DESERT ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD
PART 2 - MOSES, IN EXILE

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Readings: Exodus 1-3; Luke 20:37; Acts 7:22, 30-35; Hebrews 11:23-27

The Sinai Peninsula becomes a place of destiny for Moses, the king's dethroned son. Day after day, year after year, 40 years long Moses roams aimlessly through the desert of the Sinai Peninsula, just a shepherd with his flock. It all seems meaningless.

Moses is doubly an exile. Exiled from his home, the royal court, his adopted mother, who raised him, and all his friends at court. Exiled from his people, whom he loves and for whom he would have gladly laid down his life. He toils away as a shepherd, though not like other shepherds, for he is a broken man, the task of his life lying in shambles. As a fugitive and outlaw, he is a virtual prisoner, banned from court, prohibited from re-entering Egypt. Here in the desert he lives, agonising over what had happened. "I only wanted to help my people, be their deliverer and saviour, and now they are worse off than ever." After Moses killed the Egyptian overseer, Pharaoh would have treated the Hebrews even more harshly. Inevitably Moses would have reproached himself.

It is a classic illustration of the saying: the punishment fits the crime. Moses killed a man in anger and now he flees Pharaoh, who wants to kill him. Moses judged his Israelite brothers and now God judges him. Moses had a dream: to save his people. But now it is all over with his hopes and aspirations.

The desert of Sinai will have heard the repeated cries and prayers Moses utters in his turmoil. With much searching of heart, he appeals to the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whom he would have heard of through his sister Miriam. *Why? Oh, why?* would have been the first anguished cry to escape his lips. Hadn't he wanted the best for his people? Didn't he want to save them even at the cost of his own life? And what did he get for all his troubles? Why did God let everything go so horribly wrong? Why didn't his people understand that he was their deliverer, just like the Patriarch Joseph? *"Moses thought that his own people would realise that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not"* (Acts 7:25 NIV-UK).

Why did they misunderstand him? Other voices will have haunted him. There is the voice of his Hebrew brother: *"Who made you ruler and judge over us?"* (Exodus 2:14). Conscience-stricken, Moses will have asked, *Am I to blame that everything has gone so wrong?*

He will have tussled with these thoughts, for it takes a person a long time to admit their guilt and own up to their failings.



We are so quick to excuse, to justify, to gloss over our wrongdoing. So God needed 40 years to mould this arrogant, strong-willed and hot-tempered personality into a pliable tool, a humble man surrendered to God. Moses' life takes a new direction at God's initiative. Instead of lording it over his people, Moses now shepherds a flock of sheep. He lives among animals – just like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). And all the time God is training him. People, like sheep, are to be led not driven.

God trains and disciplines Moses with a strong hand. Forty years of luxury, fame and potential are followed by 40 years of a barren, lonely and meaningless existence, herding someone else's sheep in the desert. But because God is love, this time of painful discipline is also a time of preparation. God is preparing Moses for an epiphany, an amazing revelation of God.

Alone with God, Moses learned. He learned to watch out for the flock of sheep in his care. He led them, bore with them, and sought what was best for them. Following God's promptings in his heart, he protected the sheep from all unsafe paths and dangerous predators. Although he didn't know it at the time, this was preparing him for the day that he would no longer be leading sheep. Moses was to be commissioned for a task that would impact all of the tribes of the Hebrew people. Those were the days that Moses formed an unbreakable bond with God, and learned to trust Him without doubting.

Finally, the day came that God saw that Moses was ready for his destined mission. His own strength had been broken down over the years, and he became the most humble and meek man on the face of this earth (Numbers 12:3). He was now wiser and stronger than any other person alive because he became a servant – a representative – of God.

God needs people who are willing to go through the same training Moses did so they can be shepherds and examples, leading people to the freedom that is in Christ. Are you attentively listening to what God wants to teach you, day after day? Are you willing to humble yourself under God's guidance and will, at the expense of your own opinions and human understanding? If so, you will also attain an unbreakable bond with God. It is the hidden faithfulness in the daily life, small situations that nobody could see, that prepared Moses to be an instrument in God's hands.

So to this day the desert of Sinai has a powerful message. The bigger God's task for us and the greater its significance, the longer will be the time of preparation, and the more humbling our experiences.

The Evangelical Sisters of Mary

Adapted from the original German, "Wüstenzeit – Bereitungszeit Mose", *Sinai heute.*

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