

# THE FAMILY YOU CHOOSE



## Introduction

Families often come with reputations. The Jacksons are known as talented singers with a traumatic family history. The Wayans are known as comedians with a slapstick film style. The Kardashians are known as beauty influencers with never-ending family drama. And the Kennedys are known as American politicians and activists. These reputations are generalized and not everyone in the family lives up to them but that doesn't stop people from associating family members with those reputations.

✚ **What's your family's reputation? How closely do you align with it?**

## Session Context

Moses's origin story in the Bible gives little insight into his early years. The story jumps from his birth and subsequent adoption into Pharaoh's household to him being forty years old (Acts 7:23). Scholars use historical information about Egypt to understand more about how Moses might have lived in the palace, placing his story somewhere between 1500 – 1200 BCE, during a time period associated with Egypt's New Kingdom era.

During this time, Pharaoh had immense wealth and power. Children in his family would begin formal schooling around 4 or 5 years old and daily life would center on developing skills that distinguished them from other classes. With such a formal social hierarchy, Hebrew slaves and Egyptian royals had limited to no personal interaction.

### ☆ Social Insight

Egyptian society during the New Kingdom was divided into distinct and rigid classes. Historians often order them as (from top to bottom): Pharaoh and his family (level 1); Nobles and Priests (level 2); Scribes, Soldiers, Artisans, and Merchants (level 3); and Farmers, Laborers, Slaves, and Servants (level 4).

## Scripture Exploration

### Exodus 2:11-25

<sup>11</sup> In those days, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his brothers and saw their burdens. He saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his brothers. <sup>12</sup> He looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no one, he killed the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

<sup>13</sup> He went out the second day, and behold, two men of the Hebrews were fighting with each other. He said to him who did the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow?"

<sup>14</sup> He said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you plan to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?"

Moses was afraid, and said, "Surely this thing is known." <sup>15</sup> Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and lived in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.

<sup>16</sup> Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. <sup>17</sup> The shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. <sup>18</sup> When they came to Reuel, their father, he said, "How is it that you have returned so early today?"

<sup>19</sup> They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and moreover he drew water for us, and watered the flock."

<sup>20</sup> He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why is it that you have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread."

<sup>21</sup> Moses was content to dwell with the man. He gave Moses Zipporah, his daughter. <sup>22</sup> She bore a son, and he named him Gershom for he said, "I have lived as a foreigner in a foreign land."

<sup>23</sup> In the course of those many days, the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. <sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God saw the children of Israel, and God understood.

## **VERSES 11-12**

Hebrew children were typically nursed until they were 2-3 years old, which means Moses likely watched his ethnic family endure slavery from about age 3 to age 40, even if he initially watched from a distance.

From the text, it's unclear if Moses killed the Egyptian in front of the Hebrew or after the Hebrew was gone. It's also unclear if he committed murder because he (a) struggled to control an inherited family trait of anger from his ancestor Levi, (b) believed it would help right a social injustice, or (c) demonstrated he sided with his Hebrew heritage. It could have been all three. What's clear is that Moses recognized his actions were problematic in some way, so he hid the body.

## **VERSES 13-15**

Moses's return to the Hebrews the following day was a defining decision. Through it he learned his murder of the Egyptian was known and his fellow Hebrews didn't view his actions favorably.

The first question presented to Moses in verse 14 foreshadowed who Moses would ultimately become to the Hebrews: a ruler and judge (the word translated prince also means ruler). The second question to Moses exposed Moses's injustice of killing the Egyptian.

Confronted with the public knowledge of his crime, Moses became afraid. It's possible Moses intervention among the Hebrew men fighting is what led to Pharaoh finding out about Moses murdering the Egyptian. Once Pharaoh knew what Moses had done, he sought to kill him – causing Moses to flee for his life and end up in the land of Midian (300 - 500 miles away) at a well.

## **VERSES 16-22**

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Abraham's second wife). While at the well, Moses met his future wife, Zipporah, echoing the story of his ancestors Jacob and Rachel. Again, Moses shows an intolerance for injustice and physically defends Zipporah and her sisters against shepherds who drove them from the well.

Moses's bravery was rewarded by the women's father, Reuel (also known as Jethro). Interestingly, the women identified Moses as Egyptian to their father but we don't read in scripture where Moses identified himself that way. We also don't read in scripture that he gave them his name. However, it's probable these details were shared while he helped the women water their flock.

## **VERSES 23-25**

On rare occasions a king's orders were overturned by the following king, but that didn't happen for the Hebrews. After the death of the Pharaoh who enslaved them, a new Pharaoh emerged and their slavery continued. The Hebrews cried out to God because of their enduring bondage and God's response was to remember his promise to their ancestors. He not only remembered the promise, but he saw them and the Bible says he "understood."

## **Life Application**

### **+ Conflicting identities create defining moments.**

Moses's decision to see the Hebrews' slavery up close led to a defining moment. He had to choose between his conflicting identities. Similar conflicts can happen in our Christian lives as well, even within our family. Will we show up as the family member who sees a common sin like fornication and refuses to address it

for fear of falling out? Or will we be the Christian who remembers the wages of sin is death and speaks up to save our family member's soul?

Defining moments don't change our past; they direct our future. Moses was born a Hebrew and raised a member of Egyptian royalty. His decision to murder the Egyptian and then intervene when two Hebrews were fighting set him on a path that would lead to significant time away from both of his known families.

**+ Sometimes we need to escape what we know to forge who we will become.**

Moses's escape to Midian led him to his future wife and shaped his future role as shepherd of the Israelites. He spent forty years developing new skills as he learned to care for and lead a flock which most likely included a mix of sheep and goats. Shepherding both types required complementary but unique skill sets. Sheep have a strong flock instinct while goats are more independent and curious. He would need both to successfully lead the Israelites.

Like Moses, we must sometimes leave the identities we know to develop a new identity God has for us. Even if we've been following Christ for a while, the calling he has on our lives can require a distancing from those who think they know us so that we can leave behind old reputations and gain skills required in our new assignments.

**+ We may not be immediately ready to play our role in the family we choose.**

Moses's actions picked a side (even if he didn't intend it) and that choosing brought unexpected consequences for him and the Hebrews.

The Hebrew slaves were likely wondering where God was amid their suffering. Their ancestor Abraham had

called God Jehovah Jireh so they knew he could provide a way out of slavery, but he hadn't yet. What they didn't know was their rescue was delayed because their earthly leader wasn't ready. Moses needed time to develop skills he hadn't learned as an Egyptian royal.

We too are not born with all the skills we need to do the work God assigns us and we may have even learned some skills we need to unlearn if we're going to fulfil our God-given assignments. Therefore, when we have a defining moment, we can't assume we're fully ready to take on our new assignment. We must be open to the possibility that there is more God needs us to learn and develop before we're ready to be a leader in his family.

## **Session Reflection**

- What are you known for in your family?
- What defining moments have you experienced?
- What do you believe God is calling you to do for him?
- How does your reputation help or hinder your walk with Christ?
- What skills or experiences do you still need to fulfill your current or next assignment from God?

## Notes

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