



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



EXODUS 1 - 6

## Exodus 1

***1:7-14 - "But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. "Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land." So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them."***

The Lord has been faithful to the promise he made to Jacob (Genesis 46:3). Jacob's descendants are now growing in number in Egypt beyond natural explanation. They began as a large extended family of 70 people and by this point have grown to such an extent that the new Pharaoh takes notice of them and is fearfully concerned that Egypt will be overrun by the Israelites. There is a five-fold description of their growth as "fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them." The description is intended to emphasize the degree of the Lord's blessing upon the children of Israel, and also to remind us of these passages from Genesis (Genesis 1:28, Genesis 9:7). The connection with the two earlier passages from Genesis is important because this fruitful multiplication of Israel in Egypt is a new creation story just like the garden of Eden and the aftermath of the Flood. In all three cases God is starting with a few chosen ones and building a new world from them according to His plan and purpose. We should not see their growth as just a natural outcome, but as the hand of God upon them to bless them.

The blessing of the Lord in their amazing increase of numbers is wonderful in the eyes of Israel, but not in the eyes of Egypt. Their prosperity is not a welcomed development for Pharaoh or the nation. Though there is no hint that Israel formed any real threat to the Egyptians, Pharaoh saw their increase through the lens of natural suspicion and fear. Though they had been in the land for many years by now, they were still regarded as foreigners and outsiders. Pharaoh imagined a worst case scenario of a foreign invader recruiting the numerous Israelite men as a ready-made army. Pharaoh dealt "wisely" with Israel when he exercised not spiritual wisdom, but natural wisdom. The distinction is that natural wisdom is always self-serving and will find a way to gain advantage over others. Pharaoh convinced the Egyptian population by appealing to their own fears and instituted

a nationwide oppression of the previously free Israelites by conscripting them as forced laborers. They imposed upon them hard, rigorous, bitter labor which the Egyptians thought would accomplish two things. One, they would have a huge workforce to do all their work projects for them, and two, the difficulty and danger of the labor would limit the Israelites population growth to a manageable level.

This is one of the first examples in Scripture of the now familiar response of the world to the blessing of God upon His people. The world as represented by Egypt here reacted to the blessing of God upon His people with a hateful and wicked persecution. Even to this day, the world still reacts in a similar way. Persecution of the people of God has not disappeared in the 21st century. Yet, in spite of Pharaoh's plan, the Lord's blessing caused the Israelites to continue to grow in spite of their persecution. In the same way, the intention of wicked persecutors throughout church history has never succeeded in eradicating Christians. The more the church has been oppressed by wicked men, the more the gospel has grown and spread. The confidence of God's people to endure and even thrive in times of persecution is not found in themselves, but in God, His promises, and in His sovereign control of history. This persecution is no unexpected development escaping God's notice. He had proclaimed to Abraham many years before that this exact thing would occur. "God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years." (Genesis 15:13).

***1:15-21 - "Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them."***

Pharaoh's plan to limit the growth of the Israelites by hard forced labor has failed miserably. They are more numerous now than ever. In his growing fear of their numbers, he crosses a fateful line. Pharaoh resorts to a particularly wicked plan that has been used by evil men at critical junctures in world history as a weapon against entire people groups. The weapon is genocide. This is mass murder exercised by a powerful and oppressive government against a people group under their power to further a political goal. We should be well familiar in modern history with the horrors of genocide. We have examples ranging from the Armenian genocide by the Turks, to the Jewish holocaust in the Nazi death camps of WWII, to the Jewish pogroms by Stalinist USSR, to the gassing of the

Kurds by Saddam Hussein. Sadly, there are many other examples than these. Such a degree of evil is not reached overnight, but there is a progressive development of wickedness. In this case with Pharaoh, he came up with the plan to have the Hebrew male children murdered only after his previous plan failed. In this case, Pharaoh wants to resolve the problem, but seems to want to avoid direct involvement.

He summons two Hebrew midwives who are most likely supervising midwives among the Hebrews. He gives them a surprising and heart challenging command. He commanded them to put to death every male Hebrew child during the birth process. Remember Pharaoh was considered by all Egypt to be a god among men. His word was law and all his commands were to be obeyed and any disobedience to his commands was subject to death. The midwives were faced with an impossible problem. They could obey Pharaoh and commit murder on his behalf and in doing so they would protect themselves from his wrath. Or, they could choose to disobey Pharaoh, and risk his wrath, but avoid violating God's standard regarding murder. They had no choice available to them without danger attached to it. Their choice really boiled down to the issue of whose wrath they most feared, Pharaoh or God? It is critical for us to recognize that the midwives did not choose to obey Pharaoh by excusing themselves in God's eyes. They did not say, "We must obey Pharaoh, and certainly God will understand that we had to do so." Instead they practiced what we call civil disobedience. They did so specifically because they feared God more than they feared Pharaoh. If we are ever placed in a position of similar moral dilemma we must make the same choice they did. For the believer, when we are forced by those in power to choose between honoring God's standard or theirs, we dare not excuse our compromise. "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29).

In this case, God honored the midwives fearing Him above Pharaoh by protecting them, blessing them with their own families, and causing their names to be preserved for all successive generations. God gave them wisdom in how to answer Pharaoh when he confronted them. We do not know for sure whether their answer was truthful in describing the difference in how the Israelite women gave birth, or whether they made it up as a diversion story and in essence lied to Pharaoh. In spite of the concern of some believers that God would never bless anyone that lied in such a way, there is no spiritual conflict on that point. Even if they lied, it was not a sin for them to do so in this case. A lie is sinful because it deceives for the purpose of gaining advantage over another person. In this case the motive was to preserve the lives of innocent children from murder. There was no moral obligation for them to give the truth to this wicked ruler as a tool he could then use to destroy more lives.

**1:22 - "Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."**

Pharaoh's wicked deterioration reaches its final stage here. His first two plans to first oppress, and then eliminate the newborn male children have both unraveled. Realizing he cannot count on the midwives to do his dirty work for him, he now enlists the help of the entire nation of Egyptians as co-conspirators in the destruction of a generation of Hebrew sons. All the Egyptians are help monitor the birth of new Hebrew sons. As each is born a deadly fate awaits them. Each Hebrew son is to be taken by force if necessary and cast into the river Nile. Since the vast majority of the population lived along the shores of the Nile this was a diabolical plan by Pharaoh. It also had a hidden religious benefit. The Nile river was worshipped by the Egyptians as one of their gods. They honored the Nile as both the giver and taker of life. By casting the Hebrew sons into the Nile the participating Egyptians would be able to religiously escape the crushing guilt of such a horrendous act. They could all agree that the lives of the children was taken by the god of the Nile, not by themselves. This convenient justification is exactly the kind of excuse Satan provides whenever he is at work in a nation that together participates in such wickedness. How else can we understand how our entire nation for the last generation has agreed to sacrifice millions upon millions of babies in abortion for the sake of a "woman's right to her own body"?

#### **Questions from Genesis 50:**

**Question:** 50:15-17 - Are we to infer that Jacob did not actually say these words to be passed on to Joseph since it is being described as an after-the-fact response of Jacob's death?

**Answer:** We cannot know for sure whether Jacob actually spoke these words to his sons or not, because there is no conversation recorded where Jacob spoke this message to them. It is likely that the other sons joined Joseph at their father's bedside for his final moments together. If Jacob had spoken this message then, Joseph would have heard it himself. The only other possibility is that before Joseph arrived that Jacob gave them this message to pass on after his death. There are two valid interpretations from this passage. They both fit from what we know of Jacob and what we know of the sons of Israel. One is that Jacob feared that Joseph was only waiting for his death to retaliate against his brothers. In this possibility I could see Jacob giving this appeal to his sons much like he had appealed to Esau years before in a similar situation. The other possibility is that Jacob never spoke these words to his sons and that they simple lied to Joseph in an effort to soften the vengeance they were anticipating from him. This is not difficult to imagine from the other sons because they had a long pattern of lying to cover themselves. However, I personally lean toward the first interpretation. The main reason I do is because of the development of Judah's character by this point. When he was younger we see Judah cutting corners in various ways, but

since the time he offered himself in Benjamin's place he seems to have grown into the kind of leader that would not compromise in this way.

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## Exodus 2

***2:2-6 - "The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."***

Moses was born in the midst of the edict from Pharaoh for the newborn sons of the Hebrews to be cast into the Nile river. His parents chose to defy Pharaoh's unrighteous command to kill their own son and hid him for the first three months. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict." (Hebrews 11:23). Their choice put them in rebellion to the king's law, but their hearts were not motivated by rebellion. They showed true faith and courage to hide Moses. Their faith was shown in trusting God to cover them and their son if they did what was right in the sight of the Lord in spite of the king. Their hearts were courageous because discovery of their disobedience would most likely result in their death. We have a powerful example here of believing parents committed to doing what is right before the Lord even at potential great cost to themselves. How many believing parents today fail to do what is right toward and for their children simply because it is hard or inconvenient? Their priority concern was not for themselves but for the Lord and for their son.

The Lord is not specifically mentioned in this passage, but His presence overshadows each development. While Pharaoh was implementing his plan for Israel's destruction, the Lord was quietly at work to bring about Israel's deliverance. Moses was chosen by the Lord to one day be "savior" of Israel. In this way, Moses spiritually represents Jesus. He is a type of Christ as his work as deliverer points forward to the greater work of salvation through Christ. Two details from these early moments of Moses' life also point directly forward to similar events in the life of Christ. Like Moses, Jesus is hidden by his parents in Egypt from an evil ruler seeking his death, and in the same way, other innocent children of Israel are killed while he is hidden (Matthew 2:13-16).

This early story of Moses not only points forward in Biblical connections to the Savior, it also points backward in history to an earlier savior. There is a connection we are meant to draw between Moses and Noah. Moses was himself saved by being placed in an ark covered with pitch just like Noah. The Hebrew word in the original text translated "wicker basket" is the identical word used in Noah's story to describe the ark through which he survived the waters of the flood. "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch." (Genesis 6:14). Why would the Lord direct our attention back to Noah for a spiritual connection with Moses? There are two symbolic points conveyed by this connection. First, like Noah, the Lord keeps Moses safe in the ark of salvation. The waters that were death for so many become the means by which the Lord carries Moses to the fulfillment of His plan for His people. Second, Moses, like Noah will be the chosen one through whom the Lord is going to start a new world for His people. When Moses later leads Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land, it is similar to Noah leading his family out of the ark to begin a new world together. Both of these are spiritual previews of the fulfillment in Christ. Jesus is the beginning point of God's New Creation and He will one day build through Him an entirely new world.

***2:7-10 - "Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go ahead." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Then 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. The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, "Because I drew him out of the water."***

The Lord remained quietly in the background here also, but His hand was directing every element of this development. It was no accident that Moses' sister Miriam was watching the ark with Moses in it. It was no accident that the ark was placed in the exact spot (without human planning) upon which the eye of Pharaoh's daughter would rest. It was no accident that Pharaoh's daughter chose this exact spot on the long river Nile to bathe. It was no accident that Miriam was bold as a young girl herself to step forward and dare speak to Pharaoh's daughter when Moses was discovered. It was no accident that Pharaoh's daughter's heart was softened toward Moses in spite of him being under the death penalty of Pharaoh. It was no accident that through Miriam's offer, Moses was given back to his own mother for nursing; this time under the protection of Pharaoh's daughter. It was no accident that after being weaned, Moses became the son of Pharaoh's daughter and the grandson of Pharaoh himself. The lesson here is that man may make plans that oppose the plan of God, but no matter how powerful the man, the Lord's plan will always be accomplished.

The Exodus account does not give us any additional details of the early life of Moses from the moment he was given to Pharaoh's daughter until he became an



adult. Later in the book of Acts we are given some more details as part of Stephen's address to the Sanhedrin. "And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel." (Acts 7:21-23). Moses lived in Pharaoh's court from the age of his weaning (probably age 3-5) until he was forty years old. During that period he was given all the benefits of an Egyptian royal court education. It is clear from the text that even when he was forty, he knew that he was Hebrew rather than Egyptian. He had been raised by the Egyptians, but the Lord had insured that his early most formative years were with his mother. For the Lord's purpose in his calling Moses had gained a core identification with the Hebrews, but he was also equipped with an Egyptian education. His heart connection with Israel would be the foundation for his great task to one day deliver them from bondage. At the same time, his Egyptian education well equipped him for the negotiations with Pharaoh to come.

***2:11-15 - "Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. He went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, "Why are you striking your companion?" But he said, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and said, "Surely the matter has become known." When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.***

At age forty Moses was stirred to visit his enslaved brethren. His heart was moved by their hardships. When he saw one of the Egyptian slave masters beating one of the Hebrew slaves he formed a plan to kill the Egyptian. Moses knew that he was committing a serious violation of Egyptian law and that if discovered his slaying of the man would make him a criminal. His status as a member of the royal court did not give him the right to murder an Egyptian. Moses crossed this line to help his brethren because he believed that God had placed him in this position in order to be a deliverer for Israel. "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand." (Acts 7:23-25).

What is interesting about this perspective upon which Moses acted is that he was called by God to be the deliverer for Israel; only not this way, and not yet.

Moses acted upon a growing sense within his heart of his own future calling, but he got ahead of the Lord in this. What we don't see in this scene is Moses stopping before striking the Egyptian and seeking the Lord as to whether he should do it. He never cries out to the Lord at all, and the Lord does not speak to Moses here and now. Instead of calling upon the Lord, we see Moses looking around to make sure his act would go unseen. We discover the next day along with Moses that his best effort to conceal the murder have not been successful when another Hebrew blurts out that the murder is already known. Of course, word travels back to Pharaoh who orders the death of Moses. This is now the second time that Pharaoh has tried to kill Moses, and again he will not succeed. Moses flees in fear to the north to Midian. The plans of Moses have gone terribly wrong. His effort to deliver Israel has blown up in his face, he lost his position in Pharaoh's court, he lost his connection to his Hebrew brethren, he lost his home in Egypt, and he is a wanted criminal. Nevertheless, Moses is now right where the Lord wants him. "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." (Proverbs 16:9). His first forty years he grew strong in the court of Egypt and somewhat full of himself in the process. Now, what has begun is the next forty years of deep spiritual training in God's specialized school for men of God. The Lord is going to use these next forty years in Midian to refine and prepare the heart of Moses for the great calling ahead of him. Behind is the discipleship of Egypt and ahead is the discipleship of the Lord.

***2:23-25 - "Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them."***

Finally, the Pharaoh that twice sought to kill Moses has died. Because of the Lord, and in spite of Pharaoh's great power, Moses has outlived his adversary. But, back in Egypt things have not improved for the children of Israel. Their bondage as slaves continues and their hardship has not lightened at the death of Pharaoh. In their distress the people turn to the Lord and cry out continuously for his help. This is the turning point in their story. God will change their circumstances and their lives forever. But, we should see how and why He does. God does not intervene in their difficult circumstances just because it is hard for them. There are two reasons why God responds in powerful deliverance given in this passage. First, He intervenes because they have prayed and kept on praying! God responds to their prayers. There is a four-fold description of how God was impacted by their prayers. "God heard...God remembered...God saw...God took notice." Second, He acts on their behalf because of the covenant that He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His motive in their rescue is in place before they were even born. He is motivated by His own covenant faithfulness. This combination of factors is exactly why God delivers us today from our troubles. He is motivated toward us by His covenant faithfulness toward

the covenant He made with His Son Jesus. He also responds when we cry out to Him in believing prayer. Covenant promises along with answers to prayers that lean entirely on Him is the same combination behind every blessing from God we receive today.

### **Questions from Exodus 1:**

**Question:** I have wondered why the Israelites stayed in Egypt after the 7 years of famine, rather than return to their homeland. I know that it was God's plan; "God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years." (Genesis 15:13). However, was there a natural or physical reason why they remained?

**Answer:** It is an interesting question, but one which the Scriptures do not address except through the Genesis 15:13 passage you quoted. There is no verse that explains what they were thinking or what motivated them to remain once the famine ended. Perhaps it was their connection to Joseph and the desire to not be parted from him again. Remember when Joseph buried his father Jacob in the Promised land that he had promised Pharaoh he would return. It was clear that Joseph was permanently connected to Egypt because of Pharaoh's dependence on him as an administrator of his government. If the Israelites had left Egypt after the famine they would have had to part with Joseph. Another factor may have been the favorable circumstance of their new home in Goshen. They had been blessed through Joseph both with the best pasture land in Egypt and a promise of constant provision by Joseph for them and their little ones. Certainly, as you mentioned, the Lord's hand was the real deciding factor in their staying. Whatever their reasons on a human level, the Lord sovereignly kept them in Egypt in order to fulfill His plan.

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### **Exodus 3**

***3:1-2 - "Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed."***

From the time of his flight to Midian to escape the wrath of Pharaoh, until this day of his meeting with the Lord at Horeb a significant period of time has passed. Moses settled in Midian and married the daughter of Jethro at age forty. At this point Moses is now eighty years old (Exodus 7:7). Forty long years have passed since then. Moses has for the last forty years served his father-in-law as the shepherd of his flocks. It is not a stretch to identify Moses as a failure. The man

who was once a prince in Pharaoh's court and mighty in word and deed (Acts 7:22), has amounted to nothing more than a shepherd in the wilderness. Remember from Joseph's story that shepherds were a despised profession in the eyes of the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34). While Moses would certainly have been a failure in the estimation of Egypt, in the eyes of the Lord Moses is now prepared for a higher calling. That which most qualified Moses for greatness in the world was his education and personal accomplishments. It is worth noting that the Lord could have but did not call Moses into spiritual service at age forty when he thought he was ready, and when the world would have concluded he was most qualified. Instead, the Lord took him into a forty year period of humbling service to in a sense break down the pride and self-sufficiency that he had come to rely on. It is a spiritual irony, and a common theme in the Lord's preparation of those He sends into kingdom service that when Moses' strength was greatest, he was least prepared and qualified for his true calling, and when he was later weak and unqualified in his own eyes that the Lord deemed him ready to send.

The way the Lord chose to call Moses into His service was unique and provided Moses with a powerful image of the relationship with the Lord that he would enjoy for the next forty years of his assignment. Moses saw a common desert bush on fire. What amazed him was the bush burned without being consumed. The relationship of the bush and the fire was a symbol of the Lord's relationship with Moses. The fire represented the presence and the power of God. Fire has often been chosen by the Lord to symbolize Himself. It is an image of His holiness as a purifying fire. The Lord showed Himself to Abraham in a similar image on the day He made a covenant with him when he appeared as a flaming torch (Genesis 15:17-18). Later the Lord will show Himself again to Moses and all of Israel as a pillar of fire to lead them through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21). This fire is identified throughout the Bible as God's "consuming fire." (Exodus 24:17, Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29). The fire burning within the bush represented the Lord, but the bush symbolically represented Moses as the servant of God. The bush was ordinary. Nothing about it would have drawn the attention of Moses except the fire burning it. The point is the spiritual significance of Moses has nothing to do with himself and everything to do with the Lord's presence with him. We are also meant to recognize the contradiction of a consuming fire that does not actually consume what it is burning. The meaning is that Moses will not be harmed by responding to the Lord's call, no matter where that call may take him, but he will be changed by the call. God will spiritually, not physically consume the life of Moses. He will be purified by the fire of God, but not be destroyed.

***Exodus 3:3-5 - "So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."***

When Moses turned aside in his direction to draw near the bush the Lord spoke to him from the midst of the bush. There is a subtle, but significant lesson here. The clear implication is that the Lord would not have spoken had Moses not turned aside to draw closer. Before he saw the burning bush Moses was simply engaged in his daily life responsibilities. God chose to invade his routine, but He did so in a way that required a response from Moses. God was calling, but at first not audibly. The way God first called him was through stirring holy curiosity in Moses. Only after Moses gave his full attention to the burning bush did the Lord speak clearly to him. The question for us is whether we will turn aside from daily routines to give the Lord our full attention when He stirs our spiritual curiosity in some circumstance of our life. When the Lord did speak, He addresses Moses by name twice. It is a second way of emphasizing the importance of gaining the undivided attention of Moses and should remind us of the way God called both Abraham and Jacob (Genesis 22:11, Genesis 46:2).

Then God gave Moses a pair of surprising commands and a brief but momentous explanation. The commands were a warning to not come near the bush, and an instruction to remove his sandals. The warning is initially confusing. The reason God caused the bush to burn was to catch the attention of Moses and to draw him close for a special meeting with God. Yet, when Moses begins to draw close, the Lord warns him to not come near the bush. Moses is meant to interpret these apparently contradictory signals from the Lord as "come close, but not too close." The confusion is cleared up by holding two principles of the Lord's presence in the tension of their right relationship. The first principle is that the Lord calls us into close proximity to Himself for the purpose of fellowship with Him and to receive from Him the details of our life assignment. The second principle is that we must always maintain proper distance between ourselves and the Lord because He is awesomely holy and we are not! In our close fellowship with the Lord we dare not presume that we are His equals, but reverentially respect His perfect purity.

As a practical expression of this attitude, the Lord required Moses to remove his sandals. This was commonly done in that culture as a sign of respect when entering their home. The explanation given by the Lord makes this emphasis by identifying this location as "holy ground." The practical reason for removing the sandals was to not carry into another's home the dirt from the world outside. Here Moses is being invited into God's home, but only if he respects the holiness of it by not carrying in the defilement of a fallen world. Even though physically, this spot is no different than all of the ground around it, the ground where this bush stands is named as holy ground because of the presence of the Lord in the bush. God is holy and wherever He makes Himself known becomes holy ground. This is the first time holy ground is mentioned in Scripture, but not the first time it is revealed. Each of these circumstances were revelations of holy ground: the Garden of Eden, the ark of Noah, the altar of Abraham, and the rock of Jacob. This theme of holy ground will continue to develop throughout God's Word in the tabernacle, the temple, and in final fulfillment in the incarnation of Christ. The

application for our own relationship with the Lord is amazing! In Christ, God has come to dwell in us (Ephesians 3:17-19). We are His home. Our lives are now called by Him, holy ground!

***3:13-15 - "Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations."***

One of the key principles of God's revelation of Himself throughout history is called progressive revelation. It means that God did not choose to reveal everything that can be known about Himself from the beginning, but rather to reveal some of Himself and then progressively to add more to that revelation until His full revelation is reached. The fullness of His revelation is in Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3, Colossians 2:2-6). From the garden of Eden until Christ, God progressively revealed more and more of Himself to His covenant people. In this meeting with Moses, God unveils one of the most significant things that can be known about Him. He reveals His covenant Name to Moses. He identifies it as His "name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations." The meaning points to the many names which God associates with Himself throughout the Old Testament that identify some specific aspect of His nature or acts. These names such as El Shaddai, El-Elyon, and many others serve to highlight one quality of God for a particular kind of situation that the people of God are facing. For instance, El Shaddai means God Almighty and is an encouragement that God is in control because He is more powerful than everyone and everything.

The memorial name of the Lord is different than His other names. This name identifies the nature of the Lord in a way that the other names do not. This name reveals more than a single aspect of His nature, it describes His essence. We could say that this name defines what it is to be God! Only God can be called by this name. No man or angel can claim this name for themselves. The name has been theologically identified by the term Tetragrammaton. That comes from a Greek word meaning four letters. The four letters in view are in the original Hebrew text that is translated here by the words, "I AM". The four Hebrew letters are YHWH. The Hebrew does not fill in the vowels between the consonants, but the popular pronunciation in earlier generations of this name was Jehovah. In recent years that more accepted pronunciation is Yahweh. The name is the continuous present tense form of the Hebrew verb "to be". When God reveals that His name is I AM, the meaning is that He continuously IS! The focus is not on what He was, or what He will one day be, but that He always has been, is now, and always will be what He IS at this moment! He is the eternally

unchanging One Who alone is self-existent depending on no one or no thing for His existence. This understanding is essential equipment for his relationship with the Lord and for the accomplishment of his great assignment from the Lord. This understanding remains essential for us to grasp in our own relationship with Him and to equip us to carry out our own assignment from Him.

***3:18-22 - ""They will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' "But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go. I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians."***

The Lord now describes for Moses what will unfold as he obeys Him in this call. Moses will return to Egypt and meet with Pharaoh. This alone is a fearsome task for Moses because of the circumstance under which he fled from Egypt forty years before. However, this meeting with Pharaoh will not be a social visit, but a spiritual confrontation representing the Lord's concerns to Pharaoh. Moses is to inform Pharaoh of his meeting with God and then confront Pharaoh with the Lord's demand for him to release Israel for a three day journey into the wilderness for the purpose of worshipping God. This demand of the Lord is not going to sit well with Pharaoh. For one thing, Pharaoh is himself considered a god in Egypt and he also worships his own gods including the Nile and others. Pharaoh had little respect for the God of the Hebrews since they were his slaves and their God had not intervened for them until now. The demand for a three day release would be understood differently than we might expect. A three day journey was a common figure of speech at that time for a long trip of an undetermined time period. It actually meant that they would be gone as long as it takes. In other words Pharaoh would know that there was no promise they would ever return.

God does not send Moses with the message hoping to persuade Pharaoh with these words. The Lord knows Pharaoh's heart and intentions. He tells Moses up front that the message will not change the mind of Pharaoh and confirms for Moses that He knows that Pharaoh will only change his mind when the Lord forces him to do so by the powerful persuasion of His miracles. God is preparing the heart of His messenger Moses for the confrontation ahead. The real story of this negotiation with Pharaoh will be one of spiritual warfare. The Lord wants Moses to know from step one to expect opposition and resistance, but that the Lord will win this confrontation. This will be no uncertain contest of wills between

the God of Israel and the god of Egypt (Pharaoh). The struggle between God and "god" must take place so that the entire world can see which is the real God.

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## Exodus 4

***4:1-5 - "Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail"--so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand-- that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."***

The discussion between God and Moses at the burning bush continues. Moses here raises his third objection to what the Lord is calling him to do for Him. In the first part of the conversation Moses had objected, "Who am I", and "Who will I say sent me?" When the Lord answered those concerns, Moses then raises the issue of his believability in the eyes of the leaders of Israel. "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say?" It is becoming clear by this point that Moses has no desire to accept the Lord's call and return to Egypt. He is doing his best to wiggle out of the Lord's assignment for him. This objection should not have been an issue for Moses at all if he was listening carefully when the Lord spoke at the beginning of the conversation. When the Lord described for Moses that He was sending him to speak to the leaders of Israel He assured Moses that they would listen to him. "They will pay heed to what you say..." (Exodus 3:18). Now, as if the Lord's Word had no substance Moses raises the question of whether they will listen to him. We are so often like Moses in this that it is scary. God has spoken very clearly in His Word, the Scriptures on many issues of importance to us. Yet, when one of those issue comes to the forefront in our lives we will quickly question whether it is true, or trustworthy, or if it really applies to us. It reminds me of a time a friend in the Lord was compromising in an area of sin and I read for him a couple of passages that directly identified what he was doing as sin. Rather than accept what God had said and repent, he immediately raised objections about the translation or the interpretation. The point is that Moses had his mind made up before God even spoke. Yet, God does not falter at the resistance of Moses, nor ours.

The Lord anticipates both the reluctance of Moses and the uncertainty of the leaders of Israel. He graciously provides miraculous signs to confirm beyond question that Moses is His prophet. These signs are gracious because the Lord owes no one any explanation or confirmation beyond His Word, but He also knows our weakness in discernment and faith and He gives powerful



demonstrations that eliminate all skepticism. The Lord gives Moses three signs to confirm His Word. This principle of confirming signs continues on into the New Testament in the ministry of Jesus. From His own teaching, Jesus identified the miraculous works He did as basis of faith in Him as the Messiah. "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." (John 10:37-38). These sign miracles function as God's testimony regarding the one He sends. "God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." (Hebrews 2:4).

The first of the confirming signs calls attention to the staff of Moses. It was common for men to carry wood staffs in those days, and for shepherds like Moses they were essential equipment for their work. Interestingly, God asks Moses what he has in his hand. Of course, the Lord knew it was a staff, but by asking in this way the Lord shows Moses that what was an ordinary staff to him, would become something awesome and powerful in the purpose of God. In the same way in all of our lives, when the Lord calls us to serve Him he will make use of ordinary elements of our lives and transform them to become extraordinary in His service. This is also a test of faith and obedience for Moses. When God has him throw down his staff and He changes it into a serpent, Moses immediately reacts with normal fear of the snake. God then commands Moses to do something naturally foolish. He is to grasp the snake by the tail. To do so would expose Moses to the danger of being bitten. Moses may be reluctant to obey, but he does what God has commanded and is relieved to see God change the snake back into the staff. This sign also serves to symbolize what God will demonstrate over and over in Egypt; that His power is far superior to the power of the gods of Egypt. The serpent was another of the gods of Egypt that was honored by them as a symbol of wisdom.

***4:10-12 - "Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."***

The Lord has resolved the issue of whether Moses will be received by the leaders of Israel. However, Moses is not finished with his list of objections. What is amazing is that Moses had no advanced warning about this burning bush encounter with God. He had no time to prepare a list of objections, but when he is put on the spot by the call of God, he instantly has several strong objections lined up as to why he should not be sent by the Lord. This objection is particularly ironic and not a touch disingenuous by Moses. He essentially tells the Lord that he is the wrong man to choose for this assignment because he is not a great speaker, and never has been. He even goes so far as to tell the Lord that his

speech deficiencies have not improved since the Lord appeared to him. In other words, this meeting changes nothing as far as Moses is concerned. Moses is dead wrong. This meeting with the Lord changes everything whether he likes it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not. When the Lord meets us in a chosen encounter for the purpose of giving us our calling, or life assignment, we are changed by that encounter, whatever the specific circumstances He chooses for the encounter. A true encounter with God never leaves the person unchanged by it. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (II Corinthians 3:18).

Where Moses was not being completely honest with the Lord was in his self description. After forty years living as a humble shepherd, Moses no longer felt qualified to represent the Lord in the court of Pharaoh and to speak eloquently on His behalf. His current feelings however, did not change the past. Here again is the description of Moses in his first forty years; "...he was a man of power in words and deeds." (Acts 7:22). He had been a man of eloquence in Egypt. The last forty years has not destroyed the gift within him that made him powerful in his words. Instead the last forty years have changed his self perspective from a man confident in himself to a man completely unsure of himself. That change in perspective is actually a necessary condition for where the Lord is taking him. Moses will not go to Egypt leaning on his own wisdom, talent, or eloquence. He is going to lean on the Lord alone. His ability to impact Israel, Egypt and Pharaoh with his words will have nothing to do with him and everything to do with speaking only the words of God. In this, we should all follow the path of Moses. God calls us to speak on His behalf. It won't be our words or clever way of saying it that will impact their hearts, but the words of God. We will see this pattern of initial reluctance to speak for the Lord repeated in various ways in the generations to follow in those the Lord calls.

Jeremiah the prophet began when he was called to object like Moses. "Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth." (Jeremiah 1:6-9). The Lord's answer to Jeremiah and to Moses is similar. Their weakness in speech is irrelevant for their call. What counts is the One Who calls and sends. He made the mouth. He gave them the ability to speak. All that matters is that He goes with the one He sends and gives them the message to deliver. Since it is His message, if we will simply trust and obey Him, He will accomplish His purpose through our obedient delivery.

**4:13-18 - "But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will." Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs. Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."**

The Lord has met every objection that Moses raises and has not budged on His call to Moses. Moses has no other valid reason not to go, but his heart is still resisting at this point and he makes one last desperate attempt to deflect the call on his life. All that he can do is make a final appeal to the Lord. He asks the Lord to please send anyone else beside himself! Please Lord, just send anyone except me! This last squirming effort by Moses really exposes the real issue here. The issue is not whether he is a great speaker, or whether Israel will believe him. The issue is that he just does not want it to be him. A critical principle of kingdom service comes into focus here for Moses and for us. God does not take volunteers into His army. Everyone that enters the service of the Lord is drafted into service. The Lord does not market, or advertise His service in an effort to persuade by enticements the enlistment of servants in His kingdom. He chooses those that He wants to serve Him. When He chooses a person, He does not first interview them and ask their input or permission. He chooses and He calls, and those He calls must respond. We have no options other than complete rebellion or obedience. Of course, when the Lord is the One calling even rebellion is not an effective resistance. Ask Jonah the prophet whether rebelling against the call of God is effective. When Moses raises this final objection, he quickly discovers that God's grace has a limit and that he dare not presume upon the Lord in resisting any further. "Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses..." That means that further resistance will be treated as disobedience and punished.

Once God issues His call, the outcome is already determined. Moses must submit. The Lord is not unreasonable however in dealing with the weakness of Moses. God provides Moses with a spokesman in his brother Aaron. This arrangement of the Lord speaking to Moses, then Moses speaking to Aaron, and Aaron speaking for Moses will not be permanent, but accommodates the struggle of Moses in a transition into ministry. At the beginning we will see Aaron serving in this way and later, as Moses grows into his role, he will begin to speak for himself more and more. What we should notice is that the Lord tells Moses that Aaron is already on his way to meet him. That means the Lord stirred Aaron to seek out Moses for this purpose before the burning bush encounter. This was not

God switching to Plan B because He did not anticipate the weakness of Moses. The Lord knew before they ever spoke that Moses would need this initial help from his brother and provided the answer before Moses even asked. "...your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:8).

One additional detail in this passage is important to notice. Once the meeting with the Lord at the burning bush ends, Moses returns home. Once there he does not give his "two week notice" to Jethro and then immediately leave for Egypt. Moses approaches Jethro, who is both his father-in-law and his boss in the shepherding business and he asks him to let him go to Egypt. God has just spoken to Moses and told him to go to Egypt, but Moses appropriately does not presume on Jethro in this change of his life direction. Moses has been a member of Jethro's family for forty years now. Jethro has always treated Moses well from the first day they met. He generously opened his home to Moses, offered him his daughter in marriage and gave him a livelihood. It would have been disrespectful for Moses to just announce he was leaving because God told him to. What Moses does is trust the Lord. Since the Lord has called him he can be confident that the Lord will convince Jethro's heart to agree to his leaving. By asking for Jethro's blessing to go, Moses does not burn any bridges behind him in their relationship. Later, the fruit of his wisdom here will bless both Moses and all of Israel when they meet Jethro in the Exodus and receive the benefit of his wise counsel.

***4:22-26 - "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, 'Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.'" Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." So He let him alone. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood"--because of the circumcision."***

This passage has traditionally confounded many believers. It is the unexpectedness of the event and the uncertainty of what has happened, why, and to whom that has left many confused. The first mystery is to identify who it was that the Lord sought to put to death. The text only identifies the target as "him." There are two possibilities. Either it refers to Moses, or to his son. The wording of the original Hebrew allows for either interpretation. I cannot say for sure, and the real point being made is the same in either case. I lean toward identifying the target of the Lord as the son of Moses. The reason is the immediate context in which the Lord tells Moses what he must declare to Pharaoh about the Lord's firstborn son, Israel and Pharaoh's firstborn. It is a strong warning that the Lord intends to kill Pharaoh's firstborn son because he refuses to release the Lord's firstborn. If Moses' firstborn is the Lord's target, that would make perfect sense in parallel to what will happen in Egypt. It is also

possible that Moses is the target because he is not the one to step forward to perform the circumcision, but Zipporah does. However, if Moses is the one God sought to kill, the main point remains the same.

The mystery is in why God would first call and send Moses to Egypt and as soon as he leaves in obedience the Lord Himself rises up to confront him (either directly or through his son). The issue has to do with circumcision, and the standard to which God holds those He calls to lead and represent Him. The son of Moses had not been circumcised. He should have been. There was no excuse why he wasn't circumcised. Since the days of Abraham, the focus of those in covenant relationship with God was this sign of circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14). Moses was the head of his household. It was his responsibility to circumcise his own sons on the eighth day after birth. There is an implication in the story that Zipporah knew all about circumcision, but did not want it for her sons. Moses most likely abdicated his leadership in the family on this issue and let her have her way. God had not made it an issue between Him and Moses until the time came for Moses to fulfill the Lord's call. The kingdom principle is "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." (Luke 12:48). Those who lead are held accountable to a higher standard (James 3:1). It did not matter what Zipporah thought of circumcision, or what Moses thought of Zipporah. The issue was what God required of Moses as a leader of Israel. If he could not lead his own family in the ways of the Lord, how could he lead all Israel? "(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Timothy 3:5).

We should also recognize the intentional wording of the death threat toward either Moses or his son. The passage tells us that the Lord "sought to put him to death." We have many examples in the Bible of the Lord executing a person for serious violations of His holiness and in each case the death of the person is instantaneous (Leviticus 10:2, II Samuel 6:7, Acts 5:5). When the Lord wants to put someone to death, they die. He doesn't have to try or seek to put someone to death. The description here is meant to alert us to the provision of the Lord's grace and mercy in His necessary discipline. The point is that the Lord made it clear that if this issue of circumcision was not resolved, through repentant action, that it would end in death. When Zipporah circumcised the son, the Lord mercifully withdrew His hand of judgment.

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## Exodus 5

***5:1-4 - "And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go." Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!"***

This is the first meeting of many to come between Moses and Pharaoh. Moses does obey the Lord and deliver His message to Pharaoh, but not in every detail. The Lord had originally told Moses to take the elders of Israel with him to this meeting, and he was also instructed to perform for Pharaoh the signs that God had shown him at the burning bush (Exodus 3:18, 4:21). By missing these two details we can see that Moses is in a heart orientation of obedience, but that he is not yet giving the full measure of attention to the Lord's instructions that his calling deserves. The background concept to keep in mind is the significance of every word from God. The Lord does not waste words or give idle commands that can be ignored or overlooked without concern. There are reasons why the Lord wanted the elders of Israel there to observe this meeting with Pharaoh and there are reasons God wanted Moses to perform the signs he had been given. The failure of Moses to follow in detail the commands of the Lord is an example we all too easily follow when we should not. When we read God's Word and discover commands of the Lord that apply to our lives, we are not meant to grasp the general concept of His command and then decide for ourselves how or to what degree we should implement what He requires of us. The New Testament principle is identified as being "doers of the word" (James 1:22). What is the acceptable standard for doers of the Word? Should we do 75% of what we know the Lord requires and be satisfied with that because we "mostly obeyed" Him? Partial obedience laid bare is still a mixture of obedience and disobedience regardless of the percentage of each.

There is an interesting shift that occurs in the tone of this first meeting with Pharaoh. The message from the Lord that Moses and Aaron first deliver to Pharaoh is very direct and bold. The tone of their delivery is courageous and confrontational. Moses is bold in the strength of his recent encounter with God, the miracles he experienced, and the good fruit of a hero's welcome by the Israelites. The message does not come with any consideration for how Pharaoh may feel about what God has to say to him. It is delivered as it should be representing the Lord as a King speaking to another king (Pharaoh). It is not a request or an appeal for cooperation. It is a demand of a superior and more powerful king to an inferior and weaker king. Pharaoh's response is classic. Who

is this Yahweh that I should obey His voice? His denial of knowing the Lord has nothing to do with our sense of being saved, but instead describes Pharaoh's unfamiliarity with this specific name for the God of the Hebrews. Pharaoh does not know about Yahweh yet, but this is just the introduction and in the days to come he is going to get to know Him far more than he ever wanted. When Pharaoh insolently rejected the message from Yahweh, the tone of the meeting suddenly changes. Moses and Aaron shift from bold messengers of a greater King, to almost pathetic supplicants. Rather than perform the miracle signs God had given him at this point, Moses resorts to using the "magic word." Moses says, "Please, let us go...", as if softening the conversation from a demand to an appeal and asking Pharaoh rather than telling him will suddenly change his mind. Their nice request is met, not with Pharaoh's cooperation, but with a demand from him for them to stop stirring up trouble with the people and to get back to work!

***5:6-9 - "So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words."***

When Moses and Aaron first arrived back in Egypt as the Lord's messengers they were greeted with great hope by the people of Israel (Exodus 4:29-31). The people had worshipped the Lord when they learned that He was concerned about their afflictions in Egypt and had sent messengers to rescue them from their difficulties. That is exactly what Moses was there to accomplish. There is just one problem that the people had not anticipated, and would have to learn by experience. What they began at this exact point to learn is a discipleship lesson that we must all learn along with them. The lesson is that while God has promised to favor His covenant people with blessings, the fulfillment of His promise does not always unfold in the way or the timing we would choose for ourselves. If Israel, or even Moses were in charge like the Lord of this scenario, they would have chosen for it to unfold like this. First Moses would have delivered the message to Pharaoh, then Pharaoh would have immediately had a change of heart and released Israel with no fuss or further problem. When Pharaoh did the exact opposite and actually strengthened their bondage and affliction once God's message was delivered, both Israel and Moses were disoriented and confused. If God is in it, shouldn't everything just go smooth?

This is no different than the new believer that comes to know the Lord expecting that their life circumstances will all be fixed now that they are saved. When more troubles, rather than less troubles develop in their life, many are disillusioned and disappointed with God. The same pattern often develops when a believer makes

a difficult decision to trust the Lord in some issue of obedience and do the thing pleasing to the Lord, only to be caught off guard that their obedience ends up costing them something. The discipleship principle involved here is that God's priority is not our comfort but our growth. There are bigger spiritual issues at stake than God making our lives as cushy as we would prefer. "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22).

In this case there was a needful perspective being gained by Israel through Pharaoh's hardening heart. They were learning the hard way about the reality of rebellion against the revealed will of God in this world, and their own hearts were being safeguarded against the temptation to return to Egypt in the future by a fresh and increased dose of just how harsh a world in rebellion to God can be. Even with this lesson of their severe hardship and suffering, Israel would soon be tempted in the wilderness to reject the Lord's direction and run back to their slavery under Pharaoh.

***5:20-23 - "When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them. They said to them, "May the LORD look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us." Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all."***

Following the increased demands of Pharaoh and the new workload upon Israel the foremen of the slaves were themselves punished when the people could not meet their quota of bricks. Rather than appeal to Moses, the foremen went directly to Pharaoh and cried out for relief. Pharaoh did not flinch but held them and the people to the impossibly high standards of work that he had imposed. When the foremen left the meeting with Pharaoh they were met by Moses and Aaron. What ensues is the beginning of the unraveling of the relationship between Moses and the people of Israel. Up until this point Moses was the new hope of Israel and welcomed without reservation. How these foremen respond to Moses establishes a pattern that will play out over and over for the next forty years of their journey through the wilderness. The pattern is simply this; when Moses does something that makes their lives easier he is a hero to Israel, but when he does something that makes their lives more difficult he becomes the target for their anger.

Moses and Aaron had to be taken aback by how these Israelite foremen address them coming out from their meeting with Pharaoh. Without even saying hello, the men declare their desire for the Lord to take notice of Moses and Aaron and to judge them for what they have done. They are asking for the judgment of God to fall upon them and in doing so they are accusing them of having sinned. The



essence of their perspective is that what Pharaoh has done is all the fault of Moses and Aaron. The underlying implication is that if Moses must have blown his assignment as the Lord's messenger somehow. If Moses had delivered the message the way he should have then Pharaoh would have let them go, not made their slavery worse! This is of course a false accusation based upon a fleshly conclusion which failed to understand the deeper plan of the Lord in this circumstance. Pharaoh responded in the way he did because God wanted him to do so. God was setting up a confrontation between Himself and Pharaoh. The foremen were blind to that greater purpose of God, and were only concerned to attack the one they blamed for causing them more trouble.

It is not right that these men reacted by blaming Moses, but it is somewhat understandable because they did not have the benefit of all Moses had experienced with the Lord. However, Moses did not have that excuse for his reaction that followed. When the foremen blame Moses for their troubles, how does Moses respond? Moses does something right and something wrong. What is right is that he does not stand there and argue with the foremen. He does not even attempt to defend himself or justify himself in their eyes. He knows that it really is not his fault since he was only the messenger. While it is a hard pill to swallow, those that are called to be messengers for the Lord have to learn the lesson that when the message is not welcomed, the messenger is often blamed. Moses does what he should when he is unjustly blamed for the increased trouble for Israel, and being blamed for it by the people. Moses returns to the Lord. Since it was the Lord's message and the Lord's commission to deliver it, Moses can only find understanding in the presence of the Lord. What he does wrong, however, is that he does not return to the Lord to humbly seek wisdom and an explanation from the Lord. What Moses does is carry the attitude that the foremen approached him with in his own communication with the Lord. Just like they blamed him, Moses now blames the Lord. Moses' prayer is not one of innocent confusion seeking an explanation. He does want an explanation, but it is flavored with an accusation that the Lord has mishandled the situation.

Moses did not expect that by delivering the Lord's message the circumstance for Israel would grow worse before it got better. Moses asks two loaded "Why Lord?!?" questions and follows them with a complaint that the Lord had not fulfilled His promise to deliver the people through him. "O Lord, why have You brought harm... Why did You ever send me?" Moses has not yet learned what we should know. The Lord is wise and faithful beyond question. He knows what He is doing even when we don't. He is always faithful to fulfill His promises even when we don't see how He will do so. When things don't go according to our plan that does not mean that they aren't going according to His plan. Moses should have known better. The Lord specifically warned him that Pharaoh would not respond well at first. "But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go."

(Exodus 3:19-20). We should know better also to ever blame the Lord for what goes "wrong" in our lives.

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## Exodus 6

***6:1 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land."***

Chapter five ended with Moses being accused by the Israelite foremen of mishandling the entire situation, and then Moses returning to the Lord and confronting the Lord about the way the Lord has handled the entire situation. Moses asked the two loaded "Why Lord?" questions. Moses wanted to know why the Lord had brought harm to Israel because Pharaoh had made their lives even more miserable when he increased their workload. Moses also wanted to know why God had even bothered to send him to Egypt in the first place because his mission had so far been a complete failure in his perspective. Moses then compounded the two accusatory questions directed toward the Lord with a direct statement implying the Lord had not fulfilled His promise to deliver Israel from their bondage. This verse is the Lord's response to the questions and insinuation of Moses of His unfaithfulness.

The first thing to notice in the Lord's response is that He does not directly answer either of the questions Moses asked Him. He also does not directly address the insinuation that He has not fulfilled His promise. Instead, the Lord declares that the time has arrived for Him to act directly and that Moses would see for himself what He was going to do. This interaction between Moses and the Lord strikes me as very parental. Moses, like an immature child is emotionally reacting and venting his frustrations over a difficult circumstance. The expectations of Moses have not been matched by the actions of God. In his frustration Moses wants answers and demands them from the Lord. The Lord responds as a wise parent who is more concerned about what Moses needs to learn than He is with how Moses is misinterpreting His role in the situation. The Lord, never directly answers the questions Moses asked, but directs his attention to what He is about to do. His upcoming actions will answer all of Moses' questions and more. The deeper principle revealed here in the way the Lord handles the frustration of Moses is that the Lord does not owe any of us any explanation of His plans. He graciously chooses, when it serves His purpose, to grant us understanding of what He is doing and why, but we should expect a similar response from the Lord when we make similar demands. If you want to be ignored by the Lord, then following the bad example of Moses in demanding answers from the Lord is a good starting point.

The Lord's answer directs Moses back to His original declaration when they spoke at the burning bush of what He was going to do, but let's Moses know that the time has come for Him to accomplish it (Exodus 3:19-20). Once again, the emphatic point that the Lord makes is that He is not going to ask, persuade or appeal to Pharaoh. He is going to compel Pharaoh to do what he does not want to do, but the Lord will force him to do! The Lord twice describes that Pharaoh will only release Israel "under compulsion". This is another strong indicator of the complete sovereignty of God over all human beings. Many believers can embrace the idea that the Lord is sovereign over His own people who in their minds have willingly wanted the Lord to be in complete charge over their lives. Here though, the Lord is going to exercise forceful control over the mind, heart and will of a man that has not requested it and does not want it. Pharaoh never invites the sovereignty of God over his life and decisions. So, this passage forces us to deal with a clash of concepts in how God deals with humans, both willing and unwilling. Is God really in complete charge like He declares here, or does God always limit Himself to only working where humans invite His involvement? On the one hand we have those who insist God will never impose His will on an unwilling human. On the other hand we have God's declaration to Moses here to watch how He is going to force Pharaoh to do under compulsion what he would never choose to do on his own. I choose to accept God's own testimony of how He deals with humanity over humanity's presumptive assertions of what God would never do.

***6:2-5 - "God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them. I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant."***

God chooses this key moment to refresh for Moses what He revealed to him about Himself at the burning bush. Remember, it was at the bush that God had identified Himself to Moses by what would be from that point forward His covenant name, YHWH, or Yahweh. Now, the Lord gives Moses some additional background history on this special name. The Lord declares again to Moses, "I am Yahweh", and reminds Moses that He is the One Who had appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The important connection is that what God was about to do for Israel through Moses had everything to do with the special covenant relationship established previously with those three patriarchs. The Lord had made promises to them over 400 years before, that He was now about to fulfill. Moses had just questioned the faithfulness of the Lord to His promises, and now indirectly the Lord lets Moses know that even a 400 year delay does not undermine His faithfulness.

Then the Lord makes a curious statement to Moses. In referring to His name Yahweh, He tells Moses that He was known as God Almighty to them, but that He did not make Himself known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by the name Yahweh. This statement is curious because of two passages from Genesis. In the first (Genesis 15:1-2), the Lord appeared to Abraham and Abraham used the name Yahweh in his response as he was talking with God. In the second (Genesis 28:13), God appeared to Jacob in ladder dream and told Jacob that His name was Yahweh. This apparent contradiction of what the Lord now tells Moses is a misunderstanding of emphasis. The Lord is not telling Moses that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had never even heard of the name Yahweh before. What the Lord is emphasizing is that Moses is the first person in history that was ever given the explanation by the Lord of what His covenant name means (Exodus 3:14). The earlier patriarchs were familiar with the name Yahweh, but were not given deeper spiritual understanding of the meaning of His name. They did know Him primarily as God Almighty, but from now on, Israel would know Him primarily as Yahweh. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob He was God Almighty, or the God who is more powerful than all the other gods of the nations. Now, to Moses, and Israel after him, He will be known as Yahweh, the eternally unchanging One, the self-existent One, Who depends on no one and no thing for His existence.

***6:6-8 - "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.'"***

The Lord now graciously lays out for Moses His plan for Israel's future. Because it lays in the future, it seems uncertain to Moses, but because it is the Lord's plan its fulfillment is as certain as the past. God first commissions Moses to pass on to Israel the knowledge of God's covenant name that he has been given. The promises that follow are dependant upon the meaning of His name. The Lord then gives seven wonderful promises to Moses to pass on to Israel. These seven promises form the specific outline of the plan of God for Israel. The strength of the promises is measured by the integrity of the One that makes the promise. The Lord frames them in seven "I will..." statements. Because He wills these seven things, there are all 100% certain to one day happen just as the Lord said.

The seven promises are 1) the Lord will bring them out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, 2) the Lord will deliver them from their bondage, 3) the Lord will redeem them with an outstretched arm and great judgments, 4) the Lord will take them for His people, 5) the Lord will be their God, 6) the Lord will bring them to the land He swore to the patriarchs, 7) the Lord will give that Promised Land to them for their possession. He then finishes His declaration of what He intends to

do by repeating that His name is Yahweh. The meaning is that His name reveals His true nature, and that is the proof, the absolute certainty that what He says He will do is what will happen.

There are several details in these seven promises deserving more detailed study, but I'll highlight a couple. The Lord is going to stretch out His arm when He brings Israel out of Egypt. This is an image meant to tell us something about the way God reveals His power in history. The Biblical perspective is that God is all powerful. We use the theological term omnipotent to describe that God is not just more powerful than all others, but that the full degree of His power is so great that any comparison with the power of others fails to show how great His power really is. Yet, we do not see the greatness of God's power in all of history. God chooses not to show all of His power at all times, but instead He has chosen specific times and events through which He will show His power. The events immediately ahead for Israel will provide one of the great demonstrations of God's power in all of history. This is not the only time in history in which God stretches out His arm and makes His great power known. He did so in the creation, in the curse which changed the world because of Adam's sin, in the flood, and in the blessing of the patriarchs. Now He is about to reveal His power by humbling the greatest nation in the world and exalting the least of nations to a place of greatest prominence in world history.

***6:9-13 - "So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage. Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land." But Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?" Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt."***

God ordered Moses to speak this plan to Israel as His messenger, and Moses obeys. Moses declares the full message of God to Israel, but he is met with a discouraging and disheartening response. Israel does not listen to Moses. Can you imagine God sending a true prophet to you with a true message directly from God and you just don't listen to what he has to say? Israel has no excuse to so completely ignore the messenger and message from God, but there is an explanation. They are themselves despondent because of the increasingly cruel circumstances of their bondage. Their suffering has exhausted their capacity to hear the word from the Lord and believe it. The word despondency in our translation is literally shortness of breath or spirit in the original Hebrew. Both senses apply here. Their increased hardship has left them gasping for breath, which then renders them unable to catch their breath spiritually. This is a real issue for Israel here that is beyond their control. Their tribulations have so deeply impacted their physical and spiritual lives that they can't even really hear let alone respond to this message of hope from God.

I appreciate that the Lord does not berate Israel for this lack of response here. The Lord knows their suffering and does not compound their suffering by condemning them for their spiritual weakness. The Lord had Moses deliver His message to them even knowing in advance they would not listen. Later, once the Lord has delivered them, Israel will be able to look back and gain appreciation for the mercy and faithfulness of the Lord when they were at their lowest point.

Moses does not in this moment grasp yet what the Lord is doing. Being ignored by Israel tempts Moses to rehearse once more to the Lord his fear and uncertainty about himself as the Lord's messenger. "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?" In the perspective of Moses, a skillful messenger will get people to listen. Since they ignored him, the issue must be his lack of skill to deliver the message of the Lord effectively. The tone of this question that Moses asks the Lord here is a bit less disrespectful than previously, and more of an honest doubt in his own ability. However, in the big picture, the ability of Moses is no factor in his calling. The Lord had previously made it clear to Moses that his skill has nothing to do with his calling. All that matters is that the Lord has called him, sent him, and is with him. The Lord does not stop and repeat all this to Moses here. In fact, the Lord once again ignores this attempt by Moses to be excused from this assignment. The Lord's only response is to renew His charge to Moses and Aaron. Eventually it will sink in that when the Lord calls and assigns the only appropriate response is obedience, not negotiation.