

OT LESSON #13
BONDAGE, PASSOVER, AND EXODUS
by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Elder Holland quoted George Q. Cannon as he taught a great lesson on the character of God.

“No matter how serious the trial, how deep the distress, how great the affliction, [God] will never desert us. He never has, and He never will. He cannot do it. It is not His character [to do so]. He is an unchangeable being; the same yesterday, the same today, and He will be the same throughout the eternal ages to come. We have found that God. We have made Him our friend, by obeying His Gospel; and He will stand by us. We may pass through the fiery furnace; we may pass through [page 20] deep waters; but we shall not be consumed nor overwhelmed. We shall emerge from all these trials and difficulties the better and purer for them, if we only trust in our God and keep His commandments” (“Freedom of the Saints,” in *Collected Discourses*, comp. Brian H. Stuy, 5 vols. [1987–92], 2:185; emphasis added; cited by Jeffrey R. Holland, “Come unto Me,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1998, 20).

The rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt is powerful evidence of the truthfulness of the statement above.

1. THE LORD CALLS MOSES TO DELIVER ISRAEL FROM BONDAGE.

Why was Pharaoh killing little boys? At least one of the reasons is that he felt threatened by the numbers of Israelites. In a military action, the Israelite males might join with an enemy (see Ex. 1:10) and become a great danger to the security of Egypt. Therefore Pharaoh issued a command. The record suggests that the first effort to control the Israelites was affliction:

. . . they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. And [the Egyptians] were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel

to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour. (Ex. 1:11-14)

This effort was not terribly successful. “ But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.” (Ex. 12) So Pharaoh issued a command to the midwives,

of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. (Ex. 1:15,16)

The midwives must have feared the wrath and power of Pharaoh but they feared God more, and refused to do this heinous thing. They “saved the men children alive.” (Ex. 1:17) Finally Pharaoh commanded all the people, not just the midwives, to kill the male babies. (Ex. 1:22)

It was into this environment that Moses was born, sentenced to death before he had drawn his first breath. But in the way we are all familiar with, his mother saved his life and he made his home at the palace. In spite of the presentations in *The Ten Commandments* and *Prince of Egypt*. Moses did not learn of his heritage with he was a young man. He always knew he was of Israel.

The Egyptians knew who and what he was (see Ex. 2:6). He was nursed until weaned by a his own mother, a Hebrew (Ex. 2:7-9). And he was named Moses. The JST contains a prophecy written by Joseph that tells us about the significance of the name Moses.

And I will make him great in mine eyes, for he shall do my work; and he shall be great like unto him whom I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel, out of the land of Egypt; for a seer will I raise up to deliver my people out of the land of Egypt; and he shall be called Moses. *And by this name he shall know that he is of thy house;* for he shall be

nursed by the king's daughter, and shall be called her son (JST App. Gen 50:29, emphasis added).

His name told him that he was Israelite. It was apparently not until he was forty however, that he went to visit his brethren. But when he went, knew they were his people.

And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not (Acts 7:23-25).

This passage even suggests that he knew by the age of forty that he might have some role in delivering his people.

To pursue this thought a bit more, consider why Moses fled from Egypt. The passage quoted above from Acts 7 tells us that he “smote the Egyptian.” Verse 28 tells us that he killed the man. From Exodus we learn that this act had serious repercussions.

Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well (Ex. 2:15).

It would be incorrect to assume that Moses fled only out of fear of Pharaoh. Paul suggests another reason:

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible (Heb. 11:24-26).

Moses and the midwives teach us great lessons about fearing and obeying God. Both refused to act on the basis of fear. The midwives would not kill innocent babies to preserve their own safety. Moses' journey to Midian was the not the flight of a condemned man seeking to avoid justice, rather it was the journey of a disciple, seeking to behold the face and understand the will of God. The Lord spoke of Joseph Smith regarding the loss of the 116 pages and this very matter:

For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words— Yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble (D&C 3:7,8).

In Midian, Moses met Jethro, the priest of Midian, a man with seven daughters. The identification of Jethro as a priest is significant. The D&C tells us of

. . . the sons of Moses, according to the Holy Priesthood which he received under the hand of his father-in-law, Jethro . . . (D&C 84:6).

Jethro was the priesthood leader of a group of righteous people whose story is not recounted in the scriptures. Moses married a daughter of Jethro and settled down in Midian for 40 years.

Then the call came. We will discuss the reaction of Moses to that call in a moment, but first consider what Moses learned about the character of God.

The Lord said to Moses

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey . . . (Ex. 3:7,8)

Later he said,

Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:16,17).

These people had been living lives made bitter with hard bondage. I imagine they often felt abandoned by the God who had made covenants with their fathers. But he had not abandoned them. He had seen and had heard and knew and would deliver them and lead them into a land of milk and honey.

Last week we talked about the Lord's timing. How important it is that we trust him to do things in the best way and at the best time. The call of Moses was God's declaration that the time for the deliverance of Israel had come. The promises he had made to Israel through Joseph about a deliverer named Moses (see JST App. Gen 50:29) were now to be fulfilled.

But Moses was not thrilled with the call. There seem to be five objections he raises in his interview with the Lord. Here they are:

1. (3:11) "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of bondage?" *Who, me?* He seems to be saying. *Surely there are more qualified people out there, Let me work in the nursery and find someone else to teach Gospel Doctrine.*
2. (3:13) Who are you? We do not know how clear a concept of God the Israelites had retained after 400 years in Egypt, but Moses seems concerned that they will expect Moses to identify this God for them.

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your

fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? (Ex. 3:13).

3. (4:1) They will not believe me.

And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.

The Lord provided Moses with some fairly dramatic evidences to give his people so that they would understand that Moses was moved by the power of God.

4. (4:10) "I am not eloquent" and I never have been. "I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue." This is the language Enoch used thousands of years earlier. He protested when he was called that he was slow of speech (see Moses 6:31). Moses' difficulty seems to be very real. Look in your scriptures at Exodus 6:12.

And Moses spake before the LORD, saying, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?

The phrase *uncircumcised lips* is rewritten in the footnotes. Fn12a changes the phrase *uncircumcised lips* to *impaired speech*.

Exodus 6:30 gives more insight:

And Moses said before the LORD, Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?

JST footnote 30a tells us that Moses was "of stammering lips, and slow of speech . . ."

5. (4:13) Please send someone else!

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can

speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God. (Ex. 4:14-16).

This reluctance of Moses disappeared before the Israelites left Egypt. The probable cause of Moses' dramatic change in commitment is the experience recorded in Moses 1. There is one more lesson from the experience of Moses on Mt. Sinai that deserves a paragraph or two here.

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the presence of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. (Ex 3:1-3, JST).

When Moses approached the bush, the Lord stopped him for a moment:

And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground (Ex. 3:5)

The lesson is that reverence and respect must be a part of our entrance into the presence of God. We must prepare ourselves—we must take off our shoes, spiritually sneaking—before we approach the Lord. Elder McConkie said:

We approach Deity in the spirit of awe, reverence, and worship. We speak in hushed and solemn tones. We listen for his answer. We are at our best in prayer. We are in the divine presence. (Bruce R. McConkie, "Why the Lord Ordained Prayer," *Ensign*, Jan. 1976, 12)

Another lesson worth learning here: *Whom God calls, he qualifies*. We have seen this truth manifested many times in the scriptural accounts of the calling of God's servants, for example, Gideon, Nephi, Saul, Enoch, etc. The willingness of the Lord to assist us in difficult assignments, as he did Moses, is nicely illustrated by the following story: President Faust told

. . . of a young piano student. His mother, wishing to encourage him, "bought tickets for a performance of the great Polish pianist, Paderewski. The night of the concert arrived and the mother and son found their seats near the front of the concert hall. While the mother visited with friends, the boy slipped quietly away.

Suddenly, it was time for the performance to begin and a single spotlight cut through the darkness of the concert hall to illuminate the grand piano on stage. Only then did the audience notice the little boy on the bench, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

His mother gasped, but before she could move, Paderewski appeared on stage and quickly moved to the keyboard. He whispered to the boy, "Don't quit. Keep playing." And then, leaning over, the master reached down with his left hand and began filling in the bass part. Soon his right arm reached around the other side, encircling the child, to add a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice held the crowd mesmerized.

In our lives, unpolished though we may be, it is the Master who surrounds us and whispers in our ear, time and time again, "Don't quit. Keep playing." And as we do, He augments and supplements until a work of amazing beauty is created. He is right there with all of us, telling us over and over, "Keep playing" (James E. Faust, "What It Means to Be a Daughter of God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 101).

2. THE LORD SENDS PLAGUES UPON EGYPT.

Moses and Aaron went to visit the Children of Israel. They delivered God's message and showed God's signs.

And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped (Ex. 4:31).

We might suppose that they immediately began packing for the Exodus. God was going to deliver them! No more slime pits! No more scavenging for straw! No more tally of bricks to deliver! The language of Pharaoh suggests that they may have quit working or reduced their effort in anticipation of their freedom (see Ex. 5:4,5,17). But once again, we discover that the timing of God's people and the timing of God are not necessarily the same. Things did not immediately get better for Israel. In fact, as they were obliged to find their own straw for the required supply of bricks, things got worse. The Israelites came to Moses and Aaron

And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us (Ex. 5:21).

Moses took the matter to the Lord:

Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all (Moses 5:22,23).

God sent a return message to Israel.

I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring

you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD. (Ex. 6:6-8).

We will pass by the first 9 plagues in reverent silence except to note that the Lord offered the Egyptians a number of opportunities and reasons to repent, all of which were rejected by Pharaoh and, apparently, by many of his people.

3. THE LORD INSTRUCTS MOSES IN THE PREPARATION OF THE PASSOVER.

In preparation for the 10th plague, the Lord gave special instructions: the Israelites were to select a perfect male lamb and prepare themselves so that the angel of destruction would *pass over* them. Their protection would come as they applied the blood of the lamb to the door posts and lintels of their dwellings. There are levels of lessons here.

The Passover is a type of deliverance from the slavery of sin: from the bondage of the world; from the Pharaohs of greed and power and lust. It is the passing over of the angel of spiritual death so that the darkness of unbelief is replaced by the light of the gospel. It is a deliverance from the doom we deserve for our sins; from the spiritual death that awaits the wicked; from the outer darkness of Egypt and Sodom and Sheol-because the blood of Christ has been applied to us by faith. By sprinkling our Lord's blood upon the doorposts of our hearts and upon the lintels of our souls, we set our dwellings apart from the world: we make open and visible confession of our allegiance to Him whose blood has eternal saving power; we set ourselves apart from the Egyptians, the Sodomites, and the seekers after Sheol; and we place ourselves with the believing portion of mankind. As each family group ate their paschal lamb and drank of the cup of blessing so must we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus. As the Passover was useless unless eaten, so must we live godly lives in Christ, and openly certify our love for him by keeping his commandments. As it was eaten with bitter herbs so must we eat our Passover with the bitter herbs of confession and repentance. (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, vol. 1, p. 165)

This account caused me to remember the prayer of the Nephites who had been listening to the sermon of King Benjamin.

And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men (Mosiah 4:2)

We must cry out for this same blessing, that the Lord will “apply the atoning blood of Christ” upon “the doorposts of our hearts and upon the lintels of our souls.”

What a blessing to have the atoning power of Christ and his blood protecting us and our families and the places where we dwell. But there is more: a warning, as it were, comes from Exodus 12:22 to those of us so protected.

And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and *none of you shall go out at the door* of his house until the morning (emphasis added).

Once we have installed the protective influence of the atonement in our lives, we must not leave it to out at the door to explore the world.

The last supper eaten by the Savior with his disciples was a Passover meal. At that time, the Lord instituted a new ordinance, the sacrament, designed as was the Passover to focus the attention of the people on the atonement.

As the Apostle Paul wrote, we were “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20). What an expensive price and what a merciful purchase!

That is why every ordinance of the gospel focuses in one way or another on the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, and surely that is why this particular ordinance with all its symbolism and imagery comes to us more readily and more repeatedly than any other in our life. It comes in what has been called “the most sacred, the most holy, of all

the meetings of the Church” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56, 2:340).

Perhaps we do not always attach that kind of meaning to our weekly sacramental service. How “sacred” and how “holy” is it? Do we see it as our passover, remembrance of our safety and deliverance and redemption?

With so very much at stake, this ordinance commemorating our escape from the angel of darkness should be taken more seriously than it sometimes is. It should be a powerful, reverent, reflective moment. It should encourage spiritual feelings and impressions. As such it should not be rushed. It is not something to “get over” so that the real purpose of a sacrament meeting can be pursued. This is the real purpose of the meeting. And everything that is said or sung or prayed in those services should be consistent with the grandeur of this sacred ordinance. (Jeffrey R. Holland, “This Do in Remembrance of Me,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 67,68).

4. THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL CROSS THE RED SEA.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea (Ex. 14:1,2).

Note that the Lord placed Israel in the predicament from which their appeared to be no escape. When Israel found themselves trapped between the sea and the Egyptians, they panicked.

And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did

tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Ex. 14:10-12).

It is not as though these people had never experienced the power of God. What nation since the days of Enoch had ever seen the might of God displayed like these people saw it during the plagues?

Moses tried to reassure them.

Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace (Ex. 14:13,14).

The Lord said to Moses:

Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward . . . (Ex. 14:15).

Forward? The Red Sea is *forward* . . . But the Lord has said, “ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6). Going toward the sea is such an act of faith. But during a period of several hours (“all that night”), while the Egyptians were restrained by the pillar of fire, Israel crossed the sea on *dry ground* (see Ex. 14:16,21,29) The miracle seemed to have the desired effect.

And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses (Ex. 14:31).

No one in all of Israel, watching the tumult of cascading waters destroying the chariots and horses and soldiers of the Egyptians, was inclined to say, “Boy, were we lucky!”

CONCLUSION: At least one of the purposes of the plagues and other manifestations was to convince the Israelites and the Egyptians of the majesty of God. Each of the following verses speaks of this reality: Exodus 6:7; 7:5; 7:17;

8:10; 8:22; 9:14; 9:16; 9:29; 11:7; 14:4; 14:18. How well this worked is subject to some debate. The Israelites were frequently rebellious during their journeys in the wilderness, refusing to be governed and murmuring against Moses and Aaron. But when Israel left Egypt, a “mixed multitude” left with them (Ex. 12:38). When Moses announced the forthcoming plague of hail,

He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses . . . (Ex. 9:20).

Perhaps these servants were among those who departed from Egypt with the people of God.

These events ought to help convince us as well. We can take comfort in this reality. When God sets out to do a thing, he gets it done.

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