

## Making Choices

**Aim:** To encourage us to make godly choices in our lives by learning from the example of others who lived in the days of Moses.

**Reading: Hebrews 11:23-26** *“By faith Moses.....choosing rather to suffer affliction....”*

### **Introduction:**

When God made man, He made him different from all the other creatures – He made him “...in the image of God” (**Genesis 1:26-27**). Man was not made with an instinct that strictly controlled what he did in his life. God made him a free moral agent with the ability to reason things through (**Isaiah 1:18a**); with the ability to choose whether we serve God, or serve ourselves (**Joshua 24:15**). While God is in control of everything (**Matthew 10:29-30**), He doesn’t control us like robots. He doesn’t force us to obey His Will. A quick look at the scriptures, and every day life, will demonstrate that people are “free” to disobey God<sup>1</sup> (**Genesis 6:5; Ephesians 2:1-3**).

We make decisions and choices every day – some big, some small. Some of these choices don’t really have a spiritual significance – e.g. the choice we may make as to whether we wear a blue shirt or a red shirt today, or what time we put the rubbish bins out. But there are times when we do have to make choices about things that have a moral, or an ethical or a spiritual impact. Some of these choices won’t be easy, because there will be competing interests;

- on the one hand, we have a knowledge of what God requires of us, and we want to do His will.
- on the other hand, the desires of the world and the desires of self pull us in another direction.

(Paul referred to this type of struggle in **Romans 7:22-23**.)

The Bible often points us to faithful men and women recorded in the scriptures as being examples or patterns for us to follow<sup>2</sup>. Jesus, of course, is our ultimate example (**John 13:15; Ephesians 4:32; Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:21**), but we can also learn from those who were just as fallible as us, e.g.

- the Prophets – **James 5:10** *“as an example of suffering and patience...”*
- Job – **James 5:11** *“...the perseverance of Job....”*
- Paul (and those with him)
  - **1 Corinthians 11:1** *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”*
  - **Philippians 3:17** *“...note those who so walk, .....a pattern”*
  - **2 Thessalonians 3:9** *“...an example of how you should follow us”*

In this lesson, we will look at some people from the time of Moses, and to consider the example that they set for us when it comes to making choices between things of the world, and the things of God.

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<sup>1</sup> This doesn’t mean that we are free from the consequences of our decisions – **Rom. 2:5-11**.

<sup>2</sup> There are also some people put forward as bad examples for us not to follow – e.g. the Hebrews in the wilderness (**1 Corinthians 10:5-6**), and Sodom and Gomorrah (**Jude 7**).

## Making Choices

### LESSON

#### 1) The example of the Mid-Wives

##### a) Background

The ancestors of the nation of Israel had moved from Canaan to Egypt during the time of Joseph (**Genesis 46:1-27**; **Exodus 1:1-5**) The reason behind the move was because there was a famine throughout the area, and through the providence of God, Joseph had been placed in Egypt to prepare a food supply for the nations beforehand (**Genesis 45:5-7**). Those who traveled to Egypt were about 70 in number (**Exodus 1:5**) – Jacob, his other sons and their wives, and their descendants.

The Hebrews settled in the land of Goshen (**Genesis 46:28 – 47:6**), located in the Nile delta. The relationship between the Hebrews and the Egyptians seemed friendly enough in those days (**Genesis 47:6**). Note also that God had previously told Abraham that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land for around 400 years (**Genesis 15:13**) – God’s prophetic Word always comes true.

However, time passes, and we read in **Acts 7:17-18** that a new Pharaoh came along who didn’t know about Joseph Presumably, he also didn’t know the circumstances behind why the Hebrews were residing in Egypt. By the time of this Pharaoh, the Hebrews had grown in number to such an extent that he considered them a potential military threat (**Exodus 1:9-10**).

Note: It is possible that the actual “bondage<sup>3</sup>” started quite some time after the death of Joseph because of the following;

- Joseph was no longer remembered by the Pharaohs.
- the Hebrews had grown from an initial size of around 70, to be so numerous as to be considered a threat.
- **Acts 7:17** talks about this all happening when God’s promise<sup>4</sup> to Abraham was drawing near.

Pharaoh’s answer was to put them into bondage – *i.e.* slavery (**Exodus 1:11**). But this didn’t slow down the rate of population growth. The more they afflicted the Hebrews, the faster they multiplied (**Exodus 1:12**). So Pharaoh made life even harder for the Hebrews – “...*he made them serve with rigour, and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage...*” (**Exodus 1:13-14**). Life would have been very unpleasant for the Hebrews. But this tactic didn’t work either. So Pharaoh tried something new – he told the midwives that they were to kill the baby boys as soon as they were born to the Hebrew women (**Exodus 1:16**).

It is at this point that we see the example set by the midwives.

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<sup>3</sup> The term “...*into bondage.....four hundred years....*” (**Acts 7:6**) may be more of a colloquial term for the period, rather than the whole of the 400 years being a period of bondage. The actual number of years in bondage during the 400 year period may have been somewhat less than 400 years due to the reasons stated here. But I’m not going to make an issue of it

<sup>4</sup> God’s promise to Abraham:- **Genesis 12:2** “...*I will make you a great nation...*”; **Genesis 12:6-7** “...*to your descendants I will give this land (i.e. Canaan)...*”; and, **Genesis 15:14** “...*they shall come out with great possessions....*” – see **Exodus 12:35-36**

## Making Choices

### b) The Midwives feared God

We read in **Exodus 1:17a** that “...*the midwives feared God...*”. These were God-fearing women. They had a great respect and reverence for God. It is interesting to note that the Old Testament Law had not been delivered at this point in time. But from the context, we can see that these women knew how God felt about killing babies as soon as they were born. They knew that killing the babies would be wrong. And so they had a decision to make. They had to make a choice between;

- do we obey Pharaoh (and disobey God) ? or,
- do we obey God (and risk incurring Pharaoh’s wrath) ?

Remember, life was very harsh for the Hebrews. **Acts 7:19a** tells us that Pharaoh “...*dealt treacherously...*” with them. He had “...*made their lives bitter with hard bondage...*” (**Exodus 1:14a**). These were people living under great hardship. One could probably excuse the Hebrews if they thought that God had abandoned them. But in spite of all the hardship, these women remained true and faithful to God. They chose to obey God rather than man (**Acts 5:29**), and they let the babies live.

- remember, they were defying the ruler of one of the most powerful nations on earth at that time.

When Pharaoh found out that the midwives have not killed the male babies, he called them to “front and centre” (**Exodus 1:18**). Can you imagine what it would have been like for these Hebrew women to enter the palace of this powerful man ? - to be led down the corridors of power, to see the military might and power of Egypt, and to stand before Pharaoh in his court.

When asked why they had disobeyed him, they told him that the Hebrew women give birth before they could get there. Whether the midwives deliberately took their time in attending the births, we don’t know. But what we do know is that they feared, *i.e.* respected, God (**Exodus 1:17**), and they obeyed Him rather than Pharaoh. The result of their decision was that they were rewarded by God - **Exodus 1:20** “...*God dealt well with them...*”.

**Point:** Based on what we read in **Hebrews 11:39**, these women did not have the promises that we have. Other than see the nation grow in size, they had not yet seen the miracles that happened during the ten plagues and the wilderness wanderings. But when it came to making a choice between doing what God wanted, and what man wanted, they chose God – even though, potentially, it could have cost them their lives. But these were women who did “...*not fear those who kill the body.....But rather, feared Him.....*” (**Matthew 10:28**).

## 2) The example of Moses

### a) Moses early life

Moses was born during the time described above regarding the mid-wives (**Exodus 2:1-2; Acts 7:20a**). Being a male, he was subject to the command issued by Pharaoh that all male babies should be killed at birth (**Exodus 1:22**).

## Making Choices

When he was born, his parents hid him for 3 months (**Hebrews 11:23a**). Like the mid-wives, their respect for God was greater than any fear that they may have had of Pharaoh (**Hebrews 11:23b**). But there came a time when Moses couldn't be hidden any longer. So his mother set him adrift in a basket on the river with his older sister keeping watch (**Exodus 2:3-4**).

Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe, and saw the basket. After getting one of her maids to retrieve the basket, she finds Moses inside weeping and takes compassion on him (**Exodus 2:5-6**). She realizes that he is a Hebrew child, and again we see the providence of God come into play in that Moses' mother is paid to nurse the child (**Exodus 2:7-9**).

Eventually, after he is weaned, Moses is handed back over to Pharaoh's daughter, and he is raised as her own son (**Exodus 2:10**).

- it is interesting to note that it is Pharaoh's daughter who gave him the name, Moses.

Moses was then raised in the house of Pharaoh, and was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt. (Remember, this is the nation that designed and built the pyramids.) **Acts 7:22** tells us that He "...was mighty in words and deeds...". Moses had been raised as a prince for 40 years (**Acts 7:23**), and he was successful in his achievements. He held a position of power in one of the great empires of his time.

But a time came when he made a choice between having all the power and glory of Egypt, and being with God's people who were suffering oppression.

### **b) Moses chose to be with God's children**

Although he was raised as an Egyptian prince, Moses knew about his heritage.

His mother had probably nursed him for only the first 2 or 3 years of his life<sup>5</sup>. What on-going contact he had with his Hebrew parents, we don't know. But he was certainly aware of his ancestral roots, and who God was.

- presumably, his Hebrew parents instilled these things within him, for it would be hard to imagine that the Egyptians taught him such things.

From **Acts 7:25**, it seems that Moses knew that God was going to use him to lead His people to freedom.

The time came when Moses decided to visit his brethren (**Exodus 2:11a**). In **Acts 7:23** we read, "*Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.*" (emphasis mine – SK) Visiting his brethren didn't happen by accident. This was a deliberate, heart-felt decision by Moses to go and visit the people of the Almighty God. **Hebrews 11:24** tells us that, "...when he became of age, (Moses)

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<sup>5</sup> The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol 4, M-P, Moses, Page 280, B. "Infancy"

## Making Choices

*refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter...*". The word "*refused*" means that he performed a specific act of making a choice<sup>6</sup>. He didn't want to be a part of Pharaoh's household – he was rejecting Egypt, and he wanted to be with his brethren, God's people.

The choice Moses was making was this. In **Hebrews 11:25** we read;

- "...to suffer affliction with the people of God....", or,
- "...to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin...".

One option involved a life of hardship with God's people. The other, a life of power and pleasure. Some people become "...*hardened through the deceitfulness of sin..*" (**Hebrews 3:13**), but Moses saw sin for what it was – a passing pleasure. Sin may give pleasure for the moment, but the pleasure is only temporary. Afterwards comes the bitter consequences (**Ezekiel 18:20a**). Moses considered "...*the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt...*" (**Hebrews 11:26**). In other words, Moses considered that to suffer with God's people was better than enjoying the material wealth and power of Egypt.

When Moses came to the Hebrews, he saw one of them being wrongfully treated by an Egyptian (**Acts 7:24**). So he defended the Hebrew, and struck down the Egyptian. Now most Egyptians probably wouldn't have bothered defending one of these oppressed people. But these were Moses' brethren, they were his people. But more importantly, these were the children of God, and he couldn't stand back and ignore what was happening.

While the consequences of his actions may have finally severed his place in Pharaoh's household, the decision to visit his brethren had come first.

**Point:** Moses made a choice – to suffer with God's people, rather than enjoy the power and wealth of Egypt. He chose peasantry to royalty; he chose ill treatment to pleasure; and he chose material poverty over earthly riches. The deciding factor in his decision was that he looked to the eternal reward that God gives to the faithful (**Hebrews 11:26; 2 Timothy 4:8**). Being right with God was more important than having power in this world. He knew that whatever rewards Egypt had on display were only temporary, and could not match what God had to offer.

### **Application:**

While the choices made by the midwives and by Moses involved different scenarios, there is one thing that they both have in common – they involved taking the long range spiritual view. They looked beyond the here-and-now, and looked to the eternal. Whatever material benefit or security they may have gained in the short term by following the world, it was put aside as they considered the "higher" things of God. In **Hebrews 11:24**, we see that Moses had faith (in God - *implied*). He believed and trusted God and His Word. It is to God that we must ultimately give account (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). And so the choices that Moses and the midwives made was based on, "*what is right in the eyes of God?*" (**1 Kings 15:5a**)

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<sup>6</sup> "Truth for Today" magazine, October 2006, page 32, "The Faith of Moses"

## Making Choices

Some of the choices we make in life may only involve ourselves, *i.e.* they have no direct<sup>7</sup> impact on others. For example the choices we make about what type of books we read in private, how we choose to spend our time in general, how much time we spend with God's Word, the types of activities we choose to indulge in.

Other choices are made in the context of other people. The things that we decide to do can involve or have an impact on others;

- Do I join my secular friends in a dubious activity so as not to be alienated ? (**1 Corinthians 15:33**)
- Do I do a certain thing because I consider it my right to be able to do it, even though I know it will offend others, and non-offensive options are available to me ? (**Romans 14:15**)
- Do I simply speak my mind with whatever words come into my head, or, do I choose to use speech that is "...good for necessary edification..." (**Ephesians 4:29**)
- When I see someone being treated unjustly, do I choose to do nothing to defend the victim in case I receive the same treatment ? (**John 12:42-43**)
- Do I choose to no longer live faithfully to God, and as a result, no longer be a light unto the world ? (**Matthew 5:13-16**)

Quite often, we make choices based on "*What do I want to do?*", or "*What do we want to do?*". Perhaps there are times when these are the wrong questions to ask. Perhaps we need to ask, "*What does God want me to do?*", or, "*What does God want us to do?*"

Decisions we make in life need to be made in the light of God's Word. That is what is involved when we use His Word as "...*a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path...*" (**Psalms 119:105**). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had to choose between sparing His own life, or doing the Father's Will (**Luke 22:41-42**). But like the mid-wives and Moses, He looked beyond the immediate. He could see the glory that would come from submitting to the Father (**Hebrews 12:2**) His decision was based on what God wanted Him to do, not on what He would have preferred to do. As a result, God "...*highly exalted Him...*" (**Philippians 2:9**)

When we have choices to make in this life, we need to;

- think about what God wants – the answer will be in His Word (**2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3**),
- consider the immediate consequences of our decision, and compare them with the eternal (**Hebrews 11:26**),  
and,
- consider the examples of people like the mid-wives, Moses, and Jesus, and strive to follow their example.

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<sup>7</sup> While some of our decisions may have no "*direct*" impact on others, they can result in "*indirect*" impacts. For example, if we neglect God's Word and live according to the world, we can jeopardize our own salvation. But it will also impact on our ability to be "*lights unto the world*" (**Matthew 5:16**), *i.e.* it impacts on our ability to lead other people to Christ.