

EXODUS CHAPTER 3-4

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In the previous chapters, we read of the family of Israel (Jacob) becoming a nation, then being subjected to bondage by the government of Egypt. They cried out to God and He raised up Moses and trained him in the finest schools available.

Moses killed an Egyptian taskmaster for beating one of his Hebrew brethren. This caused Moses to flee to neighboring Midian where he married and took up shepherding. From a prince in Egypt to a shepherd in Midian.

Contents:

Moses Encounters the Lord in the Wilderness

Moses is Sent to Pharaoh

God Identifies His Name for Moses

God's Strategy to get Israel out of Egypt

The Lord Equips Moses With Special Power

The Lord Reminds Moses About Who Made His Mouth

Moses Quits Shepherding and Returns to Egypt

Moses Parts Ways with His Wife and Sons

Moses and Aaron Were Believed by the Elders

MOSES ENCOUNTERS THE LORD IN THE WILDERNESS

(3:1) One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God.

- **Moses** was becoming acquainted with the terrain where he would be eventually leading his people. But of course,

he had no idea at this time. The Lord was again training His man.

(2) There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. (3) "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

- **The angel of the Lord** is the Lord Himself. This will be seen as the story unfolds in verse 6. This is the second Person of the trinity, the One who was later born as Jesus. Consider John:

No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is Himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

(John 1:18 NLT)

- Before talking, the Lord got Moses' attention with the burning **bush**. There are times the Lord does something to us to get our attention, too.

(4) When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied.

- **Moses** did not know at the moment who was calling him in this remote place. Who, out here in the wilderness, would know his name?

(5) "Do not come any closer," the LORD warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.

- God had a dress code and it did not include **sandals**. There was to be no footwear on **holy ground**.

(6) I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses

heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

- **God** clearly identifies himself as the **God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses** knew who these men of old were. His *mother* had taught him. Training this child had been so rewarding.

(7) Then the LORD told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. (8) So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey -- the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live.

- The **Lord** is taking action on the **suffering** of His people Israel. He is a God of personal feelings and tenderness. He has not forgotten His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He's been silent, but a plan for **rescue** is beginning to be revealed.
- **A land flowing with milk and honey** is very descriptive. Think of all that is implied for an abundance of **milk** and an abundance of **honey**.

MOSES IS SENT TO PHARAOH

(9.) Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached Me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them.

(10) Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead My people Israel out of Egypt."

- The Lord proposes to send Moses to **Pharaoh** so he can lead God's **people** from this land of oppression. Moses can see the compassionate heart of the Lord.

(11) But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

- Forty years before, **Moses** thought that he was important. Now he asks “**Who am I . . .**”
- The plan did not appeal to **Moses** one bit. Over time, **Moses** made four excuses for not talking with **Pharaoh**:
 - “Who am I that I should go . . .” (in this verse)
 - “They will not believe . . .” 4:1
 - “I am not eloquent” 4:10
 - “Send someone else” 4:13

(12) God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the One who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

- **God** didn't answer Moses' question, but told Moses how he would be supported from heaven. **God** would have Moses bring **the people** out here on this **very mountain**. That would be a **sign** to Moses.

(13) But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is His name?' Then what should I tell them?"

- **Moses** wanted more ID from **God** than that He was the **God** of his **fathers**. He needed a **name** to use. **Moses** had grown up in Egypt where there were many gods, each with a **name**.

GOD IDENTIFIES HIS NAME FOR MOSES

(14) God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you."

- The **name LORD (YHWH)** had been used in former times but perhaps forgotten. The famous archaeologist **William F. Albright** rendered the name, “I am he who causes (things) to be.” **God** always was in the past, is in the present and always will be. There was never a time when He did not exist, or a time when He will cease to exist. He is outside of His created universe.

(15) God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you. This is My eternal name, My name to remember for all generations.

- When **Moses** was to speak to Israel, he was to identify God as the **God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**. The name of the Lord is to be repeated throughout all **generations**. Those who refuse to pronounce the **name** are missing the point.

(16) "Now go and call together all the elders of Israel. Tell them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—has appeared to me. He told me, "I have been watching closely, and I see how the Egyptians are treating you. (17) I have promised to rescue you from your oppression in Egypt. I will lead you to a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live.'"

- Because of how Israel has been treated, **God** made a **promise** to bring them from **Egypt** and give them the **land** of Canaan, now possessed by several people groups. It is a very productive property. **Israel** leaving **Egypt** was a step in the Lord fulfilling His promise to **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**.

(18) "The elders of Israel will accept your message. Then you and the elders must go to the king of Egypt and tell him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So please let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD, our God.'

- **God** said that Moses would have success in leading Israel. The first encounter with Pharaoh was outlined ahead of time by the **Lord**. Moses, accompanied by the **elders**, was to ask to allow the **Hebrews** to make a

three-day journey into the wilderness. No mention was made of a return.

GOD'S STRATEGY TO GET ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT

(19) "But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand forces him. (20) So I will raise My hand and strike the Egyptians, performing all kinds of miracles among them. Then at last he will let you go.

- God also knew that it would take pressure on the **king of Egypt** to release this free labor. So He would supply that pressure. God would actively intervene to change the king's mind.

(21) And I will cause the Egyptians to look favorably on you. They will give you gifts when you go so you will not leave empty-handed. (22) Every Israelite woman will ask for articles of silver and gold and fine clothing from her Egyptian neighbors and from the foreign women in their houses. You will dress your sons and daughters with these, stripping the Egyptians of their wealth."

- In addition to letting **Israel** leave **Egypt**, they would leave with plunder from their taskmasters. They would receive a bonus for their years of slave labor and this would finance their next venture.
- This very outcome had been promised way back in the time of Abraham:

But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. (GENESIS 15:14 NLT)

THE LORD EQUIPS MOSES WITH SPECIAL POWER

(4:1) But Moses protested again, "What if they won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, 'The LORD never appeared to you?'"

- **Moses** made another objection that the **Lord** handled quickly.

(2) Then the LORD asked him, "What is that in your hand?" "A shepherd's staff," Moses replied. (3) "Throw it down on the ground," the LORD told him. So Moses threw down the staff, and it turned into a snake! Moses jumped back.

- This sign from God was immediate. **Moses' shepherd's staff** became a **snake**. **Moses**, as a former prince in Egypt, would immediately see something familiar in the **snake**.
- **Wilbur Fields** explains:

A carving of a serpent (cobra, or uraeus) was placed upon the front of the crown by many Pharaoh's. It was a symbol of the royal power in lower Egypt. Thus Moses' miracle gave the appearance of an intentional attack upon Egypt's supreme authority. Also, an Egyptian goddess, *Buto*, was depicted in serpent form. She was the protectress of Egypt's northern capital. The miracle discredited her power.

(4) Then the LORD told him, "Reach out and grab its tail." So Moses reached out and grabbed it, and it turned back into a shepherd's staff in his hand. (5) "Perform this sign," the LORD told him. "Then they will believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—really has appeared to you."

- **Moses** was immediately required to show some *faith* in the **Lord**. He was asked to catch the snake by the **tail!** Now a simple shepherd was going to grab the snake by its **tail** and shake it.
- Now for a second sign:

(6) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out again, his hand was white as snow with a severe skin disease.

- The Hebrew text calls this *leprosy*, a nearly incurable **skin disease!**
- Now for the cure:

(7) "Now put your hand back into your cloak," the LORD said. So Moses put his hand back in, and when he took it out again, it was as healthy as the rest of his body

- **Moses** must have been overwhelmingly convinced by **God's** signs. **Fields** says,

It displayed the limitless and superhuman power of God. Leprosy usually was a disease of long duration. Even the ceremony for cleansing it took eight days (Lev. 14:8-10). But in the case of Moses, the infection, the cure, and the cleansing were all immediate.

(8) The LORD said to Moses, "If they do not believe you and are not convinced by the first miraculous sign, they will be convinced by the second sign.

- These **two signs** had the further purpose of convincing the people of **Moses'** authority.

(9) And if they don't believe you or listen to you even after these two signs, then take some water from the Nile River and pour it out on the dry ground. When you do, the water from the Nile will turn to blood on the ground."

- God had a further persuasive **sign** for skeptics. **Water** from the **Nile** would be turned into **blood**.
- This is the first time in God's dealing with the human race that He had empowered anyone like this. But even with this remarkable set of **signs**, Moses had more excuses.

(10) But Moses pleaded with the LORD, "O Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though You have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled."

- Now **Moses** tries a third objection: **"I'm not very good with words."** That was just an empty excuse because the later book of Deuteronomy is mainly his speeches to Israel.

THE LORD REMINDS MOSES ABOUT WHO MADE HIS MOUTH

(11) Then the LORD asked Moses, "Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the LORD? (12) Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say."

- The **Lord** reasons that He is the creator of the communication faculties. He can handle any speech deficiencies in **Moses**.
- **Fields** says:

Moses had to learn that the working of God's power does not depend upon human eloquence and wisdom (1 Cor. 2:1,4). Many people thought the speech of the apostle Paul was of no account (2 Cor. 10: 10). But his influence was powerful, in spite of this. When we appear weak in ourselves, the power of God may become more obvious and more potent in us (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

(13) But Moses again pleaded, "Lord, please! Send anyone else."

- **Moses** simply begs off on going to his people. He offered no excuse this time. He just doesn't want to go.

(14) Then the LORD became angry with Moses. "All right," He said. "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he speaks well. And look! He is on his way to meet you now. He will be delighted to see you."

- The objections were **angering** the patient **Lord**. A solution to **Moses'** reluctance was already in motion. His **brother** was coming and will be **delighted** to see **Moses**.

(15) Talk to him, and put the words in his mouth. I will be with both of you as you speak, and I will instruct you both in what to do. (16) Aaron will be your spokesman to the people. He will be your mouthpiece, and you will stand in the place of God for him, telling him what to say.

- The Lord is promising inspiration to Moses so he can direct his brother **Aaron** to **say** the right thing. More than 300 years had passed since the Lord had any communication with the sons of Jacob.

(17) And take your shepherd's staff with you, and use it to perform the miraculous signs I have shown you."

- Moses was to take his **shepherd's staff** to the interviews rather than go empty handed. God would enable the **staff** as a tool for heavenly **signs**.

MOSES QUILS SHEPHERDING AND RETURNS TO EGYPT

(18) So Moses went back home to Jethro, his father-in-law. "Please let me return to my relatives in Egypt," Moses said. "I don't even know if they are still alive." "Go in peace," Jethro replied.

- Since **Moses** was working for **Jethro**, he asked to be released so he could return to his **relatives** in **Egypt**. **Jethro** granted the release.

(19) Before Moses left Midian, the LORD said to him, "Return to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you have died."

- The **Lord** removed one fear from **Moses**: There was no warrant out for his arrest any longer.

(20) So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey, and headed back to the land of Egypt. In his hand he carried the staff of God.

- **Moses** packed up his family and headed back for **Egypt**. He brought his shepherd's **staff** because God told him to bring it.

(21) And the LORD told Moses, "When you arrive back in Egypt, go to Pharaoh and perform all the miracles I have empowered you to do. But I will harden his heart so he will refuse to let the people go.

- **Moses** had a direct commission from the **Lord** to **perform miracles before Pharaoh.**

(22) Then you will tell him, "This is what the LORD says: Israel is My firstborn son. (23) I commanded you, "Let My son go, so he can worship Me." But since you have refused, I will now kill your firstborn son!"

- God claimed the people of Israel as a **firstborn son** and if **Pharaoh** refused to let God's **firstborn** leave then He would kill **Pharaoh's firstborn son**. God could reach right into **Pharaoh's** house.

MOSES PARTS WAYS WITH HIS WIFE AND SONS

(24) On the way to Egypt, at a place where Moses and his family had stopped for the night, the LORD confronted him and was about to kill him.

- **Moses** and his **family** stopped at an inn while returning to **Egypt**. **Moses** was to be the leader of the covenant people, but had failed to keep the covenant by circumcising one of his own sons.

Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant." Genesis 17:14 NLT

- The **putting to death** has caused some writers to understand that Moses was very sick so his wife did the circumcising. It is normally a man's job. Keep in mind that this is written by **Moses** himself.

(25) But Moses' wife, Zipporah, took a flint knife and circumcised her son. She touched his feet with the foreskin and said, "Now you are a bridegroom of blood to me."

- While **Zipporah** circumcised her **son**, she didn't like doing so.

(26) (When she said "a bridegroom of blood," she was referring to the circumcision) After that, the LORD left him alone.

- The Hebrew is not clear, paving the way for much discussion. By comparing this with Exodus 18:2, it appears that Moses sent his wife and sons home. Perhaps because of Zipporah's opposition to the circumcision. We don't know. Later they were reunited.
- It may be that Zipporah was beginning to realize that the new role of Moses was one demanding a very high level of commitment. At any rate, she returned to her father.

MOSES AND AARON WERE BELIEVED BY THE ELDERS

(27) Now the LORD had said to Aaron, "Go out into the wilderness to meet Moses." So Aaron went and met Moses at the mountain of God, and he embraced him.

(28) Moses then told Aaron everything the LORD had commanded him to say. And he told him about the miraculous signs the LORD had commanded him to perform.

- At their **mountain** meeting, **Moses** caught **Aaron** up on what was happening including the **signs Moses** had seen from the **Lord**.

(29) Then Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt and called all the elders of Israel together. (30) Aaron told them everything the LORD had told Moses, and Moses performed the miraculous signs as they watched. (31) Then the people of Israel were convinced that the LORD had sent Moses and Aaron. When they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

- As the **Lord** had said earlier, **the people believed** and knew that the **Lord** had **visited** His people **Israel**.