

“Grace Allman Burke recounts the events of the biblical story of the Exodus in a tale of adventure that captures the imagination of young readers.”

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“Vibrant and delightful illustrations add spice to this engaging tale of young Gershom, the son of Moses in the Bible, as he learns valuable lessons on the road to maturity.”

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Cynthia James Evangelistic Ministries,
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“Adolescence is a road of uncertainty whether the voyage is one traveled in the 21st Century or 5,000 years ago. Grace Allman Burke transcends the millennia and enables young people to grasp the truth of whom they are and whom they are meant to be. It is a treasure in a genre for the age group which many have overlooked far too long.”

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Carol D. Foster & Co.,
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“*The Stranger’s Son* is a delightful and uplifting story. Young readers will find much with which to identify, celebrating the power of faith and family ties.”

—Mae Alice Reggy, PhD.,
Beulah Heights University,
Atlanta, GA

“*The Stranger’s Son* by Grace Allman Burke is the kind of fiction that captivates you and gets your attention from start to finish. This inspiring biblical narrative is a must read.”

—Rev. Dr. Winston Broomes,
Grace Assemblies of God,
Atlantic City, NJ

“This book captures the mind and heart of an adolescent as he is facing major changes in relationships and family relocation. Grace invites us into Gershom’s experience as he encounters the wonder of becoming a man and as he gains an understanding of spiritual things. Her writing evokes a visceral response. You experience what Gershom is feeling and thinking. You are captured by the storyline of how a pre-teen manages the changes within himself and those in the outside world. Every teen should receive this book as a gift. They will be able to identify with the character, Gershom, and learn something to apply to their own lives.”

—Freda McKissic Bush, MD,
Jackson, MS

THE
STRANGER'S
SON

THE
STRANGER'S
SON

A NOVEL

GRACE ALLMAN BURKE



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To my son Cranston

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MIDIAN



GERSHOM CHATTERED EXCITEDLY as his family gathered round. He and Uncle Hobab had just returned from an exciting journey into the desert. A week ago, Gershom had celebrated his twelfth birthday. The trip had been Uncle Hobab's present to him.

How elated he had been when Uncle Hobab told him his plans! The desert had always seemed so mysterious to him and he secretly had yearned to go there. He hardly could believe that his dream had come true.

Zipporah, his mother, gazed at him with pride in her eyes. He was her oldest son, and he knew she had mixed feelings about him growing up. Although she had worried the whole time they were gone, she said she had trusted Gershom's safety in the care of her brother Hobab. Hobab had taken the journey many times and knew the desert well. Besides, she knew he never would let any harm come to Gershom, his beloved nephew.

Gershom's father, Moses, laughing, interrupted his chatter. "Slow down, Gershom. You're talking too fast, we can hardly keep up with you. Tell us, slowly, how it was."

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Gershom, tall and husky, seemed older than his twelve years. Now sun-baked from the penetrating desert sun and weary from the journey, he sighed deeply.

“It was wonderful, Father. Simply wonderful. It is something I will never forget.”

Until late into the night hours, the travelers spoke on, recounting every detail of their great adventure.

As Gershom spun his tale of their hunt for wild animals, finding watering places for the donkeys, and sleeping under the stars, ten-year-old Eliezer sat in rapt attention. Digesting each word his older brother spoke, he hoped that before long he too would be able to make the journey.

“After all, I’ll soon be twelve,” he reasoned.

Grandfather Jethro yawned widely.

“All right, folks. That’s enough for tonight,” he said. “We can hear more about this tomorrow. Soon it will be morning and the sheep must be taken out.”

Gershom slept fitfully that night in his family’s tent. He knew he had taken a giant step toward manhood.

He awakened to the sound of chatter and laughter. His aunts and his mother were cooking breakfast outdoors.

“Zipporah, you must be so proud of Gershom,” he heard one of them say.

“I’ll bet he was really scared, though,” tittered another.

Gershom loved his six aunts dearly. As he was their oldest nephew, they doted on him and let him get away with everything.

Secretly, though, there were times when Gershom wished he were away from them. He never would let them know it, but his trip with Uncle Hobab had made him feel this even more. He and his uncle had talked of many grownup things while they were there, and the peace and quiet was very different from the bustling village life of Midian.

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“Gershom, you’re just in time for prayers,” his father declared as he stepped outside. “Your grandfather is just about ready.”

Grandfather Jethro was highly respected in their community. Not only was he a shepherd, he was also a priest. Every morning and evening the entire family worshipped God together around the family altar.

Grandfather also visited the sick and older folks in the village, saying prayers for them. Sometimes Gershom went along with him. He felt good knowing his grandfather was such an important person.



One evening, Gershom overheard his parents talking inside their tent. His father said something very strange indeed. Gershom, crouching outside, cocked his head and listened closely.

“It was very frightening, Zipporah,” his father said. “I actually spoke to God.”

“You? You spoke to God?” his mother replied, laughing. “Come on. How? Where?”

“I’m quite serious, Zipporah,” his father said sharply.

“Well, what happened?” his mother inquired, sounding more attentive.

His father continued. “Early this morning, I led the sheep near the edge of the desert to graze. I dozed a little, and when I opened my eyes, I saw something quite unusual. I saw a bush on fire, but there was no smoke. What’s more, the bush wasn’t burning up, and there were no ashes.”

“Moses, are you sure you weren’t dreaming?” his mother asked.

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“No, Zipporah. Believe me, I wasn’t. I went closer to get a better look at it when suddenly I heard a loud voice calling my name.”

Gershom heard his mother gasp. Before she could speak again his father spilled out the rest of the story.

“I was so scared that I wanted to turn and run away. My knees felt weak.”

“Go on,” his mother urged. “Tell me what happened next.”

“The voice then commanded, ‘Don’t come a step closer, and take off your sandals because you are standing on holy ground.’”

Gershom’s heart began to pound rapidly.

“Oh, Moses,” his mother cried in a trembling voice. “What is this all about? What have you done wrong? Why you?”

Gershom was glad darkness had fallen. He would have felt so ashamed if his parents had caught him eavesdropping. But he just had to hear more.

“God wasn’t angry with me,” his father said. “He spoke to me for quite a while, in fact. It’s all very confusing, Zipporah. I’m quite shaken over the whole thing.”

His mother’s voice dropped to a whisper. “I’m very frightened, Moses,” she said. “I think we’d better talk to my father about this. He understands about the ways of God.”

“I think you’re right, Zipporah,” his father said, “because I’ll be leaving soon.”

“Leaving?” his mother questioned. “To go where?”

“God is sending me back to my people, the Israelites, in the land of Egypt where I came from. He told me they are living there as slaves now. He wants me to go there to help set them free.”

His mother wept. Gershom was shocked by this news. He felt he had heard enough.

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Tiptoeing stealthily away, he retreated to the spot on the far side of the village where he went whenever he wished to be alone. Sitting silently in the darkness, he tried to absorb what he had just heard.

Father? Egypt? Slaves? His thoughts raced as he deeply pondered the situation.

Father has told me so little about himself, he thought. *I know he came from Egypt, but he's almost never spoken about his family. I can't bear the thought of his leaving us now to go back to them.*

He remembered that his father had told him a little about growing up there.

"The king of Egypt is called a Pharaoh," Father had told him. "His palace is near the banks of the great Nile River."

"Have you ever seen a Pharaoh?" Gershom had asked him. He remembered how Father had roared with laughter and replied mysteriously, "Everyone in Egypt has seen a Pharaoh."

Father had told him once that Egyptians are beautiful people.

"Both men and women wear an ornate collar made of beads, gold, and other jewels," he had said. "Their clothes are made of fine linen."

Gershom tried to picture in his mind now what it was like. The cities with high walls Father had described sounded so different from the simple village life to which he was accustomed.

Father said tonight that his people are called Israelites, his thoughts continued. *I wonder how they got to Egypt? What's more, why are they slaves?*



Gershom received some of the answers to his questions a few days later when he was summoned to a family meeting in Grandfather Jethro's tent. He had dared not breathe a word

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to anyone about what he had heard, and the suspense of what would happen was more than he could bear.

When everyone had gathered, Grandfather spoke. It was a very solemn occasion.

“I’ve called you all together to share some very important news,” he affirmed. “Moses has been chosen to do a great work for God. God Himself spoke to him last week just outside of the desert.”

Gershom tried to look surprised as he searched the other family members’ faces. Eliezer’s face registered confusion as he tried to make sense of his grandfather’s words. His aunts looked bewildered. His mother, clutching his father, furtively brushed away a tear. Uncle Hobab couldn’t restrain himself.

“Just what do you mean?” he demanded, interrupting what his father, Jethro, was saying.

Grandfather Jethro gestured sharply, silencing him. Turning again to Moses, Grandfather declared, “From the time you came here to our village in this great land of Ethiopia, Moses, I knew there was something different about you. Even though that was many years ago, somehow I knew that one day you would leave us. Now the time has come. We all will miss you very much, but when God speaks, we must obey.”

A quiet hush of disbelief enveloped the group.

Why doesn’t Father say something? Gershom thought, feeling somewhat annoyed.

His father must have read his thoughts.

“In a few days we’ll be packing to leave. Zipporah, the boys, and I will be traveling to Egypt, as Jethro said.”

“We’re going too, Father? For good?” Gershom blurted out.

“Yes, son,” he replied. “For good. I don’t even know how my people will receive me. I don’t think this is going to be easy for any of us. But God told me that He would be with us.”

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His father's voice trailed off as Gershom became engrossed in his own thoughts. As the rest of the family plied his father with questions, Gershom's uneasiness from the past few days slowly turned to resentment.

Why? Why? Why? Gershom thought unhappily. *Why do we have to leave Midian forever? Father even said he doesn't remember much about his family. Suppose they make us slaves too when we get there?*



As Gershom and his family prepared for their journey, he felt a curious mixture of excitement and fear. In a way, the coming adventure seemed thrilling. But the fear of the future was forbidding.

Finally, the day came for the family to leave. The entire village gathered that morning for Grandfather Jethro's last prayer.

Gershom felt a thick, hard lump in his throat. Although he had told himself he would be brave, his eyes blurred with tears. He was glad Eliezer's excited chatter covered up for him.

Amid the weeping and tearful goodbyes, the tiny group passed slowly out of the village.