

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

Monday, February 21st

Exodus 8:20-32

²⁰Next the LORD told Moses, "Get up early in the morning and meet Pharaoh as he goes down to the river. Say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so they can worship me. ²¹If you refuse, I will send swarms of flies throughout Egypt. Your homes will be filled with them, and the ground will be covered with them. ²²But it will be very different in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites live. No flies will be found there. Then you will know that I am the LORD and that I have power even in the heart of your land. ²³I will make a clear distinction between your people and my people. This miraculous sign will happen tomorrow.'"

²⁴And the LORD did just as he had said. There were terrible swarms of flies in Pharaoh's palace and in every home in Egypt. The whole country was thrown into chaos by the flies.

²⁵Pharaoh hastily called for Moses and Aaron. "All right! Go ahead and offer sacrifices to your God," he said. "But do it here in this land. Don't go out into the wilderness."

²⁶But Moses replied, "That won't do! The Egyptians would detest the sacrifices that we offer to the LORD our God. If we offer them here where they can see us, they will be sure to stone us.

²⁷We must take a three-day trip into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, just as he has commanded us."

²⁸"All right, go ahead," Pharaoh replied. "I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the LORD your God in the wilderness. But don't go too far away. Now hurry, and pray for me."

²⁹"As soon as I go," Moses said, "I will ask the LORD to cause the swarms of flies to disappear from you and all your people. But I am warning you, don't change your mind again and refuse to let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD."

³⁰So Moses left Pharaoh and asked the LORD to remove all the flies. ³¹And the LORD did as Moses asked and caused the swarms to disappear. Not a single fly remained in the land! ³²But Pharaoh hardened his heart again and refused to let the people go.

Points of Interest:

- With his return to Egypt, Moses has entered the phase of the hero's journey called, 'test, allies, and enemies.' During this stage of the journey, the hero spends some time getting to know the landscape, and he faces some challenges meant to prepare him for the final showdown which will happen later. Moses' testing comes in the form of a series of encounters between him and Pharaoh in which Moses threatens Egypt with curses unless Pharaoh releases the Israelites. Along the way, he faces the Egyptian magicians, minor henchmen of Pharaoh; his dueling miracles with them help him build the skills and confidence necessary to eventually defeat Pharaoh. Aaron is so far Moses' only human ally—his sidekick. Of course, it also becomes clear that Moses has God on his side.
- 'Next the LORD told Moses'—between yesterday's and today's passages, we've actually skipped a little bit of the back-and-forth between Moses and Pharaoh. When changing the rod into a snake proves unconvincing, Moses uses another of the signs God had given him in the desert, the turning of the Nile's water into blood. The Egyptian magicians are also able to replicate that sign, and Pharaoh remains unimpressed. So, under God's direction, Moses begins to turn up the temperature, sending more and more impressive signs which make life more and more uncomfortable for Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Previous to this passage, there is a plague of frogs (which the Egyptian magicians are able to replicate) and a plague of gnats (which they are not). When the magicians fail to match the plague of gnats, even they tell Pharaoh (essentially), 'We think this really is God's work.' But Pharaoh doesn't listen.
- 'But it will be very different in the land of Goshen'—this is the first of Moses' signs that is targeted specifically at the Egyptians. The fact that the flies infest the homes of the Egyptians but not those of the Israelites demonstrates that it is not a natural phenomenon. This is literally

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

an act of God. In this act, God is protecting the Israelites and punishing the Egyptians, demonstrating both his great power and his love for the Israelites.

- 'Pharaoh hastily called for Moses and Aaron'—flies can get very bothersome very quickly. Perhaps Pharaoh also recognizes that he can't afford to wait Moses and Aaron out in this case (which is what he does when the Nile is turned) because this plague has a disproportionate effect: his people will surely reach the end of their patience before the Israelites do, since the Israelites aren't even affected.
- 'That won't do!'—Pharaoh backs down, but he doesn't want to completely give in to Moses' demands. He's trying to preserve his dignity, but he's not really in a good position for negotiating. Moses clearly has the upper hand; so he's not going to settle for anything less than full agreement from Pharaoh. Once again, it seems that the Lord is interested in making it very clear that Pharaoh is not in command of this situation. What Moses is looking for is not an act of mercy on Pharaoh's part, or even a compromise; it's recognition that Moses, by God's power, has beaten Pharaoh in a contest of strength.
- 'But don't go too far away'—a pathetic attempt by Pharaoh to keep some semblance of control over the situation.
- 'Not a single fly remained in the land!'—at Moses' command, the flies disappear just as quickly as they came. Pharaoh might appear to possess authority and power, but Moses clearly and easily demonstrates that he has the real thing.
- 'But Pharaoh hardened his heart again'—as his bargaining and his continued attempts to assert control might have indicated, Pharaoh has not really surrendered. As soon as the pressure is off, he reverts to his old stubbornness. He's like someone who cries, 'uncle,' when his arm is tied behind his back, only to start fighting again as soon as he's let go.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* When Moses steps out on this adventure, he quickly outstrips his preparation. God has showed him ahead of time how to do a couple of miraculous signs, but he quickly blows through those signs without getting anywhere close to succeeding in his mission. Have you ever stepped out in response to a call of God only to find yourself quickly over your head? How did it feel? How did you respond? God provides Moses with more guidance and more power when he needs it. Has God ever been there for you when you've reached the end of your own knowledge or skill? Thank him for those times. And if you find yourself over your head right now, take a moment to ask God, 'What now?'
- *For your six:* Sometimes we respond to God in times of stress only to revert back to our old patterns once the stress is gone. Have any of your six recently become interested in God because of a problem or crisis? Pray that they would continue to seek relationship with him after the problem is resolved.
- *For our church:* Moses tells Pharaoh, 'But it will be very different in the land of Goshen.' God loves to show just how different life can be for people who choose to worship him. Our purpose as a church is to empower impossibly great lives, and many of us have gotten tastes of such impossible lives. Pray that those experiences would only grow, that more and more we will be unmistakable examples of how very different, and how incredibly great, a life lived with God's power and blessing can be.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

Tuesday, February 22nd

Exodus 9:13-35

¹³Then the LORD said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning. Go to Pharaoh and tell him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so they can worship me. ¹⁴If you don't, I will send a plague that will really speak to you and your officials and all the Egyptian people. I will prove to you that there is no other God like me in all the earth. ¹⁵I could have killed you all by now. I could have attacked you with a plague that would have wiped you from the face of the earth. ¹⁶But I have let you live for this reason--that you might see my power and that my fame might spread throughout the earth. ¹⁷But you are still lording it over my people, and you refuse to let them go. ¹⁸So tomorrow at this time I will send a hailstorm worse than any in all of Egypt's history. ¹⁹Quick! Order your livestock and servants to come in from the fields. Every person or animal left outside will die beneath the hail.' "

²⁰Some of Pharaoh's officials believed what the LORD said. They immediately brought their livestock and servants in from the fields. ²¹But those who had no respect for the word of the LORD left them out in the open.

²²Then the LORD said to Moses, "Lift your hand toward the sky, and cause the hail to fall throughout Egypt, on the people, the animals, and the crops."

²³So Moses lifted his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning struck the earth. The LORD sent a tremendous hailstorm against all the land of Egypt. ²⁴Never in all the history of Egypt had there been a storm like that, with such severe hail and continuous lightning. ²⁵It left all of Egypt in ruins. Everything left in the fields was destroyed--people, animals, and crops alike. Even all the trees were destroyed. ²⁶The only spot in all Egypt without hail that day was the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel lived.

²⁷Then Pharaoh urgently sent for Moses and Aaron. "I finally admit my fault," he confessed. "The LORD is right, and my people and I are wrong. ²⁸Please beg the LORD to end this terrifying thunder and hail. I will let you go at once."

²⁹"All right," Moses replied. "As soon as I leave the city, I will lift my hands and pray to the LORD. Then the thunder and hail will stop. This will prove to you that the earth belongs to the LORD. ³⁰But as for you and your officials, I know that you still do not fear the LORD God as you should."

³¹All the flax and barley were destroyed because the barley was ripe and the flax was in bloom. ³²But the wheat and the spelt were not destroyed because they had not yet sprouted from the ground.

³³So Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. As he lifted his hands to the LORD, all at once the thunder and hail stopped, and the downpour ceased. ³⁴When Pharaoh saw this, he and his officials sinned yet again by stubbornly refusing to do as they had promised. ³⁵Pharaoh refused to let the people leave, just as the LORD had predicted.

Points of Interest:

- Between last passage and this passage, we skipped a plague and a terrible rash.
- 'I could have killed you all by now'—this statement reminds me of something we sometimes hear people say in action movies: 'If I wanted to kill you, you'd be dead already.' God could have rescued Israel already. As he says here, he could have done it over the Egyptians' dead bodies. It seems he also could have led his people out of Egypt without Pharaoh's permission, protecting them from any punishment. Apparently, God wants something besides merely rescuing the Israelites or killing the Egyptians. What he seems to want is for the Egyptians to recognize and acknowledge his desire and ability to save the Israelites. It's as if he's saying, 'Just admit that I'm a good God to my people.'

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

- 'Quick! Order your livestock and servants to come in from the fields'—Moses gives the Egyptians fair warning here. If they believe what he says and act accordingly, they can avoid the worst effects of the storm.
- 'Some of Pharaoh's officials'—even some of Pharaoh's own officials are beginning to show respect for God and his word. At this point, it seems that Pharaoh is beginning to lose the public relations battle, even among his own people.
- 'Lift your hand toward the sky'—it's worth noting again that the LORD is saying and doing all of these things through Moses. God probably doesn't need Moses to lift his hand in order to send the storm. But God gives Moses the incredible privilege of playing a crucial role in the amazing thing he is doing.
- 'left all of Egypt in ruins'—because an earlier pharaoh was willing to listen to God's servant Joseph, Egypt was saved in the midst of a famine. Because this pharaoh refuses to listen to God's servant Moses, Egypt is being torn apart.
- 'this terrifying thunder and hail'—even in our modern, materialist age, it's generally acknowledged that there's something awe-inspiring and even frightening about a thunderstorm. The idea that a thunderstorm is a God speaking or showing his wrath isn't completely absent today, and it was the general belief in the ancient world. Any thunderstorm, therefore, would have been somewhat frightening. The fact that this storm was particularly severe—and that it was specifically sent as a judgment from God—would have made it especially unnerving.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* Moses is in some ways quite an ordinary person, but God sends him on an extraordinary journey. One of the unbelievably awesome things Moses experiences on this journey is the power to do the impossible. How many of us have never dreamed about what it would be like to have a superpower? Well, one of the amazingly fun things about stepping out on a journey of faith is that when we do, God actually enjoys giving us supernatural abilities. Have you ever done something you know you don't have the power to do yourself? How did it feel? Thank God for giving you that wonderful opportunity. If you've never experienced something like that, ask God to give you the chance.
- *For your six:* In this story, some of Pharaoh's officials experience the benefits of respecting God's words. They hear him and respond, and it turns out well for them. Have you heard some words from God recently that you think might be especially helpful to one or more of your six? Consider passing God's suggestion along to them. Give them the chance to hear, respond, and experience the benefits.
- *For our church:* God makes his intentions clear: 'that you might see my power and that my fame might spread throughout the earth.' Pray that we will see God's power here in Boston—through a widespread outbreak of the benefits that come from the Holy Spirit, rather than a storm of hail, if possible—and that what we experience of God's saving power will spread throughout the earth.

Wednesday, February 23^d

Exodus 11:1-9, 12:21-39

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will send just one more disaster on Pharaoh and the land of Egypt. After that, Pharaoh will let you go. In fact, he will be so anxious to get rid of you that he will practically force you to leave the country. ²Tell all the Israelite men and women to ask their Egyptian neighbors for articles of silver and gold."

³(Now the LORD had caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the people of Israel, and Moses

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

was considered a very great man in the land of Egypt. He was respected by Pharaoh's officials and the Egyptian people alike.)

⁴So Moses announced to Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD says: About midnight I will pass through Egypt. ⁵All the firstborn sons will die in every family in Egypt, from the oldest son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the oldest son of his lowliest slave. Even the firstborn of the animals will die. ⁶Then a loud wail will be heard throughout the land of Egypt; there has never been such wailing before, and there never will be again. ⁷But among the Israelites it will be so peaceful that not even a dog will bark. Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites. ⁸All the officials of Egypt will come running to me, bowing low. 'Please leave!' they will beg. 'Hurry! And take all your followers with you.' Only then will I go!" Then, burning with anger, Moses left Pharaoh's presence.

⁹Now the LORD had told Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you. But this will give me the opportunity to do even more mighty miracles in the land of Egypt" . . .

²¹Then Moses called for the leaders of Israel and said, "Tell each of your families to slaughter the lamb they have set apart for the Passover. ²²Drain each lamb's blood into a basin. Then take a cluster of hyssop branches and dip it into the lamb's blood. Strike the hyssop against the top and sides of the doorframe, staining it with the blood. And remember, no one is allowed to leave the house until morning. ²³For the LORD will pass through the land and strike down the Egyptians. But when he sees the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe, the LORD will pass over your home. He will not permit the Destroyer to enter and strike down your firstborn.

²⁴"Remember, these instructions are permanent and must be observed by you and your descendants forever. ²⁵When you arrive in the land the LORD has promised to give you, you will continue to celebrate this festival. ²⁶Then your children will ask, 'What does all this mean? What is this ceremony about?' ²⁷And you will reply, 'It is the celebration of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt. And though he killed the Egyptians, he spared our families and did not destroy us.'" Then all the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

²⁸So the people of Israel did just as the LORD had commanded through Moses and Aaron. ²⁹And at midnight the LORD killed all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn son of the captive in the dungeon. Even the firstborn of their livestock were killed. ³⁰Pharaoh and his officials and all the people of Egypt woke up during the night, and loud wailing was heard throughout the land of Egypt. There was not a single house where someone had not died.

³¹Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron during the night. "Leave us!" he cried. "Go away, all of you! Go and serve the LORD as you have requested. ³²Take your flocks and herds, and be gone. Go, but give me a blessing as you leave." ³³All the Egyptians urged the people of Israel to get out of the land as quickly as possible, for they thought, "We will all die!"

³⁴The Israelites took with them their bread dough made without yeast. They wrapped their kneading bowls in their spare clothing and carried them on their shoulders. ³⁵And the people of Israel did as Moses had instructed and asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold. ³⁶The LORD caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. So, like a victorious army, they plundered the Egyptians!

³⁷That night the people of Israel left Rameses and started for Succoth. There were about 600,000 men, plus all the women and children. And they were all traveling on foot. ³⁸Many people who were not Israelites went with them, along with the many flocks and herds. ³⁹Whenever they stopped to eat, they baked bread from the yeastless dough they had brought from Egypt. It was made without yeast because the people were rushed out of Egypt and had no time to wait for bread to rise.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

Points of Interest:

- Once again, we've skipped a couple of plagues: locusts and darkness. Both times Pharaoh promises to let the people go but reneges when the plague is gone.
- 'Moses was considered a very great man in the land of Egypt'—a far cry from, 'Who am I to speak to Pharaoh?' Even among the Egyptians, Moses has gained respect through this contest with Pharaoh.
- 'All the firstborn sons will die in every family in Egypt'—this is a sobering moment. It nearly brings tears to my eyes to read it, and I can't help but ask, 'Lord, wasn't there some other way?' Although I confess that I certainly don't completely understand God's reasons for doing this, there are a few observations that help me get some handle on what is happening here. This passage powerfully portrays the fact that a willful decision to ignore God—and even more so a decision to actively work against God—has serious consequences; it can well be a matter of life and death. God wants to make it absolutely clear that it is very good to have him as a friend and very bad to be his enemy; he's willing to go to shocking lengths to demonstrate that fact. In a way, God seems to be directly confronting a strongly held fundamental human assumption. We tend to think that saving life is the very highest priority; God communicates here that matters of relationship with him take precedence over life and death. He doesn't take the situation to this level easily or flippantly, though. This is reserved as a last desperate measure.

Having taken this step, God actually shows himself to be more merciful than the pharaohs. The previous Pharaoh tried to kill all the Hebrew boys in order to keep the Hebrews in slavery. God sends death only on the firstborn. It's certainly a strong enough statement: it affects every family, and it strikes down the person who was supposed to be the future leader of that family.

The hero's journey also gives us some perspective on this awful moment in the story. Terrible as it is, this confrontation with death is actually a universal element of the hero story. This fact might not be immediately apparent to us because it is frequently either metaphorical or simulated: in a romantic comedy, the death is usually the death of the relationship, when the couple temporarily splits up; in the sports genre, like *Rocky* for instance, the hero is down on the mat or behind by an impossible score; in an action flick—James Bond comes to mind—the enemy has the hero in his sights, and he is about to pull the trigger. It might not be too much of an over-statement to say that every good story involves the hero facing her darkest moment; almost always that dark moment involves death, near death, or the semblance of death.

This face-off with death usually happens during a big show-down with the enemy. Sometimes at that moment, it is revealed that there is an even more sinister influence behind the person who we've assumed all along is our main enemy; the hero defeats her apparent enemy, only to find herself at the mercy of her true enemy. Such an unmasking of the real enemy happens here at the Passover. All along, we've assumed Pharaoh is the enemy. When it gets to the final moment, we see that the true enemy is death itself.

Perhaps this is what the hero's journey—and in fact life itself—is actually about. To state something that is both incredibly morbid and incredibly obvious at the same time, we will all someday face the moment of death. Maybe, the hero's journey is all about preparing for that moment well. In this passage, God shows his people that one key to victory at that moment is relying on him. He has the power to rescue them from death, taking them through the ordeal to the other side.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

- ‘Only then will I go!’—Moses is predicting a complete reversal of roles. At first, Moses was practically begging (unsuccessfully) for permission to leave. By the end of the night, Pharaoh will be begging him to go.
- ‘when he sees the blood’—the Israelites are saved from death, but not bloodlessly. It takes the sacrifice of a lamb. Jesus later identifies himself profoundly with this Passover lamb. The Last Supper is a Passover meal, and at that meal Jesus identifies the wine they are drinking as his blood, shed for the ransom of many. Jesus’ trial and the beginning of his punishment happen during the night when the rescue from the Destroyer is commemorated. The sour wine Jesus is given on the cross is handed to him on a hyssop branch, the same branch used to sprinkle the blood here. Whatever we feel about the death of the firstborn of Egypt, we see in Jesus that God is not callously removed from the situation. He sacrifices his own firstborn to rescue his people from death. Jesus, as the Passover lamb, is our provision for escape. He is also our example: like a true hero, he faces death and overcomes it.
The Passover and Jesus’ death—a new and better Passover—are unsettling, frightening, and yet profound and awe-inspiring examples of the idea of ‘myth become fact,’ which Dave mentions in his User’s Manual.
- ‘but give me a blessing as you leave’—Pharaoh may be asking for special favor, but my guess is that he just wants some assurance that the madness will stop and life will return to normal if he does let the Israelites go. He doesn’t want Moses to leave any terrible plagues behind when he departs.
- ‘There were about 600,000 men’—there’s a great deal of debate about the accuracy of this number. Some translators suggest that the phrase actually means, ‘600 troops’ (*Bible Background Commentary* 88), meaning 600 squadrons of men, probably of quite a bit less than 1000 people each. Regardless of the exact number, the writer of *Exodus* has made clear that the Israelites are very numerous and that this is a total evacuation. It does not escape the author’s attention that such a very large number of people would be difficult to organize and feed in the middle of the desert; in fact, it becomes a major element of the story.
- ‘Many people who were not Israelites went with them’—we’re not exactly sure who these people are. It seems most likely that they are other immigrant slave laborers, but the story at least opens up the possibility that some Egyptians might have joined them too. God has made it clear that he is trying to reveal himself to the Egyptians through Moses’ mighty deeds; and in the past couple of passages, we’ve seen some Egyptians respond positively to Moses and to God’s words. It’s pretty clear that these non-Israelites are quickly welcomed and incorporated into the community. Before the plague of flies, God says, ‘I will make a clear distinction between your people and my people.’ We see here that God is not describing a strict, exclusionary racist policy. ‘Your people’ and ‘my people’ does not necessarily mean Egyptians and Israelites, although it is generally the case. People have the freedom to choose whether they will belong to God or Pharaoh. About those who choose to join God’s people, God tells Moses, ‘They will be treated just as if they had been born among you’ (Exodus 12:48).
- ‘because the people were rushed out of Egypt’—these people have been kept captive for so long. Now, the Egyptians can’t wait one more second for them to leave. The Egyptians treat them like dinner guests who’ve overstayed their welcome, practically putting their coats on and shoving them out the door.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* In this passage, we encounter the unsettling notion that the hero’s journey ultimately leads to death. Perhaps this explains our ambivalence about the hero’s journey, which is a story we love to hear about a life we’re afraid to live. We spend much of our life—either

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

consciously or unconsciously—trying to avoid the topic of death. The hero's journey places its inevitability right in our faces. It also inspires in us hope that, despite all appearances, we can in the end conquer death. How does it change your perspective on the hero's journey, and on your own life itself, to think that it might be all about us preparing for that showdown well?

- *For your six:* The true enemy of your six is death. Pray against their enemy, and ask God to provide for them a way to escape death.
- *For our church:* Many people who were not raised as Israelites ended up joining them on this journey. That's an exciting picture for our church, because one of the major dreams God has given us is that we would be a church filled with people who wouldn't consider themselves church people. Pray that many, many new people would join us in our journey of faith.

Thursday, February 24th

Exodus 14

¹ Then the LORD gave these instructions to Moses: ²"Tell the people to march toward Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and the sea. Camp there along the shore, opposite Baal-zephon. ³Then Pharaoh will think, 'Those Israelites are confused. They are trapped between the wilderness and the sea!' ⁴And once again I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after you. I have planned this so I will receive great glory at the expense of Pharaoh and his armies. After this, the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD!" So the Israelites camped there as they were told.

⁵When word reached the king of Egypt that the Israelites were not planning to return to Egypt after three days, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds. "What have we done, letting all these slaves get away?" they asked. ⁶So Pharaoh called out his troops and led the chase in his chariot. ⁷He took with him six hundred of Egypt's best chariots, along with the rest of the chariots of Egypt, each with a commander. ⁸The LORD continued to strengthen Pharaoh's resolve, and he chased after the people of Israel who had escaped so defiantly. ⁹All the forces in Pharaoh's army--all his horses, chariots, and charioteers--were used in the chase. The Egyptians caught up with the people of Israel as they were camped beside the shore near Pi-hahiroth, across from Baal-zephon.

¹⁰As Pharaoh and his army approached, the people of Israel could see them in the distance, marching toward them. The people began to panic, and they cried out to the LORD for help.

¹¹Then they turned against Moses and complained, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? Why did you make us leave? ¹²Didn't we tell you to leave us alone while we were still in Egypt? Our Egyptian slavery was far better than dying out here in the wilderness!"

¹³But Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid. Just stand where you are and watch the LORD rescue you. The Egyptians that you see today will never be seen again. ¹⁴The LORD himself will fight for you. You won't have to lift a finger in your defense!"

¹⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving!"

¹⁶Use your shepherd's staff--hold it out over the water, and a path will open up before you through the sea. Then all the people of Israel will walk through on dry ground. ¹⁷Yet I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they will follow the Israelites into the sea. Then I will receive great glory at the expense of Pharaoh and his armies, chariots, and charioteers. ¹⁸When I am finished with Pharaoh and his army, all Egypt will know that I am the LORD!"

¹⁹Then the angel of God, who had been leading the people of Israel, moved to a position behind them, and the pillar of cloud also moved around behind them. ²⁰The cloud settled between the Israelite and Egyptian camps. As night came, the pillar of cloud turned into a pillar of fire, lighting the Israelite camp. But the cloud became darkness to the Egyptians, and they couldn't find the Israelites.

²¹Then Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the LORD opened up a path through the water

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

with a strong east wind. The wind blew all that night, turning the seabed into dry land. ²²So the people of Israel walked through the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on each side! ²³Then the Egyptians--all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and charioteers--followed them across the bottom of the sea. ²⁴But early in the morning, the LORD looked down on the Egyptian army from the pillar of fire and cloud, and he threw them into confusion. ²⁵Their chariot wheels began to come off, making their chariots impossible to drive. "Let's get out of here!" the Egyptians shouted. "The LORD is fighting for Israel against us!"

²⁶When all the Israelites were on the other side, the LORD said to Moses, "Raise your hand over the sea again. Then the waters will rush back over the Egyptian chariots and charioteers." ²⁷So as the sun began to rise, Moses raised his hand over the sea. The water roared back into its usual place, and the LORD swept the terrified Egyptians into the surging currents. ²⁸The waters covered all the chariots and charioteers--the entire army of Pharaoh. Of all the Egyptians who had chased the Israelites into the sea, not a single one survived.

²⁹The people of Israel had walked through the middle of the sea on dry land, as the water stood up like a wall on both sides. ³⁰This was how the LORD rescued Israel from the Egyptians that day. And the Israelites could see the bodies of the Egyptians washed up on the shore. ³¹When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the LORD had displayed against the Egyptians, they feared the LORD and put their faith in him and his servant Moses.

Points of Interest:

- "Then Pharaoh will think, 'Those Israelites are confused'" —there is a highway that goes straight from Goshen toward Canaan, but God directs Moses to lead the people on a random, zigzag path that ends at a dead end on the seashore. It looks like they have walked right into a trap; actually they are the bait, and Pharaoh is the one walking into a trap.
- 'the sea'—traditionally, this is known as the Red Sea; but it is almost certainly not what we call the Red Sea. It's actually the Sea of Reeds, which was basically the string of lakes and marshes connecting the Mediterranean with the Gulf of Suez. These lakes and marshes were later formed into the Suez Canal. Obviously, the water is still deep enough to be an impediment to the Israelites' passage and to drown the Egyptians when it rushes back in. The Israelites are thought to have been on the shore of one of the three larger lakes of the area: Timsah, Balal, or Bitter Lakes (*Bible Background Commentary* 87)
- 'So Pharaoh called out his troops'—the Egyptian army was the best, most technologically advanced army in the world—or at the very least in that part of the world—at the time. Despite their large numbers, the Israelite rabble would have had every reason to fear these squadrons of chariots if it weren't for God's protection.
- 'and he chased after the people of Israel'—This part of the hero's journey is called 'The Road Back.' Now that the hero has succeeded in the big ordeal, he must return to the ordinary world. Interestingly, some of the most exciting chase scenes happen at this point in the story. The enemy hasn't been as completely defeated as it seemed, and he chases the hero down, trying to regain what he has lost. There's a final final showdown, often with another near death experience and resurrection. That's exactly what happens here. Pharaoh regains his composure and runs after Moses. He catches up, forcing a final confrontation. It looks like the people are doomed, but they escape death through the unexpected means of crossing the sea. What looked like death for the Israelites turns out to be death for the Egyptians, and Pharaoh is finally completely defeated.
- 'Why did you make us leave?'—Moses has now called the Israelites to join him in the heroic journey. Just like Moses did, they are expressing hesitations and regrets at leaving their ordinary world for the special world of the hero's journey. They hated their ordinary world

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

when they were in it, but now that they've left it they find something appealing in its predictability and familiarity.

- “But Moses told the people, ‘Don’t be afraid!’”—Moses is leaving Egypt a significantly different person from who he was when he arrived. When Moses left the wilderness, he was a lot like these people. It took four miraculous signs from God to convince Moses to go on the journey—and even that wasn’t enough. Then, at the first sign of trouble he asked, like the Israelites do now, ‘Why did you even send me here?’ But now, Moses has utter conviction that God is with them and that he will rescue them. Pharaoh is still not completely convinced of God’s greatness. Even the Israelites aren’t. But Moses now is.
- ‘Just stand where you are and watch’—Moses may be convinced of God’s power, but he’s a little mistaken regarding God’s plan. When Moses tells the people to stand still and watch, God immediately responds, ‘Tell the people to get moving!’ There’s only one way to go for the Israelites. They can’t go back to Egypt, nor even stand still. They will be rescued by God when they move forward.
- ‘a path will open up before you’—the adventure for the Israelites is an adventure of faith. When they step out where there is no path, God will make a path.
- ‘the pillar of cloud’—caravans would often have a brazier carried in the vanguard (*Bible Background Commentary* 90). The rear of the caravan would be able to know where the caravan was heading because they could see the smoke during the day and the flame at night. Apparently, the Israelites have something similar, a massive, supernatural brazier—perhaps even an angelic being in the form of a pillar of cloud and fire, since the pillar is described as moving itself, rather than being moved. It’s possibly even the physical form taken on by God himself (the Lord looks down from the pillar in verse 24).
- ‘Then the angel of God, who had been leading the people of Israel, moved to a position behind them’—the phrase ‘the angel of God’ sometimes refers to an angelic lieutenant of God and sometimes to a manifestation of God himself. At the burning bush, it was probably the latter; here it is probably the former (later, God tells Moses that he will leave his angel with Moses, but that he himself was leaving—we’ll study this story in detail when we come to it). The angel and the pillar are sent to be a rearguard, giving the Israelites enough of a head start on the Egyptians that the Egyptians won’t catch up to them in the middle of the sea.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* Moses is now firmly on the hero’s path. There’s no going back to the same, old ordinary world for him. In fact, he’s now called an entire nation to join him on the hero’s journey. If you’ve already stepped out on the hero’s journey yourself, consider who you want to take with you. What’s the call you have for them, and what do they need to know from you to take that step?
- *For your six:* Often God’s plans don’t seem to make the most sense. In this passage, God instructs Moses to lead the people on a random, zigzag path through the desert. It doesn’t look like they’re headed in the right direction. In fact, it looks like they’re headed toward certain doom. In the end, though, God’s path turns out to be the right one. Pray for your six that they would have the boldness to follow a crazy plan from God, and ask God to amaze them with the results.
- *For our church:* As we step out together on this hero’s journey, pray that God would be the guide in front of us and the protector behind us.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

Friday, February 25th

Exodus 16:1-21

¹Then they left Elim and journeyed into the Sin Desert, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there a month after leaving Egypt. ²There, too, the whole community of Israel spoke bitterly against Moses and Aaron.

³"Oh, that we were back in Egypt," they moaned. "It would have been better if the LORD had killed us there! At least there we had plenty to eat. But now you have brought us into this desert to starve us to death."

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Look, I'm going to rain down food from heaven for you. The people can go out each day and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵Tell them to pick up twice as much as usual on the sixth day of each week."

⁶Then Moses and Aaron called a meeting of all the people of Israel and told them, "In the evening you will realize that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ⁷In the morning you will see the glorious presence of the LORD. He has heard your complaints, which are against the LORD and not against us. ⁸The LORD will give you meat to eat in the evening and bread in the morning, for he has heard all your complaints against him. Yes, your complaints are against the LORD, not against us."

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say this to the entire community of Israel: 'Come into the LORD's presence, and hear his reply to your complaints.' "¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the people, they looked out toward the desert. Within the guiding cloud, they could see the awesome glory of the LORD.

¹¹And the LORD said to Moses, ¹²"I have heard the people's complaints. Now tell them, 'In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.' "

¹³That evening vast numbers of quail arrived and covered the camp. The next morning the desert all around the camp was wet with dew. ¹⁴When the dew disappeared later in the morning, thin flakes, white like frost, covered the ground. ¹⁵The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. "What is it?" they asked.

And Moses told them, "It is the food the LORD has given you. ¹⁶The LORD says that each household should gather as much as it needs. Pick up two quarts for each person."

¹⁷So the people of Israel went out and gathered this food—some getting more, and some getting less. ¹⁸By gathering two quarts for each person, everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed.

¹⁹Then Moses told them, "Do not keep any of it overnight." ²⁰But, of course, some of them didn't listen and kept some of it until morning. By then it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell. And Moses was very angry with them.

²¹The people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the food they had not picked up melted and disappeared.

Points of Interest:

- 'the Sin Desert'—this has no connection to our English word *sin*.
- 'between Elim and Mount Sinai'—they are making their way back to Sinai, the mountain where Moses saw the burning bush. God had promised Moses that he would return there with all of the people to worship him. In hero's journey terms, they're still on the road back.
- 'At least there we had plenty to eat'—perhaps, after a month, they're reaching the end of the supplies they were able to bring with them out of Egypt. There being many thousands of them in a barren desert, it's true that finding enough food is a matter of genuine concern. However,

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

one would think that they would have some inkling by now that God might be able to provide for them. Somehow, they are unable to turn their amazement and gratitude over God's past intervention into confidence during the current crisis. The faith they had after the parting of the sea has quickly dissipated. Because they have a hard time remembering God's faithfulness and retaining their trust in him, they face each new obstacle on the edge of despair.

- 'twice as much as usual on the sixth day'—the seventh day is the day of rest; so they are supposed to prepare twice as much food the day before.
- 'What is it?'—from here on out, this bread is known as *manna*, which means, 'What is it?'
- 'Each family had just what it needed'—God demonstrates how well he knows them and how well he is able to take care of them. Everybody has exactly what they need.
- 'But, of course, some of them didn't listen'—apparently, they're not quite convinced that the bread will keep coming; so they try to protect themselves from the coming famine.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* Manna only lasted for a day; after that it turned kind of ugly. Sometimes, God gives us something that works for a certain season of our lives; but when we come to a new day, we need a new gift from God. Is there some life strategy you've used that used to be great, but doesn't seem to be working anymore? Ask God to provide something new for this new phase of life.
- *For your six:* When God gives the people the manna, they don't even know what it is. It takes Moses to tell them that it is the bread they asked for. Sometimes, it takes someone else to point out something that God has done in our lives. If you see a way that God has met the needs or answered the prayers of any of your six, share what you've seen with them.
- *For our church:* Moses is wise enough to know that the complaints of the people are against God, not himself; and he's secure enough not to respond defensively. As we pursue our mission in this city, we're sure to face criticism: some of that criticism will come because of some fault on our part; some of it will actually be complaints against God. Pray that God would give us the wisdom to know the difference between the two, and the security to respond with gentleness and confidence.

Saturday, February 26th

Exodus 17:1-13

¹At the LORD's command, the people of Israel left the Sin Desert and moved from place to place. Eventually they came to Rephidim, but there was no water to be found there. ²So once more the people grumbled and complained to Moses. "Give us water to drink!" they demanded.

"Quiet!" Moses replied. "Why are you arguing with me? And why are you testing the LORD?"

³But tormented by thirst, they continued to complain, "Why did you ever take us out of Egypt? Why did you bring us here? We, our children, and our livestock will all die!"

⁴Then Moses pleaded with the LORD, "What should I do with these people? They are about to stone me!"

⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Take your shepherd's staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile. Then call some of the leaders of Israel and walk on ahead of the people. ⁶I will meet you by the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come pouring out. Then the people will be able to drink." Moses did just as he was told; and as the leaders looked on, water gushed out.

⁷Moses named the place Massah--"the place of testing"--and Meribah--"the place of arguing"--because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD going to take care of us or not?"

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

⁸While the people of Israel were still at Rephidim, the warriors of Amalek came to fight against them. ⁹Moses commanded Joshua, "Call the Israelites to arms, and fight the army of Amalek. Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."

¹⁰So Joshua did what Moses had commanded. He led his men out to fight the army of Amalek. Meanwhile Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of a nearby hill. ¹¹As long as Moses held up the staff with his hands, the Israelites had the advantage. But whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites gained the upper hand. ¹²Moses' arms finally became too tired to hold up the staff any longer. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side, holding up his hands until sunset. ¹³As a result, Joshua and his troops were able to crush the army of Amalek.

Points of Interest:

- 'Why did you ever take us out of Egypt?'—this has become a familiar question, and we're not finished with it yet. This cycle that the Israelites are in reminds me of the saying, 'Whoever does not learn from history is destined to repeat it.' This proverb is supposed to mean that if we don't learn from someone else's mistakes, we're dooming ourselves to make the same ones. In this passage, though, the Israelites aren't even learning from their own mistakes. They've entered the testing period of their heroic journey, but they're not passing the tests. If you fail a test, you've got to take it again. Until they learn to trust God to provide, they're going to keep finding themselves in situations of scarcity.
- 'Take your shepherd's staff'—often when Moses is overwhelmed by the problems and complaints of the people, God points him to his shepherd's staff. It's a reminder that Moses is the shepherd of these people; he's responsible to lead, guide them, protect them, and provide for them. It's also a reminder that God has supernaturally equipped him to succeed in this task.
- "Moses named the place Massah—'the place of testing'" —perhaps the consistent complaining of the people is beginning to wear on Moses' patience. Rather than calling it, 'the place of miraculous water,' Moses calls this spot, 'the place of testing and arguing.'
- 'Is the LORD going to take care of us or not?'—the Lord has adequately answered that question. The real question is, 'Are you going to trust him or not?'
- 'the warriors of Amalek came to fight'—the Amalekites were another group of nomads who inhabited the general area through which the Israelites were passing.
- 'Moses commanded Joshua'—Moses gets some new allies, Joshua and Hur. Joshua especially becomes a very significant figure. He's a younger protégé of Moses who ends up becoming something of a personal assistant; he also gets sent on missions that Moses can't accomplish himself, either because of age or his other responsibilities. Joshua eventually succeeds Moses as the leader of the Israelites.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* Do you find yourself repeatedly in the same uncomfortable situation? Although it's certainly not always the case, often it happens because there's a lesson we must learn. Ask God if there's something he's trying to teach you and what it might be. Ask him to give you the wisdom and strength you need to move on to the next lesson.
- *For your six:* Aaron and Hur take on the simple task of helping Moses keep his arms up, but by doing it they get to participate in an amazing miracle. Look for opportunities to ask for help from your six, particularly in ways that will give them a chance to participate in and witness God's work.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

- *For our church:* We've been blessed in this church with an amazing group of leaders, but there's always room for more. Pray for more people like Hur, who step into crucial roles at important times. And pray for Joshuas, a new generation of leaders ready to take on our call.

Sunday, February 27th

Exodus 18: 1-12

Word soon reached Jethro, the priest of Midian and Moses' father-in-law, about all the wonderful things God had done for Moses and his people, the Israelites. He had heard about how the LORD had brought them safely out of Egypt.

² Some time before this, Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons to live with Jethro, his father-in-law. ³ The name of Moses' first son was Gershom, for Moses had said when the boy was born, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land." ⁴ The name of his second son was Eliezer, for Moses had said at his birth, "The God of my fathers was my helper; he delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." ⁵ Jethro now came to visit Moses, and he brought Moses' wife and two sons with him. They arrived while Moses and the people were camped near the mountain of God. ⁶ Moses was told, "Jethro, your father-in-law, has come to visit you. Your wife and your two sons are with him."

⁷ So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law. He bowed to him respectfully and greeted him warmly. They asked about each other's health and then went to Moses' tent to talk further. ⁸ Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to rescue Israel from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He also told him about the problems they had faced along the way and how the LORD had delivered his people from all their troubles. ⁹ Jethro was delighted when he heard about all that the LORD had done for Israel as he brought them out of Egypt.

¹⁰ "Praise be to the LORD," Jethro said, "for he has saved you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. He has rescued Israel from the power of Egypt! ¹¹ I know now that the LORD is greater than all other gods, because his people have escaped from the proud and cruel Egyptians."

¹² Then Jethro presented a burnt offering and gave sacrifices to God. As Jethro was doing this, Aaron and the leaders of Israel came out to meet him. They all joined him in a sacrificial meal in God's presence.

Points of Interest:

- 'Word soon reached Jethro'—it's possible that Moses himself has sent Jethro a message, but it sounds more like Jethro has heard the news through other sources. There were many caravans of traders that passed back and forth between Egypt and other parts of the Middle East; perhaps the rumors are spreading of what God accomplished. The victory over Pharaoh was not a private contest; it was meant to be shown on a world stage. One of God's was to show the whole world how much greater the Lord is than Pharaoh. It seems he has succeeded. We learn now that Moses had earlier—apparently while he was still in Egypt—sent his wife and sons to stay with Zipporah's family. Now that Jethro has heard that it is safe, he's bringing his family back to Moses.
- 'the mountain of God'—Mount Sinai, that is. Understandably, places where God appeared were commemorated as sacred sites. Mount Sinai later becomes known as 'God's Mountain' because it's the site of the burning bush and—later in the story—the Ten Commandments.
- 'bowed to him respectfully and greeted him warmly'—Moses' heady experience as rescuer of the Israelites hasn't changed his feelings toward his father-in-law. He still treats him with the respect due an elder and the affection due a friend.

Moses and the Journey of Faith

Week Two

- ‘They asked about each other’s health’—it’s a little funny to imagine Moses asking, ‘So, how’s it going?’ and Jethro responding, ‘Good. Good. How about for you?’ But that seems to be pretty much how it happens. They start with a few minutes of idle chit-chat; then, once they warm up a little, they go into the tent for deeper conversation.
- ‘Moses told his father-in-law about everything’—I wonder if Moses gets lonely. He seems to jump at the chance to talk things through with this person whom he can treat as a peer, or perhaps even an older advisor. Moses’ many responsibilities and his unique position of authority probably mean there aren’t very many people with whom he can just let his guard down and be himself.
- ‘I know now that the LORD is greater than all other gods’—Jethro’s relationship with the LORD before this point—and even after it—is something of a mystery. We are told that he is a priest, but not what god he serves. Virtually anything is possible. It’s conceivable that he has always been a worshipper of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Maybe he’s been a priest of the same God as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but has known him by a different name. He might have been a worshipper of a different god completely, or of many gods. We don’t really know whether Moses and Jethro conceived of themselves as sharing the same faith or not. What we do know is that Jethro displays a character exactly opposite to Pharaoh: he has a very soft heart toward the LORD.

Taking it home:

- *For you:* In this passage, Moses enjoys the chance to talk about everything that’s been going on with someone he knows and trusts. Has God given you people like that in your life? If so, thank him for the great times of deep community you’ve experienced with them. If not, ask God to send someone your way, just like Jethro unexpectedly showed up for Moses.
- *For your six:* When Moses shares honestly with Jethro about what’s been happening in his own life—both the joys and the hardships of following God—Jethro responds by delightedly worshipping God. Share with your six what it’s like for you to be on the journey of faith, and see how they respond. Pray that they will be as joyful as Jethro was when he heard from Moses.
- *For our church:* In this passage, we see Moses’ whole family participating in this hero’s journey of faith together: Moses’ wife, children, and father-in-law all join him on his path. Pray for the families in our church, that they will experience the joy and excitement of going on this adventure together.