

Message #9**Exodus 4:18-31**

We have acquired a new puppy. She is an Australian Shepherd. Don't be fooled by that name. The Australian Shepherd is a true American dog out of the west. It is believed that shepherds from Australia fell in love with the dog and called it that name. But the fact is the Australian Shepherd is a pure American western dog. They are very friendly, very smart and very loyal.

Now the process of how we got this dog and we train a dog reminds me a lot about what God does with us and with what He did with Moses. June 18 began as a typical day for this pup down at a ranch in Tennessee. She had no idea that by 9:30 A.M., she would be chosen to become part of our family. We made the choice, we paid the price and now she belongs to us. She actually had no say in it. Once we made this choice, she became our responsibility and it is a big responsibility. It is important that we immediately start training her to respond to us.

Now the first thing we are teaching her is that she can trust us and that she needs to obey us. This is an important point that covers all aspects of her existence. She needs to learn we will always do what is best for her. We are working on commands like no, sit, stay, heel, come, and down. It is critical that she learn these commands and it is critical that she obey them because those commands could, at some point, save her life. For example, if she is running toward something dangerous like a tractor in a field, it is imperative that she obeys our commands immediately or else she can get hurt or killed.

When I think about that, I think about God and Moses and this passage. Moses was out tending sheep one day, when all of a sudden God appeared to him in a burning bush and said, "I choose you." He wasn't looking to be chosen, God just chose him. God said you can trust me to go with you and help you, but your calling means you go to Egypt and get the Hebrew people. Now in the early days of this calling, it was critical that Moses learn you can trust God, you need to believe in God and you need to precisely obey His Word.

That is the key lesson of this text and that is a key lesson every believer needs to learn. God wants us literally trusting His Word, believing His Word and obeying His Word.

MOSES NEEDS TO LEARN THAT TO DO GOD'S WILL ONE MUST LITERALLY BELIEVE GOD'S WORD AND OBEY GOD'S WORD.

We need to learn the same lesson. We won't do much for God until we learn this point and Moses was about to learn it in a major way. There are seven historical facts to observe:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Moses receives permission to leave from his father-in-law. 4:18

This almost seems strange for an 80-year-old man, but Moses returned to his father-in-law and asked permission to leave and go back to Egypt. Now Moses will become the greatest deliverer/leader in the history of Israel and he is still submissive to the authority of his own father-in-law. Proper submission to authority is certainly a very biblical trait.

Now let's remember when God called Moses, he was tending sheep. In fact, he had led those sheep several miles away from his Midian home. A very conservative guess would put him at least 100 miles from the land of Midian at Mt. Sinai. When God called him, he could not just walk off his job or abandon his responsibilities and let the sheep fend for themselves. There were some loose ends that needed to be tied up. Good leaders see things through. They finish one job then move on to another. There are a couple of things to observe:

First, he needed to get his flock of sheep back home. Moses didn't own this flock; it belonged to Jethro (Ex. 3:1). So the first thing he needed to do was travel back northeast to where he lived and take this flock back.

Secondly, he was right up front with his father-in-law and courteously asked him if he could return to his Hebrew relatives in Egypt and see if they are still alive. Now this is partially true, but it is not the whole truth. Moses did know Aaron was alive, but he probably wondered about Miriam, his sister. **Moses was interested in seeing if people in his immediate family were alive, but he also was going back to lead the entire nation out of Egypt, which he does not appear to tell Jethro here.**

Sometimes not revealing everything about what you know is very smart. God's calling was specifically to Moses, not to Jethro, and all Jethro really needed to know is that Moses is asking him to go back to Egypt to see his family. What Jethro didn't know is that he was going to bring his entire Hebrew family back with him.

However, what Moses did want was the blessing of his father-in-law to leave. Notice he uses the word "please." Doing God's will and doing God's work should always have a grace and decency to it. Jethro told Moses to go in peace, which means Jethro gave Moses his blessing. His leaving Jethro did not put him in war with Jethro; the relationship was one of peace. This is the last time we hear of Jethro until chapter 18 when he and Moses' family will be reunited.

There are a couple of things we want to observe:

- 1) When God calls us to do something other than what we are presently doing, we do have the responsibility to see to it that we end our present responsibilities with integrity.
- 2) When God calls us to do something other than what we are presently doing, there will usually be some form of positive human confirmation.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Moses receives revelatory confirmation from God. **4:19**

Now God did not reveal everything to Moses at one time. As soon as Moses started pursuing the will of God, God revealed to Moses that all the men who had been seeking his life were dead.

This is very interesting. It has been 40 years since Moses had left Egypt on the run as a fugitive, and in the 40 year span of time all the men who were out to get Moses were dead. The Pharaoh who had once been in power was also now dead.

God knew every one of them by name, and He knew they were all dead and he told Moses that here. Moses is outliving all of his enemies. They are dropping like flies and he is still going strong.

Now the fact that God tells Moses his enemies are dead may seem like a little thing, but as soon as Moses started to move in the direction He wanted him to go, God made it clear that He was right with him and this was the right move.

God controls the life and the death of every human, including the life and death of our enemies. He knows the best timing of everything. We may confidently move forward knowing God will take care of the enemies.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – Moses takes his wife and sons and they head to Egypt. **4:20**

There is no place where God told Moses to take his wife and children, so this appears to be a decision of Moses. He will not end up taking her. Moses' wife's name was Zipporah and they had two sons: Gershom and Eliezer (Ex. 18:2-4). He mounted them on a donkey. Now the Hebrew here does not automatically mean they all rode on one donkey. In fact, this very same Hebrew word "donkey" (hamor) is translated "donkeys" in Genesis 32:5. Sometimes a singular word can be used to refer to plural animals.

When we lived out west, often horses were used to go into the mountains. Often when a group was going for a ride you would hear someone say, "let's all mount up on the horse." The noun horse stood for many horses. This is true here. There was probably more than just one donkey. Each rider probably had his own donkey, plus supplies were packed on other donkeys. This is a 200 mile trip across some tough country and they needed the donkey to make this trip.

The only thing Moses took with him was his staff, which is called "the staff of God." **So to deliver Israel, what we have is an 80-year-old man who has a wooden stick in his hands. But if the stick is called the "staff of God," that is all you need.** As S. Lewis Johnson said, Moses is going to Egypt to duel with the most powerful man in the world and all he has in his hand is a stick (*Exodus 4*, p. 6).

Now in light of the assignment, go get the Hebrews and bring them back to this point, it almost appears as if Moses thinks he is relocating himself and his whole family to Egypt.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – Moses is told by God exactly what to do and say and what the outcome will be. **4:21-23**

This is an amazing passage that reveals the sovereignty of God in a major way. God spells out in great detail how things are going to go down. He spells out three sovereign details:

Sovereign Detail #1 - Moses is to go to Pharaoh and perform all signs God has given him the power to perform. **4:21a**

Now they were called signs earlier, but here they are called wonders.

These signs are designed to have people stand in awe of the power of God. Moses was to perform the staff/snake sign, the hand in the coat leprosy sign and the Nile water blood sign.

Sovereign Detail #2 - God is going to harden Pharaoh's heart and He will not let the Hebrews go. **4:21b**

In Exodus there are three different terms God uses concerning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

The **first** word, which is used here, is the most common. It is the word "hazaq" + leeb (heart) which emphasizes that God is the one who makes a heart bound strong in obstinate stubborn rebellion against Him and His Word (Ex. 4:21; 7:13; 7:22; 8:19; 9:12; 9:35; 10:20; 10:27; 11:10; 14:4; 14:8; 14:17) (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 269).

The **second** word "qashah" + leeb (heart) means God causes or determines that a heart will be in a firm, fast, heavy, stubborn state against God's Word and will (Ex. 7:3) (*Ibid.*, p. 746).

The **third** word "kated" + leeb (heart) means to have a dull heart that will not bend or move to God's Word or will (Ex. 7:14; 8:15; 8:32; 9:7; 9:34; 10:1; 14:4) (*Ibid.*, p. 381).

Most of the time in the book of Exodus, God is the One who is making or causing Pharaoh's heart into a stubborn rejection of His Word and will. The reason why, in some places, the text says Pharaoh hardened his own heart is because this shows that this judicial hardening was certainly not against the will of Pharaoh. He was a willing participant in having a heart that did not want God's Word or will in his life.

God did not give this information to Moses to stir up some theological debate about His sovereignty. This is truth. God does what He wants to do and causes what He wants to cause. What Moses would learn here is that God could do anything He wanted with Pharaoh's heart. God can turn the heart and mind of a king any way He wants at any time He wants (Prov. 21:1).

God's sovereignty totally and completely extends over all political leaders, including over those who are liars and in complete evil rebellion against the Word of God and will of God. God's people need to know this about God.

Does a person have a free will? Every person thinks he does and perceives that he does. But in all reality when it comes to who is sovereign, it is God, not a human.

Sovereign Detail #3 - God tells Moses exactly what to say to Pharaoh. **4:22-23**

There were primarily two verbal messages Moses was to communicate to the Egyptian leader:

(**Message #1**) - The nation Israel is the firstborn son of God. **4:22**

This is one political message that every national leader of every nation better understand. Israel belongs to God.

The classification of “firstborn son” means that this is the nation of special status and blessing. In the Israelite biblical world, the firstborn son was the favored son and special heir and the recipient of double portion blessings.

Now there were other nations in existence before God chose Israel to be His nation. In fact, the calling of Abraham shows up in Genesis 12 and the list of all nations shows up in Genesis 10. **But God made an elective choice that Israel would be His favored and blessed nation.**

Israel is the firstborn nation to be put into the family of God. Israel is the apple of God’s eye. It is true that many people from many nations have come to faith in Jesus Christ and are in the family of God, but there is only one firstborn nation to God and that is Israel.

God says to Moses, you go tell that Egyptian king that. Washington D.C. needs to be told this. You had better not miss this point because what happened to Egypt can happen to this country.

(Message #2) - If you do not let Israel go to worship God, God will kill your firstborn son.
4:23

God says if you don’t let my firstborn son/nation go, I will kill your firstborn son. This payback likeness of judgment is called by theologians “lex talionis.” Talis is the Latin word that means “like” and “lex” is the Latin word that means “law.” So this means law of like judgment. God says if you don’t let My Son go, I will kill your son. S. Lewis Johnson said God shows us all that He is not some “Santa Claus kind of God” (*Exodus 4*, p. 7). He is a sovereign God who does not play games. He can and will kill people.

Now this would actually turn out to be the tenth and final plague that God would send on the Egyptians before he would let Israel go. God is sovereignly revealing right up front exactly what would happen and what He is going to do. Moses could enter the land knowing just exactly how this thing was going to end.

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – God threatens to kill Moses. **4:24-26**

Now this is an odd text, but it does show the importance of Moses and us being willing to do exactly what God’s Word demands if we are going to be greatly used by God.

The first thing to contextually observe is that this story text comes right after a warning that God is going to kill firstborn sons of the Egyptians.

Now before we try to figure out what actually happened here, I want us to observe that after this event, apparently Moses sent Zipporah and his two sons away. They did not end up going to Egypt with him and he does not meet them again until Exodus 18:2.

We may assume from this fact and from what we know about the sovereignty of God that God did not want Moses taking his wife and sons with him on this assignment.

Now it appears as though that Moses had not circumcised one of his sons. Most scholars believe it was probably Moses' second son, Eliezer. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:10-14) and obviously there had been a breach in the covenant in this case.

Now **verse 24** says God sought to put Moses to death. It is possible He struck Moses down with a life-threatening illness. But notice in **verse 25**, Zipporah responded and took a flint and cut off the foreskin of her son and threw it at Moses' feet and said, "You are the bridegroom of blood to me." What this means is the thing that saves your life with God is the shed blood of a son.

This is the only thing that can save us from God's wrath and eternal execution; the shed blood of the Son of God.

It would appear to me that Zipporah is not happy about the fact that she has to circumcise her son. If we read between the lines a little bit, it appears that Moses had not demanded that his son be circumcised and probably gave into the request of his wife in not doing it. Gershom had probably been circumcised and Zipporah didn't like it and didn't want Eliezer to have to go through it.

That was a major mistake. Being circumcised was not about the wishes of a wife, it was the will of God. Furthermore, if you are going to be dominated by a woman, you cannot be a great leader for God. So God struck Moses down.

However, the moment God's Word was obeyed, He healed him. God is a God who will turn cursing into blessing if His people repent of rebellion against Him and His Word.

HISTORICAL FACT #6 – God directs Aaron to meet with Moses. **4:27-28**

God made himself known to Aaron and told him to go and meet Moses in the wilderness and He did and met him at Horeb. This is an amazing display of God's sovereignty. How would Aaron know where Moses was? How do you find someone in a wilderness? By the sovereign power of God. It was a sweet moment when these two brothers met again and Moses told Aaron all the amazing things God had revealed to him. He told him about the Word of God, the calling of God and the signs of God.

HISTORICAL FACT #7 – Moses and Aaron go to Egypt assemble Israel and Israel believes. **4:30-31**

This of course is exactly what God told Moses would happen (Exodus 3:18). God is sovereign over those who believe and over those who don't believe. When Israel received the news that God has seen their affliction and had come to get them, they bowed down and worshipped.

Now as this epoch journey begins, there were two things Moses learned: God is totally and completely sovereign over everything.

Moses learned that he needed to completely obey God's Word because that would literally save his life. This is the same lesson we need to learn.