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Shoeless In The Desert

THE MODERN MISTAKE OF MOSES

BY RICHARD JORDAN

A number of years ago the infamous infidel Robert Ingersol traveled the world lecturing on "The Mistakes of Moses." One dear saint commented, "I'd pay double to hear Moses lecture on 'The Mistakes of Ingersol!'" So would we.

This is not to imply that Moses made no mistakes-this article, in fact, focuses on one of his greatest blunders. Infidels, modernists and liberals alike, however, have long sought to discredit the validity of Moses' writings by pointing to supposed discrepancies and mistakes in the first five books of the Bible. We have no sympathy for such efforts and remind our readers that all such attempts have failed. Again and again the writings of Moses have proven trustworthy and true.

One of the great proofs of the inspiration of Scripture is that it records the failures and blemishes of its heros, their weaknesses as well as their strengths. Mere human authors would hardly do so as openly and consistently as do the divinely inspired Scriptures.

Thus as we look at a mistake Moses made-one that many in our day continue to make-we do so not to discredit either Moses or the books he wrote. Rather we desire to learn the lesson Moses learned and which God has recorded for us in the pages of His Word.

MOSES MISTAKE

"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 angel 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" (Ex. 3:1, 2).

It is instructive to notice that when the Lord confronted Moses at the burning bush, He found him in "*the backside of the desert.*" Moses had completely abandoned his nation, having been rejected by them as their deliverer some forty years previous.

Even though he had been raised in Pharaoh's household, groomed, educated and prepared for forty long years to fill a position of power in the Egyptian empire, Moses made the tremendous choice rather to stand with his people:

"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;

"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king..." (Heb. 11:24, 25, 27).

It is doubtless that Moses *knew* he was to be Israel's deliverer. This is clear from Stephen's address in Acts 7:

"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..." (Acts 7 :23-25).

Moses was in for a terrible disappointment, however, for when he made himself known to his people, they rejected him, misunderstood his mission and despised him

instead. The story is a familiar one: Having killed an Egyptian who was abusing one of his fellow Israelites, Moses supposed that now the news would soon spread that he was indeed their friend. He had not forsaken them for the prestige of Egypt. He was now ready to deliver them from bondage and lead them out, so he declared himself openly to them. But the next day when he visited his brethren again, probably to get their reaction to his initial act of deliverance, he approached and found two Israelites fighting:

"...and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?" (Ex. 2:13).

Then came the shock and surprise for Moses, for we read:

"And he [the fellow whom Moses rebuked] said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?" (Ex.2:14)

This seems to have been entirely too much for poor Moses. Had he not shown them that he was their friend? Had he not jeopardized his life by defending them? And now this! We can almost hear him saying, "There is gratitude for you! Instead of appreciating what I came to do for them, they accuse me of trying to murder my own brethren."

So Moses, disillusioned, wounded and disappointed, turned his back on his nation and went to "the backside of the desert." There he remained for forty more long years, content to be the herder of a flock of sheep.

WHAT MOSES FORGOT

Somehow we are surprised that Moses, who knew of God's covenant with Israel, who knew that they were God's people and that he was to be their deliverer, should so soon forget it all and leave them forsaken and alone. Really, however, it is not so difficult to understand.

Moses knew of God's covenant with Abraham but he forgot that this covenant was an unconditional, unbreakable covenant and that nothing Israel could do would ever cause God to forsake His covenant. Even though Israel had forgotten God, even though they had rejected God's chosen deliverer and savior, God's covenant still stood.

Moses seems to have missed this fact entirely. He supposed that because of Israel's disobedience and their rejection of him, the Lord was now through with them and was no longer bound by His oath to their fathers. Thus by abandoning his nation and fleeing to the backside of the desert, Moses was saying in essence, "These people are unworthy of God's mercy. They have forfeited their right to be delivered. God is through with them. Let them die in Egypt. That is exactly what they deserve and I'll have no more to do with them!"

But God had not forsaken His people and after forty years in the desert, He meets Moses at the burning bush to teach him the great lesson that the unfaithfulness of His people cannot affect or alter the faithfulness of God.

WHAT MOSES LEARNED

At the burning bush Moses is brought face to face with a dramatic picture of the nation which he had forsaken (and, no doubt, believed God had forsaken (The fact Moses had not circumcised his son would indicate he no longer considered the Abrahamic Covenant to be operative-at least as far as he was concerned (Ex. 4:24-26).), because of their unworthiness. The picture of Israel's history is presented to Moses under the symbol of the *burning bush*-a bush fiercely aflame and burning, yet at the same time unharmed and safely preserved.

In the record, Moses' encounter at the burning bush stands *between* two statements of God's covenant with Abraham and reminders of His faithfulness (2:24, 25 and 3:6-8). As Moses stood before the burning bush he was to learn that God keeps His promises in spite of all the unworthiness and unfaithfulness of others. They may suffer for their sins but God will not permit them to be destroyed; He will preserve them and ultimately deliver them.

The burning bush is a picture of the nation Israel, burning in the fires of affliction, persecution and slavery, yet for all that still not consumed. Burning, burning, burning, but not consumed. This is God's symbol of the nation Israel. (The true symbol of the nation Israel is *not* the six pronged so-called "Star of David," which in reality is the Satanic star of the demon Remphan (See Acts 7:43), but the *burning bush*)

Not only is the burning bush a picture of the nation Israel in Egypt during the days of Moses, but prophetically it becomes a preview of the whole history of that nation

from their beginning in the furnace of Egypt (Deut. 4:20) to their final, ultimate deliverance when their Messiah comes to put an end to their oppression and lead them into the Promised Land in complete fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham. Thus the burning bush pictures Israel in the midst of burning affliction, yet preserved by the presence of the Lord (Mal. 3:6, Isa. 63:9).

All this was impressed on Moses in a most emphatic and unforgettable fashion:

"And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

"And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

"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. 3:3-5).

The command to remove his shoes has been greatly misunderstood. This whole incident was a graphic object lesson to Moses. Being required to remove his shoes was a bitter *rebuke* for his terrible failure and mistake in his duty to his brethren.

We should understand that this command went beyond the simple fact that Moses was in the presence of God. Think it through for a moment: An animal had no doubt given its life to provide the shoes which covered the sinful flesh of Moses' feet. Thus it would have been better if they had remained covered in the presence of a holy God (Gen 3:21, Isa. 6:2). This would be better than to expose his sinful flesh! No, there is more here than this.

In Scripture, taking off the shoe was a sign of *disgrace*. It was demanded of those who had failed in their duty to their brethren. It was a *severe rebuke* for unfaithfulness to one's duty (see Deut. 25:5, 7-10, Ruth 4:6-8).

Moses' brethren were suffering in Egypt while he, their God-appointed deliverer, was on the backside of the desert. Off with your shoes, Moses, and get back into the place where God wants you, back to Egypt and your suffering brethren! Is it any wonder after this rebuke we read:

"And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God" (3:6).

Thus the shoe was removed, Moses was rebuked and God began to show him how he must go back to the place from whence he had fled and deliver Israel according to God's original plan and purpose. We suggest that you read the balance of Exodus 3 and all of chapter 4 to see the patience of God's tender dealing with his servant. He pleads with him and in spite of all of Moses' many, many objections, continues to bear with him until at last he does arise and start back to the land of Egypt, to his despised brethren and the place of duty.

THE MODERN MISTAKE

The mistake Moses made is still the mistake being made by much, if not most, of professing Christendom today. The teaching that God is through with national Israel, that they will never be restored to the land of Palestine again, but that the Church now is Israel and has taken her place and thus all the promises made to the nation must be spiritualized and given to the Church--this is only a repetition of Moses' mistake.

The modern teaching--that because the nation Israel rejected the Greater Prophet than Moses and failed to recognize Him when He came the first time, God is released from His covenant promises to them--is as great a mistake as Moses himself made.

Sadly Christendom must still learn the lesson that Moses had to learn. And just as Moses' mistake sent him to "the backside of the desert," no doubt this can explain why the professing Church finds itself, spiritually speaking, in the same empty, barren condition: Busy but barren.

Romans 11:25-27 clearly tells us:

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

"For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

Two things are very clear from this passage:

First, God is *not* "through with Israel" by any means. There has been a *temporary* interruption in His program for her, but that program has in no wise been cancelled or altered.

Second, the Body of Christ-the Church of today-is *not* Israel nor are we Israel's replacement. The expression "*wise in your own conceits*" is the idea of thinking you are something or someone you are not. This is exactly what those who fail to see "*this mystery*" revealed through Paul have done: they have usurped the position, promises and program given to the nation Israel. They have made "*The Modern Mistake of Moses.*"
