

BIOGRAPHY FROM
ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS
LEGENDS, FOLKLORE, AND STORIES OF ANCIENT WORLDS

The Life and Times of

MOSES



Jim Whiting



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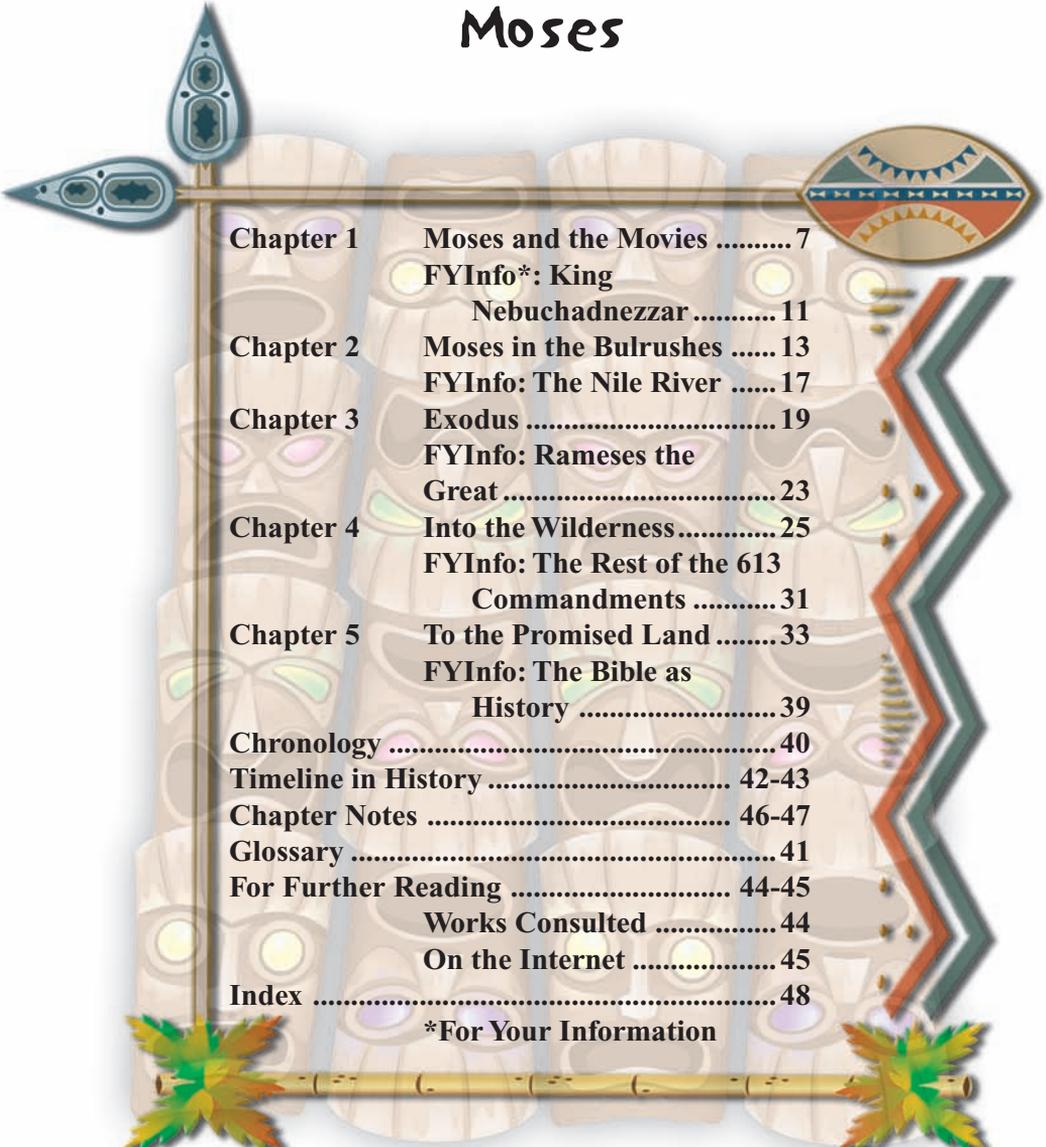
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***For Your Information**

CHAPTER
ONE

MOSES AND THE MOVIES

It is one of the most famous scenes in movie history. At the beginning of the 1981 movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, explorer Indiana Jones has just penetrated deep within a mysterious cave. He has dodged several booby traps that have claimed the lives of less experienced men. Gingerly, he lifts a small statue from the pedestal on which it rests. Suddenly he hears an ominous rumbling. To his horror, a huge round boulder begins rolling toward him. He turns and begins running frantically down the passage. The boulder is faster. It grows steadily closer and closer. Ahead of him, the door at the entrance to the cave begins to descend. Diving desperately, Indy rolls under the door—a split second later, he would have been crushed.

The “lost ark” of the title was one of the holiest items in the Jewish religion. Built more than 3,000 years ago and plated with pure gold, the Ark of the Covenant held the Jews’ most sacred object: the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. According to the Bible, they were given directly by God to their leader Moses at the top of Mount Sinai.

For the Jews, the Ark was imbued with God’s power. It led them through the desert, destroying snakes, scorpions, and other dangers. It caused the walls of Jericho to fall down. When the Ark was captured by

the Philistines, one of their rival groups, it brought down so many plagues and other calamities that it was quickly returned.

For those looking for a more scientific answer to the Ark's powers, there are hints that the Ark may have been history's first electrical harness. "The accounts given of peoples' sudden deaths from touching the Ark are consistent with death by a high voltage, lethal electrical charge," comments David Shyovitz, who writes for the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. "Such a charge could have resulted from the constant exposure of the box to static electricity, which builds up quickly in a hot, dry climate like the Middle East. The materials that the Ark was made of further support this theory: gold is one of the most powerful electrical conductors, and wood is an excellent insulator."¹

For several centuries, the Ark lay in the innermost sanctuary of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. When the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar captured the city in 586 B.C. and carried the Jews into captivity, the Ark disappeared. Its whereabouts remain a mystery to this day.

The plot of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* revolves around the belief that the Ark contains almost unimaginable power. In the movie, German dictator Adolf Hitler wants to locate the Ark and use that power for his own evil ends. (In real life, there is no evidence that Hitler felt this way, although he did commit other horrible crimes against the Jewish people. During World War II, more than 6 million Jews were murdered at his orders.) Despite Indy's best efforts, a group of Hitler's followers capture the Ark. When they open it, its power is unleashed, and all of them are destroyed.

While Moses is not a character in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, he has been portrayed in several other major Hollywood movies. Famed director Cecil B. De Mille ended his illustrious career with the 1956 film *The Ten Commandments*. It was an audience favorite. Starring Charlton Heston as Moses and Yul Brynner as Rameses the Great—the Egyptian pharaoh, or king, who was his rival—the film depicts the life of Moses from his infancy through his leading the Jewish people out of Egyptian captivity and receiving the Ten Commandments. The image of Moses that this movie presented became very influential. "I want to see Moses," one

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an eloquent voice for equal rights for all people. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. He often echoed Moses' cry to the Pharaoh, "Let my people go!"



delegate to the 1996 Republican National Convention told a newspaper reporter to explain why she was attending a cocktail party featuring Heston.”²

In 1998, DreamWorks Studios—the same studio that produced such films as *Shrek*, *Shrek II*, and *Antz*—told the story of Moses in the animated feature *The Prince of Egypt*. Moses and Rameses are shown as being about the same age. The two of them grow up as fast friends—even racing their chariots against each other—before events split them apart. The all-star cast features Val Kilmer as Moses and Ralph Fiennes as Rameses, and also includes Patrick Stewart, Sandra Bullock, Steve Martin, Michelle Pfeiffer, Martin Short, and Danny Glover. Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston sing “The Prince of Egypt (When You Believe),” which won an Academy Award for Best Song.

Moses also has a strong influence today in the real world. Several times in the Bible, God orders Moses to tell the pharaoh, “Let my people go!” Famed civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. During a lecture at the awards ceremony, he looked

back to those moments. “The Bible tells the thrilling story of how Moses stood in Pharaoh’s court centuries ago and cried, ‘Let my people go,’” Dr. King said. “This is a kind of opening chapter in a continuing story.”³

Rabbi Levi Meier finds a useful contemporary personal meaning in Moses’ story. While considering him “the greatest leader of humanity,” Meier adds, “Moses’ life, like ours, was not easy. He experienced pain, difficulties, and failures. . . . Moses told his people that if they listened carefully and did what he taught them, they would understand the meaning of life. The words that Moses recorded continue to help each of us find purpose and direction today.”⁴

And Jonathan Kirsch points out that Moses is not presented in heroic, larger-than-life terms: “The essential impression of Moses that we are given in the Bible . . . is that he was born like every other infant, grew to manhood with all the impulses and excesses of which real men and women are capable, lived a life marked with passions that are perfectly human, and came to a tragic end.”⁵

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