

# “The Reproach of Christ”

## The Nineteenth in a Series on the Epistle to the Hebrews

*Texts: Hebrews 11:23-28; Exodus 12:21-30*

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While all the Old Testament saints mentioned in Hebrews 11 believed the same covenant promise—that God would save them from their sins and grant them eternal life—not all of them believed that promise under the same set of circumstances. Although but a large family who believed in YHWH, the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the fathers of Israel) believed God’s covenant promise to grant their descendants the land of Canaan, make them a great nation, and give them so many descendants that they cannot be counted. Moses, however, came on the redemptive historical stage some four hundred years after God appeared to Abraham, when two of these covenant promises had already come to pass. Although effectively held captive in Egypt for many generations, the Israelites had become a great nation, and despite the difficult circumstances in which they found themselves, had grown in number well into the hundreds of thousands. But someone would have to lead the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt, across the Red Sea, through the desert of the Sinai, and then into the promised land of Canaan which was occupied by a number of very fierce Canaanite tribes. That leader was Moses.

As we return to our series on the Book of Hebrews, we are working our way through Hebrews 11, the so-called “hall of faith.” Throughout our time in this chapter, I have made the point that the author’s primary purpose is not to give us a list of people to emulate (“have faith like Abraham”). Rather, his purpose is to remind us that each of these people mentioned in this chapter believed God’s covenant promise to provide a redeemer who would save them from their sins, and who would ensure that all the covenant promises which God makes to his people are fulfilled. To enable us to devote sufficient attention to each of the people who make the catalogue of those who believed God’s covenant promise, I have divided our study of this chapter into small sections dealing with the individuals who make the catalogue according to the period in redemptive history in which they live.

In vv. 1-3, we discussed the author’s definition of faith—“*faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*” In vv. 4-7, we discussed those men known as the pre-diluvians because they lived before the time of Noah’s flood. All three of these men Abel, Enoch, and Noah, believed God’s promise, were justified, and then demonstrated their faith in God by living in obedience before him. Then in verses 8-16 we took up a discussion of Abraham, the man of faith, who believed God’s promise that he would have so many descendants that they could not be counted, despite the fact that Abraham and his wife Sarah were well beyond child-bearing years.

Last time (when we covered verses 17-22), we discussed Abraham and his immediate descendants, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (the so-called patriarchs, the fathers of Israel). As recounted in Genesis 22, when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac—the very one through whom God’s covenant promise would be fulfilled—Abraham obeyed God, took his beloved son Isaac up the mountain and prepared to sacrifice him as a burnt offering. According to the author of Hebrews’ interpretation of this event, not only did God provide a substitute for Isaac in the form of a ram, but Abraham knew that should he take Isaac’s life, God had the power to raise him from the dead. In fact, God must raise him if the promise to be fulfilled.

In verse 20, the author of Hebrews gives us a quick overview of the account in Genesis 27, where Isaac

thought he was blessing his oldest son Esau, but instead blessed the younger son Jacob, thereby ensuring that the line of the promised seed (the Messiah) remained intact. In Romans 9, we read that God loved Jacob, but hated Esau and that God's purpose in election must stand. Next, in verse 21, the author of Hebrews turns to the account of Jacob blessing his grandson Ephraim instead of Manasseh (Genesis 49), despite the objections of Joseph. As the author of Hebrews demonstrates, throughout these accounts we see the patriarch's awareness of God's covenant promise across five generations (Abraham down to Ephraim). We also see that God does what is necessary to ensure that his covenant promise stands, even when the patriarchs try to help God fulfill his promise (Abraham having a son, Ishamel, with Hagar; Jacob deceiving Isaac; and Joseph insisting that Jacob bless Manasseh).

**I**n verses 23-28 of Hebrews 11, we come to the next period in redemptive history recounted by the author, the life and times of Moses, events which occur some four hundred years after the time of Abraham.

In verse 23, the author of Hebrews begins to give us the New Testament perspective on the ministry of Moses, again from the perspective of Christ's death and resurrection, and in the light of God's covenant promise to Abraham. The author opens his discussion of Moses' role as covenant mediator by informing us that *"by faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."* The author is referring to events found in the first three chapters of Exodus.

Moses' parents were Amram and Jochebed (Exodus 6:20), and we know that his family were Levites, and that they are commended by the author of Hebrews for their faith in God's covenant promise. As we read in Exodus 2:1-2, *"now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months."* The child was hidden to protect him from being killed by the Egyptians, who were now under the reign of a new Pharaoh, who had issued an edict that all the male Hebrew children were to be killed. This action was intended to lower the population of the Israelites under captivity in Goshen (in Egypt), thereby reducing the chances of a rebellion of the Israelites against their increasingly cruel Egyptian masters.

According to the closing verses of Exodus 1, Hebrew midwives defied Pharaoh's order and cleverly found a way around the Pharaoh's edict, allowing male children to be hidden away to escape death. But we read of Moses' unnamed parents that they took it upon themselves to hide their child from the Pharaoh's authorities, and in doing so, demonstrated their faith in the promise that one day the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would inherit the land of Canaan. And according to the author of Hebrews, by faith, this unnamed Levite couple knew that their son would some how and some way be instrumental in the fulfillment of God's promise, and so they hid their son from the Pharaoh's men.

According to the mysterious purposes and providence of God, Moses ended up being raised in the household of Pharaoh. We learn in Exodus 2:3-10 how this remarkable turn of events came to pass. *"When [Moses' mother] could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child [Moses] in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.' Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew*

women to nurse the child for you?' And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Go.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed him. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, 'Because,' she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'" Moses' mother saved her son from certain death, God ensured that Moses would be raised in the household of Pharaoh (setting the stage for the future confrontation between Moses and the Pharaoh), and God even provided that the infant Moses would be nursed by his own biological mother. God's promises will come to pass!

In verse 24 of chapter 11, the author of Hebrews takes up the story of Moses at the point where the Exodus account we just read leaves off. *"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."* Again, while we are not told the specifics, Moses knew that he was a Hebrew (not an Egyptian), and despite the privileges that go with being raised in the royal household of one of the world's great empires, Moses identified with his people. As we read in Exodus 2:11-15, *"One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. [Moses] looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, 'Why do you strike your companion?' He answered, 'Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid, and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.' When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian."* Midian is located on the Arabian peninsula across the Red Sea.

Moses not only took a man's life, he now was a fugitive from justice. But the author of Hebrews reinterprets these events in light of the subsequent character of Moses' life, and especially in light of God's redemptive-historical purposes. God chose this very flawed man to be the one to rescue his people, and to serve as the mediator of the covenant which God would soon make with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The author of Hebrews says that by faith, Moses not only refused to be an Egyptian, he gave up all the perks which were rightly his. Says the author of Hebrews in verses 25b-26, *Moses left Pharaoh's house, "choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."*

There is much here of which we should take notice. First, it is clear from Hebrews that Moses believed the same covenant promise which Abraham believed. The promise had been passed down through the generations of Israelites living in captivity in Egypt. Second, this also means that the covenant which God makes with Israel at Mount Sinai does not supercede the gracious covenant God made with Abraham. Paul makes this very point in Galatians 3:16-18: *"now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise."*

How and in what form Moses knew the covenant promise made to Abraham, we are not really told. But we do know that Moses wanted nothing to do with the Pharaoh, or his daughter (who had raised him). Moses knew he was a Jew and that he could not serve the false God's of Egypt. Moses saw the plight of his people and identified with them. This is why he renounced Egyptian ways as sinful. And because of

this, the author of Hebrews describes Moses as identifying with the “reproach of Christ” while renouncing the passing pleasures of sin. Moses would rather be persecuted with his people than live in the royal palace.

Unlike Abraham, who looked ahead to the promise of descendants and possession of land of Canaan, Moses had seen firsthand the descendants of Abraham multiply greatly, but live in slavery under the cruel hand of an Egyptian king. The Israelites had become a nation, despite being guests of the Egyptians. So, for Moses, much of what God had promised to Abraham had already become a reality. The only thing that remained was to possess the land of Canaan. Although the nature of the promise was the same, the promise was further down the road of fulfillment. Yet, Moses’ own personal circumstances and temptations were much different than Abraham’s. Moses could have chosen the wealth, women, and prestige of the royal household. He could be a ruler in a great empire, not a fugitive from justice. Instead, Moses chose to be an exile in Arabia, because, according to the author of Hebrews, he was seeking a reward of a different kind. The words of Psalm 16 (a messianic Psalm) and the nature of true riches certainly come to mind in light of the author of Hebrews’ comments about seeking the true reward:

*Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Here’s Moses leaving his home in Egypt, fleeing as a fugitive from justice because of his fear that the Pharaoh would kill him—which is the second time Moses escaped the sentence of death from the Pharaoh. Yet the author of Hebrews informs us, Moses did this by faith, *for he endured as seeing him who is invisible*. The fact that Moses saw the invisible God is very likely a reference to the events recounted in Exodus 3:1-8, wherein YHWH confronts Moses from the burning bush while Moses was still in Midian. *“Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb [Sinai], the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, ‘I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.’ When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then he said, ‘Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ And he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Note the continuity of God’s covenant promise. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey;”* in other words, Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham. Having seen the invisible God through the form of the burning bush, Moses was now prepared to return to Egypt to do combat with Pharaoh, and to lead the people of God into Canaan.

In verse 28 of Hebrews 11, the author jumps ahead to that time after Moses returned to Egypt, became leader of the Israelites, and had confronted the Pharaoh with the first six of the seven great plagues. The author of Hebrews writes, *“by faith [Moses] kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.”* This is a reference to the events recounted in Exodus 12, when Moses led the people of Israel in keeping the first Passover before the next event in Hebrews 11, the account of the Exodus in Hebrews 11:29-31 (a subject we will take up in the coming weeks).

In the first 20 verses of Exodus 12, we read that God instructed Moses and Aaron that the Israelites were to take a lamb without any defect or blemish and kill it at twilight on the appointed day. The Israelites were to take some of the blood from this lamb, and apply it to the doorposts of their dwelling, and then eat the lamb, and destroy any remaining portion. In verse 11 of Exodus 12, we find the famous command from YHWH, *“in this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover.”* And in verses 12-13, we find the dreaded warning. *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.”* God is going to spare his people through the sacrificial blood of a lamb (an obvious foreshadowing of the death of Christ, the true lamb of God), and he is going to bring judgment down upon Israel's Egyptian oppressors because of the Pharaoh's refusal to allow the Israelites to worship the true and living God.

Having been given these instructions from YHWH, Moses then gives these same instructions to the people of Israel in verses 21-24 of Exodus 12 (from our Old Testament lesson). *“Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, ‘Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.’”* The Israelites will be delivered by sacrificial blood, but apart from the sacrificial blood there is nothing but wrath and death.

In fact, this first Passover celebration will lie at the very foundation of the covenant God will soon make with his people at Mount Sinai when they leave Egypt. As we read in verses 24-27, God commands the Israelites, *“you shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’ And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.”* When our Lord Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples on that night in which he was betrayed, he reinvests the Jewish Passover with an entirely new meaning, demonstrating that Jesus was the true Passover lamb without spot or blemish (sin) to whom this original Passover had pointed all along.

In Exodus 12:28-30, we read the specifics of how the first Passover came to pass. *“Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. At midnight the Lord struck down 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 the livestock. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead.”* God's wrath came upon all those in Egypt not

protected by the sacrificial blood of the lamb. This act of judgment is every bit as typological as is the death of the lamb pointing ahead to the cross of Jesus Christ. All those not protected by the shed blood (those for whom Jesus Christ does not die) will indeed come under the judgment of God, just as the uncovered firstborn did in Egypt on the night of the Passover.

**W**hat, then, do we take with us from this passage.

First, once again we see the remarkable way in which the covenant promise was preserved across the generations of Israelites. Abraham received the promise (and in light of YHWH's own confirmation of these things), passed it on to Isaac, who passed it on to Jacob, who passed it on to Joseph, whom we are told lived to be 110, long enough witness the promise passed down two more generations. We don't know how many generations, exactly, passed from Abraham to Moses' parents, but Paul does say that some 430 years passed. And after all that time, and despite all that had transpired with the Patriarchs leaving Canaan during a famine, living in Egypt and multiplying in great numbers, Israel became a nation in the midst of their time in Egypt. Some how and in some way, God's people (including Moses' parents) remembered his promise and longed to leave behind the difficulties they faced in Egypt, and so journey to Canaan—that land which God promised to the descendants of Abraham. In this emphasis on the continuity of the covenant promise, we see the overarching theme of Hebrews 11. God will keep his covenant no matter how weak and sinful are those individuals through whom he keeps that promise.

Second, although the emphasis throughout Hebrews 11 does not fall upon the exemplary character of the faith of those mentioned—that we should have the kind of faith that Moses and his parents did—nevertheless, Moses' rejecting the sin of Egypt for the reproach of Christ is set out as an example of what his faith in the promise led him to do. Moses knew he was a foreigner in the house of the Pharaoh, likely because he had been circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day and then hidden in the bushes. Moses is held out as an example to us of choosing to suffer reproof (shame and persecution) in identifying with the people of God, rather than embrace the paganism of Egypt.

How much better to be identified with Jesus Christ and all that he promises, than renounce Christ and his people in exchange for fame, fortune, celebrity, and power. We tend to think of idolatry in terms of the worship of some pagan deity, but we miss the fact that it is every bit as idolatrous to seek the treasures of modern America by seeking to avoid the reproach non-Christians heap upon us because we are followers of Jesus Christ. Much better to suffer the reproach of Christ and receive his treasure, than seek the sinful and fleeting treasures of our contemporary age.

Finally, the first Passover is presented by the author of Hebrews as clear a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus Christ for our sins as we anything we find elsewhere in the Old Testament. There is only one covenant promise, and one gospel. It was hidden in types and shadows in the Old Testament and fully renewed in the New. Whether it be Exodus or Hebrews, the blood of the lamb saves us from our sins. And if we are not covered by the sacrificial blood, we too will face the wrath of God on the day of judgment, just as those not protected by the blood faced the wrath of God on the night of the first Passover.

Although the temptations and treasures of modern America are certainly appealing in so many ways, let us follow the example of Moses and bear the reproach of Jesus Christ, the lamb of God, who shed blood spares us from the wrath of God. For it is in Jesus Christ that we receive our inheritance and all those heavenly treasures which God has in store for us.