

## **Sibling Jealousy, Sibling Pride**

‘A Sunday school teacher asked her grade-school class how old they thought Isaac was when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son. One boy raised his hand and said that Isaac could not have been over twelve years old. The teacher asked him how he knew this. The boy explained, “I have a brother and sister who are in their teens. I’m not sure it would have been that much of a sacrifice if Isaac had been older than twelve”.’

This little boy could just as well have been Moses, for Moses was the youngest of his siblings, Aaron and Miriam. Miriam was the oldest, followed by Aaron, three years older than Moses. As we all know, Moses is one of the most famous men who ever lived. After the Lord Jesus, Who is in a rank all by Himself, the second rank of most famous and important people includes only Moses and possibly Elijah and Abraham. For Moses not only confronted the then most powerful man in all the world, Egypt’s pharaoh, secured the Israelites’ freedom from slave labor, led them out of Egypt entirely, destroying the bulk of the superpower’s military might in the process, governing two generations of them through a 40-year wandering in the wilderness, bringing them to the entrance of the Promised Land; more important than all of that, Moses gave us and all the world the very Law of God.

Moses, alone among all human beings, spoke with God face to face. Such that Moses' physical appearance was greatly altered after each time he spoke with God. His face so glowed with an unearthly glorious shining that everyone who saw him was afraid of him. So he had to wear a veil when he left the Lord's presence so that people would not run away from him. His face's glowing was the Lord's glory, which rested upon him for hours after each meeting with God. It was so powerful that even more than its appearance, it could be physically felt by those nearby. This presence, this power, this divine authority that radiated from him came to be referred to as the "horns" of Moses. From which we get the famous sculptures of Moses which portray him with two small horns protruding from his head. What a lack of imagination to think that Moses had actual horns, antlers as it were, coming out of his head! No, Moses bore no vague resemblance to longhorn cattle! His "horns" referred to the divine authority he wielded, which was evident whenever he approached, and especially when he spoke, and when Aaron spoke for him.

Moses was a miracle baby, as God had a unique role and purpose for him. Born shortly after pharaoh's "executive order" that all male Hebrew babies be killed, aborted, as soon as they were born or before, Moses should not have survived at all. But his mother, Jochebed, had managed to both keep her pregnancy "under wraps", and then the baby himself hidden for about three months. This subterfuge could not be maintained indefinitely, and

Baby Moses' days were quickly running out, as he would soon be discovered. In despair, but with a faint hope that God could possibly work something out, Jochebed made a waterproof basket in which she laid the baby Moses, and set him adrift in the scenic shallows of the Nile River, where frequented princesses and ladies of high rank. Moses' older sister, Miriam, now enters the scene. In a cunning plan, Jochebed stationed Miriam a discreet distance away to watch what would happen to Moses. One of Egypt's princesses heard the plaintive hunger cries of Baby Moses, and saw him floating among the reeds. Smitten by his helplessness, she decides on the spot to adopt him as her own child. At which point, the pre-teen Miriam, anywhere from seven to twelve years old, boldly and fittingly approaches and suggests to the princess that she could find one of the Hebrew slave women to nurse the baby for her. Given leave to, she, of course, "finds" Moses' own mother, who becomes Moses' nursemaid and nanny. And so, in God's perfect providence, Moses is saved from infanticide, and returned to the loving arms of his own mother, who now had regular access to the palace itself, while Moses was raised as an Egyptian prince, living in the very lap of lavish luxury.

Aaron, who was three years older than Moses, just old enough to have escaped pharaoh's genocidal law, remained serving as a slave himself, along with Miriam and their mother Jochebed. After Moses was weaned he saw less and less of his mother and his siblings, being groomed as a prince and future

ruler of the Egyptian Empire. All the trappings of ultimate wealth and power were at his fingertips as the son of an imperial princess, while his brother and sister toiled in their assignments as slaves. If I had been Aaron or Miriam, I might have been just a wee bit envious of my younger brother's privileged station in life, especially since he was part of the "racist", supremacist, system that kept all Israelites in slavery and abject poverty.

Well things did not stay that way. Years passed. Prince Moses, now forty years old, chanced to see an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave. In a fit of rage, Moses struck the taskmaster, killing him. And just like that, in that momentary loss of temper, Moses forfeited his royalty, and became a murderer, a treasonous fugitive from Egyptian law. Once again his life was in jeopardy. With the law on his tail, he fled, disappearing into Midian, outside the Egyptian Empire's jurisdiction. For forty years, he lived in this distant land, incommunicado with his brother and sister still toiling back in Egypt. But God's time had come for Moses to step up to the plate and begin the process of delivering God's Chosen People from Egypt's cruel clutches and its pantheon of pagan gods. Moving on both Moses and Aaron, God brings the two brothers back together in a tearful reunion after forty years, with the older sister, now matriarch, Miriam, soon joining them.

Perhaps the statute of limitations on murder had passed, or everyone who remembered Moses' murder of an Egyptian civil servant 40 years before had passed or moved elsewhere, in

whatever way, God didn't allow Moses to be arrested upon his return to the palace to ask pharaoh to allow the Israelites to go into the wilderness to worship God. As Aaron was now Moses' official spokesman, as God had appointed him, Aaron was rarely not beside Moses. He became nearly as well known as Moses himself. And as the sister of both Moses and Aaron, Miriam's "star" also began to rise, as she became the most famous of the Israelite women, a true type of national matriarch. When the people escaped from pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, Miriam, as moved by Holy Spirit, led all the women, and then all the people, in one of the greatest songs of all time. Known as the Song of Miriam and Moses, it overflows with joy, praise and thanksgiving for the stupendous, miraculous deliverance of the people from bondage in Egypt. By virtue of being Moses' sister and his "savior" as it were when he was still a babe, Miriam was now practically like a queen, if the Israelites had had then a ruling family.

Some years pass. Moses remarries. Apparently first wife, Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, had died sometime during the interim. This time, Moses marries a Cushite woman, probably from Ethiopia. Gasp! A foreigner! This didn't sit well at all with Miriam, who functioned as Moses' mother at this point. But with Moses now having a wife, who may well have attracted some people's attention and adoration away from her, she felt she needed to reassert herself in the national eye. With the foreign wife as a flimsy excuse, she enlisted her brother Aaron's help, and they went

together and challenged Moses' authority, claiming that since they both were also prophets and spoke for God, they both, but mostly Miriam, should have a greater role in leading the people.

Said to be the most humble man who ever lived, Moses was taken aback by their implication that his relationships were anything but humble and forthright. God, though, was angered, since when they challenged Moses' status with God, they were ultimately challenging God Himself. God was so incensed that, after having summoned them to His presence, He up and left, leaving Miriam deathly white with leprosy, a possible death sentence in itself. Moses prays that God will forgive them both, and deliver Miriam from the humiliation and shame of leprosy. God did, but for a short seven days, she was banished from the camp, having to call out "Unclean, unclean!" to anyone who happened to come near. Such a fitting punishment for her jealousy! The Bible record nothing more about her, other than the people still loved her enough to wait this seven days until she became clean again before they broke camp and moved on. Tradition also says that when she later died a few years before Moses, God arranged for her grave, like Moses' in the future, to be in a secret place that only God knew of. And the people mourned her for thirty days.

The simple lesson here is that we dare not question God's will nor try to assume the public glory He's given to others as He appoints them for certain tasks. We also learn that He is just, especially so in His judgements. In that, we take ultimate comfort.

