

EXODUS

Lesson 5 - Chapter 4

Let's continue our study of Exodus as we move, today, into chapter 4. Last time we met, we were in the midst of the Burning Bush theophany. I say theophany because indeed that kind of direct interaction between God and a man by which God manifests Himself in some visible or audible way is rare in the Bible. In fact, the last recorded Biblical theophany happened with Jacob, some 500 years before this time with Moses.

Although our modern Bibles are structured in such a way that we just ended one chapter (Exodus 3) and are about to begin the next that is NOT actually the way the scriptures were written. The first verse of chapter 4 is just a continuation of the last verse of chapter 3. And, so, we are **still** in the midst of the conversation between God and Moses, in the land of Midian, at the site of the Burning Bush.

READ CHAPTER 4 all

And, in V1, we see Moses' reluctance.....the usual mode of a potential prophet of God..... or, perhaps downright fear, start to really push to the fore. If we look closely, we see that Moses flat-out didn't believe God. Because in chapter 3 Vs 18, God **told** Moses, unequivocally, that the elders and people would listen and pay attention to Moses. Now, Moses turns right around and says to God, in essence, "no they won't". So, in His great mercy, God begins to give Moses a series of proofs..... The Bible typically calls them signs.....of God's ability to carry out whatever it is that He ordains.

Now, what we are about to witness in Chapter 4 is something never before done: God gives Moses the power to bring about miracles. This ability to wield such extraordinary, heavenly power had not been given to any man before it was given to Moses at this moment in history. And, yet, we must understand that this power is NOT Moses it is God working through Moses. Moses did NOT become a godly magician. Rather, this is the same mysterious stuff that we struggle to understand about the faithful Believer today: whatever power we do have is NOT our power, nor is it of ourselves, nor does it come by our minds or our flesh, it is God in us. As such, whatever we do with such power must FIRST be done strictly by His will, and second by means of the power of HIS spirit.....that thing we call the Holy Spirit.

The first sign God put forth for Moses dealt with Moses' staff; it was but a stick, a Shepherd's staff, used in his vocation as a tender of flocks. But, God was going to transform the purpose of both Moses and his staff: instead of shepherding sheep, Moses was about to lead Israel.

What are we to make of God turning Moses' staff from a piece of dead and dried-up wood, into a snake, and then back again? Well, there have been many analogies and allegories put forth to explain this meaning, and it's hard to know for sure which is right.....if any. But, what we

can know with assurance is that it is no coincidence that the serpent the staff was turned in to was the official Egyptian symbol for royal power and authority, both religious and civil. Pharaohs usually wore a golden serpent symbol on their heads; the snake represented the patron cobra-goddess of Lower Egypt. So, somewhere in the midst of God showing Moses the tremendous supernatural ability to turn a dead, dried-out piece of wood vegetation into a live animal, and back again, at His command, Moses as a former prince of Egypt, must have instantly recognized the symbolism of the serpent. For Moses was indeed going to, with God's power, overcome Egypt, whose very symbol was a serpent.....and that Old Serpent, Satan himself, who guided Egypt. A simple Shepherd was going grab the serpent, Egypt, by its tail and shake it.

The second sign is a little more straightforward, to my way of thinking. The clean hand was inserted into Moses' garment and it became diseased.....defiled. Then the defiled hand was inserted back into the garment and became clean. This sign was as much directly related to Israel, as was the first sign with the staff directly related to Egypt. God's chosen people began pure, and then God allowed them to become impure. But, God can redeem. He can take the most defiled person, or nation, and purify them.

When Moses removed his hand the first time, the skin disease that had instantaneously consumed his hand was NOT Leprosy. The Hebrew word for this affliction is Tzara'at: and it is nowhere as serious as Leprosy. We're not precisely sure what the disease was in medical terms, but the Hebrews considered it not only ugly and contagious but as an outward sign of the infected person's inward spiritual condition. In other words, a person with Tzara'at was seen as under a condition of discipline or curse from God. Therefore, anyone defiled with Tzara'at was removed from the presence of the other people. Moses' diseased hand represented Israel's inward spiritual condition in God's eyes. And, just as important, God then removed the Tzara'at from Moses' hand; that is, He was able to, and going to, purify Israel from all their defilement.

The 3rd and last sign, as seen in Vs 9, was God showing His power over the worthless Egyptian gods. The Nile was life to Egypt, in a very real way; in fact the Nile, itself, was also a god in the Egyptian religion. And, when Moses would later take water from the Nile and pour it on the desert sand, it would turn into blood. Since Adam and Eve, God had made it clear that blood was all-important in His divine plan.... This is why blood is the basis of God's sacrificial system. The Hebrews well understood this. By turning the water of the Nile into blood, God was showing His complete mastery over the Mystery religion system of Egypt.

This coming battle of the God of Israel against the non-gods of Egypt is quite interesting and thought provoking. Now, we have the benefit of knowing that there is but One God, and He is God of everything. But, in those ancient times, it was considered common knowledge that not only was there many gods, but they were regional and national gods, and they operated within certain territories. When they went to war, they took with them god-idols and their priests in hope that in this way their gods could have influence in a foreign territory. So, Egypt had their gods; and their gods' realm, their sphere of authority, was usually LIMITED to Egypt, the Egyptian people, and matters that concerned the land and affairs of Egypt. That was a principle of all the Mystery Babylon religions that existed then, and every society ever

unearthed and studied generally believed the same way. So, for instance, up in Canaan, the various Canaanite cities and nations would **each** have had their own set of gods that generally **only** dealt with those particular cities' and nations' people, territory, and issues. From time to time, as one nation or people would come up against another, then the gods that represented those nations would also battle amongst themselves. And, it was believed that, according to whichever nation won the battle, the gods of that nation were therefore more powerful and clever than the gods of the vanquished nation. Sometimes, the defeated nation would, naturally, adopt the gods of the victorious nation because it was believed that those gods **MUST** be stronger than their own gods, so why have not have better gods?

Now, this idea of multiple gods did not get immediately cleansed from the thinking of the Israelites. We'll talk about this more from time to time as the situation arises; but for now, its important to understand that when we see references in the earlier parts of the O.T. referring to Yahweh as the "god above all gods".....that's exactly what it meant to the people of that day. To us, we just kind of take that Biblical statement, "god above all gods", and see it as a statement of grandeur. Or we allegorize a bit, and say that it means that God Almighty is more important than anything else in our lives.....our money, our family, our job.....and that anything we might make as equally necessary in our lives as God, in itself becomes a god. And, while that is all true, that was NOT what it meant to the early Hebrews. To them this was all quite literal.

In a few chapters, in Exodus 20, we'll get into the 10 Commandments. And, of course, the first thing God instructs in those commandments is that "you shall have no other gods before Me". That was not a quaint statement with a symbolic meaning. The Hebrews, Israel, absolutely believed there were other gods. The whole world had other gods.....hundreds of them. Shoot, everybody knew **that** from the time they were children! For Israel, it was bad enough that their chief god, the El (from which we get El Shaddai, El Elyon, Beth'el, Dani'el, Immanu'el, and scores and scores of Biblical names incorporating the title "El") did not allow Israel any other gods; because the sheer number of gods a nation possessed indicated wealth and power. So, Israel, with but Yahweh, was considered by other nations, and early in their development by their own estimation, god-poor since they only had ONE god. Frankly, the idea that a people would have only one god was preposterous; so don't think Israel was thrilled with the notion.

I tell you this so that you can put yourself into the minds of the ancient Israelites, as well as the Egyptians, in the upcoming battle between Moses and Pharaoh. And, this so that you can understand the context of Exodus, and the Torah, as concerns the matter of identifying God and his attributes. Also that we don't allegorize, but understand that when Scriptural wording speaks in any way of God Almighty being above "other gods", that is exactly what the writer thought and meant. Not because there were really other gods, but because the demons that posed as deity to humans, and the polluted and corrupted human thought that believed there were many gods, had to be shown as what they are.....false, frauds, deceivers.

But, before we kind of giggle at that notion, or snicker and think how ignorant and primitive it was for the world and early Israel to think such absurd thoughts..... also understand, that our personal walk with God is one that began right where we were when He found usmentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And, we were a mess. We didn't get cleaned up and

THEN accept Christ. We didn't believe upon Jesus and become instantly perfected. We Americans are very fortunate that 1000's of years of God working with mankind has allowed us to live a society that at least doesn't practice multiple god worship, so that we had **that** to overcome. It took a long time, and many hard lessons, for Israel to fully comprehend even the basic concept that there is but ONE god. Not just one god for Israel, and other gods for other peoples. One Universal God for everyone and everything. This went against all their human nature. They saw God, any god, on purely nationalistic and cultural terms and Moses saw it all that way, too. And, his first meeting with God, in the burning bush, didn't change his thinking on the matter right away. It only changed it sufficiently for Moses to be God's instrument in securing Israel's release from Egypt.

In V10, when it seems that Moses' arguments to God have all been answered, he throws out one last ditch effort to avoid this calling: he says he is "no man of words", and, oh yeah, one more thing, "my words come slowly, and my tongue moves slowly". Or, most literally, "I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue". What the exact nature of Moses' speech difficulty isn't clear; tradition is that he had forgotten how to speak Hebrew well. Others think that perhaps he was concerned that he no longer spoke Egyptian well enough to approach the King of Egypt.

Be that as it may, we see then that God shows anger with Moses. And, we need to take from this that Moses really had little idea who God was, what He was about, what His purposes were, just HOW omnipotent God is. And, so, God begins at the beginning. And, He says to Moses "Who gives a person a mouth?" God knows way more about Moses' mouth than Moses' ever will. Even more, God says He will be-there with Moses and tell him what to say. This is interesting. At this time in history the Holy Spirit had not yet dwelt within man; that spiritual mystery was still 1400 years into the future. So, what did it **mean** when God said, "I will be-there with you"? HOW was God going to be there with Moses? In what form? And, just like you or I would wonder about how it was that God would be with us, so did Moses. Well, remember back in Exodus 3:14, God answered Moses' question about His name by saying "ehyeh asher ehyeh", which is most typically translated "I am that I am"? But, equally as correct, would be "I will be-there howsoever I will be-there". In fact, this is MUCH more literal than the "I am that I am" translation.

Several times now in Exodus we're going to encounter "ehyeh" and "asher" when God is telling Moses that He will be-there with him in some situation or another. And, here in 4:12, we encounter those same Hebrew words. God is going to "ehyeh" with Moses, be-there with Moses, in some way that is not explained. Whatever way He is there, however, we can be sure it is EXTERNAL to Moses.....its not like God being present with us, in the Church Age, in the form of the Holy Spirit living literally within us. Many times in the OT we will see that when the Holy Spirit is talked about in relationship to men, it is that the Holy Spirit is "upon" that man.....not "within" that man, like it is now. "Upon" is an "external" condition; "within" is an internal condition. So, let's not get too confident that we can completely sum up through our rather simplistic doctrinal views God's full range of manifestations as being limited to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; at the least, we know there is another manifestation called "the Angel of Yahweh", who is the One now talking to Moses. And, in a few chapters, we'll be introduced to God's Shekinah, which doesn't fit too well with any of the other categories we've devised, either. As God has told Moses, "I will be-there HOWSOEVER I will be-there". In other words,

we couldn't comprehend it even if He explained it.

And, Moses replies, "send somebody else". Wrong answer. God makes short work of this conversation by telling Moses that his older brother Aaron will speak for him....that Aaron will be Moses' mouth. And, in fact, God has visited Aaron, and he's on his way to meet Moses, as they speak. It should not go unnoticed that God referred to Aaron as the "Levite". I mean, after all, since this was Moses' own brother, Moses rather well knew that Aaron was of the tribe of Levi. I think the thing to take from this, is that right here we see God's intention that the tribe of Levi is going to be set apart as special. And, in Vs 15, the pecking order is established: God speaks to Moses, and Moses speaks to Aaron, and Aaron speaks to Pharaoh and to the people.

Now lets also not overlook those few little words in Vs 16 in which God tells Moses, "and for him (Aaron) you shall be a (or as a) god". Whoa. God, for His own divine purposes, has decided that whatever Moses speaks shall carry with it the same authority as if God Himself spoke it. Does that sound just a little bit like Yeshua the Messiah? I mentioned sometime earlier that while the Jews venerate Moses above all except God, the Church sees him as pretty much just another Bible character. God sure seemed to see Moses as very special, as he was given the power to work miracles, and the position of speaking AS God. What an incredible responsibility. NO wonder he didn't want the job.

Well, that's the end of the dialogue.....for now.....between God and Moses. And, apparently, it's become a settled matter with Moses; he has determined he will obey God. So, he heads for home, and obtains approval from his father-in-law to leave Midian and go to Egypt to fulfill God's command to confront Pharaoh. This procedure of Moses asking permission of Jethro was simply Middle Eastern courtesy, as Jethro was the head of the house in which Moses lived.

Then, Yahweh again speaks to Moses, days or weeks after the Burning Bush manifestation; and He tells Moses that all the men who sought to kill him, as justice for Moses' murder of an Egyptian so many years ago, were now dead. In other words, it was safe for Moses to go back without fear of arrest. This tells us a couple of things: first, even though in a previous chapter we read that the Pharaoh who was in power when Moses committed the murder, had died, that in Moses' mind Egypt was still a danger to him. God, who knows our thoughts, decided He needed to comfort Moses in this regard. Second, this experience with God in the Burning Bush was not the end of either God's communication or presence with Moses. God is step-by-step showing Moses this Truth, and in the process, Moses' faith in God is going to grow.

Moses loads up his family, his wife and two sons, and they depart for Egypt. Again God speaks to Moses, presumably early in the journey. He is preparing Moses, telling Him what to expect. How he is to respond. And, here in Vs21, we get a word from God that has troubled the Believer to no end: that God is going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will not let Israel go.

At one point or another many of us have wondered whether this was fair. If God was going to harden Pharaoh's heart then what chance did Pharaoh ever have to do right? I mean, did God **actually** decide beforehand that He was going to intervene and make Pharaoh incapable

of obeying God? Does this mean that God hardens the hearts of certain people, at His choice, so that they will do evil things.....and so that they will never be allowed to know God and be saved?

Now, there is no way we're going to solve this mystery here, today, because there are ways of God that are so beyond us to contemplate that it is a hopeless, if not faithless, endeavor to pursue. Yet, the Scriptures themselves do give us some clues. The first time we hear of God declaring His own power in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, is right here in Vs. 21. The next time we hear of it is in Exodus 7:3 (just before the 10 plagues). Both times, it is prophetic. That is, it is something that is future, and for whatever reason, God thinks Moses needs to know it. Apparently, God wanted Moses to not be perplexed or discouraged when the miracles using his staff failed to sway Pharaoh, and later during the first 9 of the plagues, Pharaoh still didn't fully give in. God was going to use this rebellious Pharaoh for His purposes, much of which involved showing BOTH Israel AND Egypt the worthlessness of their gods and Yahweh's own limitless power.

Now, if we dissect the Deliverance Narrative, we'll find that 20 times the word "harden" is used to describe the condition of Pharaoh's heart. It is no coincidence that 10 times it refers to God being the author of the hardening, and the other 10 as Pharaoh HIMSELF hardening his own heart.

As I prayed and studied about this, it occurred to me that I could not possibly explain the Divine reasoning for why this interaction with Pharaoh went the way it did. For one reason, I don't have the words, and the other is, I don't know why. But, we can draw some practical lessons from this to apply to our lives. First, God will not always strive with man. There is a time when we have hardened our own hearts sufficiently, that our path is locked in, and our destruction at the time of Judgment is assured. That was Pharaoh's situation. Second, it appears that for the already rebellious man (which Pharaoh was), God will, sometimes, intervene and do a FURTHER hardening Himself upon that heart. At times it is to use that rebellious individual, who God pre-knows has determined to die resisting God's will and mercy, for a purpose that will showcase God's Glory and achieve a goal that furthers God's Kingdom. At other times, a temporary hardening, at God's hand may occur to actually bring that person to a point of repentance. As most of us have learned the hard way, change usually only occurs within us when the pain of our condition is finally so great that we become truly open to listen to God. So, it may be that God will actually harden a man's heart, for a time, for that man's own, eventual, good.....so well does God know us as to know at exactly what point of pain and discomfort, if there is such a point for us, that we will finally submit to God and be saved from eternal destruction.

And, third, it is our **continuing** rebelliousness that contributes to our hearts hardening. It is not God's will that any should perish. But, that doesn't mean that the vast majority of humans will not perish. We know from the Bible that only what is described as a "remnant" will stay steadfast to the faith, and thereby have our eternal lives preserved. So, step-by-tiny-step, each time we dismiss God's admonition to us, each time we say "not yet" to His Lordship, our minds become increasingly resistant to God's Spirit. Until, little by little, almost unnoticed by us, our rejection of God's Spirit becomes complete; and for this there is no remedy, no hope

and no redemption. As it says in Proverbs 29, “....**he that hardens himself shall suddenly be destroyed, and for that there is no remedy**”.

Moses is now given further instructions on exactly what he is to say to Pharaoh. Clearly, Moses is to make it perfectly understood that he stands before Pharaoh not as a rebellious leader of Israel, but as a prophet for God. And, God tells Moses to advise Pharaoh that Israel is so important to God, that God sees Israel as His firstborn. And, that He wants His firstborn set free to serve Him.

Now, this custom of “firstborn” varied a little from society to society in ancient times, but in general, it had the same meaning. The firstborn, always speaking of the MALE firstborn, was considered a child of special significance. Pharaoh would most certainly have understood what Moses was saying to him. All through Genesis we have seen the place of honor that goes to the firstborn. But, there is something else to take note of: being labeled the firstborn, indicated that there is to be a **second-born**.....and perhaps a 3rd, 4th, 5th, and more. In other words, the implication is that after the firstborn, others will follow. Remember that when Jacob passed over his firstborn son, Reuben, as the one who should have received the double-portion blessing AND the right to rule to Israel upon Jacob’s death, that the next in line was Simeon, who Jacob also passed over with an explanation, and then Levi, the 3rd born, who was also passed over with an explanation.....until Jacob came to Judah, the 4th born, and gave to him the “firstborn” rights of tribal leadership. The order of birth, starting with the firstborn, was critical. So, who was to be the second born? Who would, some time later, become the new members in the family of God? It’s what we now call the Church.....but in more detailed terms, it is really referring to gentiles.

So, in Vs 23 where Yahweh goes on to say to Pharaoh “but you have refused to send him (meaning the firstborn of God, which is Israel) free, so then I will kill YOUR firstborn: Understand, that we have two things running together here. That is, Moses is to first explain that Israel **is** the firstborn of God, and only AFTER Pharaoh refuses, at some point, Moses is to threaten him with the death of Pharaoh’s firstborn.....the heir to the throne of Egypt.

The journey from Midian to Egypt begins, and we immediately encounter this strange story of Vs 24-26. Here we see Moses’ wife, Tziphora, in a rather nasty mood. But, just before THAT we find that God is none too pleased, either. Now, until fairly recently, I took this meaning to be that God was threatening Moses. But, why would God threaten to kill the man he has just appointed to be His Mediator, before Moses even got to first base in his assignment? Bottom line: I don’t think the threat was aimed at Moses; it was aimed at his son.

Apparently, Moses’ son (he had 2 sons at this time and most scholars feel this concerned the 2nd son) had not yet been circumcised. And, the Tradition of the early Israelite sages is that Moses knew full well he was to circumcise his son, but Tzipporah wouldn’t let him. It was the man’s, the father’s duty to perform the circumcision on his own son.

Even more, how could the great Mediator, Moses NOT follow God’s instructions to circumcise his own sons? Anyway, we see that Moses was anything but a strong man. He was no born leader! Not even of his own family. So, how in the world was God going to use HIM to lead 3

million stiff-necked Israelites out of bondage? More evidence that it is never by our might, but by the Lord's, that all things are accomplished for good.

Who was Tzipporah mad at? Moses, because he had "chosen" this God that demanded such a thing. See, that was the thinking in those days because men were not chosen by the gods, gods were picked, and sometimes dumped in favor of another, by men. Don't like your gods?.....get a whole new batch! Here we have a good lesson that ancient man, perverted by the Mystery Babylon religious system, thought HE was in control when it came to choosing whom and what to worship.

Now, I won't dwell on this next point, but neither do I want you to miss it. There is an organic connection between circumcision and the Passover. And, between circumcision and Passover and the death of Christ. In every case, something has to die, there is an element of separation from God, and blood is central to the entire event. So, with that in mind let me point out a strange use of Hebrew word in verse 25 that has always had the Rabbis scratching their heads. Yet, I think it has Messianic overtones, and it occurs where it says that Tzipporah "**....cut off her son's foreskin...**" First, notice that it was Tzipporah who did the circumcision. But, more importantly, in Hebrew the word used for "cut off" is **karet**. Now, we've discussed this important Hebrew word before, because it's meaning is that a person is to be separated from God's people, but also to be separated (permanently) from God. When an action of simple cutting....like cutting your finger, or cutting a rope, or cutting up some meat is discussed in the Torah, there are several standard Hebrew words employed such as natach, or gazith, or batar, or milah. In fact, the act of circumcision is called a B'rit milah, because it literally means, "cut a covenant", and circumcision is part of required entry into the community of Hebrews. So, why would the term karet be employed here.....seemingly a complete misuse of the term..... when this is but referring to rather usual action of cutting something....in this case, the cutting of a foreskin?

There is wonderful and prophetic symbolism employed here. The idea of removing the foreskin is that a piece of flesh, part of the corrupted body, must be removed, separated, and die. In fact, the usual Hebrew procedure is that the foreskin must literally be buried in the ground because it is dead.

When the NT speaks of dying to the flesh.....a phrase we've all heard..... it is with the symbolism of circumcision in mind. What dies of the flesh.....in the case of circumcision the male foreskin, in the case of the Passover every person in Egypt who did not bow to the will and offer of redemption of God, and in the case of Christ his physical body.....all are karet; cut off from God. Even Christ shouted out from the Cross, My God, My God, why have you forsaken (left) me? There was a moment when Jesus, the man, in his flesh, was karet.....spiritually cut-off, karet, from the Father.

As time goes on we'll continue to discuss the principle of karet, but we'll leave this for now.

One other thing: we'll see in a later chapter of Exodus (18), Jethro bringing his daughter Tzipporah and her 2 sons out to meet Moses on his return trip from Egypt. One could speculate, fairly easily I think, that just as Moses was hardly of great character at this point in

his life, Tzipporah was not much of a helpmate either. Moses probably sent her home.....either as a direct result of this circumcision episode, or something else.

Vs 27 takes us back, a few days or weeks, to BEFORE Moses began his journey to Egypt. Like we were told earlier, Aaron, Moses' brother, was to play a key role in the coming showdown with Pharaoh. So, God dispatched Aaron to go to Midian to meet Moses, and interestingly, WHERE they met was the Mountain of God, Mt. Sinai/Horeb in Midian. And, there Aaron was filled in on the encounter Moses had with God, and what their mission was to be.

So, the sequence is that Moses and his family leave for their journey to Egypt. The journey takes them back towards the mountain of God. At the mountain of God, Moses runs into Aaron. Aaron then accompanies Moses on the remainder of the trip from Midian to Egypt....about a 175 – 200 mile journey. When they arrived, they immediately gathered the elders, the Hebrew common people's representatives, and Aaron spoke to the elders, and presented all the signs God had given Moses, and just as God had told Moses would happen, the people heard and saw and believed. And, they praised God for it.