



Volume II

By

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Chapter Fourteen

Israel is a small country located in the Middle East. Its neighbors include Egypt to the southwest, Jordan to the east, Syria to the northeast, Lebanon to the north, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. The 'State of Israel' was established in 1948, but it is much older than that.

Israel's Name

Abraham and Sarah (Sarai) had one son together. His name was Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons together. Their names were Jacob and Esau. Jacob, along with two wives and two maidservants, had 13 children – 12 boys and one girl.

God's intention is to move forward the promised 'Seed' of the woman who would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). He is also training chosen members of the human race to 'subdue and have dominion' over the earth (Genesis 1). He's training them to 'reign.' What we're about to see next is how God does that through 'Israel.'

Jacob went through an intense 'basic training' with God. Jacob often made bad choices in his life, but he was God's choice to carry forward 'the Seed.' God put Jacob through a training program and eventually came to this interesting point as Jacob returned from Haran to Canaan after spending many years in a type of 'exile' out of fear of retribution from his brother. Jacob was an old man by this time. He was 'greatly

afraid and distressed' as he returned to Canaan, so he divided his very large family into two groups or 'companies.' Jacob said, If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape' (Genesis 32:8).

You might remember the five 'basic training' principles I chose for this series:

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

Jacob's prayer to God as he returned to Canaan demonstrated some of what his basic training had taught him

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Then Jacob said, 'O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' Genesis 32:9-12

Jacob believed in the God of his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. Jacob feared God and obeyed him. The Lord told Jacob to return to his country and family with the promise, 'and I will deal well with you.' Jacob worshiped God and served Him. He listened to God and trusted Him. He asked God deliver him from the hand of his brother, even though he feared him. Jacob's statement to God about making his descendants 'as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude' is reminiscent of promises God made to Abraham and Isaac.

Jacob sent his two wives, two female servants, and his eleven sons (his daughter had not been born yet) 'over the ford of Jabbok,' along with herds and flocks. Jacob was alone when a 'Man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day' (Genesis 32:24). Jacob later learned that he had been wrestling with God. It was part of Jacob's training and the beginning of God's next great phase in His plan to move the 'Seed' forward.

God changed Jacob's name to 'Israel' – “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:28). Whereas the name Jacob (*Yaaqob* – יַעֲקֹב) means ‘heel grabber, heel grasper, supplanter – which refers to Genesis 25:26. Israel (*Yisrael* – יִשְׂרָאֵל) means ‘God strives, God rules.’ It fits beautifully with God's eternal plan for humans to ‘subdue’ the earth and ‘have dominion’ (reign) ‘over every living thing that moves on the earth.’

Israel's Mission

God's mission for Israel did not change from the promise or unconditional covenants He made with Abraham –

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. Genesis 12:2

I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. Genesis 17:6-8

It's important to remember that God's 'thoughts and ways' are not our thoughts and ways. He may do many things differently than we would. If we make the mistake of trying to 'judge' or 'second-guess' God's decisions, we will soon find ourselves lost in a wilderness of misunderstanding and doubt.

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9

God had an eternal plan for Israel. He began by calling an idol worshipper (Abram) from a far-off land to become His representative of blessing on earth. That 'blessing' would come through the 'Seed' that God had promised to Eve. Israel would carry forward the 'Seed' and 'blessing,' but the journey would not be an easy one. It would also include many twists, turns, and tests.

Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons who would eventually become the 12 'tribes' of Israel. However, they would first go through a process of 'basic training' that would prepare them to rule and reign.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram. Genesis 35:22-26

Based on that list of sons you might think the 'Seed' would progress through Jacob's firstborn son, Reuben. However, remember that Jacob was not the firstborn son, yet God chose him to become the one through whom God would carry forward His promised 'Seed.' The 'choice' of eternal blessing is always up to God, the Creator of all things.

Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. This is the history of Jacob. Genesis 37:1-2

Jacob and his family were back in the land of Canaan – the ‘promised’ land. Question: which son would carry forward the promised ‘Seed’ after Jacob’s death?

Chapter Fifteen

Israel has a history of thousands of years, but it is far more than just one of the many nations that have existed on the earth. God called a man named Abram about four thousand years ago and told him that God would bless ‘all the families of the earth’ through him. That promise would come through the ‘Seed’ God promised Eve in the Garden of Eden centuries before (Genesis 3:15).

Judah

Judah was one of Jacob's 12 sons. Even though Jacob preferred Rachel, God brought Judah into the world through Jacob's first wife Leah. Judah was her fourth son, then 'she stopped bearing' (Genesis 29:35). Jacob fathered many other sons and one daughter through two wives and their two maidservants – for a total of 12 sons and one daughter.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Genesis 37:3

Joseph's brothers envied him because their father preferred him. As we saw with Cain, envy and jealousy often lead to murder.

Then they said to one another, 'Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams! Genesis 37:19-20

Though some of Joseph's brothers wanted to murder him, Reuben talked his brothers out of killing Joseph. So, they threw Joseph into an empty pit. Judah, the fourth oldest brother ended up saving Joseph's life by suggesting they sell Joseph as a slave to a passing company of Ishmaelites. The brothers sold Joseph for twenty shekels of silver. The Ishmaelite traders laid Joseph in irons, hurt his feet with fetters, and took him to Egypt to sell him as a slave (Psalm 106:18).

The brothers had gotten rid of their brother, but what would they tell their father? Jacob was the one who had sent Joseph to check on his brothers (Genesis 37:13), so the brothers had to come up with a convincing story about what had happened to him. They decided to take Joseph's tunic, kill a kid of the goats, and drip the tunic in the blood. They showed the tunic to Jacob and told him that a wild beast had 'devoured him.'

It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.' Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, 'For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.' Thus his father wept for him. Genesis 37:33-35

Israel's Salvation

Even though the sons of Jacob thought they had solved their problem with Joseph, they didn't realize that God would use their treachery to prepare a people for His Name and move the 'Seed' forward toward blessing all the families of the world. God blessed Joseph in Egypt to the point that the young man became second in power only to the Pharaoh himself. The reason that happened was because God revealed to Joseph that He was going to bring a great famine on the land in seven years, giving the Egyptians seven years to prepare for it. Pharaoh placed Joseph in the position of running the government program to store the massive amounts of grain that God would give Egypt.

When the seven years of plenty ended and the seven years of famine began, people in Egypt and across the world came to Joseph for food.

*So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.
Genesis 41:57*

One of the families that came to Joseph for food was his own. Joseph eventually revealed his identity to his brothers and they were afraid that he would kill them because of what they had done to him. However, this is what Joseph revealed to them –

And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Genesis 45:7-8

Since five years of famine remained at the time, Joseph invited his brothers to return back to Canaan to bring Jacob and the rest of his family to Egypt. What did Pharaoh think of that plan?

Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. Now you are commanded—do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and your wives; bring your father and come. Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’ Genesis 45:18-20

God had prepared the way for Israel to begin a new life in Egypt. Jacob was so excited to hear that his son Joseph was alive – ‘Joseph my son *is* still alive. I will go and see him before I die’ (Genesis 45:28). Jacob lived in Egypt for several years, but he was old and the time of his death was coming closer. He called all of his sons to his sick bed so that he might bless them and prophesy over them.

What I'd like you to see is what Jacob (Israel) prophesied over Judah because God would use the lineage of Judah to bring forward the 'Seed' of the woman that would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent –

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk. Genesis 49:8-12

Compare that prophecy to these words about Jesus Christ, the 'Seed' –

Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals. 'And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Revelation 5:5-6

Chapter Sixteen

Jacob (Israel) lived in Egypt for 17 years and died at the age of 147 (Genesis 47:28). Pharaoh gave Joseph and his family permission to take Jacob back to Canaan to be buried in the same cave as his father and grandfather. Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt, which had become their new 'home.' However, it was not be their permanent home. In light of our series focus, we see Egypt as a place of 'training to reign.' The children of Israel still had much to learn so that they might 'subdue and have dominion.'

Israel in Egypt

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing. Genesis 49:28

This is the first place in the Bible that Israel is referred to as ‘twelve tribes.’ If you look at the context of Genesis 49, you’ll see that it refers to the ‘twelve sons’ of Jacob (Israel). Keep in mind that the promise and unconditional covenants God made with Abraham, and repeated to Isaac and Jacob, passed along to the sons of Jacob as well. That meant the ‘twelve tribes’ of Israel were still in ‘training to reign’ and be a blessing to ‘all the families of the earth’ (Genesis 12:3).

The ‘children of Israel,’ as they were also known, were alive and well living in Egypt because of Joseph. Yet, they were afraid of Joseph because his brothers had sold him into slavery many years earlier. Joseph was second-in-command to Pharaoh, so the brothers were afraid he would kill them as revenge for their evil cruelty toward him. However, they were about to learn an important lesson in how God works out His eternal plan to bless –

When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.’ So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, ‘Before your father died he commanded, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph: ‘I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.’ ’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.’ And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants.’ Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against

me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Genesis 50:15-21

Key in for a moment on verse 20 – “you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.” Joseph, who had undergone extreme pain and suffering because of his brothers’ evil, understood that God’s plan ‘for good’ was far greater than just one person’s suffering. Joseph knew that everything that had happened to him had happened as part of an eternal purpose.

God trained Joseph to ‘reign,’ and reign he did as the chief governor in Pharaoh’s government. Joseph had learned these five ‘basic training’ principles –

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

That’s the lesson we all need to learn.

So, how did the ‘twelve tribes’ of Israel do? Did they learn these basic principles as well?

A Major Change for Israel

Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household continued to live in Egypt for many years. However, he and his brothers eventually went the way of all people. Joseph died at the age of 110 years old. Joseph made a prophecy just before his death that gives us some insight to God's eternal plan for Israel –

And Joseph said to his brethren, 'I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.' So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. Genesis 50:24-26

God's plan for Israel was not for them to remain in Egypt, but there were things for them to learn in Egypt before returning Joseph's remains to the land of Canaan.

Egypt's Pharaoh took good care of the families of Jacob (twelve tribes) because of Joseph. The children of Israel 'were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them' (Exodus 1:7). However, a new Pharaoh came to power in Egypt who 'did not know Joseph' (Exodus 1:8). He viewed the Israelites (children of Israel) as a potential threat to native Egyptians. The Pharaoh was afraid that 'in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land' (Exodus 1:10). The Pharaoh changed the children of Israel from being free people enjoying their lives in Egypt, to being slaves to the Egyptian government.

So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor. Exodus 1:13-14

Pharaoh went even further and commanded the midwives for the 'Hebrew women' to kill every male Israelite as they were born. (Abram was first called a 'Hebrew' in Genesis 14:13, עֵבְרִי, one who has traveled, crossed over .. it became another name for an Israelite). However, 'the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive' (Exodus 1:17).

That angered Pharaoh. He asked the midwives why they were not killing the male children of Israel. The midwives made up a story about how the Hebrew women were not like the Egyptian women – 'for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them' (Exodus 1:19).

Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them. So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, 'Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.'
Exodus 1:20-22

Pharaoh commanded Egyptians to kill every baby boy by casting them into the river to drown. Only the Hebrew baby girls would be allowed to live. That would eventually destroy the Hebrew race within a couple of generations because there would be no males to continue the 'Hebrew race.' While that sounds like something the Israelites could not possibly overcome, it was part of God's eternal plan.

Chapter Seventeen

God was not going to let that happen because the ‘Seed’ of the woman who would destroy the ‘seed’ of the serpent would come through the Hebrew people – specifically the **Tribe of Judah**. God was also about to unveil His ‘salvation’ of Israel and teach them how to ‘reign.’

Moses

Meet Moses –

And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her

maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.' Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?' And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Go.' So the maiden went and called the child's mother. Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed him. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, 'Because I drew him out of the water.' Exodus 2:10

Moses was one of those Hebrew baby boys whose life was saved from drowning in the river. However, Moses wasn't just 'any' Hebrew boy. God was going to use Moses to save the Hebrew people from extinction.

Moses grew up in the household of Pharaoh, learning ‘all the wisdom of the Egyptians.’ He was ‘mighty in words and deeds’ (Acts 7:22). However, Moses did something that appeared to be a fatal error. He was 40 years old when he decided to ‘visit his brethren, the children of Israel’ (Acts 7:23). Moses saw the burdens they suffered in slavery. He also saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. What Moses didn’t know was that some Hebrews had seen what he did and told him. Moses became afraid when he realized what he had done was known. Pharaoh did hear about it and sought to kill Moses, but Moses fled to the land of Midian to escape. Depending on the route Moses took, and if he was on foot, it may have taken him weeks or even months to travel hundreds of miles to the east to escape Pharaoh and anyone he may have sent to search for Moses.

Moses arrived in Midian and sat down by a well. Seven daughters of the priest of Midian came to the well to water their father’s flock. Shepherds came to drive them away, but Moses stepped in and helped them water their flock. The daughters returned to their father and told him that ‘An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and he

also drew enough water for us and watered the flock' (Exodus 2:16-20). Their father asked his daughters to find Moses and invite him to eat with them.

Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. And she bore him a son. He called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land.' Exodus 2:21-22

Keep in mind that Moses had no idea about the plan God had for his life. He spent the next 40 years in Midian living as a shepherd, husband, and father. Moses may have thought about his time in Egypt and what he had done by killing the Egyptian. He may have also thought about his people who were suffering as slaves. Whether he did or didn't, what Moses didn't know was what God was thinking about His people –

Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.

Exodus 2:23-25

The time had come for the next part of God's eternal plan.

Training Moses to Reign

God saw the oppression of His people in Egypt. He heard their cry because of their cruel taskmasters. He knew their sorrows. It was time for God deliver His people ‘out of the hand of the Egyptians’ and bring them from Egypt ‘to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey’ (Exodus 3:7-8). God’s plan was to send Moses to Pharaoh ‘that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

First step? God would introduce Himself to Moses in a most unusual way –

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does

not burn.’ So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ Moreover He said, ‘I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. Exodus 3:1-6

To say the least, Moses was hesitant (even resistant) to the idea of returning to Egypt and confronting Pharaoh about letting the children of Israel go free. God assured Moses by saying – ‘I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’ Moses responded with a question –

Then Moses said to God, ‘Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?’ Exodus 3:13

God answered Moses by revealing His full identity and an important aspect of His eternal plan for Israel –

And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord 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, and this is My memorial to all generations.’ Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, ‘I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and

the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.' Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians. Exodus 3:14-22

Chapter Eighteen

Moses and Polytheism

Remember Rule #1 in our Basic Training Manual?

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)

Monotheism was not a primary worldview in the time of Moses. People believed in ‘multiple gods’ – known as ‘polytheism.’ Moses grew up in the palace of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Egyptians believed in lots of different gods, so Moses would have been very familiar with them. He may have even ‘believed’ in them as did his adopted mother (Pharaoh’s daughter) and other Egyptians.

Moses married the daughter of 'the priest of Midian.' Midianites also believed in the existence of many 'gods,' even though they came from the lineage of Abraham through the son he had with his wife Keturah. He married her after the death of Sarah.

Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.

Moses, marrying into a Midianite priest's family, may have also 'believed' in some of their gods as well. That would not have unusual in ancient times. It's important to remember that Abraham (Abram) was a polytheist before God called him to leave his father's house and go to the land of Canaan. Abraham grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans before moving with his father and family to Haran. They believed in multiple 'gods.' Though God trained Abraham to believe in Him, the One True God, many in Abraham's family still believed in multiple gods – especially those who continued to live in Haran (e.g. Laban, Rachel, and others). Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, had to tell his wife and family to –

Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments ... So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. Genesis 35:2, 4

Polytheism would continue to be a stumbling block to Abraham's family for many generations to come.

Ancient polytheists, those who believed in many gods, had a variety of ideas about the origin of life. I spent years researching the history of polytheism for my book, *A History of Man's Quest for Immortality*, and found the belief in multiple gods went back as far in written history as I could find writings on stones, wall carvings, etc. Cave drawings from pre-historic times also indicates a belief in multiple 'gods' and 'supernatural' forces.

Christians know that the devil planted the idea for polytheism in the Garden of Eden when he deceived Eve –

For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:5

The idea of being ‘like God, knowing good and evil’ opened the door for people to think of themselves as being ‘little gods,’ which turned into some people thinking of themselves as ‘bigger gods.’ It’s quite possible that Noah’s great-grandson Nimrod viewed himself as a ‘god’ as he built his ‘kingdom’ in Mesopotamia (Genesis 10:8-12). He may have even been part of the leadership that led Noah’s family from Mt. Ararat to ‘a plain in the land of Shinar’ to build a city and tower ‘whose top *is* in the heavens’ (Genesis 11). God saw that effort as evil and confused the language of humanity so that people couldn’t understand each other and scattered across the world – which was God’s earlier command for humanity to – ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (Genesis 1:18).

Nimrod and his family remained in Babel to build a city, which is one reason I think he was the primary leader of the protest against God's plan for humanity – 'let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth' (Genesis 11). Nimrod expanded his kingdom from Babel to Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar, and Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah in the land of Assyria (Genesis 10). By the time Nimrod finished building his kingdom, he controlled most of ancient Mesopotamia (Sumeria).

In the famous passage about Israel's Messiah being born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), God referenced the Assyrian enemies of His people being from 'the land of Nimrod' (Micah 5:6). As we study the ancient city-states that Nimrod founded and his successors ruled over, we find them filled with multiple 'gods.' Nimrod or some semblance of him may have been a 'god' that people worshiped. Some historians believe that the Babylonian 'god' Marduk may have been based on the life of Nimrod. Others believe that the 'part god and part man' Gilgamesh was also based on the life of Nimrod. Legends

about kings grew from generation to generation, so some of these theories are difficult to accept with certainty.

This is the world that Moses was born and raised – a world filled with ‘gods’ and superstitions about how those ‘gods’ impacted their lives on earth and in the afterlife. That is why God revealed Himself to Moses as He did in a ‘burning bush’ that did not burn up. That is why God told Moses to take off his sandals because he was standing on ‘holy ground.’ That is why God told Moses, ‘I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ That is why Moses ‘hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God’ (Genesis 3). God had to begin at the beginning with Moses and train him to understand Rule #1 – to ‘Believe in the Only True God.’ Yes, there were many ‘gods’ made of wood and stone in ancient times, but there was only One True God, and Moses was speaking directly to Him.

Moses and Monotheism

The conversation between God and Moses was an important part of preparing Moses for the ‘mission’ God had for him – to free the children of Israel from slavery and lead them into the ‘promised land.’ In order for Moses to convince the elders of Israel to follow him out of Egypt, Moses had to first be convinced himself.

When Moses asked God what he would say when the elders of Israel asked him the ‘name’ of the ‘God of your fathers’ who had sent him to them, God answered – ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ‘The Lord 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, and this *is* My memorial to all generations’ (Exodus 3).

As I mentioned in a previous study, Moses was hesitant to do what God had told him to do. Moses still had to learn Rule #2 of 'Basic Training' as a child of God – 'Fear God and Obey Him.' Moses was definitely afraid of God, but he did not yet truly 'fear God.' The 'fear of God' is the 'beginning of knowledge' and the 'beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). Moses wasn't there yet. So, how did God teach Moses about Rule #2? He demonstrated just a small amount of His 'power' – power that He would share with Moses for his upcoming 'mission' in Egypt –

So the Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A rod.' And He said, 'Cast it on the ground.' So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Reach out your hand and take it by the tail' (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.' Furthermore the Lord said to him, 'Now put your hand in your bosom.' And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it

out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And He said, 'Put your hand in your bosom again.' So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. 'Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land. Exodus 4:2-9

These were no parlor tricks that God was playing with Moses on the side of the mountain. God demonstrated that He had the ability to give Moses all the 'supernatural tools' necessary to free Israel from slavery to Egypt.

Moses returned to Jethro his father-in-law and asked permission to 'return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive' (Exodus 4). Jethro gave his permission. God told Moses that all of the people in Egypt who had sought to kill him were dead. Moses left Midian for Egypt with his wife and sons, along with the 'rod of God' in his hand.

The Lord spoke to Moses' older brother Aaron, who still lived in Egypt, and told him to go into the wilderness to meet Moses. Moses told Aaron everything God had said to him, plus details about the signs God had shown him. Moses and Aaron gathered together the elders of Israel and Aaron told the people what God had told Moses. The people's response? 'So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped' (Exodus 4:31). That's Rule #3 – Worship God and Serve Him. The training of Israel had begun.

Chapter Nineteen

‘Basic Spiritual Training’ for any human being starts with Rule # 1 – **Believe in the Only True God** (Monotheism). That is true now and was true thousands of years ago when Moses and his brother Aaron confronted the Pharaoh of Egypt. God had heard the ‘cries’ of His people who were in slavery in Egypt, and called Moses to lead His people to freedom.

Moses is ready. Aaron is ready. The people of Israel are ready. The next step in God’s plan was to get Pharaoh ready. However, what God did to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt had a purpose that went well beyond just freeing Israel from slavery. God was about to ‘rock the world’ with one of the greatest displays of ‘supernatural power’ ever seen by humanity.

Please keep this in mind as read the following. The ‘gods’ of Egypt were made of wood and stone. Some were small, some were large. They didn’t talk. They didn’t walk. They didn’t breathe. They weren’t alive. However, Egyptians believed they were representative of ‘real gods’ that lived in the ‘heavens’ or the ‘underworld.’ They believed that their Pharaohs were ‘gods’ and needed to be embalmed and have special burial places (e.g. pyramids) filled with all of the necessities of the ‘afterlife.’ Egyptians depended on their Pharaoh making a successful journey through the underworld to ensure that the people would also make a successful journey after their death on earth. Many Israelites also shared similar beliefs about ‘idols’ and ‘false gods.’ The One True God was about to burst their spiritual balloons with a demonstration of the power of the ‘Living God.’

Moses Confronts Pharaoh

But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.’ Exodus 3:19-22

Before Moses ever left Midian for Egypt, God had told him what was going to happen when Moses confronted the Pharaoh. Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go free, so God was going to stretch out His hand and strike Egypt with all His wonders. After that, Pharaoh would let Israel go.

Some people may wonder why God decided to handle the situation that way. The answer is simple. God was going to teach Israel that He was the 'Only True God.' The Egyptians believed in many 'gods' (idol worship – polytheism) and had influenced the children of Israel to also have some of those beliefs. God would destroy that notion with a series of 'wonders.'

Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh and said – 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.' Pharaoh said, 'Who *is* the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.' Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave and told them to get back to work. Pharaoh even made slave labor harder for Israel by taking away the straw needed to make bricks. That led the children of Israel to become upset with Moses and Aaron, so Moses presented their concerns to God. Remember that Moses also has really believe in Rule #1.

So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all. Exodus 5:22-23

God's response to Moses?

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.' And God spoke to Moses and said to him: 'I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name Lord I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their

bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord.’ So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. Exodus 6:1-9

The children of Israel still didn't believe in the ultimate power of the One True God, so what's next? Here's how God explained His eternal plan to Moses –

So the Lord said to Moses: ‘See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you,

so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.’ Exodus 7:1-5

God was going to make Moses appear to Pharaoh as a ‘god.’ Pharaoh, who believed himself to be a ‘god,’ would relate to that. God was going to make Pharaoh’s heart ‘hard’ so that He could ‘multiply’ His ‘signs and wonders’ in the land of Egypt. God was going to judge Egypt, even as He had told Abraham many years earlier –

Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Genesis 15:13-14

That day of divine judgment had finally arrived. Here was God's process (using NKJV headings for explainers in Exodus chapters 7 – 12). Moses and Aaron asked Pharaoh to free the Israelites, but Pharaoh's heart became harder and more resistant with each of God 'signs and wonders' –

- **Aaron's Miraculous Rod** – Aaron threw down his rod and it became a snake. Pharaoh's magicians threw down their rods and they also became snakes. However, Aaron's rod swallowed up the rods of the Egyptian magicians.
- **The First Plague: Waters Become Blood** – Moses told Aaron to take his rod and stretch out his hand over the water of Egypt, including their streams, rivers, ponds, and pools. All of the water became 'blood throughout all the land of Egypt.' The fish died, the river stank, 'and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river.' God's judgment on the water lasted seven days.
- **The Second Plague: Frogs** – Moses told Aaron to take his rod and stretch out his hand over the streams, rivers, and ponds, and 'cause frogs to come up on the land of

Egypt.’ The frogs were so many in number that they went into people’s houses, into their bedrooms, on their beds, into the houses of their servants, into their ovens, and into their kneading bowls. Pharaoh appeared to relent a bit by saying that he would let Israel go free ‘tomorrow’ if Moses would ‘take away the frogs from me and from my people.’ Moses prayed and God caused the frogs to die out of the houses, out of the courtyards, and out of the fields. However, when Pharaoh saw that he had received relief from the frogs, ‘he hardened his heart’ and would not give Israel its freedom.

- **The Third Plague: Lice** – Moses told Aaron to take his rod, stretch out his hand, and ‘strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.’ All of the dust became lice that covered people and beasts. The Egyptian magicians told Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ The magicians were beginning to believe in the power of Israel’s God. ‘But Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.’

- **The Fourth Plague: Flies** – Moses told Pharaoh that if he didn't let the Israelites go free, he would send swarms of flies on him and his servants, on his people and into their houses. Moses also said that these flies would not bother the Israelites living in the land of Goshen, in order that Pharaoh would know that the True God was in the 'midst of the land.' Just as Moses said, thick swarms of flies came into Pharaoh's house, into his servants houses, and into all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh relented again and told Moses and Aaron to take the people of Israel and 'sacrifice to your God in the land.' Moses prayed and God removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, his servants, and from the people of Egypt. What did Pharaoh do in return? Did he keep his word? Of course not – 'But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go.'
- **The Fifth Plague: Livestock Diseased** – Moses told Pharaoh that if he didn't let Israel go, 'that they may serve Me,' the hand of the Lord would bring a 'very severe pestilence' on the Egyptians cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. At the same time,

God would not let anything bad happen to animals belonging to the children of Israel. God did just that the next day, ‘But the heart of Pharaoh became hard, and he did not let the people go.’

- **The Sixth Plague: Boils** – God told Moses and Aaron, ‘Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh. And it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.’ Moses and Aaron did what God commanded and boils broke out in sores on people and beasts. The boils were also on Pharaoh’s magicians and on all the people of Egypt. ‘But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.’
- **The Seventh Plague: Hail** – ‘Then the Lord said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may

know that *there is* none like Me in all the earth. Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. But indeed for this *purpose* I have raised you up, that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go. Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now. Therefore send now *and* gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die.’ God did what He said He would do. Hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, but there was no hail in Goshen where the children of Israel lived. Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron that he had ‘sinned,’ the Lord was ‘righteous,’ and his people were ‘wicked.’ Pharaoh asked Moses to call on God to stop the hail. What happened when God stopped the hail? ‘And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder

had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the Lord had spoken by Moses.’ Notice God’s purpose for hardening Pharaoh’s heart – ‘that you may know that *there is* none like Me in all the earth ... that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’

- **The Eighth Plague: Locusts** – ‘Now the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I *am* the Lord.’ Notice God’s reasons for what He was doing in Egypt. He wanted Israel to know that He was the Only True God and He wanted their children and children’s to know it. Moses told Pharaoh that if he didn’t let Israel leave Egypt God could bring locusts into the land of Egypt. They would eat anything left from the devastating hail storms.

The locusts would also eat every tree ‘which grows up for you out of the field.’ They would also ‘fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians.’ Pharaoh’s servants were so distraught by what God was doing that they begged the king to let the Israelites go, ‘that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?’ Pharaoh would not agree, so God sent the plague of locusts on Egypt. However, once Pharaoh saw the tremendous devastation of the locusts on Egypt, he called for Moses and Aaron in haste and said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only.’ Moses prayed and God sent a very strong west wind that removed all of the locusts from the land of Egypt. ‘But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.’

- **The Ninth Plague: Darkness** – God told Moses to stretch out his hand toward heaven so that there would be ‘darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may

even been felt.’ Moses stretched out his hand and ‘there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days.’ People could not see each other, ‘nor did anyone rise from his place for three days.’ What about the children of Israel? They had ‘light in their dwellings’ the entire time. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart again and he would not let the children of Israel go. Then Pharaoh said this to Moses – ‘Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!’ So Moses said, ‘You have spoken well. I will never see your face again.’

Chapter Twenty

Death of the Firstborn

God has one more terrible plague to bring on Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. It will be the plague that finally frees Israel from slavery. While this plague will be great, what God will do afterward will stun Egypt and Israel. It will cement in history the ultimate power of the Only True God.

And the Lord said to Moses, 'I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether.' Exodus 11:1

The tenth plague is often called the ‘death of the firstborn.’ The firstborn child (or animal) was seen as having the purest and strongest blood because they were the first to receive the many benefits of the mother’s womb. The firstborn son had a special place in his family. He grew up to have authority over his younger brothers and sisters. He was also entitled to the ‘Birthright,’ which was a double portion of the family property at the death of the father. The firstborn son also became the spiritual leader of the family at the father’s death. He would provide for his mother until she died, and also provide for his sisters until they married.

The final part of God’s plan in Pharaoh agreeing to give the children of Israel their freedom was the death of all firstborn children in Egypt. God would protect Israel through what is known as the ‘Lord’s Passover’ (Exodus 12:1-11) You can read the details of the Passover in Exodus 12:14-28. It was vital that every Israelite family followed God’s direction in order to live through what He was going to do to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. Exodus 12:12-13

And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, 'Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the Lord as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.' And the Egyptians urged the people, that they

might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, 'We shall all be dead' ... Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. Exodus 12:29-33, 35-36

This is exactly what God had prophesied to Moses when He first talked with him from the burning bush in Midian –

But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians. Exodus 3:22

God spoke to Moses about consecrated all the firstborn to Him – ‘whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, *both* of man and beast; it is Mine’ (Exodus 13:1-2). Moses taught the people about how to remember this special occasion of God’s deliverance (Feast of Unleavened Bread), along with the law of the firstborn (Exodus 13:3-16).

After Pharaoh freed Israel from slavery, God led them around by way of the wilderness of Red Sea rather than by way of the land of the Philistines, which was closer. Why? ‘God said, ‘Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt’ (Exodus 13:17) Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, which was Joseph’s stated desire centuries earlier – ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you’ (Exodus 13:19).

Moses led the Israelites from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. God went before Israel by day in a ‘pillar of cloud, and by night in a ‘pillar of fire’ to give them light.

Death of Pharaoh's Army

Pharaoh, though a defeated demigod, is not done yet. Neither is the One True God –

Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.' Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.' And they did so. Exodus 14:1-14

Notice that God said He would ‘harden Pharaoh’s heart’ so he would pursue the Israelites. God said that by doing that, He would ‘gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.’ Remember, that’s what this is all about! God was going to finish proving to Egypt that He was the Only True God by destroying Pharaoh’s army.

Here’s how it played out –

And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon. And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, ‘Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this

not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen. Exodus 14:8-18

‘Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.’ I love that divine statement. We don’t do anything, other than be still and know that God is the One True God. How did God ‘save’ Israel from Pharaoh’s armies?

1. The Angel of God moved the pillar of cloud from in front of Israel to stand behind Israel. That meant that God stood between the children of Israel and the soldiers of Pharaoh. The cloud and darkness of the pillar faced the soldiers’ camp at night, while the other side gave light to Israel at night. That meant the soldiers could not move forward to attack Israel.
2. Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea and God caused the waters to divide. That allowed the children of Israel to walk across the sea on ‘dry ground.’ The divided waters were a ‘wall’ on their left and right.
3. The Egyptians were finally allowed to pursue Israel. They went after them ‘into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horseman.’ However, God ‘looked down upon the army of the Egyptians’ and

‘troubled’ them. God took off their chariot wheels, making driving them difficult.

4. The Egyptian soldiers said, ‘Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.’ However, by the time they realized that it was too late.
5. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea while the Egyptian army was trying to turn around and go back to their side of the land. The Red Sea returned to its full depth, drowning Pharaoh’s army. ‘Not as much as one of them remained.’
6. The children of Israel arrived on the other side of the Sea before the waters returned, so none of the Israelites were lost.

So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.
Exodus 14:30-31

Chapter Twenty-One

One of the ways that Bible study has come to ‘life’ for me through the years is to imagine myself living in the shoes and sandals of the people in the Bible. I think about what events would look like, sound like, feel like, smell like, etc.

Rightly dividing the Word (correctly handling the text within context) comes first, but I also like to think about the audience as I read. That’s what I’ve done throughout this series. What was it like to live during the events we’ve studied together?

Devotion and Celebration

God heard the ‘cries’ of His people who were suffering in Egypt and chose Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt with great ‘signs and wonders.’ Imagine standing on the other side of the Red Sea and watch as the water returned to its place, drowning all of Pharaoh’s mighty army. Egypt was a destroyed nation because of God’s ‘Mighty Power.’ God demonstrated His ultimate Authority over every Egyptian ‘god.’ He didn’t just beat them – God destroyed them. Remember these words?

Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, ‘How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed? Exodus 10:7

Egypt was destroyed and Israel was free. God was teaching His people that He was the Only True God. His victory led to what is known as 'The Song of Moses' –

*I will sing to the Lord, For He has triumphed gloriously!
The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!
The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become
my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a man
of war; The Lord is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his
army He has cast into the sea; His chosen captains also
are drowned in the Red Sea. The depths have covered
them; They sank to the bottom like a stone. Your right
hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right
hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces. And in
the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown
those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath;
It consumed them like stubble. And with the blast of Your
nostrils The waters were gathered together; The floods
stood upright like a heap; The depths congealed in the
heart of the sea. The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will
overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be*

satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, My hand shall destroy them.' You blew with Your wind, The sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them. You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength To Your holy habitation. The people will hear and be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, Trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them; By the greatness of Your arm They will be as still as a stone, Till Your people pass over, O Lord, Till the people pass over Whom You have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, In the place, O Lord, which You have made For Your own dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. 'The Lord shall reign forever and ever.' For

the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. Exodus 15:1-19

Teaching Rule #1

Rule #1 is to 'Believe in the Only True God' (Monotheism). The Egyptians worshipped 'gods' made by hand from wood and stone. They physically had to move them, dress them, and pretend to feed them because their 'gods' were not alive. The God of Israel, on the other hand, was very much Alive. He is Self-Existent (I AM WHO I AM.). He is All-Powerful and Everywhere-Present. He is All-Knowing and Unchanging. He is the One True God among the many 'false' gods that people worshipped.

Notice how the 'Song of Moses' emphasized that point –

- The Lord *is* my strength and song, And He has become my salvation
- He *is* my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him
- Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces

- And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You
- You sent forth Your wrath; It consumed them like stubble. And with the blast of Your nostrils The waters were gathered together
- Who *is* like You, O Lord, among the gods?
- Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?
- The Lord shall reign forever and ever

The God of Israel was unlike any of the ‘gods’ of Egypt or any other nation. All nations would one day learn that lesson, but the first step to ‘reigning’ with God was for the children of Israel to believe their God was the Only True God.

Did they learn that lesson that day? That day that God destroyed the ‘gods’ and armies of Egypt?

Chapter Twenty-Two

Imagine. You've just witnessed the Supreme Power of Almighty God judge Egypt with mighty 'signs and wonders.' You watched as God drowned the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea. You follow close behind the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who appears as a great 'pillar of cloud' by day and a 'pillar of fire' by night.

Now, imagine that six weeks after being freed from slavery in a foreign land that you, your family, and friends begin to complain against the two men God used to free you. Complain about what?

And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, 'Oh,

that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.
Exodus 16:1-3

Seriously? That's their concern? Did they learn nothing from what God did for them? How would God respond to their complaining?

God Supplies

The human 'sin nature' is powerful. Remember what God said about people immediately following the Flood that covered the earth?

... although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.' Genesis 8:21

God was right. Even after proving that He is the Only True God by defeating every Egyptian 'god,' judging the nation of Egypt, and freeing the children of Israel from cruel slavery, how did they repay God? They complained about the food.

It was obvious that Israel had a lot to learn before they could 'reign' with Him. Remember the Rules for 'Basic Spiritual Training?'

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him

4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

How would God teach people whose imagination of their hearts were 'evil' from their youth?

Fortunately for all of us, God is loving, compassionate, and understanding. He knew the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10), so God was prepared to continue training His people. His response was supply them with 'bread from heaven.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. Exodus 16:4-5

Did you see what God was doing? He was ‘testing them, whether they will walk’ in His Law or not. Testing is part of many types of training. If you want to join the military, be prepared to be tested. If you want to attend college, be prepared to be tested. If you want to become a Black Belt in martial arts, be prepared to be tested. The Hebrew word translated ‘test’ in Exodus 16:4 is *nasah* (נָסָה) and means ‘to examine, prove, try, put to the test). Part of Israel’s training to reign would include a series of ‘tests.’

As Moses and Aaron were telling the people how God would respond to their complaints, ‘behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud’ (Exodus 16:10). God told Moses to tell the people, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I *am* the Lord your God.’ Notice that God is still working with the people to believe that He is the Only True God even as He testing them for obedience to His Word.

God supplied the people's nutritional needs morning and evening –

So it was that quail came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: 'Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.' Exodus 16:13-16

There is more to the story, so feel free to read the rest of Exodus 16 on your own. Also, take a look at the first seven verses of Exodus 17. That details how God responded to the people's complaints about drinking water. As you read through the 'wilderness' story of the people of Israel, you'll find that they often 'complained' about one thing or another. How God responded to their many complaints gives us insight into both His Character and how He trained Israel to reign.

Chapter Twenty-Three

When God created humans in His image, in His likeness, He said –

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Genesis 1:28

As we saw in previous parts of this series, God wanted humans to ‘fill’ the earth, ‘subdue’ the earth, and ‘have dominion’ over every living thing that moves on the earth. The Hebrew word for ‘subdue’ is *kabash* (כַּבַּשׁ) and means ‘to bring into subjection,’ with force if necessary. The Hebrew word for ‘have dominion’ is *radah* (רָדָה) and means ‘reign, rule, dominate.’

How will God train the children of Israel to do that?

God's Armies

Before I move forward, let me share something from several studies ago. It comes from Exodus 6:26 –

These are the same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, 'Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies.'

The context was God renewing His promise to Israel after Moses and Aaron's first meeting with Pharaoh. What stuck out to me was that God referred to His people as 'children' and 'armies.' The Hebrew word for 'armies' in that verse is *tsaba* (צָבָא) and means 'warfare, war, army.' God used the two descriptors for Israel again in Exodus 7:4 and Numbers 33:1 –

But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.

These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

God used the term 'armies' to describe the 'children' of Israel many times after He freed them from slavery in Egypt. It's obvious from God's use of the words that He saw Israel as warriors.

We find their first taste of battle training in the wilderness in Exodus 17 –

Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.' So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it.

And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.' And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-Lord-Is-My-Banner; for he said, 'Because the Lord has sworn: the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. Exodus 17:8-16

The army of Amalek attacked Israel 'in Rephidim' in what appears to be an 'unprovoked' attack. Why? The people of Amalek were descendants of Isaac's son Esau. The people of Israel were descendants of Isaac's son Jacob. They probably knew the story of how Jacob 'stole' the lineage blessing and birthright from Esau, which probably fueled their hatred for the descendants of Jacob. Even though Israel did not start the fight with Amalek, they ended it. God said that he would 'utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.'

Another interesting aspect to this story is that the Amalekites fought 'dirty.' Here's how we know that –

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.
Deuteronomy 25:17-19

The Amalekites are mentioned almost 50 times in the Old Testament as enemies of Israel. The last we read of them is when they suffered devastating defeats at the hands of Judge Samuel and Israel's kings Saul and David (e.g. 1 Samuel chapters 15, 27, and 30; 2 Samuel 1; 1 Chronicles 4).

There are no extrabiblical references to them, and the nature of the physical remains of their existence is hotly debated. Archaeology Study Bible, p 113

A Few More Thoughts

A few other things I'd like to mention about Israel's defeat of the army of Amalek. We meet 'Joshua' for the first time in Exodus 17 – 'And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek.' It's as if Joshua came out of nowhere to hold the position of a fighter and leader of Israel's army. We learn later that Joshua was from the Tribe of Ephraim and would eventually become successor to Moses, and physically lead Israel into the 'promised land.' More about Joshua in future studies.

Another person we meet for the first time is 'Hur' – 'So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.' According to Exodus 31:2, Hur was from the Tribe of Judah. He also seemed to come out of nowhere to be one of two men who would help Moses hold up his arms during battle. We'll learn more about Hur in future studies.

The third thing I'd like to point out was the importance of 'the rod of God' that Moses held in his hand. Israel 'prevailed' in battle as long as Moses held up the rod of God. However, when Moses tired and lowered the rod of God, Amalek prevailed. That's a clear demonstration that the 'battle' truly does belong to the Lord. God was teaching Israel that He would win their battles for them, and that without Him Israel would lose. With the help of Aaron and Hur supporting Moses' hands, Moses was able to keep the rod up and steady 'until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.'

One last thing. I'm almost as old now as Moses was during the battle against the Amalekites. I've always marveled at his physical stamina, but now that I'm inching toward 80 I am even 'more' impressed. However, even Moses needed some help to hold up the 'rod of God' during the battle. Speaking as an older man, I appreciate the younger Christians who are stepping up to hold up the hands of some of their older brethren who've been in the fight for decades. We're getting tired, but our God is great and will keep us fighting the good

fight until He's ready for us to 'come home.' My thanks to all Christians who are 'in the fight.'

Chapter Twenty-Four

Information in the ancient world did not travel as fast as modern communications, but travel it did. It might have taken weeks or even months, but caravans, couriers, and other types of travelers carried information by foot, donkey, and camel from city to city, nation to nation.

It didn't take long for word about God's defeat of Egypt and Amalek to find its way to the people and leaders of many city dwellers and nomadic tribes. They heard of Egypt's devastation, freedom of the slave nation of Israel, and the defeat of Amalekites by the 'armies' of Israel. How could a nation of slaves do all of that? People heard that it was because of the power of the 'God of Israel.'

All of these ancient people knew about the 'gods.' They made images to their 'gods' from wood, stone, and precious metals (e.g. gold, silver). They believed their 'gods' were greater than other nations' 'gods,' and would often go to war to demonstrate the power of their 'gods.' So, you can imagine the fear they felt when they heard that the 'God of Israel' had defeated all of the 'god's of Egypt and Amalek. What would God do to their 'gods?'

Jethro Visits

And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people—that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. Exodus 18:1

Remember Jethro? He was Moses' father-in-law and lived many miles to the east of Egypt and the wilderness area where the Israelites were camped. He heard about all that the One True God had done for Moses and Israel. Moses had left his Midian family many months earlier to obey God's call to confront Pharaoh about freeing Israel from slavery. He had asked Jethro to allow him to go to Egypt. Jethro told Moses to 'Go in peace.' Moses traveled with his wife and sons for a short distance, but then sent them back to stay with Jethro (Exodus 4).

What we see in Exodus 18 is Jethro traveling to visit Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped 'at the mountain of God.' Jethro brought Moses' wife, Zipporah, and his sons, Gershom and Eliezer, with him. They reunited and went into Moses' tent to catch up on all that had occurred since Moses left Midian.

And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.' Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And

Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. Exodus 18:8-12

Jethro was a 'priest of Midian,' which meant he was a spiritual leader of the Midianites. He was most likely a worshipper of 'other gods.' [Some researchers think Jethro may have become a monotheist because of Moses.] That's why his statement about the God of Israel is so important to notice – 'Now I know that the Lord *is* greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, *He was* above them.' God's defeat of the 'gods' of Egypt was proof to Jethro that 'the Lord' was 'greater than all the gods.'

Even though Jethro was kind to Moses and the Israelites, that would not always be the case for the Midianites. The leaders of Midian came to fear Israel (Numbers 22) and schemed with the Moabites against God's people. That eventually led to some Israelites worshipping false 'gods' (Number 25). God would not allow that, so He told Moses to 'Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes' (Numbers 25:16-18). God later told Moses to 'Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of

Israel' (Numbers 31:1). Moses sent an army of thousands of men (1,000 from each tribe) to fight the Midianites. The Israelites won.

The pagan nation of Midian would continue to be a hindrance to Israel for many years. You can read more about their paganism and hatred for Israel in Judges chapters six, seven, eight, and nine.

Jethro Advises

Back to our current story from Exodus 18. Jethro had the opportunity to see Moses in action the next day. He saw that ‘Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening.’ Jethro did not think that was a good use of Moses’ time or method of judging the people of Israel. He realized that Moses would wear himself out judging the people from morning until evening. So, Jethro gave his son-in-law some good advice –

Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then

it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.’ So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land. Exodus 18:19-27

Notice that Jethro's advice included the phrase, 'If you do this thing, and God so commands you.' Any advice we receive from men must always be compared to God's commands. He is our final Authority. Moses believed Jethro's advice was good, so he implemented the new 'system of justice.' The 'rulers' of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, judged the every-day types of cases that people would bring before them – the 'small' ones. That allowed Moses to deal with the 'hard cases.'

After giving his advice, Jethro returned to Midian. As for Moses' wife and sons, we know little about what happened to his wife. However, we do read about his sons later in 1 Chronicles 23. They 'were reckoned to the tribe of Levi.' That makes sense since Moses was from the 'tribe of Levi.' His sons would therefore be descendants of Levi through Moses.

Next eBook

In the next part of our series – *Train to Reign* – we’ll see God continues training the people of Israel from the top of a mountain.

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