

EXODUS: Lesson One, Moses' Birth and Call

Exodus 1:1 – 7:7

Subject: God prepared and called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt.

Main Idea: God is passionate about rescuing His people.

Principles:

1. *From our perspective, living within the limits of time, God seems slow to accomplish His purposes.*
2. *Those involved in God's ongoing "rescue mission" learn to see life from His perspective.*
3. *God's enemy resists conceding defeat.*

Introduction

We all have those special people we love deeply, for whom we feel an extra measure of concern: perhaps a parent, a child, maybe a longtime friend or coworker. My greatest burden is for my spiritually lost loved ones. Undoubtedly, you also have one or more people in your life who are so entrenched in a habit, an unhealthy attitude, or an otherwise destructive way of living that you can't imagine what it will take for them to be delivered.

In the chapters of Exodus in this lesson, we repeatedly read of God's concern for the enslaved Israelites. Since God is omnipotent (all-powerful), we may wonder why He did not protect His people from slavery in Egypt. The answer to that question is beyond the scope of this lesson. It is really the question of why God allows evil in the world at all. Some suggest the answer has to do with allowing us free will. However, the main point is that we cannot read these chapters without being moved by God's deep love and concern for the troubles of His people.

Israel's exodus from Egypt is a historical event. The Bible often uses such real, historical events to portray greater realities. The Israelites' enslavement in Egypt and God's great concern and action to deliver them portrays the *greater* reality of the enslavement of all humanity to sin, God's deep concern for us, and His institution of a "rescue mission" in the person of Jesus Christ, who died to save us (John 3:16). God is passionate about rescuing sinners. Exodus 3:8 records God's resolve: "So I have come down to rescue them..."

The first chapters of Exodus describe the birth and call of Moses as God's instrument in accomplishing Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Moses' personal story dominates this part of the narrative. In the framework of God's greater plan of redemption, Moses' birth and call signify the initiation of God's plan to rescue the Israelites from Egypt, and it reminds us that we, too, have a Deliverer who is passionate about rescuing His people.

I. Moses' Preparation by God – Exodus 1 – 2

A. Israel's Oppression by Pharaoh – Exodus 1

- i. Jacob's Family Multiplied: God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (also known as "Israel") many descendants. The first thing we learn in Exodus 1 is that while the seventy members of Jacob's family who entered Egypt all died there, their descendants had greatly multiplied in the 430 years since their arrival, becoming so numerous that "the land was filled with them" (1:7, 12:40-41).
- ii. A New King with New Programs
 1. *The Pharaoh of the Exodus*
 - a. A new Pharaoh, with a different attitude toward the Israelites, had come into power since the time of Joseph. Scholars debate just who this new Pharaoh was, but what is certain is that he felt threatened by the presence of the Hebrews (or Israelites). One of his specific concerns was that if Egypt went to war, they might join the enemy and fight against Egypt (Exodus 1:10).
 - b. Most scholars believe the Israelites lived in Egypt through the duration of a unique period in Egyptian history when foreigners, the Hyksos people, had overrun and ruled northern Egypt. The expulsion of the Hyksos was greatly celebrated in Egyptian history. It was a time in which sentiment against foreigners would have been strong. This helps us understand why the new Egyptian Pharaoh would have held a different attitude than previous Pharaohs toward the Israelites' presence in the land. In fact, the implication of Joseph "meaning nothing" to (or not being known by) this new king is *not* that he was unaware of the history of Joseph's assistance and leadership but that he had no interest in honoring any foreigner who had ruled in Egypt.ⁱ
 - c. Furthermore, Genesis tells us that Egyptians despised shepherds (46:34) and even found eating with the Israelites detestable (43:32). For this reason, the Israelites had settled in a separate space in a region known as Goshen (Genesis 47:6).
 - d. The result of all this was that the new king began a program to attempt to deal with what he perceived to be a serious problem.

2. *Pharaoh's First Program*: Hoping to make the Israelites' lives difficult enough that their population would stop growing, Pharaoh forced them into heavy oppression through slave labor. However, "the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread" (1:12).
 3. *Pharaoh's Second Program*
 - a. *Pharaoh's Order to the Midwives*: When his first plan did not succeed in diminishing the Hebrew population, he commanded the two overseers of the Hebrew mid-wives, named Shiphrah and Puah, to make sure none of the male Hebrew babies survived beyond birth.
 - b. *The Response of the Midwives*: Shiphrah and Puah feared God and refused to obey the king's orders (1:17). When questioned by the King, they said, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive" (1:19). There are two ways we can understand their response.
 - i. Perhaps what the women said was true. Perhaps God did protect the Hebrew male babies by causing them to be born quickly and easily.
 - ii. The other possibility seems more likely. It appears that they lied to Pharaoh out of respect for the sanctity of human life. But would God reward them for lying? Isn't lying a sin (Exodus 20:16)? Most Christians would deny that ethics are "situational" and say we should not lie but be truthful and trust God with the results. The fact is that God often blesses us for *right* things we do without removing that blessing for some of the other *wrong* things we do. These women spared the lives of many children, and God blessed them, not because of but despite their deception.
 4. *Pharaoh's Third Program*: After his first two plans failed, Pharaoh took an even more drastic measure. He gave an order that "all his people" were responsible for killing male Hebrew babies (1:22), only allowing the girls to live.
- iii. Two Agendas at Odds: By the time we arrive at the end of this first chapter, it is clear to us that there are two competing agendas. God's "program" was to make Abraham's descendants numerous, as He had promised (Genesis 13:16, 15:5). The agenda of God's enemies was to keep this from happening. God is the Giver of life. His enemies seek to destroy life and enslave. This was the situation into which baby Moses was born.

B. Moses' Education – Exodus 2

i. Education through His Parents

1. *Moses' Parents and Their Unusual Child:* Moses' parents were from the tribe of Levi. As we discover, they were brave and resourceful individuals. We also know they were people of faith. Hebrews 11:23 tells us, “*By faith*, Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was “no ordinary child” and they were not afraid of the king's edict.” Some have translated these words “beautiful child.” While the meaning could be pointing to Moses' physical attributes, it is more likely that his parents saw something in him that inspired them to believe he was unusual. We later learn they already had at least two older children (a daughter, Miriam, and a son, Aaron). So it is unlikely that they simply thought Moses was unique and “cute” in the same way most adoring parents see their children.
2. *The Bold Plan:* Moses' parents hid him in a basket made to float, placing it among the reeds just off the bank of the Nile River. There, an Egyptian princess discovered the baby. Moses' older sister Miriam was nearby (by God's design), and she wisely offered to find the princess a Hebrew nursemaid for the baby. Upon Miriam's recommendation, the princess offered to pay Moses' mother to nurse him for her. We do not know whether the princess knew her nursemaid's true identity, but we can certainly say that when God's people live courageously by faith, as Moses' parents had, God often does more than we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20)! John Calvin wrote concerning Moses' preservation: “God rules all men by His providence, He honours [sic] His elect with his peculiar care, and is watchful for their deliverance and support.”ⁱⁱ
3. *Moses' Early Years:* Moses' mother probably nursed him at least three to four years, as was customary. Because of high infant mortality rates in ancient cultures, adopted children were not given to their adoptive parents until after they were weaned. This would have given Moses' parents the opportunity to influence him during his most formative years. Surely they trained him according to their faith. Even after he was taken to the palace, Moses may very well have remained in contact with his family of origin.

ii. Education in Egypt

1. *Moses' Naming:* The princess named the baby “Moses.” Though believed to be Egyptian in origin, the name sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “draw out,” which was appropriate since it reflected the manner in which Pharaoh's daughter acquired the child.

2. *All the Wisdom of the Egyptians*: Forty years of Moses' life (minus the amount of time he was nursed by his mother) transpired between Exodus 2:10 and 11. Hebrews 11 and Acts 7:22 give the only Biblical commentaries on these years. Acts says, "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action." According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the Egyptian writings of Manetho, and the early church historian Eusebius, Pharaoh had no son or heir and Moses was being groomed for the throne. Whether or not that was the case, he certainly would have been raised, as any son of an Egyptian princess, with all the privilege of royalty.
- a. One such privilege would have been Egyptian tutoring. The "Temple of the Sun" at Heliopolis has been excavated by archaeologists and shown to be "the Oxford of the ancient world." As many as 10,000 upper class youths from Egypt and other countries were educated there and were instructed in sciences, medicine, mathematics, architecture, music, astronomy, chemistry, theology, philosophy, and law.
 - b. In addition to the Hebrew language, Moses would have spoken Akkadian (the common commercial language of the day) and known hieroglyphics.
 - c. As a male member of Pharaoh's household, Moses would have also received advanced military training. Historians claim that by the time Moses was thirty, he had led the Egyptian army in an incredible victory over the Ethiopians. He was surely a highly qualified and experienced leader!ⁱⁱⁱ

iii. Education in the Desert

1. *Moses' Privilege Eschewed*: One might assume that a person with the kind of privilege Moses enjoyed as a prince of Egypt would have been eager to identify himself as such. By inference from 2:19, Moses looked Egyptian in his dress and hairstyle. But this was not a reflection of his inner attitude. Moses gladly aligned himself with the despised and persecuted Hebrews, meaning he would have been ready and willing to suffer along with them.^{iv} Hebrews 11:24 says, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time."

2. *Moses' Murder of an Egyptian*: Acts 7:25 reveals an interesting insight: Moses thought his kinsmen would recognize him as their deliverer! In a rash moment, he expressed his deep anger over the mistreatment of his people by murdering one of their abusive, Egyptian overlords (Exodus 2:11-14). Apparently, Moses expected to be thanked, but instead, the Hebrews confronted, chastised, and rejected him.
3. *Moses' Flight to Midian*: Because of his power and knowledge, Moses' flagrant display of disloyalty to Egypt and the throne posed a serious threat to Pharaoh. Once he learned of the murder and knew how far Moses would go to aid the Hebrews, he wanted Moses dead. As a result, Moses wisely fled to Midian.
4. *Forty Years of Shepherding*: He married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest, and spent forty long years as a shepherd in the Arabian Desert. The meaning of his first son's name, Gershom, reflected Moses' loneliness as "a foreigner in a foreign land" (2:22). But the desert surely became God's "schoolhouse," a further training ground to prepare Moses for what lay ahead.

Summary Statement: We arrive at the end of Exodus 2 aware that Moses' preparation for service to God was related to God's deep concern for Israel. Despite God's concern, He did not immediately put an end to Israel's enslavement. Neither did He seem to be in a hurry to equip Moses. Moses was eighty years old before God called him to do the job (Exodus 7:7).

Principle: *From our perspective, living within the limits of time, God seems slow to accomplish His purposes.*

This is as true of His purposes in our own lives as it is of His greater purposes in human history. Moses' preparation took eighty years. Israel had been in Egypt 430 years! God had not been in a hurry to prepare Moses or to bring Israel out of Egypt. This seems hard to understand considering His concern for them. Yet from Genesis 15:16 we understand that He was being patient with the exceedingly wicked Canaanites, giving them ample opportunity to repent before He brought judgment on them by giving Israel their land. He also waited until Moses was equipped for the job of leading Israel. God considers what is best and loving in a way we cannot always understand, because He alone knows everything.

Just as Moses remained in the desert for an extended period of time, few believers escape a "desert experience." We may think of it as any time we experience a period in which we either feel spiritually "dry" or that we have been removed from a place (either geographically or circumstantially) of fruitfulness (where God was using us to have a spiritual impact on others). Furthermore, God does not seem to be in a hurry to change these circumstances.

- This might follow...
 - a geographical move, job change, or retirement from some avenue of service;
 - the death of a loved one or loss of a significant relationship;
 - or a period in your ministry, family, or work life that is characterized by tremendous growth.
- Some of us will feel unable to see God working in or through us at all during this season. We feel we have entered a fiery trial. A few might even begin to question God's existence. *Or* we may quickly recognize it as a God-appointed season for hearing His voice. But in either case, we may experience some degree of underlying depression, loneliness, or sorrow. In truth, a desert experience is a *place of preparation* by God for service.
- We always have the choice of becoming embittered by our circumstances or accepting them, humbling ourselves, and learning all we can. In my own experience, if we wait patiently on God and ask Him to teach us the lessons He wants us to learn, we learn a great deal about ourselves and about Him during our desert experiences.
 - As a shepherd, Moses learned about faithfulness in small tasks and about patience while leading the weak, qualities he definitely used later in leading the Israelites.
 - Moses became familiar with the desert. Little did he know that he would spend most of the last forty years of his life as a desert guide!
 - Most importantly, Moses learned humility. Before his desert experience, he had felt qualified to rescue Israel. After forty years in obscurity, that self-confidence dissolved. Every work of eternal value must be accomplished in God's strength, not our own.

Might you be living in the “desert”? God uses these experiences to teach us practical skills, to instill character in us, and to remove sin from our lives. He is not in a hurry; He is thorough and exacting in His work. He may seem absent, but He never is! He is deeply concerned for us at all times.

Transition: At the beginning of Exodus 3, Moses seemed to be experiencing an ordinary day tending his father-in-law's flock in the desert when his life suddenly changed.

II. Moses' Call By God – Exodus 3 – 4

A. Moses at the Burning Bush - Exodus 3:1 – 4:17: Moses was near Horeb, an alternate name for Mount Sinai, when he saw a burning bush. This would not have been uncommon in the heat of the desert. What *was* unusual was that, although on fire, the bush was not being consumed. Drawing near to examine the curious sight, he heard a voice from within the bush calling His name.

- i. “Angel of the Lord”: We are told “the Angel of the Lord” appeared to Moses within the flames of the bush. This is not the first Biblical mention of “the Angel of the Lord”. He had also appeared to Abraham, Hagar, and Jacob. Who is this mysterious angel?
1. Although His words are attributed to the Lord (“the Lord said ...”), it certainly seems He was more than a mouthpiece for the Lord, more than one of God’s created angels. A clue within Exodus 3 is found in the words, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Nowhere does the Bible indicate that angels make things holy or that they are holy, as God is (Revelation 19:10). In Genesis, Hagar and Jacob identified this angel as the Lord Himself (Genesis 16:13, 48:15-16). Furthermore, here (Exodus 3) and elsewhere (Exodus 19:18, Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29, etc.), fire is a symbol of God’s presence.
 2. When “the Angel of the Lord” spoke to Moses, He said, “*I am the God of your Father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*” (Exodus 3:4-6). The appearance of God in physical form is called a theophany. The only “person” of the holy Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) stated in Scripture as having put on flesh is the second person, Jesus Christ. For this reason, many believe “the Angel of the Lord” was a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ (a “Christophany”).
- ii. The Lord’s Concern and Commission: After identifying Himself, the Lord expressed His concern for the suffering Israelites (3:7-10; also in 6:5-8) and reaffirmed His promise to bring them to the land He had promised them. The Lord then commissioned Moses for his new role: “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (3:10).
- iii. Moses’ Hesitation
1. *Who am I? (3:11)* Moses’ first reaction was, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (3:11) Moses was not the same self-assured man who had once believed the Hebrews would recognize him as their God-appointed deliverer (Acts 7:25) and had gone so far as to kill a man in their defense. In fact, he altogether lacked confidence that he was a suitable candidate. The Lord assured Moses that He would be with him. As a guarantee of Moses’ success, He foretold that once Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he would come back to the very location where he was then standing.

2. *Who are You? (3:13)* Moses' second concern was that the Israelites would ask him the name of the "God" who sent him (3:13). The Egyptians, like all the nations around them, believed in many gods. After 400 years, the Israelites' knowledge of the God of their fathers was, at the very least, at risk of being distorted, and at the very worst, on the verge of being lost. Who was this "God" who assured their release from Egypt? "Moses' request for God's name is important because the Israelites believed that the name reflected an individual's essence."^v

a. *God's Name*

- i. *I Am:* God answered by stating, "I Am Who I Am." In the next verse, He called Himself "the Lord." The Hebrew word is *Yahweh*, and it became the proper, personal name by which Israel identified God. It reminded them of His covenant relationship with them. The Creator of everything had entered a covenant relationship with them, promising to be their God and make them His people (Exodus 19:4-5). Therefore, the name "Yahweh" is closely tied to God's identification as "I Am Who I Am." Technically, the Hebrew is in the third person form and says, "He is/causes to be."
- ii. *Translation:* This name is sometimes called the "Tetragrammaton" (*tetra* is the Greek word "four" and *gramma* is the Greek for "a letter of the alphabet"). In Hebrew, "Yahweh" only consists of four letters: Y(or J)-H-W-H. Throughout the centuries, Jews refused to pronounce these letters, believing "The Name" to be too sacred to speak aloud. They substituted their word "Adonai" (meaning "lord" in a general sense). Some older English translations of the Bible, such as the King James Version, write the name Yahweh as "Jehovah."
- iii. *Meaning:* Although scholars have debated the meaning of "I am Who I am" for centuries, such a name, at the very least, emphasized God's unchanging, self-existent nature. The God of Israel's forefathers (3:15) covenanted to give them the land of Canaan (Genesis 15:8-21). He *was* faithful, *is* faithful, and *would be* faithful. Readers of the New Testament know that Jesus said, "I Am" (John 8:58), identifying Himself as God.

- b. After giving Moses His name, God stated His relationship to Israel and His plans for them (3:16-22). He was the God of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He had commissioned Moses to let Israel know He had seen their misery, to remind them of His promise to give them the land of Canaan, and to request Pharaoh permit them a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer God sacrifices. The Lord told Moses in advance that Pharaoh would deny this request until He Himself compelled Pharaoh to allow Israel to leave by performing supernatural wonders. Finally, God said He would make the Egyptians willing to give the Israelites silver, gold, and clothing to take with them out of Egypt (3:21-22).
 - c. John Calvin wrote, “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”^{vi} This well summarizes Moses’ first two concerns.
3. *What if They Don’t Believe Me? 4:1* Next, Moses said he was afraid the Israelites would not believe him. Therefore, God gave Moses three supernatural signs as validation that he was indeed God’s messenger: the ability to transform a staff into a snake, the ability to make his own hand leprous and then “clean” again, and the ability to turn water from the Nile into blood. All three of these signs reflected God’s supreme power over things the Egyptians believed represented power and life.
 4. *I am slow of speech, 4:10* Moses’ fourth and subsequent concerns begin to sound more like objections. Moses said he was slow of speech. It seems Moses was downplaying his abilities since Acts 7:22 states Moses was “powerful in speech.” However, forty years shepherding in obscurity had clearly humbled him. God answered Moses’ concern about his eloquence by reminding him that He is the Creator of human mouths and that He would go with Moses and teach him what to say.
 5. *Can’t someone else do it? 4:13* Moses’ final objection made God angry: “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.” Perhaps Moses initially hesitated out of fear but now was displaying stubborn disobedience.^{vii} God agreed to allow Moses’ brother Aaron to be his mouthpiece. God would speak to Moses, Moses would speak to Aaron, and Aaron would speak to the people or Pharaoh. Moses probably lived to regret his request when Aaron later led the Israelites into idolatry (Exodus 32) and even challenged Moses’ authority (Numbers 12).

6. Exodus 3 portrays Moses as meek and uncertain. Forty years of shepherding in a foreign land had transformed his self-confidence into self-doubt. God prefers to use servants who know they must depend on Him.

B. Moses' Family's Preparation for His New Role – Exodus 4:18-31

- i. Jethro's Blessing: Even though God called Moses, he sought his father-in-law's blessing in taking on his new role. Jethro, also known as Reuel (Exodus 2:18, Numbers 10:29), granted this request.
- ii. Further Information Given to Moses: Exodus 4:19-23 gives us other pieces of information God gave Moses before he left Midian for Egypt. Those who had wanted Moses killed were all dead. Moses would be required to perform all the wonders God gave him power to perform. God would harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would not release Israel (we will learn more about the hardening of hearts in our next lesson). The death of Pharaoh's firstborn son, at God's order, would finally convince Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave.
- iii. Moses' Uncircumcised Son
 1. Moses left for Egypt with his wife and sons (4:20), but along the way God threatened to kill Moses until Zipporah circumcised their son (which of Moses' two sons was referenced is unknown). This is a strange passage. The best suggestion may be that Moses became deathly ill and the language indicating that God planned to kill him was only intended to point to God as the *ultimate* cause of all things.^{viii} Moses' wife apparently somehow recognized her husband's illness as resulting from their failure to circumcise their sons (circumcision was something God had required of all Abraham's male descendants in Genesis 17:10-14). Based on Zipporah's comment about Moses being a "bridegroom of blood to her," she must have found circumcision extremely repulsive. Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser, Jr. has suggested that there may have been a long debate in the household over whether their son would be circumcised or not. But in order to save her husband's life, she quickly circumcised her son, commenting with disgust on what was required of her as the wife of a Hebrew!^{ix}

2. There are two likely reasons for this incident. First, God was uncovering an area of private neglect in Moses' family life. If Moses was going to lead God's people, he would have to have his own house in order before God. Kaiser explains: "Moses had failed to have his son circumcised, either as a concession to his wife's scruples or because of his own relaxation of standards. As a result, he almost lost the opportunity to do what he had been prepared all his life to do—and he almost lost his life as well."^x Second, the account immediately follows God's recorded words indicating He was going to kill the firstborn son of Pharaoh. There seems to be an intended comparison between the sons of Pharaoh and the sons of Moses, the son of Pharaoh representing the disobedient and rebellious and the son of Moses representing those who would live in submission to God's commands.
- iv. Moses and Aaron United: The Lord spoke to Aaron in Egypt, instructing him to meet Moses in the wilderness. There, Moses fully informed Aaron about their mission and all the Lord's instructions. When the two arrived back in Egypt, they met with the elders of Israel, relaying God's message and performing the signs God gave Moses to perform. Exodus 4:31 tells us, "they believed" and "when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped."

Summary Statement: In Exodus 3 and 4 we see that God was patient with Moses' ignorance and self-doubt but unwilling to allow him to be disobedient to His clear instructions (about leading Israel *and* regarding circumcision). Moses' thinking had to change so that he could begin to see things from God's perspective.

Principle: *Those involved in God's ongoing "rescue mission" learn to see life from His perspective.*

God's "rescue mission" is ongoing. He is concerned about our enslavement to sin. He has come down to rescue us. Once He has saved us, we are commissioned to join Him in rescuing others (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8).

We are all born self-centered. Considering God's concerns and plans *first* is unnatural to us, but it is an important part of becoming a person God can use. We must learn to see life from God's perspective, think His thoughts, and take His priorities as our own. These are marks of a maturing believer.

- You probably have family members or other people in your life about whom you can often predict what they might think, feel, or say. How did that happen? It happened because you have spent a great deal of time with them.
- Since Moses' parents were people of faith, they surely passed on what they knew about God to Moses. But nothing they told him could equip him for service in the way that spending time in God's presence would. One of the things that will become obvious in our study in future lessons is how transformative it was for Moses to spend time in God's presence. When Moses first encountered God, his thoughts were focused entirely on his own fears and doubts. But that changed.

How do believers today learn to see life from God's perspective?

- The Bible is the place where we become familiar with God's perspective and plans. The more time we spend in Bible reading and in prayer, the more natural it becomes to think God's thoughts and to make His priorities our own. We begin filtering all our thoughts through the lens of His word and we spend time talking with Him each day about *His* concerns and priorities.
- As I work on this Bible study, I continue to know God more and more because it keeps me in His word. But I must also make sure I am committed to spending time in prayer: talking with Him about what I am learning, considering how my perspective needs adjusting, and asking Him to show me how to make His priorities my own each day. This is my goal but I often fall short, rushing my conversations with Him, forgetting that all the time in the world will not be enough to enable me to accomplish anything worthwhile, unless I am going in *God's strength* and according to *His plans*. Jesus addressed this, saying, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Application: *What* do you need to start seeing from God's perspective? A loss of income? A mundane task? A challenging assignment? *Who* do you need to start seeing from God's perspective? An impossible boss? A difficult neighbor? A meddling in-law?

Transition: Moses was learning to put his personal problems in perspective with God's interests and God's adequacy. Once he did that, Moses was finally ready to meet with Pharaoh.

III. Moses' Challenge to Pharaoh – Exodus 5:1 – 7:7

A. The Israelites' Lives Made More Difficult: Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and gave him the Lord's instruction: "Let my people go!" They told Pharaoh God had instructed the Israelites to take a three-day journey into the wilderness of offer Him sacrifices (Exodus 3:18-19).

i. A Three-Day Journey? We might wonder why Moses only requested that Pharaoh release Israel for a three-day journey in the desert if it was God's plan to release Israel completely from bondage and remove them permanently from Egypt. Was God deceiving Pharaoh? No! God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

1. Many suggestions have been made about this through the centuries. The church father Augustine suggested that God "deliberately graded his requests... first placing before [Pharaoh] a fairly simple plea...after which [Israel] would return... This first plea would lead to requests increasingly more difficult for Pharaoh to grant... prepar[ing] Pharaoh to do what he might otherwise be unprepared to do."^{xi} Dr. Walter Kaiser Jr. has pointed out that this "grading" of the demands was evidence of God's concern for Pharaoh, giving him an opportunity to soften his heart toward God's plan for Israel.^{xii} God knew (and even informed Moses in advance) that Pharaoh would not be willing to make such concessions (Exodus 3:19-20). Nevertheless, He gave Pharaoh the opportunity to consider changing his attitude.

2. D.K. Stewart offers another explanation: "A 'three-day journey' was an idiom in the ancient world for 'a major trip with formal consequences.'" Thus, Pharaoh understood Moses' request to mean, "We want to leave Egypt for however long we choose." Pharaoh "knew from the start that the Israelites were not merely asking for three days off from work; they were asking to migrate from Egypt."^{xiii}

ii. Pharaoh's Response

1. *Who is the Lord?* Just as the Lord had told Moses, Pharaoh refused to allow the "three-day journey." Pharaoh replied, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go." As a pagan, it is true that Pharaoh did not know God. It is also true that he may have concluded from Israel's vulnerable position that her God was impotent. Furthermore, since the Egyptians believed Pharaoh was a god, his words may have represented a challenge to the God of Israel. We begin to understand how the plagues would have been instructive for Pharaoh, answering his question, "Who is the Lord?" and meeting his challenge.

2. *Decree Regarding Straw*: As Pharaoh mentioned, allowing the large group of Israelites to leave would have enormous implications since they provided him slave labor. Fearing the Israelites might listen to Moses' "lies" (5:9), Pharaoh instructed his slave drivers to make their work even more difficult. They were no longer to provide the Israelites with the materials (the straw) needed to make their daily quota of bricks. The Israelites were told to add the gathering of straw to their other responsibilities without reducing the number of bricks they made each day. When the quotas were not filled, the slave drivers beat the Israelite overseers.
- iii. The Israelites' Appeal: The Israelite overseers appealed directly to Pharaoh about the injustice and unreasonableness of the demand. Pharaoh told them they were lazy and must get back to work. The stunned Israelites directed their frustration at Moses and Aaron, blaming them for their lives becoming even more difficult.

B. Moses' Prayer and God's Answer

- i. Moses' Open Dialogue with God: In great frustration, Moses pled with the Lord, boldly pouring out his trouble. He asked the Lord why he was sent to Pharaoh since it had only resulted in more trouble.
- ii. The Lord's Response: The Lord explained to Moses that the method He was using would set the stage for a powerful display of His wonders.
 1. He reminded Moses who He is. He repeated His name: "I am the Lord." Then He said something that is difficult to interpret. The Lord stated that the Patriarchs had known Him as "God Almighty" but had not known Him as Yahweh ("the Lord"). A recent revision in the NIV English language translation says God did not make Himself "*fully* known" to the Patriarchs by His name, "the Lord." This is probably the intended meaning. "This phrase meant that while Abraham, Isaac and Jacob heard and used the name Yahweh, it was only in Moses' day that the realization of the character, nature and essence *of what that name meant* became clear. 'By the name' is better translated 'in the character [or nature] of Yahweh [was I not known]'.^{xiv}
 2. The Lord instructed Moses to tell the Israelites He would do what He promised. He would free them from slavery with mighty acts of judgment, take them as His own people, be their God, and bring them to Canaan. "Then you will know that I am the Lord your God." The Israelites were about to know God in a way they never had before. But when Moses reported this to them, they were too tired and discouraged to even listen.

C. The Lord's Commission Re-Affirmed – 6:10-7:7

- i. Moses' Faltering Lips: The Lord spoke to Moses again, sending him back to Pharaoh. Moses must have blamed himself for Pharaoh's first refusal and for the Israelites' unwillingness to listen to him. He thought the problem was "his faltering lips." In his discouragement, Moses' eyes focused back on his own sense of inadequacy. This time, the Lord addressed both Moses and Aaron, commanding them to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.
- ii. Moses' Family Record:
 1. *Moses' Pedigree*: The purpose of the genealogy that is inserted into the narrative is to show us the pedigree of Moses and Aaron. The genealogy identifies them precisely because of their important positions. What is most important is that they were both descendants of Israel (Jacob), and in particular, of Israel's son Levi.
 2. *Four Representative Generations*: The statement in Exodus 12:40 that Israel had been in Egypt 430 years is difficult to reconcile with only four listed generations here in Exodus 6. The number of generations seems far too few. Many genealogies in the Old Testament are "selective." Two genealogies of the same family may include a different number of generations. Many scholars have concluded that those called "fathers" in Biblical genealogies are sometimes forefathers (grandfathers or great-grandfathers). It is possible that Jochebed and Amram were not Moses, Aaron and Miriam's parents, but grandparents (or great-grand parents) in their lineage. (Numbers 26 calls Kohath the "forefather" of Amram.) The way in which the original language states that Jochabed "bore" Aaron and Moses allows for this possibility (Exodus 6:20). It is also interesting that Moses' parents' names are not included when his birth is mentioned in Exodus 2, Acts 7, or Hebrews 11. Another possibility is that the Amram listed as one of Levi's grandsons in Exodus 6:18 is not the same Amram named as Moses' father in verse 20. In this case, there are unlisted generations between the possible two Amrams.
- iii. Summary of Information (6:28 – 7:7): These verses summarize for us what we have learned up to this point before moving on to tell us about the plagues God sent and Israel's departure from Egypt. Inserted into this information is God's interest in the *Egyptians* knowing Him: "And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it" (7:5). It has always been part of God's plan that the world would know Him through His dealings with His people and their witness. We are also told that Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Summary Statement: When Moses delivered God’s message to Pharaoh, the Israelites’ troubles intensified. From their perspective, they were further away from being delivered than they had been before Moses got involved.

Principle: *God’s enemy resists conceding defeat.*

Early in this discussion, I mentioned the competing agendas of God and of Pharaoh.

- The Bible teaches that a very real war is being waged, although invisible to us, between God’s forces and those of His enemy Satan. The battleground is the world in which we live. While we do not see these spiritual forces with our eyes, we can often see the results of the conflict.
- Not only are the heavenly armies of angels involved in this battle, God’s people are engaged, and sometimes Satan and his demons work through cooperating, evil human agents. In subsequent chapters in Exodus, we will see that Pharaoh became such an individual.
- Wherever God is at work, the enemy will not yield to defeat without putting up a good fight. Satan knows that his doom was sealed when Jesus died on the Cross and rose again. He knows his destruction has been assured. But, just as Pharaoh resisted, our enemy the Devil fights, determined to “steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10) all he can and keep people in bondage.

Application: For this reason, we should not be surprised that when God is at work in our family, in our church, or in our community, our difficulties may seem to intensify. Do your struggles seem to be intensifying? The enemy is not willing to easily relinquish any territory he has previously held. He is almost certain to test your commitment to study God’s word this year. Don’t be surprised by all of the obstacles that arise to your daily preparation and your attendance.

Rather than be discouraged, increased trouble should be our signal to pray harder, to persevere in faith, expecting God’s deliverance, and to enlist other believers to stand firm with us. The battle may be over at any moment! If Moses and the Israelites had been able to see into the future, they would not have been so discouraged when their troubles intensified. Whether or not the battle you’re facing is over quickly, ultimate deliverance is assured for the people of God.

Conclusion

God is concerned – for us and for those who are still lost in their sins – and He has done something about it. In the person of Jesus Christ, He *came down* to rescue us.

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