

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 38 February 9, 2020 Moses and His Parents Hebrews 11:23-29

Introduction

Hebrews 11:23-29

The two people the author of Hebrews spends the most time on in chapter 11 are Abraham and Moses. They are arguably the 2 most prominent people in the OT, and are revered in the NT by the Jewish people in the 4 gospels and in Acts. In Hebrews 11, there are five things said about Abraham, and five times in the text, there are statements about Moses that begin with “By faith”.

Moses and Abraham are mentioned often in the NT. Moses was especially revered by the Pharisees and Scribes because he'd been the ‘source’ of the law they claimed to love so much. Whereas the leaders and those people in their charge almost worshipped Moses, when Jesus spoke to them, He attempted to make realize that it was in fact, God, who had provided them with the foundational blessings through Moses and Abraham, and other patriarchs – so He was the real source they tended to forget about.

Notice John 6:30-35, and the interchange between Jesus and the people regarding the manna and what it really symbolized and who had supplied it. In John 7:19, Jesus acknowledges that the law came through Moses, but if they revered him so much and his law, why did they not keep the law? (Note v. 24). The people were also rebuked by Christ regarding Abraham in John 8:33-47, and then in vv. 48-56. Back to Moses – see John 9:24-30 & 5:39-47. The problem was that they revered Moses but failed to listen to Moses’ writings! Moses himself spoke of Christ directly, in prophetic terms in Deut. 18:15-19. Notice the rebuke and threat in v. 19 if they would not listen to this prophet, whom we know to be Jesus Christ!

Of course, in Matt. 17:13 (and parallel passages Mk 9 & Lk 9), Moses is one of the 2 OT characters that appear and talk with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration; and to round out our NT comments (which could go on for awhile) about Moses – notice Stephen’s final words, with which he defends against those gathered to persecute him in Acts 7:8-60. Moses is brought into Stephen’s historical speech at Acts 7:20-44, so he is a central feature in Stephen’s words, by means of rebuke. Verse 20 here acts as our segue into Hebrews 11:23...

The Faith of Moses’ Parents

Heb. 11:23

This passage in Hebrews 11, from vv. 23-26, begins with the faith of Moses’ parents in v. 23 and ends with the faith of the generation of people whom Moses led out from Egyptian bondage in v. 26. We must go back to Exodus 1 & 2 to determine why faith was required to hide a baby. Let’s read first Ex. 1:8-22. This sets the scene and

context, and then Ex. 2:1-10 narrates the amazing results of the faith of Moses' parents. The narration centers on Moses' mother and the baby, but there is no way his father was not privy to what was going on – hence, 11:23's "his parents". According to Ex. 6:16-20, Moses and Aaron's parents were Amram – son of Levi's son, Kohath, and Jochebed, his aunt. Both Moses and Aaron were thus direct descendants of Levi and, as we discover later on, eligible for the priesthood.

So, the necessity for faith in having a baby boy, arises in the early verses of Exodus, kicked off by Ex. 1:8. In v. 9, we see that God's promise to Abraham is coming true – notice Gen. 15:5-6, 12,13,14. Not only are Abraham's descendants thriving in Egypt, but they are now on the verge of the start of the prophesied affliction as '*sojourners in a land that is not theirs.*'

The decision of this Egyptian king (unnamed), who '*knew not Joseph*' (perhaps a conquering king?) was a foreshadowing of what King Herod in Matthew 2:16-18 did in order to make sure that the newborn king of Israel would not survive. Of course, he failed. But kings or not, God's promises cannot be thwarted by mere mortal kings, no matter how powerful they are among their human peers.

Comparing Exodus 2:2 and Hebrews 11:23, we see a similar construction;

Ex. 2:2 – "*she saw that he was a fine child...*"

Heb. 11:23 – "*they saw that the child was beautiful...*"

John Brown says that this likely means "not sickly or maimed", in other words a healthy child.¹ But in English, we tend to read this as, "hiding and sparing the child was as a result of his beautiful physical appearance", a rather shallow viewpoint. But is that likely to be the reason? If so, what on earth would that have to do with faith? No, there is something much deeper going on here that must be probed in order to better comprehend it.

A.W. Pink's idea is that "most probably, the Lord made known to these parents that their child was to be the promised deliverer, and furnished them beforehand with a description of him."² He bases this on an earlier comment, concerning Romans 10:17 – "thus Amram and Jochebed must have received a Divine revelation (not recorded in the OT) and this word from God formed the foundation of their confidence and supplied the motive power for what they did."³ John Brown concurs with this idea, citing Josephus. Brown comments, "there is nothing in Scripture inconsistent with this."⁴

Now, Pink may be right, but certainly, this is speculative, as good of a theory as it is. He is correct, though, when he concludes, "When in due time, he was given to them, they "saw that he was a proper [KJV] child" – it was the discernment of faith and not

¹ John Brown, Hebrews, Banner of Truth, p. 538

² A.W. Pink – The Heroes of Faith, p. 143

³ Pink, p. 143

⁴ Brown, p. 539

the admiration of nature.⁵ They were doubtless aware of the Abrahamic Covenant and knew that a deliverer was going to be in play if Genesis 15:14 was going to be fulfilled and this child could very well be that deliverer. The timing was obviously in the ballpark. Their knowledge of the Covenant would have been passed down by oral history as no Scripture had as yet been written (cf. Exodus 17:14; 34:27).

The faithful hiding of this baby boy included two things: they initially hid his actual birth from the Egyptian authorities, and then, for 3 months they hid him in some part of their house. Surely, if this was done “by faith”, they must have fervently prayed to God daily to help them keep their secret, because babies cry and generate a lot of laundry – evidence of their ‘aliveness’. They must have been very careful for those 3 months. Yet, certainly, along with their own prayerful diligence, God’s preservation of His elect was in full providential action. Nothing could ultimately threaten Moses’ continued existence until all God had decreed for him to accomplish had been fulfilled.

At the end of 3 months, apparently, he could no longer be safely hidden – perhaps the Egyptian authorities checked on the Israelites and their homes every few months. But for whatever reason, the hiding of Moses became impractical, and they resorted to what is recorded in Ex. 2:3-10. In an incredible providence, the faith of Jochebed and Amram is almost immediately rewarded by God when Moses’ own mother is selected (vv. 7-9, at Miriam’s suggestion) to be Moses’ nursemaid until v. 10 came to pass, and Moses then becomes the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter – who is also never named.

One last point is in Heb. 11:23. See “*because...they were not afraid of the king’s edict.*” Faith often (almost always) requires real risk. Had Moses been discovered, at minimum, the Egyptian authorities would have taken him from his parents, and killed him, and probably punished his parents somehow. But in their faithfulness, they counted on God’s providence, and placed him in a sealed (v. 3 – bitumen and pitch) basket (or ‘ark’ – reminiscent of Noah’s ark), and placed it, not in the flow of the Nile River, but “*among the reeds by the river bank*”. Amazing faith, and even more amazing grace! The story of Moses unfolds from there.

The Reproach of Christ

vv. 24-26; Exodus 2:11-22

These verses (24-27) in Hebrews 11 have long been a challenge to me, because the most immediate questions that is presented to the reader are questions like; What does it mean for a person whose life pre-dated Christ’s by thousands of years to have the author say, “*He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.*”? And v. 25 – “*choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin?*” Or, v. 27 – “*By faith, he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king.*”? The statements of v. 24,28 and 29 are clearer, almost narrative biblical statements, but vv. 26-27 are difficult, almost seemingly to be contradictory when you examine the account in Ex. 2:11-22.

⁵ Pink, p. 143

Here is why these verses puzzle me – along the order of the questions above;

- 1) In what way did Moses even know of Christ, and what does “the reproach of Christ” mean in this sense to one who did not even know Him? Or did he? And if so, how?
- 2) Did he choose to be mistreated with the people of God or does his flight into the wilderness place him many miles away from the people of God, basically on his own, or with those who were not the people of God? (cf. Ex. 2:16-22 – the Midianites). Meanwhile, Ex. 2:23-25 describes what was happening to the people of God during Moses’ lengthy absence (40 years). Or is this verse talking about his return to confront Pharaoh?
- 3) The Exodus account indicates (Ex. 2:13-14) that Moses left specifically because he feared Pharaoh. Verse 15 says when Pharaoh heard that Moses had killed an Egyptian, “*he sought to kill Moses*”, *But Moses fled...*”.

So, as we can see, there is some ‘sorting out’ to do, because I believe there are no contradictions in the Bible – it is only our misinterpretation of it that creates such seeming contradictions. I found the commentaries I consulted to be mostly silent in answering my questions, but I have attempted to glean some biblical clarity from their statements wherever I could.

Let’s exegete Heb. 11:24ff and compare it to the Exodus account to see how these issues resolve themselves biblically. Verse 24 says,

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter...” Quite simply, this means he had matured, and most theologians say he was about 40 years old here, having been taught for years in Pharaoh’s courts, educated in the world’s leading nation at that time. Exodus 7:7 tells us that Moses was 80 years old when he and Aaron stood before Pharaoh as the people’s deliverers, and Stephen’s soliloquy in Acts 7:23 tells that Moses was 40 years old when he killed the Egyptian, and so, 40 years had passed from that point until the episode of the burning bush (Acts 7:30). So we can learn the timing of it all from Scripture.

When he was 40, Ex. 2:11-15 gives us the account of what made Moses take sides with his own (God’s) people as a result of what he viewed as an unjust oppression. Note v. 11.

The act of killing the Egyptian task master was tantamount to ‘refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter’. In that one act, the words of Hebrews 11:24-25 are vindicated. He made a life changing choice. He could continue to look the other way, as he must have for years, but now, he recognized that this ill-treatment of the Hebrews was evil (sinful) and though he could not overturn all of the oppression, he could make a symbolic statement of his dispute over it, and he did. Thus, for 40 years making himself a fugitive from Pharaoh by fleeing to Midian.

So, my second question from above, now comes up. He saw the oppression, did something about one episode of it, and then left God’s people, one step ahead of

Pharaoh's law and anger. He did not convert to being a slave in Egypt and join his people to make bricks. How do we reconcile this?

We need to understand the conflation of events necessary when a one or two verse account refers back to a chapters long history of events being referred to, which is what we have here. It is not the immediate situation the AH refers to, but the end of the 40 year gap spent in the wilderness by Moses, and then his return under God with Aaron to deliver God's people – per Exodus 3-5. Note especially Ex. 4:27-31. Then, by Exodus 5:1, Moses and Aaron are standing before Pharaoh.

By God's grace and at God's insistence, they are the chosen vessels to carry God's message to Pharaoh – to let His people go – and so, it is here that Moses' "chose rather to be mistreated with the people [as their spokesman & redeemer] of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin for a season." That is what he could have done had he remained, unaffected by the plight of Israel and stayed in Pharaoh's court rather than kill an Egyptian and flee.

Here in v. 26 is where my first question above came from. JC Ryle comments, "Faith told Moses that affliction and suffering were not real evils. They were the school of God, in which he trains the children of grace for glory; the medicines which are needful to purify our corrupt wills; the furnace which must burn away our dross; the knife which must cut the ties that bind us to the world...Marvel not that he refused greatness, riches and pleasure. He looked far forward. He saw with the eye of faith kingdoms crumbling into dust, riches making to themselves wings and fleeing away, pleasures leading on to death and judgment, and Christ only and His little flock enduring forever...he saw with the eye of faith affliction lasting but for a moment, reproach rolled away, and ending in everlasting honour, and the despised people of God reigning as kings with Christ in glory."⁶

This verse occasioned my greatest struggle to understand the AH's point. John Brown rightly states, "I believe every attentive reader of the Bible has felt some difficulty in satisfactorily explaining to himself this passage. He to whom the appellation, "Messiah, Christ or Anointed" belongs, did not appear until more than 1500 years after the days of Moses. The Son of God existed from eternity, but He did not become the Christ till He assumed human nature. The great Deliverer had indeed been promised, but He had not been promised [yet] under the name of Messiah."⁷

Brown sees only two probable and viable interpretations of the passage. The first one is that this verse does not refer to Jesus Christ, but to the Israelites – the people. God's people are called 'God's anointed' or 'christs' in Hab. 3:13 or in PS. 89:50-51, where "Thine anointed" are the people, not Jesus. In this case, "the reproach of Christ"

⁶ JC Ryle, cited in Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 500-501

⁷ John Brown, Hebrews, Banner of Truth, 1862 / 1964 – p. 544-545

is almost synonymous with “the afflictions of the people of God”, just as ‘the treasures of Egypt’ correspond with ‘the pleasures of sin for a season’.⁸

Brown’s second view is this: “the reproach of Christ” is equivalent to “reproach similar to what Christ sustained”, as in II Cor. 1:5, the phrase “sufferings of Christ” being similar to “suffering similar to those which Christ endured”.⁹

In the first case, the meaning is “Moses willingly took part in the contempt and reproach to which the oppressed Israelites were exposed. In the second, the meaning is, “Moses, the deliverer of Israel willingly submitted to reproaches similar to those which were heaped on Jesus Christ, The Saviour of men.” While Brown leans toward the first option, I prefer the second. This solution also covers the fact that Moses was despised not only by Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but also by his own people, just as Christ was equally set upon by the Jewish leaders and the Israelites themselves!

Also, in v. 26, what Moses forsook as a result, was “the treasures of Egypt” (and archaeology tells us they were huge) “for he was looking to the reward.” The AH tells us this was ‘by faith’, but we have to ascertain – what did Moses believe? And how did his belief influence his judgment, choices and conduct?

As far as what was revealed to Moses at this point in his life and career, the Bible does not actually share with us. Later on, though, especially in Deuteronomy, his prophetic gifts spell out his idea of a future deliverer (Deut. 18:15-19), the exodus of his people from bondage, and his knowledge of the Abrahamic Covenant (Deut. 30:19-20), as well as the concept of the Land. But at this point, in his return to deliver Israel (and certainly before that), what he is privy to is not recorded for us, and we have only the AH’s points to give us direction, as well as Stephen’s final words in Acts 7:35-38.

Brown, on whom I have counted for much of this insight, comments, ““This is one of the passages which lead me to think that plainer revelations of a future state were made to the patriarchs than any that are recorded in the OT Scriptures. ‘The recompense of rewards’ cannot refer to the possession of Canaan, for Moses was never to enter that country. The meaning seems to be this – ‘Moses expected that all the sacrifices he made in the cause of God and His people would be far more than compensated in a future state;’ and this expectation could only be grounded in a corresponding revelation. Such was the faith of Moses.”¹⁰

This could be emblematic of the reward that we hope for, the words of our Saviour (MT 25:21), “Well done, good and faithful servant...”

⁸ IBID, p. 545

⁹ IBID – p. 545

¹⁰ IBID, p. 547

He Left Egypt

vv. 27-28

This verse is where my 3rd question (above) comes in. Moses actually left Egypt twice. The first time was alone, as a fugitive, after he had killed the Egyptian, and knew he'd receive the death penalty if he stayed. The 2nd time was after the 10 plagues had ended and Pharaoh finally released the people, or better, chased them out of Egypt. So, the first thing we need to ascertain, is which leaving of Egypt is being referred to in v. 27? Based on what v. 27 says, when we compare it to Ex. 2:11-15, could this be the first time he left? Many say it is, although there certainly appears to be contradictory statements if that is the case. He did fear the king here, that's why he left isn't it? He fled for his life. As a result of these facts, we can say that the Hebrews 11 verse cannot be a referral to this event. It has to be the second time. According to Richard Phillips, among those who agree are Calvin, Owen and Westcott. Phillips himself disagrees because this would interrupt the chronological order the AH seems to be following, thus putting the verse regarding Passover before this incident of the Exodus, when historically, it preceded it. I think that is a weak argument, and the chronological order is interrupted when we get to 11:32 for sure anyway. Phillips bolsters his view with an argument that says, "True, Moses' abortive attempt to free the people had failed, and yes, Moses became afraid, but his faith in God overcame his fear and he left to await the Lord."¹¹

As much as I respect Richard Phillips as a commentator and theologian, I wholly disagree with his argument here. It is clear from the Ex. 2:11f text that Moses did fear Pharaoh, and for good reason, according to v. 15. To further call this an act of murder an attempt to 'free the people' is a real stretch. He was angry because he saw injustice and he killed the perpetrator out of vengeance. This is clear from the event recorded the very next day – cf. Ex. 2:13-14. It was an act of vengeance, not deliverance, and this is the way even the Hebrews themselves saw it. Also, to say that 'he left to await the Lord', is also not really true to the narrative of his 40 years spent in Midian (Ex. 2:15b – 5:1). The only episode that changes his life in Midian is God's message through the burning bush some 40 years after he left Egypt the first time. It was, of course, God's sovereign grace that He appeared to Moses in this way. Here, it can be said, he was probably given faith by God's grace and a command to return to Egypt as God's chosen deliverer. God had known this all along, but it was never in Moses' purview until the burning bush incident. Whether or not this is out of chronological order or not is irrelevant because the concept is simply not supported by the facts.

Instead, the AH must be referring to Moses' 2nd exit from Egypt – the Exodus itself – cf. Ex. 12:33-51 – which took place after a spiritual, emotional and exhausting series of meetings with Pharaoh, of the hardened heart of Pharaoh, of Moses and Aaron's forceful commands of God's intentions if Pharaoh refused to heed. In all that – chapters 5-12, Moses certainly exhibited a lack of fear of Pharaoh and a faithful trust in God all the way through, after an initial stuttering start (cf. Ex. 3:10,11,13; 4:1,10,13). These objections that Moses puts forth don't seem to align with Richard

¹¹ Phillips, Hebrews p. 507

Phillips' idea that "he left Egypt to await the Lord", or he'd have been eager to do God's bidding whenever God commanded him to do something, when his 'wait' for God ended.

Peter Lewis comments;

"Moses had to learn to be a servant, not a master, a prophet, not a prince, the friend of God, not Pharaoh. And so God stripped him of his advantages and began his apprenticeship in spiritual leadership...Moses spent his first forty years becoming a somebody, then his second forty years becoming a nobody and then God could use him...it was an apprenticeship in faith."¹²

God knew why Moses had gone to the wilderness, because God knows everything. But Moses went there, not to wait on God, but because he was in danger of execution at Pharaoh's hand if he had stayed in Egypt. God's purpose, as it always does, overruled Moses' intentions.

Of course, history bears out that Moses did believe God, that he did operate in faith from the time of the burning bush incident on. In Exodus 3:1-22, God lays out His plan of redemption for his people, and despite Moses' objections, already noted (Ex. 3 & 4), Moses believed God. Had he not believed what God had said, he'd have remained in Midian where life was not so bad – he was settled in after 40 years, and comfortable. But he went, and God provided his elder brother (by 3 years) as his spokesman and they both went to do God's bidding with regard to Egypt and Israel. (Ex. 4:10-17)

God even told Moses that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened and he would not immediately respond positively – note Ex. 4:19-31. By faith, he went, and by faith he persevered (even when his initial attempt to free the people failed miserably and bewilderingly to Moses and Aaron caused Pharaoh to punish the people) – see Ex. 5:1-23 and 6:1. So, ultimately, after ten miserable miraculous plagues upon Egypt, "*by faith, he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible*" (Heb. 11:27 & 11:1). Even his words at the Red Sea, that totally unexpected trap once they had left Egypt (cf Ex. 12:40-41& 50-51, and note Ex. 14:13-14) cry out to us that he was faithful!

In v. 28, the AH mentions that first Passover, an immensely important event in Jewish history and national life, as well as in the history of world redemption. The Exodus happens historically after the first Passover, but now, based on our interpretation of v. 27, it occurs in Hebrews 11 out of sequence.

The account of the first Passover is found in Ex. 12:1-39. It is of utmost importance, as vv. 2,14-17 spell out for us. It has great theological as well as Christological significance. One example, in John 1:29, the words of John the Baptist, almost certainly are referencing Jesus as our Passover Lamb, and Paul, in I Cor. 5:6-8 mentions specifically, "*Christ, our Passover Lamb*" as sacrificed [for us]. That Christ was sacrificed at Passover, even though the Jewish leaders did not want to kill Him on

¹² Peter Lewis, cited in Phillips, Hebrews, p. 508-509

that day (cf. Matt. 26:3-5), they would kill Him, Judas' treachery making it possible by helping them to capture Him at night, and God made sure it occurred at the exact time to ensure that Passover connection could be easily drawn (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

The very concept of substitutionary atonement – so vital to the Bible's plan of salvation, is anchored here by what the Passover signified and continues to symbolize (now Good Friday and Easter Sunday for Christians) – note Ex. 12:11b-13 – “When I see the blood, I will pass over you...”. Note I John 1:7b & Heb. 9:14,22.

But when we consider the actual instruction and following of that instruction in Ex. 12, we must recognise that absolutely, this required faith, huge faith. A.W. Pink states this very well:

“Nothing but faith could be of any avail here. Everything was opposed to human understanding and human reasoning. With all the consciousness of ill-success upon him, nothing but unfeigned faith in the living God, and what he had heard from Him, could have enabled Moses to go to the people and rehearse all the intricacies of the Passover observances, and tell them to exercise the greatest care in the selection of a lamb on the tenth day of the month, to be slain on the fourteenth day, and eaten with (to them) an unmeaning ceremonial.”¹³

Passover symbolizes the escape from God's coming wrath, just as Christ's sacrificial death as God's Lamb saves those who apply His blood to their hearts (by faith) escape the coming wrath of God (cf. Romans 8:1) – the condemnation that all are already under who do not put their faith in Christ – John 3:17-18.

Philip Hughes shows us the connection between the two events;

“As the Passover lamb was to be perfect and unblemished and its sacrifice was the people's moving from bondage to liberty, so Christ is the fulfillment of all that was symbolized by this event: He is “the Lamb of God” (JN 1:29,36), “our paschal Lamb” (I Cor. 5:7). “whose precious redeeming blood is “like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (I Pet. 1:19), and who through His death has destroyed the power of the Devil, our spiritual Pharaoh, and delivered us from lifelong bondage (Heb. 2:14f.).¹⁴

Since this is the case, the most critical act of faith is to lay hold of Christ, God's lamb, to remove our sin and preserve us against the sure promise of God's wrath against sin. Hughes cites Chrysostom here;

“If the blood of a lamb then preserved the Jews unhurt in the midst of the Egyptians and in the presence of so great a destruction, much more will the blood of Christ save us, for whom it has been sprinkled not on our doorposts but in our souls.” proclaims Chrysostom. “For even now the destroyer is still moving around in the depth of night; but let us be armed with Christ's sacrifice, since God has brought us out from Egypt, from darkness and from idolatry.”¹⁵

¹³ A.W. Pink, The Heroes of Faith, p. 177

¹⁴ Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 500

¹⁵ Hughes, p. 501

To wrap up our brief study of this verse in Hebrews 11, read what Pink presents to us in describing the Passover as a type of Christ;

“The Passover was one of the most solemn institutions of the Old Testament, and one of the most eminent types of Christ. 1. It was a lamb that was the matter of this ordinance (Ex. 12:3). And in allusion hereunto, as also to other sacrifices that were instituted afterwards, Christ is called “The Lamb of God” (JN 1:29). 2. This lamb was to be taken out from the flock of the sheep (Ex. 12:5). So was the Lord Christ to be taken out of the stock of the church of mankind, in His participation of our nature, that he might be a meet sacrifice for us (Heb. 2:14-17). 3. This lamb being taken from the flock was to be shut up separately from it (Ex. 12:6). So although the Lord Christ was taken from amongst men, yet He was separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26), that is, absolutely free from all that contagion of sin which others are infected withal. 4. This lamb was to be slain, and was slain accordingly (Ex. 12:6). So was Christ slain for us – a Lamb, in the efficacy of His death, slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). 6. This lamb was so slain, as that it was a sacrifice (Ex. 12:27); it was the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover. And Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (I Cor. 5:7). 7. The lamb being slain was to be roasted (Ex. 12:8,9), which signified the fiery wrath that Christ was to undergo for our deliverance. 8. That “neither shall ye break a bone thereof” (v. 46), was expressly to declare the manner of the death of Christ (JN 19:33-36). 9. The eating of him, which was also enjoined, and that wholly and entirely (Ex. 12:8, 9), was to instruct the church in the spiritual food of the flesh and blood of Christ, in the communication of the fruits of His mediation unto us by faith” (John Owen).”¹⁶

Crossing the Red Sea

v. 29; Ex. 14:1-31

This, of course, is one of the greatest miracles ever wrought by God in either testament. It is certainly significant that the author of Hebrews adds it as a testament of the faith of Moses, Aaron, Caleb, Joshua and the remnant of true believers whose faith is highlighted in Heb. 11:29. Why say it like that? Why not ‘the faith of the children of Israel?’ The author is purposefully highlighting the faith of true believers in chapter 11 – those who were saved. He does not call this group of millions ‘the children of Israel’ in v. 29, but *“the people”*.

In this crowd were unbelievers, grumblers, unfaithful complainers who crossed over, but only because the immediate alternative was death at the hands of the Egyptian army. Notice a couple of things in the account – Ex. 14:10-12. This was no accident of navigation which boxed them in at the Red Sea. Note also Ex. 14:1-8 & 13:17-21 (esp. v. 18). This was a divine test for Israel. Now, well after this event, see Deut. 32:20. And we are all aware of the numerous accounts of complaining and grumbling by the majority of the people as they were led towards the promised land. Even on the doorstep of Canaan (Num. 13:1-14:38), 12 spies go in to scout out the land, but the negative report of 10 of them overshadow the godly report of the other 2, and the

¹⁶ Pink, Heroes, p. 178

people rebel and refuse to enter – note Num. 14:20-38 & compare Heb. 3:12-19, where disobedience = unbelief.

So, while the faith of those among the ones who cross over on dry land through the Red Sea is celebrated here, there is no real mention of the unbelieving majority except by the absence of the title, “children of Israel”. There is the contrast of the pagan Egyptian army of Pharaoh who tried to follow without faith and were drowned when God brought the waters back over them and made their chariot wheels stick and break on the sea bed – trapping them for deadly judgment.

There are so many interesting elements of the crossing story in Exodus 14, and even in chapter 15 in “the Song of Moses”, that we could spend a long time examining the details, however, this lesson has already been lengthy, so I want to highlight why God did it this way – why He put them to the test to see whose faith would rise to the occasion.

Even if we go back to before the actual plagues, Passover and the Exodus, we see God’s intentions as expressed to Moses, the redeemer of Israel.¹⁷

It is God who works in all of His people’s lives to give them faith to exercise on His behalf, deeds that will bring Him glory. We have seen this in every case since we began to look at Hebrews 11 many weeks ago. Verse 29 is no exception. God can do amazing things through His people when they fully trust in Him and in faith, exercise the “conviction of things not seen” and have the “assurance of things hoped for.”

Every person named or even alluded to in this chapter had a picture in their hearts of a huge God, a God with no weaknesses and no possibility of failure. Os Guinness gets the last word in this lesson;

“If we believe in God, yet at the same time presuppose a picture of God that is less than he is, our faith is bound to suffer. Our conception of God will be pinched and uncomfortable. The false idea of God will act like a tight collar on faith, throttling its style, confining its movements, shutting down the full freedom of truth. Could someone expect to be comfortable if he is wearing a belt two inches too tight or a pair of shoes two sizes too small? Is it different for faith? Confronted with a shrunken picture of God, faith has no room to be itself and doubt is the expression of its discomfort.”¹⁸

¹⁷ The following verses express the purposes of God for the plagues being brought against Egypt and Pharaoh – Exodus 3:15, 19-20; 4:21-23; 6:1-12 (God’s “I wills”); 7:3-5,17; 8:10,21-22; 9:13-16, 29-30; 10:1,2; 11:6,7,9; 12:12,40 (cf. Gen. 15:13f); 13:8,16; 14:4,15-18,31 & 15:21.

¹⁸ Os Guinness, *God in the Dark*, Crossway, 1996, p. 69-70