

Why You Can't Tell the Jew What to Do

Category: Shemos, Shemos

Why did the Egyptians hate the Jews? And why are Jews so difficult to govern?

The Exodus Movies

Good Shabbos!

Moses has been in a few movies since Charlton Heston first portrayed him in “The Ten Commandments” in 1956.

In 2014 he appeared again, this time in “Exodus: Gods and Kings,” a movie in which he was played by the same guy who played Batman: Christian Bale.

Like all previous Moses movies, this one also aspires to tell the grand saga of the Exodus from Egypt.

In general, Exodus movies are a good thing because they bring the Exodus story to life and to the attention of the public. Now, the story suddenly isn't just a subject you hear about in synagogues but also at dinner around the table, too.

But in the movie Exodus: Gods and Kings, it seemed that the connection between the authentic story in the Tanach and the movie is very distant.

As a general rule (there are notable exceptions), historical movies do not keep to the original true stories on which they are based. Directors and producers try to make it more contemporary. But in this movie, apparently, the changes are so big that almost everyone who saw the movie was disappointed.

As a matter of fact, the movie was even banned in Egypt and Morocco for not being true to the original story. The Egyptians and Moroccans didn't like the fact that the movie depicts the ancient Hebrews building the pyramids—they didn't want to hear that these archaeological wonders, upon which is built the entire pride of Egypt, were built by Jews.

Jews building some of the ancient mega-structures of Egypt is actually one of the things shown in the movie that may be historically and factually true. On the other hand, however, the movie shows things that are not mentioned in the Torah at all. For example, for the Splitting of the Sea, the water doesn't split into two but rather, moves to one side. The movie tries to make it look like some sort of tsunami or natural disaster, as long as it doesn't look like a miracle.

Even in the beginning of the saga, according to the movie, Moses and the Pharaoh are brothers who battle each other. Obviously, this has no resemblance at all to the true story of how the Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses as her son and raised him in her father's palace, and you can be sure that there are many other changes to the original story in the movie.

But the most disturbing thing in the movie is that G-d is depicted with an image. When G-d reveals Himself to Moses, the movie shows a nine-year-old boy—and there can be no greater distortion of the story than giving G-d a human appearance, G-d forbid.

The Original Anti-Semitism

Let's take a look at some of the historical facts. What was the real reason the Hebrews, our direct ancestors, were hated in ancient Egypt? Why indeed did the Egyptians turn them into slaves and throw their babies into the river? Why did the Jews really not assimilate into Egyptian culture?

The answer to all these questions is that the Hebrews who came down to Egypt brought with them a faith that they had inherited from their Patriarch, Avraham Avinu. Avraham had not only taught them but had taught the entire world to have faith in monotheism—to believe that there is one true G-d who created the universe and who continues to control it, but who cannot be seen, heard or touched, a G-d with no body and no physical form.

It was this faith that the Jews had imported to Egypt, and the Egyptians, idol worshippers as they were, could not take it. It was that fact that caused the Egyptians to hate the Jews. Thus, the first buds of anti-Semitism can be found as far back as the Book of Bereishis (Genesis).

In the Torah portion of Miketz, we are told how the brothers of Yosef were

summoned by the “prime minister” of Egypt (who, as we all know, was really Yosef) to join for lunch. The Torah says, “And he said, ‘Set forth bread! And they set for him separately and for them separately, and for the Egyptians who ate with him separately, because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, because it is an abomination to the Egyptians” (Bereishi 43:32).

On that verse, commentator Onkelus says that the reason for this arrangement was because the food the Jews ate, which in this case was meat, came from the Egyptian idols, which in this case was sheep. In other words, the Jews would eat the Egyptians’ gods. And so even back then, even when Yosef—a Jew—was the ruler of Egypt and there was not a single other Jew in the country, the Egyptians couldn’t bear sitting around the same table with a Jew.

What’s more, the entire purpose and lesson of the Makkos, the Ten Plagues, and the Splitting of the Sea, was “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the L-rd” (Shmos 7:5)—for the Egyptians to know and recognize G-d. This was something that the Jews taught them—that G-d has no body or physical form. And so, depicting G-d with a physical form is the movie’s biggest distortion.

Who Appointed You?

But one of the most fascinating parts of Moses’ story was not shown in the movie at all.

When G-d reveals Himself to Moshe at the Burning Bush in the Torah portion of Shmos, G-d asks Moshe to “now go, and I will send you to the Pharaoh, and take My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” To that, Moshe responds, “Who am I that I should go to the Pharaoh?” Moshe refuses the suggestion; he rejects the appointment. Then, a dispute breaks out between G-d and Moshe. Moshe refuses G-d’s request four times to be the one to take the Jews out of Egypt.

The first time he refused, he said, “Who am I?” He argued that the Jews would ask him what Gd’s Name is. The second time, he argued that they wouldn’t believe him. Then he argued that he was not a “man of words,” a communicator and a speaker. Finally, he argued, “send now [Your message] with whom You would send”—and then, in the end, G-d got angry at Moshe and He forced him to accept the appointment.

So now we can ask the obvious question: Why was Moshe so opposed to the appointment, carrying on a dispute with G-d for seven days? What was he so afraid of that he didn't want the job in any way, shape or form?

What's most interesting is that for the entire course of 40 years of Moshe's leadership, he didn't change his mind on the matter: At the start of the Book of Devarim, which takes place five weeks before the passing of Moshe, we find Moshe saying, "How can I bear your trouble, your burden, and your strife all by myself?" (Devarim 1:12).

But the sharpest words can be read in the Parsha of Behaalos'cha, where Moshe turns to G-d and says, "Why have You treated Your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in Your eyes that You place the burden of this entire people upon me?" And Moshe goes on: "Alone I cannot carry this entire people for it is too hard for me" (Bamidbar 11:11-14).

But what was really so hard for Moshe?

Perhaps we can answer that Moshe's first experience with the Jewish Nation had greater influence on him than anything else.

What were the first words that Moshe heard from the first fellow Jew that he ever met in his life?

(Remember, he grew up a prince in the Egyptian palace.) Well, the Torah tells us in our Parshah, "And Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers...and he saw an Egyptian man smiting a Hebrew man from among his brothers... and he smote the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. And he went out the second day and behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the villain, 'Why do you strike your fellow?' " And then, what does that villain answer him? "And he said, 'Who appointed you to rule us?'"]

So the first words that Moshe hears from a fellow Jew are, "Who are you?" Who put you in charge of us?

At that time, Moshe was not a leader and no one had appointed him to anything—and yet he's already hearing the charge, "Who made you...?"—who are you to tell us what to do? Why should we listen to you all of a sudden? And that was what the "slaves" said to a "prince" of Egypt!

So Moshe saw right from the beginning that the Jewish Nation was a people that did not accept the authority of Man. The only authority that they were ready to accept was that of G-d's—but for someone to come along and tell them what to do? That was something they were not prepared to accept in any way.

The Best Example

And who defined this best? None other than Korach.

When Korach shows up to argue with Moshe, he declares, “The entire congregation is holy and

G-d is within them; why do you raise yourselves above G-d's congregation?” (Bamidbar 16:3). The words that Moshe Rabbeinu first heard when he met a Jew in Egypt, he now hears again many years later from Korach: Why do you raise yourselves? Why do you make yourself more important than the rest?

Even though Korach was corrupt and only sought his own benefit, he still said something true there: “The entire congregation is holy”—and indeed, he was right. Every Jew is holy. About each individual Jew, the verse states, “You are sons to the L-rd your G-d” (Devarim 14:1)—and so the Talmud (Tractate Bava Metzia 113b) states, “Every Jew is a prince.”

Not only that, but the Rebbe adds in a farbrengen of Yud Shvat, 5735 (Sichos Kodesh Vol. I, pg. 338) that it is quoted in Tikunei Zohar (in the preface) that not only are Jews princes but that “all Jews are kings”—and you cannot rule over kings.

You see this in Israel today, where you have elections almost every two years—because you can't rule Jews. To Jews, it doesn't matter who the Prime Minister is—you're always going to have Jews screaming, “Who put you in charge?”

The story is told that when President Harry Truman called David Ben-Gurion to congratulate him on the establishment of the State of Israel, Ben-Gurion told him, “You are the president of 200 million citizens, but I am the prime minister of one million prime ministers!”

And that, my friends, is the secret of the strength of the Jewish Nation: Every

single individual Jew has the inner strength of a king. As the Talmud (Tractate Bava Basra 3b) puts it, "A king decrees and a mountain is uprooted." That means that a true king is intimidated or daunted by nothing. He stands his ground and wins.

And so Jews have always never been fazed by what the world said. We Jews are the world's truest free men and women. We accept no flesh-and-blood authority; we ultimately bow only to G-d.

And so nothing has ever stood in the way of the Jew as he or she marches on, perpetuating the golden chain of "the kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Good Shabbos!