

## Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church

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DHW

### LESSON 04

## The Book of Exodus

### Chapter 04

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians that the record of God's call of Moses to deliver the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage and lead them through to the Promised Land is written as examples for our learning so that we do not fall into the same sin as they did (1 Corinthians 10:11).<sup>1</sup> There are principles which we can draw and apply to our church. We can also learn many precious lessons for our personal walk with God:

- 1) God's call of Moses,
- 2) God's openness to Moses' objections and excuses,
- 3) God's intent to take Moses' life,
- 4) God's encouragement and assurances to Moses for the task that was assigned to him.

Our study of Exodus should result in much spiritual benefits. One very

precious lesson we can learn is to trust God completely – what He says and promises are the truth and when we have listened and understood, we ought to obey. Another is the understanding of God's sovereignty in His judgment over Pharaoh but the latter bore the consequences of his responsibility by refusing to obey (4:21). We shall discuss this matter when examining the section.

The following is a suggested outline of the chapter:

- 1) Moses expressed his fears that the Israelites would not believe and obey him (4:1-9);
- 2) Moses reasoned that he was not eloquent and asked God to send another (4:10-17);
- 3) God forewarned Moses that Pharaoh would harden his heart refusing to let the Israelites leave Egypt (4:18-23);
- 4) Moses needed to fulfil all righteousness before he could lead the Israelites out of Egypt (4:24-26);
- 5) Moses was joined by Aaron to go to the elders of the Israelites in order to take them out of bondage in Egypt (4:27-31).

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:11 *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

## ***STUDY THE WORD***

### **Moses Tries to Reason with God Not to Call Him**

God commissioned Moses to return to Egypt and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses did not readily accept God's invitation to him to be a leader to lead God's people out of Egypt. Instead Moses raised some objections. The first objection was he was nobody, who was capable of confronting Pharaoh (3:11). The second objection was that the Israelites might not believe him that the LORD their God had sent him (3:13). On these two objections God assured that He would be with him and that the Israelites would listen and believe him (3:12-18).

Now Moses raised a third objection. Moses pointed out that the children of Israel might not believe and listen to him because they would say that the LORD God had not appeared to him (4:1). This objection was contrary to what God had assured him. But Moses apparently wanted a sign to demonstrate that God had appeared to him so that the Israelites would believe and listen to him. Although Moses refused to accept God's words, yet God did not chide him. Instead God took Moses' objection seriously, for He knew the weaknesses of every man.

God then gave Moses three sign-miracles.

Moses was holding his shepherd staff or crook. God told him to throw his staff on the ground and it became a serpent. Then God told him to pick the serpent by the tail. Moses obeyed and the serpent turned back to become his original staff. Next God told him to put his hand inside his cloak and when he took his hand out, it was afflicted with leprosy. Then God told him to put his hand inside the cloak again but when Moses took his hand out of the cloak his hand was completely healed. With these two signs they should believe. But if they still would not believe him, God told Moses to take water out of the river and pour it on the land and the water would become blood on the land.

God provided Moses with these three sign-miracles. These sign-miracles were not mere miraculous acts or magic. These sign-miracles in themselves mean nothing. The significance lay in their interpretation. Power was given by God to Moses to perform these miracles to authenticate his divine calling to lead the people out of Egypt to worship and serve the LORD God.

The signs were not selected out of random. The serpent or snake (probably a cobra) was a much revered animal in Egypt. It was worn on the

forehead of Pharaoh. It was a symbol of power and authority. It was worshipped by the Egyptians. Moses' power to perform this sign anticipated the superiority of God over the snake-god of the Egyptians. God was sovereign and powerful not Pharaoh. The affliction of Moses' hand with leprosy, which was a most dreaded disease, demonstrated the power of God to heal even the most dreaded disease. Spiritually, the Israelites needed to be cleansed from the leprosy of sin and become a holy nation to worship and serve God. The power to turn water into blood anticipated the turning of the river Nile into blood, thus making it undrinkable and life-threatening. It was a display of God's power to the Israelite slaves that He was more powerful than the god of the Nile of Egypt. These sign-miracles were related to the gods of Egypt. However, the primary purpose was to authenticate the divine commission to Moses.

### **Moses Excuses Himself Saying He is Not Eloquent**

Having been given the signs to authenticate his divine commission, Moses' next objection was that he was not *eloquent, slow of speech* and *slow of tongue* (v.10). In other words, Moses was saying that he did not have oratorical skill. He was not persuasive

and fluent. He was afraid that he would be tongued-tied. However, whatever the impediment might be, he told God that he was not the man. Once again, God was patient with him. If Moses had a speech defect, God would take care of that. He reminded him that He was the Creator of man and posed a series of rhetorical questions to him all relating to the qualities of speech, hearing, and sight. God would be with him and teach him what to speak.

Moses pleaded with God to send another instead of him. This was the fifth and final objection and excuse (v.13). Up to this juncture of the dialogue between Moses and God, the crux of the problem with Moses was that his unwillingness to obey and trust God. The divine writer recorded that *the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses* (v.14). God could have removed him completely or struck him dead. But God was patient. God had chosen him and He made no mistake. But Moses was unwilling. God immediately suggested Aaron, Moses' brother, to be his spokesman. Aaron would speak the words what Moses gave to him, and the words of Moses in turn would be given by God. Obviously, this was not the best way. But we see how patient God is. If Moses wanted this way, so be it. God would still accomplish His purpose, but Moses

would be forfeiting the honour of being God's spokesman to His people. Although this is not the best way, God accepts and uses what is possible and available.

### **God Forewarns Moses that Pharaoh Will Harden His Heart**

Moses finally gave in. It was the right thing for him to do. Did he not desire to help his brethren whom he saw were suffering in bondage? Now he was given the chance to do so. God had commissioned him and even offered to help him so that he would be successful. God chose him partly because he had this desire, partly because the forty years spent in the *backside of the desert* had changed him. He was more humble than before and God always used a humble person.

Before he set out for Egypt, he went to Jethro, his father-in-law to seek leave of absence to go back to Egypt. Moses respected Jethro who had been good to him. The latter had given him a home to live in Midian and even gave his daughter to be his wife. Moreover, Moses worked for Jethro and it was only right and respectful that he asked permission to go away. Now he had to leave because God had called him and given him a work to do in Egypt. Moses told Jethro that he wanted to see

how his fellow Israelites were doing, whether they were alive or dead (v.18). Moses did not tell him fully what God had said to him. While it was true that he was concerned for his fellow Israelites, God had told him that they were alive but in bondage. The reason why he omitted revealing that God had appeared and called him to deliver his fellow Israelites from bondage in Egypt is not told to us. The important thing is that he obeyed God and decided to go. Jethro gave his blessing. Moses took his wife and his two sons. It is mentioned earlier that Moses had a son, whom he named Gershom (2:22). Another son was born to him after Gershom and his name was Eliezer (18:4).<sup>2</sup> Moses also took the shepherd crook with him but it was now called *the rod of God* which he held in his hand (v.20). God reiterated His commission to Moses assuring him that all those who sought his life were dead (v.19). God specifically instructed him what he should do when he presented himself before Pharaoh. He should not hesitate to do all the wonders which God had empowered him.

God then said to him that in spite of all these sign-miracles (they were more than the three sign-miracles mentioned here) God would *harden*

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 18:4 *And the name of the other was Eliezer; for the God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh:*

Pharaoh's heart that he would not let the Israelites leave Egypt (v.21). Moses was to declare specifically to Pharaoh: *Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn* (v.22). Pharaoh should let them go so that they might serve him. And if Pharaoh refused, God would slay even his firstborn. This is the first time it is mentioned that Israel is the firstborn son of God. God's relationship with Israel is special and this father-son relationship cannot be broken for He had made an everlasting covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

An important truth is revealed to us here, that is, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart shows the sovereignty and the all-knowingness of God. But what perplexes many people is why Pharaoh was held accountable for his action in refusing to let God's people go when it was God who hardened his heart. It is mentioned that Pharaoh's heart was hardened in one of three ways.

First, it is mentioned that God hardened his heart (v.21). Secondly, Pharaoh's heart is hardened (7:14). This is stated in the passive voice. Who or what hardened his heart is not mentioned. The third way is that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15).

If Pharaoh refused to let God's firstborn son go to worship and serve

Him, God would judge and punish him by taking his firstborn son. From this we learn that although God hardened Pharaoh's heart, yet Pharaoh was also held accountable for his action. The divine comment on God's sovereign will in the affairs of man is aptly addressed by Paul in his letter to the Christians in Rome.

Paul affirms in the first place that God is sovereign. He does what He pleases. He illustrates this truth in the potter who has absolute power over his clay. Then Paul continues that God has the prerogative to delay His judgment upon those who hardened their hearts. Pharaoh hardened his heart against God. He deserved nothing less than instant judgment, but God in his mercy and patience for His purpose, hardened his heart and postponed the judgment on Pharaoh (Romans 9:18-23). In other words, God knew that Pharaoh would harden his heart against Him in the first place, and God hardened his heart to delay His judgment on Pharaoh and to manifest His power and glory.

### **Moses Must Fulfil All Righteousness**

It is strange that God, having called and chosen Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, *sought to kill him* (v.24). In what way God used to take his life is not revealed but

the reason is clearly discerned. It concerns the matter of the circumcision of his son. Moses probably was too weak to perform the act of circumcision. But Zipporah quickly circumcised her son.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Moses was not slain. It teaches that God holds obedience to His commandment as a very important and necessary act.<sup>4</sup> For Moses it would be doubly imperative – a bearer and a doer of God’s Word to the people of God. He must first be blameless in obeying God’s law.

We do not know how Zipporah knew that it concerned the circumcision of their son. There must be more to what was reported. However, the revelation is that God’s seeking to slay Moses was intended to correct him rather than merely to exact satisfaction for Himself. God is ever merciful and longsuffering. It pleases and glorifies

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<sup>3</sup> Moses had two sons, and which son was involved in this instance is not mentioned. It is plausible that Moses did not circumcise the second son because Zipporah could have objected and was upset by the gruesome nature of the circumcision of the first son.

<sup>4</sup> **Genesis 17:10** *This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. <sup>12</sup> And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. <sup>13</sup> He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.*

Him to see His people keep His commandments. Moreover, God placed a high premium on the need to be circumcised. We, who lived in the New Testament era, can safely say that God also views baptism as very important, although Scripture baptism in itself does not save a person. If you are a believer of Jesus Christ, have you been baptized?

### **Moses and Aaron Go to the Elders of the Israelites**

The LORD said to Aaron to meet Moses on the Mount of God (Mount Horeb, or Mount Sinai, Exodus 3:1; 19:10-11). Aaron went and met Moses. They exchanged traditional kisses of greetings. Moses told Aaron all that God had said to him and also the sign-miracles which God had commanded him to do. Together they went to Egypt and rounded up the elders of the children of Israel. Aaron spoke. He told them all the words which the LORD had commanded Moses, who also did the sign-miracles before the Israelites. Having heard, they believed that the LORD would deliver them from bondage in Egypt. They responded by bowing their heads and worshipping God. Worship was the appropriate response to God’s love and mercy towards them.

Moses had expressed that the Israelites would not believe his message or would receive him as their leader. He realised now that his fear of rejection was unfounded. God was with him. The scene was set for Moses' encounter with Pharaoh.

### *PRACTICAL VALUE*

The dialogue between God and Moses shows us that God is patient and reasonable. He is open to all our views. He listens intently and answers all of them. He allows us to present our reasons and objections to Him, and He will always reassure and encourage us, as He did to Moses.

We also learn that God is displeased when we disobey Him. God will deal with us as His children. He will chastise us and we must be wise and discerning and amend our sinful ways. God was angry with Moses because he did not circumcise his son as God had commanded. A leader, who does not obey the clear commandments of God, may not assume the leadership of God's people. It is a bad testimony.

We learn that God is sovereign and is in control of everything. This truth does not absolve every person of the fact of his own moral responsibility and accountability. God hardened Pharaoh's heart and yet Pharaoh was held accountable for his acts of

rebellion. While we cannot fully comprehend this vital truth, we should be careful about what we do. God knows everything about us even our intents and purposes. He knew Pharaoh that he would not listen to Moses in the first place. God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was only delaying His judgment on him. Another example is Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus Christ which resulted in Christ's condemnation and crucifixion. But it was God's plan and purpose that Jesus Christ would be betrayed, condemned and be crucified. However, Judas Iscariot had to bear the full responsibility and judgment of his heinous deed.

Effectiveness in proclaiming God's Word does not depend on eloquence or oratorical skill. Such qualities are good in themselves, but they are not necessary. Moses gave the excuse that he was not eloquent. God said that what he needed to do was to say what God had told him to say. The *how* is not more important than the *what*. It is the message not the messenger that counts. Putting it in another way, it is the song and not the singer that is important. AMEN