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## **Moses**

**the birth of a prophet  
based on Exodus 3:1-16  
by Ralph Milton**

**from [Is This Your Idea of a Good Time, God?](#)  
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Moses kicked the dry and rocky rubble. He hated the desert. He hated Midian where he lived in exile. He hated the sheep he cared for, sheep that amazed and amused him with their stupidity.

"Ha!" snorted Moses. "I'm amazed and amused by *my own* stupidity."

A moment of recklessness had brought him to this wilderness. An Israelite slave abused by an Egyptian overseer. In a flash of anger Moses killed the overseer. Then ran into the desert like a hunted rabbit.

Moses hated this dry and lifeless place. He wanted so desperately to be back in Egypt, in the palace, eating well-cooked food, sipping well-aged wine, exchanging well-phrased witticisms with well-dressed courtiers.

But here he was in this God forsaken desert. No one to talk to but the half-witted sheep. Nothing to eat except half-cooked mutton. Nothing to drink except lukewarm water.

Moses felt trapped in this wilderness. He felt trapped by Zipporah his wife. He felt trapped by the son he had fathered and named Gershom, which means, "I have become an alien in a foreign land." For a moment, he hated his wife, his son. Moses hated everything.

There in the searing desert, Moses wept for all that was lost to him, the tears drying instantly in the heat.

His earliest years had been spent with his mother, Jacobed, who told Moses the ancient stories of a chosen people and planted the seeds of faith in a God who cared.

Then he had been taken to live with his adoptive mother in the Pharaoh's palace. There the noxious weeds of ambition, pride, envy and greed had all but choked the tiny seedlings of faith planted by his mother.

Now in the heat of the desert sun, Moses struggled to keep those seedlings alive. At night he would fantasize a triumphant return to the lush Nile valley – to all his friends in Pharaoh's court. But now, in the glaring brightness of noonday he could only think of his family, his people, struggling to make bricks for the ambitious, cruel Pharaoh.

At first Moses tried not to think of his family. He tried not to think of the Israelites. "They're slaves," he muttered. "But so what? They do all right if they're not lazy. They get enough to eat. Anyway, it's none of my business. If I'd realized that sooner, I'd still be in Pharaoh's court."

But the thought wouldn't go away. The seeds of his Israelite past were well planted. The seeds of his mother's stories, of a sister who had risked her life. And the seeds grew well in the heat of his anger.

"Why?" Moses yelled out to no one in particular. Or maybe to God. "Why does it have to be like this? Why do you let my people be slaves? Why don't you do something?"

The sheep scampered away at his outburst. There was no other response.

In the tent, at night, Moses felt some comfort. Here in the tent, he loved Zipporah and his son.

Moses snuggled closer to Zipporah and tugged the blanket over them against the cold. He remembered Zipporah pregnant with Gershom, how he felt the child grow and move in her womb as he lay close to her in the night.

As he drifted off to sleep, Moses half-imagined that he too was pregnant with... with something – something God had seeded. He dozed and the fantasy, or dream became a memory of twins in a womb, of Esau and Jacob struggling, each trying to dominate the other. Now Moses was both of them, and one twin was Moses the ambitious courtier and the other was Moses the angry slave. And both were struggling toward birth. And one would die in the struggle and the other would be born. Moses started awake, his hand on his own belly.

The dream was in his mind the next morning. And the next. He almost felt an ache in his belly. Or was it pleasure?

It was noon. The searing sun was punishing the earth. Moses pulled his cloak around his head against the heat. A crackle broke the stillness. Moses turned. A small bush on fire. Not unusual in this heat, but then he noticed that the bush was not consumed. It burned and burned, and Moses went to have a look.

"Moses!" The voice was gentle, quiet, strong. He stopped. Afraid.

"Don't come any closer, Moses," said the voice. "And take off your shoes. The place where you are standing is holy ground."

Quickly, Moses fumbled off his sandals. The hot rubble burned his feet. He gasped at the pain of it as a woman gasps for breath in labour.

"Moses! I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying at the hands of the slave masters. Moses, I will bring my people out of Egypt. You will go down to Pharaoh and bring them out of slavery and into a land that I will show you."

"But who am I?" said Moses. "I don't know anything about this. I'm just a shepherd. Why me?"

"Moses!" said the voice. "I am with you now. I will be with you then. You will bring my people out of Egypt."

Moses struggled to find his breath. This, he knew, was the moment he had dreaded and longed for. Now was the choice, the holy, terrifying moment.

The universe of human soul struggled in the pangs of birth, struggled forward, held back, groaned itself to birth and death. All that was held Moses back. All that might be pushed him on.

One last breath shuddered, rattled through his body. Death. And peace.

The barely whispered words. "I will go." Moses turned and faced the land where he was born.

There in the desert, the life-destroying desert, a midwife God had loved a prophet into birth.

"Go down, Moses,  
way down in Egypt land  
Tell old Pharaoh,  
To let my people go."

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