

# **Moses, Before He Was MOSES**

(Exodus 2:11-3:6, Etz Chaim page 323)

## **1. Legends of the Jews, Volume II, p. 279**

To supervise the Israelite slaves, an officer from among them was appointed over every 10 slaves, and an Egyptian taskmaster over every 10 officers. One of these Hebrew officers, Dathan by name, had a wife, Shelomith, daughter of Dibri of the tribe of Dan, who was of extraordinary beauty. Whenever the Egyptian taskmaster set over her husband came to their house on business, she would approach him pleasantly and enter into conversation with him. This beautiful Israelite woman kindled a mad passion in the Egyptian taskmaster's breast... One day he appeared at the break of dawn at the house of Dathan, roused him from his sleep, and ordered him to hurry his detachment of men to their work. The husband scarcely out of sight, he executed his plan, and dishonored the woman...

At the moment when the Egyptian was slipping out of Shelomith's chamber, Dathan returned home. Vexed that his crime had come to the knowledge of the husband, the taskmaster goaded Dathan on to work with excessive vigor, and dealt him blow after blow with the intention of killing him. Young Moses happened by...and Dathan hastened toward him, complaining of all the wrong and suffering the Egyptian was inflicting upon him. Full of wrath, Moses...cried out to the Egyptian, saying: "Is it not enough that you have dishonored this man's wife, do you aim to kill him, too?"...

Moses wanted to see if someone would step forward and...declare himself ready to avenge the outrage. He waited in vain. Then he determined to act himself. Naturally enough, he hesitated to take the life of a human being. He did not know whether the evil-doer might be brought to repentance and go on to lead a life of pious endeavor. He also considered that there might be someone among the descendants of the Egyptian for whose sake their wicked ancestor might rightfully claim clemency. The holy spirit allayed all Moses' doubts. He was made to see that there was not the slightest chance that any good would come from the taskmaster himself or from any of his offspring...

Neither physical strength nor a weapon was needed to carry out his purpose. He merely pronounced the Name of God, and the Egyptian was a corpse....To the bystanders, Moses said: "...I pray you to keep the knowledge of what happened a secret within yourselves. Let nothing be said concerning it."

## **2. (continued from above)**

The wish expressed by Moses was not honored...and those who betrayed it were Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Pallu, of the tribe of Reuben, notorious for their effrontery and

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contentiousness. The day after the thing with the Egyptian happened, the two brothers deliberately began to scuffle with each other, only in order to draw Moses into the quarrel and create an occasion for his betrayal. The plan succeeded admirably. Seeing Dathan raise his hand against Abiram to deal him a blow, Moses exclaimed, “You are a villain, to raise your hand against a fellow Israelite...” Dathan replied: “Young man, who has made appointed you a judge over us?... We know very well that you are the son of Yocheved, even though people call you the son of the princess Bithiah, and if you attempt to play the part of our master and judge, we will publicize what you did to the Egyptian. Or, maybe it is your intention to slay us as you slew him, by pronouncing the Name of God?”

### **3. Rashi on verses 16 and 17**

The “Kohen” of Midian – that is, their chief. But he had abandoned idolatry, and they (the Midianites) had excommunicated him....(The shepherds) could never have treated the daughters of such an important man this way if he had not been excommunicated.

### **4. Moses’ father-in-law Reuel, a.k.a Jethro, a.k.a Hovev**

Exodus 2:16-18 – Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters... When they returned to their father **Reuel**...and he gave Moses his daughter, Zipporah, as a wife... (J)

Exodus 3:1 – Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law **Jethro**, the Kohen of Midian, drove his flock into the wilderness...(E)

Exodus 4:18 – Moses went back to his father-in-law **Jether** and said to him, “let me go back to my kinsmen in Egypt and see how they are faring...” (E)

Exodus 18:1 – **Jethro**, Kohen of Midian, Moses’ father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people... (and 5 more as Jethro throughout chapter 18, all E)

Numbers 10:29 – Moses said to **Hovev son of Reuel the Midianite Moses’ father-in-law**, “we are setting out for the place of which the Lord has said, ‘I will give it to you.’ Come with us... (J)

Judges 4:11 – Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, the descendants of **Hovev, father-in-law of Moses**, and had pitched his tent at Elon... (D)

### **5a. Rashi, on Exodus 2:18**

Some think that Reuel was Jethro’s father, and “father” here means “ancestor”

### **5b. Nachmanides (Ramban) from JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot, The Commentators’ Bible (2005)**

...After Jethro converted to Judaism he was called Hovev, as we know from Judges 4:11, “Hovev, father-in-law of Moses.” For it is the way of converts to call themselves by a different name when they become Jews. His (Hovev/Jethro’s) *father’s* name was Reuel, as we know from Numbers 10:29, “Hovev son of Reuel the Midianite.” When it says in our own text “When

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they returned to their father Reuel,” it really means their *grandfather*. Similarly, Jacob (Genesis 32:10) says, “God of my father Abraham,” though Abraham was really his grandfather. There are many such occurrences in the Bible. In this particular case, the daughters are described as returning to their grandfather because their father was detained at the temple with his priestly duties.

### **5c. Torah, A Modern Commentary, Edited by Gunther Plaut, on Exodus 2:18**

...the original text may have actually read “*When they returned to their father Hovev, son of Reuel*”.

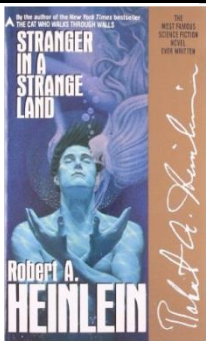
### **7a. The Torah, A Modern Commentary, Gunther Plaut, Ed., p.350**

Gershom – The biblical word play hides the real etymology: the name is derived from *garash*, to drive out. Egypt was home for Moses, and Midian was the “foreign land”...

### **76b. Exploring Exodus, Nahum Sarna, p. 37**

The text tells us that there among the Midianites, a son was born to Moses whom he called Gershom. Various levels of associative meaning blend in this name. Its true etymology is to be sought in the Hebrew stem *g-r-sh*, “to drive off/out,” a verb that is at once redolent of the incident with the shepherds who “drove away the girls” and that led to Moses finding a wife. By the folk etymology in the story, it also evokes Moses’ unhappy personal situation as a fugitive and a man without a country. Finally, the name presages divine promises of Israel’s redemption, for this verb is three times employed in Exodus in such contexts to express the breaking of the pharaoh’s obduracy. Thus in Exodus 6:1 God assures Moses that the Egyptian king would eventually “drive (*yegarshem*) them from his land,” and again in Exodus 11:1 He pledges that the arrogant monarch “will drive you out of here (*garesh yegaresh*) one and all.” When the Exodus finally occurs, the text confirms that the Israelites indeed had been “driven out (*garshu*) of Egypt.”

## **8. From Wikipedia and Mental Floss**



*Stranger in a Strange Land* is a 1961 science fiction novel by American author Robert A. Heinlein. It tells the story of Valentine Michael Smith, a human who comes to Earth in early adulthood after being born on the planet Mars and raised by Martians...

The novel takes its title from the scriptural verse Exodus 2:22 and Moses’s reflections on fleeing Egypt and producing a son with his wife Zipporah: “For he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land.” Before adopting the passage as the name of his book, Heinlein considered the decidedly less religious title *The Heretic*. The author also tinkered with working titles including *A Martian Named Smith* and *The Man from Mars*.

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### **9. Exodus 3:1-10**

And Moses had been shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, priest of Midian. And he drove the flock to the far side of the wilderness, and he came to the Mountain of God (*Elohim*), to Horeb.

And an angel of the Lord (*YHVH*) appeared to him in a fire's flame from inside a bush (*s'neh*). And he looked, and the bush was aflame, but the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, "Let me turn and see this great sight. Why isn't the bush consumed?"

And the Lord (*YHVH*) saw that he turned to see. And God (*Elohim*) called to him from inside the bush and He said, "Moses, Moses." And he said "I am here (*hineni*)"

And He said, "Don't come any closer. Take your shoes off from your feet, because the place that you are standing, it is holy ground. And He said, I am the God of (*Elohei*) your fathers, the God of (*Elohei*) Abraham, the God of (*Elohei*) Isaac, and the God of (*Elohei*) Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God (*Elohim*).



*Rubus Sanctus* at St. Catherine's monastery

### **10. Legends of the Jews, Louis Ginzberg, Volume 2, p. 303-304**

There were good reasons for selecting the thorn bush as the vessel for a Divine vision. It was "clean," for the heathen could not use it to make idols. God's choosing to dwell in the stunted thorn-bush conveyed the knowledge to Moses that he suffers along with Israel. Furthermore, Moses was taught that there is nothing in nature, not even the insignificant thornbush, that can exist without the presence of the *Shechinah*... The thorn-bush may be taken as the symbol for Israel in several respects. As the thornbush is the lowliest of all trees, so the condition of Israel in exile is the lowliest as compared with all the other nations, but as the thornbush releases no bird that alights upon it without lacerating its wings, so the nations that subjugate Israel will be punished. Also, as a garden hedge is made of the thornbush, so Israel forms the hedge for the world, the garden of God, for without Israel the world could not endure. Furthermore, as the thornbush bears thorns and roses alike, so Israel has pious and impious members, and as the

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thornbush requires ample water for its growth, so Israel can prosper only through the Torah, the celestial water. And the thornbush, the leaf of which consists of five leaflets, was to indicate to Moses that God had resolved to redeem Israel only for the sake of the merits of five pious men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron and Moses. The numbers represented by the letters composing the Hebrew word for thorn-bush, *s-n-h*, add up to one hundred and twenty<sup>8\*</sup>, to convey that Moses would reach the age of 120 years, and that the *Shechinah* would rest on Mount Horeb for 120 days. Finally, in order to give Moses an illustration on His modesty, God descended from the exalted heavens and spoke to him from a lowly thornbush instead of the summit of a lofty mountain or the top of a stately cedar tree.

(\*\*Actually, the *gematria*, or numerology, for the word “*s’neh*” (thornbush) actually comes to 115:

*samech* (60) + *nun* (50) + *hay* (5) = 115

But the word actually used in the text is “*ha-s’neh*” (*the* thornbush). Adding the value of the additional *hay* (5) would bring the total to 120. Maybe this is how the 120 was calculated. – WL)

### **11. Legends of the Jews, Louis Ginzberg, p. 305**

God said to Himself, “If I reveal Myself in loud tones, I shall alarm him, but if I reveal Myself in a subdued voice, he will hold prophecy in low esteem,” whereupon He addressed him in his father Amram’s voice. Moses was overjoyed to hear his father speak, for it gave him assurance that he was still alive. The voice called his name twice and he answered, “Here I am! What is my father’s wish?” God replied saying, “I am not thy father...I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” These words rejoiced Moses greatly, for not only was his father mentioned in the same breath as the three patriarchs, but he was mentioned before them...