

"Moses 3: Our perseverance produces character"

For 40 years Moses was trained by God in the lands of Midian and when he was 80 years old he became the leader who led the people of Israeli out from Egypt. God used Moses after the age of 80, when he was not at his peak of his mind or physical ability.

How come? Well, when Moses was 40, he was still lacking something that was needed in order for him to lead the Israelites into the wildness. Without knowing where he was lacking, he stood up for Israel, but failed in Egypt. Gods plan was not the same as his plan. In Acts 7: 25, it says Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. From these words we kind of see into some of Moses's thoughts, in which he thinks of God as his servant who grants him wishes, which is wrong. God is Moses's Lord and Moses was just an imperfect human who needs God mercy and grace in order to live.

After this event Moses lived for 40 years in the wilderness of Midian. When he became 80 years old, God talked to Moses and told him to free the Israelites from Egypt. After this he at last became the leader who would lead his people into the promised lands. However this does not mean that Moses became a perfect man. There were many events which happened while they traveled from place to place in the wilderness.

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In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.² Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron.³ They quarreled with Moses and said, “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord!⁴ Why did you bring the Lord’s community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here?⁵ Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!”⁶ Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them.⁷ The Lord said to Moses,⁸ “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.”⁹ So Moses took the staff from the Lord’s presence, just as he commanded him.¹⁰ He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?”¹¹ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.¹² But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”¹³ These were the waters of Meribah,^[a] where the Israelites quarreled with the Lord and where he was proved holy among them. (Numbers 20:1-13)

As it is written in Numbers even Moses made mistakes. These mistakes happened to Moses’s in the closing years of his life.

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Like I discussed last week, Moses had to learn to entrust himself to the Lord in the wilderness in Midian. He had come this far by overcoming many trials as the leader of millions of people. He was able to, unshakably, deal with the pharaoh, and even though his people complained and complained he still became the bridge between his people and God. In his 40 years of training in Midian, he gained him the ability to deal with these problems.

As Number 12:3 says “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.” Moses character was probably cultivated in the wilderness in Midian. However Moses made a mistake, which had happened because his humbleness, which was the strongest of them all, was shaken.

Let me quickly explain the background of this event. Numbers 20:1 says that the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Moses’s older sister, Miriam, died. To tell a little bit about Miriam, she was a very smart girl who used her wit to save Moses’s life when he was just a baby. Moses had to bury her body in the Deserts of Zin. Miriam was Moses’s lifesaver and a big supporter of this long and tough journey. I believe that Moses felt deep grief, as anyone would, having just lost a loved one. Anyone would wish for a moment of quiet. I don’t believe that there is much cultural difference when dealing with feelings of loss.

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However the Israelites did not care for this. Because they could not find water in the place they were resting, they threw their dissatisfaction and complaints toward Moses who had just lost his sister. “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! ⁴ Why did you bring the Lord’s community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? ⁵ Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!”

Even after he had led them to freedom from Egyptian slavery, Moses had to listen their complaints again and again. The people ended up blaming Moses for leading them into the wildness. Their words of “There is nothing! Are you going to kill us all in this wildness!” pierced Moses’s heart. This was not the first time that Moses had to listen to these complaints, he had listened to these same complaints many times before, and every time he did, he dealt with them with his unsurpassed humbleness and patience. Do you remember Moses first mistake? Moses thought his people would believe that God had sent Moses to save them from Egyptians. But his plan didn’t work out. His plan and their ideas didn’t match. At this time, he might have thought that the people would have understood Moses’s circumstances, who had just lost a loving sister and was mourning. That they would leave him alone and would silence their complaints for a little while. However his people did not care, they just wanted to vent their dissatisfactions and complaints.

Even to those who listen to constant complaining about the same things, all the time, and know how to deal with it, will slip up when multiple things come

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crashing down on them at the same time. Moses was also human and was no exception to this. Moses left his people without any word and went to God and fell down to worship. If Moses had stayed among his people, he did not know what mistakes he would make. At that time what Moses did was his defense, which he had learned from similar situations before.

Moses fell down at the entrance of the tent of meetings, and the glory of the Lord appeared before him. God told him "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."

In God's presence Moses began to calm down and he probably thought "I must preserve my calm and follow Gods words," but once he came before the assembly he shouted like this "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"(10) And he raised his hands and hit the rock twice with his cane; and water began to flow out. The assembly and their livestock were satisfied from with these results.

However this was unlike Moses, this was not how he would normally deal with this situation. God told Moses, "Speak to that rock and it will pour out its water." However Moses did not just tap the rock, but he raised his hands (as the bible says) and hit the rock with great force. Obviously he was very emotional.

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This act was not what God had ordered Moses to do. Then why did he take this kind of action? This, I can only imagine must have been because he heard more complaints, when they gathered the people around the rock. He might have seen their rebellious attitude up close. Moses with his body and soul exhausted because of the loss of his loving sister must have found it so hard to keep himself together and to keep calm.

Moses knew that he just needed to speak to the rock, but he could not suppress the wave of emotion coming from within him. So, he shouted "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"

His thoughts might have been like this, "You come to me to complain again and again. You guys are always complaining. Never are you thankful, never do you change. Do you know how much and how hard I have worked for you guys? Can you not even give me the time to mourn for my sister's death?! Why must I help provide water for you? I'm done with this!"

Moses vented the anger that had been gathering within him for a long time. To his emotional anger God spoke solemnly, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." (Numbers 20:12)

These words of God were very heavy. Moses was disrespectful this one time only and his anger resulted in being unable enter the Promised Land, which was his reward, his purpose, and his goal. This would mean that his life would close

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before the arrival to the Promised Land that he had been striving for. Then as the bible says, his life ended.

What do you think about this? Do you think this is a little too severe? Do you think it was only a onetime mistake and that he should have been given a break? Through these events what do you think we could learn?

In Psalm 106: 32-33 this incident is recorded like this. "By the waters of Meribah they angered the Lord, and trouble came to Moses because of them; for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips." You could say that the words that come from our mouths could turn our lives upside down.

We should understand from this that God pays attention to the words we speak more than we think. God knows that the words a person speaks could lower him or herself down and that they could harm others who listen to them. It could negatively influence situations.

The mistakes that Moses made, is a good lesson for all us. Let's think about ourselves, when we are stressed and worried from various matters; when we are incredibly busy with hectic schedules, we can lose our self-composure. At these times it becomes very tough for us to control our emotions. This happens even to the humblest of people and Moses was no exception. Every person lives with this possibility.

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We understand Moses’ feelings and we can sympathize with him. We can all face the mistake of losing our tempers, like Moses. However God closed the door for Moses and did not let him enter the Promised Land. I pondered at what Moses lacked at this time. The one word that comes to me is perseverance. I really feel for him, because there are times where everyone runs out of patience. Still, seeing what God requested of Moses, we know that God is asking us to be patient. Nowadays people don’t use this word much, “perseverance”. We are living in a social phenomenon, in which people advise in speaking one’s mind. But the Bible is specifically telling us to “persevere.”

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ³⁷ For, “In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.” And, “But my righteous^[g] one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.” ³⁹ But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

It seems that the writer of Hebrews saw great trials. These trials will come to us as well, and in order for us to conquer these trials we need patience. However this does not mean to just be patient and to endure the weight of life, but to know that God sees our struggles and has already gone ahead and prepared our promise of the holy land. Therefore we do not need to abandon the belief of faith, and we should proceed with patience and perseverance.

We may come to think, why do we need patience? Well patience is a tool used to keep things going. For example, we begin to pick up the sport of baseball. Your

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goal is to become one of the regular players of your team and to help your team win games. In order to do this, it is necessary to practice hard for a long time. To reach this goal we must believe in our potential, and tackle this training with patience and endurance. We do not need patience to do quick and easy things. It is funny when someone says, after putting a coin into a vending machine, that "I am patiently waiting for the drink to come out in a few seconds" or that "I'm patiently waiting for the subway train that comes every few minutes." That is because you can obtain both of these easily and quickly.

I have said over and over, life does not end here. It is a long journey and that is why we need patience. Do you know exactly when you are going to get stress out? It normally happens when things do not proceed as planned. When there is something that stands in your way. When the plan collapses or becomes ineffective, we start to feel stress. Yes, this happened to Moses too. Moses, who was just wishing for a quiet moment to mourn and to wallow in the sorrow of his sibling's death, but then he had some people break in and interrupt his wish. He felt a tremendous amount of stress from this.

Everyone lives with some kind of stress and these stresses sometimes become bitter words that pour out from our mouths. It is tough to keep holding in such stress. However when such distasteful words and attitudes get out from us, it is just as distasteful for others to hear and see. These "others" are sometimes outsiders, and if you consider this, these people who just happen to be there are all victims of your stress. To make matters worse, we don't realize how much our spite makes others feel uncomfortable.

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My brothers and sisters, what we need is patience. When listening to such things, we tend to take this as a sort of remedy, like writing "patience" in the palm of your hand and squeezing it when you feel stressed out, but what the Bible is saying is different. Our "patience" is always living with our "faith". So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.(Hebrews 10: 35-36) Patience is born out of faith. The reason for patience is in our beliefs.

Paul was not the writer of the book of Hebrews; however you can connect some of the verses in Hebrews to some of the verses he wrote in the book of Romans.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we^[b] boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we^[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:1- 5)

Paul said patience develops from various trials and tribulations, and that patience brings character, and character brings hope. The New International Version bible says, we^[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. I think patience is

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like a lacquer that we paint many layers with. It is not like tin plating that peels off easily. These layers of patience build our character.

I wonder if it is because I'm getting older, but I have come to think that human beauty isn't just in appearances. I'm beginning to think that we can see patience within people.

I watched a TV show called "Singing contest of the world! 2016 Spring," towards the end of last year. For this contest there were many nonnative speakers from around the world who passed the preliminaries, just to compete at singing Japanese songs. In this competition one blind lady, who is from Kyrgyzstan Republic, sang two songs and won first place. The level of this competition was very high and there were even people who have gone on to become professional singers after participating in the show. Professional Japanese musicians and music producers score on how well these people sing and dance.

This lady from the Kyrgyzstan Republic couldn't see anything so she had to be escorted to the right spot to perform. And then she sang with all her heart. We don't know if she was born blind or if she had some accident in her past, but we know that she can't put make up her face or dress herself up in front of a mirror.

After seeing her I soon realized there was no such feeling that she would not try to display. She was just herself and sang naturally. We did not get to know her background but we knew that she was a mother of two young children and that she was blind.

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There were many good singers before her but I was most impressed by her attitude and her song. Again I tell you that I didn't know anything about her life but I feel that she conveyed half her life to me. I've come to think like this, that I have found beauty through her voice and that it touched me. That she had endured life and overcome difficulties and though all of this, she responded to it with patience.

Most of us do not know how much patience people have. However when you find something beautiful inside a person, you realize that this is the result of how much that person has stood up and overcome the challenges and difficulties of life by trusting their lives with God above. Therefore the bible tells us it is not our abilities and our successes that bring out our character; but it is our perseverance that brings it out. What inspires us is our perseverance and beliefs, which is always hidden behind the scene. This all refers to the culmination of our patience and faith, and all of this creates your personality and that at the end of it all this is what remains, and only this is taken with us into heaven.

We face challenges every day and like Moses we make mistakes. When we make a mistake we hope to reflect on ourselves before God. Don't just leave it and give up with feelings of despair, let yourself be brought before God. Moses didn't close his life with this mistake. His life continued. He was once again taken by God and his character was shaped even more. It takes time to make valuable things. Let us be reshaped every day by His hand. Let us pray.

Translated by Team Laskaris