CBTJ 10 (Fall 1994) 43-63

Moses' Preparation for Ministry: The Significance of His Egyptian Background

Eric Lovik

Few Bible characters are better known than Moses. The familiar stories of his rescue by Pharaoh's daughter, the burning bush incident, the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and the receiving of the Ten Commandments are taught to children at the earliest ages in virtually every church of every denomination. He has been immortalized in the 'hall of faith' in Hebrews 11. Moses is emphasized throughout Old Testament scriptures as the model prophet of God. Many readers of the Bible lift characters up on pedestals, thinking that these men and women were divinely gifted at birth to be super-human. Moses' life demonstrates, however, how Yahweh, the God of Israel, used an ordinary man to accomplish His purposes.

Moses was born into a Jewish family during the years of slavery in Egypt. Moses' father was Amram, and the name of his mother was Jochebed (Exod 6:20). Aaron was his elder brother, and Miriam was his elder sister (Exod 4:14). The Bible describes nothing of his childhood and adolescent years, except for the fact that he grew up in the home of Pharaoh's daughter where he became her adopted son (Exod 2:10-11). His membership in the royal family provided him the best possible learning and growing opportunities of the ancient world. After fleeing to the Midian wilderness following his act of murder, he met and married his wife, Zipporah (Exod 2:11-21). They had at least two children, Gershom (Exod 2:22) and Eliezer (Exod 18:3-4). Moses' ministry began when he was commissioned by

Yahweh at the burning bush in the Midian desert (Exod 3:1-4:17). With Aaron's personal assistance, Moses confronted Pharaoh and finally persuaded him to let the Israelites leave Egypt. Through a series of miraculous events, Moses finally led Israel to the Promised Land.

Looking at the life of Moses from an evangelical perspective, it is very clear that the Lord used him as His instrument to carry out His will. This paper is not intended, in any way, to diminish the significance of God's leading in his life. However, from a human perspective, it is also apparent that because of his forty years of living in the culture of the Nile, Moses was well prepared for his ministry. The purpose of this paper is to show how Moses' residence in Egypt prepared him for his future service as Israel's leader.

Introductory Background Study

The Dating of Events in Moses' Life

Before one begins serious study of the cultural background of Moses' life, it is vitally important to make specific decisions regarding the timing of significant events such as Moses' birth and the exodus. This writer supports an early date for the exodus based upon the biblical and archaeological evidence.[1] The reason for this section on dating is that one's choice of an early or a late date will change the identifications of who the pharaohs were during Moses' birth, exile, and exodus. This writer will explain his choices for the dates of the following events: the sojourn in Egypt, Moses' birth, Moses' exile, Israel's exodus, and Moses' death.[2]

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[1]Charles R. Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20 (September/October 1994): 54-62.

[2]All dates stated in this article are B.C., unless otherwise indicated.

The first event to be considered is the date of the exodus. The timing of the exodus of Israel is the foundation for all other significant dates relating to Moses' life. There are a number of theories, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. The year that appears to be most accurate is 1446. Looking at the internal evidences of the Old Testament, one sees two proofs in support of this date. First, the historian writing 1 Kings 6:1 recorded that "it came about in the four hundred and eightieth year after the sons of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel."[3] This fourth year, the same time which saw the building of the temple, was 966. Adding 480 years to that figure equals 1446. Second, in a passage found in Judges 11:15-27, Jephthah reminds the Ammonites that there is no reason they should create conflict with Israel. For the previous 300 years, Israel had held the rights or controlled the land to the east of the Jordan. This narrative account took place around 1100, thus the original defeat of the Ammonites must have occurred approximately 1400. The date of a 1400 victory over Sihon of Ammon fits nicely with a 1446 exodus. Further, there are a number of cultural and extra-biblical evidences supporting a 1446 exodus. These will be mentioned in conjunction with specific events, such as Moses' return from exile following the death of Thutmose III.[4]

The second event to be dated is the length of Israel's residence in Egypt. According to Exodus 12:40-41, the length of the sojourn was 430 years:

> Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came about at the end of

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[3]All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.

[4]For a summary comparison between the early date and the late date theories, see John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 29-30.

four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.

Accordingly, 430 years prior to the exodus would be a date of 1876. This date falls within the 12th Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom. The pharaoh who was ruling Egypt when Jacob and his family moved into the fertile Delta was Sesostris III. Sesostris was one of the primary kings of the Middle Kingdom, and he implemented an administration of land similar to the one found in Genesis 47.

Third, the most likely date for Moses' birth is 1526. In Exodus 7:7, it is recorded that "Moses was eighty years old" at the year of Israel's exodus. Thus his birth would have been eighty years prior to the exodus (i.e. 1526). Looking at the chronologies of Egypt's royal families, Moses appears to have been born the same year as Amenhotep I's death. Immediately succeeding Amenhotep was Thutmose I. Consequently, Moses was born in 1526, either at the end of Amenhotep's reign or at the beginning of Thutmose's rule. The identity of pharaoh's daughter who found Moses was most likely Hatshepsut. In the year 1526 she was in her teenage years.[5] Putting all of the pieces of the puzzle together, the above scenario seems most accurate.

Fourth, the date chosen for Moses' exile from Egypt is 1486. Scripture records in Acts 7:23 that "when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel." It was at this time that he killed an Egyptian and immediately fled from Egypt. Of course, forty years following the birth date of 1526 would be 1486. The end of his fugitive years in the Midian wilderness took place after Thutmose III died in 1450. Merrill presents an interesting case

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[5]Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 60.

for the reason why Moses waited until after Thutmose's death:

> Thutmose III was a minor when he came to power in 1504 and thus was younger than Moses. If, indeed, Moses had been reared as the foster son of Hatshepsut, there is every likelihood that he posed a real threat to the younger Thutmose since Hatshepsut had no natural sons. That is, Moses may have been a candidate for pharaoh, only his Semitic origins standing in the way. There appears in any case to have been genuine animosity between Moses and the pharaoh . . . . Moses' self-imposed exile took place in 1486 . . . [when] Thutmose III had been in power for eighteen years; and the aged Hatshepsut, who died three years later was no doubt no longer able to interdict the will of her son-in-law/nephew.[6]

Of course, his exile was over the same year as the exodus (1446). Fifth, the date of Moses' death on the eve of the conquest of Canaan is 1406. Deuteronomy 34:7 states that "Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died." Simple calculations point strongly to the idea that 1406 was the year in which Moses passed away.

Royal Education in Egypt

The evidence strongly suggests that the education Moses received during the early years of his life when he resided in Egypt offered tremendous preparation for his future ministry. During this period of its history, Egypt led the ancient near eastern world in learning. The culture of the Nile offered the greatest instruction in the world. Furthermore, when Stephen was delivering his final sermon, he recounted that "Moses was

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[6]Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 60-62.

educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22). What exactly did this Egyptian education entail? What did Moses learn?

To begin with, the teachers of ancient Egypt were highly skilled in their particular area of expertise. In fact, they were not simply a group of specially trained scholars. Rather, the teachers were hand-picked specifically by the king. The king would select his favorite, best-skilled men to teach in the royal court. The teachers came from a variety of backgrounds and occupations, including medicine, law, and the military. One recorded example of this practice is that the chief steward of the pharaoh's court was a personal tutor of Hatshepsut's daughter.[7]

The first major emphasis of Egyptian education was in the academic disciplines. First, they started with the basics: reading and writing. Students were taught how to write Egyptian dialects intelligently and clearly. "Good handwriting was considered essential, and copies were set aside for this purpose. Composition was also important, as a good scribe often had to write letters in which style was of more consequence than matter."[8] Second, learning how to write and understanding the hieratic and hieroglyphic systems, students also learned non-Egyptian languages. Because of the prominent trade status that Egypt enjoyed, the future administrators and civil servants of the kingdom learned the speech of the Canaanite regions and of Mesopotamia which was Akkadian. This training in foreign languages was implemented so that the royal subjects would be able to effectively interact with other people of the ancient near east during trade negotiations. Third, Egyptian education stressed oral communication skills. In addition to reading and writing, students learned to speak properly and convincingly.

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[7]Charles F. Aling, *Egypt and Bible History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 73.

[8]Margaret A. Murray, *The Splendour That was Egypt (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1949), 105.*

Royal education highlighted rhetorical skills, mandating many hours of practice and performance. Public speaking was a valued art in ancient Egypt. Additional studies of minor importance were the mathematical and musical disciplines.

The second major emphasis of Egyptian education was in physical fitness. This physical training placed the greatest priority on military preparation. Among other skills, students learned the valuable techniques needed to prevail in archery, horsemanship, chariot driving, and hand-to-hand combat.

There is another interesting note concerning Moses' education. The cultic aspect of Egyptian life was highly emphasized, particularly to those of the king's family. So, it is very probable that not only was he schooled in the languages and mathematics, but he was also trained in the religion of Egypt. "All the Pharaohs had a priestly training, and therefore were highly educated according to the standards of the time."[9] This in-depth training in the pantheon and rituals of the Nile no doubt proved to be tremendously valuable in Moses' warnings to Israel against polytheism.

The third major educational emphasis of the royal family member and associates included geographical and political learning. At this point in ancient near eastern history, Egypt was the center of trade. Certainly, the future leaders of the country would need to be familiar with the surrounding lands of the Mediterranean and the Orient. Murray points out that the pharaohs "were great travellers also, and had a considerable knowledge of other countries besides their own."[10] The social, political, and geographical lessons that Moses learned during his schooling aided him in his future dealings with various people on the way to the Promised Land.

Because Moses was not Egyptian by birth, it is very probable that he was recognized as a foreigner. Despite his

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[9]Ibid., 109.
[10]Ibid.

background differences, he still was offered a royal education. It was not unusual for a foreigner to earn a prestigious education and then be placed in a notable position of civil service.

> Two of the best known examples are Hekareshu and his son Hekerneheh, who served under Thutmosis IV and his predecessor Amenhotep II. The father probably made his reputation in the army, and then served in the very responsible position of tutor to the king's sons. Hekerneheh was himself raised at court and ultimately succeeded his father as tutor of the royal princes. Late in life he was also given a high rank in the military, commander of chariotry. The careers of these two foreigners illustrate that Moses' position at court need not be considered unique.[11]

Providential Preparation of Moses

While the first part of this article was introductory, the remainder will seek to demonstrate how Moses' education in Egypt did help prepare him for his role as the emancipator of Israel.

Moses' Confrontation of Pharaoh

The most challenging task in Moses' life prior to the exodus account was his confrontation with Pharaoh. He had been a fugitive for forty years, spending his time tending sheep in the Midian wilderness. He had been out of touch with Egypt, the cultural and intellectual center of the ancient near east. He likely would have felt uncomfortable dealing with a political ruler with whom he had never interacted. Hatshepsut had since been dead for many years, so his Egyptian step-mother was not there

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[11]Ibid., 74-75.

to assist him. The odds appeared to be against him. On the other hand, he did live his first forty years just like other Egyptian dignitaries. Moses surely would have remembered most of the customs, language, etc. of ancient Egypt. By looking at the exodus narrative, it is clear that Moses used very appropriate language when he dealt with Pharaoh prior to the exodus of Yahweh's people.

First, Moses spoke with Pharaoh using actual Egyptian words. Of course this sounds very obvious, because it was necessary for the two of them to communicate with each other in the same language so they would understand the meaning of the conversation. There is a particular term spoken by Moses to Pharaoh which is recorded in Exodus as an Egyptian loanword. This term was fitly chosen by Moses, because it implies a double *entendre* (i.e. a play on words). In the account of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh immediately prior to the plague of flies, Moses conversed with Pharaoh saying, "It is not right to do so; for we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God what is an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not then stone us?" (Exod 8:26[22])[12] The term "abomination" is an appropriate one for the setting. The word תּוֹעֵבָה has as its etymological root ו/יעב.[13] This word is a denominative form of the Egyptian word *wʿb* and is the usual word for "pure, holy, or purification," or as the verb "to purify oneself."[14] This word was used frequently in Egyptian literature in the context of sacrifices, priestly and cultic rites, food for the deceased, etc.[15] Essentially, it applies to any situation dealing with sacrifice. On

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[12]Versification in the Hebrew Bible will be in brackets.

[13] A. S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 95; however, most Hebrew lexicons show the root to be חעב meaning "to loath or be abhorrent."

[14]Yahuda, *Language of the Pentateuch*, 95.

[15]Ibid., 75-76.

the other hand, this term was used in Hebrew with a completely opposite connotation. To the Egyptians, the offerings and sacrifices of Israel were detestable and appalling, not holy and sacred.[16] The Hebrews were presenting pure, clean offerings to Yahweh their God. But from the Egyptians' point of view, those offerings were corrupt.

Second, Moses used Egyptian metaphorical expressions based on body parts as he dealt with Pharaoh. One example of this is found in Exodus 9:2, following the plague of flies. After Pharaoh's refusal to let Israel depart from Egypt following the fourth plague, Moses confronted the king again. Under Yahweh's guidance, Moses told Pharaoh "For if you refuse to let them go, and continue to hold them, behold, the hand of the Lord will come with a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks" (Exod 9:2-3). "The hand of God" was a significant expression to the ancient Egyptians. In Egyptian thinking, this phrase had two connotations. The first part suggested the idea of safety, security, protection, blessing, and salvation. For the Egyptian mind, the "hand" of their god(s) would protect their nation to the extent that they would be undefeatable. They would always reign victorious over their enemies. The second connotation identified the hand of God as the instrument of punishing evildoers. It was directly from the hand of God that the calamities of fate fell upon sinners. With those considerations in mind, notice the sarcasm with which Moses confronted Pharaoh:

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[16]A good illustration of this has been preserved in the Elephantine papyri where an Egyptian mob was incited to riot by the Egyptian priests and destroyed the Jewish temple in Elephantine, Egypt. What brought about the riot was the Jewish offering of the fatted calf during Passover. Across the street was the Egyptian temple where the calf was worshiped. Obviously, the sacrifice of calves by Israel was an abomination to the Egyptians; see D. Winton Thomas, *Documents from Old Testament Times* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 258-260.

> It is now possible to gauge the biting irony that lay in Moses' announcement of one of the worst plagues by which the Egyptians were to be so sorely tried in the use of the phrase יד יהוה as their punitive instrument. Thereby Pharaoh was to be told that . . . 'the hand of God,' to which he and his people looked up in hope and fear, which they at one moment regarded as the symbol of the highest and surest protection . . . would not prove to be helpless against the 'hand of יהוה', which would be raised against him as a menacing power, destroying the whole wealth of Egypt . . . . In the ears of an Egyptian the use of . . . 'the hand of God' must have sounded from the mouth of a Hebrew uttering threats as a terrible blasphemy and felt as an intentional insult.[17]

Moses' Polemic Against Polytheism

A second way in which Moses' education in Egypt served him well in his role as Israel's emancipator is seen in his polemic against polytheism. By means of divine inspiration, Moses presented the law of Yahweh, with its famous decalogue, to the people of Israel. Naturally, the first two commandments regarding monotheism and pagan worship were given directly by Yahweh Himself. There were a number of occasions, however, in which Moses warned the people to resist the temptation to worship as the surrounding nations worshiped. He encouraged them to serve the one deity, Yahweh, and not to follow the pantheon of Egypt. Specifically, Moses commanded Israel not to create their own gods of silver and gold (Exod 20:23, 32:31). Furthermore, he instructed them during his farewell sermons at the plains of Moab about the dangers of serving the gods of the inhabitants of the countries around them.

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[17]Yahuda, *Language of the Pentateuch*, 65-66.

> You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the people who surround you (Deut 6:14).
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> . . . for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. Moreover, you have seen their abominations, and their idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which they had with them; lest there shall be among you man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations (Deut 29:16-18).

Moses had firsthand experience with the religion of the Nile. He had grown up in and was schooled in the ways of the cultic practices of Egypt. As mentioned previously, Moses' education probably included priestly training. He knew Egyptian mythology. He was knowledgeable about the pantheon and each god's outworking in nature. This leader was well aware that it would be tempting for Israel to follow the gods of the Canaanite and Egyptian religions. Consequently, he stressed the need for Israel to worship Yahweh and Him alone.

When Yahweh used Moses and Aaron as the instruments of accomplishing the ten plagues, He chose the specific calamities for a purpose. An examination of the Egyptian pantheon yields an obvious connection between the plagues and the identities of various gods. There were certain gods of Egypt which were directly assaulted during the series of plagues. Consider the following examples.[18]

For the first plague, Yahweh turned the Nile River into blood (Exod 7:20-24). The water that feeds the land of Egypt was poisoned. Hapi, the god of the Nile, was defeated. Because

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[18]For a summary of the theological assaults of the plagues, see Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, 43.

the river could not provide the necessary nutrients to the land, Hapi was impotent.

The second plague was an invasion of frogs (Exodus 8:6-14). Now, the Egyptian cult abounds with frog and toad gods. There is one frog deity, in particular, against whom this plague may have been directed. The best known was the goddess of childbirth: Hekat. As Aling explains, "the plague certainly mocked her function. Frogs, associated with the fertility goddess, became exceptionally and disgustingly abundant."[19]

The seventh plague was a terrible storm of hail and fire (Exod 9:23-26). Moses recorded the account as follows:

> So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it become a nation. And the hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field, and shattered every tree of the field (Exod 9:24-25).

Essentially, this calamity destroyed the agriculture of the land. Two gods which are closely related to productivity of crops are Seth (the protector of crops) and Osiris (the god of grain).

The next plague responsible for attacking a deity was the ninth. This time, the event was complete darkness across all of Egypt for three days (Exod 10:22-23). Ancient Egypt placed high priority on the sun. This is evidenced by the number of sun-related gods. The primary deity of the sun, however, was Re. Re, the giver of light, was incapacitated during this period of darkness. Egyptians were certainly afraid of the situation, wondering what had happened to Re. Until Yahweh lifted the curtain of night from the land, Re was helpless.

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[19]Aling, *Egypt and Bible History*, 106.

The tenth plague was the culmination of Yahweh's supremacy over the Egyptian pantheon, for it was a clear defeat of the human-deity of Egypt (i.e. Pharaoh). In this curse, Yahweh killed the firstborn son of every Egyptian. The significance of this plague is monumental. The king of Egypt had always been considered by the people to be a god himself. The king came from the gods, and he was a deity as well. Now, the god-king of Egypt had lost a son. Maybe this ruler was not a god after all!

When Moses warned Israel against the perils of polytheism, he knew what he was talking about. He had many experiences with these foreign gods, and he was Yahweh's prophet who exhorted the people to follow Him and Him only. Moreover, it is probable that Moses had an acute knowledge of Canaanite deities as well. Since Canaan was constantly under vassalage to Egypt, the royal court in Egypt would have been well trained in the Canaanite religions, especially for diplomatic purposes.

Moses' Familiarity with Geography

As mentioned earlier, Moses' education included geographical and socio-political studies. An examination of the journeys of Israel from Egypt to the plains of Moab demonstrates that Moses was familiar with both the land and the people of the area. Scripture indicates that Israel followed the presence of Yahweh as revealed by the cloud during the day and the pillar of fire at night. Consequently, Moses does not deserve full credit for Israel's travels. Nevertheless, both his education and his experience provided the necessary preparation for the journey to the border of Canaan.

First, Moses had a keen knowledge of the international road system.[20] When the four decades of wilderness wanderings

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[20]Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence," 55-57.

had ended and it was time to enter Canaan, Moses' strategy involved entering the Promised Land from the east. The nation was camped at Kadesh Barnea, and the best route north to the trans-Jordan was via the King's Highway. The King's Highway was an international trade route that led directly through the heart of the land east of Canaan. However, because of political reasons, Israel was not permitted to travel along that road. Moses was forced to follow alternative routes around certain boundaries.

This leads to the second point: Moses was astute politically. He knew how to deal with diplomats and officials of foreign countries. It is interesting to note the situations that caused international conflicts between Israel and the surrounding people. One general observation is that during their trek to Canaan, Israel never instigated military conflicts. The battles that did occur were always provoked by the surrounding people.[21] Moses did his best to avoid military confrontations when Israel was travelling to Canaan. During the previously mentioned situation concerning the King's Highway, Moses sent messengers requesting permission to travel on the highway through Edom. The messengers politely assured the king of Edom that "we shall not pass through field or through vineyard; we shall not even drink water from a well. We shall go along the King's Highway, not turning to the right or left, until we pass through your territory" (Num 20:17). The king of Edom declined the request.

Another similar negotiation occurred shortly thereafter when Israel was travelling north of Edom toward the region of the Amorites. As usual, Moses sent a delegation to King Sihon. Notice the wording of the messengers' request: "Let me pass through your land. We will not turn off into field or vineyard;

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[21]One exception happened when Israel responded negatively to the report of the spies and then foolishly attempted to invade the hill country (Num 14:40-45).

we will not drink water from wells. We will go by the King's highway until we have passed through your border" (Num 21:22). This time, not only did the king refuse the appeal, but also he attacked Israel. Yahweh protected His people and defeated Sihon. The biblical record indicates that Moses was skilled at the art of international diplomacy.

Moses' Literary Skills

Moses is probably best known for his role in the parting of the Red Sea and the receiving of the Ten Commandments. A close third place would be his writing of the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures: the Torah. Earlier in this paper, we examined Moses' education. A major part of his training was in the areas of language and writing. Correct grammar, writing style, and literary form were taught to the students of the royal court. Perhaps the greatest contribution of Moses' residence in Egypt was in his literary accomplishments.

After having lived so many years in Egypt, and after having been taught the systems of the language of the Nile, the Egyptian background of Moses certainly would have influenced his writings. In his book on the linguistic relationship between the Pentateuch and the Egyptian language, Yahuda writes that,

> In the most important of these stories there are, besides Akkadian, also abundant Egyptian elements; that here, too, Egyptian loanwords occur, as well as idioms and phrases considered by biblical scholars as typical of this portion of the Pentateuch, but which can only be explained from Egyptian; finally, that there are other highly significant Egyptian influences on the composition, style, and mode of

narration, and on many conceptions concerning the Creation, Paradise, the Flood, and even the Tower of Babel.[22]

First, Moses incorporated Egyptian titles of royal court members into his writings. The most prominent example is the pharaoh. Instead of referring to the ruler of Egypt as 'king—', Moses simply wrote "pharaoh." He altogether omitted the king's personal name. It has been proved by historical records that as early as the 5th dynasty, it became customary to call the king's palace פרעה. In time, this title was identified with the ruler himself. Further, people would not call the king by his first name. This practice was so that they would show honor to this deified man. Eventually, it became a common custom to call the king פרעה. Yahuda cites evidence that "even in edicts such as e.g. that of Haremheb (1350-1315 B.C.) and in writings by order of the king as e.g. in the Pap. Harris written by command of Rameses III (1198-1167 B.C.) in which he himself occasionally appears as the person speaking, the king is simply referred to as . . . Pharaoh."[23] Both the writers and the readers of various Egyptian narratives ordinarily understood פרעה to refer to the king of Egypt.

Second, Moses used Egyptian phrases and idioms in his writings. In his narrative recording of the plague of locusts, Moses described the vast number of insects as covering "the eye of the land" (literally, Exod 10:5). This phrase originated directly from Egyptian mythology. According to Egyptian legend, the right eye of Horus is the sun, and his left eye is the moon. The idea also applied to Re. The "eye of Re" was equivalent to the sun. So, in this passage, "the eye of the land" is a metaphor meaning the sun. During this plague, the quantity

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[22]Yahuda, *Language of the Pentateuch*, xxxiv-xxxv.
[23]Ibid., 46.

of locusts swarming in Egypt was so great that the sun was literally darkened, as if storm clouds had blocked its light.

Third, Moses included Egyptian expressions in his writings. One of the most recurrent expressions is "in all your/their seats." This formulation occurs in many passages throughout the Pentateuch, including these verses: Exod 10:23, 35:3; Lev 7:26, 23:14. The proverbial expression "in all seats" was taken by Moses directly from Egyptian. It was used idiomatically to indicate habitations or dwelling places everywhere. Of further interest, the Hebrew usage is a literal translation of its Egyptian counterpart. So, when Moses wrote "in all seats," he was meaning "in every habitation."

Fourth, Moses used actual Egyptian words in his writings. These direct transliterations, also known as loanwords, were included in the autographs, because there was no Hebrew word or phrase to capture the precise meaning. The loanwords of the Pentateuch were unique to the culture of Egypt and had no close counterparts in Hebrew. One example of an Egyptian loanword is חַרְטֻמִּים, a term defined in English as "magicians." Now, it is difficult to prove without debate the certainty of the exact meaning of this particular loanword. However, by looking at the situation in which it occurs in the Pentateuch, it is safe to assume that it is indeed a loanword. חַרְטֻמִּים occurs several times (Gen 41:8, 24; Exod 7:11, 22, 8:7, 18-19, 9:11), each taking place in the context of the royal court. An etymological analysis of the word appears to indicate that it is actually a compound word. In Egyptian, the first part חרי means "he who is over something."[24] חרי was used in various records to refer to administrative and military titles, such as "he who is over the army" and "he who is over the ship." The second half is טם. This part means "book." Ancient Egyptians used this term to identify the sacred books, the books of the gods. Therefore, it is reasonable to

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[24]Ibid., 93.

conclude that this compound loanword literally means "he who is over the books."[25] This title would most likely pertain to a type of cultic scribe, similar to the English counterparts of "sorcerers" or "magicians."[26]

The evidence points strongly to the idea that Yahweh used Moses' experiences in Egypt to prepare him for the enormous undertaking of writing the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures. The following is a summary of the major Egyptian components found in Moses' writings, with references:

1. Loanwords (Gen 42:4; 50:15; Exod 4:2; 7:27; 9:31; 12:11, 15).
2. Expressions unique to the life and land conditions of Egypt (Gen 47:6, 24; 50:2; Exod 1:10, 11; 13:21; 14:4)
3. Phrases and idioms (Gen 39:11; 40:7; 41:9; 47:26; Exod 2:2).
4. Metaphorical expressions using body parts (Gen 11:8; 41:8; 45:26).
5. Semitic loanwords of New Kingdom Egypt (Gen 41:42, 43; 42:25; 45:19; Exod 4:25).
6. Personal names of Egyptian origin.
7. Stylistic, syntactic, and grammatical Egyptian peculiarities.[27]

National Diplomacy and Treaties

Another way the education of Moses may be observed is in his national diplomacy and the literary structure of treaties in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Immediately prior to Israel's entrance into Canaan, Moses addressed the nation one final time. His "swan song" speech (Deut 33) was actually a series of sermons

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[25]Ibid.
[26]Ibid., 94.
[27]Ibid., 99-100.

at their camp on the plains of Moab. These sermons were delivered orally, of course, but eventually they were recorded in writing. The text of his sermons, as well as the account of Moses' death, was put together to form the book Deuteronomy.

An analysis of the book demonstrates the interesting discovery that throughout the course of his sermons, Moses is actually presenting a covenant treaty to Israel. Now Moses' delivery of the treaty was under the divine supervision of Yahweh, but there is no doubt that this type of presentation (a treaty) was familiar to Moses and the people. As noted earlier, Moses' education in Egypt stressed literary communication. One particular type of legal record in the ancient near east was the vassal treaty. Biblical scholarship has determined that the book of Deuteronomy was presented by Moses in the form of a Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty.[28] The structure of the content of Moses' sermons is strikingly similar to the structure of suzerain-vassal treaties found in the Hittite royal archives in Turkey. These Hittite documents are dated back to the Late Bronze Age, the period contemporary with Moses. The basic outline of a vassal treaty contains five parts: the preamble, historical prologue, main provisions, curses and blessings, and arrangement for succession of the treaty. Note the outline of Deuteronomy according to the treaty structure.

1. Preamble (1:1-5)
2. Historical Prologue (1:6-4:49)
3. Main Provisions/Stipulations (5:1-26:19)

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[28]For further study on the vassal treaty genre of Deuteronomy, see Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966); Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963); George E. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (May 1954): 24-46, and "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (September 1954): 50-76.

4. Curses and Blessings (27:1-30:20)
5. Arrangement for Continuation (31:1-33:29)

The purpose for Moses' presentation of the covenant between Israel and Yahweh in the treaty format is self-evident: to provide the people with a formal agreement concerning their relationship with their God in a format that they could easily understand.

In conclusion, God can use a wide range of experiences and circumstances in preparing his people for service. In the life of Moses, the royal education he received in Egypt enabled him to confront Pharaoh, lead Israel, warn against polytheism, write the Pentateuch, and present the covenant to the Israelites in the form of a treaty. The evidence points strongly to the fact that the Lord designed Moses' early years in Egypt for a reason: to mold him as the deliverer of God's people, the children of Israel.