

Messianic Rabbi: Moses, a Great Leader but a Bad Father

Moses is one of the heroes of the Bible and is definitely one of the greatest leaders we find in the Scriptures. However, while Moses was a great leader, he was a bad father. It was his failure at being a father that ultimately kept him from being a leader.

Before we get into the text we will be focusing on, let me establish the context and reason for my claim that Moses was a bad father. Let's look at Exodus 4:22-26 (TLV):

You are to say to Pharaoh, "This is what Adonai says: 'Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I have said to you, Let My son go, that he may serve Me, but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will slay your son, your firstborn.'" It happened along the way, at a lodging place, that Adonai met him and sought to kill him! But Zipporah took a flint, cut off the foreskin of her son, and threw it at his feet, saying, "You are surely a bridegroom of blood to me." She said, "A bridegroom of blood" because of the circumcision. Then He let him alone.

These verses come right after G-D has established Moses as the one who would lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. As G-D sends Moses forth to confront Pharaoh and deliver Israel from bondage, we find these few verses dropped inside the larger narrative. G-D says, "Israel is My firstborn," pointing out a focus on fatherhood. Then G-D reminds Moses that he had not circumcised his son. Ever since Abraham, circumcision was the ritual that allowed one to enter into the covenant that G-D had made with Abraham and his descendants. Yet Moses had not seen to it that his son had entered this covenant with G-D. This was the first and primary

responsibility of a father. Circumcision was to take place when a son was eight days old. So even though Moses was clearly a leader chosen by G-D to redeem Israel from slavery, we find that he was a great leader but not a good father.

Of course, we know that the Bible teaches us not to let anything be established without at least two witnesses, so let's see if we find further evidence in Scripture for Moses not being a good father. We find this evidence in Joshua 5:2-5:

At that time Adonai said to Joshua, "Make yourself flint knives and circumcise again Bnei-Yisrael a second time." So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised Bnei-Yisrael at Gibeath-ha-araloth. Now this is the reason why Joshua circumcised: all the people that came out of Egypt who were males—all the men of war—had died in the wilderness along the way after they came out of Egypt. Though all the people that came out were circumcised, none of the people who were born in the wilderness along the way as they came out of Egypt had been circumcised.

Notice here that the entire time that Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness, and during the time in the wilderness, not one of the sons of Israel were circumcised, even though Moses already had been confronted by G-D over the importance of this covenant. Remember the statement G-D makes above: "Israel is My son, My firstborn." Moses was a great leader who had confronted Pharaoh, parted the Red Sea, written the Torah and won battles against Israel's enemies. Yet when it came to fatherhood responsibilities, both his own and corporately, Moses was a bad father.

So now that we see the evidence of Moses' fatherhood failures, let's see if my second claim holds true. Was his leadership of Israel removed because he failed as a father? To find out, let's read Numbers 20:7-13, a very familiar event in Moses'

life.

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: 'Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, that it give forth its water; and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock; so thou shalt give the congregation and their cattle drink.' And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said unto them: 'Hear now, ye rebels; are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?' And Moses lifted up his hand, and smote the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle. And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron: 'Because ye believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.' These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and He was sanctified in them.

Have you ever wondered why this one action would be viewed by G-D as so significant that he would punish Moses by not allowing him to lead the children of Israel into the promised land? After all, hadn't Moses been a great leader?

In order to answer this question about Moses and to understand why G-D punished Moses with such severity, we must look a little closer into the text, as well as look a little deeper into the history of Moses' leadership of Israel. When G-D told Moses what his sin was, G-D said, "Because ye believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel." So what Moses did was not believe G-D and not sanctify G-D in the eyes of the children of Israel. The Hebrew word translated as sanctify in the verse is קדש. The root word of this word is קדש, which means holy, separate or sanctify.

So what exactly did Moses do that did not sanctify G-D in the

eyes of the children of Israel? In order to know this, let's look at Deuteronomy 4:21, which refers to this event just before Joshua replaced Moses as Israel's leader.

Deuteronomy 4:21 reads: "Now the LORD was angered with me for your sakes, and swore that I should not go over the Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance."

When we read these verses, and almost every time I have heard a teaching or sermon on the verses, the words "for your sakes" have been interpreted as "because of you," or "because of what you did or said." In other words, the reader reads these words to say that Moses was saying that G-D punished him because of the actions of the children of Israel. This interpretation leaves the hearer/reader with two possible conclusions. The first is that Moses, in his last words to Israel, acted like a spoiled brat blaming them for his punishment, or the second that G-D unfairly punished Moses for the actions of the children of Israel.

I don't believe that either of those options are the right interpretation of the text. I believe the correct view is to read the text to say "for your sakes," to mean "for your betterment."

Think about what is happening at the time when Moses hits the rock. The people were complaining about where they were and that G-D did not fulfill His promise to bring them to a land filled with blessings. They said, "you led us to a place without seeds, figs, vines, or pomegranates and neither is there any water to drink." G-D then spoke to Moses and said, "Speak to the rock ... and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock."

Instead of speaking to the rock as commanded, Moses hit the rock in anger. Moses was supposed to be a leader and a father to Israel. Moses was supposed to teach his children his faith

in G-D's promises.

Instead of behaving as a good father would to magnify G-D as a good Father, Moses behaved badly and failed to show G-D as holy or sanctified in the eyes of the children of Israel. The bad representation of G-D's fatherliness just before Israel was preparing to enter into the promised land resulted in Moses being replaced as the one who would lead Israel into the promised land. Moses wasn't punished because the people acted badly. He was punished because he as a leader was supposed to also be the physical father to the children Israel as an example of G-D as their invisible Father. Moses' actions made G-D look unholy to Israel, and the result was his removal.

Please remember what we read above. One of Joshua's first actions when he replaced Moses was to act fatherly and circumcise all of those who had not been circumcised under the leadership of Moses. Joshua was a great leader and a great father.

In the Romans 2:24, we find Paul speaking to the Jewish believers on his day about this same sin. "For as it is written, 'the name of God is slandered among the nations because of you.'"

You and I, like Moses, were called by G-D to live as fathers leading those around us into a covenant relationship with him. It isn't enough that we lead people to G-D; we must introduce them to our heavenly Father. After all, when Yeshua was asked, "how should we pray," His response was, "Our Father." Moses led Israel for 40 years, but it took Joshua replacing Moses before Israel knew what it was like to be led by a father.

It isn't enough for us to be good leaders; we must also be good fathers. How are we doing?

Rabbi Eric Tokajer has served the community of Brit Ahm Messianic Synagogue in Pensacola, Florida since 2006. In addition to serving at Brit Ahm, he also helped to establish

six other Messianic synagogues along the United States, Gulf Coast. He is also a sought-after speaker for both national and international conferences and events, and has authored 12 books. In addition to his duties as a rabbi, he also serves on the board of several Messianic ministries and as the theology team facilitator for the Tree of Life Version Bible.

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