

Moses' Excuses, Our Calling

Parashat Shemot



Parashat Shemot

In some respects, Parashat Shemot, our weekly Torah portion, connects us to some of the major parts of the Torah. This parasha brings us back to the beginning, as well as connects us with the giving of the Torah, the prophets, and even the New Testament.

The portion begins with the following concept:

But the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them. – Exodus 1:7 [NIV]

This verse should remind us of Genesis, but in contrast to the beginning, when God brought order to the chaos, in Exodus Pharaoh rearranged the social structure of his world and brought demographic chaos to Egypt. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people:

'Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.' – Exodus 1:22 [NIV]

Why does Pharaoh command such a terrible and gruesome order? Does he know with royal intuition that a royal successor and redeemer of the people was born? Did Pharaoh want to kill the same redeemer that Herod did, when he followed Yeshua's star to Bethlehem?

In Genesis it is the woman who violated the commandment and also in Exodus, the woman (five women actually – Jochebed, Miriam, Shiphrah and Puah the midwives, as well as Pharaoh's daughter) violate an explicit order. Although contrary to what occurred in Genesis, they brought life.

Moses' Excuses

In chapter 3 of our Torah portion, there is a long and detailed description of a special, historical event: when Moses drew near to find out why the bush was not consumed by the fire (Exodus 3:3), he heard God call out to him. God presented Himself as God of his fathers and of the patriarchs, and informed him that He is about to free the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and bring them to the Promised Land.

It turns out that God imposed on Moses a major role in the task of liberating the enslaved Israelites:

So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. – Exodus 3:10 [NIV]

In a very interesting and human way, Moses refused to accept his calling five times, and each time he was asked he made another excuse to explain why he is not the right person for the task. I am sure that Moses had mixed emotions about all of this. On the one hand, we saw that Moses identified with the people of Israel so much that he risked his life and reputation just to rescue one of them. If he could, I'm sure he would have been happy to continue to help.

However, at the same time, he escaped from Egypt under the threat of capital punishment, and now he has a family, a job, and a whole other life. Moses' excuses are as follows (Exodus 3:11-4:13):

1. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11 [NIV])

2. “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” (Exodus 3:13 [NIV])

3. “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’” (Exodus 4:1 [NIV])

4. “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” (Exodus 4:10 [NIV])

5. “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.” (Exodus 4:13 [NIV])

For every argument, question, and demand, God answers patiently, until the last excuse: “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.” Then God got angry:

Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses... – Exodus 4:14a [NIV]

How is his fifth reason different from the other excuses? What can we glean from this today?

God asked Moses to take upon himself a very practical role with very fateful consequences – to save an entire people from slavery to freedom, to bring the people out from the mighty Egyptian empire. In order to succeed in this, he will not only have to convince Pharaoh to release a people who had worked there for hundreds of years, but to convince them that they are able to go out to freedom. From a human perspective, this is an impossible task. Therefore, Moses’ first four responses were justified, if not necessary. To convince the people of Israel, Moses had to know the answers to questions 2 and 3. To convince the house of Pharaoh, Moses had to remove the doubts he had about his abilities and talents, and for this came questions 1 and 4. God responded to this excuse and provided him with answers that were the tools needed for the task. In response to Moses’ last excuse, “Please send someone else”, God got angry. Why?

Because it’s likely that Moses is saying here that if he can not complete the task of bringing the children of Israel into the Promised Land, it’s better not to start at all (the “all or nothing” mentality).

Our Calling

There is a saying from Pirkei Avot that teaches us:

It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. – Pirkei Avot 2:16

This sentence teaches us that when there is an opportunity to get up and do something, it is permissible to check whether we have the proper tools to carry out the task, and if so, to get up and do as much as possible. If it is needed, you can rely on others to aid in carrying out the task.

I believe that this is the meaning of our calling as believers. To see how and what I can do for the Kingdom of God, for the sake of the Gospel. We are all the workers of God, and we must build the body of the Messiah and the Kingdom. There is so much work that Yeshua even asked us to pray for more workers because the time is short and the work is great, as it says in Matthew 9:

Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’ – Matthew 9:37,38 [NIV]

We have to get started. Regardless of whether we will be the ones who finish, or if we’ll have to hand off the work for others to finish. We must plant the seeds, and one day God will send someone else to harvest. Who are the workers of God who contribute to the creation and construction of the body of Messiah? The answer must be, “all of us together”.

**The Teachings of
Messiah Yeshua
*in a Jewish Context***

LEARN MORE AT:



NETIVYAH.ORG