

The Book of Exodus



2. Murder Most Foul (Exodus 2:10-15, Acts 7:18-29, Heb 11:24-27)

One of the most dominant kinds of TV programme that has been aired in the last 30 years or so has been the detective thriller – Inspector Morse, A Touch of Frost and Midsomer Murders are all examples – some programmes being more believable than others. If Midsomer Murders involved a real police force, Chief Inspector Barnaby would have been sacked for being a liability as people just seem to die and keep on dying when he's around.

Actually, the thing about murder cases is that usually there is no complicated story to murder: it doesn't take long for the police to find the murderer in most cases.

Here in The Case of the Murdered Egyptian, it didn't take long for people to realise it was Moses, Pharaoh's adopted grandson who had done it. He may have thought that he could get away with killing an Egyptian taskmaster, but he's been seen; there'd been witnesses and the long arm of the law was headed in his direction. By the time they had gone to arrest him, he had fled the country: here was obviously no extradition treaty with Midian!

Yes, it's the second episode in our soap opera. Last week, out of seeming disaster, we saw how God moves in an amazing way out of seeming disaster. Israelite boys were doomed to be drowned in the Nile and we saw how Moses' mother had to first hide her baby and when she could do so no longer she put her baby on to the Nile herself – hoping for what? We don't know. I'd love to think that it was an act of faith, trusting that the baby would not die on the Nile as others had, but that God would somehow save the situation. Either way he did and we saw the ultimate irony as the baby in the water, who should have been drowned, becomes part of the family of Pharaoh – the Israelites' arch enemy.

You maybe thought I missed something last week when I skated over the role of Moses' mother in this. The other irony was of course that Moses was brought up during the early part of his life by his own mother and only later adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and given an Egyptian name – Moses. We don't actually know what his Hebrew name was.

This is significant in the life of Moses. As Pharaoh's grandson, he would have got the best education in the world at that time, he would have been a rich and privileged man – but he clearly knew where he had come from – his mother had given him those values. It makes the irony greater. Here was the future saviour of Israel being groomed under the noses of their oppressors. But did Moses know what God's plan was for him? The passages in Acts and Hebrews suggest he had some idea but he was yet to have his own definitive encounter with God.

As for the Egyptians, what were they thinking? They knew he was Hebrew but possibly they just thought him as someone who had got a lucky break courtesy of Pharaoh's daughter – he was one of them: an Egyptian (that's how the Midianites saw him later in the chapter). Whatever, here was a man who grew up into maturity as an Egyptian – a privileged Egyptian. And this rich educated man blows it all when he commits murder most foul.

Most people's take on the story of Moses' killing of the Egyptian taskmaster was that it was the rash act of a young man who thought that he could do God's will and something great amongst the Hebrews by being their champion. I'm not sure that's so because he was already forty when he committed the act – hardly a young man. And what was his awareness of God and the things of God? Pretty thin I think as he was handed over for adoption at a young age. But he did know he was a Hebrew as is clear from scripture and would know something about God, but His encounter from God was to come.

That he was burdened about his people is without doubt but this wasn't him trying to make his mark as an "Egyptian Hebrew" hero. His murder of the Egyptian was not a heroic act which said "hey

look at me, I'm your hero!" He hid the body in the sand and hoped that no-one would notice. What it shows is that he was an angry man who realised he'd made a big mistake. Possibly he felt for his people but didn't feel he could do anything and killing the Egyptian was a way of venting his spleen. He seems to have been angry because of the oppression of Israel – he wanted to do something but he couldn't – except this rash killing. And of course, to add to their frustration, the reaction of the men who were fighting to him was that after 40 years, no Israelite recognised him as one of theirs. I don't know if either of them saw it, but it may well be that the Israelites were the ones who grassed Moses up to Pharaoh. He'd blown it and all he could do was run for his life.

Why did it fall apart for him? Because he was trying to deal with something he was clearly fired up about without the will and the power of God – or even the presence of God. He had a cause, but couldn't even be a rebel because he wasn't any good at that.

We saw last week how out of minuses God brings unexpected pluses. But we can't do it for Him. However we discern the will of God, unless we act according to His will and His power, we do it in our own strength. And what happens? Nothing works. And worse; we end up as frustrated people and frustration may not lead to murder most foul, but we may well make a mess of our lives or our church. Look at all the disasters you have ever come across in churches and you'll see frustrated people trying to get their ends in their strength.

So rather than see Moses, the successful fifth columnist infiltrating Pharaoh's household and bringing change, we see a disillusioned man fleeing for his life, being stranded in the wilderness for 40 years as a peasant shepherd – in anonymous exile.

On the face of this a minus – but yet again, God brings a plus out of this disillusioned, silly man. As we shall discover next week, it was in that exile that he learned the things of God, and he learned that God has His ways and His timings and we need to patiently wait for them.

Do we want to see change in the church of God here? Do we want to see people won for Christ? Then change must come in the Lord's way and in His time. We need to learn the lesson of Moses – to wait His time but use that time to come closer to Him and to know his mind as he eventually had to do in Midian.

Part of our coming around the table I believe is not just remember, but to meet with our Saviour – It's His supper and by His Spirit He's here. Let's take this opportunity to cast away all our small ambitions, our personal plans and our frustrations, leave them at the foot of the cross and listen to the voice of Jesus who wants to lead us into new things, in His way and by His power.

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Scripture Quotes TEV*