

- c. Moses spent nearly all his first forty years of life as a prince of Egypt, enjoying all of the privilege and luxury that such status afforded him. But God had set him apart for greater things, and Moses himself seems to have had some sense of his calling on behalf of Abraham's descendents. The Exodus narrative suggests that, at the very least, he was aware of his Hebrew heritage, and that knowledge led him to the providential interaction with his brethren that resulted in his complete separation from his Egyptian family and home. But Luke's account of Stephen's stoning goes further, stating that Moses acted with the knowledge that God had appointed him to deliver the Hebrew people from their bondage.

Assuming that Moses had that awareness, it raises the question of what he was thinking when he fled from Egypt under the threat of death. He obviously couldn't help his Hebrew brethren from a place of refuge outside of Egypt, and so he must have had some confidence that God was going to bring him back there. Even more, why would Moses flee in the first place? If God had indeed set him apart to be His deliverer, wouldn't He keep him safe from those who sought his life? These sorts of questions become all the more significant in light of the Hebrews writer's assertion that Moses' flight from Egypt was an act of *faith* (11:27). If anything, he seems to have acted out of fear (note Exodus 2:13-15), not faithful regard for his calling. And yet this is the very thing the writer denied: "*By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.*"

Some have answered this dilemma by concluding that the author was referring to Moses' *second* departure from Egypt – the occasion when he led the Hebrew nation out into the wilderness. This resolves the question of Moses' fear, but it introduces a *chronological* problem: It has the writer speaking of the Exodus before the Passover episode (vv. 27-28). This isn't a problem in itself, but there are several considerations that argue against it.

- 1) First, the author has followed the historical and scriptural chronology throughout the entire context, and he doesn't give any hint here that he had a reason for deviating from that pattern in this particular instance.
- 2) Secondly, the Exodus episode was a matter of *corporate* faith, and not simply Moses' faith. Indeed, the writer noted that with his next statement that the *Hebrew nation* passed through the Red Sea "by faith" (v. 29). That being the case, why single out Moses in the matter of leaving Egypt?
- 3) As well, the author associated this departure with Moses' *endurance* provoked by the faith of "*seeing Him who is unseen.*" This depiction could describe the Exodus and wilderness period, but it fits more naturally with the forty years that Moses spent in the land of Midian (Exodus 2:15ff). For those long years were indeed a time of endurance, as Moses patiently waited for the day when Yahweh would call him to his appointed task. He fled Egypt with the conviction that God had chosen him to deliver His people, and no span of silent years would change that ordination.

These considerations (and others as well) strongly suggest that the author was here referring to Moses' flight after he killed the Egyptian taskmaster, not the Exodus that came some forty years later. But this leaves unresolved the seeming contradiction between the Exodus account and the Hebrews writer's claim. There's no doubt that he knew the scriptural account of this episode, and he'd closely adhered to the scriptural text in all of his treatment to this point (vv. 4-25). It makes no sense, then, that he would here contradict the Scriptures by insisting that Moses' acted out of faith rather than fear. There has to be a different explanation, and a closer consideration shows what it is.

The first thing to note is that the Exodus text associates Moses' fear with the fact that he'd *been seen* slaying the Egyptian. He hadn't *acted* out of fear, but solidarity with his Hebrew brethren, and with the full knowledge of the grave, life-changing consequences of his action. Moses knew there was no going back once he raised his hand against an Egyptian, and yet he did so without fear or doubt. Even more, the indication is that Moses intervened with the clear sense of his calling to deliver the whole Hebrew nation from their Egyptian masters.

For his part, the Hebrews writer linked Moses' fear specifically to the Pharaoh and his retribution: "*By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's wrath...*" One might well argue that this is merely a distinction without a difference, in that Moses' fear when he realized that his action was known to others was precisely his fear of the king's wrath. For it was Pharaoh's authority and power that would see Moses punished, and indeed this is precisely what the Exodus account records (2:15). And so the dilemma remains: *Was Moses afraid for himself as Exodus says, or unafraid as the Hebrews writer insists?*

In the end, the dilemma is resolved by discerning how *both* are true – how it was that Moses was afraid, and yet marked by faith as he departed from Egypt. Some accomplish this by arguing that Moses was afraid of the possibility that he might die before fulfilling his task of delivering his Hebrew brethren. He was scared when he learned that his deed was known to others, because he realized that, however good his intention, he may have sabotaged God's purpose for him. And so he fled Egypt, not because he was afraid of the king, but in order to survive to fulfill his calling. While this interpretation is plausible, a closer look at the writer's statement suggests that he was actually making a different point.

The essence of his claim was that Moses' departure from Egypt was a matter of faith rather than fear of Pharaoh's wrath. But how was that the case? Again, many have answered that Moses' faith told him that he needed to survive; he fled Egypt because he believed he was God's chosen deliverer. But there is a better answer – one that better suits the second part of the statement. And that is that the writer wasn't speaking about Moses' flight from Egypt as such, but the circumstance that followed from it. He had left his brethren behind, and Pharaoh would almost certainly punish them for his offense. But Moses' faith enabled him to not fear the king's wrath – not with respect to *himself*, but his Hebrew countrymen.

And so the issue in Moses' *leaving* wasn't the action itself, but what it represented. It was by faith that he renounced Egypt (vv. 24-26), and it was by faith that he abandoned it altogether when he fled to Midian. But forsaking Egypt meant forfeiting all opportunity to help his brethren. He had left them behind, and yet he knew they weren't abandoned. For his faith was set upon the *God* who is faithful; the God who would not forget His covenant and oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses had been forced to flee, but he did so with full confidence that the Lord who is King over all kings would constrain the wrath of the Egyptian ruler and insure His people's survival. The God who'd made them a great nation against all odds (Exodus 1:8-20) would surely deliver them from their bondage and gather them to Himself in the land He promised to their fathers.

Moses had renounced Egypt forever, but not his Hebrew countrymen; he remained fully committed to them, even in his exile. He would never again be an Egyptian prince, but he would return as Yahweh's deliverer. It seems that Moses was sure of this outcome, but he had no way of knowing when or how it would happen. Thus the faith that the writer here highlighted had two basic dimensions: First, Moses' faith involved his patient endurance in Midian as he trusted Yahweh's purpose and timing and waited for His hand to lead him back to Egypt to fulfill his calling on behalf of his brethren. But Moses also trusted that his faithful God would watch over and preserve His people in their subjugation. When the day came for him to return to Egypt as Yahweh's deliverer, he was fully confident that he would encounter a great nation awaiting their deliverance.

Moses' faith expressed itself in patient endurance as he fixed his gaze on the God who, though unseen and silent, is ever-faithful. *And this endurance wasn't to be a brief interlude.* Most anyone can persevere in faith for a few weeks or months, but God required Moses to endure for forty years; he spent as long in Midian tending sheep and waiting for Yahweh's call as he did as a prince of Egypt. And this was no coincidence, for forty is the number of *testing*, and Moses' life consisted of three distinct periods of testing: forty years in Pharaoh's house as a prince of Egypt, forty years of patient waiting as a shepherd of Midian, and forty years leading Abraham's descendents through the travails of its wilderness wandering. In each of those eras, Moses was tested precisely at the point of his faith:

*Would he order his life and govern his decisions on the basis of his circumstances, experiences, and expectations, or according to his confidence and trust in the God who is faithful to His purposes and promises? Would he endure as holding onto what is seen, or as seeing Him who is unseen?*

Thus Moses passed his years in Midian, waiting and working in patient faith, unsure of what the future held and how his life would play out. But he knew two things: God is faithful, and his destiny lay in Egypt, so that his brethren's plight and his own calling were never far from his mind. For forty years he shepherded his family's sheep, until the day finally came when Yahweh sent him back to Egypt to shepherd His people Israel.