

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 3

Chapters 3:16 – 4:31

As Exodus 3:15 begins, Moses was 80 years old and he was still standing at the burning bush. The LORD had just revealed two important things to Moses. First, in Egypt, when the people asked Moses Who sent him to take them out of bondage to the land of milk and honey, Moses answered that the great “I AM” sent him. Second, the LORD revealed that His eternal name that would last forever, past the time of human life on earth, would be *Yehovah Elohim*, the LORD God. It was then time for the LORD to give Moses traveling instructions for his trip to Egypt.

Instruction to Moses

Exodus 3: 16 "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ' The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, ' I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷ "So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'" ¹⁸ "And they will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt, and you will say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' ¹⁹ "But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. ²⁰ "So I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go. ²¹ "And I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. ²² "But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians."

"Go and gather the elders of Israel together" was the instruction of the LORD to Moses. It has often been taught by many teachers that the “elders” were the formal leaders of the government among the Israelites. It is very unlikely that the Israelites were allowed to have a government of any kind during the time of their bondage in Egypt. The taskmasters were the controllers of their society. Therefore, the “elders” were not necessarily formal leaders among the tribes; however, that does not mean that elders did not exist among the people. In every society throughout all of humanity, certain people have risen to the top as the unofficial leaders who are sought out to be the spokesmen for the common people. Because the Hebrew word for “elder” means *old*, the Israelites may have looked



Map 7: Artist Unknown. Pink area designates land mentioned in Exodus 3:8 & 17

to the oldest patriarchs of each clan as their spokesmen. Later in this book, Moses will name the oldest patriarchs. Mostly likely, the elders of Israel were a mixture of both. The oldest patriarchs were the official elders; the natural leaders were the unofficial elders. These elders were to accompany Moses on his visits to Pharaoh.

Moses was to ask Pharaoh to let the Israelites go “**a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.**” It is obvious from the words of the LORD that Pharaoh would refuse that original request. A “three days’ journey” to the east would put them at the border of Egypt and the beginning of the wilderness of Beersheba, essentially at the lower west border of the Promised Land.



Map 8: Three day journey from Goshen

The LORD says, “**I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it.**” The prophecy was in place; the miracles of the LORD would come upon Egypt. Other translations use the word *wonders* instead of miracles. Often we hear about the signs and wonders or signs and miracles of God. Sometimes a miracle is called a sign of God and at other times a sign is called a miracle. The interchangeable use of the two different Hebrew words can and has caused some confusion in interpretation. In the Old Testament, a sign, the Hebrew word *oth*, points people to God. A wonder or miracle, the Hebrew word *mopheth*, is a special manifestation of God’s power. What the LORD intends to do will not be signs, they will be miracles! We must ask the question, “Can a miracle of God’s act as a sign?” Yes! As will be seen, the miracles of God can and will act as signs to the unbelieving that He is at work. They do not guarantee a change of heart or a belief in Him.

Here is a perfect place to discuss the importance of proper biblical interpretation. As Moses was recording the stories in the first five books of the Bible, he was laying the foundation for the entire Word of God “once for all.” At the end of the New Testament, as the LORD was completing His written Word to humanity “once for all,” He had Jude write the following:

Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly **for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.** ⁴ For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. ⁵ Now I desire to remind you, **though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe.**

Notice that by the time of Jude in 96 AD, all that was needed to enter into the faith and live in the grace and salvation of God had been delivered to the church. No further instruction would be given. No prophecy would be added, no detail would be omitted, no element of the LORD’s plan would be overlooked; everything that people needed to know had “once for all” been delivered to the saints of God. In the first five books of the Bible, the seeds of the LORD’s knowledge and plan were being planted. Throughout the rest of the Bible the seeds of the

LORD's knowledge would be nurtured and matured to their fullest. Because the one mind of the Holy Spirit guided the engraving of the written WORD of God, the Scripture must be used to interpret the Scripture to discover the truth of the LORD's intent in the context of every passage. Therefore, as we see in this passage the LORD is saying, **"So I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles;"** so, too, all the miracles throughout the rest of the Bible belong to the LORD. They are His actions and no one else can produce a miracle. With Elijah and Elisha in the book of Second Kings, the miracles were the doings of the LORD. With Jesus in the Gospels, the miracles were the deeds of the LORD. With the Apostles in the book of Acts, the miracles were the actions of the LORD. In the end times in the book of Revelation, the miracles will be the feats of the LORD. Humans cannot perform miracles; however, the LORD will use humans to announce the coming of a miracle. In the Scripture, the LORD used prophets to record the future miracles that the LORD will perform. Since the completion of the WORD of God was delivered "once for all," preachers are to proclaim and teach the fulfilled and coming miracles that are recorded in the Bible. They cannot add to those miracles and they dare not diminish them. Nevertheless, all miracles belong to the LORD Who enacts them. That is not to say that the LORD is not still in the miracle working business in the lives of His people today, but His miraculous acts since the completion of His WORD are not as blatant as the staff turning into a serpent or the withered and healed hand or the water from the Nile turning to blood. Today, in His will and Divine plan, He provides for the needs of humans by working all things for their good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.²² The working of all things for the good of the saints is a miracle in itself but not blatantly open to the eyes of all. With that said, when a miracle is presented in the Scripture or in the world today, it is the LORD's miracle, performed and completed by Him and no one else. It belongs to Him!

"And I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians." The LORD goes on to state that Israelite women will ask the Egyptian women for gifts of silver, gold and clothing. When the children of Jacob moved to Egypt 430 years before, it was the pharaoh who clothed and provided for them. At this time, the women of Egypt will offer the provisions. As such, we can infer that the Israelite and Egyptian women lived in harmony in the region and had a great love for each other. Surely the Egyptian men would be afraid of retaliation from Pharaoh if they had given gifts to the Israelites, but the LORD would bless Israel through the hearts of the women of Egypt.

Miracle of the Rod and Serpent

Exodus 4:1 **Then Moses answered and said, "What if they will not believe me, or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'"** ² **And the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff."** ³ **Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.** ⁴ **But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp *it* by its tail"-- so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand--** ⁵ **"that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."**

²² Romans 8:28

When Moses complained to the LORD about the possible disbelief among the elders of Israel, the LORD armed Moses with three miracles. The first was turning Moses' staff into a serpent. Notice that when the LORD had Moses cast his rod on the ground, the LORD turned it into a serpent; it was not Moses who performed the miracle but the LORD. In the future, when Moses needed to show the power of the LORD, he could throw his staff to the ground and the LORD would change it into a serpent. Moses and the staff were tools used by the LORD to show His mighty power to the Egyptians.

Miracle of the Withered Hand

Exodus 4:6 And the LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷ Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again; and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like *the rest of his flesh*. ⁸ "And it shall come about that if they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.

The second miracle that the LORD provided to Moses was the leprous hand. We are not sure whether or not the leprosy of Moses' day was the same disease as that of the modern era. Nevertheless, it is evident that people of Moses' day were fearful of that type of leprosy. Leprosy was rarely cured and considered highly contagious. To see a hand with the dead white flesh hanging off the bone restored immediately was to truly see a miracle of God. As before, it was a tool given to Moses to prove that he was there in the name of the LORD God Almighty. When Moses needed a miracle, the staff and the leprous hand were readily available to Moses although it would be the LORD doing the action.

Miracle of the Blood in the Nile

Exodus 4:9 "But it shall be that if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

The third miracle of God at the disposal of Moses involved the water from the Nile turning to blood. To the Egyptians, the Nile was their source of life and essential to continued life. For Moses to show the Egyptians that his God had power over the Nile was to signify that God had power over all of Egypt.

Moses' Speech Excuse

Exodus 4:10 Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

"Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent," was Moses' way of saying he was not trained in public speaking. To say he was "slow of speech and slow of tongue" means he was not a person of many words. Whether or not that is truly the case, Stephen, in Acts 7:22, stated that Moses

was “powerful in word and deed.” Moses was well educated as an Egyptian but to speak for the LORD against the Egyptians was a task for which he had not been trained.

Creator of Mouth, Ears and Eyes

Exodus 4:11 And the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

The LORD did not allow Moses to get away with his complaints. In three questions to Moses the LORD made it clear that He could prepare Moses for the task of speaking to Pharaoh.

Moses' Reply

Exodus 4:13 But he said, "Please, Lord, now send *the message* by whomever Thou wilt."

"Please, Lord, now send *the message* by whomever Thou wilt," was Moses' way of saying to the LORD, "Please send your message by someone else." Moses was turning down the offer to be the LORD's spokesman to pharaoh.

Aaron on the Way to Meet Moses

Exodus 4:14 Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵ "And you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. ¹⁶ "Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and it shall come about that he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be as God to him. ¹⁷ "And you shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."

Moses had refused the LORD's direction and it angered the LORD. However, the LORD would not allow Moses to refuse. If Moses did not think that he had the ability to speak to Pharaoh, then he could teach his brother Aaron the message and Aaron would speak for the LORD. Notice that the LORD states that Aaron was already on the way to seek out Moses. We often forget that the LORD is omnipresent. He was speaking to Moses at the same time He was speaking to Aaron.

Moses Request Leave from Jethro

Exodus 4:18 Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

Out of respect, Moses delivered Jethro's flock back to the homestead and asked permission to travel to Egypt to check on his family. If this request was the extent of all the conversation, Moses did not reveal to Jethro the massive task the LORD had assigned him to do. Furthermore, we do not know if this was the first time Moses attempted to return to Egypt; he had been in Midian 40 years.

Moses' Foes Dead in Egypt

Exodus 4:19 **Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead."**

"For all the men who were seeking your life are dead." Moses must have been fearful to return to Egypt and the LORD sought to calm that feeling with this statement. Who could have been the men who wanted Moses dead? First, Moses' adopted brother Amenhotep I who was Pharaoh when Moses left Egypt had many reasons to want Moses dead. In the beginning of Exodus 3, Amenhotep I stated that he wanted to kill Moses after Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. More than that, and most likely, Amenhotep I would have wanted to protect the throne from Moses becoming Pharaoh, thus, wanting him dead. The male child of Amenhotep I had equal reasons for wanting the death of Moses who was a threat to his possibility of becoming pharaoh one day because he was not a full-blooded Egyptian royal; his mother was a concubine; therefore, Moses' adoptive status put him in a higher position of authority than Thutmose I's place in the family line. But Thutmose I had already died by this time and so had his son, Thutmose II who had served as Pharaoh for 14 years. Hatshepsut, Thutmose II's sister had been acting as Pharaoh for about 20 years but was now very sick with cancer and would die in just a year or so. Thutmose III, who was now 22 years old and was serving as co-regent with his aunt, Hatshepsut, came into power of his own because of her sickness. Hatshepsut had a reason to want Moses dead but with Thutmose III on the throne it seems that, for her, Moses could not have been a threat to the royalty anymore. Thutmose III was young and powerful. According to Egyptian history, he and Hatshepsut had been involved in a major military campaign previously to force all the domains of Egypt to be loyal to the throne; that process was near completion when the LORD called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. Until this time in the story, Thutmose III could not have been concerned about Moses at all.

Moses' Departure

Exodus 4:20 **So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.**

The domain of Egypt began at the western border of Midian. For 40 years Moses had not been far from the domain of his Egyptian roots. Horeb and Mount Sinai were within a half days journey from the line between the two nations. Moses, Zipporah and his sons left Jethro and headed toward Egypt. Perhaps it was a few days' journey even to the mountain of God from Jethro's home. Moses would have to find lodging each night on the journey that was more than 250 miles. Even when traveling on donkeys, the journey would take almost 30 days.



Map 9: Boundary line between Egypt and Midian

In this passage we see that Moses had "sons." We do not know exactly how old the sons were but Gershom and Eliezer were their names.

Final Instruction

Exodus 4:21 **And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. ²² "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, " Israel is My son, My first-born. ²³ "So I said to you, ' Let My son go, that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your first-born.'"**

The LORD's final instruction to Moses foretold the result of the last plague on Egypt. Here it was directed at Pharaoh's firstborn son specifically but as we will see, the sin of Pharaoh's hard heart will affect every Egyptian family with the death of the firstborn. That plague will be a mighty miracle of the LORD. Only the LORD can direct a plague that will target just the firstborn in every Egyptian family and pass over the homes of the Israelites.

LORD Sought to Kill

Exodus 4:24 **Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. ²⁵ Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw *it* at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." ²⁶ So He let him alone. At that time she said, "*You are a bridegroom of blood*"-- because of the circumcision.**

Obviously, this passage is difficult to understand. Somewhere along the way to Egypt, Moses stopped with his family for the night for this event. Because of the context of verse 27 in this chapter, they were probably in the wilderness of Horeb by Mount Sinai, the same place where Moses had seen the burning bush on the mountain. In this passage, the LORD sought to put someone to death. Whom did the LORD seek to put to death? Moses, Gershom or Eliezer? Why did Zipporah quickly circumcise her son? Which son was not circumcised? Whom did the LORD let alone after the circumcision? Moses, Gershom or Eliezer?

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham; they circumcised their sons on the eighth day of life. For some reason, one of the sons of Moses was not circumcised and we do not know which one. Moses was about to go to the entire nation of Israel with an uncircumcised son, an abomination in the eyes of the Israelites. The law matters to the LORD. He had issued the decree that if a male child, servant or hired slave was not circumcised, he could not remain in the family of the descendants of Abraham. The appearance of the LORD at that lodging place that day was a wakeup call to Moses to get his family in order. Zipporah understood the problem and made the correction. From the context of the LORD's final instruction to Moses concerning Pharaoh's firstborn, it is reasonable to surmise that Zipporah circumcised her first born, Gershom.

Zipporah's statement, "***You are a bridegroom of blood***" is a mystery to all. Any commentary is only speculation.

LORD Speaks to Aaron at Mountain of God

Exodus 4:27 **Now the LORD said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." So he went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him.**

Aaron had been on his way for almost a month by this time and he found Moses, Zipporah and his nephews at “the mountain of God,” Sinai. It had been 40 years since the two brothers had seen each other.

Conversation between Brother

Exodus 4:28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him *to do*.

Evidently, Aaron had sought to find Prince Moses to see what he could do to help with the affliction on his people back in Egypt. Aaron could not have imagined the story Moses was about to tell him!

Moses and Aaron in Egypt

Exodus 4:29 Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; ³⁰ and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people.

Together, Aaron and Moses traveled to Egypt to meet with the elders as directed. Theologians disagree as to whether Zipporah and the two sons continued with Moses to Egypt from this point. Some say she returned to her father’s house, others say she continued with them, but most ignore the subject. We will take the position that she continued on the trip. In Egypt, as expected, Moses spoke with the elders and the LORD performed the miracles as a sign to the people.

Belief of the Nation of Israel in Moses

Exodus 4:31 So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.

The miracles acted as a sign to lead the Israelites to worship the LORD just as they were designed. They bowed their heads to their knees and then knelt to the ground with their foreheads touching the earth. In that position, every vertebra of the backbone is bent from the head to the tail as well as the elbows and the knees. It is how we should worship the LORD even today.