

THE PRAYER OF MOSES

By Paul Penno Jr.

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How would you feel if at the age of 40 you have made a colossal mistake, lost your temper, done something that has ruined your life-career, forced you into ignominious exile? And then you have spent 40 more years there in obscurity, so now you are 80 and your life's-work is nil.

Just being a good sheep-herder, that's all you have accomplished—except you have left behind a poem that is read at almost every funeral in the world thereafter: Psalm 90. And in that poem you have pretty well shut the door on yourself as being at 80 years old (verse 10), far too old for any meaningful career. “We live for seventy years or so (with luck we might make it to eighty), And what do we have to show for it? Trouble. Toil and trouble and a marker in the graveyard.” (Peterson version; actually, when Moses finally found a grave, there was no “marker,” but the Resurrection Lord remembered where he was buried, for we read of Moses' special resurrection in Jude 9!).

Forty years of repentance finally fitted Moses for a world career beginning at the age of 80. Keep your wits about you and your heart warm, and it is never too late for God to bless you. And for younger people below the age of 80, there is tremendous Good News in the story of Moses. For sure, he knew all about discouragement as the result of failure.

In his prayer, he prayed, “Your anger is far and away too much for us; we're at the end of our rope. You keep track of all our sins; every misdeed since we were children is entered in Your books. All we can remember is that frown on Your face. Is that all we're ever going to get?” wrote Moses in his poem (vss. 7-9). At this time just before his beginning of success, he had a dark view of God's character, saw Him as, well, our Enemy writing down all our mistakes and sins, to hold them against us.

Moses always saw God as a Divine Stickler for righteousness, but he finally came to see Him as not the “frowning” One but as the One “merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness” (Ex. 34:6), the One who always gives what He demands—“the righteousness which is of faith” (Rom. 10:6).

The prayer of Moses in Psalm 90 is uncannily appropriate to God's people today. Moses was “exiled” in Midian, living among what might be called lukewarm “church members in good and regular standing,” for the Midianites worshipped the true God and prided themselves on being descendants of Abraham through Keturah (Gen 25:1, 2); but they were not absorbed in the mission of Israel as Moses was. They weren't concerned (as Moses was) night and day about the salvation of the world, the coming of the Messiah and those seven grand promises that God had made to Abraham in Gen. 12:2, 3 and how God had said, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” not “in Keturah's descendants.” Even Moses's own wife, Zipporah, being a Midianite, apparently did not fully share her

husband's dreams, for we never hear from her, no "song of Zipporah" as we hear the "song of Miriam."

The parents of Moses had instilled into him the destiny of delivering Israel from slavery and settling them in the Promised Land so they could fulfill Heaven's gospel plans for the world. And now Moses's life work is in ruins; he is a failure, a mere sheep herder. It seems to him that Israel is doomed to be forever a race of slaves, and the world will never be "lightened" with the glory of the gospel entrusted to Israel.

Now today: modern "Israel" is lukewarm as were the Midianites (Rev. 3:14-7); few carry the heart-burden of a people being prepared for the actual second coming of Christ; few are concerned to understand what is the message that Revelation says must "lighten the earth with glory" so that a Voice from heaven can speak to every honest-hearted soul in "Babylon."

Few are concerned as Moses in Midian was concerned—about the triumph of "the great controversy between Christ and Satan," the honor and vindication of the Son of God. Most are content with the popular philosophy (as they understand it) to "occupy till I come" in the enjoyment of continued material prosperity and a mere token support of God's work. But Moses in Midian prays night and day for the deliverance of Israel; the burden of a lost world is on his heart. What kind of "burden" do you carry?

It's one of the greatest stories ever told, and it's 100% true: a man destined for the throne of the then-greatest empire in the world turns his back on

that bright career in order to share with Jesus the bearing of His cross.

Moses was no dummie. He "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians [considerable!] and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). He had the equivalent of a dozen doctoral degrees. (He is in fact even to this day the most widely read author of all time). His earthly path was strewn with flowers; was immensely popular as Egypt's Crown Prince; had won military victories that endeared him to the nation; the throne was his.

But he had learned about the sacrifice of Christ. True, he lived long before the incarnation of the Son of God, but that sacrifice was made "from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), so that Moses could experience a heart-appreciation of the *agape* that led the Son of God to take those seven steps in condescension in our behalf that led Him to the "curse" of death on a cross for us (Phil. 2:5-8).

Here is a revelation that we need to understand. The world today is full of "the treasures in Egypt." Look for example what's in the shopping malls, the car dealers' showrooms, the department stores, the palaces the real estate dealers offer you. Many church members "esteem" those "treasures" as "greater riches" than "the reproach of Christ."

But look at what the *agape* of Christ did for a fellow-human being who by nature was born as selfish and world-loving as we are: "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 of Egypt” (Heb. 11:24-26). Take a look at that same cross that Moses looked at and you’ll find “the treasures” of today fade into insignificance. Then you’ll be delivered from the “bondage” of Egyptian materialism.

Have you ever prayed about a difficult situation, and the more you prayed and “obeyed” the worse it got? If your answer is No, then welcome to the always-sunny skies. But some of us have met the storms that Moses met. For 40 years he had prayed for God to deliver his people Israel from slavery in Egypt, and nothing had happened. Finally the Lord met him at the burning bush and commissioned him to go back to Egypt and deliver them. “Face the king and demand emancipation for My people.” The story is in Exodus 4, 5.

So, what happens? A miracle? Pharaoh suddenly collapses in front of Moses and says “Let them go!”? No, far from it; the more Moses demands freedom, the meaner Pharaoh becomes, and in a fit of anger he actually makes their slavery worse, doubling their work loads.

The irate Israelite “officers” meet Moses and chew him out: “The Lord will . . . punish you for making the king and his officers hate us. You have given them an excuse to kill us” (5:21, GNB). Sunny skies? Not for Moses! His own people resent him for doing exactly what God has told him to do. The more he prays and “obeys,” the worse the situation becomes.

Moses has asked God for a piece of “bread,” and it looks like the opposite of what Jesus promises: God has given him “a scorpion” or “a stone.”

What about your prayers when things get worse? (1) Don’t go off in a huff and give up on the Lord. Moses did the right thing and so should you: the next verse says, “Then Moses turned to the Lord again” and laid the problem out before Him. “Ever since I went to the king to speak for You, he has treated them cruelly. And You [God] have done nothing to help them!” (vs. 23).

(2) Next, listen to what God tells you then. “He that cometh to God must believe (a) that He is, and (b) that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Time’s up; thank God, we can learn from Moses!

The Bible itself is a better source of information about Moses than “The Prince of Egypt,” and more interesting, too. If it is read with unbelief, it becomes boring, because doubt short-circuits practically every Bible statement and paralyzes the understanding. But if it is read with heart-felt belief, it grips the attention more than any man-made movie can do. The Holy Spirit re-creates the happenings described there and you see it all in three-dimensional realism, a vividness that can never be forgotten as a movie can be.

The tenth plague, the slaying of the firstborn, was the final judgment on Pharaoh and the unbelieving Egyptians. When the “destroying angel” passed through the land at midnight of Passover Eve, there were two classes of people in the land: those who believed the word of God, and those who did not

believe. No one was in between. Momentous was the issue of believing or disbelieving!

So today, everything depends on believing or disbelieving the truth of God. Someone may say, No, everything depends on obeying or disobeying the word of God. But outward conformity to rules (based on fear) that camouflages an unreconciled heart is not true obedience. Both the Hebrew and Greek Bible words for “obey” convey the basic idea of bending the ear down low to listen carefully. Believing the truth produces obedience and disbelief produces disobedience. The Israelites were told to kill an innocent lamb “without blemish” and splash its blood on the door posts and the lintel. Their doing so was an evidence that they believed what God had said.

What saved them in the Passover was their faith which worked. God had said, “When he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door and not suffer the destroyer to come in” (Ex. 12:23). Not when He sees the obedience, but “when He sees the blood,” the obedience being the evidence of faith in the blood of the Lamb of God. The world today is “Egypt,” and again there will be re-enacted the events of the ancient Passover and the Exodus. Let’s be ready.

The Prayer of Moses (Part 1)

How could a good man pray that God would send him to hell? The idea is shocking! Good men pray that God will take them to heaven! Suicide bombers who terrorize Israel believe they have found a sure path to heaven.

Yes, someone who is stupid, superficial, might carelessly express the silly thought, “Lord, send me to hell!”—someone who has no idea what hell is all about. But someone sober, thoughtful, serious, who knows what’s involved in hell?

There was a wonderful man who prayed such a prayer, and God loved him for it. God said, “No, you can’t go to hell, I won’t let you.” But God appreciated that his prayer came from the kind of love in his heart that God has in His heart.

The man?—Moses. The kind of love that prompted that unique prayer?—*Agape*. The story is the high water mark of sinners praying to God. In all human history, He had never heard such a prayer. It was proof to God (and to the heavenly universe) that sinful human beings CAN “grow up unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). We don’t have to remain little children in comprehension! Yes, children are delightful creatures; we love them. But one whose body develops but whose mind never does, is pathetic; a parent can’t endure greater pain. A heaven full of overgrown toddlers may seem like a great idea, but God says He wants us to “grow up” in “comprehension” (3:18, 19).

Moses did “grow up” in “comprehending” the heart of God. It meant tears, but God sheds tears, too. And it comforted God to find a man on earth who at least was beginning to understand Him! Israel had committed the corporate sin of sins—they had broken their solemn promise they made to God and had worshipped a golden calf. It meant they were turning their backs on God’s plan of salvation and

were deliberately going back into the sex orgies “worship” that was ruining the pagan world. And God said, “Enough! I can’t forgive them!” That’s when Moses stepped in and prayed his strange prayer.

The Prayer of Moses (Part 2)

When Moses knelt and prayed to God, “Blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written” (Ex. 32:32), he prayed a prayer that Heaven had never before heard from the lips of a mortal man.

It was a prayer in reverse gear. How could anyone who loved God, who appreciated His plan of salvation, who was obedient to all His commandments, actually beg to be sent to the hell of “everlasting punishment?” It takes your breath away!

Israel were God’s true people; they had slapped Him in the face, insulted Him, rebelled against all that He stood for and chose to return to the sex-orgies idolatry of the Canaanites and Egyptians. So far as they were concerned, their choice to worship a golden calf implied a rejection of any divine purpose to redeem the world from sin (vss. 1-6). Self and pleasure were their “gods” from now on. As a nation they would play the roles of Peter in denying their Savior and of Judas in betraying Him.

God opened Himself up and told Moses how He felt about it all. “Let Me alone,” He said to Moses, “that My wrath may wax hot against thy people [no longer Mine!], and that I may consume them” (vs. 10). His “wrath” must be allowed to run its course, “wrath” not against people themselves but against

the cruelty and murder and all the horrors of idolatry, of World Wars I and II, the Holocausts, and all the injustices and rapes and slavery and thievery, that sin will bring on innocent people for millennia to come. I will start from scratch, says God; “I will make of thee a great nation.” I must save this world, says God; Israel have had it. They hinder Me.

But Moses took the “let Me alone” at face value: here was the loving heavenly Father that Abraham had pleaded with to save Sodom and Gomorrah. No pleading now for “ten’s sake” (Gen. 18:32); Moses must throw himself into that “wrath.” (1) He loved rebellious Israel, and (2) he sensed that the honor of God Himself was at stake. If He couldn’t save Israel, forgive them, convert them, then the entire plan of salvation must do down the drain. And Moses delivered an ultimatum to God: forgive Israel, save them, or blot my name out of Your Book of Life! Serious.

The Prayer of Moses (Part 3)

It wasn’t only his love for idol-worshipping Israel that prompted Moses to pray his ultimatum prayer to God—“forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book [of Life] which Thou hast written” (Ex. 32:32).

Something more was involved: Moses was most of all concerned for the honor of God’s name. In vss. 12, 13 he argued that if God could not forgive His rebellious people, the world would get a false view of the character of God. That would mean that the plan of salvation must go down the drain. And God “repented” (vs. 14).

It is unthinkable that Moses was more mature, more loving, more righteous than God Himself. God came down to his level to show him how distressed He was with the perversity of Israel. He virtually invited Moses to share His burden. In fact, we can say reverently that God put the fate of Israel in the hands of Moses! And if we can say that, He also put the plan of salvation in his hands. Would Moses rise to the occasion? Could he handle this tempting offer that God made to him, to make of him “a great nation” so that no longer would people talk about the “children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” but from now on it would be “the children of Moses”?

It turned out that Moses was more concerned for the honor of God and for His plan of redemption, than he was for his own personal, eternal salvation! He must have been convulsed with tears before he expressed that decision, for he was in dead earnest. It took every ounce of his soul energy to pray that prayer.

That must be why the Father sent the resurrected Moses on that special errand to meet with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration before His crucifixion (Mt. 17:1-3). Moses understood the heart of Jesus who would also surrender His hope of eternal life when He was “made to be sin for us” and endure “the curse of God” in dying that awful death on His cross. Moses and Jesus shared something in common: the love that is *agape*. Someday 144,000 others will also share it (Rev. 14:1-5, 12). They will learn a higher motivation than pious self-concern for their own reward.

The Prayer of Moses (Part 4)

We want to stand hushed in solemn awe as we think of Moses willing for God to blot his name out of the Book of Life because of (a) his love for Israel that they not perish, and (b) his concern for the honor of God’s name before the wicked, pagan world. (The fantastic story is in Exodus 32).

Jesus said that there is no “greater love” possible than for one to “lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). But that “life” is more than this present physical life; if you “lay down [that] life” in hope of getting it back for eternity in the first resurrection, that’s wonderful, but Moses did far more than that! He laid down his eternal life, because if your name is “blotted out” from the Book of Life, you are in the second resurrection category, and that ends in “the second death” (see Rev. 20:12-14 and 2:11). That’s the death with no hope whatever. And that was the commitment Moses made! That’s why he was chosen to encourage the Son of God as He was facing His cross (Mt. 17:2, 3). Nobody else from the previous 4000 years was quite so able to penetrate into the thinking of Jesus at that time.

Well, there was one other man who stood with the Son of God on the Mount of Transfiguration—Elijah (translated without dying, 2 Kings 2:11). He too had had an experience like that of Moses—he “requested that he might die, . . . O Lord, take away my life” (1 Kings 19:4). He must have been down in the worst depression possible! Yes, he had been through deep waters: (a) Not one person had stood with him on Mt. Carmel—he saw himself utterly alone (1 Kings 18:21). (b) Now the government of Israel, God’s true people, wanted to kill him with the

“curse” of the second death (that was their idea; vs. 2). (c) Elijah saw himself as a total failure in serving God in “the great controversy between Christ and Satan.” He did not yet have a clear concept of the resurrection, as we have today; for him, “life” here and now seemed all there was to it (Job wrestled through that, too).

Elijah, like Moses, meant, “Take away my [eternal] life.” Yes, Elijah was in Moses’s league; thus he too could encourage the Son of God in His darkest hour (Mt. 17:2, 3)! But why is God going to send “Elijah” back to us now (Mal. 4:5, 6)? Do you have an answer?

Have you ever lost your temper in a momentary trial of your patience? Well, poor Moses did. And it wasn’t when he was a young man, the tragic mistake came in his old age. Now Moses may not have felt “old age” like people do today for we read that at the time of his death at the age of 120 “his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deut. 34:7). But it was at the end, not the beginning, of Israel’s 40 years of wandering for their unbelief that Moses’s patience gave way. Maybe his physical and mental stamina was a bit weakened by then.

The “straw that broke the camel’s back” in his case was the cynical cry of the rebellious people, blaming him for lack of water. “Listen, you rebels!” he cried out. “Must we fetch you water out of this rock?” Then in his fit of temper, he struck the rock twice with his rod instead of once, thus destroying the accuracy of the ceremony which symbolized the death of Christ. What Moses had done was to teach

that Christ must die twice for the sins of the world, and he took to himself (Moses did) the glory for producing water out of a dry rock. God loved Moses; the man was very special. But his public sin of losing his temper made it impossible for Moses to lead Israel at last into their Promised Land. “Because ye believed me not, . . . ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (vss. 10-12).

It’s not only old people, but young people too have this same test of impatience. It seems severe for the Lord to sentence Moses to die for such an apparently “innocent” sin of momentary impatience. But Moses must be a teacher for succeeding generations as well; no matter how high we have been in the favor of God, a sin of impatience is serious. But the root of their sin was not merely being angry (even God sometimes is angry, and several times Moses experienced “righteous indignation”).

The problem, said the Lord, was Moses’s unbelief. “Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, . . .” the Lord said to both Moses and Aaron. It is impossible for you and me to lose our temper so long as we believe the word of the Lord! Whatever the trial that tempts you to impatience, a choice to believe the promises of God will every time deliver you from sin.

When Moses chose “to suffer affliction with the people of God” (Heb. 11:25), he turned his back on “the treasures in Egypt.” His life thereafter was one of almost unending toil and sacrifice and tears, until

finally he died utterly alone on Mt. Nebo and was buried there by angels.

But as compensation, he was permitted to go up into “the mount” and there fast, and commune with the Infinite One. Moses was the man, unique among all fallen descendants of Adam, “whom the Lord knew face to face” (Dt. 34:10), for “the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as man speaketh unto his friend” (Ex. 33:11). What do you think—would that be worth more than Egypt’s wealth and luxury?

Who is “Moses” today? The wealth of the Vatican is enormous, probably far greater than all the wealth that the ancient Pharaohs ever dreamed of. Does the Vatican turn its back on the glory of this world, in order to “suffer affliction with the people of God”?

Or is “Moses” a symbol of the leadership of Protestant churches today? God enjoyed “friendly” communion with Moses “face to face.” It was a pleasure for Him. One wonders if today He is lonely, neglected, like some old man in a nursing home who yearns for someone to talk with “face to face.” Where is the pastor, the church administrator, the leader, who climbs “the mount” and fasts and communes with God, and thinks God’s thoughts with Him, then goes down into the Valley, his face shining with glory, to communicate the knowledge of God to the people? What a pity if such a leader, appointed by God to shepherd His flock, never takes time to go up in the “mount”! Or have we come to a time of electronic marvels and jet planes and satellite glory, so that talking with God face to

face as Moses did is old-fashioned like ox-cart travel? Well, we want some GOOD News. Here it is: YOUR “mount” is waiting for YOU, and there on top is the Infinite One waiting patiently to commune with YOU. The air there is pure; YOU can breathe it.