

(God is Great,)

God is Good

(and wants us to be good)

worshipweekly.com/God-is-Good.html

There was good reason for the ditty sung at the dinner table. Repetition and remembering are important. One can argue good is better than love. Love is a feeling. Whether love is good or evil depends on who or what you love and how you express it. Good, is good. "God is love" is not in the Hebrew Bible. "I will make all my goodness pass before you" (God says to Moses when Moses asks to behold His presence), Exodus 33:19. Let that be a teaser...

The Exodus and Moses, Part 1

Exodus 1-10 (really 1-4, 5-10 on your own)

Sources

Rational Bible: Exodus, Dennis Prager

**Dennis acknowledges all his sources in
the book**

Sefaria.org (Bible translation used here)

Only 2 volumes out so far. Exodus was published first because of the Ten Commandments, which, if everyone followed, we'd be practically devoid of human-caused suffering.

Pragertopia.com, \$10/mth, all five books lecture series verse by verse, from some years ago, very different on the details but the big picture remains the same. 241 hours, 199 lectures. Or \$5-600/book CD, USB, download.



This is the 3rd attempt by God to teach humans how to be good.

1st=conscience

2nd=laws of Noah

Why not just start with 10 Commandments?

God may not have known where free will would lead

The 1st two were necessary steps

Establishes the *raison d'être* for the Jews

Why do people think there are so many Jews? Only 2/1000, .0018%, always been small compared to the rest.

Over-estimate due to their greater influence than their size.

1:8 A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph.



Most common bad trait in humans is ingratitude: either not acknowledge or soon forget (but how well we remember evil done to us).

To be a good person requires fighting your nature, like tendency to be ungrateful.

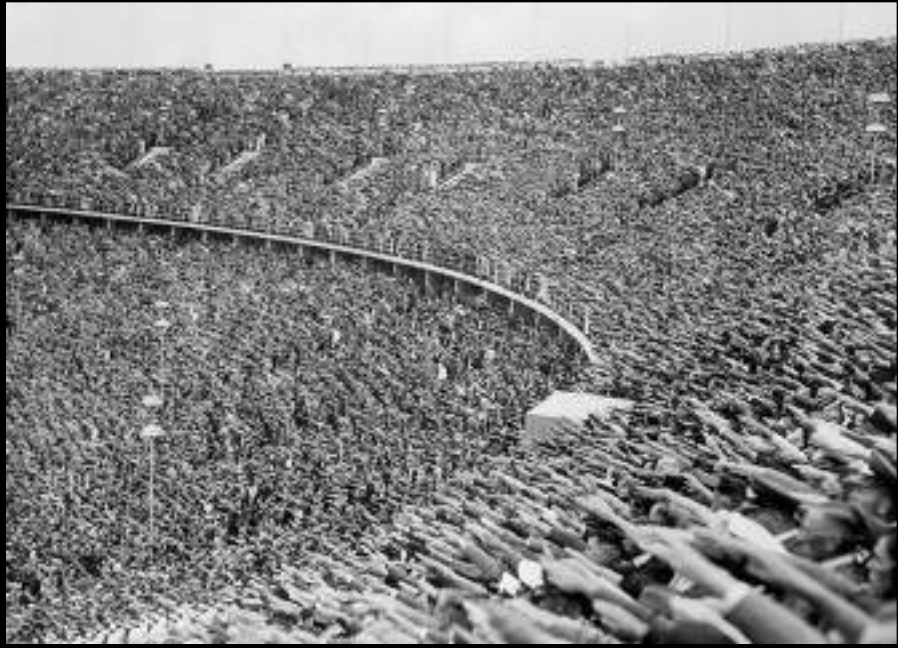
The Exodus story starts with forgetting. Egypt does not remember who saved Egypt over 400 years ago.

Remembering both good and evil are indispensable to be good.

Nations, too, need to remember. Need to keep their history, teach it to each generation.

Part of why the Jews have uniquely survived so long is that they remember well (study, ritual, etc.).

1:9 And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us.



Great evil requires the masses to participate.

Individuals can inflict a lot of evil, but not on such a massive scale as Pharaoh, Hitler, Lenin, etc.

We see this in reaction to lone gunmen. How can one person do such evil? Had to have been a conspiracy of many more people. Oswald.

Two Hebrew words for nation: am & goy. Am = blood ties, Goy = political unit.

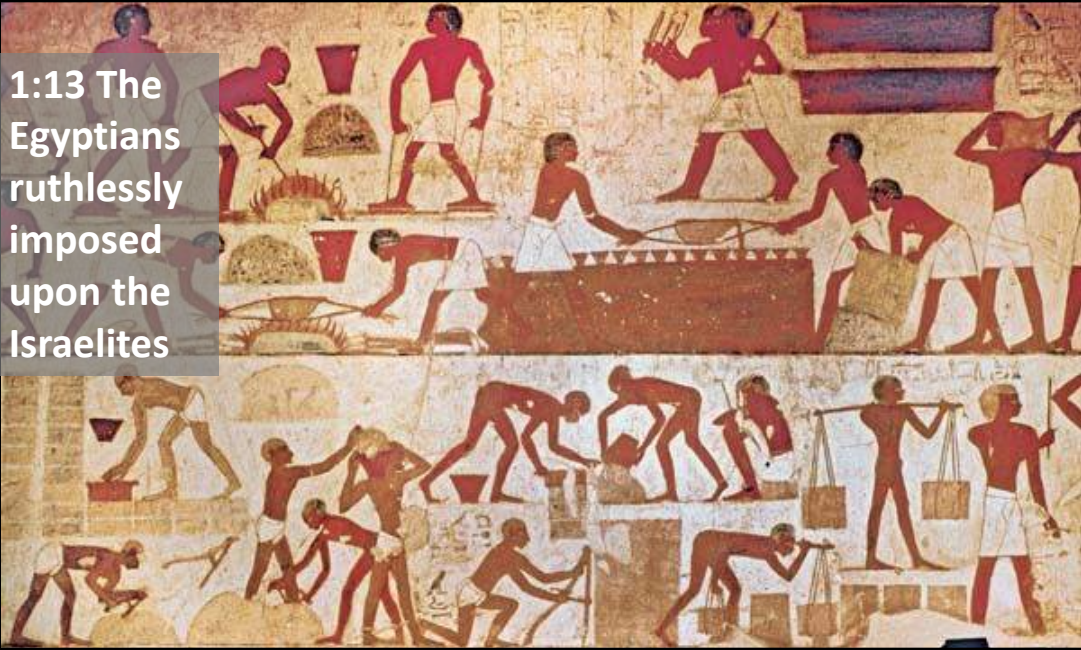
Am is used here, Pharaoh is worried Jews will dilute the bloodline of the Egyptians.

Historically this concern has led to much evil.

Jewish thought is goy based. Others are welcome, blood/ethnicity not important.

Ruth, non-Jew Moabite, becomes an ancestor to King David and ultimately to Jesus.

1:13 The Egyptians ruthlessly imposed upon the Israelites



Most Egyptians were not as evil as Pharaoh – just like most Germans were not as evil as Hitler. There are few extremely evil individuals.

What it takes for evil to triumph:

1. ordinary people indoctrinated
2. people who benefit by the evil (e.g. Europeans who got wealthy from Jewish assets)
3. lack of courageous, good people

Courage is a very rare trait in battle against evil. Good without courage fails in the battle.

1:15 The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,



What is translated here as “Hebrew midwives” could also be translated as “midwives of the Hebrews.”

There are several clues indicating the latter is correct. (e.g. Who would think Hebrew midwives would really kill Hebrew babies?)

Torah identifies two midwives by name, but does not name Pharaoh.

1:17 The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.



Not out of compassion, not love of God, but rather fear of God.

You need an unassailable moral code, higher authority who you know judges us in order to be so brave.

Throughout history, fine people have been referred to as God-fearing, not so much God-loving.

It gives strength.

Torah pattern: often sites heroes who are non-Jews and sites evil people who are Jews. Unlike nearly all historical nation/group myths/stories.

Surprisingly Pharaoh did not punish the midwives, merely pleads with them.

Sometimes being good against evil doesn't lead to the worst case. Even Nazi soldiers who could not slaughter Jews were simply re-assigned (albeit mostly to the front).

1:19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth."



There's a lie here... By vigorous they meant Hebrews have their babies fast like animals and we could not get there in time.

When lying is moral. We are not obligated to tell the truth to murderers.

Moral: absolutes, relativism, situational.

Absolutes plus situational is the key, not relativism (opinion)

2:1 A certain man
of the house of
Levi went and
married a Levite
woman.



Moses parents aren't even named here (they are later in 6:20).

Moses was an ordinary guy, not born miraculously at all.

Not pre-ordained for anything, normal mortal.

He will prove his metal before God chooses him for a task.

We're about to see the pre-eminent role women will play in Moses' life

There are many heroic women in the Torah. It is hardly a sexist writing. In fact, pounds home the equality of male-female.

2:3 When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.



Basket here is the word *tevah*, ark, same word used with Noah.
Indicates a new creation.

3rd attempt at "fixing" humanity: 1=conscience, 2=laws of Noah, 3=ten commandments, 4=Jesus, 5=Mohammad, 6=Mormon



2:5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it.

Think of it – the daughter of the Egyptian king saves Moses. She knew the child was Hebrew (next verse).

Non-Jew female hero (many more).

Biology is not destiny, a child of evil can be good. (The opposite is true, too, sadly.)

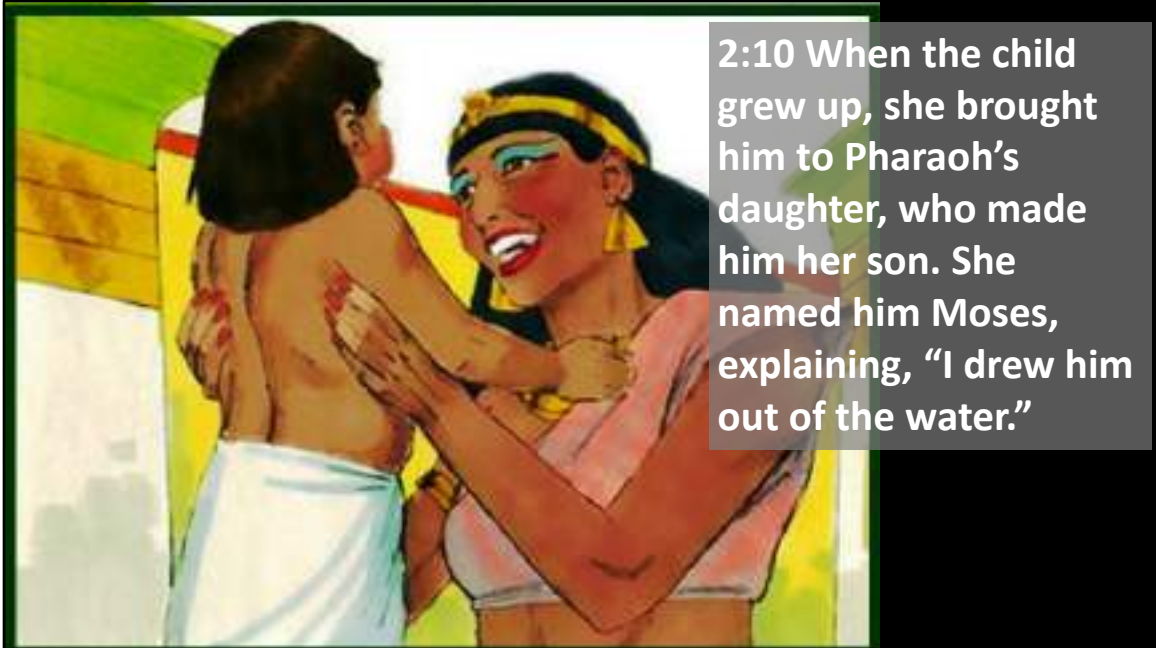


2:7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?"

Miriam, Moses' sister, shows great courage. She'd been watching and then approached the Princess...

Another heroic female. I do mean to mention this over and over and it refutes a common criticism of the Torah, sexist.

The fact that it was patriarchal is simply because it's "of the day".

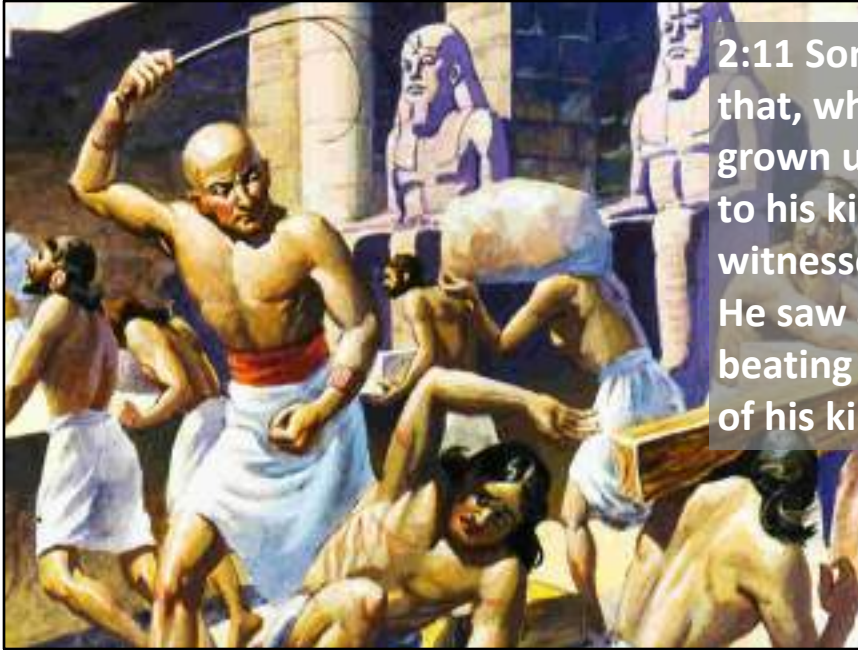


2:10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."

Probably around 3 years old when done suckling. That's when Moses' mother gives him over to Pharaoh's daughter.

Pharaoh's daughter names him Moses. In Hebrew = "drew out of the water."

Also an Egyptian name which presumably meant something, but we don't know what it meant in Egyptian.



2:11 Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen.

Apparently Moses knew he was Hebrew (kinsmen, “one of his brothers”). He did spend first three years with Mom. Or maybe someone told him during childhood. Also possible he did not know and the “brother” reference was more general. Jewish tradition holds that the mother is the one who raises him to adulthood, not the birth mother. So Pharaoh’s daughter was his mother.



2:12 He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

1st clue as to Moses' character and greatness.

Some have been critical of Moses for this, but... the verb for what the Egyptian did to the Hebrew is the same verb for what Moses did to the Egyptian. Could be either beat or killed. In any case, eye-for-eye.

Even if we see Moses reaction as over the top, what else was he to do? Either let the evil continue or stop it and face death.

Regardless of what we think, God approved.

What did he turn around to look for? Witnesses? Someone else to help? Unknown.

In the Hebrew, he looked around for an "ish", a man, a mench (person of integrity, honor, wisdom). Jewish saying, "In a place where there is no man (ish), be a man (ish)."



2:13 When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, “Why do you strike your fellow?”

An evil Hebrew (not to belabor the point about the Torah’s focus on behavior, not nationality-driven).

Second intervention against evil by Moses.

The reaction of the aggressor was “who made you chief? Did you not kill the Egyptian?”

Typical response of someone caught doing wrong – accuse the person who points it out.

Difference between decent and indecent is how they act when caught doing something wrong:

Say oops, sorry, you’re right, I’ll be better next time (and actually do better next time), or

Re-direct, accuse, name-call, etc.

Driver caught doing something wrong: does he say oops/sorry or flip off the accuser.

Takes a secure person to take criticism. Every one does wrong, it’s how you react.

Moses is now a wanted man and flees Egypt.

2:20 He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread."



Moses has blocked bullies from preventing Zipporah from watering her flock (pictured).

She goes home and Dad asks how she got home so soon in the day.

She explains she didn't have to wait on all the bullies because this guy helped me.

Bullied every day.

Then the Dad said to the daughter...(above). 7 daughters!

Reuel gives Zipporah to Moses as a wife. No mention of love/beauty from either or anyone else.

This was Moses 3rd approach to combatting evil, and our choices as well:

1. Violence (Egyptian task master)
2. Speak (2 Hebrews fighting)
3. Stand (block the bullies at the well)

2:22 She bore a son whom he named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."



Ger-shom = stranger there.

2:24 God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.



Why didn't God intervene earlier? (Been in Egypt > 400 years)

God has his own timetable.

They cried out but did not pray, they forgot God.

God intervenes when you relate to him.

Could ask this question at any point, 200yrs, 100 yrs, 1 year.

In any case, God remembering (doesn't mean He forgot) = deciding to act.

3:1 Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.



Wilderness = “furthest reaches” – to get away from evil which he hates.

Tired of having to fight.

He didn’t want to be a leader, argues with God about it.

Unlike those who would do anything to be a leader (lie, flip-flop, whatever they thought would work), get elected, “could taste it.”

Horeb = area of Mt Sinai.

Another thought about leaders: great leaders come from somewhere else. Must know >1 group to be wise, have empathy. Also probably helps to spend time in isolation, meditate.



3:2 An angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed.

Burning bush is a metaphor for the Jews. Constantly burned (even literally) but not consumed.

Torah angels are not winged, human-looking creatures. They are messengers taking many forms (dreams, visions).

Here, the “angel” is the fire (most likely).

Moses “gazed” – paid attention.



3:3 Moses said, “I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn’t the bush burn up?”

Noticing the divine is a choice. Most people don’t look enough or close enough to notice,

But Moses did notice. This was God’s last test of Moses, would he notice the divine. He did.

Same with us. When we see a baby born, is it divine or is just sperm, egg, and 9 months? We have a choice.

Do you see God at work in things. Do you even try?

Did Beethoven come from paramecium by way of an infinite number of monkeys, time, and typewriters?

Or was there something divine? Your choice.

**Almost
everything
important
in life is a
choice.**



To be happy. To be honest. To be hard-working. To be kind. To see miracles. To believe/trust in God (or at least live like that). To love.

If there is no God: - life is ultimately pointless. Humans have no more meaning than rocks. No purpose. Insignificant.

- good and evil do not objectively exist. There is only material reality.

No moral properties. Just opinions of insignificant humans.

- the only reality is material. Love is just neurons firing. The mind is simply deceiving itself to think it's thinking.

To believe: - is to live a richer, more meaningful, hope-filled life.

BTW, you can't live as an agnostic. You can intellectually be agnostic, but behaviourly you act as if there is a God or as if there isn't.

Moses chose to look carefully and see a miracle. We can, too. It's a choice.



3:4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: “Moses! Moses!” He answered, “Here I am.”

Only after Moses pays attention (turns aside) does God speak.

God communicates with us generally/only after/if we notice him.

It's a choice.

Like Shakespeare, God will only “speak to you” after study, and the deeper the study, the more you get out of it.

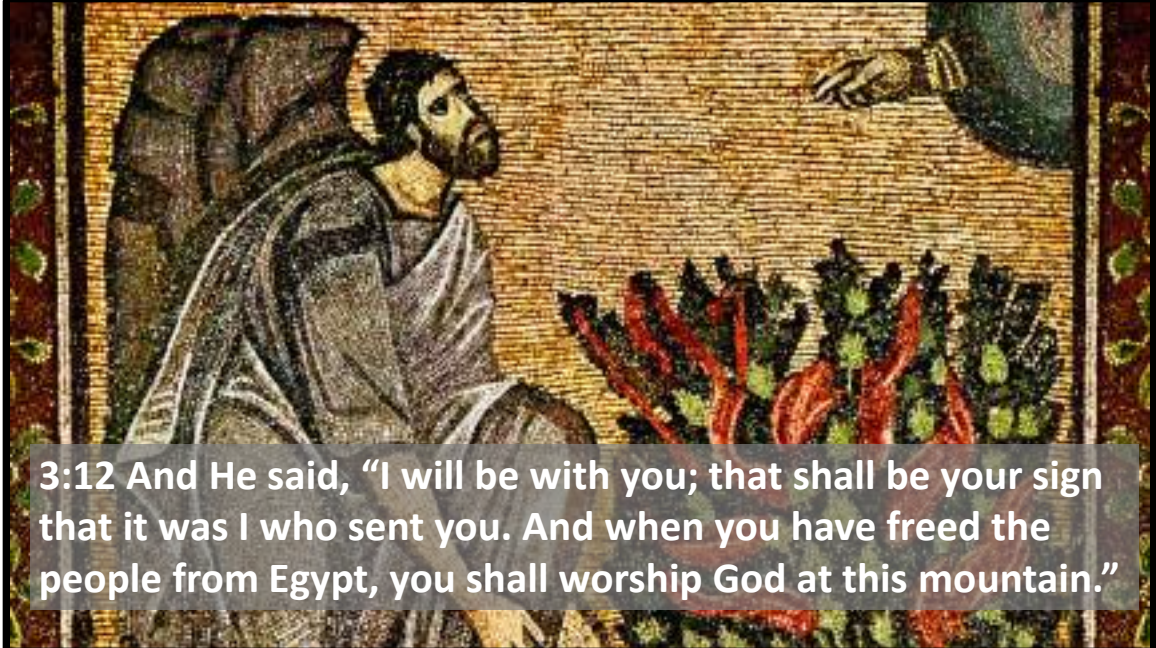
The more effort, the more the meaning. It's what animates me to this study of the Torah.

Moses replies, “Here I am.” The same “yes sir” that Abraham replied.



3:5 And He said, “Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.

No land is inherently holy. It is holy because God is there. It's where we bring God into, or where we encounter God. This is another choice. Bring God in. See God there. Or not.



3:12 And He said, “I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”

Moses has been arguing with God up till now about leading.

He’s got a peech impediment, he’s a wanted man, etc.

It’s God that matters, not Moses.

Moses character is important, but it is God that will bring success.

What is the “sign” – the freeing of the people.

God’s intervention is often only clear in retrospect, whether with nations or with individuals.

Moses is chosen not because he sounds good, but because he is good.

3:14 And God said to Moses, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.” He continued, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’”



Ehyeh = verb to be. Hebrew (and other languages) has no present tense of to be (am, is, are).

This name is never mentioned again.

Probably for Moses alone, not likely understood by others in the day.

But it is for us to understand today, or appreciate.

In the next verse, God gives Moses a more understandable name to use, Adonai. We get Jehovah from the letters.

Jehovah is from the letters of the verb to be, usually pronounced Adonai.

Bottomline: God simply is.



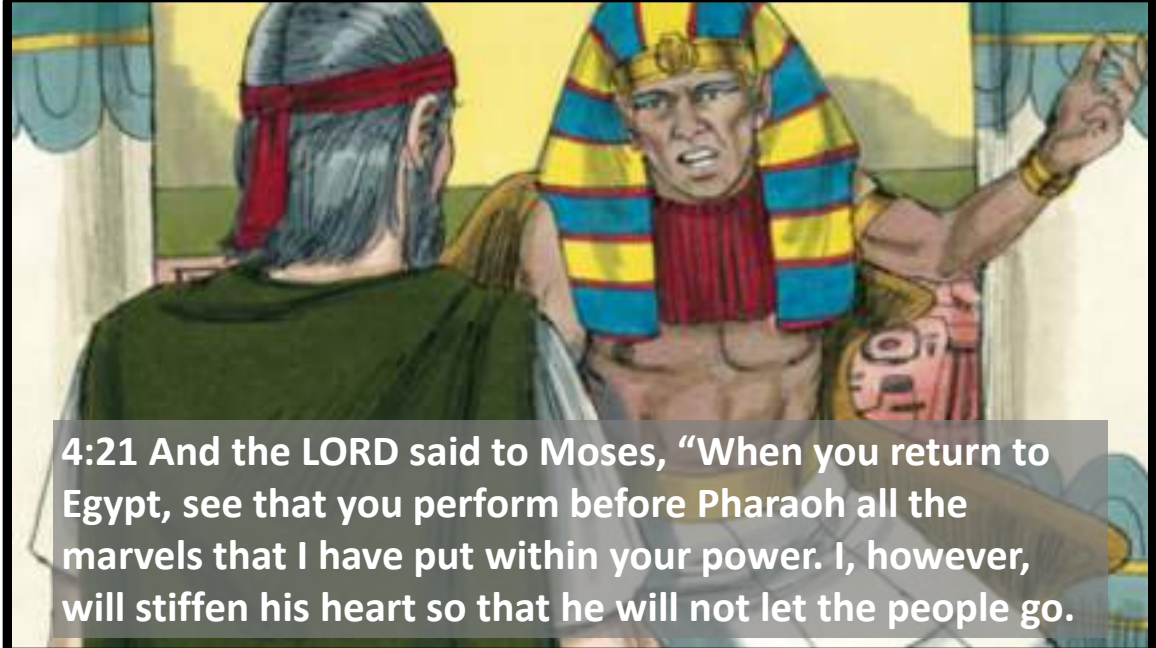
3:15-22 And God said further to Moses, “Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, This My appellation for all eternity.

Balance of chapter... God tells Moses what to do and say and what will happen. Go to the elders, tell them what's going on. I (God) have taken note of your outcry and will smite Egypt. God directs that the elders go with Moses to Egypt, but that doesn't happen for some reason. Only Moses and his brother Aaron go to Egypt. God tells Moses to ask for days off to go into the wilderness and offer sacrifices. Moses initially botches the request when speaking to Pharaoh. Pharaoh will not go for it. God tells Moses he will show a great deal of force and the Israelites will be set free.



Chapter 4: 1-20

Moses continues arguing with God about he's not the guy. What if they don't believe me. God tells Moses to see that the rod in his hand is indeed a rod. God turns it into a snake, and back to a rod. Take the rod with you, God says. Does another sign/miracle with snowy scales on Moses breast. Moses brings up his speech impediment, "never been a man of words." God says I will give speech to you. Moses argues back and God gets angry but agrees to send Aaron with Moses to be "an agent." Moses goes back to Jethro (father-in-law) and asks for permission to go to Egypt without telling him about the encounter with God. Being polite (was close to Jethro). Probably thought Jethro wouldn't like the "let my people" go thing. God assures Moses all the people back in Egypt who wanted to kill him are dead.



4:21 And the LORD said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the marvels that I have put within your power. I, however, will stiffen his heart so that he will not let the people go.

Did Pharaoh really have free will? The Torah speaks of “stiffening his heart” 20x, half by God and half by Pharaoh to himself.

Was it fair to punish P. for what God forced upon him?

1. God believed P. deserved to be punished.
2. Stiffening his heart is exactly what gave P. free will.

Had God not hardened his heart, he may have not felt free to say no. Avoided giving in with a gun to his head. Gun-to-the-head confessions are rarely sincere.

See Exodus 10:7.



4:23 I have said to you, “Let My son go, that he may worship Me,” yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your first-born son.”

This is still God telling Moses what to say, what will happen, etc.

Few people remember that God spoke of this first-born slaying at this point, before Moses even goes back to Egypt.

But Moses does not repeat those words as instructed.

Why didn't Moses repeat these words as instructed? Fear he'd be killed by P.? Likely fearing something and not totally trusting God:

Belief versus trust.

To trust in God does not mean God will intervene all the time. It means He will ultimately do right by us, ultimate justice, even if held off till afterlife.

Jew trusted God to return them to their homeland, and He eventually did.

Liberty Bell: You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants (Leviticus 25:10). America became the one truly Judeo-Christian country.

Chapters 5-10



Moses blows what God told him to say. Pharaoh says no and makes Hebrews get their own straw. Moses accuses God of doing evil.

Plagues 1-9 (10 is next week).

Read these chapters in your Bible, the Prager book if you have it, or...

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Next session: September 29th, 6pm PDT

The Exodus and Moses, Part 2

Genesis 11-19, 32-34