathered censers to offer incense. But “. . . there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense” (Num. 16:35). Their rebellion against God led to their destruction. God then gave this sign as a warning to anyone who assumes an office not assigned by Him. But the attitude and understanding of the people was as bad as the rebels. Look what happened next.

“But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD” (Num. 16:41). This was an incredible accusation—that Moses and Aaron had the power to cause the earth to split asunder. God once again directly intervened. He said: “Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they [Moses and Aaron] fell upon their faces” (Num. 16:45).

Only the quick action of Moses and Aaron spared the nation once again. Moses had now become the mediator. He instructed Aaron:

. . . Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed (Num. 16:46-48).

When we see the patience and compassion of Moses in all these trials we can see why the Bible says:

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

“(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)” (Num. 12:3). How many of these people died as a result of this rebellion? The Bible gives the answer. “Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah” (Num. 16:49). We have seen from the many examples that in those instances where there was a genuine need, God always granted the Israelites their requests. But, rebellion was another matter entirely.

The next example illustrates how God took care of their needs when they were legitimate.

Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them (Num. 20:1-6).

Now God told Moses and Aaron what to do. He gave the following instruction: “Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink” (Num. 20:8). Moses was instructed to speak to the rock, but here was the one time he failed to follow God’s instructions. Look what happened.

And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also (Num. 20:9-11).

Moses did not speak to the rock. Rather, he addressed the congregation and called them rebels. But they were not really rebels on this occasion. Perhaps all they had put him through had worn Moses’ patience thin. His accusation was out of line, not called for on this occasion. Most important of all, God regarded it as a serious infraction of His instructions. Moses had failed to obey God. He had set a wrong example. God told both him and Aaron: “. . . Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Num. 20:12). He had told the people, “Must we fetch water out of this rock?” Moses failed to give the glory to God, but allowed Aaron and himself to be given the credit for performing the miracle. Did this act make Moses a failure? No. God merely made Moses pay a physical penalty for this infraction, but Moses will be in the coming Kingdom of God (Heb. 11:24-26, 13). This nation of ingrates had so stressed Moses that he succumbed to his emotions. We read: “They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips” (Ps. 106:32-33). Their constant complaining, and their doubting were finally too much for Moses. Yet, there was no greater man of faith in the Old Testament. Moses was a type of Christ.

There was another serious incident that took place at Baal-Peor. “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods” (Num. 25:1-2). The false prophet Balam had provoked it. In the war that followed, the Israelites “. . . slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword . . . Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD” (Num. 31: 8, 16).

Those in the camp of Israel who had been guilty of whoredom and idolatry were held accountable before God. “And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor” (Num. 25:4-5). As a result of this sin, 24,000 people lost their lives (v. 9). God would not tolerate immorality and idolatry among His people!

Moses was completely dedicated to God. He, too, refused to tolerate immorality and idolatry. But the people of Israel were slow learners. Look what happened to them when Moses had gone up the Mount to receive the Ten Commandments.

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play (Ex. 32:1-6).

While on the Mount God told Moses:

. . . Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation (Ex. 32:7-10).

Moses came down from the Mount carrying the Ten Commandments. They had been engraved on two tables of stone by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18). Moses was so angry by what he saw, he cast the tables to the ground (Ex. 32:19). He realized God was indeed going to destroy the entire nation and make a new nation from his descendants. Moses cried out to God not do so (vv. 11-13). “And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (v. 14). God even answered Moses’ plea to spare the life of Aaron (Deut. 9:20). No wonder the Bible compares Moses to Christ. He acted as a mediator between God and the nation of Israel on more than one occasion.

Moses was not without trials within his own family. He was severely criticized by Miriam, his sister, and Aaron, for marrying an Ethiopian woman. The marriage appears to have taken place much earlier in Moses’ life. Josephus gives the account in his Antiquities of the Jews, II, x. Moses had been an Egyptian general. In order to maintain peace, he formed an alliance with the Ethiopians by marrying an Ethiopian princess. Why Miriam and Aaron made an issue of this at this time is not known, but it appears to have become public. Notice their attitude: “And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it” (Num. 12:2). Miriam appears to have been the

Bethel Church of God

Part Four—the Prophets: Moses

instigator. God was not pleased.

And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out. And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous (Num. 12:4-10).

Moses again became the mediator, pleading for God's mercy toward his sister Miriam.

And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb. And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee. And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again. And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again (Num. 12:4-15).

Look at the stress and criticism Moses endured, not only from the people, but also from his own family. Yet, he was kind, forgiving, and greatly concerned for the good of all. No wonder Moses will be in the Kingdom of God. How special was Moses with God? God had not spoken directly to any human being in thousands of years, yet we read of Moses: "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend . . ." (Ex. 33:11). Moses enjoyed a one-on-one relationship with God. He was so special that to prevent the people of Israel from worshipping him, God kept the location of his burial site hidden. "So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" (Deut. 34:5-6).

Who was Moses?

Moses was one of the greatest men who ever lived. He was an able military commander, a highly educated patron of Egyptian culture and learning. He was a great organizer who totally devoted himself in service to God. He never sought personal revenge or retribution. He was forgiving and kind. He was faithful to God in all his duties and responsibilities. He was loyal to his calling all his life. He was a great prophet. He was an outstanding example of faith in action. Moses was indeed a great man of the Old Testament.