



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 7
MOSES**

FEBRUARY 12-18, 2007

| DAY | DIRECTED READING | DEVOTIONAL READING | <i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i> READING |
|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Monday | Exodus 4 | Psalm 31 | Exodus 10-12 |
| Tuesday | Exodus 5 | Psalm 32 | Exodus 13-15 |
| Wednesday | Exodus 12 | Psalm 33 | Exodus 16-18 |
| Thursday | Exodus 13:17 & 14 | Psalm 34 | Exodus 19-21 |
| Friday | Exodus 15:22 & 16 | Psalm 35 | Exodus 22-24 |

READ

Exodus 4

Psalm 31

REFLECT

As we begin the story of Moses (this week will be the first of three dedicated to the biblical account of Moses' life) we notice that we have before us a much more detailed account than we have yet seen in our *Walk through the Bible*. The prosperous life of the Israelites settled in Egypt, in the rich area of Goshen, has now devolved into slave labor in a highly prejudiced social context. With the death of the one oppressive Pharaoh, they hope for new policies from his successor, and they cry out to the Lord for help. The successor is bad news; but the Lord begins to prepare His own deliverer.

Moses was a Hebrew child, raised in the palace of the Pharaoh by Pharaoh's daughter. Because of the requirement that Hebrew male children be exposed (and thus relegated to certain death), Moses' mother gave him up, exposing him indeed, but in a small boat on the Nile. The princess's compassion had several consequences: his life was saved, his mother was allowed to raise him, and he became highly educated in one of the great sophisticated courts of the world. On the negative side, he lost touch with his people, and even as a leader always had an awkwardness in relating to them.

The plot gets moving as one day he notices the abuse of one of his fellow Hebrews by an Egyptian overseer, and he strikes the Egyptian, killing him. He thinks that he has covered up the crime until, as he rebukes two other Hebrews for fighting each other, one asks, "Who made you a prince or judge over us? Will you kill me too, as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:13-14). Since he sees he is known as a murderer, he flees into the Sinai desert, into the region of Midian. There

he will settle with a family of shepherds, and live with them from age 40 to age 80. His introduction to them, encountering his wife and her sisters at a well and helping them water their livestock, is very reminiscent of the stories of Rebekah's and Rachel's recruitment as wives of Isaac and Jacob. As Moses settles into the life of a shepherd, under the wise tutelage of his father-in-law Jethro, we can sense that he is relearning something of his own family background. The city boy is finding deeper roots of his own.

The words of the anonymous Hebrew – "Who made you a prince or judge over us?" – sound an important theme for this story. Moses had stepped beyond appropriate boundaries in rebuking the Egyptian, and certainly in killing him. In trying to help his people he had made things even worse, because he had no real authority to do what he did. As we will see tomorrow, when God calls him into service, he will suddenly have more authority than he wants. When he returns to Egypt with his astonishing demand of Pharaoh, not only Pharaoh but Moses' own people will be wanting to know where he gets his authority to demand these things. At that point he will have an answer.

RESPOND

Each of us has ongoing burdens that we would like to see the Lord lift, in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones. The story of Moses, and also today's Psalm, remind us that it is really the Lord who is finally the deliverer. It is a good thing to get good help from those authorized to provide it, and a good strong church community has a lot of help to give. But salvation ultimately belongs to the Lord.

PRAY

"O love the Lord, all you his godly ones! The Lord preserves the faithful, and fully recompenses the proud doer. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord." Psalm 31:23-24

D.D.

READ

Exodus 5

Psalm 32

REFLECT

In the course of his shepherding duties, Moses one day passed along the foot of Mt. Horeb, and turned aside to gaze at a bush that burned and burned but was not consumed. Here he unexpectedly found himself locked into conversation with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The conversation, in which God called Moses to return to Egypt and bring His people out, should have been fairly simple. It was made more complicated because Moses, rather than expressing prompt obedience, presented five objections, one after another, against why he should go (Ex 3:11; 3:13; 4:1; 4:10; and 4:13). We will look more closely at the first two.

First, Moses asks the Lord the very good question, “Who am I that you should send me?” This actually reflects the comment of the anonymous Hebrew who asked Moses who he thought he was in judging them. The Lord’s answer confirms that Moses is really a nobody. It’s not Moses’ presence, but the Lord’s, that is the salient point: “Certainly I will be with you” (3:12).

Then Moses asks, essentially, “And who are you again?” He asks what name he may give to the sons of Israel if they want to know who sent him. The Lord’s answer constitutes one of the great moments of the biblical narrative: “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you . . . This is My name forever, and this is My name of remembrance to all generations” (3:14-15).

In calling Moses to this great task, and in simultaneously calling His people back into the proper current of His will for them, God gives them a new name by which they may call upon him. The Hebrew behind the “I AM”

gives us the name “Yahweh” (sometimes misrepresented as “Jehovah”) and it becomes the great covenant name, the special name of God that only Israel knows. In most of our English translations, it is represented by the small caps format “LORD” (as in the first few verses of Exodus 4). But in the Bible a name is not just a designation or denotation, but rather a name is meant to communicate identity. What does this name of God tell Israel (and us) about Him?

There is a long debate about this, but it is beginning to swing in one direction. For a long time the Church understood this name as having to do with eternal being in some way – “I am the One who really IS.” But more recently the connection has been seen between the I AM and God’s answer to Moses’ first question. The promise “I will be with you” is in the same phrasing as the “I AM.” The message is this: Your God is the one who can and who will be with you in all that I call you to. My presence will go with you, and my love will rest upon you. I am the God that never remains distant, but always is near. I will watch over the believer, and I will watch over the community. And I will act to fulfill all My promises. This is who I am. And My people are the people who live their lives in that knowledge.

RESPOND

God’s presence is a precious experience, but it can also be a challenge to us. Psalm 32 declares the basis of this relationship: the LORD has seen to it to cover our sin, and banish our iniquity (v. 1). But it also describes negative feelings about His presence (vv. 3-4) and even the LORD’S own annoyance when we resist (vv. 8-9). But when all is right, we know it in the boundless joy we find in Him (vv. 10-11).

PRAY

“Thou art my hiding place; Thou dost preserve me from trouble; Thou dost surround me with songs of deliverance.” Psalm 32:7

D.D.

READ

Exodus 12

Psalm 33

REFLECT

As Moses follows the command of the Lord to return to Egypt and to work for the release of God's people, he finds several kinds of resistance. He was aware that the Israelites would need convincing that he was their deliverer, and the wonders that he is able to do allows them to believe that the Lord has sent him. However, when Pharaoh responds to the initial evidences of revolt among his Hebrew slaves by increasing their workload, the Israelites are again ready to question Moses' leadership (Ex 6:9). Pharaoh forces them to "make bricks without straw" – and they begin to think of their former workload with nostalgia. Deliverance seems a long way off.

Nevertheless Moses persists in his primary mission to Pharaoh: "The LORD says, 'Let My people go.'" Pharaoh declares he has no knowledge of this God Yahweh (5:2) – thus denying Him any real authority – and so the agenda is set for Moses: to demonstrate who the God of Israel really is. Moses does so in an escalating series of signs and plagues, each of which contributes to the message that the Hebrew God is in fact the Lord of heaven and earth: who else could perform these acts? The escalation pits Moses against the magicians of Egypt, and his increasing ability to witness to a God more powerful than they know even gets them and others of Pharaoh's councilors on Moses' side: "Let the men go, that they might serve the LORD their God! Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?" (10:7)

But the great obstacle to deliverance is now Pharaoh himself. He refuses to accept the loss of the huge work force if Israel is to leave, and as things progress it seems he has something more at stake. We might see it as ego, or the tyranny of absolute power, or a socially-based refusal to allow liberation to those he had come to see as slaves. All of these are suggestive, and the story has a psychological depth that almost cries for us to see some such interpretation. We are also told, after hearing many times that Pharaoh's heart was hardened against

Israel, that with the last plague, God himself hardened Pharaoh's heart. This has seemed to many readers as unfair of God, if it means that God turned Pharaoh's heart against Himself when he might have accepted Him. It is more likely that what the text means to say is that Pharaoh was never really going to open his heart to God, but Pharaoh's heart was "toughened" to go the distance in his obstinacy (look at 14:17). Pharaoh remains responsible, but it was also in keeping with God's strategy in this battle. God's opportunity was to use the conflict to demonstrate His true and full character, not only to Pharaoh, but to the people of Israel as well (14:31). Both sides were a hard sell.

The deliverance from Egypt would soon be lost to the annals of Egypt. But it would remain of central importance in the Israelite story, comparable to the role for Christians of the crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. It would become the defining act of faithfulness on God's part in creating a people to praise Him (15:13, 17). Pharaoh's resistance to the revelation of God seems to exemplify the resistance of any entrenched secular institution to the realities of God's love. It correlates with Pilate's maddening questioning of Jesus, ending with his flippant "What is truth?" (John 18:38) In Moses God challenges the world itself to stop His will and way; in Pharaoh the world accepts the challenge; and the world finds itself outmatched. There is no way to exaggerate the drama of this battle, or the spiritual power of its outcome.

RESPOND

Sometimes life does require us to acknowledge the absolute enmity of the things of God and the things of the secular world. Living "in this world but not of this world," we can find ourselves, or others that we know, caught by enslavement to destructive activity and self-assessments. God is the Savior, and the Gospel is salvation from such things. God's rescue of us into love, growth, health, and joy can be as dramatic and final as it needs to be.

PRAY

"Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His lovingkindness, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." Psalm 33:18-19

D.D.

READ

Exodus 13:17 & 14
Psalm 34

REFLECT

The last of the ten plagues of Egypt was the worst. Every first-born son would die, throughout the land, except in the homes where Yahweh was acknowledged as God. Moses announced this last plague while being driven from Pharaoh's presence for good, and so it came not as an avoidable threat but as a judgment (Ex 10:27 – 11:8).

How would those homes be known where Yahweh was worshipped? The answer was the command to observe the Passover meal, especially in smearing the blood of the sacrificed lamb on the doorposts and lintels of the front door. But at the same time the first Passover represented much more than that, more than just warding off death. We see that Israel was being challenged to come together in a celebration of what the future would hold as well. The meal is much bigger in significance than even the event of deliverance from Egypt. A number of factors point this way.

Most obvious are the several places where it is made clear that the celebration of the Passover is to become a yearly event: "Throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance" (12:14). But more is going on here than repetition. The meal is designed to draw the people together; the family is the unit, though more than one family may join to partake. Those drawn together eat a meal that brings specific testimony to deliverance from the bitterness of slavery (the "bitter herbs) as well as redemption through blood sacrifice. The signs of haste (girded thighs, unleavened bread) speak not only of the rush of the moment, but travel toward a new future. The context of obedience and worship (12:26-27) ties the entire meal to the work and will of God. In fact, the first Passover meal was God's fresh opportunity to begin to teach His people who they were, and who He was, by

affirming His particular care and love for them. It was a lesson about who they were and who they were becoming, this people freshly rescued from the dejection of slavery and called into the highest possible service. "Israel is My Son, My first-born." (4:22-23) And this is the way the Passover has functioned ever since: as an annual restatement and celebration of the essential identity of the Israelite people.

As Christians we tend to view the Passover meal in reference to Jesus. After all, one evening toward the end of His ministry, He reached into the middle of the table set for the Passover, and picking up a piece of bread He redefined the Passover itself: "This is My body, given for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). The blood of the Lamb, the sacrifice of salvation, the reality of deliverance from evil, the gift of community – all these Passover themes we now understand in reference to Jesus' crucifixion and His resurrection. In many ways Communion has an effect for us that is similar to the Passover's for Israel: as we celebrate it, it has the power to confirm us and extend us in who we are in Him. Put another way, communion becomes God's opportunity to impart to us, as His children, fresh confirmations of His love and His will for us.

RESPOND

In responding to the challenges of each day – personal, family, social, professional, national, global – we will surely find that we can give more of our best as we are able to refresh ourselves in who we are as Christians. This can happen in many ways; for instance: in regular reading of the Bible; in coming together on Sunday; yes, in partaking together of Communion; in developing sustaining relationships with other Christians; in letting others know of His impact in our lives; and in serving in the work of the Lord.

PRAY

"O taste and see that the Lord is good! How blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him!" Psalm 34:8

D.D.

READ

Exodus 15:22 & 16

Psalm 35

REFLECT

With the Passover celebrated, and the visitation of death upon the first-born of Egypt, the Israelites are finally given the permission to leave Egypt, and so they go (12:29-34). This doesn't prevent Pharaoh from changing his mind and leading an army out after them to bring them back into servitude (14:6). And so the stage is set for the final confrontation at the Red Sea.

Here is the episode that generates the phrase "an event of biblical proportions." Some have tried to tone it down, noting that another translation of "Red Sea" is "Sea of Reeds," and suggesting that the Israelites really just walked through a marsh about six inches deep in water. Then we'd have to say that the miracle was that Pharaoh's army drowned in six inches of water! No, the Bible account itself insists on the power of the miracle: the Israelites were truly trapped between Pharaoh's army and the sea; at Moses' command the sea divided and stood aside like two walls (14:22; see also 15:8); the Israelites passed through safely; and when the Egyptians followed, the waters closed back over the sea bed and destroyed them. The result was an unequivocal testimony to all other nations, Egypt as well as the tribes in Canaan, about who Yahweh really was (15:14-15). It was also an unequivocal testimony to Israel itself about the God they served (14:30-31).

Israel never forgot the deliverance at the Red Sea. They celebrated it yearly at Passover. They sang of it in several psalms (for instance, Psalm 66:5-6). It provided a wonderfully concrete anchor to their faith and spirituality. It is this incident, perhaps more than any other, that gave the indelible quality to Israel's religion of being a historically-grounded religion. Their faith was not just a set of mystical ideas that might elevate life for the believer. It was not a religion of hope-against-

hope that some day, maybe after death, their perspectives would be vindicated somehow. Hebrew faith could always look to the precise historical moment of the parting of the sea to confirm its faith. Yahweh was a God who belonged in historical partnership with Israel. That meant on the one hand that the God who had divided the waters was no mere local deity, but the very Creator of heaven and earth. It also meant that He is also a God who can save today, and in the future (see Psalm 77:1, 7, 11, 16, 20). He is a God of history who can enter history, and make a day-to-day difference.

Christianity too is a historically-oriented faith, looking back to historical realities it will never dismiss, and expecting "real time" engagement with God. Occasionally the attempt is made to turn Christianity into a philosophy or a set of truisms for life, but this has never succeeded well in the Church as a whole. What grounds us in history in such a firm way? No doubt it is the fact that the Son of God Himself walked the earth and shared His own love with us, that on a given day He died for the sins of the world and for my sins, that three days later at a particular spot near Jerusalem He rose again, conquering death and winning life for all who believe.

Clearly the God who raised Jesus from the dead is no mere local deity, but rather the very Creator of heaven and earth. The implications of the defeat of death itself are even further reaching than the implications of the parting of the sea. The message of His love is designed specifically for each man, woman, and child threatened by evil and death (which by my calculation is everyone).

Will you open your life to Him today?

PRAY

Lord, Thank you for your decisive entrance into the history of your people, which is the only thing that could save us from a life not worth living. "My soul shall rejoice in the Lord; it shall exult in His salvation."
Psalm 35:9

- Dave Dorman