

JOURNEY
into a
God-Filled
LIFE



God at Work for His People
Studies from the Life of Moses

CLARK TATUM

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Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Introduction	vii
1. The Great Oppression <i>(Exodus 1:1 – 2:15)</i>	1
2. Lessons from the Wilderness <i>(Exodus 2:15 – 4:17)</i>	21
3. The Big Question <i>(Exodus 4:18 – 6:1)</i>	37
4. God Is Big Enough <i>(Exodus 6:1 – 8:19)</i>	51
5. The Difference God Makes <i>(Exodus 8:20 – 10:29)</i>	69
6. God Makes His Point <i>(Exodus 11:1 – 13:16)</i>	83
7. God Takes Off the Wheels <i>(Exodus 13:17 – 15:21)</i>	97
8. The Promise of Provision <i>(Exodus 15:22 – 18:27)</i>	111
9. Mountain Meetings with God <i>(Exodus 19:1 – 20:21)</i>	129
10. Commands with Eternal Principles <i>(Exodus 20:1-17 / Exodus 31:18-32:35)</i>	145
11. The Golden Mistake <i>(Exodus 32:1 – 32:35)</i>	161
12. The Long Way Around <i>(Exodus 13:1 – 14:45)</i>	177
13. The Last Mountain Moses Climbed <i>(Numbers 20:1-12 / Deuteronomy 32:44-35:12)</i>	189

Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated in memory of
John Sparks
in appreciation for the spiritual encouragement,
Christian example, and friendship he showed me and my family.

John Sparks was a towel-carrying, cross-bearing disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was an imitator of His “Rabbi” Jesus. He was an honest, transparent, multi-talented, hard-working, and loving servant of Jesus Christ. He served joyfully as an elder in the church of Christ and was a servant of servants. The term “elder” in the Bible also refers to a man serving as an “shepherd” who watches over and cares about the flock of God’s people. The work of shepherding requires learning to love people like Jesus loves us. John Spark’s ministry was one of caring about the needs of others and touching lives with the Spirit of Jesus. John went about doing good and helping the hurting, encouraging the down-hearted, and looking after the widows and widowers. I will never forget how passionate John was about caring for and loving individuals going through difficult times. The way John loved people inspires me to run my race and cross the finish line with faith in God.

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Introduction

The journey of Moses is a transformation of how God wants to work in us and through us. In fact, God must work in us before He can work through us. This principle is valid in both the Old and New Testaments. The life of Moses is a trip from being self-centered and wanting to do things his way to becoming God-centered and doing things God's way. We could say, "Those God Assigns, He Refines." God refines His faith followers so they can live God-filled lives. God's refining work in us is both a natural and sometimes a painful part of walking with God. God refines us because He cares about us. Psalm 66:10, *"For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver."* Moses will learn through God's refining process that God's way is always the right way. God's refining method frees us from the things that bog us down and keep us from strengthening our spiritual muscles. God's purpose in refining us is to keep us walking closely with God and experiencing His spiritual blessings. God is at work for His people through His refining process.

God's refining process is not limited to the days of Moses. Christians can know God is still at work in behalf of His people. The

Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:6-9, ⁶*“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* Christians are shielded or guarded by the power of God, which means there is no trial we can experience, if we hold faith, that God’s power cannot bring us to glory. God is all-powerful, but it is faith in God and obedience to Him throughout the Bible that makes up the formula through which God gives us victory. Bible faith (Romans 10:17) puts us in touch with God’s power. Perhaps God’s favorite place to do His refining work in the life of Moses was a literal wilderness, for us it might be a figurative wilderness. Nevertheless, Moses through God’s refining process experienced a God-filled life and we can experience that kind of life today through our faith in Christ. God called Moses and equipped him to deliver God’s people from their harsh bondage in Egypt. In the process Moses, along with the people of God, will be tested with various trials that presented them the opportunity to grow in their faith and trust in God.

If we have ever been to an amusement park, we have likely seen a sign at the beginning of some rides that will warn us in advance by saying – “You are going to get wet on this ride.” We may hear people on these types of rides scream as water shoots across their raft or splashes them in the face. At the end of these rides these water-drenched folks are dripping wet. Strangely enough, despite the screams and wet clothes, most folks are laughing because that is why they came to the park in the first place. They wanted to experience the adventure of a refreshing body jerking ride across the rapids. There is something about these types of rides that appeals to

us. Today the reality of a day at a high-priced modern amusement park is not primarily hazardous to our health, but rather to our wallet. The reality of the “daring adventure” at an amusement park ride represents nothing, but a relatively low-risk desire for a short-lived diversion of real life. When we choose to follow God, as did Moses, there is no diversion from real life – it is life. Make no mistake about it walking with God is absolutely the best life, but it is not a casual ride in some amusement park. Jesus told us in advance *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

Trials put our faith under fire, but God uses our trials to refine us and purify us. Some folks live with chronic physical pain. Others suffer from broken friendships, failed marriages, defiant children, or stressful pressures at work. Everyone has to deal with trials, it is just some trials are more visible. Moses had his share of trials, but Moses’ faith walk reminds us that God’s grace is sufficient for every hardship. The apostle offers reassurance to us who persevere under trial because our trials on earth are short in comparison to eternity. Trials and trouble help us see the value of our enduring faith. Faith, Peter says, is *“of greater worth than gold”* (1 Peter 1:7). Not only is gold beautiful; it is a symbol of things that last. Gold rings last for centuries, but even gold eventually, *“perishes even though refined by fire”* (1 Peter 1:7). The testing of our faith proves the authenticity of our faith. God uses trials to refine our faith, for a faith that cannot be tested and stand cannot be trusted. By the grace of God Moses’s life was refined to lead God’s people burdened by Egyptian slavery back to Him. In the process God moved Moses from Despair Drive, Regret Road, and Self-Help Avenue to the place where peace and hope resides. This study of Moses can keep us from being self-centered and equip us to become more God-centered so we too can experience a God-filled life.

Chapter 1

The Great Oppression

(Exodus 1:1 – 2:15)

There are certain events in the history of any nation that are so pivotal that they shape that country for generations. One of the most pivotal events in the history of this country was the Great Depression. We could not have lived through the Great Depression without it changing our life. The people who lived through that time period were changed people. The Great Depression changed people's values, it changed their attitude toward money, and it changed their overall outlook on what was important. If we were to ask a Hebrew, "What's the greatest event in your nation's history? What's the one thing that shaped your nation for generations and centuries to come?" The answer would likely be, "The Exodus out of Egypt." For Israel it was not the Great Depression, but the Great Oppression. We really cannot understand the Exodus unless we understand the Great Oppression and how the bondage and brutality begins for Israel in Egypt. Therefore, before the Book of Exodus even mentions the name of Moses, we learn some important details about the Great Oppression and what life was like before Moses came on the scene.

The story in Exodus is a continuation of the story that started back in the Book of Genesis. To appreciate the story of Moses' walk of faith, which will help us in our personal walk with God, we need to understand how the Israelites got into the land of Egypt in the first place. It was a story that began with a promise made to Abraham of how God would bless Abraham's descendants and bring them to the land of Canaan. That promise was repeated to his son Isaac, and his son Jacob and his twelve sons, one of whom was Joseph. Joseph was mistreated by his brothers, sold as a slave and Joseph ended up down in the land of Egypt. There he was oppressed, treated unfairly, lied about, thrown into prison unjustly, but God was with him and eventually Joseph rose to become the second most powerful man in all the land. Through Joseph's God given wisdom he would save Egypt from a famine as well as his own family, including his brothers who tried to harm him. At the end of Genesis there was a great reunion with Joseph's family and when Pharaoh found out that Joseph's family was coming to Egypt, he shows kindness as a favor to Joseph. Pharaoh said to Joseph in Genesis 45:18, *"bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land."* The Israelites enjoyed the good life in Egypt for many years but in time the circumstances changed due to a change of Egyptian leadership. The Israelites who had been brought into Egypt by invitation of Joseph had grown into a great nation and after Joseph's death the new Pharaoh forced Israel into slavery. When a new ruler came to power according Exodus 1:8 virtually overnight, the Hebrew people became slaves. The oppression lasted at least 125 years and perhaps much longer.

Exodus 1:6-22, ⁶*"Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, ⁷but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them. ⁸Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. ⁹'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become much too numerous for us.*

¹⁰Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.' ¹¹So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹²But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly. ¹⁵The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ¹⁶'When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.' ¹⁷The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, 'Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?' ¹⁹The midwives answered Pharaoh, 'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.' ²⁰So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. ²²Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.'"

Some of us have had hard times that lasted a day, a month, a year, or even more. But the Hebrew oppression lasted no less than 125 years. Think about that. They were not just slaves for a year, or a decade, or even a century, but for generations. There were basically two reasons why Egypt at this time chose to oppress the Israelites.

1. The Egyptians were prejudiced. The Israelites were different from the Egyptians and their cultures were much different. In fact, back in Genesis 46:34, when Joseph's family came to Egypt Joseph told them, "Shepherds are detestable to Egyptians." Shepherds were commoners and besides there was that smell that goes along with being a shepherd. Therefore, the Israelites were put over in the land

of Goshen, away from the rest of Egypt. Now you can hide a family of shepherds, but you cannot hide a nation of shepherds.

2. They also were oppressed because of fear. Now they did not dread the Israelites as long as they were a little group over on that side of town, but when they started growing in size, the Egyptians decided they need to do something in terms of national defense. The new king of Egypt did not know about Joseph and decided it was best for the Egyptians to oppress the Israelites. He enslaved them and assigned them to hard labor. Perhaps his thought process was, "I'm going to make their lives so miserable and work them so hard, they are going to be too tired to reproduce and it will decrease their number." But Pharaoh's cruelty could not stop God from blessing Israel. The more Pharaoh oppressed God's people; the more Israel multiplied.

Pharaoh then tried a much more sinister plan. His plan was to make it look like the male Hebrew babies were stillborn. He told the midwives who were likely in charge of the team of midwives who assisted in delivering the babies to do a terrible thing. *"When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live"* (Exodus 1:16). Thank God, there were two faithful Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah who feared God. Pharaoh did not count on this, but they feared God more than they feared the most powerful ruler in Egypt. These women understood that life is sacred. They understood what God creates in the womb; no king on the outside of the womb has a right to touch and they would not do what Pharaoh said. And when he asked them why they didn't do it, they said, *"Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive"* (Exodus 1:19). It was likely true the midwives were arriving too late, but their late arrival was likely planned and they kept that to themselves. If they were deliberately arriving late that could have been easily detected by the Egyptian police under a surveillance detail. If this was what was happening

these women ran a risk of detection and execution. A half-truth to Pharaoh or not, they loved God and chose to prevent death of innocent babies. It is obvious God endorsed their conviction that life is sacred and blessed them. God blessed them for their willingness to face persecution in order to save the children.

Pharaoh is now frustrated because his plan of hard labor failed in slowing the birthrate of the Israelites. He is frustrated because his plot to murder babies under the radar did not work. Pharaoh now moves to all out in the open plan of ruthlessly killing baby boys. *"Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live'"* (Exodus 1:22). It was an absolutely horrible thing to do. God took the evil intended for His people and turned it around and brought some good out of it. God takes the wicked plan of Pharaoh and turn it against him. Pharaoh has no idea that the plan he came up with is going to wind up bringing the boy who will deliver Israel to grow up in his very own palace. The beginning of the book of Exodus is not the setting up of a duel between the Pharaoh and Moses, it is setting up a duel between Pharaoh and God. We will be looking at the life of Moses and how God-filled his heart to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but the main character in the Exodus is God. Exodus gives us a picture of Pharaoh setting himself up against God, whom Moses serves.

Pharaoh picks a fight in essence not with Moses, but with God. I think that is important because we live in a culture where people are constantly picking fights with the very God they refuse to acknowledge exists. It does not matter if it is a nation or an individual, God will ultimately win that fight. If we oppress people, if we abuse people, if we use people, we are picking a fight with God and God does not lose in the end. The king that ordered the murder of the baby boys of Israel set in motion a series of events that eventually would result in the boys in his own nation and his own household being killed. This king who said throw the babies into the river and drown them will witness his whole army be submerged to their

death. No one who picks a fight with God wins. That should bring to our hearts a word of hope. There are countless people in this world living under oppression (often religious oppression) forbidding them doing what we are able to do on the Lord's Day and worship the God of creation. We can own Bibles and not be arrested or killed in our country, but it is not the same in some places of our world. As we are trying to do God's will and make spiritual progress, have we ever felt like that we are going one way and everyone else is coming against us in the opposite direction? It is hard to go against the world's flow coming at us, but it is always right to go God's way.

Three things to remember when times get tough and we are being persecuted:

1. Oppression Will Not Escape God's Notice. If we are going through a rough time, we need to understand God is aware of it. The struggle sometimes is to believe God notices what we are dealing with when it does not seem like He's paying attention, but He is. Later in the book we will hear God tell Moses, *"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering"* (Exodus 3:7). God was at work to bring about a deliverer long before anybody knew anything about it. Some of us will remember a time when we prayed fervently for God to do something to help us, and it seemed like He was not hearing our prayer, but He did hear it and did notice.

2. Oppression Will Force You to Take Sides. That is one of the things about oppression -- it will always force a person to take sides. The key question in the book of Exodus is, "Who will Israel serve?" We have to make a choice. Is God going to be our salvation, or is Egypt, or something else, going to be our salvation? Be careful in making the choice because salvation only comes by way of God. The

sad thing at this time is most of the Israelites dealt with their oppression by looking to Egypt instead of their Creator. There is an interesting subplot in the book of Exodus. Most people think the main plot in Exodus is, "Can God get Israel out of Egypt?" But the bigger question in this book: "Can God get Egypt out of Israel?" Because even after the Exodus, after all the plagues, after they had walked through the Red Sea parted by God's mighty hand, when anything bad happened in the desert wilderness the people had a rebellious heart toward God. Deuteronomy 9:7, *"Remember this and never forget how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD."* It was not just the Egyptians who forgot about Joseph and his God, it was the Israelites themselves. Pressure from the world around us can make us forget who we are. Just like the Israelites, we as Christians are in danger of losing our identity.

3. Oppression Cannot Erase God's Promises. There is no king, visible or invisible, who can ever stop the intentions of God. Many years earlier God told Abraham in Genesis 15:13-14, ¹³*"Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. ¹⁴But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.'"* Hang onto God's promises because God has never told a lie. Truth is, just like those Israelites, we are sojourners in a land that is not the land God has prepared for us. Someday Jesus will come back to take us to the Heavenly Promised Land, but until then may this world know that we follow God. Jesus said in Luke 11:23, *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters."*

As we begin examining the life of Moses who by God's providence shaped history, we must consider that if it were not for some godly women the story of Moses would look much different. Pharaoh orders that every Hebrew boy had to be thrown in the Nile River which meant nothing less than mass murder of innocent babies. The

second chapter of Exodus could be entitled: "Battles and Babies" with a subtitle: "God uses women to deliver the deliverer." Exodus 2:1-10, ¹"Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, ²and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. ⁵Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. ⁶She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. 'This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said. ⁷Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?' ⁸'Yes, go,' she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰When the child grew older; she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'"

How do we normally feel when a child is born into our family? When we become that parent or grandparent? Don't we feel happy and sort of proud? How do we feel when we hear about a neighbor or good friend having a baby? Good, right? Well, that was taking place all over Israel. The Israelite people were also proud and they said, "Isn't that great another baby," and the Israelites were having baby showers all the time. Not only were there babies being born and the nation was growing in number, but also their crops were doing well. Their herds were growing and their influence was growing. Things were looking mighty good for Israel but it all came to a screeching halt when a new king came to power in Egypt. The new Pharaoh didn't like the way the Israelites were growing and having so many babies. He reasoned that the baby boys would grow up and become men causing potential problems to his reign so he had

his people oppress the Israelites. However, that didn't slow the birth rate. In fact, the Bible says, "*the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread*" (Exodus 1:9). This led the Egyptians to work the Israelites ruthlessly. Things have dramatically changed for the Israelites since the generation of Joseph had died. The Israelites were no longer saying, "Look at my herd," "Look at my crops." They were now saying, "Look what the Egyptians are making us do." Bad times had come and if things were not bad enough already, they soon became worse.

There was no joy in their nation anymore; no joy in their children being born anymore, their lives had become bitter and they cannot do anything about it because Pharaoh has the upper hand. Pharaoh basically said, "If we can't stop them from growing by making them slaves and if we can't slow them down by severely oppressing them, I will talk to the Hebrew midwives and solve the problem. But as mentioned Pharaoh did not count on these women being so courageous and faithful to God (Exodus 1:17). When Pharaoh's original plans did not work, he gave the order to let every girl live, but kill the boys by throwing them in the river. Now think about that, can you imagine the emotion you would feel now to hear the news that you were going to have a baby. There is no excitement or joy now to hear that your daughter was going to be with child. Instead of thinking about all the things that child would be able to do, we would be weighed down in heart because of all the things he would not be able to do. We can only imagine the feeling of knowing that your child to be born was to be thrown into the river? We cannot fully comprehend the thought of being forced to throw our child into a river full of crocodiles and poisonous snakes. And consequently, the Israelites do what we would try and do and that is hide their newborn boys. Oh no we are going to have a baby; is there any way we can hide the boy? At this point it would not just be frustration, it is not just anger, it is flat out fear.

In Exodus chapter 2, a family who already had 2 children, a son named Aaron and a daughter named Miriam, learn that they were going to have another child. God uses Moses's mother, Jochebed and her daughter Miriam, and the daughter of Pharaoh to deliver the deliverer. What we have here are three more women God used to deliver the deliverer. Jochebed gives birth to a healthy baby boy and she was able to hide him for 3 months, but finally it comes the day that they cannot hide him anymore and she gets a plan of her own. It is her plan but we cannot read this section about little baby Moses without being strengthened in our faith. Hebrews 11:23, *"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."* What the parents of Moses did was a direct result of their faith in God. The size of our faith is always going to be limited by the size of our God. Get this – Pharaoh planned to kill all the baby boys of Israel so that they will never raise a leader to lead them out of here. But the one deliverer who would lead them out of Egypt was brought up in Pharaoh's palace – the safest place in Egypt. Who paid for Moses' groceries? Pharaoh. Who paid for his doctor's bills? Pharaoh. Who paid for his first chariot license? Pharaoh. Who paid for his college education? Pharaoh. It makes us wonder if there is anything we need to put in our basket and trust God will work for our good?

Moses was not simply lucky; it was within the providence of God that Jochebed devises a plan. Jochebed was not simply lucky to find herself raising her own child in Pharaoh's house and getting paid for it when her child, was to have been destroyed by the orders of Pharaoh himself. Absorb what is happening here. Moses' mother gets a plan and God is working through it. Her plan involved a basket and the Nile River. I think we sometimes have this pictured all wrong. We get the idea she just put little Moses in a basket, set it in the water, gave it a shove down the river and said, "Bye, bye, honey." No, she did not send her son down the river that way. She

intentionally secured the basket in the reeds at a particular spot. We can be fairly confident that she put him in that spot on the river because she knew the bathing habits of Pharaoh's daughter. She hid the baby there so that he would be found. I think she was counting on the tears of her child to reach something that lies deeper than all the differences of race and culture. God saw that she was right.

When Pharaoh's daughter opened that basket, and saw that little baby crying she had compassion for him and felt sorry for him. Pharaoh's daughter was touched and responded exactly the way Jochebed prayed that she would respond. This is when the second part of Jochebed's plan went into effect – little Miriam ran up to her. We would not be surprised if Jochebed had rehearsed that scenario with her daughter a number of times before that day. Certainly, there was some coaching that went on about what to say and how to say it. While Pharaoh's daughter was looking for a suitable nursemaid, Miriam came up and said in Exodus 1:7b, *"Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"* The result was Jochebed got the best job in all the world – she got paid to be the mother of her own child and her nurturing was not just physical. Pharaoh's daughter asked Jochebed to raise and nourish the baby, and she nourished Moses, but in more ways than food. She fed him from the faith of her fathers and gave him the foundation of a religious heritage that spoke of God the Creator. The Hebrew writer would later say, ²⁴*"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time"* (Hebrews 11:24-25). Jochebed instilled in little Moses a sense of loyalty to the children of Israel, but even more important than that, she instilled within him a commitment to the God of Israel. This loving and godly mother poured God's teaching into his heart, soul, and mind.

Four things we learn about God at this part of the story:

- 1. God always has a remnant.**
- 2. God does not always do what seems logical to us.**
- 3. God makes foolish the wisdom of men.**
- 4. God is at work (a continued theme in the Exodus story).**

No matter how hard times are, there will always be some who will not bow down and worship the kings or the gods of this world. God does not always do what seems logical to us. Think about this. Amram and Jochebed already had a son named Aaron. He was a past the age of anyone throwing him in river because he was already three years old. So why did not God just use Aaron? Would not that be more logical? One thing about God is, sometimes it does not make sense why He chooses who He does to us, but God is always right! For example, why did He choose Samson? He certainly had his faults. Why did He choose Peter? He was always sticking his foot in his mouth. Or why did He choose that persecutor Paul to be so prominent in the mission work of the early church? While we are considering this line of thought we might ask ourselves, "Why did he choose us? Why did he choose me?" Yes, God loves us, but He loves everyone. We do not know why God chose Moses instead of Aaron, but we can know God knows what He's doing even if it makes no sense to us. Maybe he wanted Moses to experience firsthand what deliverance was all about. God makes foolish the wisdom of men. Think about it. It is so ironic that Pharaoh's means of execution -- the river -- becomes Moses' means of salvation. Isn't it ironic that Pharaoh kills all the boys and lets the girls live and then it is a Hebrew girl who comes up with a rescue plan to spare the life of Moses? Isn't it ironic that Moses' mother saves Moses by doing exactly what Pharaoh wanted her to do -- put him in the river? Isn't it ironic that a member of the royal court would raise the boy who would one day destroy that very court?

Isn't it ironic that Moses a Hebrew boy, would receive the best education Egypt could offer anyone at the expense of Egypt? And here is what's really ironic. The first two chapters of Exodus tells us that the mightiest man on the face of the earth is outsmarted by several women. Women play such an important role in the deliverance of the great deliverer and we know what is happening is no accident – "God is at work!" The mightiest and most powerful of men picked a fight with God and God used the weak and powerless to bring him down. In Egypt, God worked through the weak and the lowly to embarrass the high and the mighty. God will do it again several thousand years later. A baby will be born and a king will say "kill him," but God will use shepherds, some Gentiles, a poor carpenter and he will frustrate that king, and baby Jesus will be spared.

There is a cute story I heard a while back about a mother who had two children. She had a 3-year-old daughter named Sarah and 6-month-old son named Nathan. This mother was talking to a friend on the phone when she noticed that the kids were no longer in front of the television where she left them. She could not hear them anywhere, so she put the phone down, went looking through the house and found them back in Sarah's room. The problem with that was Nathan could not crawl and Sarah had been given strict instructions not to carry him. The mother knew she was going to have to discipline her daughter and she said, "Sarah, you know you are not supposed to carry Nathan!" Sarah said, "But I did not carry Nathan." The mother asked, "Then how did he get back here in your room?" Sarah said, "I rolled him." There is an interesting story behind "how Moses went from there (in the basket in the river) to here (a grown man in the palace of Pharaoh). Moses' story is also interesting on how he went from here to there in that at one point in time, Moses was a young ruler in the most powerful country in the world of his day. But he went from the palace of Pharaoh to becoming a fugitive in land of Midian. In Exodus 2:11-15 we find the

answer to how Moses went from being prince of Egypt to being a fugitive in Midian? ¹¹ *“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. ¹²Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, ‘Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?’ ¹⁴The man said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?’ Then Moses was afraid and thought, ‘What I did must have become known.’ ¹⁵When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well” (Exodus 2:11-15).*

The Bible tells us Moses lived to be 120 years old (Deuteronomy 34:7). There were 40 years in Pharaoh’s palace as prince of Egypt, 40 years spent as a shepherd in the land of Midian, and 40 years as deliverer and leader of the Israelite people. Most of the biblical record we have deals with the last 40 years of his life. Moses may have spent the first forty years thinking he was somebody, his second forty years learning he was nobody, and his last forty years learning what God can do with a nobody. That idea is worth considering for we know God can do a great deal when we walk by faith. Walking by faith will fill our hearts full of the goodness of God. Moses was a person with access to tremendous riches and power in Egypt. Hebrews 11:26 says, *“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”* The idea here is “all the treasures of Egypt” were at his disposal, but he chose Christ to be the greater value. Moses was educated in Egypt to be a great leader. Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7:22 tells us, *“Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.”* Moses may have not considered himself to be a good speaker, but the Egyptians thought differently and saw Moses as a powerful communicator. That is interesting because at the burning bush, Moses will tell God he is

not a good speaker. Moses was a great leader of men and well respected in Egypt and it would have been easy for Moses to have remained on that course and completely distance himself from his race and his people. But it's obvious the very best educators in Egypt could not erase the heritage Moses' godly parents instilled in him as a young boy.

Moses was dedicated to leading, but not in the way that Pharaoh intended. At the age of 40, Moses was dedicated to being God's man for Israel. He was very interested in helping Israel at 40 get out of their bondage, but at this time he did not have a clue how to do it. Now some people might think differently. There are many good people who think that Moses did not make that decision of determination to help Israel until he reached the age of 80, when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. Although, Hebrews 11 tells us that Moses made a choice between Egypt and earthly riches and God and spiritual riches. That tells me Moses decided a long time before he was 80 years old about the plight of his fellow Israelites. Moses leaving Egypt was a conscious decision based on his faith in God. His faith in God was not an afterthought once he killed an Egyptian and took off. When Moses murdered that Egyptian, it may not have been an impulsive act of anger as it has almost always been displayed to me. Perhaps it was a clear statement of whose side Moses was on and he could not help, but show it because inside his skin he was on God's side. He had witnessed the brutality of Egypt as long as he could and wanted to help those oppressed by Pharaoh. Moses was careful when he killed the Egyptian. He was not planning on advertising what he had done for obvious reasons. In fact, he tried to hide it, but still he had come to the point where he had seen the abuse of the Egyptians long enough and he wanted it stopped. In other words, he was in Egypt; he had been trained in the Egyptian ways; but Egypt was not inside of Him, God filled his heart! God and His people were own his mind all the time!

Think about it. Why did Pharaoh react the way that he did when he heard Moses killed an Egyptian? It was not because Pharaoh cared about someone like Moses committing murder even on an Egyptian. Pharaoh had no morality; he killed people all the time so that was not it. Moses had power and influence and he was a man of Egyptian royalty. Egyptian royalty could take it upon themselves to have someone killed if they wanted to with no repercussion. Remember the story in Genesis of Joseph's companions when he was tossed into jail? If we were a king and did not like our butler or we did not like your baker, we could throw them in jail if we wanted too. If we wanted to hang our baker on our birthday, we could do that. Therefore, I am convinced that if Moses had said to Pharaoh, "This Egyptian sassed me" or "He didn't obey me", "He made fun of you," there would have been no problem with what he did, but there was more to it than that. What bothered Pharaoh was this particular Egyptian was beating up on a Hebrew. And Moses took the side of the Hebrew – that is what bothered him. Pharaoh's problem was that he knew Moses was up to something by killing an Egyptian for beating up a Hebrew. This was a clear indication where his loyalty rested. Pharaoh would have recognized that in the murder of that Egyptian, Moses was rejecting his royal position and he was boldly identifying himself with Israel. Acts 7 is where most of my proof comes for saying at this time in Moses' life, he wanted to be God's leader. Acts 7:23-25, ²³*"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. ²⁴He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not."* Moses in killing this Egyptian on this occasion had identified himself with the plight of the Hebrews and this was why the Bible says, "Moses was afraid."

Moses saw himself as God's appointed leader of the Israelites a long time before he walked up to that burning bush. He thought he was ready earlier, but after 40 years in the wilderness and at 80 years old

he was not sure he was ready. How did Moses get from here to there? How did he get from being prince of Egypt to being a fugitive in Midian? After all, he was trying to do the will of God. Moses was like a lot of us because there are times in our lives when we have faith in God and we are committed to doing what God wants done, but our lives are more self-centered than God-centered. I have found it is possible for us to fully understand what God wants and be committed to doing what God wants us to do and still leave God out of the plan.

Consider three statements that remind us to look upward to God:

1. God's will must be done in God's way. The Bible is filled with people who wanted to do what they wanted to do rather than what God wanted them to do. We do not have to look far in our Bible to find examples of that approach. In Genesis chapter 4 we have the example of Cain wanting to do it his way. Cain was more impressed with what he brought as a sacrifice than with what God thought. Apparently, Moses left God out of his plan. It was Moses' idea to murder that Egyptian, not God's. God's will has got to be done in God's way.

2. God's will must be done in God's time. In Exodus 2, it was not God's time to deliver the Israelites; Moses thought it was time. Moses began "Operation Deliverance" without any word from God. We can relate here to Moses. How many of us have thought at times God is slow? We know what God wants, but we cannot understand why it is taking God so long to get it done. If we have ever seen a dog taking a person on a walk it would make the point. There are times instead of a person walking a dog on a leash, the dog is out in front just pulling the person along. The dog wants to hurry ahead, but the owner wants to take a slower pace. We may sometimes want to do that with God. We sometimes want to move faster than God.

Only God knows when His time is right and it was not the right time for the Israelites to be led out of Egypt by Moses. It takes wisdom and maturity to refrain from trying to jumpstart God's will before God's time. Faith involves trusting God's timetable.

3. God's will must be done by God's strength. Up to this point in his life, Moses was used to seeing his orders carried out and his plans executed, and I'm sure he thought this is just going to be like other plans he had ever come up with. He may have thought, "When I come up with a plan to build a city, the city gets built. When I plan out how to win a war, it gets won. I can deliver Israel." At the age of 40, Moses may have been a little too big for God to use. It is a tremendous temptation at times to say, "I'm going to do something great for God," and then try to do it in your own strength. We must be willing to do God's will, in God's way, in God's time, and in God's strength. God still needed to prepare Moses' heart to be the deliverer God's people needed.

CHAPTER 1 QUESTIONS

To Teach, Train, And Transform Lives

1. Why were the Hebrews in Egypt in the first place? How did Joseph arrange his family being received by the Pharaoh who ruled Egypt at the time?
2. What changed for the Israelites after Joseph's death and another king came to rule over Egypt? Why the change and what kind of burden did this place upon God's people?
3. Why might Pharaoh be concerned about the population growth of the Israelites? What did the king do to slow down their growth?
4. What command did Pharaoh give concerning the Nile River? Explain the emotion of families that found themselves expecting a child following the command.
5. Name three things we should remember when times are tough and we face persecution. How can reflecting on these things help us when we feel like God may not be hearing our prayers?
6. How do we know it was by faith Moses' parent hid him for three months?
7. How long did Moses live and where in the Bible can we read it? How does Steven divide up those years?
8. List four things we can know about God from the actions of Moses' parents.
9. List three statements that remind us to look upward to God and discuss them? How might these three statements apply to Moses?

Chapter 2

Lessons from the Wilderness

(Exodus 2:15 – 4:17)

I once heard about a first-grade teacher who, on the first day of school, went to pick up her class from lunch recess. She quickly realized one student was missing from the line and started searching everywhere for this student. Several minutes later, she spotted him over at the bus stop. When she got to him, she asked, “Johnny why are you over here?” He said, “I’m waiting for the bus to take me home.” The teacher explained to him that he was no longer in kindergarten and children stay at school in first grade all day long. Johnny looked up at her and said, “Well, who in the world signed me up for that?” I would imagine we all could think of times when we did not like going to school all day long, or at least we did not like some of the classes we had to take in school. When we were children, we did not always go to school by our choice. There were likely times our parents had to make us go to school. Sometimes God sends us to school and the class He enrolls us in is not our preferred class. In the last chapter we noted that Moses understood it was God’s will for him to deliver the people of Israel, but his attempt to deliver the Israelites in his way failed miserably. Moses chose to flee from Egypt and Pharaoh after killing an Egyptian and

he ends up in the desert of Midian. Moses fled from Egypt and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well (Exodus 2:15).

Exodus 2:16-25, ¹⁶*“Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father’s flock. ¹⁷Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. ¹⁸When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, ‘Why have you returned so early today?’ ¹⁹They answered, ‘An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.’ ²⁰‘And where is he?’ he asked his daughters. ‘Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.’ ²¹Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. ²²Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, ‘I have become an alien in a foreign land.’ ²³During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. ²⁴God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.”*

It is obvious here at the end of chapter 2, God’s getting ready to do something about the Israelites in bondage. God was not ready when Moses took action and killed the Egyptian, but God is soon to move against the evil Egyptian Empire. In the first Stars Wars movie back in the 70’s, Luke Skywalker was ambitious and wanted to go take on the evil empire, but he was basically told, “You haven’t been trained yet.” He was not to take on the empire until he had been trained for the task. Well, something like that is happening here in Exodus 2. Moses did not realize it, and he had not even signed up for it, but when he got to the wilderness, he entered God’s classroom to prepare him to be the leader God wanted him to be. I suggest God’s Wilderness School could headline this motto: “Those God assigns, He always refines.” God has to do a work in us before he can do a work through us. It is likely God’s favorite place to do His refining

work is in the wilderness. In fact, years later, the children of Israel who spent a lot of time in the wilderness are reminded, *“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands”* (Deuteronomy 8:2). God makes no apology about sending Moses, directly or indirectly as it might have been, into the wilderness school to test him. If we were to glance through the Bible, we might well be surprised how many Bible characters spent time in the wilderness. Besides Moses, Elijah spent some time there. David spent a long time in the wilderness as did John the baptizer. Even the sinless Jesus spent some time in the wilderness. Make no mistake about it – the wilderness is not a place where we typically choose to go, but it is a place we can learn some valuable lessons for life.

The wilderness can come in a lot of different forms. Some of us, in a figurative sense, may be in the wilderness at this time. Perhaps we are going through a time of testing, a time of difficult circumstances, and a time of pain. We did not choose to be where we are right now, because if we had a choice, we would be somewhere else. We have heard the expression, *“No pain, no gain.”* That is not how most people prefer to live, but that is not necessarily God’s philosophy. God’s philosophy more accurately expresses this idea: *“No refining, then no assigning.”* God rarely gives us an important, significant or major task until we attend wilderness school and submit to His refining work. The wilderness is a place where God teaches us what we need to learn to be faithful to Him. We can read in Psalm 119:67, *“Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word.”* Psalm 119:71, *“He said, It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.”* What David is saying in these verses is what he went through was painful, but it allowed him to learn something. That is what wilderness school is about. If we have spent time in the wilderness we can probably now look back and say, *“God taught*

me some things there that I probably would not have learned if I had not been there.”

There are four courses in God’s Wilderness School:

Course #1 – Handling Humility 101. This is a required course. Remember, “Those God assigns, He always refines.” Most world leaders tend to be rather proud and arrogant. But God’s classroom produces men who are humble and lowly. Matthew 20:26-27, ²⁶“*Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,* ²⁷*and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.* It is not surprising that when we look at the person who, other than Jesus, becomes one of the greatest leaders in this world Moses name surfaces. Numbers 12:3 tells us, “*Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.*” This great leader was a man of humility. Where do we suppose Moses learned that humility? There is absolutely no question it was in the classes he took in the wilderness that greatly helped him develop that character trait. Talk about a career shift. He went from being the prince of Egypt to nobody’s shepherd. Moses went from “head of state” to “head of sheep.” He went from “who’s who” to “who’s he?” When we are less full of ourself, the more room God has to work in us.

In the wilderness, Moses was away from the applause of men for the first time in his life. For the first 40 years of his life, everything he did was applauded and celebrated. And now, for the first time in his life, Moses was in obscurity. He performed his task with no one to tell him how great he was. It was in the wilderness Moses learned to stand alone and to not need the applause of men. That lesson would prove to be very important later on in his ministry. While we are in the wilderness, it is important that we learn humility. I know he learned humility in the desert because 40 years later at the burning bush when God said, “You’re the man to deliver the people

from Egypt," Moses responded, in effect, "You have to be kidding, Lord, not me. Wrong guy, wrong address!"

Course #2 – Facing Failure 201. At the burning bush Moses will imply from every angle God remember me? I'm the failure. I'm the washout. I tried before, but it didn't work. Moses had to face his failure and move forward with God. We all have wished we could go back and do something over again. Some of us have spent some sleepless nights wishing we could take back something we said, or wishing that we had the opportunity to undo some damage that we did. We all have fallen short of God's glory and we have our own form of corpses we try to bury just like Moses did. It is human nature to want to react to failure by trying to hide it. That is the first thing Adam did when he sinned. He thought he could hide it from God. But Moses learned something else vitally important in the wilderness that hiding failure doesn't erase failure. It's much better for us to confess our shortcomings and to ask God what he wants us to learn from our mistakes. The question is not, "Are we going to fail?" The question is, "When we fail, what have we learned?" Moses had failed God back in Egypt, by killing the Egyptian, but the wilderness taught him we cannot try to do something for God and leave God out. He also learned that covering his mistake is not the solution. It was in the wilderness Moses faced his failure and learned to lean solely on God. And while Moses would fail him again at times, he would never again try to cover up his mistakes. Our time in the wilderness should teach us how to face failure.

Course #3 – Seeking to Serve 301. The Egyptians considered the job of tending animals to be beneath them, especially shepherding. Joseph told his brothers back in Genesis that shepherds were detestable to the Egyptians. Have you ever considered the fact that God gave Moses a job doing what he was told all his life growing up he was too good to do? We may have great dreams of what we will one day do for God, but the immediate question for is – "Are we willing right now to do what we can do right where we are?"

The question is not, "What would we do for God if we had the ability to preach, teach a Bible class, or lead a congregation in a song service?" The question is, "What are we doing for God with the hammer or the sewing needle we have in our hand right now?" If we are too big to do something small for God, we are way too small to do something big for God. Or as Jesus put it, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much" (Luke 16:10). The King James Version in 16:10 reads, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much." Among the lessons God teaches us while we are in the wilderness is that He has more ways for us to serve Him than perhaps we have ever considered. While we are in the wilderness we can learn the importance of serving.

Course #4 – Willing to Wait 401. During those first 40 years in the desert Moses discovered the hard way we have to do God's will in God's time. Paul said in Romans 5:3-4, ³*"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope."* Notice here that tribulation produces perseverance, or patience, and patience produces character. Moses was in wilderness school for 40 years. That's a long time. How many of us have been in the wilderness a lot shorter time than that and pleaded with God to let us drop out of school before we had learned what we need to learn from Him? Moses still needed to learn more in the wilderness about the nature and power of God.

Exodus 3:1-15, ¹*"Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.'* ⁴*When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am.'* ⁵*'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where*

you are standing is holy ground.’⁶Then he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.⁷The LORD said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.⁸So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.⁹And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.¹⁰So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’¹¹But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’¹²And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’¹³Moses said to God, ‘Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?’¹⁴God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.’¹⁵God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.’”

Moses is 80 years old when he gets this call from God. While Moses lived longer than we do today he was still on the downhill stretch as far as his lifespan. That truth should be an encouragement to us who are older. God is still at work in us and He still calls us into His service. Years earlier Moses was filled with enthusiasm and had great plans for getting the people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. Forty years prior to the burning bush Moses had plans to be the deliverer, but his plans were on his schedule and not God’s. In an effort to correct what was lacking in Moses for the job of delivering the

Israelites, unknowingly to Moses, God had enrolled him in a ministerial program in the desert of Midian. Moses was in God's school while he was a shepherd in the field. One day God came to Moses to refresh his enthusiasm and renew his spirit and direct him for the work God wanted him to do. Moses sees a bush burning in the desert and in a dry and barren land a burning bush might not be so unusual. However, this bush caught Moses' attention because it was on fire and was not burning up, so he investigates why. He soon realizes there was only one explanation – God was in this thing. Moses is going to find out that it is graduation day from the desert school he had been attending. Moses goes over to get a closer look and the Bible says, *"God called him from within the bush, Moses! Moses!"* Moses will learn that the Lord who was in the midst of the burning bush wants to be the One around whom everything else in our lives revolves. The Bible declares, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline"* (Proverbs 1:7). Moses responded to God's call by saying, "Here I Am." God reminds him he was standing on holy ground and while the bush is blazing God speaks more words. Until we respect the power and awe of God more than the power of the Pharaohs of the world, we will never become the lights of this world God wants us to become as Christians.

When humanity stands in the presence of Deity if there is not an AWE, a reverence of respect for the Almighty something is mightily wrong. Only when we fear the Lord can we have an understanding of knowledge that will keep us from fearing the Pharaohs of the world. The Lord reminded Moses that He had a name – a holy name – a name like no other. Names are important and sometimes we forget people's names, but we learn in Exodus chapter 3, there is a name we should never forget! God who made the heavens and the earth has a name. In fact, various names are used for our Creator in the Bible, but God answered the cry of the Israelites by using the term "I AM who I AM." Exodus 3:14, *"God said to Moses, 'I AM*

WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." God used this name as He introduced Himself as the deliverer of the Israelites. Exodus 3:15, *"God also said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.'"* God explained the meaning of LORD (Yahweh) here by placing it in parallel with the name "I AM." Whenever we find the word "LORD" in the Old Testament in all capital letters the translators are saying – this is the name of God. Literally the word means HE IS or HE CREATES. In practical terms it means He is the God who keeps His promises and is in control. This name of God has a way putting things in perspective for Moses as well as us. Other nations had gods they called "Lord." Other nations had gods they called "most high," yet only Israel worshiped a God called "Yahweh" – the Great "I AM." When God said, "I AM WHO I AM" it covered it all. No god could precede Him; no god could follow Him; no god could compare with Him.

God tells Moses, ¹⁶*"Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites – a land flowing with milk and honey.'"* (Exo 3:16-17). This is a good place for two practical questions for our thought: First question, "What is our Egypt?" By that I mean what is the situation that has lasted so long in our life that it seems hopeless? Whatever it is we need to hear God say, "I AM." Second question, "Who is our Pharaoh?" Who is the person or what is the situation that seems to stand against us and God's plans for us? Here is some sound advice. We should not let anybody who once was not and soon won't be, take our eyes off of the "I AM."

Exodus 3:18-20. ¹⁸*"The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the*

God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.’ ¹⁹*But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him.* ²⁰*So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.”* God will soon send a series of plagues and He will make it clear everywhere the God of Israel is “I AM” and nothing can frustrate His purposes (Exodus 3:21-22). What is happening here? God is at work! God is at work in the middle of the desert and Moses cannot help, but notice. God’s mighty power was at work and He was working on behalf of His people. God wants to free the Israelites from the oppression of Pharaoh so God calls Moses to lead the Israelites from Egyptian slavery.

In the 4th chapter of Exodus, we find Moses reluctant to accept God’s call. He is reluctant to do what God wants him to do even when he knows it is God doing the calling. We can be the same way at times. When God reveals His will to us, we have our own set of excuses like Moses for not accepting His call. Therefore, let us shift the scene from the dusty desert to a comfortable meeting room in a Lord’s Day assembly. No shepherd’s clothing or burning bush, no booming voice saying, “take off your sandals for this is Holy Ground!” Being together in an assembly to worship is an awesome thing, but it is not as dramatic as the scene near Sinai so long ago. Nonetheless, God still calls us. He does not call us the same way He called Moses, but He does call us to be saved and walk by faith. Let me summarize from the Bible how we accept God’s call and become New Testament Christians. The God who speaks to Moses from a burning bush calls us from the Words He gives us in the Bible. God’s Word produces faith (Romans 10:17). The Bible says, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Acts 2:21). How do we call on the name of the Lord and be saved from our sins? We do so by believing Jesus is Lord (John 8:24), confessing He is the Christ the Son of God (Matthew 10:32),

and repenting from our sins and being baptized into the name of Jesus Christ so our sins can be forgiven (Acts 2:38). If we happened to think our sins were washed away prior to baptism, we should consider again what God's Word teaches on how we call on the name of the Lord. There was a person who believed in Jesus, repented of his sins, but had not yet been baptized into Christ and he was told in Acts 22:16, *"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."* There are no legitimate excuses for not doing what God says to do.

In Exodus 4, Moses is still standing near the burning bush although God had told him to go to tell Pharaoh to let His people go (Exodus 3:10). Exodus 4:1-12, ¹*"Moses answered, 'What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you?'* ²*Then the LORD said to him, 'What is that in your hand?'* *'A staff,' he replied.* ³*The LORD said, 'Throw it on the ground.'* *Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it.* ⁴*Then the LORD said to him, 'Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.'* *So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.* ⁵*'This,' said the LORD, 'is so 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.'* ⁶*Then the LORD said, "Put your hand inside your cloak.'* *So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow.* ⁷*'Now put it back into your cloak,' he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.* ⁸*Then the LORD said, 'If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second.* ⁹*But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.'* ¹⁰*Moses said to the LORD, 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.'* ¹¹*The LORD said to him, 'Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who*

gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.'

The call of God comes to Moses and Moses does not want to answer the call. We cannot be sure of exactly what he was thinking, but we can know when we do not want to do something can make excuses and that is what Moses does here. The excuses he makes to the Lord is a reminder we tend to still making similar excuses all these years later.

Here is a summary of Moses' excuses:

1. **"I Don't Have Credibility."** Moses' question in Exodus 4:1 may seem to be valid, but it is actually a denial of God's clear promise. God had already told Moses back in chapter 3:18 the elders of Israel were going to listen to him. Moses says, in essence, "Yeah, but what if they don't?" This is not a communication breakdown; it is an obedience breakdown. Moses implies, "I have no credibility with those people anymore." God graciously recognizes what Moses is concerned about so God will help him and does so by giving him some authenticating miracles. God turns Moses's staff into a snake and what does Moses do? He ran away from it. We can relate with Moses on this one. If we see snakes most of us run away from them. God has to deal with Moses' fear. His staff becomes a snake and he takes off or backs up for sure. Notice what God tells him to do next. He says, "Pick it up by the tail." Amazingly Moses does this! God was not finished as Moses' hand is covered in leprosy for a moment and leprosy was normally a fatal disease. He does what God says and then his hand is made clean again. God is teaching Moses, "The things that frighten you, need not frighten you when you trust Me." God is saying, "I give you all the credibility you need to deliver these people." Sometimes as God's people today we make the mistake of thinking we don't have creditability. We may think I don't have the credibility to say anything that will change a person's

life. Who am I that he should listen to me? And we forget, like Moses, the credibility is not ours, it is God's.

2. "I Don't Have the Ability." Moses claims he is not a wordsmith and is slow of speech. That is not what Stephen said by way of the Holy Spirit concerning Moses (Acts 7:22). Stephen said that Moses was powerful in speech. Either Moses did not want to admit his ability, or Moses had forgotten about his ability. Maybe after 40 years in the desert he felt like he was inadequate for such a job and that would be understandable. Moses is persuaded that God has the wrong guy for the job. Moses was a humble man, but I suspect at this point he really believes he is not the man to do such a job or perhaps more accurately he does not want to do the job. We may sometimes hear Christians say something similar when faced with a task for the Lord. We might say, "I'd love to teach a class, but I just don't have the ability." "I would love to do this or do that, but I just don't feel qualified." While those responses may sound humble and we do not know the heart, but we should be careful not to confuse the virtue of humility with a spirit of inadequacy that causes us not to do God's will.

I have discovered what is most important to God is not our ability, but our availability. God is able to bless us with more talents and ability if we will use what we have for God right now. If we will make ourselves available to God, He will equip us as He chooses to do His work. In Exodus 3:12, God had clearly told Moses, "I will be with you." That should have been enough! We should remember if God commands us to do something, He will empower us so we can do it. God can give us abilities we do not currently have if we will walk by faith. Let me give you a personal example from my life. I have stood outside many hospital rooms knowing that someone inside was suffering and needing a word of comfort. If I waited outside that room until I felt adequate, I would never go in to see them. Before I go in the room, I ask God to help me say what needs to be said and I step in by faith and God goes into that room with

me. If we wait outside the door until we have something profound to say we will never go in and encourage the sick and be encouraged by the sick.

3. "I Don't Want the Responsibility." God's been patient with Moses for he had some legitimate concerns. "Lord, I don't think I have any credibility." God says, "I'll deal with that." "But Lord, I don't think I have the ability. God says, "I'll deal with that, too." Then look at what Moses said next: "Lord, please send someone else to do it." After all the legitimate concerns are met, Moses finally blurts out the truth. Exodus 4:13-17, ¹³*"But Moses said, 'O Lord, please send someone else to do it.'* ¹⁴*Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, 'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you.* ¹⁵*You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.* ¹⁶*He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.* ¹⁷*But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it."* God will work in Moses' life and his faith will grow. God's patience with Moses is amazing. Thank God, He is patient with all of us. Today, God is calling us to be saved and to help others find the spiritual freedom in Jesus. Romans 6:17-18, ¹⁷*"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.* ¹⁸*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."*

CHAPTER 2 QUESTIONS
To Teach, Train, And Transform Lives

1. What are some lessons we can learn by spending some time figuratively speaking in God's Wilderness School? What must happen before God can work through us?
2. List four courses that are basic for our learning whether in or out of the wilderness school. Discuss why these courses are important for God to work through us to accomplish His purpose.
3. Why did the burning bush catch Moses' attention?
4. How old was Moses when God calls him from the burning bush and how might this encourage us who are older today?
5. What name should we never forget from Exodus chapter 3? How does this name put things in perspective?
6. What does God tell Moses to do concerning the elders of Israel and how does he initially respond? How could we summarize his response to God?
7. List the miracles God does for Moses at the burning bush? What is God trying to do for Him?
8. Could God be more interested in our availability than our ability? Could God equip us to do His work? What did God tell Moses that should have been enough for Moses to accept God's call?
9. In summary how do we accept God's call today and become New Testament Christians?