

Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews is commonly referred to as the “Faith” chapter of the Bible. In it we see a number of Old Testament examples of faith, some of which are obvious, others that sort of leave you wondering “why is that an example of faith?”. For instance, we see the example of Abel, who offered a sacrifice to YHWH along with his brother Cain. According to the text, Abel’s offering was an act of faith though his brother Cain’s offering apparently was not. Why is that?

Then there was Enoch. We have a number of questions about Enoch. Is he alive? Is he dead? Did he go to heaven? His ending is somewhat of a mystery. But why was it an act of faith to let God do whatever He did with him?

Maybe in Abel’s case, it was knowing that his brother had a short fuse, and “blew up” for seemingly insignificant things. Maybe Cain knew what kind of offering to give, but only gave what he wanted. And maybe Abel knew that if he offered the proper offering, Cain might have a melt down and kill him. If he offered his sacrifice knowing he might die as a result, I can see it being an act of faith. Was that the case? I’m not sure, because the writer of Hebrews does not give us enough information.

So what do we know, or better yet, what did they know, that we don’t know? It appears that 2000 years ago, there was more information available to them than there is to us today.

Another example of faith in the “Faith Chapter” of the Bible is that of Moses. There, beginning in verse 23, it talks about his parent’s faith when they chose to hide him, knowing that it might lead to their own deaths. Then it talks about Moses’ faith when he chose to forsake the ‘good life’ of being a part of Pharaoh’s household, and instead become a part of the Hebrew people. After that, it talks about him leaving Egypt, and the apparent fear he had of being hunted down by Pharaoh’s “hit men”.

Then it says –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 11:28** By faith he (Moses) kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

That verse perplexed me. Why did it take ‘faith’ for Moses to keep the Passover? If Moses had been sent to secure the Israelite’s release (which he was), and if the Passover was going to be the final step in fulfilling that task, why would it take any more faith than any of the other plagues?

Did he think that his fellow Hebrews might not participate? When you consider the Israelites plight, that scenario seems unlikely. Would not the Hebrews do practically anything to end their years of slavery and get out of Egypt? Would they even have a second thought about killing a lamb and eating the Passover if it was going to protect their firstborn and secure their freedom?

Maybe he thought that the Israelites had been lulled into thinking that “it wasn’t going to happen to them!” After all, they had not been negatively affected by Moses’ other plagues since the lice. Since then it seemed that they had been “protected” from the plagues. And why would God want to kill any of us anyway? Didn’t He send Moses to us to set us free? Surly He’s not going to kill any of the Israelite people!

So why did it take faith for Moses to keep the Passover? Is there something in the story that we’re missing? Did the first century writers know something we did not know? Or are we simply reading the story and “passing over” many of the details that have been laid into the text?

In this message I want to show you that it did indeed take faith for Moses – as well as for all Israel - to keep the Passover on that very fateful night. To set the stage for that conclusion, we will see that:



- Moses' pathway to faith was his education
- Faith comes by building on a foundation
- Moses' Calling was absolute
- Killing a lamb meant certain death
- It took Faith for Moses and Israel to keep the Passover

### Moses' Background

Moses was sent to by God to secure the release of the Israelites – a monumental task. Not only would he have to convince the Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave, he also would have to convince the Israelites to actually pack up and go. Knowing the difficulty Moses would face, God began to prepare him very early in life for the role he was going to play.

First, Moses would have to know the history of the Hebrew people. Whereas most children learn about their family history simply by being a part of the family and asking questions, Moses was adopted at a very early age and raised in an Egyptian home – but not just any Egyptian home. He was raised in the home of the princess of Egypt, the daughter of Pharaoh himself.

Scripture gives us little detail as to how long Moses stayed with his birth parents, when he discovered that he was a Hebrew, and whether or not Pharaoh eventually discovered that his 'grandson' was a Hebrew. Much, if not all of what we do know comes from the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), specifically Steven's discourse and the book of Hebrews.

When Steven was retelling the history of the Hebrew people, he said:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Acts 7:22-25** "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. <sup>23</sup> "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. <sup>24</sup> "And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. <sup>25</sup> "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that **God** would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.

Though this short passage provides much information about Moses and his status among the Hebrews, I want to hone in on three specific points:

- Moses was well educated in what it meant to be an Egyptian
- Moses was mighty in words as well as in deeds
- Moses had come to realize (before the Burning Bush encounter) that it was his destiny to deliver Israel.

### Moses' Education

According to Steven, Moses had become very knowledgeable of the Egyptian culture. This implies that as part of the 'royal family' he was tutored in every aspect of Egyptian history, had access to libraries, and was privy to information regarding Egyptian law and treaties with other nations. With such access to information, he surely read, or had been taught about the Hebrew people who had such an impact on Egyptian history and who were now serving them as slaves.

He would have learned about a certain governor named Zaphnath-Paaneah<sup>1</sup>, a man the Egyptians had once held in high esteem, and who surprisingly enough, was in fact a Hebrew named Joseph. He would have learned that Joseph rose to power very quickly and had for nearly two centuries, been honored for his wisdom in saving Egypt from a devastating famine. He would have also noticed that many of the nations who were currently subject to Egyptian law, had become vassals during that famine.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 41:45



Studying deeper into the life of Zaphnath-Paaneah, Moses would have found that his brothers and their families remained in Egypt long after the famine had ended, and were the progeny of the Hebrew people. Finally, he would have learned that Zaphnath-Paaneah died years before his brothers, but before he did, instructed them to transfer his bones back to Canaan when they finally left Egypt. “Could that” he probably wondered, “be the reason Pharaoh has kept a sentry at the tomb of Zaphnath-Paaneah for all these years?”

Further study into this man ‘Joseph’ (as the Hebrews would call him) would have lead him to find Joseph’s great-grandfather, a former Babylonian named Abraham. Abraham had long before given up the belief in the pantheon of Babylonian gods, and had begun to believe in the one true God. He had migrated to Canaan to escape the Babylonian culture where he become the patriarch of the Hebrew people.

As he learned more about this man ‘Abraham’, Moses would have seen that the current bondage of the Hebrew people was part of a covenant Abraham’s god had made with Abraham hundreds of years ago. He would have seen that the bondage was to last 400 years, would be proceeded by a time of judgment for Egypt, and that the Hebrews would become very wealthy just before being delievered from bondage. He also noticed that, based on Egyptian chronology , the time these things were going to happen was very near.

In addition to his studies in Egyptian history and politics, Moses would have become well versed in the meaning, purpose, and worship of the various Egyptian “gods”. Moses’ Egyptian ‘grandfather’ was himself considered to be a ‘god’, and if things continued as they were, it was likely that Moses too would have become a “god”.

In Egypt, there was a ‘god’ for everything, so as an Egyptian leader, Moses would need to know which ‘god’ to call on for various reasons. If he were to instruct the people regarding planting, He would reference Osiris, the God of the Nile. If he were asking for relief from a storm, he would call on the god “Set”, the god of chaos and storms. As an “Egyptian”, Moses would have been expected to bow down and worship the ‘gods’, and he probably did.

### **Moses, the Leader**

Steven also revealed that Moses was mighty in words and deeds. Either Moses had become a prolific writer, or he was a great orator, or both. Based on the fact that the words spoken by Moses are still being repeated today is a testament to the fact that he was indeed mighty in both.

Being able to motivate by words is a trait that propels leaders to greatness. Unlike the theory that Moses stuttered, it’s quite likely that Moses was a commander of a large part of the Egyptian army, and by his spoken words, was able to motivate men to succeed. He had probably learned that in victory, good leaders give credit to others, and seldom take credit themselves. As a leader, Moses would have had compassion for those who were in his charge, and as such – his men looked up to him and trusted him . . . knowing that their leader had their best interest in heart. He probably gained these traits while being groomed by Pharaoh himself to become Egypt’s next leader.

### **Moses, the Hebrew**

One last piece of information we learn from Steven is that Moses had sometime in his life, come to know that he was a Hebrew. As years went by, and as he witnessed the suffering of the Hebrew people, he began to put the ‘puzzle’ pieces together and realized that he would be Israel’s deliverer. This put him in a very difficult position. As an Egyptian leader, conspiring with the Hebrews to secure their release would have been treason and punishable by death. On the other hand, if he were to denounce his relationship to the royal family, he would have lost the status required to intervene for the Hebrews, and would have become a slave himself.



The writer of Hebrews reveals still more information about Moses -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 11:24-27** By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, <sup>25</sup> choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, <sup>26</sup> esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. <sup>27</sup> By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Looking at Moses' life from a 'faith' perspective, we see five additional points about his life –

- he decided to help the Hebrews during the 'peak' of his career.
- he believed that to ignore the Hebrew's plight would be 'sin'
- he had come to see through the fallacy of the Egyptian gods
- if he remained as Egyptian, he was destined to become Pharaoh
- if he denounce his Egyptian status, his grandfather would not be very happy

The first point is that Moses made the decision to renounce Egypt at the pinnacle of his greatness. In verse 24, the phrase "of age" comes from the Greek word "megas" (Strong's 3173) which means "great" or "huge" as in "megabyte" or "mega-millions". Thus the writers intent could be (as is translated in Young's Literal Translation) that Moses made this decision to help the Hebrews when everything was going good for him. It was at that point that God moved him to make a choice, and it wasn't an easy choice.

Secondly, if indeed Moses had already concluded that he was the Hebrew who would free the Israelites from slavery, simply ignoring his calling would have caused him to miss the purpose for which he was brought into Pharaoh's house. Moses' predicament could be summarized like this –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **James 4:17** Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

The third point reveals that Moses had begun to believe that there was one God, and that this one God had much more to offer than the Egyptian pantheon of gods. This knowledge probably came about as a result of his studies of Abraham and his offspring – Isaac and Jacob – who each had a 'relationship' with their god Yahweh. This was quite different from the Egyptian gods, where the tradition was to avoid contact with them and leave them alone.

Our fourth point is that it appears Moses was destined to become either the next Pharaoh, or at least someone very high in government. As such, the "treasures of Egypt" would be at his disposal. Maybe because Moses had shown himself to be such a superb leader, Pharaoh had already let it be known that Moses would bypass to the throne any of Pharaoh's biological children.

Finally, if Moses denounced the throne, Pharaoh would have felt betrayed (based on the previous point) and would attempt to have Moses killed.

From what we've seen so far, it's clear that if Moses were to renounce Egypt, he would not only be giving up a very prestigious life, he would also be putting himself in jeopardy. When he decided to protect the life of an Israelite by killing an Egyptian, his course was decided, but when he found that the Hebrew people were not going to automatically accept him as their deliverer, he realized that he had acted prematurely. So he left Egypt and went to Median where he could regroup and come up with a plan.<sup>2</sup> While in Midian, Moses married, had children, and became a shepherd. It appears that his desire to rescue the Hebrews soon gave way to his new life as a shepherd.

But God still had unfulfilled plans for Moses. According to the apostle Paul -

<sup>2</sup> See Hebrews 11:27 where it shows that Moses persevered with God



<sup>NKJ</sup> **Romans 11:29** . . . the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable.

Once God has called a person, or a people, to perform a service for Him, that calling cannot be undone. Moses' life as a shepherd was about to change.

### **Moses' Faith?**

Before moving on, let's talk a little about faith. According to the book of Hebrews –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 11:1** . . . faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Breaking this statement down to its root meanings, we find that FAITH equals SUBSTANCE plus EVIDENCE. Let's break those two words down and see what they really mean.

Taken from the Greek word "hupostasis" (Strong's 5287) the word "substance" basically means "something strong on which something else is built". In the New Testament, "hupostasis" is oftentimes translated "confidence", and confidence is built on something strong and steady. So faith is first built on a solid foundation. In other words, a person can begin to have hope for something if there is a foundation for that hope.

The second word, "evidence" is something you know is there, but you cannot see it. The word is taken from the Greek word "elegchos" (Strong's 1650) which means "proof". We have "evidence" that air exists because we can feel it when the wind blows, yet no one has ever seen air. The very fact that we are alive is proof that air exists.

So faith equals evidence that is built upon a strong foundation. A good example of faith is the Empire State Building in New York City.

A tourist who had never been in a tall building might be hesitant to go to the top of this historic skyscraper out of fear that it might fall down. But if he wanted to overcome his fear, he would ask for help. If he were to ask for assurance that the building was not going to blow over, he would probably be shown at least two things:

1. that the building is built upon a massive foundation that extends down to the bedrock.
2. Though he had not been there to witness them, he might be shown historic evidence that the building has been standing for nearly 90 years and has weathered hurricanes, high winds, and storms without flinching.

Armed with this information, the tourist would be more confident that he can safely go to the top of the building.

Such is the same with faith. When the evidence that God provides through miracles or natural life cycles is placed on the foundation of God's word, which He says "never changes"<sup>3</sup>, you have faith.

For Moses, faith grew as he began to see YHVH working in his life. The foundation for his faith began with his education. It revealed to him that his ancestors played a huge part in making Egypt great, and that Egypt's greatness was simply part of a plan. It revealed to him that there was a God, and that God was fulfilling that plan right before his eyes.

The evidence of his faith was the fact that he – a Hebrew – had been raised as an Egyptian, knew the Egyptian laws and customs, had been trained to be able to motivate people by his words, had name recognition among the Hebrews, and most of all - had access to Pharaoh. As of yet, he had not seen God working this out, but never-the-less, he had evidence that he himself was going to play a part in it.

### **Moses' Calling**

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:10; Malachi 3:6; John 17:17



Armed with the faith that He was the one who God was going to use to free the Hebrews, Moses was probably not surprised when he heard God calling from him out of the Burning Bush. After a few futile excuses, Moses surrendered to his calling. To encourage him, God performed a couple of miracles and let Moses know that those who were given the responsibility of killing him, were now dead.

For the next few months, God sent plagues to Egypt. With each devastating plague, the Israelites knew they would soon be released, but their hopes were dashed as they realized that Pharaoh had become more resolved in his determination to never let the people go. Surely it crossed their minds that Moses might eventually 'give up', in which case Pharaoh's wrath would come down on them and they would be worse off than before, but Moses kept coming back time and again with a new and bigger plague.

Unbeknownst to the Israelites, the plagues were not for the purpose of securing their release. Instead, they were designed to minimize and destroy in the eyes of both the Egyptians and the Israelites, each of the Egyptian gods. One by one the 'gods' fell at the hand of Moses, and YHVH – Moses' god – became more real.

As the plagues continued, all Egypt began to see that the plagues were not simply 'the wrath of "the gods"', nor were they 'natural disasters'. They were indeed "the finger of God", i.e. – the God of the Hebrews - a god that was greater than all the Egyptian gods. To help establish that point, God (YHVH) began to insulate the Hebrews from the plagues, thus making a distinction between them and the Egyptians.

### **Darkness**

The ninth plague had a tremendous impact on the Egyptians. Though the previous plagues had devastated the agriculture and the economy, the darkness immobilized the nation. Every step they took might find them falling off a stair, slipping into a creek, being attacked by a wild animal, or worse. They would light a torch and feel its heat, but the light of the fire never appeared. They could not cook, draw water, or collect what little grain had been left after the locusts. They could not do anything . . . except see that things were normal for the Israelites. The Israelites were basking in light, but the light never extended to the Egyptians. It's as if the Hebrews had power over the light, and if they had power over the light, they had power over Khnum, the Egyptian god of light.

Khnum was the god of the sun and the air, the light and the breath. To the Egyptians, he was the "king of the gods". Because Khnum controlled the light, and since only the Israelites had light, it seemed as if the Israelites were able to control Khnum.

One of the interesting characteristics of this particular 'god' was that, like many of the Egyptian gods, Khnum had both human and animal features. In his case, he had the body of a man, and the head and face of a ram<sup>4</sup>. So Khnum was associated with sheep.

This is where things got touchy for Moses and the Israelites. The Israelites had come to see that YHVH was a god that far exceeded the power of the Egyptian gods. But were they willing to reject all the gods – even Khnum – and give their allegiance to YHVH?

What about Pharaoh and the Egyptians? Were they willing to do the same? Except for Khnum, all the 'gods' were shown to be nothing, and now YHVH was going to destroy Khnum as well, and the way He was going to do it was through the sacrifice of a lamb.

### **the Abomination of the Egyptians**

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<sup>4</sup> The names, characteristics, and responsibilities of the ancient Egyptian gods changed over time. Based on the era, the ram-faced god could have also been named "Amun"





During the plague of flies, which was the first plague that did not affect the Israelites, Pharaoh offered to let Israel do their sacrifice “in the land” if Moses would stop the plague. We see the story in Exodus 8.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 8:25-27** <sup>25</sup> Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God in the land." <sup>26</sup> And Moses said, "It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us? <sup>27</sup> "We will go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He will command us."

What is the “abomination of the Egyptians”? According to Genesis 46:34, it is sheep.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Genesis 46:34** "that you shall say, 'Your servants' occupation has been with livestock from our youth even till now, both we *and* also our fathers,' that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd *is* an abomination to the Egyptians."

Why were shepherds an abomination? Probably because to the Egyptians, sheep represented a ‘god’, and the ‘gods’ were something people just don’t mess with. In most pagan cultures (for instance, the ancient Greek and Roman cultures) the people believed that the best way to appease the gods was to stay away from them and leave them alone. If there had to be interaction with them, they would let a foreigner deal with them. In regards to sheep, it would be OK for a foreigner to shear the sheep to collect the wool (since that was a benefit to the sheep) but a person would never kill one, and especially not eat one.

So Moses was unwilling to sacrifice sheep in the vicinity of the Egyptians. To do so would be suicide. So he again suggested going three days into the wilderness where the Egyptians would not see it being done, and of course, Pharaoh refused.

Now six plagues later, God was going to unleash the “destroyer” on all the firstborn in the land, both Egyptian and Israelite, but was offering to protect the life of anyone’s firstborn if they would sacrifice a lamb and eat it. To the Israelites, this would be suicide if this plague turned out like the rest and failed to secure their release. To the Egyptians, it would be suicide as well, since they would be blamed for stirring up the wrath of the gods, especially the ram-faced ‘god of the gods’ named Khnum.

For Moses the Hebrew, it was even more. He had been reared as an Egyptian and had been fully indoctrinated in the Egyptian culture. He knew how serious an offense it was to kill a lamb, and now he was being instructed to tell the Israelites to do it. What’s more, he was to instruct them to take a lamb and restrain it in their homes for three days. To the Egyptians, it would be as if they had kidnapped Khnum - the “king of the gods” - and imprisoned him. Just think of the wrath that would bring on Egypt, especially if the Egyptian people did nothing to rescue him.

Then, for three long days, the Israelites were to wait to see if the Egyptians were going to react. If not, they were going to kill the lamb – in plain sight of the Egyptians – impale its carcass with a stake, then roast it on an open fire, again – in plain sight of the Egyptians. As it was cooking, the Egyptians would have figured out that the Israelites had every intention of eating it as well.

If YHWH was true to His word, the Israelites would out of Egypt before the next evening. If not, they would probably all be stoned. This was Moses’ big test of faith.

Up till now, Moses had only jeopardized his own life. Though Pharaoh may have gotten upset with Moses’ repeated demands to “let my people go”, he had not threatened to kill his entire work force. But now, Moses was putting all Israel in jeopardy. Was he willing to do that?

What if he did not follow God’s instructions? Moses had firstborn of his own. Both his wife and older son were firstborn. So was his sister. Was he willing to jeopardize their lives in order to avoid offending the Egyptians? Moses had to make a choice, and he did so based on his foundation and on evidence.



## By Faith, Moses . . .

Moses' foundation in YHVH was the knowledge he gained through his early studies. In those studies he saw how God had orchestrated events these past 300 or so years so that Moses would be in a position to bring the Israelites out of slavery. He saw that God had told Abraham that the Israelites would 'spoil' the Egyptians before they were released, and he was currently experiencing this very strange behavior. He read that Joseph had instructed his brothers that when they were released, they were to take his bones out of Egypt, and Moses knew where they were. He had also figured out the chronology of their promised release, and they were at that time. The foundation was secure. YHVH had been true to His word.

The evidence that Moses was indeed being called to fulfill this mission started with the Burning Bush. Evidence continued to build as Moses was able to call up signs from God almost on demand. Moses' ability to turn the mighty Nile River into blood was evidence that he was indeed being used to judge the false gods of the Egyptians, and the fact that in the later plagues, YHVH clearly made a difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians was further proof that God intended to separate the Israelites from Egypt.

So even though Moses had brought havoc on Egypt, but had yet to bring the release of the Israelites, he had the foundation and the evidence that it was indeed going to happen. Then God said something He had never said before –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 11:1** . . . "Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you away completely.

With this plague, God made a promise . . . a promise that this was going to be the plague that would make a difference. With this plague, Israel was going to be set free.

Moses had nothing to fear. If he and the Israelites all killed lambs and spread the blood on their doorposts, they were not going to die at the hand of the Egyptians.

So by faith, Moses instructed the Israelites to do what they feared.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 12:28-29** <sup>28</sup> Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. <sup>29</sup> And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock.

That evening, in plain sight of the Egyptians, Moses killed his lamb and all Israel followed his example. In the face of potentially catastrophic consequences, Moses' faith prevailed, and he – along with all Israel - kept the Passover.

Shalom Alecheim