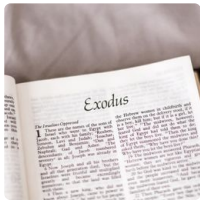


OpenTheo

Exodus 4



Exodus - Steve Gregg

Exodus 4 covers Moses' commission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, starting with his encounter with God through a burning bush. Despite Moses' objections, God assures him of His presence and equips him with signs and wonders to convince Pharaoh to release the Israelites. Aaron is appointed as Moses' spokesman, and they both face resistance from Pharaoh, who imposes harsher burdens on the Israelites. However, God's plan prevails, and the Israelites worship Him, anticipating their deliverance.

Transcript

We're returning now to our studies in the book of Exodus. We've covered the first three chapters in our last session. And there we found that the Israelites were oppressed in Egypt, that God raised up a man, actually spared a baby from destruction, and through sovereign providences, it would seem, caused him to be raised in the household of the Pharaoh.

And that was Moses. And Moses grew up with an Egyptian culture and education, but with a heart for his own people, whom he knew to be the Hebrews, an enslaved race, oppressed and afflicted by the Egyptians who had raised him and educated him. And on one occasion, he went out to check on the state of his brethren.

And we know he saw the oppression firsthand, and he was offended by it. In one case, he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating mercilessly one of his Hebrew brethren. And so he, thinking that he would begin to be a deliverer of his people, he struck the Egyptian and delivered his countrymen.

And the next day, he found out that his deed had been discovered and that the Hebrews did not necessarily appreciate his act as much as he thought they would. He thought that they would know that God had sent him to deliver them, but they didn't understand. It says in the Book of Acts and Chapter seven, Stephen is retelling the story.

And so Pharaoh heard about this and most had to flee into the wilderness where he met his wife, Zipporah, who stayed with her father for 40 years. He was 40 years old when he struck the Egyptian, and he was another 40 years after that, before he encountered God

at the burning bush. And in those first 40 years of Moses' life, he was learning to be great.

It would appear that in the second 40 years, he's learning to be small, because at the end of the first 40 years, he was quite confident that he was God's man. He was the man who would deliver his people. There's every reason to believe that.

He was positioned just right in the Pharaoh's court. He had influence, he had power. He may have, if Josephus is correct, even been a military commander in the Egyptian armies, in the southern armies, according to Josephus.

As it says in the Book of Acts, he was mighty in word and deed. In Acts seven, Stephen tells us that Moses, in his first 40 years, was mighty in word and deed. He became a great man, intelligent, well-educated, probably handsome, since he was said to be a beautiful baby.

We don't know what he looked like as an older man. It's not an issue in the narrative, as it was, say, with Joseph. But he was strong.

He was even eloquent, apparently, if he was mighty in word. But after the 40 years he spent tending sheep in the wilderness, he was no longer any of those things. He was an old man, probably still physically strong, because even at the end of the wilderness wanderings, at 120, he said that his natural strength was not abated and his eye had not dimmed.

So he was either supernaturally kept healthy and strong to age 120, at which time he died, or else he was just a man of a strong natural constitution. In any case, he had natural endowments. And he had learned to have confidence in those endowments at age 40.

But by age 80, he had lost all that confidence. He had spent those years as a shepherd, and every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians, which was his cultural upbringing. He was raised not to respect shepherds, but to consider them loathsome and dirty and abominable.

And now he had spent the second half of his life, as it turned out, the second third of his life. But at the point at 80 years old, it was then the second half of his life thus far as a shepherd and had lost, apparently, his confidence and his eloquence. And so he was now ready to be used by God.

He had to learn to be small first. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, used to say that when people would say the great things that God had accomplished through him, he used to say, well, God had to look a long time to find someone as weak as me to use so mightily. And that's an understanding that the mature people of God come to, is that it's not when you have self-confidence.

It's not when you have anything to commend you that God finds you most useful, but when actually you come to the end of yourself, the end of your confidence, as Paul put it, with the thorn in his flesh, when I'm weak, then I'm strong, he said. And so Moses encounters God at age 80. It's not God, but Moses is age 80.

God is ancient of days, much more so. But at the burning bush, I said that the burning bush that did not get consumed is probably intended to be a symbol of Israel itself. In the fires of affliction for hundreds of years and yet not consumed in hard oppression, in circumstances that could cause them to be destroyed as a nation, as a family.

They weren't even a nation. They were just a clan. They were just a bunch of people related to the same father, Jacob.

And yet, away from their homeland, with nothing to necessarily make them nationally cohesive, they remain cohesive as a people. Even as they have to this day, for the most part, because of their strong culture. The Jews, even away from their homeland for the past 2000 years, remain somewhat distinct as a people.

That doesn't usually happen. Usually, if you disperse people out of their homeland, they simply become part of the cultures into which they go. Now, of course, to some extent, the Jews have done that, maybe to a very great extent in our time.

The Jews who have been among the Gentiles for 2000 years have definitely intermarried a great deal. And it's very difficult to really know who has pure Jewish blood and who does not because of all the intermarriage that's been going on. Not that that matters today because, of course, God is not a racist and God doesn't care what someone's bloodlines are.

But the fact remains that even if they have intermarried a great deal, there still is a group of people who are bound by Jewish culture and Jewish heritage. And they have not dissolved in spite of persecution and so forth. They've been like a bush that's been on fire for 2000 years and still has not been consumed.

And so they were in Egypt in the fires of affliction and yet not burned up. And so Moses wants to turn aside and see what this strange thing is. He apparently saw the fire at first and just assumed the fire was maybe a lightning destructive bush that's going to burn up.

But perhaps he came back later in the day and it was still burning. This bush has got a long burn time here and perhaps over a course of hours, he kept checking back in the bush was not burned up. He's like, I need to check this out.

He came started to come close and God told him to take his shoes off. He's on holy ground. And God identified himself as the God of Moses ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Which, as I pointed out yesterday, Jesus used that fact, the fact that God at that point in history still identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a proof for the resurrection against the Sadducees. Because Jesus said, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And yet when Moses met God, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had long since died.

And God said, I'm still their God. Well, God's not the God of dead people, but living people. So Jesus is implying, of course, that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must still be living.

If God is still their God, even at this late point in history. Now, God tells Moses that he's going to be the man to go and deliver the children of Israel from the Egyptians and to stand before Pharaoh and demand that he let the people go. And Moses, who at a previous time in his life would have agreed that that was really a good choice, that he was the man for the job, now believes he is not the man for the job.

And he raises that altogether five objections. God is continually pressuring, saying, you're going to go, you're going to be my man, you're going to do these things. And Moses keeps interjecting things which are a way of saying, no, I'm not the man for the job.

The first objection he raises was in chapter three. We got up through chapter three yesterday and in chapter three, verse 11. The first objection Moses raised was, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Now, this who am I is, of course, a rhetorical saying I am nobody.

I'm nobody. Pharaoh won't pay any attention to me. I don't even know if I pay attention to me.

I'm not anybody. And God says to him, well, that doesn't really matter. I will be with you.

Maybe the less you are, the better, since it's going to be me, not you. It's going to be delivering the people of Israel. You're just going to be my instrument.

The less personal involvement the instrument has, perhaps the better, the less qualifications the instrument has, because God has chosen the weak things and the foolish things to confound the strong and the wise, Paul said in First Corinthians chapter one. And he did that, it says, so that no one would glory in God's sight. That's why God had to bring Moses to the place where he had no self-confidence, because if Moses had retained all of his qualifications that he had counted on earlier in his life, then one might give him all the credit for what God did.

And so it is that Paul says that in First Corinthians one, I mentioned. It says in verses. Twenty seven through thirty one.

First Corinthians one, twenty seven to thirty one. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty and the base things of the world and the things which are despised. God has chosen and the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are.

That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us from God. For us, wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that as it is written, he who glories, let him glory in the Lord.

So this is what God did with Moses, brought him to a place where he said, who am I implying I am nothing. And God says, OK, that's OK, because I certainly will be with you. Then his second objection.

Essentially was, who are you? I mean, Moses first said, who am I? God said, I'll be with you. Then Moses said, well, who are you? I don't know your name. What is your name? The children of Israel are going to ask me who what this God's name is, who sent me to them.

That's in verse thirteen of chapter three. And so there God reveals to Moses himself as I am that I am. Or later in the same verse 14, he just reduces it to I am.

Which in the Hebrew is the letters that comprise the consonants of the name Yahweh or Jehovah. And although that name had been used in Genesis and in earlier times, even in Exodus earlier. In fact, even Moses mother's name, Jacob, that means Yahweh is glory.

So even the name Yahweh is implied in Moses on mother's name. It was obviously a known name. But God identifies himself as that Yahweh, the Yahweh who had appeared to Abram, Isaac and Jacob.

The one who is who he is. And, you know, in saying I am, you know, it's in the context of polytheism that this question is asked. Well, what is your name, God? They're going to say, which God, which God is the one who sent you to us? Because in Egypt and in all lands, people worship multiple gods or at least believed in multiple gods.

And so they'd want to know, is this the God of the is this the sun God Ra? Is this the God of the River Nile? Is this the frog God? Which God is this? And so I'm the God that is. Meaning all the others aren't. I'm going, I am.

I'm the existing God. The others are non-existent gods. None of them can say I am because they aren't.

They are non-existent. And so I am the one that is. In fact, that's how some translators translate the I am who I am.

I am he that is. It's possible that this is the correct translation because over in Revelation chapter one. In the opening of that book, we find that there is a greeting sent from the triune God to the seven churches.

And in Revelation one for it says, John, to the seven churches, which are in Asia, grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and is to come. And from the seven spirits who are before his throne and from Jesus Christ. Now, the seven spirits are often said to be a reference to the Holy Spirit.

So we have all three of the triune. Members of the Godhead. You've got Jesus Christ mentioned last in verse five.

The Holy Spirit apparently signified by the seven spirits. But the father is spoken of as him who is and who was and who is to come. Which simply means the one who is and was and will be.

And as it continues to be. But the statement him who is is thought by many scholars to believe to be a reference back to this place. God saying, I am the one who is.

I am that I am. And so in chapter three of Exodus, God does tell Moses, you're going to bring the children of Israel to a land flowing with milk and honey. But he does say in verse 19, but I'm sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go.

Not even with a mighty hand. So that's kind of a discouraging part of your commission. Say, OK, you're there to confront the king of Egypt and tell him to let the people go.

And he won't. That's like Jeremiah was told when he was commissioned. He was told that he's going to be sent to a stubborn people who were not going to answer.

They're not going to listen to him. Isaiah was told the same thing. And I think chapter six, Jeremiah and chapter one of Jeremiah.

They were both told these people are not going to listen to you. Of course, a remnant would. But for the most part, the nation would not.

And yet they were to go anyway. Now, why are you supposed to go and preach to people when God has already told you that they're not going to listen? Apparently, the preaching has to be done. There has to be a witness.

There has to be a response, even if it's a negative response. When people stand before God, it's important that they cannot say no one told me. Even if God knows they're going to say no to him, they have to bear responsibility for having had the opportunity.

And Pharaoh has got to be given the opportunity. Now, some people say, well, didn't really have a genuine opportunity because we find that God hardened his heart. And we will talk about that, of course, as a separate issue.

It's an important theological issue that is brought up in the New Testament as well. But this noncompliance of Pharaoh mentioned verse 19 is to be only temporary. God said, ultimately, he will judge Egypt.

He will judge even the gods of Egypt, as we hear him say in chapter 12, and he will let the people out. And at the end of chapter three, he says, and your women, your Hebrew women, tell them to ask the Egyptian women to give them gold and silver and everything they have that they need. And I will send you out well equipped with stuff and I can send you out empty handed.

Now, one might see that these articles of gold and silver that they took out of Egypt were their back pay for hundreds of years of free service as slaves. And so they're kind of getting their paycheck at the end of their as they're being terminated from that position. Now, chapter four is our new material.

We find a third objection that Moses raises. Moses answered and said, but suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice. Suppose they say the Lord has not appeared to you.

And this is a reasonable question to bring up. And God considers it reasonable, doesn't mind answering it and even giving him signs to show to Israel. So the Lord said to him, what is that in your hand? And he said, a rod.

Now, a rod is just a walking stick. Everyone had one in those days. Anyone who walked used a walking stick.

So it was nothing exceptional. It was just a stick, a piece of wood, nothing more. Certainly not something that you would think would be useful for confronting a Pharaoh and delivering his slaves from him.

But when that which God has already put in your hand, however ordinary it may be, is put into God's service. God adds his own miraculous element to it and accomplishes things that could not be done naturally. I think of the feeding of the 5,000 as John records it in John chapter 6. When the disciples say, send the people away, they're hungry.

Jesus says, why don't you feed them? And they say, well, it would take 200 denarii of food to give each one even a little bit. And Jesus says, well, what do you have? What do you have in your hand? We have five loaves and two fishes, but what are they? Well, just give them to me. And so a lot of times we see a need and we sense that God wants us to do something about it, but we don't have what it takes.

His question is, what do you have? What do you have? This ordinary stick, these five loaves, nothing much, not enough, certainly. Nothing that could be counted on in itself. True.

But in God's hand, God can be counted on and something like a rod can become something more than a rod, as we shall see. And God said to him, cast it on the ground. So he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent and Moses fled from it.

It may be that the serpent in this case represented Pharaoh because the Pharaoh on his headdress did have, as you probably have seen in pictures, a gold band around his headdress that resolved into the head of a cobra over his forehead, the symbol of the Pharaoh. And this serpent may have been a cobra. Very likely it was.

And we see Moses fleeing from it as he had, in fact, fled from Pharaoh 40 years earlier. He had been afraid and had fled from Pharaoh. And he sees this snake and he's afraid of it and he flees from it.

And the Lord said to Moses, reach out your hand and take it by the tail. And he reached out his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand. That is, it became rigid, it became paralyzed, it became harmless.

And if Moses would obey God and simply, instead of running away from Pharaoh, if he would go and take hold of Pharaoh, not physically, but confront him fearlessly, that Pharaoh would become powerless like this serpent became a rod. By the way, it's, I think, fairly well known that there are enchantments in sleight of hand that magicians can do to actually give the impression that a serpent becomes or that a stick becomes a serpent. We will find that the Egyptian magicians also duplicated this, although not exactly.

But it is said that you can hold a snake in a certain way, pinching, as it were, its neck so that it's somewhat paralyzed. And if you paint it to look like a stick, you can give the impression you're holding a stick. But when you put it down on the ground and release the snake's head, then it begins to wriggle and act like a snake again.

So that a magician could give the impression that he has a stick when it's really a snake and put it down and it becomes obviously a snake. It's an old magician's trick. However, it requires that you hold the snake by the head.

And God told Moses to pick up the snake by the tail. And he picked up by the tail, it became a rod. In other words, this is not a trick.

This was supernatural. He didn't say pick it up by the head. But Moses was obviously not doing a trick with a snake to make it look like a rod.

It literally turned back into a rod when he picked up by the tail. And verse five says that they may believe that Yahweh Elohim of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has appeared to you. Furthermore, the Lord said to him, now put your hand in your bosom, apparently into his clothes.

And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, the hand was leprous like snow. And he said, put your hand in your bosom again. So he put his hand in his bosom again and threw it out of his bosom.

And behold, it was restored like the other flesh. He said, then it will be if they do not believe you nor heed the message of the first sign that they may believe the message of the latter sign. Now, the ability to cause leprosy immediately to appear and then immediately to disappear.

It was a good miracle to probably had symbolic value like the other. In all likelihood, it represents Israel going into Egypt and turning into a bad state of affairs like leprosy. Being slaves, being afflicted, it's as if they've gotten a dread disease.

In Isaiah chapter one, that's the way Israel's condition is described, like a sick man from the crown of the head to the sole of the feet. The whole body is full of running, putrefying sores. Leprosy may be what is described there in Isaiah chapter one.

But it's describing the condition of the nation at the time of Isaiah, because it had come into very bad straight because of their rebellion against God in that case. And because God had afflicted them, the Assyrians had conquered all the Judean cities. They were threatening Jerusalem.

The farmlands were devastated. There was famine. And God describes the condition of Israel at that time as being like a sick man covered with sores, like a leprous man, perhaps.

So Israel in Egypt was in a similar condition, not necessarily because of disobedience to God in that case, but still their condition was sick. They needed someone to heal them, to rescue them, to deliver them. To heal them of the leprosy that they were experiencing as a nation, so to speak.

And so he pulls his hand in there again and comes out clean, like this is the way Israel is going to be when I bring them out. And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, verse nine, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. Now, this is one that Moses couldn't do here at the bush.

He could do the two right there in front of the bush to practice, make sure they work. This one he'd have to do by faith because the river was not here in Mount Horeb. And so he'd just have to know that when the time came, if necessary, he could take water from the river and pour it out and it would become blood.

The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land. Now, Moses had a fourth objection. Moses said to the Lord, Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent neither before nor since you have spoken to your servant, but I'm slow of speech and it literally heavy of tongue.

Well, interesting, he says, I wasn't before you met me. And even now that you've met me, I'm not any better. I would have thought, you know, meeting God would make me full of some kind of new endowment of power or something.

But I'm I'm I'm slow speech, even as I'm speaking to you right here, even since you've spoken to me. You know, if you pick a man who doesn't speak well, you'd think you'd at least at the time that you meet with him, you'd give him a gift in speaking. Well, but you haven't done that.

I don't speak well. I'm slow of speech. Now, if Moses was formerly mighty in word, as Stephen said, then he had lost all his confidence and stuttered.

Now, in the slow, certainly not an orator anymore. He had not spent those 40 years on the wilderness, tending sheep, practicing oratory to the rocks and to the cactus like John the Baptist probably did when he was living out in the wilderness there. But he had not honed his skills.

He had not thought he'd ever be in a position to do oratory again. It's possible that when he had been a young man in Egypt, that he had addressed the legislature and the ruling bodies and so forth. If he was a man mighty in word, he might have been a statesman as well as a warrior.

We don't know, but he hadn't done that for a while. And he certainly didn't think that was going to be something he could do again. So the Lord said to him who made a man's mouth or who makes the mute or the deaf or the seen or the blind have not I, the Lord.

Now, therefore, go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say. This verse is interesting because God seems to indicate that he is the one who makes people in whatever condition they are in. He's saying, Moses, he's not he's not denying that Moses is slow of speech and heavy of tongue.

He just says, well, who do you think made you that way? You think I'm not aware of this? And Isaiah says, he that made the eye, can he not see? He that made the ear, can he not hear? He knew Moses capabilities and lack thereof. In fact, Moses wasn't as bad off as some people. God, who had made Moses this way, made some people blind and mute and lame and dumb, deaf and whatever.

He says, I'm the one who made the people this way. Now, this goes against some people's theology. Some people think it's the devil who creates sickness and that God always is in the healing business.

That's not necessarily what the Bible indicates. He crippled Jacob. After wrestling with him, after blessing him, he blessed Jacob.

I'm sorry, crippled him first, then he blessed him. But he remained crippled even after he

was blessed. There are times when a disability is something that can glorify God in more ways than one.

For example, the man who was born blind. In John chapter 9, the disciples said, who sinned, this man or his parents, who was born blind? And Jesus said, neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God could be seen in him. In other words, this man was born blind for a purpose.

What purpose? The devil's purpose? No, God's purpose. That the works of God could be seen in him. God caused this man to be born blind, Jesus said, so that God could, at this later date, be glorified, in this case, by healing him.

But it should not be thought that healing is the only way that God can be glorified in a sick person's life. In some cases, it's the lack of healing that makes them useful for God. I recently heard that Johnny Erickson Tata now has terminal cancer.

I guess that was on Focus on the Family or Dobson or something recently. Those listening to this tape may be listening after she's passed. But almost everybody knows who Johnny Erickson Tata is.

But they wouldn't have if she wasn't paralyzed. If at age 19 she had not dove into a shallow lake and broken her neck and been paralyzed, we would never have heard of her. She would have never had a worldwide witness, as she did.

Her very condition is what has made her visible, has made her remarkable. She's what has gotten all the attention, because in her weakness, God's strength is made perfect. God does allow people to be born with handicaps and to acquire them in the course of their lives, if he wishes.

And people say, well, that sounds cruel. Why would God do that? It only sounds cruel because we're self-centered, because we think something's wrong because we don't like it. As if God made us in order to be the centers of attention and the centers of the universe, he's got to please us.

When you become a Christian, you decide it doesn't matter what you like. It matters what God likes. It's not my will, but thine.

It's not my fulfillment. It's God's glory that we care about. If we're not there yet, we're not really thinking like Christians yet.

I almost said we're not Christians yet, but I'll just say we're not thinking like Christians yet. I think sometimes people are Christians who haven't learned to think like Christians yet. But when you think like a Christian, you're thinking, who cares what God does to me as long as he gets the glory? I mean, that's what I'm here for, not to pursue my own interests, but to pursue the will of God, that God to be glorified.

If it, you know, if he slays me, I'll still trust him. It's up to him to do what he wants with me. And God is not ashamed to say that he's the one who made the blind and the deaf and the mute and the heavy tongue.

He's not ashamed to say that he's the one who made the blind and the deaf and the mute and the heavy tongue. He says, I can use all of that. God can glorify himself through sickness, either by healing it, as in the case of a man born blind, or in the case of many other people that could be pointed to through their not being healed.

I remember in the Jesus movement at Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, when there was, you know, all these, this revival going on. There was one, there were certain people you'd see all the time there every night. Me, for one.

I was there every night, not doing something on stage. I was just one of the kids in the crowd. But there were lots of people you'd recognize all the time.

And one guy who was never absent was a guy in a wheelchair who had some kind of palsy. You know, he was kind of twisted up and couldn't talk and strange, but he'd be singing as best he could. He couldn't understand his words.

I think God could. But at his request, someone had written on the back of his wheelchair, I praise God, do you? And this man was in a very unenviable disability. I mean, he couldn't even communicate, couldn't even straighten his arms or legs.

And yet he did. You could see he did praise God. He was full of joy.

And I think he, in a sense, glorified God in that condition in a way that wouldn't have been as impressive if he had been normal in his body and his abilities. So God does make some people well, some people disabled. And while I'm one of the well ones, I've never been disabled.

And it may therefore sound callous. I'm not callous. I mean, to say, well, I mean, if people are disabled, that's how God made them.

Now, he might heal them. I'm not saying they should never seek healing, because that might be the way in which he seeks to glorify himself is by healing them. But if not, you know, I'm not physically disabled, but I have other circumstances in my life that are not what I would choose.

Actually, they're not what anyone would choose. And yet we just have to say, well, the conditions that the sovereign God places us in are the conditions where he wants us to be useful and glorifying to him. And so God clearly says, I'm the one who made these disabilities.

Now, therefore, go, I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say. Verse 13,

last objection, Moses raises and then God gets angry. So Moses doesn't raise anymore.

But Moses said, oh, my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else you may send. Now, the word else is supplied. It's an italics because it's not really in the Hebrew, but it's implied.

Certainly the way it reads in the King James, which does not add the word else. And the way it reads in the Hebrew is, oh, my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever you may send. Which sounds like Moses is now resigned.

OK, you want to send me, send me, send whoever you want. I guess that could include me. But the fact that God gets angry at him makes it very clear that what Moses is implying.

Send by anyone you want other than me. You've got a lot of other options out there. I'm still convinced that he is not God's man.

And it's actually this conviction that he is not God's man that probably makes him God's man, makes him qualified to be. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses. He said, is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well.

And look, he's also coming out to meet you when he sees you. He'll be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth.

And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and I will teach you what you shall do. So he shall be your spokesman to the people and he himself shall be as a mouth for you and you shall be to him as God. And you shall take this rod in your hand with which you shall do the signs.

Now, he says Aaron is coming out to meet you. Aaron wasn't apparently coming out to be right at that moment. But he's saying he will come out to meet you.

And he did later on when Moses actually leaves Holman and goes to Goshen. Aaron does come out to meet him. We should not think that he's coming out at this moment to meet him.

What God is saying is, listen, you may be slow speech, but you can talk as slow as you want to Aaron and he can speak well. He can be your mouthpiece. You'll be like God to him.

That doesn't mean that Aaron will become a worshipper of Moses, but rather God's not going to speak directly to Aaron. He's going to speak to Moses. Moses is the prophet.

Aaron, as it will turn out, will be a high priest, but not a prophet. But he'll be like a prophet to Moses. Moses will be like God.

And Aaron will speak for Moses. Now, whether this really happened, in fact, is not known. Because in the interviews with Pharaoh, it looks to me like Moses is doing the talking.

As you read the rest of the story, it seems like Moses is the one talking directly to Pharaoh. It is possible that it's only recorded that way because we're supposed to know that all this conversation was done through Aaron. That Moses was, you know, all the time saying Aaron say this, you know, Aaron say that.

And the conversation is going like that. And the narrative may simply leave that fact out. Or it may be that once Moses got started and saw that God was with him, that Moses kind of rose to a higher degree of confidence in God.

And just Aaron was left out of the equation. But at least at this point, God says, you've got another option. You don't have to worry about not being a good speaker because Aaron can speak.

Well, you can use him if you want to. Now, verse 18, So Moses went returned to Jethro, his father in law, and said to him, Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt and see whether they are still alive. And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace.

Now, Moses didn't tell him what he's really going for. He just said, I want to see if my brethren are still alive. And no doubt that was not a lie.

It was a partial truth. But why did he tell him the whole truth? Well, what likelihood is it that Jethro, his father in law, would believe him? That God had appeared to him in a bush that burns that doesn't burn up and that he's going to go confront Pharaoh? I mean, say, my son in law is going nuts. He's going to go face the tyrant in Egypt and tell him what to do? I don't think so.

And so Moses kind of keeps his mission under wraps and just tells his father in law, I've got to leave for a while. I want to go see the family. And Jethro says, Go in peace.

Now, back when the shepherding movement was real popular in the charismatic movement back in the 70s, I remember the shepherding movement was a movement that was quite oppressive, quite authoritarian, where the leaders of churches were basically put in the place of God over the congregation. And if you wanted to know the will of God, you asked your shepherd, your pastor, your group leader, your under shepherd or whatever they call them in a given case. And if they said no, you didn't do it.

If they said yes, you did it. In fact, whatever they said was thought to be God's way of speaking to you. And I remember some of the verses they used to use to support that notion.

And this was one of them. They said, look at this. Moses was subject to his father in law.

His father in law submitted to him. And even though God himself had told Moses to go to Egypt, he didn't go without getting permission from his father in law. And so they use this as sort of a precedent.

Even if you think God has told you to do something, even directly in a vision, you must get permission from your elders. You must get permission from the persons you're submitted to. And then you can go if they give you permission.

If they say no, don't. Actually, I was talking to one of the pastors of in this movement. And I said, well, what if somebody thinks what if God tells you to do something and your pastor doesn't say yes? And he said, well, then you can make an appeal to him.

And, you know, tell him that you think that he needs to change his mind. But he said that if he doesn't change his mind, if he still says no, you submit to your pastor. And if that ends up being disobedient to God, God will hold the pastor responsible, not you.

That's a very damaging movement. The Bible makes it very clear, you are answerable to God and your conscience as the final court of appeals. You're not answerable to elders.

There's no place in the Bible that gives elders of the church that kind of authority. And Moses, I'm sure, was not giving Jethro that kind of authority. He would have gone with or without Jethro's approval.

Or if he would not have, then Moses would be in the wrong. I'm not saying at this point in his life, Moses was beyond doing the wrong thing. But had he had Jethro said, no, I can't.

I need someone to take care of the sheep right now. There's a busy season. Can't spare you right now.

If Moses said, oh, OK, well, I won't go to Egypt then. Well, that would have been wrong. God told Moses to go to Egypt.

But we can imagine that God also worked in this situation to give him favor and decide Jethro to go. And after all, there was nothing about it that necessarily seemed objectionable to Jethro just going to visit his family there in Egypt to see if they're OK. So Jethro said, go in peace.

And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, go return to Egypt for all the men are dead who sought your life. Then Moses took his wife and his sons. Now, we've read about the birth of one of his sons.

There were actually two sons of Moses, and he set them on a donkey and returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand. And the Lord said to Moses, when you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in your hand, but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

We'll say more about this hardening of the heart in a little bit. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, that says the Lord, this is Yahweh. Israel is my son, my firstborn.

So I say to you, let my son go that he may serve me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed, I will kill your son, your firstborn. Now, this is actually the ultimate punishment at the end of the nine plagues.

The 10th plague was the killing of the firstborn of Pharaoh. Apparently, Pharaoh was to be told of the final outcome right from the beginning. So that Pharaoh would know what he's getting into, if he resists and what it would ultimately cost him.

This reference to the Lord saying Israel is my son, my firstborn, is the basis for Hosea's words in Hosea 11. One actually God's words through the prophet Hosea, who said when Israel was young, I loved him and I called my son out of Egypt. Referring to the fact that Israel, as God's son, was called out of Egypt in the Exodus.

And we saw that in Matthew chapter two, this is quoted as a reference to Christ, God's son coming out of Egypt. But that's because the apostles knew that Israel, as many other things in the Old Testament are, is a type of Christ. And therefore, Israel coming out of Egypt in its infancy was a type and a shadow of Christ, the Messiah coming out of Egypt in his infancy.

And Matthew saw that connection there. But the fact that both Israel and Jesus are referred to as God's son in this particular case, for example, is what allowed that play on words to be made, that that scripture to be seen that way in Matthew. Chapter two, verse 24.

Now, this is a peculiar passage that I've been asked about many, many times. People, when they're reading this narrative, they're reading along nice and smooth until they come to this. And then they really got hung up on it.

And it's easy to see why it's got some difficulties attached to it. It came to pass on the way. At the encampment that Yahweh met him, that is, Moses, and sought to kill him.

Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses feet and said, Surely you are a husband of blood to me. So he let him go. Then she said, You are a husband of blood because of the circumcision.

Now, this passage has a number of things about it. They're not entirely clear. For example, one thing is that is the statement of her.

But she cast the foreskin at Moses feet. Actually, it's not that she cast it to see, but she touched his feet with it. And it's not necessarily Moses feet, it's just as in the Hebrew at his feet, it could be the son's feet.

It's not clear whether she touched Moses feet with the son's foreskin or touched the son's feet with the foreskin. Apparently a ritual act of some kind. This is, you know, very ancient.

This is before the law was given. And exactly what the touching of the feet with the foreskin means is not clear. In fact, many scholars believe that the word feet here is a euphemism for the genitals.

And that there's some ritual going on here that is not explained, but it's assumed that the readers know something about. But the biggest problem is knowing why God sought to kill Moses. God had been friendly with Moses previously, been talking in a friendly way with him just before this.

Moses is obeying. He's on his way to Egypt to do what God said. And God meets him and tries to kill him.

Now, we can talk about why God sought to kill him. But first, we might want to ask, in what way was it manifested that God sought to kill him? I mean, if God really wanted to kill a man, he could do it instantly. Right.

He struck the angel. The Lord struck Herod when he spoke in Acts chapter 12 and the man was eaten with worms and died. It doesn't take long for God to kill a man.

He can strike him with a lightning bolt if he wants to. So God didn't really want to kill Moses, but he sought to kill him. There was obviously something going on that night at the encampment that was understood to be God's threatening of Moses' life.

Many commentators believe that Moses got deathly ill, that he had a high fever, that he was on the verge of death. And that was recognized that God was, you know, judging him. Others would believe perhaps that God appeared as he did to Jacob and wrestled with him all night in a human form, like a theophany.

It's really not told. And we don't really I mean, we can guess we can make assumptions about our favorite options, but we really don't know. In some way, something was going on with Moses.

And it was prolonged enough for this action to take place in the course of the time that there was a conflict between God and Moses. I don't know if it was God appearing visibly, like I say, like a man fighting with Moses threatening to kill him, or whether it was merely them recognizing in some sudden deadly illness that came upon him, God's hand in seeking to kill him. But in any case, Zipporah knew instantly what to do.

And she circumcised her son. And it sounds like she kind of complained about it after she said, you surely you're a bloody husband to me. Now, some say that that wasn't a complaint that husband of blood or bridegroom of blood was a common expression.

And that in some parts of the world in the Middle East, there was an ancient custom. And I don't really know how much this is attested to and how much the commentators are guessing that this is so. But some commentators say that there was this custom of a bridegroom before getting married, being circumcised.

Many times people were not circumcised at birth like they were in Israel on the eighth day of a child's life. But in many parts of the world, even to this day, some some African countries and so forth, circumcision is a rite of passage for young men. So like the Jews have their bar mitzvah, where a young man becomes a boy becomes a man.

But that doesn't involve his circumcision because a Jewish boy is circumcised on the eighth day of his life. But in some cultures, that passage from boyhood to manhood is accompanied by circumcision at that point. And the commentators have said that there was a custom.

Again, I don't always trust commentators because you wonder, I mean, they may have some they may have really good documentation from this from outside the Bible, or they may just be putting two and two together in their own way and getting this answer. But that there was a custom of a bridegroom being circumcised just before his marriage and therefore shedding his own blood, as it were, for his bride. Sort of a picture one might say that resembling some of Jesus shedding his blood in order to obtain his bride, the church.

The temptation to make that connection is great, which makes me wonder whether it's an artificial claim about the customer, whether it really did happen. But it is said, then, that a husband who had done that was a bridegroom of blood, which then would not be a negative statement, but a statement of how much the bridegroom had sacrificed, how much he had pained himself in order to take his bride, the value he placed on his bride. So maybe so.

But if so, why hasn't this happened earlier? Well, maybe it was maybe it was because Moses had already been circumcised as a baby in Egypt. And but his son had not been. And I don't know.

To me, it sounds like she's upset with him. But maybe it's just the way I'm reading this. You are truly a bloody husband to me.

It doesn't sound like, you know, some of them, some of she's happy. And I've read between the lines my own way about all this. What I believe is this, that there had already been discussion between Moses and Zipporah, perhaps at an earlier point in time about the circumcision of their son.

In the book of Numbers, it says that Moses is the meekest man on the face of the earth. That means he was not assertive, not self-assertive. I'm going to suggest that when the

son was born, Moses knew that as an Israelite, he should circumcise his son on the eighth day.

I think his wife probably found it a disgusting suggestion. And therefore, they argued and Moses being the meekest man on the earth deferred and said, OK, let's have peace in the home. And so they didn't circumcise the boy.

Clearly, the boy had been born sometime earlier and was not circumcised. So Moses had been disobedient in that. And it may well be because of his wife's distaste for the idea of circumcising the son.

And the fact that she knew instantly what to do. So just that this was not something that just had never been discussed before. I think that she had known this probably had been a bit of a bit of tension between them, that he had known that God wants the son circumcised, but his wife didn't.

And he'd gone with his wife's way instead of his, instead of God's. And now that she sees she's about ready to lose her husband over it, she says, OK, OK, OK. I'll comply.

And so she circumcised the boy, cast the foreskin and says, OK, you got your way. OK, the boy's circumcised and God lets Moses go. God, God ends the attack.

Now, it's interesting about this. And one reason I think she was not happy about it is that Moses and Zipporah did not continue together on the journey after this. Moses continued alone without her.

And in Chapter 18 of Exodus, we find after the Jews have come out of Egypt and they're now in the wilderness that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law and Zipporah, his wife, come to visit Moses. And it says in Exodus 18, too, then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back with her two sons, of whom the name of one is Gershom, for he said, I've been a stranger in a strange land. And the name of the other was Eleazar, for he said, the God of my father was my help.

Eleazar means help and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness. Now, it says in verse 2 that Moses had sent her back.

It was probably on this occasion that we're reading about in Chapter 4. I think this renewed something of the hostility or bitterness that had existed. It would seem to me that Moses had championed the idea of circumcising the son and Zipporah had opposed it, which is why she'd be kind of angry at him. Like, he got his way.

OK, if you're going to die over it, you know, you're putting me under pressure. I'll go ahead and circumcise the boy, but I'm not going to be happy about it. And Moses is saying, well, if you're not going to be happy about it, why don't you go home and be with

your father until I'm done in Egypt? That's what I think went on.

Seems to fit. But there's another aspect to this whole story, and that is, why did God make an issue of the boy's circumcision at this point? Why not at an earlier time? We don't know how old the child was, but the child was apparently not a baby, not eight days old. The right time for circumcision had passed and the right had not been performed.

Why didn't God make an issue of it before? Because Moses wasn't called to be God's man before. That is to say, when a man is not in ministry, when a man is not called to speak for God, little compromises that he's made in the past may not be. I mean, they are an issue, but they may not come up.

They may be things that God will bring up on the judgment day, but not, you know, mess with it in this life. But when a man is called to go and represent God, then he's got to have his own laundry clean. And there was an area of negligence.

There was an area of disobedience in Moses' life. It might seem like a small matter, but it's not, because God had told Abram that any descendant of Abram who's not circumcised would be cut off from the people. That wouldn't be part of Israel.

Moses had been negligent to bring his sons into the covenant. It's interesting the Bible says that a man to be an elder of a church must have children who believe. Someone who's actually brought their children into the covenant, brought their children into the faith.

And Moses had not done that. Now, lots of Christian people don't have Christian kids and lots of Jews didn't have godly kids too. But they weren't called to be Moses.

We see that God is a little stricter with his spokesmen than with others. After all, Moses, we know later, was forbidden to enter the promised land. Why? Because he was an adulterer? No.

A murderer? Not really. Because he was a thief? No. What had he done? He had struck a rock with a stick instead of speaking to it.

It seems like a rather small infraction compared to some of the things that even Aaron did and others. But perhaps it was smaller than what Aaron did. But Moses was a man with greater responsibility to represent God.

And so a man who's going to represent God, he's got to be obedient. And this is not really a small matter to us. It seems like a small matter.

Whether we circumcise or don't circumcise our children, depending on whether we think it's hygienically desirable. And, you know, it's not a big moral issue with us. But to Israel,

it was.

You'd be cut off from the people of Israel as far as God's concerned. They've broken the covenant if they're not circumcised. So Moses had to become obedient to God in this matter that had been neglected.

In verse 27, the Lord said to Aaron, go into the wilderness and meet Moses. So he went and met him on the mountain of God and kissed him. Now, I don't know why Aaron, who was a slave in Egypt, had the liberty to go wandering out in the desert.

Maybe he had to sneak out at night. You know, it's not like the Egyptians had to watch these people all the time. Where are they going to go? Out in the wilderness? I mean, if the whole company of slaves went out in the wilderness, that's a problem to Egypt.

But if one man goes out in the wilderness, he could be hunted down probably if they wanted to hunt him down. He'd probably die out there anyway. So, I mean, I don't think they were watching the slaves that closely.

It's not like they were slaves in a camp like you might have in the south on a plantation or something where the slaves had to be chained up at night and things like that. It's just the whole population were put under forced labor. And apparently, if they wanted to lose sleep, they'd go out in the middle of the night and walk out in the wilderness.

They'd have to come back to eat, probably. Anyway, Aaron had the liberty, and maybe everyone did, to go out in the wilderness and meet Moses. God spoke to Aaron.

We don't know how he spoke to him. Maybe in a dream? Maybe in a burning bush? Who knows? But they met each other for the first time probably in 40 years. They hadn't seen each other.

In fact, in 80 years, they might not have seen much of each other since Moses was previously in the house of Pharaoh. So Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him and all the signs which he had commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel.

So they're now back in Goshen, and the elders would be the oldest men of each clan. The ones whose approval for anything regarding the nation would be sought. And so Moses wanted to get them on his side.

And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. Apparently the leprous hand sign and the rod turning into a snake sign.

So all the people believed briefly. They changed their opinion a little later, but at this point they believed. The signs were impressive.

They also wanted to believe they'd been crying out to God for deliverance. That's what God said. He heard them doing so.

They were excited. Sounds like God heard their cries. And now there's some supernatural evidence that this man, Moses, is there to help and that God's going to do something for them.

And when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that he had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped. So here we have Israel worshipping the Lord because they anticipate deliverance. Now we're going to find out that in Chapter 5 that this is somewhat postponed a little bit because Pharaoh gets angry at Moses request initially and imposes harder burdens on the children of Israel.

So the children of Israel get kind of upset with Moses about that. But that's just how it is. Sometimes God starts to do something.

Things get worse before they get better. In this case, they got worse briefly before they got better. But then they then God pulled off what he said he was going to do.

We're going to stop there and take a break. And we'll come back to read about Moses confrontations with Pharaoh after that. .