

- b. From Moses' birth, the Hebrews writer jumped to his adulthood – specifically, the time of decision when he had to come to grips with his Hebrew identity and its implications for him and the life he was going to lead. Other than his treatment of Abraham, the writer devoted the most narrative space to Moses, and yet he provided only a snapshot of a few highlights of Moses' life. But that was more than sufficient, for his Jewish readers were well familiar with Moses and his story; indeed, Moses is arguably the most important figure in Judaism and Israel's history, national identity and covenant relationship with God.
- God chose him to lead out His captive people toward the inheritance He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:7-10).
 - So God made Moses His mediating instrument in the Sinai Covenant that confirmed Abraham's descendents as His covenant people. Israel's covenant relationship with God – the relationship He first established in His covenant with Abraham – was defined and administered through the *Torah* that came to be known as the Law of Moses (Exodus 20-31).
 - Moses was God's chosen mediator, but also His ruler, prophet and judge throughout the years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Of Moses alone it was said that God knew him face-to-face (Deuteronomy 34:10).
 - Moses' greatness and central place within historic Judaism was such that the teachers of the Law in the first century considered themselves to be his disciples (John 9:28). So the place of teaching authority and judgment in the synagogues was known as the "chair of Moses" (Matthew 23:2).

Moses' central place in Israel's history made him and his faith a profound point of exhortation to the epistle's Jewish audience. This man so revered in Jewish culture and tradition had endured the same sorts of trials and difficulties as the readers themselves were enduring: defamation, opposition, and threats of harm and death from his countrymen. He, too, knew what it meant to suffer and persevere in faithfulness as seeing Him who is unseen (11:27). Israel had pressed Moses to the breaking point, even as the readers were being pressed to return to the Judaism they'd left to follow Jesus as their Messiah. Their fellow Jews were doubtless challenging them in the same way their forefathers had confronted the blind man in Jesus' day: "*We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where He is from*" (John 9:29). No one's faith and faithfulness were better suited to encourage these Jewish Christians than Moses.

The Hebrews author was well aware of his readers' high esteem of Moses; as a fellow Jew, he shared that esteem. But he also understood that Moses' greatness lay in his role in God's purposes, now fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah, and he wanted his readers to share his conviction. Even Moses himself, though lacking the insight afforded by the fullness of the times, viewed his own circumstance and obligation of faith in terms of "the reproach of God's Anointed" (11:26).

The writer omitted the episode of Moses' parents leaving their baby in the reeds along the Nile riverbank, and he also skipped over what came next. That account is provided in Exodus 2:5-10, which records the astonishing providence of pharaoh's daughter discovering the baby in his ark when she came to the river to bathe. Even more astonishing was the fact that she, the daughter of Egypt's supreme ruler and fully aware that this infant was a Hebrew child, determined to save him in defiance of her father's direct command to his subjects.

This meant finding someone to nurse the baby, since he was too young to be weaned. Immediately, Moses' sister approached pharaoh's daughter and offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse him. She agreed, and the girl ran and retrieved her mother, who agreed to care for the child until he was weaned. Thus Moses was returned to his own mother and family and allowed to live as a Hebrew boy until he was well past his toddler years (probably around four years old).

Evidently pharaoh's daughter regarded Moses as her own child throughout that time, because once he was weaned she took him into the palace as her own son. It was at that time that she named him *Moses*, which is from an Egyptian root that means, "brought forth" or "drawn out." The text doesn't say how she managed this feat, but she somehow convinced her father, the pharaoh, to embrace the boy as her son, which obviously involved hiding his Hebrew identity.

This series of extraordinary providences secured Moses' life, but they also gave him a new identity. This child of Hebrew slaves was now a prince of Egypt, raised as Egyptian royalty with all of the benefits and endowments that exalted status afforded (cf. 11:26 with Acts 7:22). Moses' parents must have done what they could to keep apprised of their son's development, and they surely rejoiced that God had seen fit to deliver him from the agony of pharaoh's mud pits, even though it meant losing him from their family and home. But though Moses was raised from young childhood as an Egyptian prince, the text's account of his interaction with his Hebrew brethren when he was a grown man seems to suggest that he was aware of his own Hebrew identity at that time (Exodus 2:11-14).

Of course, this passage can be interpreted simply as Moses showing natural human concern for the plight of the enslaved foreigners who served his adoptive grandfather. But a couple of factors point in a different direction. First, the text nowhere indicates that Moses came to realize his Hebrew identity at a later time; if that was indeed the case, the Scripture is silent about it. On the other hand, Stephen's treatment of this context shows clearly his own belief that Moses was aware of his Hebrew lineage at that time. More than that, Stephen argued that Moses was aware of his ordination by God to be His deliverer (Acts 7:23-25).

This great dichotomy – enslaved son of Abraham and exalted son of Egypt – and its predicament of self-understanding, allegiance and preference that provided the context for Moses' first test of faith and faithful response, and it was to that challenge of faith that the Hebrews writer first turned his attention (11:24-26).

Again, the writer omitted the backstory, but his Jewish readers knew it well. They understood what it meant that Moses, “*when he had become great, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,*” choosing instead to openly embrace his Hebrew identity at the cost of every privilege and comfort afforded to him by his status as pharaoh’s grandson. Even more than that, Moses’ allegiance to his Hebrew countrymen turned his grandfather’s heart against him, such that he became an adversary determined to destroy him (Exodus 2:11-15).

Moses may have responded in the moment when he intervened and killed the Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave, but he didn’t act hastily or without thought. He was fully aware that his action meant setting aside his identity and status as a prince of Egypt; by standing with his fellow Hebrew, he was standing against Egypt’s authority and rule. He wasn’t merely taking a man’s life, he was acting against his grandfather and the people whose favor and endowments had allowed him to become one of the greatest men in Egypt, if not in the ancient Near East. When Moses raised his hand against the Egyptian, he’d already weighed that decision against his own status, wealth and power – indeed, even against the value of his own life. In the writer’s words, he “*chose to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.*”

Some have viewed this statement in terms of Moses choosing unjust suffering and hardship over comfort, ease, and sinful self-indulgence. He was willing to labor as a slave in the mud pits with his Hebrew countrymen rather than continue to live a life of luxury in pharaoh’s palace. But that understanding completely misses the point; perhaps worse, it reinforces the common human notion that faithfulness requires austerity and self-imposed hardship – that godliness is an ethic of subtraction. *But if this was the writer’s point, then why would he distinguish Joseph as a man of faith?* Joseph’s status, wealth and power in Egypt certainly rivaled Moses’, and he never walked away from them until the day he died.

No, the issue of “sin” and its “pleasures” had nothing to do with Moses’ material wealth and his lifestyle in pharaoh’s house. Rather, they concerned his relationship with the “people of God,” and that phrase is the key to understanding the writer’s meaning. *The choice that confronted Moses was faith or unbelief:* He could choose to pursue his calling on behalf of God’s covenant household, or he could choose to ignore or deny it, and thus *sin* by deviating from the truth. Joseph had proven faithful to his vocation in God’s purposes, and Moses was obliged to do the same. Joseph’s calling required that he embrace his status as prince over Egypt; Moses’ calling required that he renounce his.

Thus the Hebrews writer saw more in Moses’ action than a man for whom loyalty to family and heritage transcended material well-being. And he wasn’t simply a person governed by a compelling sense of justice and fair play. No, the writer discerned in Moses’ decision a profound act of faith; Moses was a man whose gaze was fixed on God’s promise and the reward it held out – a reward that the author associated with the *riches* bound up in the “*reproach of Christ*” (11:26).

This statement has puzzled readers through the centuries, and scholars and commentators have posed various interpretations. Some have argued that the writer was claiming for Moses supernatural insight into the future Messiah and his own connection with Him. Others have concluded that the writer wasn't referring to Jesus at all, but to *Moses*. For, though the Hebrew term *messiah* (and its Greek equivalent *christ*) eventually became a title specifically ascribed to Jesus, the noun itself simply means "anointed one."

- Thus the Scriptures apply the designation "messiah" to Israel's priests, prophets, rulers, and even the nation itself as God's elect (anointed) covenant household (cf. Leviticus 4:1-17; 1 Samuel 2:10, 12:1-5, 16:1-7, 26:5-9; 2 Samuel 23:1-2; 1 Chronicles 16:22; Psalm 18:50, 28:6-9, 84:8-9, 89:19-51, 105:8-15, 132:8-18; Habakkuk 3:13; etc.).
- So God Himself even assigned that title to Cyrus, the pagan king of Persia, whom He raised up and "anointed" to restore His people to Judea and rebuild His sanctuary in Jerusalem (ref. Isaiah 44:28-45:4; cf. Ezra 1:1-4).
- Indeed, the wide-ranging use of this designation is profoundly significant, for it provides the context for understanding Jesus as the singular Messiah – Yahweh's Anointed who embodies in Himself all of the messianic figures and representations before Him (Psalm 2:1-3; Daniel 9:25-26).

The claim, then, is that the writer was saying that Moses bore the reproach that resulted from his faithfulness to his anointing as Yahweh's chosen deliverer. This is possible, but the author almost certainly had Jesus in mind. But this doesn't imply that he believed Moses had insight into Jesus' reproach and saw himself sharing that same censure and rejection. However, Moses does seem to have had some sense of his unique calling by the time he intervened with his countrymen and killed the Egyptian; certainly Stephen believed that to be the case. And if Moses understood that Yahweh had chosen him as His "messiah" – His anointed servant to deliver Abraham's children from Egypt, he must have associated that deliverance with God's covenant promise to Abraham, not only to give his descendents the land of Canaan, but to bless all the earth's families through them. *In that sense, Moses' awareness of his own calling as Yahweh's "messiah" looked to the future messianic person and work.* Like Abraham, Moses perceived Messiah's "day" and rejoiced in it (ref. John 8:56; Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The writer's point, then, seems to have been that Moses viewed himself in terms of his unique role in God's fulfillment of His intent for the world, a work that would reach its climax in Jesus of Nazareth. Like so many others before him, and many more yet to come, Moses understood that he was God's anointed vessel, chosen to advance His purposes until the day when all would be fulfilled in a unique Anointed One – the promised son of Eve and Abraham. All prior messianic figures anticipated Him, and all who fulfilled their calling in faith endured His reproach, locking their gaze, as He did, on the reward (12:1-3).