

NEW LIFE OF MOSES

BY

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From Charles Bradlaugh's Theological Essays

London
Printed by Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh,
63, Fleet Street, E.C.
1895

Rosings Digital Publications



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THE "Life of Abraham" was presented to our readers, because, as the nominal founder of the Jewish race, his position entitled him to that honour. The "Life of David," because, as one of the worst men and worst kings ever known, his history might afford matter for reflection to admirers of monarchical institutions and matter for comment to the advocates of a republican form of government. The "Life of Jacob" served to show how basely mean and contemptibly deceitful a man might become, and yet enjoy God's love. Having given thus a brief outline of the career of the patriarch, the king, and the knave, the life of a priest naturally presents itself as the most fitting to complement the present quadrifid series.

Moses, the great grandson of Levi, was born in Egypt, not far distant from the banks of the Nile, a river world-famous for its inundations, made familiar to ordinary readers by the travellers who have journeyed to discover its source, and held in bad repute by strangers, especially on account of the carnivorous Saurians who infest its waters. The mother and father of our hero were both of the tribe of Levi, and were named Jochebed and Amram. The infant Moses was, at the age of three months, placed in an ark of bulrushes by the river's brink. This was done in order to avoid the decree of extermination propounded by the reigning Pharaoh against the male Jewish children. The daughter of Pharaoh, coming down to the river to bathe, found the child and took compassion upon him, adopting him as her son. Of the early life of Moses we have but scanty record. We are told in the New Testament that he was learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts vii, 21), and that "when he was come to years he refused" by faith (Hebrews, xi, 24) "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Perhaps the record from which the New Testament writers quoted has been lost; it is certain that the present version of the Old Testament does not contain those statements. The record which is lost may have been God's original revelation to man, and of which our Bible may be an incomplete version. I am little grieved by the supposition that a revelation may have been lost, being, for my own part, more inclined to think that no revelation has ever been made. Josephus says that, when quite a baby, Moses trod contemptuously on the crown of Egypt. The Egyptian monuments and Exodus are both silent on this point. Josephus also tells us that Moses led the Egyptians in war against the Ethiopians, and married Tharbis, the daughter of the Ethiopian monarch. This also is omitted both in Egyptian history and in the sacred record. When Moses was grown, according to the Old Testament, or

when he was 40 years of age according to the New, "it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel," "And he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew;" "And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." The New Testament says that he did it, "for he supposed that his brethren would understand how that God, by his hand, would deliver them." (Acts vii, 25) But this is open to the following objections: — The Old Testament says nothing of the kind; — there was no man to see the homicide, and as Moses hid the body, it is hard to conceive how he could expect the Israelites to understand a matter of which they not only had no knowledge whatever, but which he himself did not think was known to them; — if there were really no man present, the story of the after accusation against Moses needs explanation; — it might be further objected that it does not appear that Moses at that time did even himself conceive that he had any mission from God to deliver his people. Moses fled from the wrath of Pharaoh, and dwelt in Midian, where he married the daughter of one Reuel or Raguel, or Jethro. This name is not of much importance, but it is strange that if Moses wrote the books of the Pentateuch he was not more exact in designating so near a relation. While acting as shepherd to his father-in-law, "he led the flock to the back side of the desert," and "the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire:" that is, the angel was either a flame, or was the object which was burning, for this angel appeared in the midst of a bush which burned with fire, but was not consumed. This flame appears to have been a luminous one, for it was a "great sight," and attracted Moses, who turned aside to see it. But the luminosity would depend on substance ignited and rendered incandescent. Is the angel of the Lord a substance susceptible of ignition and incandescence? Who knoweth? If so, will the fallen angels ignite and burn in hell? God called unto Moses out of the midst of the bush. It is hard to conceive an infinite God in the middle of a bush, yet as the law of England says that we must not "deny the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be of divine authority," in order not to break the law, I advise all to believe that, in addition to being in the middle of a bush, the infinite and all-powerful God also sat on the top of a box, dwelt sometimes in a tent, afterwards in a temple; although invisible, appeared occasionally; and, being a spirit without body or parts, was hypostatically incarnate as a man. Moses, when spoken to by God, "hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God." If Moses had known that God was *invisible*, he would have escaped this fear. God told Moses that the cry of the children of Israel had reached him, and that he had *come down* to deliver them, and that Moses was to lead them out of Egypt. Moses does not seem to have placed entire confidence in the phlegomic divine communication, and asked, when the Jews

should question him on the name of the Deity, what answer should he make? It does not appear from this that the Jews, if they had so completely forgotten God's name, had much preserved the recollection of the promise comparatively so recently made to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. The answer given according to our version is, "I am that I am;" according to the Douay, "I am who am." God, in addition, told Moses that the Jews should spoil the Egyptians of their wealth; but even this promise of plunder, so congenial to the nature of a bill-discounting Jew of the Bible type, did not avail to overcome the scruples of Moses. God therefore taught him to throw his rod on the ground, and thus transform it into a serpent, from which pseudo-serpent Moses at first fled in fear, but on his taking it by the tail it resumed its original shape. Moses, with even other wonders at command, still hesitated; he had an impediment in his speech. God cured this by the appointment of Aaron, who was eloquent, to aid his brother. God directed Moses to return to Egypt, but his parting words must somewhat have damped the future legislator's hope of any speedy or successful ending to his mission. God said, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart that he shall not let the people go." On the journey back to Egypt God met Moses "by the way in the inn, and sought to kill him." I am ignorant as to the causes which prevented the omnipotent Deity from carrying out his intention; the text does not explain the matter, and I am not a bishop or a D.D., and I do not therefore feel justified in putting my assumptions in place of God's revelation. Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and asked that the Jews might be permitted to go three days' journey in the wilderness; but the King of Egypt not only refused their request, but gave them additional tasks, and in consequence Moses and Aaron went again to the Lord, who told them, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty; but by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them." Whether God had forgotten that the name Jehovah was known to Abraham, or whether he was here deceiving Moses and Aaron, are points the solution of which I leave to the faithful referring them to the fact that Abraham called a place (Genesis xxii, 14) Jehovah-Jireh. After this Moses and Aaron again went to Pharaoh and worked wonderfully in his presence. Thaumaturgy is coming into fashion again, but the exploits of Moses far exceeded any of those performed by Mr. Home or the Davenport Brothers. Aaron flung down his rod, and it became a serpent; the Egyptian magicians flung down their rods, which became serpents also; but the rod of Aaron, as though it had been a Jew money-lender or a tithe collecting parson, swallowed up these miraculous competitors, and the Jewish leaders could afford to laugh at their defeated rival conjurors. Moses and Aaron carried on the miracle-working for some time. All the water of the land of Egypt was

turned by them into blood, but the magicians did so with their enchantments, and it had no effect on Pharaoh. Then showers of frogs, at the instance of Aaron, covered the land of Egypt; but the Egyptians did so with their enchantments, and frogs abounded still more plentifully. The Jews next tried their hands at the production of lice, and here — to the glory of God be it said — the infidel Egyptians failed to imitate them. It is written that “cleanliness is next to godliness,” but we cannot help thinking that godliness must have been far from cleanliness when the former so soon resulted in lice. The magicians were now entirely discomfited. The preceding wonders seem to have affected all the land of Egypt; but in the next miracle the swarms of flies sent were confined to Egyptians only, and were not extended to Goshen, in which the Israelites dwelt.

The next plague in connection with the ministration of Moses and Aaron was that “all the cattle of Egypt died.” After “all the cattle” were dead, a boil was sent, breaking forth with blains upon man and beast. This failing in effect, Moses afterwards stretched forth his hand and smote “both man and beast” with hail, then covered the land with locusts, and followed this with a thick darkness throughout the land — a darkness which *might* have been felt. Whether it was felt is a matter on which I am unable to pass an opinion. After this, the Egyptians being terrified by the destruction of their first-born children, the Jews, at the instance of Moses, borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, jewels of gold, and raiment; and they spoiled the Egyptians. The fact is, that the Egyptians were in the same position as the payers of church rates, tithes, vicars’ rates, and Easter dues: they lent to the Lord’s people, who are good borrowers, but slow when repayment is required. They prefer promising you a crown of glory to paying you at once five shillings in silver. Moses led the Jews through the Red Sea, which proved a ready means of escape, as may be easily read in Exodus, which says that the Lord “made the sea dry land” for the Israelites, and afterwards not only overwhelmed in it the Egyptians who sought to follow them, but, as Josephus tells us, the current of the sea actually carried to the camp of the Hebrews the arms of the Egyptians, so that the wandering Jews might not be destitute of weapons. After this the Israelites were led by Moses into Shur, where they were without water for three days, and the water they afterwards found was too bitter to drink until a tree had been cast into the well. The Israelites were then fed with manna, which, when gathered on Friday, kept for the Sabbath, but rotted if kept from one week day to another. The people grew tired of eating manna, and complained, and God sent fire amongst them and burned them up in the uttermost parts of the camp; and after this the people wept and said, “Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers and

the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic; but now there is nothing at all beside this manna before our eyes." This angered the Lord, and he gave them a feast of quails, and while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled, and he smote the Jewish people with a very great plague. (Numbers, ix) The people again in Rephidim were without water, and Moses therefore smote the Rock of Horeb with his rod, and water came out of the rock. At Rephidim the Amalekites and the Jews fought together, and while they fought Moses, like a prudent general, went to the top of a hill, accompanied by Aaron and Hur, and it came to pass that when Moses held up his hands Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hands Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy, and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon, and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other side, and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun, and Joshua discomfited Amalek, and his people with the edge of the sword. How the true believer ought to rejoice that the stone was so convenient, as otherwise the Jews might have been slaughtered, and there might have been no royal line of David, no Jesus, no Christianity. That stone should be more valued than the precious black stone of the Moslem; it is the corner-stone of the system, the stone which supported the Mosaic rule. God is everywhere, but Moses went *up* unto him, and the Lord called to him out of a mountain and came to him in a thick cloud, and descended on Mount Sinai in a fire, in consequence of which the mountain smoked, and the Lord *came down upon the top* of the mountain and called Moses *up* to him; and then the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments, and also those precepts which follow, in which Jews are permitted to buy their fellow-countrymen for six years, and in which it is provided that, if the slave-master shall give his six-year slave a wife, and she bear him sons or daughters, that the wife and the children shall be the property of her master. In these precepts it is also permitted that a man may sell his own daughter for the most base purposes. Also that a master may beat his slave, so that if he do not die until a few days after the ill-treatment, the master shall escape justice because the slave is his money. Also that Jews may buy strangers and keep them as slaves for ever. While Moses was up in the mount the people clamoured for Aaron to make them gods. Moses had stopped away so long that the people gave him up for lost. Aaron, whose duty it was to have pacified and restrained them, and to have kept them in the right faith, did nothing of the kind. He induced them to bring all their gold, and then made it into a calf, before which he built an altar, and then proclaimed a feast. Manners and customs change. In those days the Jews did see the God that Aaron took their gold for, but now the priests take the

people's gold, and the poor contributors do not even see a calf for their pains, unless indeed they are near a mirror at the time when they are making their voluntary contributions. And the Lord told Moses what happened, and said, "I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiffnecked people. Now, therefore, let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." Moses would not comply with God's request, but remonstrated, and expostulated, and begged him not to afford the Egyptians an opportunity of speaking against him. Moses succeeded in changing the unchangeable, and the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Although Moses would not let God's "wrath wax hot" his own "anger waxed hot," and he broke, in his rage, the two tables of stone which God had given him, and on which the Lord had graven and written with his own finger. We have now no means of knowing in what language God wrote, or whether Moses afterwards took any pains to rivet together the broken pieces. It is almost to be wondered at that the Christian Evidence Societies have not sent missionaries to search for these pieces of the tables, which may even yet remain beneath the mount. Moses took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder, and strewed it upon water and made the children of Israel drink of it. After this Moses armed the priests and killed 3,000 Jews, "and the Lord plagued the people because they had made the calf which Aaron had made." (Exodus xxxii, 35) Moses afterwards pitched the tabernacle without the camp; and the cloudy pillar in which the Lord went, descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle; and the Lord talked to Moses "face to face, as a man would to his friend." (Exodus xxxiii, 11) And the Lord then told Moses, "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live." (Exodus xxxiii, 20) Before this Moses and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, "saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet, as it were, a paved work of sapphire stone, . . . and upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand; also they saw God, and did eat and drink." (Exodus xxix, 9)

Aaron, the brother of Moses, died under very strange circumstances. The Lord said unto Moses, "Strip Aaron of his garments and put them upon Eleazar, his son, and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people and shall die there." And Moses did as the Lord commanded, and Aaron died there on the top of the mount, where Moses had taken him. There does not appear to have been any coroner's inquest in the time of Aaron, and the suspicious circumstances of the death of the brother of Moses have been passed over by the faithful.

When Moses was leading the Israelites near Moab, Balak the King of the Moabites sent to Balaam in order to get Balaam to

curse the Jews. When Balak's messengers were with Balaam, God came to Balaam also, and asked what men they were. Of course God knew, but he inquired for his own wise purposes, and Balaam told him truthfully. God ordered Balaam not to curse the Jews, and therefore the latter refused, and sent the Moabitish messengers away. Then Balak sent again high and mighty princes under whose influence Balaam went mounted on an ass, and God's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he sent an angel to stop him by the way; but the angel did not understand his business well, and the ass first ran into a field, and then close against the wall, and it was not until the angel removed to a narrower place that he succeeded in stopping the donkey; and when the ass saw the angel she fell down. Balaam did not see the angel at first; and, indeed, we may take it as a fact of history that asses have always been the most ready to perceive angels.

Moses may have been a great author, but we have little means of ascertaining what he wrote in the present day. Divines talk of Genesis to Deuteronomy as the five books of Moses, but Eusebius, in the fourth century, attributed them to Ezra, and Saint Chrysostom says that the name of Moses has been affixed to the books without authority, by persons living long after him. It is quite certain that if Moses lived 3,300 years ago, he did not write in square letter Hebrew, and this because the character has not existed so long. It is indeed doubtful if it can be carried back 2,000 years. The ancient Hebrew character, though probably older than this, yet is comparatively modern amongst the ancient languages of the earth.

It is urged by orthodox chronologists that Moses was born about 1450 B.C., and that the Exodus took place about 1491 B.C. Unfortunately "there are no recorded dates in the Jewish Scriptures that are trustworthy." Moses, or the Hebrews, not being mentioned upon Egyptian monuments from the twelfth to the seventeenth century B.C. inclusive, and never being alluded to by any extant writer who lived prior to the Septuagint translation at Alexandria (commencing in the third century B.C.), there are no extraneous aids, from sources alien to the Jewish Books, through which any information, worthy of historical acceptance, can be gathered elsewhere about him or them."¹

Moses died in the land of Moab when he was 120 years of age. The Lord buried Moses in a valley of Moab, over against Beth-peor, but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. Josephus says that "a cloud came over him on the sudden and he disappeared in a certain valley." The devil disputed about the body of Moses, contending with the Archangel Michael (Jude, 9); but whether the devil or the angel had the best of the discussion, the Bible does not tell us.

De Beauvoir Priaulx,² looking at Moses as a counsellor, leader, and legislator, says: — “Invested with this high authority, he announced to the Jews their future religion, and announced it to them as a state religion, and as framed for a particular state, and that state only. He gave this religion, moreover, a creed so narrow and negative — he limited it to objects so purely temporal, he crowded it with observances so entirely ceremonial or national — that we find it difficult to determine whether Moses merely established this religion in order that by a community of worship he might induce in the tribe-divided Israelites that community of sentiment which would constitute them a nation; or, whether he only roused them to a sense of their national dignity, in the hope that they might then more faithfully perform the duties of priests and servants of Jehovah. In other words, we hesitate to decide whether in the mind of Moses the state was subservient to the purposes of religion, or religion to the purposes of state.”

The same writer observes³ that, according to the Jewish writings, Moses “is the friend and favourite of the Deity. He is one whose prayers and wishes, the Deity hastens to fulfil, one to whom the Deity makes known his designs. The relations between God and the prophet are most intimate. God does not disdain to answer the questions of Moses, to remove his doubts, and even occasionally to receive his suggestions, and to act upon them even in opposition to his own pre-determined decrees.”

ENDNOTES

¹ G.R. Gliddon's *Types of Mankind: Mankind's Chronology*, p. 711

² *Questiones Mosaicæ*, p. 438.

³ p. 418.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

London: Printed by Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh,
63, Fleet Street, E.C.