THE PROPHET OF THE PASSOVER By Andy Diestelkamp

By the time the generation of Joseph and his brothers passed away, *“the children of Israel ... multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land [of Egypt] was filled with them”*(Ex. 1:7). Not wanting to lose them as a labor force but not wanting them to increase in power, the Egyptians *“set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens”*(v. 11). However, despite life being hard for the Israelites, they continued to multiply to the point that Pharaoh instructed all newborn males to be killed (vv. 12-22).

It is in this context that Moses was born to parents of the tribe of Levi, who—*“by faith”* and *“not afraid of the king’s command”—*hid him for three months (Heb. 11:23). Then he was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter with his own mother serving as nursemaid (Ex. 2:1-10). No wonder then that Moses, despite being *“learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians”*(Ac. 7:22), had such an affinity for his Hebrew brethren when he *“looked at their burdens”* (Ex. 2:11) that he came to their defense. This he did by faith, *“choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin* (Heb. 11:24,25).  As Stephen noted, Moses *“supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand”* (Ac. 7:25). So Moses fled into the wilderness of Midian and worked as a shepherd there for forty years (v. 30) before God called Him to return to Egypt to appear before Pharaoh *“that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt”*(Ex. 3:10).

The parallels between Moses and Jesus are obvious. From events surrounding their births (fearful king killing innocent baby boys) to coming to deliver others from bondage to being rejected, Moses pointed to Jesus. Years later, Moses told the children of Israel that one day God would *“raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear”*(Deut. 18:15).

Stephen, in his own defense before an angry Jewish council, established Israel’s pattern of rejecting God’s prophets, citing the rejections of both Joseph and Moses by the Jewish forefathers (Ac. 7:9-36). Speaking of Moses, Stephen said, *“whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt”*(7:39).This history he reviewed as evidence that the Jews’ rejection, betrayal, and murder of the Messiah was just more of the same (vv. 51-53). *“Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy ... of how much worse punishment ... will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the spirit of grace?”*(Heb. 10:28,29).

Moses was to secure the deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt through a series of plagues by which Egypt would be humbled, God would be glorified, and the so-called gods of the Egyptians shown to be impotent (Ex. 3:20; 7:3-5; 12:12 ). Most of the ten plagues could have been seen as direct attacks on objects of Egyptian worship. After nine plagues, God told Moses, *“I will bring yet one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether”*(11:1). Moses predicted to Pharaoh that *“all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die”*(v. 5). Then Moses *“went out from Pharaoh in great anger”*(v. 8). But God told Moses, *“Pharaoh will not heed you, so that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt”* (v. 9). Yet, this *would* be the event that would secure the deliverance of Israel from bondage.

God told Moses to instruct the children of Israel about what He was going to do and how to prepare for the event. In view of their coming deliverance, the current month would be the first month of Israel’s calendar (12:1). On the tenth day of the month, each household was to select a lamb (v. 2) *“without blemish, a male of the first year”*(v. 5). It was to be kept until the fourteenth day and then killed at twilight with its blood being applied to the doorposts and lintel of the house in which the lamb was to be eaten (vv. 6,7). The meal was to be eaten quickly as they prepared for travel and was called, *“The LORD’s Passover”*(v. 11).

The significance of this terminology pertained to the judgment coming upon Egypt from which Israel would be spared. *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt ... and will strike all the firstborn ... both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment. I am the LORD”*(v. 12). The blood would be the sign that would *“make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel”*(11:7). God said, *“When I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt”*(12:13). Moses assured the people that God would *“not allow the destroyer to come into [their] houses”* (v. 23). On the midnight following the fourteenth day of the month, God struck all the firstborn in Egypt. Pharaoh rose in the night, called for Moses with the message, *“go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go serve the LORD as you have said”*(vv. 29-31). The blood of an unblemished lamb saved believers from the wrath of God and secured their freedom from bondage. They were to remember this for generations to come (vv. 24-27). So should we!

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