

(Devotional #19) **Character Studies from Hebrews 11:1-40**
Heroes of the Faith: Moses, Midian, the Passover, and the Red Sea– Part 2
(Exodus 2:11 – 4:17; 12:1-30; 14:1-31; Hebrews 11:27-29)

When Moses was grown, he went out to his brethren (the Hebrews) and observed their hard labor, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand – Exodus 2:11-12

When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well – Exodus 2:15

By FAITH (Moses) left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen – Hebrews 11:37

If you watch Cecil B. DeMille's **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**, you get the impression Moses did not know of his Hebrew lineage until well into the movie. But Scripture tells a different story. As a young man, Moses left the palace and visited his relatives¹. During one of these visits ... (for it seems there was more than one) ... Moses killed an Egyptian taskmaster, who was beating Moses' relative. By this act we learn something of the character of Moses: he was a man who recognized iniquity, and he was a man of action who did not hesitate to take the side of the oppressed. His act of killing an Egyptian may have resolved an immediate issue, but it was a capital offense in Egypt. And what Moses thought he had done in secret, became known, so he fled from Pharaoh, who sought to kill him.

When we compare the story of this murder, recorded in Exodus 2:11-15, with Hebrews 11:27, we may feel a bit confused, for it is apparent from the Exodus account that Moses feared for his life – and that *he fled* to Midian. But Hebrews 11:27 characterizes the situation differently by use of the phrases (1) **“by FAITH”** and (2) **“not fearing the wrath of the king.”**

We should take a minute to think about how the New Testament (*hereinafter, NT*) is related to the Old Testament (*hereinafter, OT*). The hardest class I took in seminary was taught by S. Lewis Johnson. The name of the class was **“THE NEW TESTAMENT'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.”** Johnson began his first lecture with these words: *“In order to pass this class, you must have an above average working knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Now we will pause for a minute or two while approximately half of you gather up your books and excuse yourselves in order to go to the Registrar's Office to drop the class.”*

How the NT interprets the OT is one of the most taxing tools we apply to biblical exegesis. If I may sum up the Johnson's class in one sentence, **THE OT CASTS LIGHT (context) ON THE NT, BUT IT IS THE NT THAT INTERPRETS THE OT.** This interpretative principle is important in understanding Hebrews 11:27 ... and I will refer to it as we work through the passage.

From Egypt to Midian:

“By faith (Moses) left Egypt” – Moses left Egypt twice, once after he killed the Egyptian taskmaster, and again forty-years later at the Exodus ... so which exit is in view here? Well, we should give precedence to the order of events mentioned in verses 27-29. Notice, **“by faith he left Egypt,”** is followed in verse 28 by **the first Passover**, then in verse 29, the seminal event is **the crossing of the Red Sea**. If **“by faith he left Egypt”** refers to the Exodus, then the events are

¹ In Exodus 2:11, the term, 'brethren' does not indicate 'just any Hebrew slave,' but 'a slave of his own family.'

out of order. So apparently what is in view is Moses' flight from Pharaoh after he killed the Egyptian.

Now the OT account of this event uses two words that seem to conflict with the NT's interpretation of the event. In Exodus 2:14, we read "*Then Moses was AFRAID, and he said, surely the matter has become known.*" Then this is followed in verse 15 with, "*but Moses FLED from the presence of Pharaoh.*" In verse 14, the word 'AFRAID' is the most common Hebrew word for fear, while in verse 15, the word 'FLED' (used 66-times in the OT) most often depicts a person fleeing in fear from an enemy. But Hebrews 11:27 goes on to say, "*by faith he left Egypt, NOT FEARING the wrath of the king.*"

This is a time when we must apply the interpretive principle mentioned above; we must let the NT interpret the OT – and the NT clearly states, '*Moses' departure from Egypt was an act of faith, not a response to fear.*' Now the NT never says, Moses was not afraid – but *his leaving Egypt* was not because of fear ... his leaving was an act of faith. A.S. Peake supports this view:

*By his impulsive act of violence, he had burned his boats so far as the court of Egypt was concerned, but he might have raised a slaves' revolt there and then. **By faith, however, he did nothing of the kind; he had the insight to see that God's hour had not yet struck, and therefore he resolutely turned his back on the course he had begun to tread, and retraced his steps until he entered on the harder way**².*

If this seems an unsatisfactory explanation, then consider divine providence that brought about the events that led Moses out of Egypt to Midian, where he met Yahweh face-to-face in the burning bush of Sinai. During his forty-years in exile, Moses gained the knowledge and where-withal to follow God's Plan for him, through which the nation of Israel was born.

The First Passover:

By FAITH he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them – Hebrews 11:28

In Exodus 12:1-13, what we might call, '*the Egyptian Passover*³' was instituted. Then in the paragraph that follows (*vss. 14-20*) we are given access to a conversation between the Lord and Moses in which Moses is instructed about a ceremony that will become central to the worship of Yahweh by the Jews throughout the Age of Israel. It will be an annual celebration known as the Passover.

The directives given in verses 1-13 are **SPECIFIC TO A SINGLE OBSERVANCE OF THE PASS-OVER MEAL** that was to be eaten on the 15th of Abib, in Egypt, the night of the 10th-Plague that took place around midnight on the night before the Exodus. But the instructions in Exodus 12:14-20 pertain to **ALL FUTURE OBSERVANCES OF THE PASSOVER.**

Israel's theology cannot be separated from her history, for Israel's theology is **NOT ABSTRACT** – it is **HISTORICAL** and it is **CONCRETE**. There is a spiritual dimension for Israel in the actual Exodus. And that spiritual reality is grounded in *actual Jews* walking out of *an actual Egypt* with *actual sand in their sandals* – and it can never be any other way. This is why attacks on the historicity of scripture are particularly egregious, for if you abandon the history of an actual Exodus, then Israel's theology is subject to collapse.

² *The Heroes and Martyrs of the Faith*, by A.S. Peake, (London, 1910) Pg. 118.

³ *There is one Passover, but it is fair to distinguish the particular Passover that took place one time in Egypt from the myriad of Passover celebrations that have been observed over the centuries.*

And this emphasis on historical theology is not unique to Judaism – it is fundamental to the NT and it is the reason Paul – *a Jew who thought like every Jew before him* – will write in First Corinthians 15:17: “***If Christ has not been raised from the dead*** – (i.e., if your interpretation of the resurrection is some New Age spiritualization of the historical resurrection) – ***then your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins.***” It is very important to understand what theologians mean when they say things because they can be masters of deception.

The annual Passover celebration is designed to bridge the gap between the Exodus generation and future generations of Jews, who will be the recipients of the same redemption that God bestowed on their forefathers – but who did not participate in the historical Exodus event itself. The Passover festival is for the benefit of those Jews who were not alive at the time of the Exodus. It provides an opportunity, albeit a symbolic one, for them to share in that experience. Said another way, ***‘it bridges the chronological gap between the Exodus generation and all future Jews during the Age of Israel.’***

The Redemptive Act of Yahweh in freeing His people was meant to transcend the Exodus event in a way that all Jews, irrespective of when they lived, could have ***‘partnership’*** with those Jews who came out of Egypt with Moses with sand in their sandals, for it was God’s Will that the salvation experienced at the Exodus should apply – not only to that one generation of Jews, but to all the generations that would come later.

The Red Sea:

By FAITH they passed through the Red Sea as though on dry land, and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned – Hebrews 11:29

Tell in the hearing of your son, and your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians, and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know I AM THE LORD – Exodus 10:2

The miracle at the sea is not a stand-alone event in the redemptive history of Israel. Indeed it is perhaps **THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SINGLE EVENT** Israel experienced, but it is one part of a bigger plan God put in place long before Moses appeared on the scene. Moses’ role was to obey the Lord by doing whatever the Lord ask of him ... even when what God asked seemed impossible.

When God rescued Israel by dividing the waters of the Red Sea, He was doing more than freeing an oppressed people; He was keeping His Promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was preparing to make the first installment on the Land-promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. And God was setting the stage to judge Egypt⁴, the nation that oppressed Israel, and then use Israel to bring divine judgment on the Canaanites⁴, which He promised Abraham He would do. All of these things were part of God’s Plan that was underway when the Egyptians pursued Israel to the Red Sea.

Two Simultaneous Plans:

Up until God split the Red Sea, there were two plans operating simultaneously:

- (1) ***There was Pharaoh’s Plan:*** (A) pursue and capture the Israelites, (B) bring them back to Egypt, and (C) continue to benefit from their free slave-labor for the benefit of Egypt.

AND THERE WAS ...

⁴ See Genesis 15:14 for God’s Promise to judge Egypt, and 15:16 for God’s declaration of judgment on the Canaanites.

(2) **God's Plan:** (A) deliver Israel by splitting the sea, (B) judge the Egyptians drowning Pharaoh's army in the sea, and (C) judge Canaan by means of the Conquest.

What is particularly interesting is these plans had been operating in parallel all along! We should begin to appreciate what God meant when He said in Exodus 10:2: "***Tell your Sons how I made a Mockery of the Egyptians.***"

Moses, as a man of faith, was weak; but the one in whom he had faith, is strong. When Moses fled from Pharaoh, God gave him a wife, children and a home in Midian. When Moses complained that he was a poor public speaker, God gave him Aaron. When Pharaoh refused to free Israel, God brought the plagues. And when Israel was trapped at the sea, God divided the waters and delivered His people. Moses' faith was not in himself. Rarely does 'self-faith' accomplish anything. But dependence on the LORD sorts out who is responsible for what. We are to believe and obey; God is responsible to act on behalf of faithful obedience.