

## **Moses And The Israelites Were Real People**

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:6).

The Hebrews, who later became the Israelites, stayed in Egypt for 430 years (Exodus 12:40) in the area called Goshen (Genesis 45:10; Exodus 9:26) before the Lord took them from Egypt back to Canaan. Although they were influenced by the Egyptian culture, what is amazing, is that after all those years they still spoke Hebrew and were still wholly Jewish. Very few, if any, had married Egyptians. It is believed that the Hebrews originated from Noah's son Shem, whose great-grandson was Eber, and from Eber sprang the Hebrews. At one time, the whole earth was of one language and accent (Genesis 11:1), and archaeology has shown this to be true, but because of sin, the Lord confused the language and scattered the population (Genesis 11:7 to 9). The descendants of Eber also scattered, and seven generations after the languages were confused, Abraham was born and he spoke and wrote in Hebrew, as has been proven by archaeology. Joseph was second in command in Egypt then 400 years later, Moses was raised in Pharaoh's palace as the adopted son of the princess. Moses, who grew up in the Egyptian court, was educated in the Egyptian culture (Acts 7:22), but he also spoke, read and wrote in Hebrew. We know that because Moses wrote down what the Lord told him to record (Exodus 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Numbers 33:2) and the Bible was written in Hebrew. During the 430 years, the Israelites went from being the family of the Governor (Joseph) and served by Egyptians, to lowly slaves of the Egyptians.

The Bible tells us how the Israelites came to be slaves. A Pharaoh who did not know Joseph or his family, became alarmed at the number of Hebrews living all over Egypt. 'The descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, and the land was full of them'. They outnumbered the Egyptians and out of fear, Pharaoh wanted to reduce their numbers and tried to make the midwives kill all the male babies, but of course that didn't happen. Then he decreed that all male Hebrew babies should be drowned (Exodus 1:7 to 22).

During their time as slaves, the Israelites helped build the cities of Pithom and Rameses with mud bricks. The bricks that were used to make buildings in ancient Egypt, are still made in the exact same way today. Although the Israelites were slaves, they enjoyed good food. We know that because when they were out in the desert, they complained about not having the good food they had freely enjoyed in Egypt (Numbers 11:5). They had homes made from mud bricks and the ruins of some of those homes are still there today. The houses had covered porches, one bedroom for the children and another bedroom for the parents. They had a kitchen and to one side was a living and eating area. These houses also had a bathroom, and a toilet was in one corner of the bathroom.

During the Israelites' enslavement, an exceptionally beautiful baby boy was born to Amram and Jochebed (Exodus 2:2; Acts 7:20; Hebrews 11:23). Jochebed was Amram's aunt and his wife (Exodus 6:20). There is no record of Moses ever having a Hebrew name, although the Jews call him Moshe. When he was three months old, his mother Jochebed, couldn't hide him from the Egyptians any longer. She was desperate to save her newborn baby, so she wove a basket of bulrushes and made it watertight by covering it with bitumen; she placed Moses in the basket and put it by the brink of the Nile river, where she must have known the Pharaoh's daughter would go to bathe (Exodus 2:3). Amram and Jochebed were not afraid of the king's decree, that all Hebrew baby boys should be drowned (Exodus 1:22; Hebrews 11:23). Moses' older sister Miriam, hid and waited and watched over her baby brother (Exodus 2:4). When Pharaoh's daughter, Princess Hatshepsut, came down to bathe, she saw the little basket and told her maid to fetch it. This is an important note: that unnamed maid saved the life of the greatest prophet and servant of God this earth has ever had. When the princess opened the basket, the baby cried. The princess took pity on Moses when she realised he was a Hebrew child, who was, by order of her Pharaoh father, to be drowned or exposed to the elements until he died. Miriam, who had been watching all this time, offered to call a Hebrew nurse to look after Moses. When the princess said, "Go" Miriam called her mother who had been waiting. The princess then told Jochebed to nurse (her own) baby and she would be paid. For three years, Jochebed was paid to take care of her own son, whom the princess named Moses, which means 'saved from water'. When Moses was weaned, he was handed over to the princess who adopted him and raised him as her own son (Exodus 2:5 to 10; Acts 7:21). Moses' Egyptian name was Senmut. A statue of Senmut/Moses as a very handsome young man with a fair complexion is in the Cairo museum. The Bible describes Moses as being exceedingly handsome (Acts 7:20).

Apart from Miriam, who would have been about 12 years older than Moses, Moses also had a brother Aaron, who was 3 years old when Moses was born. When Moses and Aaron first spoke to Pharaoh, they were elderly men aged 80 and 83 (Exodus 7:7). It is often supposed Miriam was only about 7 years old when Moses was born, but we can estimate Miriam's age by her actions when Moses was in the basket at age three months. Her actions were not that of a young child, but rather, the wisdom, patience, courage and outgoing character shown by Miriam in that frightening situation was that of a girl much older. Remember, this young lady went forward, all alone to speak to the tyrant's own daughter! It was the father of the princess herself, who had ordered the babies be drowned. Miriam was certainly aware she putting herself at risk, because initially she stood a distance away, and had it all gone wrong, both Miriam and Moses could have been killed, and possibly the family too. Logically then, Miriam's courageous actions were not that of a young child, but those of an intelligent young adult, who did all she could to save her baby brother. No more is said about Moses' childhood. The next we read of him, he is an adult.

Although he was raised as an Egyptian prince, Moses, as an adult aged 40, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter because he chose to share the hardships of the people of God, rather than the fleeting enjoyment of the sinful Egyptian life (Hebrews 11:23 to 25). One day Moses went out to see the dreadful burdens being placed on the Hebrews, and he became angry when he saw a Hebrew being beaten by an Egyptian. Moses looked around, and seeing no one, killed the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand. He thought nobody saw him, but the very next day Moses realised his deed was known, when he caught two Hebrews arguing and said to the aggressor, "Why are you striking your brother?" And the man said, "Who made you judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses believed his kinsmen would understand he was defending them and granting them deliverance, but they did not understand. Pharaoh sought to have Moses killed but he fled to Midian (Exodus 2:11 to 15; Acts 7:23 to 29) which is where modern day north east Saudi Arabia is, just south of Jordan. Moses seemed to be a gentleman, because when he arrived in Midian, he sat down at a well to rest when seven girls arrived at the well to water their flock of sheep. Shepherds came to drive the girls away, but Moses stood up to the shepherds, drew water from the well and helped the girls water all of their sheep. When the girls got home they told their father Jethro, who sent for Moses to show his appreciation. After that, Moses was content to live with Jethro, who gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as his wife. Zipporah gave birth to two sons, whom Moses named Gershom and Eliezer (Exodus 2:16 to 22; 18:3 & 4). Jethro was a righteous man and a descendant of Abraham. After Sarah died, Abraham married a woman named Keturah and one of Keturah's six sons was named Midian. Before Abraham died he sent all his children away from Isaac and Canaan to the 'East country', and that was where Jethro was living many years later (Genesis 25:1, 2 & 6).

Moses became the shepherd for Jethro's sheep (Exodus 3:1) and was there for 40 years. We can work that out because Moses was 40 when he went to Midian after fleeing the Egyptians and he was 80 when he first spoke to Pharaoh (Acts 7:30). Moses had a close and loving friendship with his father-in-law Jethro, as we can read in several verses (Exodus 2:21; 3:1; 4:18; 18:1 to 27). There is no scripture that says Moses was lonely or unhappy while he was in Midian. On the contrary, Moses was content to live with Jethro, although Moses' life would have changed dramatically from living the life of a prince to suddenly shepherding sheep in a desert. His marriage to Zipporah did not seem to be quite so happy though. Moses took her and his boys back to Egypt (Exodus 4:20), then Zipporah twice accused Moses of being a 'husband of blood' (Exodus 4:25 & 26), which is the equivalent of swearing at him. Moses sent Zipporah back to Midian to live with her father, then Jethro had to bring her back to Moses. Moses greeted his father-in-law warmly but it seems he ignored his wife and sons (Exodus 18:2 to 5). Although it seems that Zipporah and the boys stayed with Moses while Jethro returned to Midian alone (Exodus 18:27), it was the last we heard of Zipporah, Gershom or Eliezer until the boys were named as part of the tribe of Levi, long after their deaths. They married and had many children, grandchildren and descendants who served under King David (1 Chronicles 23:14 to 25). We know Zipporah must have died at some time because Moses remarried. His second wife was a Cushite – an Ethiopian (Numbers 12:1). Moses had a brother-in-law (the brother of Zipporah) named Hobab who was a Kenite (Numbers 10:29; Judges 1:16; 4:11). Moses and Aaron had an Uncle Uzziel and two cousins, Mishael and Elzaphan (Leviticus 10:4). This is not just a bunch of names found from history, this was a real family. Moses and Zipporah were a real husband and wife who argued over their son and separated for a while, until Jethro brought them back together.

Moses' contented life in Midian ended abruptly, when one day quite unexpectedly, the Lord revealed Himself to Moses and told him to deliver the Hebrews out of Egypt and take them back to Canaan (Exodus 3:2 to 10). Many people have tried to find the genus of the 'Burning Bush' and why it burned without being consumed, but supernatural events cannot be explained in the natural. The burning bush was a supernatural event to get Moses' attention (Exodus 3:2 to 4; Acts 7:30 to 32). We can imagine the surprise Moses felt

when he heard God's voice coming from within the bush! Moses was the obvious choice to liberate the Israelites, because he had grown up in the Egyptian court and would know all the protocols of the palace. He really did not want to do the huge task given to him by the Lord, and argued with God several times (Exodus 3:11 & 13; 4:1, 10 & 13; 5:22; 6:30). Moses said, "Lord, Behold, I am of impeded speech." But the opposite was true. 'Moses was mighty in his speech' (Acts 7:22). The Lord simply would not allow Moses to wriggle out of his task and finally with Aaron's help, did what God had told him (Exodus 7:6). Later, Moses said the burden was too heavy for him and he was not able to do it. In fact he felt so burdened by this task, he told God to kill him at once (Numbers 11:14 & 15).

Before any of the plagues occurred in Egypt, mercifully, Amram (and probably Jochebed too) died aged 137 (Exodus 6:20). Moses spoke to Pharaoh and told him to let the Israelites go, but Pharaoh ignored Moses and increased their suffering. The Lord turned the hearts of the Egyptians against the Israelites, so the Egyptians would hate the Israelites and force them into slavery (Psalm 105:25), then He hardened Pharaoh's heart so he would not let the Israelites go (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20 & 27), because He wanted the Israelites to strip the Egyptians of their wealth (Exodus 3:21 & 22; 11:2 & 3; Psalm 105:37). Other scriptures say Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Either way, Pharaoh's hardness of heart brought down God's judgement of ten plagues onto the Egyptian people, their servants and their animals, which would have wrought dreadful suffering all over Egypt and most sadly, innocent children suffered too.

The ten plagues sent by God were in judgement (Exodus 7:4) for not recognising the Lord for Who He is. Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). Pharaoh exalted himself (Exodus 9:17). Later, Pharaoh recognised his sin and repented (Exodus 9:27; 10:16 & 17), but it was too late. First there was the plague of blood that was in the river Nile and every stream, river, pool and every water container all over Egypt. The fish died and the river stank (Exodus 7:19 to 22).

The second plague was frogs that went into the bedrooms, onto the beds, on the people, into the ovens, in their food and covered the land. There were so many frogs, they were gathered into heaps and stank (Exodus 8:3 to 14).

The third plague was biting insects like lice, mosquitoes or gnats all over Egypt that covered man and beast (Exodus 8:16 & 17).

The fourth plague were swarms of flies that invaded and corrupted the whole land of Egypt, but in Goshen where the Israelites lived, there were no flies (Exodus 8:21 to 24).

During the fifth plague, livestock belonging to the Egyptians died, but none of the Israelite's animals died (Exodus 9:3 to 7).

Boils and sores broke out over the Egyptians and the remaining animals in the sixth plague (Exodus 9:9 to 11).

In the seventh plague the Lord sent thunder, lightning, rain and hail so heavy that any man and beast that were in the fields died. Such a storm had never happened in Egypt before that time, but Pharaoh still did not fear, or have respect for the Lord. The fierce storm had destroyed the food crops that were meant to feed the Egyptians but there was no hail in Goshen where the Israelites were, so the Israelite's crops were not destroyed (Exodus 9:18 to 35).

Locusts were the eighth plague. What the hail didn't destroy, the locusts ate. There remained nothing for the Egyptians to eat and the locusts were everywhere. The ground was darkened by them (Exodus 10:12 to 19). What was ironic about the plagues, was when Joseph was in Egypt the Lord blessed Egypt so much they were the only nation in that area with plenty of food and were able to feed the surrounding countries during the time of drought. That was why the Israelites went to Egypt in the first place. The Egyptians started with plenty and 430 years later, ended up with nothing.

The ninth plague was an oppressive darkness that covered the land of Egypt for three days, but the Israelites had natural light (Exodus 10:21 to 23).

After the ninth plague, the Lord called for the Passover to be held on the tenth day of the first month (Exodus 12:2 & 3), which is still observed by the Israeli's today. The Biblical New Year's Day is around the end of September in our Gregorian calendar. Jesus our Messiah observed the Passover feasts every year when He was on earth as we can read in all four Gospels. The Passover is explained in detail in Exodus 12:2 to 30, and Jews all over the world still keep this time aside as they have done for thousands of generations (Exodus 12:42). Passover is a holy time for the Jewish people. They rid their homes of anything that may contain yeast or leaven, which is symbolic of sin. The Lord said if the Israelites obeyed His command and put the lamb's blood on the door of their homes, He would 'pass over' the house and not kill the firstborn in those houses.

The tenth and final plague happened when the Lord slew every firstborn in the land of Egypt; from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of prisoners and the firstborn of the remaining livestock. A great cry went up in Egypt because there was not one house where there was not one dead (Exodus 11:5 & 6; 12:30). Suddenly Pharaoh had had enough and forced the Israelites out of Egypt along with their flocks, herds, food, clothing, the Egyptian's gold, silver and precious stones, stripping the Egyptians of everything they owned (Exodus 12:31 to 36). That was divine payment for years of slavery. The ten plagues cannot be explained naturally, as much as people try to. They were supernatural plagues, brought about by a supernaturally powerful God and Creator, for judgement on an idolatrous nation, and through those plagues, God showed that He owns the earth and everything on it (Exodus 9:29), and is able to do exactly what He pleases with His creation (Psalm 115:3).

This is something to think about. Those plagues were divine judgement for sin. Although we do not usually experience extreme plagues like those in Exodus, there is still a penalty for sin that brings judgement. For example, like in the first plague, we sometimes experience massive fish-kills, making the water putrid with dead fish. The fish are poisonous and the water is toxic. Like the second plague, we can experience mice, rabbits or toads in plague proportions. That affects food production. Swarms of insects and locusts are commonplace, and we all know the damage they can do. People can be bitten by poisonous animals, spiders or insects that can cause death. We have experienced disease epidemics worldwide, like influenza, polio or AIDS. There have been outbreaks of animal diseases such as Foot and Mouth and other devastating diseases that affect our food production. Bushfires, earthquakes, major storms like cyclones, tornados and hurricanes, sometimes with lightning and heavy hail happen all over the earth. We also experience eclipses and volcanic ash clouds that cover the sun, making the earth very dark. Are these modern-day 'plagues' judgement for our sins?

During the Exodus, there were about 600,000 men on foot, plus women and children; all Israelites (Exodus 12:37). Assuming each adult man had a wife, if we add the 600,000 men with one wife each, that adds up to 1,200,000 adults. Most families had several children because the scriptures tell us that the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied (Exodus 1:7 & 20) but even if each couple had only two children, that would have added up to 2,400,000 people leaving Egypt. But we know that the Israelites had several children, making the actual number of Israelites fleeing Egypt more than 3,000,000. If we look carefully at the next verse (Exodus 12:38), we see that a mixed multitude went with them. Those people were the Egyptians who believed in God and fled with the Israelites, and possibly the descendants of the original Canaanite servants that went to Egypt with Jacob and his sons 430 years earlier. A multitude is not just a few people. A multitude could easily be in the thousands, so logically, the number of people leaving Egypt at that one time, would possibly have been a few million. That number of 600,000 men is very conservative if we look at the bigger picture. Somehow, in the rush to escape, Moses remembered to take Joseph's bones with him out of Egypt to be buried in Canaan (Exodus 13:19). It seems that all of Jacob's other sons were buried in Egypt. The Israelites experienced their liberation as an act of God. It was a supernatural liberation and the Israelites, although excited about being freed from slavery, must have been afraid. They were leaving the most civilised place in the known world, to go to the barren unknown, based on God Whom they had never seen. All they saw were the terrifying plagues, but that was enough to convince them to obey Moses (Exodus 12:35).

Once Pharaoh realised the Israelites had gone, he became very angry (Exodus 14:5), changed his mind and set off after the Israelites, but the Lord would not allow Pharaoh to catch up to them. He put a cloud between them so it was darkness for the Egyptians, but light for the Israelites (Exodus 14:20). The Lord divided the Red Sea creating a wall of water on the left and the right so the Israelites could cross over on dry land (Exodus 14:21, 22 & 29). The Egyptians tried to follow but the Lord bound their chariot wheels so they became bogged in mud (Exodus 14:25). Once all the Israelites had crossed to the other side, the Lord made the waters return to the normal flow, drowning all of the pursuing Egyptians (Exodus 14:26 to 28). God had shown His mastery over nature and humanity. The dividing of the normal flow of the Red Sea, and then the return of the normal flow was a supernatural event, and cannot be explained as a normal occurrence.

When Moses was tending Jethro's sheep, he led the sheep a very long way away from Midian, all the way to the Sinai Desert where Mount Horeb is, known as the Mountain of God (Exodus 3:1). When the Lord first approached Moses, He told him that when he had brought the people out of Egypt, they would return to that place and serve God on that mountain (Exodus 3:12). Moses would have walked all the way back to Midian to return the flock and speak to Jethro (Exodus 4:18). The Sinai Desert is a seemingly inhospitable landscape yet many people call that desert area home.

During the time of the Exodus, the Lord provided a cloud to cover the Israelites from the heat of the sun during the day and to hide them from their enemies, and the Lord gave them a pillar of fire at night to warm them in the desert's freezing nights. For forty years the Israelites wandered through the desert. During that time, the covering cloud never left them (Exodus 13:21 & 22; Psalm 78:14). The heavenly manna provided by God (Exodus 16:13 to 36) did not cease until they were able to find food for themselves (Joshua 5:12). The manna was not food we can find on earth; it was supernaturally created angel's food (Psalm 78:25). The Israelite's clothing and shoes did not wear out for forty years, all the time they were in the desert (Deuteronomy 29:5), and the Lord provided water everywhere they went (Exodus 15:25; 15:27; 17:6; Numbers 20:11). A Rock supernaturally followed the Israelites everywhere they went, providing them with fresh water. That Rock was Jesus Himself (1 Corinthians 10:4).

The Israelites took forty years to travel eleven days journey from Egypt to Canaan's border (Deuteronomy 1:2). There were two reasons for the length of time it took and vast distance they Israelites travelled. (1) It took forty years (two generations) to rid the Israelites of the idolatry they had been accustomed to in Egypt. (2) The distance they were forced to travel was to prevent them from returning to Egypt and going back into slavery. 'When Pharaoh let the people go, God led them not by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer, for God said, "Lest the people change their purpose when they see war and return to Egypt." But God led the people around by way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea' (Exodus 13:17 & 18). Moses and the Israelites were real people; they walked through a real desert where there are still real wells, real palm trees and real oases. Up until they left Egypt, the Hebrews had been living in heavily populated areas, starting at Mesopotamia, then Ur of the Chaldees, then Canaan and then Egypt, but suddenly the Israelites found themselves all alone without idol worshipping neighbours, and being cared for by the One True God, encouraging them to begin a culture all of their own, unique only to the Jewish people; a culture that has endured till this present day. They had lived so long with idolatry in Egypt, it took many years for them to learn not to worship anything but God. Once in the desert, they were given the commandments and principles that were the basis for Judaism, and later, Christianity. The vast emptiness of the Sinai Desert is mostly unchanged since the time of the Exodus. We can still walk through the same place, feel the same sand, see the same things, taste the same honey, and hear the same sounds and birds that the Israelites would have felt, touched, tasted, seen and heard. It is a real place. It is also very harsh. The Israelites were used to a civilised lifestyle and would have found the harshness and extremes of temperature in the desert unbearable. Indeed, they cried because of their hardships (Numbers 11:1 & 2).

In the desert, food, water and shelter become primary concerns. The biggest problem in the Sinai Desert is not heat, but the cold. By sheltering from the sun during the day, one can escape the extreme heat, but it is hard to escape the extreme cold at night, especially during the winter when the only available shelters are tents. Just like the nomads still use today, all the Israelites had for shelter, were tents. That is why God provided the cloud and the fire. It is a very isolated feeling, being alone in the desert and the Israelites felt that too. Moses told them God sent them into the wilderness to humble them and learn what was in their hearts (Deuteronomy 8:2). In the western world, many people feel that independence is of great value, but nobody can be independent in the desert. People depend heavily on each other, so they really have to get along. In Egypt, the Israelites had everything they needed to survive, but in the desert, they had to depend on God for everything. The Israelites slowly grew closer and closer to God. At first they turned to Moses, but eventually, they learned to turn to God Himself. The desert strips away all non-essentials of life, until one has no choice but to look to God, which is exactly what the Israelites eventually did.

The route through the mountains in the Sinai Desert has plenty of caves, water and shelter. Because of the mountains, there is rainfall and therefore grass for the livestock. The Israelites camped by a place called Elim, which had 12 springs and 70 palm trees (Exodus 15:27). That oasis is still there and is now named the Spring of Moses. The springs from where the Israelites drank are still there and are still producing fresh sweet water. The Israelites made their way from oasis to oasis, most of which are still there. Three months after the Israelites left Egypt, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai and they camped at the base of the mountain (Exodus 19:1 & 2).

The two or three million Israelites plus the multitude that went with them out of Egypt, could not have lived in such a barren landscape, and could only have survived by being sustained by God. There are twenty-two mountains in that region and any one of them could have been the mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments. The Bible does not give the exact location of the exact mountain and it remains a mystery and a subject of conjecture. God instructed Moses to climb up alone which must have been more than a little frightening, and very exhausting. If we climb any mountain range today, we need to be rugged up warmly; we need to wear proper hiking boots and take plenty of food and water. Moses climbed the mountain in a

robe and sandals and had no food or water. He fasted for forty days, went down the mountain, and forty days later climbed back up and fasted for another forty days. How many of us would have survived that at 80 years of age? When God came down to the mountain to meet Moses, whatever mountain it was, is not as important as the fact that God, the God of the whole universe, came down to earth to meet with mankind. For many of the Israelites, mountains would have been unknown because most of them had lived in the flat delta of Goshen.

The Israelites' acceptance of the covenant marked their birth as a nation, as a separate people, both spiritual and actual, and they knew it. 'For what shall it be known that Your people have found favour in Your sight? Is it not in Your going with us so that we are distinguished from all other people upon the face of the earth?' (Exodus 33:16). Once they reached the Promised Land, they became a geographical nation as well, and Jews have lived in Israel continuously ever since. The Israelites lived within a strict moral framework. From the time they were given the Ten Commandments and accepted the covenant, they stayed put for a year before travelling slowly towards their Promised Land. One huge stone along the way is called the "Written Stone" where the actual Israelites carved messages into the stone. These etchings can be seen today. That proves the Israelites, the very first Hebrews, were there at that exact location, proving again, the truth of the Bible. Finally, after forty years of being nomads, the Israelites returned to the land where Abraham had once lived; the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. It took two generations for Israel to purge their idolatrous past and become a nation for God.

Survival in the harsh desert depends on being able to sense the constant changes in the desert environment, and flowing with it. The people who live in the deserts still live in very large tents, still ration water, still cover up to protect themselves from the harsh sun by day and the freezing cold nights. Each tent can have separate rooms and can comfortably fit up to 12 people. The nomadic tribes who still live in the desert, can pack up and move to new pastures in a very short time, just like the Israelites often had to do. Could these current nomads be the descendants of some of the non-Israelite 'multitude' that went with them out of Egypt? These people still talk about the Exodus as though they themselves had experienced it. The desert gives one a different perspective on life and can draw us closer to God if we let it. For the Israelites, living in the wilderness meant they had to have absolute trust and faith that God would take care of them. New research has found evidence that the Israelites travelled to Petra, where Jordan is now. The steep terrain offers natural protection. There is a place in Petra called the Valley of Moses.

Of the three children of Amram and Jochebed, Miriam died first in the Wilderness of Zin in Kadesh (Numbers 20:1). Kadesh was a city on the edge of Edom (Numbers 20:16) where modern day Jordan is now. If we work out the years, Miriam would have been about 132 years old when she died. Aaron died just a short time later aged 123 on Mount Hor (Numbers 20:22 to 28; 33:39), which was also on the border of the land of Edom but south of Kadesh. Less than a year later, Moses made Joshua the son of Nun his successor, then Moses died on Mount Nebo and was buried by God in a secret location in a valley in the land of Moab (Deuteronomy 34:7). The Lord kept Moses' burial site a secret because He knew the Israelites would have stayed and worshipped at Moses' grave instead of going into the Promised Land. We know Miriam, Aaron and Moses all died within a year of each other, because we know Aaron died at the age of 123, and we know that Moses died at the age of 120, and they were 3 years apart in age, and they died in the fortieth year after leaving Egypt (Numbers 33:38 & 39). The Dead Sea sits in between Mount Nebo and Jerusalem. Mount Nebo, where Moses died, was then in the land of Moab which is now Jordan and it is still called Mount Nebo after all these thousands of years. Moses and the Israelites were indeed, real people.

The Promised Land is not the true destination of the Bible; the true destination is coming face to face with the living God and living a life worthy to be called a child of God. That is what we should be looking for. We should not be looking for an earthly home, but a heavenly one. We can 'walk' through the truth of the Bible, not through archaeology but when we 'walk' spiritually, that is where we will find the inner peace that surpasses all human understanding (Philippians 4:7). The values in the Bible are universal and belong to everyone who takes the time to listen and obey. The way to see that the Bible is alive, is to 'walk' through it by putting ourselves, using our imagination, into the footsteps of those who went before us. Try to feel what they felt; the love, the fears, the sadness, the joys, the cool mountain air, the hot desert summers, the normal everyday human life. They were real people, with normal human problems. We can reach the destination that the first five books of the Bible intend for us to reach; a spiritual Promised Land; a spiritual Mount Zion. To do that, we need to be born-again the Biblical way as Jesus told us to (John 3:2 to 7), and walk side by side with our Creator as He holds our right hand (Isaiah 41:13).

Amen and God bless you.

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