

By Faith Moses

by G.W. North

Moses' life of faith is a powerful example of how faith can overcome fear and lead to great courage and spiritual growth.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:23

Topics: "Courage in Faith", "Faith and Heritage"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes the profound impact of faith in the life of Moses, highlighting how his parents, Amram and Jochabed, instilled a legacy of courage and belief in him from birth. Moses' decision to identify with his people rather than remain a prince of Egypt showcases the power of faith to overcome fear and societal expectations. North illustrates that Moses' faith was not just a personal journey but a collective experience that led to the deliverance of Israel, demonstrating that true faith is often rooted in the heritage and choices of those who came before us. The sermon underscores that while Moses did not enter the Promised Land, his faith and obedience to God were pivotal in shaping the destiny of a nation. Ultimately, North calls for a community of believers to live by faith, as God desires a multitude of faithful followers, not just a few exceptional individuals.

Transcript

'By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents'. How blessed Moses was to have been born to such parents: what a heritage. Obviously a man's natural heredity is not by his own faith; the seeds of their son's greatness lay in the hearts of Moses' parents, Amram and Jochabed; they saw that Moses was a 'proper' child. Whether or not his parents lived to see the eventual greatness and glory of their famous son is not told, but this we are told that we may see that faith in their hearts enabled them to see that he was proper material for God. If he finds that in a man, God does great things with him. For love's sake and for what they saw in their son that couple risked their lives; ingrained faith in a man's heart is always coupled with great courage. Faith can never be great without great courage; fear cripples faith. Faith must either overcome fear or be overcome by it, they cannot exist together in the same heart. In the hearts of this couple, especially in the heart of Moses' mother, faith overcoming fear also overcame the world, and they defied the king and his genocidal law. This spirit was inbred in their son when he was born; he needed such parents because he was born to be the deliverer of his people. This is all the more remarkable when we realise that Moses was not the firstborn son of his parents: Aaron was the firstborn. Miriam also was Moses' senior; she was also his nursemaid from afar while he floated in the ark among the reeds on the banks of the Nile.

For all that Moses was looked upon in Egypt as a prince of the realm, when he came to young manhood he was an Israelite. How soon in his young life he realised who he was and from whence he came -- whether his princess foster-mother told him, or some other person gossiped it to him -- we do not know. It might have been a member of his own family or a relative or someone else of his own tribe; that is not important for us to know. The important thing is that, when Moses did become aware of his nationality, who he was and to whom he really belonged, he became a changed person. Scripture says of him, 'by faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter'. It was a bold stand to make, a risky one; some would have thought it a foolish one too, for he was in line for the throne. Moses, full of courage made his choice, it was a step of loyalty and of faith: he was identifying himself with God's people and his own. The spirit of his family was in him, he was now commencing to live by faith. How much Moses owed to the faith of his parents who can say? He may not then have realised it was the faith of Abraham too. What incalculable wealth is bred into children of men and women of character and courage and moral uprightness, whose spirits refuse to bow down to tyrants or to give in to satan's agents. Perhaps when his spirit began to rise in him and his heart began to grapple with the problems of his nationality and identity Moses realised these things and determined before God that his future should lie with the children of Abraham.

One of the amazing things about the life of faith is the variety of ways by which a man may enter into it. We must all beware of rigidity of thought and narrow viewpoint. God has more than one way of getting hold of a person. Faith can develop from a number of sources and through many circumstances and events; ways for men to enter into the blessed life are abundant and varied. A little comparative thinking will help us here. We know nothing of Abraham's parentage or of what went on in him before God called him; his father was called Terah, his brother Haran, his nephew Lot; another relative was named Laban. All those had their respective wives and children, and it seems they believed in and practised intermarriage and perhaps either polygamy or concubinage. This was certainly not the background from which Moses came. What Abraham's spiritual heredity or manner of life was in Chaldea we cannot tell; we do know however that, whatever it was, God called him out and away from it altogether. That is how it began with him, but not so with Moses.

One of the surprising things arising from a comparison between Abraham and Moses is the great contrast between them. Moses' life of faith did not commence with some kind of call as did Abraham's; Moses did not receive an actual call from God until he was out in the backside of the desert. For him the life of faith began in Egypt, and he received this call from God precisely because he had already taken a stand of faith. The decisions he took one day in the land of the Pharaohs were absolutely fundamental to the call he later received in the wilderness. The writer to the Hebrews reveals that, upon that occasion, God did not call Moses: he heard no voice, he was not asked or advised or commanded to do anything or to go anywhere; his was a calculated decision, not a response to a call. There came a day when he sat down and marshalled some facts: (1) he could be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter: that was what she wanted; (2) he could have the pleasures of sin: that was what the devil wanted; (3) he could have the treasures of Egypt: that is what all ordinary men would have wanted. On the other hand he could: (1) be a commoner and a slave instead of a prince; (2) suffer affliction with the people of God; (3) take upon himself the reproach of the as yet unknown Christ. After mature consideration of these three alternatives to his present position, he made his decision, then by faith he: (1) chose affliction instead of pleasure; (2) refused to be called the princess's son; (3) respected the reward of such a decision and the recompense it would bring to him and to God's people. Faith's refusal, faith's choice and faith's respect of reward are as vital to spiritual life as is faith's obedience to a special call.

Comparisons are odious, it is said, but only if they are intended to be offensive, or received in the wrong spirit; they are sometimes useful for clarification, that by them we may learn. Abraham's greatness lay in his initial response to God's call, but not so Moses; he was called, but not until later. His initial greatness lay in the moral courage which made him face the facts, make a calculated choice, and take a decision; he was a brave man. Although he could not claim a distinctive call, he did know he had been miraculously preserved from death; what he did not know was that he was specially chosen, and that he was marked out for greatness. Afterwards, when he was out in the desert where the call came he knew, but not at first. How men achieve greatness or become famous by doing outstanding or unique things for God varies very greatly; that distinction is affected by many things, and is therefore difficult to assess. Primarily of course it is by the will of God, but not the least factor in it is the kind of person involved, and the conditions and times in which he lives and the purposes of God for that time and for the future.

Abraham, as already noted, did not have believing parents as did Moses; nobody had defied the wrath of a king on his behalf, and there were no people of God in Ur of the Chaldees. On the other hand Moses, though born in Egypt, had a godly heritage second to none; his position was quite different from Abraham's. This is why comparisons are oftentimes made quite mistakenly and judgements passed foolishly and unwarrantably. Under no circumstances may the greatness of anybody be measured by things he or she achieves. The will of God must first be taken into consideration, for that is paramount; then the faith with which he or she sets out to accomplish it. Everyone of whom we have read so far, whether he or she achieved much or little, had a good report from God, and each one obtained it by faith. All man's spiritual life, its growth, its development, its stature and its progress is governed by faith; there is grace for all, but eternal life is the life of faith and cannot be had or lived apart from it. This is why, in the beginning, God made faith natural to us; upon hearing the gospel anyone who will exercise his will can move in faith and have salvation.

Because Paul once said, 'all men have not the faith', it must not be thought that he was saying, 'no one has faith', or 'only a few have faith'. God made Adam and then Eve by faith, and insofar as faith is part of the law of His own being He made them of faith too. This whole creation is a faith creation -- everything in it that God created and made is a 'by faith' creation; this is why Jesus said that it is possible to tell a tree to be plucked up by the root and planted in the sea. Provided that it is the will of God to have it removed the tree would obey, He said. Unlike human beings the tree has no power to operate in faith, but neither has it power to resist faith. Faith was not incorporated into the makeup of a tree but faith was incorporated into the makeup of a human being. To remove a tree or a mountain requires faith only in the individual doing it. When the Lord cursed the fig tree so that it died, He commented on the faith by which He accomplished it -- 'have the faith of God', He said. Such things cannot be accomplished by human faith.

Any person who has so lived that his faith has been destroyed or he has lost it, can receive faith back again if he hears the word of God from a person speaking the word of faith. For this reason Paul asked that men should pray for him that the word of God should run through him freely and be glorified. He wanted to preach the word of faith, and once said quite boldly that this was precisely what he did. He also wrote about mutual faith, making plain that they, as well as he, must have faith in order that he could impart unto them some spiritual gift. Obviously if they were without faith they could receive nothing from him, and would please neither God nor him. In order to be entirely faithless a man must quench his own natural faith and refuse to listen to God's word. Sometimes men block the way to faith in their own selves, clogging up their hearts and minds with wrong beliefs, false religious ideas, belief in material things, political notions, secular philosophies, which things all prove that they have faith, but in false things.

Substitutes for the gospel abound everywhere and are held so tenaciously that souls cannot believe the truth when they do hear it.

Not so Moses though. He heard all the vain and worldly things of his day, the gossip of royal courts and popular political beliefs and the social scandals, he was trained in all the arts of the Egyptians, but he let none of this replace his faith; that remained in him indestructible. He evaluated everything, made up his own mind weighed up the 'fors and againsts', pros and cons, and arrived at the correct conclusion -- he knew that whatever loss he sustained by his choice would be more than recompensed unto him by God. What he desired most of all was that he should so live that he would receive the good report from God. Whatever anyone else said about him and his beliefs mattered little to him, he wanted to please God and have His commendation, and that requires faith as much as building an ark or sacrificing a son. Moses was an ordinary man; it is faith that makes men extraordinary.

Between verses twenty-six and twenty-seven a period of forty years had elapsed, during which time Moses lived in isolation from the people of God. He was neither in his own land, that is, in the land of Egypt where he was born, nor in the promised land where he felt he and his people ought to be. He was living in the land of Midian, working as a shepherd somewhere in the back side of the desert, feeding his father-in-law's sheep. He had married the priest of Midian's daughter, who had borne him two sons, and there he had settled down to live and work and raise a family. What he believed or what communion with God and the state of his spiritual life was during this period none but he and God knew. How lonely he must have been; the culture shock must have been tremendous beyond words. Courtier to commoner, art to vulgarity, from being waited upon to waiting upon sheep! How he survived out there, learning to shepherd the sheep, having to resist the pressures put upon him to embrace the idolatry of the people among whom he lived, is not revealed. 'He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible'; to his praise he kept faith with his God of whom there can be no effigy. His only fault was that he let go of the covenant of circumcision which God had made with Abraham about living in the promised land. Had he lost the vision? Did he no longer believe in this sign that he bore in his flesh that he believed in the covenant of God? Had he lost hope that either he or his family, especially his boys, would ever see the land? Perhaps so. Who knows? But whatever it was God never forsook him, and so he endured. If he had let go of the covenant sign and would not force it upon his wife by forcing it upon her children he had not thereby forfeited his faith; he still 'saw' God, and the vision sustained him; he would endure all for His sake.

Moses bore the reproach of Christ: that to him was riches; he had wealth untold, and he treasured it. Just when he 'forsook Egypt' is not textually clear; he himself wrote that he fled the country following the death of an Egyptian with whom he had a fight. Fear gripped him, he expected retribution, he was a born, an avowed Israelite -- he fled. The Hebrews writer says that he forsook Egypt not fearing the wrath of the king, he could not therefore have meant that occasion. He must have been thinking of another time. Was it out there in the loneliness of the desert when he 'saw' Him who cannot be seen and received the great commission that all his fears left him? Was that the moment he forsook Egypt in heart for ever? There are so many possibilities as to when the great forsaking took place; it might have been then that he took the step, knowing that doing so he would almost certainly incur the wrath of the king. On the other hand the writer may have been referring to the time when, overcoming all, he rallied Israel to do the will of God and led them out of Egypt in triumph on that great night of redemption. What a forsaking that was; it was nothing other than a total evacuation of the whole land of Goshen. We cannot tell the moment when all fear left him, and he lived fearless before God and all men for evermore. Most probably it was during the meeting with I AM at the bush: there he saw the fire and heard His voice and felt His anger at the excuses

he made about himself. Was it there that the fear of God took the place of the fear of man?

From that time onwards Moses' faith was all-powerful, its comprehensiveness cannot be exaggerated. In a way that could not have happened in Abraham's day Moses became the great mediator for all Israel; to a degree he became all Israel to God. It is said of Abraham that by faith before God he became the father of us all, and though not so literally, before God it was rather like that with Moses. Rather unexpectedly we read that, 'Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them'.

It was all Israel that kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood, yet here it is said that it was Moses who did it: such is the power and the reward of true faith. What an insight this affords us into the heart of God and into the way the good report is earned by man. O how much credit God gives to the heart of faith in whomsoever it is found; Moses was given credit for what the whole multitude of people did. Not all the credit though; each man would have been credited for responding to God's command and doing what he was told to do, but every other man did what he did because he responded to Moses' command.

They all had faith to a degree, otherwise they would not have done it, and that was noted by God and credited to them, but before God Moses believed for them all! What faith he had; all fear had gone, he could believe God for everything. The king's wrath meant nothing to Moses: he had met and believed and obeyed God. The man was beyond the power of devils or men; in his heart he had the testimony that he pleased God -- that is faith's strength: faith knows that everything is fitted together by the word of God.

There is difference between doing this involuntarily and doing it voluntarily; God takes note of this, and on the basis of this knowledge deals with souls with understanding and wisdom in grace. Much of God's dealing with souls turns on how each one's natural faith has been used and to what ends the natural abilities have functioned. The soul of man, being informed by the ceaseless function of these senses, forms a conscious mind giving rise to opinions, decisions, expressions, and the host of other things by which we are manifest to ourselves and to others.

These things are fundamental to life, nor can they be changed at deepest levels except we become spiritually regenerate. From the moment that happens we have ability to use these powers properly, that is for God's purposes; being adaptations of original faith they are quickened and enhanced by the faith which comes by the hearing of God's word and the oncoming of God's spirit. It is by the development of these powers, which now reconnect him to God, that the measure of a man's faith is determined.

Moses was a man of great faith, and so was each of his predecessors mentioned in the chapter. Moses had faith for all Israel and to him God made known His ways. By this great favour bestowed on him Moses discovered that each one of these ways was the way because it was the faith way; walking in it he went on and on, becoming greater still with every step.

The contents of this chapter furnish evidence that there are vast differences between men of faith. The author and finisher of the faith of men is the man Jesus who Moses met there at the bush. In Him faith is complete. He manifested faith fully and to the furthest degree possible to mankind; thereby He was perfected. His faith -- that quality of faith -- is the faith which God incorporated into man's spiritual nature when He made him; man was designed for this. Faith was adapted and fashioned to function in the form of the five sensory powers which all men have -- sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell; these are man's acquisitive powers. Hence man has eyes, ears, palate, nose and the whole body area of touch and feeling (especially the finger tips). God made us like this primarily so that we should see Him, hear Him, touch

Him, taste Him, smell Him. By incorporating these senses into us, the soul of man, putting them to their primary use, may attain to full stature in the sight of God; except he does this a man will not grow spiritually, but will remain a babe. All is well when a man does use these 'by faith' powers as God intended: when he uses them incorrectly, that is puts them to carnal or anti-Christ use, his spirit, if regenerate, will degenerate and lose all power to please God and gain a good report. Until a man is regenerate in spirit he can do no other than live in the flesh, function in the world, and prostitute his powers unto the devil.

All the rest of the people followed in Moses' train, and it is said of them that 'By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land'. Once the way was opened up and made clear to them every one of them passed over. It was easy to do so then; the path was nice and clean and dry, and they saw that God had made it for them. Besides this they were being chased by Pharaoh and his army, and to have stayed where they were would have meant either death or recapture, so they went over: they were very wise. The faith road was the safe road and they took it; to do so was just plain common sense. There was nothing difficult about what they did; though it was an act of faith it was by no means a great act; they did not need to exercise great faith to make that crossing, it was Moses who did the great thing, not they. God led them to the Red Sea, He saw the path through it plainly: His way for them was in that sea, hidden from their eyes as yet. 'Stretch out thine hand over the sea', He said to Moses; Moses did so and there was the way. It was Moses who had the faith though; neither he nor they saw the way; Moses saw God though -- that was the way for him and Israel -- God is man's way. Men of great faith are pioneers; by their ministry they show the way, opening it up for all to see; it then becomes easy for others to believe and use their faith too -- it is only common sense. Faith is the implicit trust of a man's heart in God by reason of the quickening of his inbred powers through God's grace in speaking to him.

This is the purpose for which the epistle was written; on God's behalf the writer was wanting every Hebrew of his day to exercise his or her faith. He had realised something which may not be recognised at the first reading of his work, and it is of this that he is writing. Reading this particular chapter it could easily be supposed that he was intent upon impressing his readers with the exploits of a handful of very special individuals, mostly men, who accomplished marvellous things by faith. If this was so, then he has succeeded, for their names are in the chapter for all to see, and, besides this, so many sermons have been preached about them among Bible-loving people that their names are household words, and so they should be. These individuals deserve all the fame they have; they have won it, and even though their day has closed and we are in the new Christian era they are counted giants among us still. We thank God for them and are pleased to have them as our elders. However, to present these persons to us was not the main reason for including their names in the book. Closer reading of the chapter reveals that what God wanted was a people living by faith, not just a few persons whose faith was of gargantuan proportions. He did not just want one individual person to live and work by faith, or even two or three or twenty or a hundred times that number of persons sprinkled throughout history; He wanted millions, everybody, to be living by faith.

God revealed His heart to Abraham about this right at the beginning, telling him that his seed would be as uncountable as the dust of the ground and the stars of heaven for multitude; God raised Abraham up unto this end. So down through Isaac and Jacob God pursued His purpose, multiplying the seed-faith of Abraham into a son and a family and a tribe and twelve tribes until, by Moses' day, it was a nation. That is what He wanted; it was what He promised to Abraham, and for this reason He raised up Moses to go down to Egypt and bring out His nation for Him: 'Israel is my firstborn', He said. He had Moses, and what a

great man of faith he was, but He wanted a nation of faith, a great company which could not be numbered for multitude. He did not want them numbered by man either. He wanted the number of the elect to be known only to Himself. David got himself and the nation into serious trouble when he desired to know how many there were in the land. Censuses may be deemed necessary by men who claim nations of fellow-creatures as theirs, but they have no place in God's nation. 'The Lord knoweth them that are his', says Paul, 'And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity'.

God never expected great faith or marvellous works of the multitude of people, but He did insist that every one of them should, indeed must, be a man or woman of faith. It is wonderful to be so loved and wanted of God, and what a wonder it is when He brings a man to faith. It has to happen of course; He still wants a people of faith; that is why He sent His Son into the world. In times past an Abraham and a Moses would do, but now it is His only Son Jesus, not they, who is the wonder man. There came a day when Abraham died; his sons came and buried him: he did not rise again. It was the same with Moses also: he died and God Himself came and buried him. Like Abraham, Moses did not rise again. Unlike Abraham, Moses' body did not even lie in the land of promise. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob and Leah were buried there, but not Moses and his wife. God purposely took his body and buried it outside the land of Canaan to ensure that it was not laid there with those three great predecessors from whom Israel sprang. God granted this man this special honour above all others because of what he accomplished, and by conferring upon him this great privilege pointed a truth we all need to understand.

Moses was a distinguished man whose faith was equal to that of Abraham, and probably greater than that of Isaac and Jacob, but he was not one of the three founders of the nation; he was their deliverer and lawgiver. The three 'fathers' of Israel were pre-law; they were under grace and it was this that, above all, God wanted Israel to understand. The law for righteousness was holy and good -- it was given by God to the people that they should live under it in the land. Canaan was not given to them by law and by Moses, it was given by promise through Abraham; Israel did not earn the land, it was theirs by gift. When Israel thought of the land they must think of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not of Moses. Law-keeping requires very little faith, only sufficient to be obedient, and that often is a matter of common sense. God intended law-keeping to be a way of life; He gave the law for that reason -- it was a most gracious act. Having been born with the work of the law already written in their hearts, the Israelites should have found no difficulty in keeping the written law when God gave it to them. That law was both an authority and a meticulously detailed summary of the way the inner law of being should be expressed in life; it should have been recognised by Israel as such: the Mosaic law is an expression of nature and of grace. The law is not opposed to grace, law and grace being both given by God are one. It is the works of the law -- chiefly the personal obligation to provide sacrifices for sin, the obligatory keeping of fasts and feasts and such things -- these are the things which are now so contrary to grace, but this is only because they are insults to God and His greater grace. He gave His Son to be sacrificed for sin -- that is sufficient. Salvation is God's work, not man's.

The response to grace requires a greater more living faith than doing law-works: what the Lord said to Thomas eight days after His resurrection puts it perfectly, 'because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed'. Faith in the invisible Christ will bring us to God and keep us obedient in His love. It should be thoroughly understood by every man that faith is a work, believing is something a man has to do himself: it is the inward work of the soul. It is not an outward work, but it does result, indeed it is demonstrated, in outward works, as the writer is revealing in this chapter. We are saved by grace through the law of faith, certainly not by law-works lest any man should

boast; grace works through faith and faith works by love. Being love God loves, and because He loves grace works on our behalf so that faith can work in us unto our salvation by that grace.

Dear Moses never got into the promised land during his lifetime, nor did he reach it in his death. Joseph's bones entered the land, but not Moses'. He died at God's wish in the wilderness and was buried there in an unmarked grave. He had so much wished to go into the land, he must have died a greatly disappointed man. God was not unmindful of that, and had actually provided some better thing for him, of which He had not yet spoken; God's will and ways are always best. To Moses was granted the great privilege of standing with the transfigured Lord on earth, and in the sight and hearing of three apostles discussing with Him another exodus. It was wonderful beyond words; it was joy. Disappointment greater than his own former disappointment must have filled him as he talked with Christ, for the promised land for which he had lived and striven those forty years of pilgrimage had itself become Egypt and there had to be another exodus. God had been saving up His Lamb for it; Moses was standing with Him. It was all so wonderfully tragic. Great as was Moses' faith, he only came out of Egypt into the wilderness; his 'home' he never reached. Neither Abraham nor he settled down in the promised land, for neither found what they sought, though they indeed had great faith. What did the Hebrews think as they read their letter? A phrase used in this chapter embraces them all -- 'These all died in faith, not having received ...'. The message to the Hebrews surely was, 'and so may you'.

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