



CLOUD OF WITNESSES

MOSES

Called and Equipped

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*A ministry of the Diocese of Little Rock
in partnership with Liturgical Press*

Nihil obstat: Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., *Censor Librorum*.

Imprimatur: † Anthony B. Taylor, Bishop of Little Rock, July 21, 2016.

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ISBN: 978-0-8146-3699-2 (print); 978-0-8146-4673-1 (ebook)

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Introduction

Alive in the Word brings you resources to deepen your understanding of Scripture, offer meaning for your life today, and help you to pray and act in response to God's word.

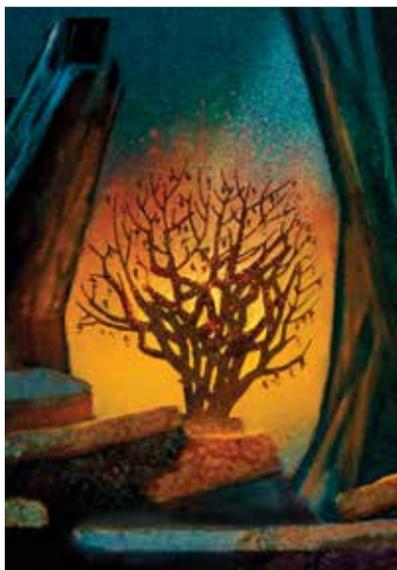
Use any volume of **Alive in the Word** in the way best suited to you.

- **For individual learning and reflection**, consider this an invitation to prayerfully journal in response to the questions you find along the way. And be prepared to move from head to heart and then to action.
- **For group learning and reflection**, arrange for three sessions where you will use the material provided as the basis for faith sharing and prayer. You may ask group members to read each chapter in advance and come prepared with questions answered. In this kind of session, plan to be together for about an hour. Or, if your group prefers, read and respond to the questions together without advance preparation. With this approach, it's helpful to plan on spending more time for each group session in order to adequately work through each chapter.

- **For a parish-wide event** or use within a larger group, provide each person with a copy of this volume, and allow time during the event for quiet reading, group discussion, and prayer, and then a final commitment by each person to some simple action in response to what he or she learned.

This volume exploring the life of Moses is one of several volumes dedicated to the **Cloud of Witnesses** theme. The pages of our Bibles are filled with the stories of women and men who have played a unique role in salvation history. By entering into a few key biblical passages written by or describing these people, we begin to see how our own story continues God's great work of salvation in the world. Their witness, handed on to us from centuries ago, continues to speak to us and challenge us to stand as faithful witnesses in today's world.

The Burning Bush



Begin by asking God to assist you in your prayer and study. Then slowly read through Exodus 2:23b–3:6, which describes Moses and his burning bush experience. The fact that this is a familiar scene alerts us to the need to hear it in a fresh way.

Exodus 2:23b–3:6

^{2:23}The Israelites groaned under their bondage and cried out, and from their bondage their cry for help went up to God. ²⁴God heard their moaning and God was mindful of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ²⁵God saw the Israelites, and God knew. . . .

^{3:1}Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock beyond the wilderness, he came to the mountain of God, Horeb. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him as fire flaming out of a bush. When he looked, although the bush was on fire, it was not being consumed. ³So Moses decided, “I must turn aside to look at this remarkable sight. Why does the bush not burn up?” ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called out to him from the bush: Moses! Moses!

He answered, “Here I am.” ⁵God said: Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ⁶I am the God of your father, he continued, 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.

After a few moments of quiet reflection on Exodus 2:23b–3:6, consider the following background information in “Setting the Scene.”

Setting the Scene

How did it come to be that Israel was in bondage? The final chapters of Genesis tell of Jacob and his children and grandchildren who traveled from the land of Canaan to Egypt in order to escape famine. Their large families settled there, remained there over generations, and multiplied. These descendants are sometimes referred to as Hebrews and sometimes as Israelites, since they are descendants of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel after encountering God (Gen 32:23-31).

In time, in a story that unfolds in the first two chapters of Exodus, Egypt’s pharaoh (also referred to as a king) became convinced that the growth of the Israelites would threaten the stability of Egypt, and so he issued a mandate to impose hard labor, which soon became slavery. Rather than diminish the size of these descendant tribal families, their growth continued, so much so that Pharaoh decreed the slaughter of the male children of the Hebrew slaves. Moses,

Pharaoh's daughter is an unexpected deliverer in this scene. When has an apparent outsider come to the rescue of someone you love? Or when has an outsider provided the needed solution in a situation?

however, the child of slaves, escaped this fate when the midwives spared his life and his mother wisely hid him among the reeds of the Nile River, where he was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in her household.

It was Pharaoh's daughter who named the child *Moses*, an Egyptian name akin to the Hebrew word that means "I drew him out" of the water, perhaps a foreshadowing of what would come for all of God's people. It was God who would provide a way through the waters when the Hebrews were later escaping Egypt (Exod 14:15-22), and in the New Testament it is God who will invite his people to enter the waters of baptism to be drawn out into new life. This singular story of Pharaoh's daughter offering "salvation" to a helpless child provides an opening act to the great drama of God's full gift of salvation in the offering of his Son, who was anything but helpless.

One final note will set the scene. By the end of the second chapter of Exodus we encounter a fully adult Moses who is tending sheep for his father-in-law. The action has shifted away from the Nile Delta of Egypt and into the wilderness of the region known as Midian, perhaps at this ancient time to be found in the Sinai Peninsula. (See the map on page 42.) Moses had struck and killed an Egyptian taskmaster for abusing one of the Hebrew slaves (Exod 2:11-15), so he fled to avoid capital punishment, settled in the region of Midian, and assumed what he surely hoped would be a very ordinary life.

Understanding the Scene Itself

The entire passage from Exodus will be considered a few verses at a time. The occasional questions in the margin (as above) are for discussion with others. If you are using these materials on your own, use the questions for personal reflection or as a guide to journaling.

2:23The Israelites groaned under their bondage and cried out, and from their bondage their cry for help went up to God. **24**God heard their moaning and God was mindful of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **25**God saw the Israelites, and God knew. . . .

At the start of the book of Exodus, we are told that the slaves led a “bitter” life and were forced to build the garrison cities of Pithom and Raamses by mortar and brick and all kinds of field work (1:11-14). Their bondage could not prevent them from groaning and crying out, which became the opening for God to begin to act. Their groans articulated their need and opened the way for divine intervention. Divine action begins with mindfulness and involves hearing, seeing, and knowing.

What does it mean to say that God was mindful of his covenant? Did God need a reminder? Had God temporarily forgotten the covenant bond with Abraham

