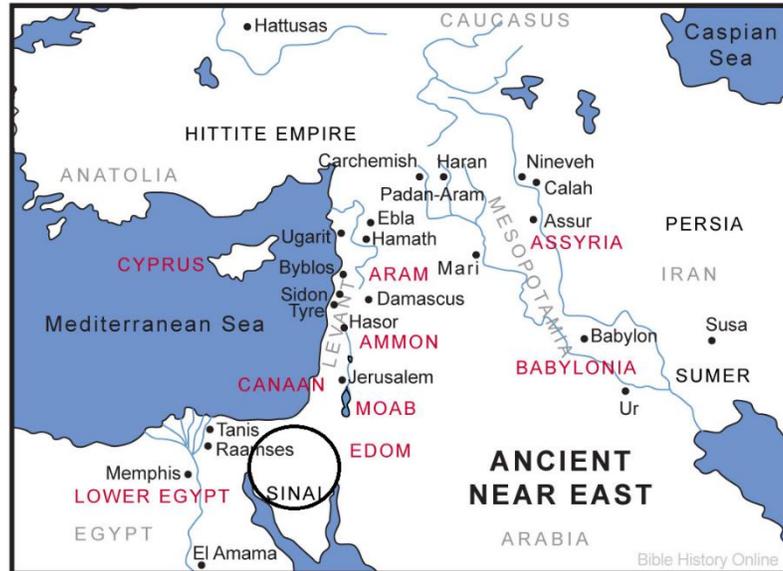


## Survey of the Bible

### Notes from 3-1-20 Class

Last time we were in Exodus 3, which we see is a fairly significant chapter. You may recall that Exodus 3 records Moses' election. Every single individual in the bible is elect. No one seeks out God; God seeks out them. So (in Exodus 3), Moses is elected, and usually at the time of election an individual is commissioned as well. So Moses is elected by the burning bush and commissioned, and his commission is: stop chilling in Midian, go back to



Egypt and lead the slaves out of Egypt on this exodus and rendezvous back in this area in the Sinai. Well, as we discussed last time, Moses is elected and commissioned, and consistent with his nature he equivocates. Turn to Exodus 3:11. He's elected and commissioned and what does Moses say? "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" It's at this point that he gets, or more accurately doesn't get, God's name, which we discussed last time as God in effect saying, "We'll eat when we eat," to Moses' "When is dinner? When is dinner?"

After God's first request, to which Moses equivocated, he's pressed again to go and in 4:1 he says, "But what if they don't listen to me?"

It's almost like you can hear the whining in his voice. He sounds like he's 13 years-old. He whines that he doesn't think anyone will listen to him, so the Lord fortifies him with what is essentially three magic tricks. Like pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Imagine going to Vladimir Putin and saying, "Stop meddling in our elections." And he says, "By what authority do you demand that I do this?" And you take your hat off and pull a rabbit out of it. God is setting Moses up by giving him these three magic tricks, and God even kind of admits that he is, so what is he doing? Well this is very folkloric recall, so God is intending to keep magnifying his glory. He's starting small; this is his launchpad from which he's going to keep magnifying and magnifying his glory over Pharaoh. So Moses equivocates in [Exodus] 4:1, and in 4:2 Moses gets his magic tricks. The Lord tells him to throw his staff on the ground and it becomes a snake. Then the Lord tells him to pick it up again by the tail and it turns back into the staff. He did this apparently so that Moses could say to people that the Lord of his ancestors really did appear to him. Then the Lord gives him another magic trick, he tells Moses to put his hand inside his cloak and when he took it out the hand was leprous, as white as snow. Then he puts his hand back in his cloak and pulls it out normal again. So if people don't believe the first parlor trick, maybe they'll believe the second. And if they don't believe the second, well then here's number three: the Lord tells him to take some water from the Nile and pour it on dry ground and it'll turn to blood.

Moses is not really going along with this fortification, because there's more equivocation. Look in Exodus 4:10. Moses says to the Lord, "But I've never been eloquent, I'm slow of speech and tongue." He's saying here's proof that I'm not the man for the job because I don't have any powers of oratory. The Lord is getting mounting angry and frustrated and says to Moses, "Who gives speech to the mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I?" The Lord tells him to go anyway, and he would give Moses the words to say. So then Moses stops equivocating and outright balks. He says, "Oh Lord, please send someone else." Now the anger of the Lord is really kindled, and the Lord tells Moses to use his brother Aaron, who does speak fluently,

as a mouthpiece. The Lord says, “You will speak to him and put the words in his mouth.” God is going to give the words to Moses and Moses is going to give the words to Aaron to speak to the Israelites and to Pharaoh. Aaron is going to serve as a mouth for Moses, who is serving as a mouth for God. This is another example of a foil. If you’ll recall we discussed the fact that a foil in a story is a hero’s sidekick; someone who is set up to showcase the hero’s qualities. Aaron is Moses’ foil. He doesn’t get much respect in the bible the at any point, but in this way, they are able to move forward, God having overcome all of Moses equivocation and resistance.

Let’s turn ahead to the next chapter, 4:18, in which Moses returns to Egypt. He’s facing a double challenge: he’s got to convince the slaves to accompany him, and slaves who are escaping slavery put themselves at risk of course; and he’s got to convince Pharaoh to let them go. The first challenge proves to be easier than the second. Take a look at 4:29. Moses and Aaron assemble all the leaders and elders of the Israelites and, according to plan, Moses spoke all the words of the Lord to Aaron and Aaron spoke them to the Israelites. He did all the magic tricks for the people and the people believed. Yay! So, they’re willing to brave the risk, the people are behind him, but we all know that Pharaoh is not going to be quite that easy of a sell. In 5:1 Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh and say, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go’ so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.” But Pharaoh says, “Who’s the Lord that I would let the slaves go out into the wilderness? I don’t know the Lord. I’m not going to let Israel go.” Moses tells him that the God of the Israelites has made himself known to him, and that he is to take them on a three days journey into the wilderness to hold this festival. Naturally that was all a ruse to make good their escape, to get a three-day head start, but Pharaoh is not going to go for it. He pointed out that Moses and Aaron were taking the people away from their work, and he wouldn’t have it. That same day Pharaoh commanded his task masters to stop giving the Israelites straw to make their bricks with. He told them to make the Israelites go get their own straw, but still force them to make the same number of bricks. He was making the work of the slaves even harder since they obviously have idle time if they’re plotting these little schemes. Naturally the Israelites were irritated. In 5:15 the Israelite taskmasters went to Pharaoh and asked why he was beating them and making them work harder, and Pharaoh tells them they must be lazy if they think there is time for going out in the wilderness to make sacrifices and what not. The Israelites left Pharaoh’s presence and they ran smack dab into Moses. Look in Exodus 5:20 – as they left Pharaoh they came upon Moses and Aaron who were coming to meet them, and they said, “The Lord look upon you and judge you! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand!”

So now Moses is like, “Come on God! I equivocated and I equivocated, and I equivocated a third time. And then I balked, and you still forced me into this and now it’s a train wreck.” It’s in this context that Moses is given by the Lord these ten plagues. He’s going to continuously multiply his glory, and multiply his glory, a motif of folk lore, until finally Pharaoh lets the people go. We said last time that we were going to pause three times in these twenty chapters we are surveying. We paused at the divine name, and we’re going to pause here and look at miracles in the Old Testament.

The word ‘miracles’ doesn’t appear in either the old or new testaments. The things we read about we just ascribe as miracles, but that’s not the word that’s used in either the Hebrew or the Greek. we’re going to pause here to look at what scholars say about miracles in the old testament. I said preliminarily that people have the impression that miracles are replete in the old testament, like every page you turn to. The miracles are confined to these folkloric, stylized, dramatized, exaggerated histories. What do scholars say about them; what is behind them? Scholars use two different pieces of evidence to support their conclusions. the first is that all of these miracles have what you could say is naturalistic roots. Let’s go through them by caption. The first plague: Water turned into blood. What’s the naturalistic root behind that? Well, to this day, algae infests the Nile and turns red. What about number two? Frogs. That’s obviously naturalistic. Number three, gnats, there’s a naturalistic root there. What about number four, flies, the fifth plague, boils, etc. etc. So that’s the first piece of evidence they use for their conclusion. The second piece of evidence they use is the fact that the word in the bible for

these miracles is 'signs'. Now signs are suggestive of a particular interpreter. Last time I mentioned that prior to deciding to adopt Adam I was praying for God to give me a sign, because there were those who thought that it wasn't prudent that I do so, and that I don't know I'm getting into, and if you want me to do this give me a sign. And then, Lo and Behold, I looked over at the window and there were two cardinals sitting on the windowsill outside looking at me. And I was like, look there, it's a sign, it looks like I've got to adopt him. Now a sign is suggestive of a particular interpreter. If my neighbors were passing by and they looked up at the windowsill and saw the two cardinals, they wouldn't all be saying, "We've got to go out and adopt a little boy from China!" So the sign is obviously suggestive of a particular interpreter. What do scholars say these 'miracles' are? They say they are naturalistic occurrences and their timing viewed in the eyes of faith as divine intervention, and then stylized according to the parameters of the saga.

I have a good modern-day example for you. When I was in process of getting ordained, I did a stint as a chaplain at Loyola Hospital. The hardest department, obviously, is the pediatric oncology department. I mean, it's horrible. There are children dying, and their parents dying inside as well, and no one wants to be there. It's much easier to be in the emergency room, where it's just traumas, and then they're taken care of and your on to the next thing. But there was one woman who was extremely effective in the pediatric oncology department, she almost had a sacred air about her. People were all concurring that she was saintly or angelic or what-have-you. Well, one night she told me her story. She was brought up Catholic but fell away from her faith. She got married and was doing the whole suburban housewife thing. She had these three daughters, but her husband really, really, wanted a boy, so she said they could try one more time, and they got the boy. He was a fine baby boy, healthy and all, and when he was about six months-old she slipped on the ice and dropped him on his head and he died. And her life then took a downward trajectory. She and her husband divorced, as most people do who suffer the loss of a child, and she lost custody of her children, and she became increasingly depressed to the point that she was suicidal. She planned her suicide, she actually had the carbon monoxide running in her garage, but she took one more walk around her block because her family of origin lived in the same neighborhood. She went into the home of her family of origin, and this one cactus that her parents had had for about thirty-five years was lit up with blossoms. Something like 300 pink blossoms. And she took that to mean that her son is alive in the breast of God, and that she needs to convey that to others who are losing children. She went back to Catholic Theological Union, she became a chaplain, and now she's so incredibly effective because she had a miracle in her life. Let's look back to miracles according to scholars: naturalistic occurrences and their timing viewed in the eyes of faith as divine intervention. That is essentially her experience. Of course, the other piece falls out because she hasn't written a folkloric saga about it, but that's what scholars think is behind these miracles. Something happened in the eyes of the faith of Israel, but maybe not as dramatic as it's been portrayed in the bible.

Now we can turn to these miracles in the bible, and there's a definite give and take dynamic here. Moses first makes no headway, then he makes some headway, then Pharaoh takes it back, then he makes a little headway, and then Pharaoh takes it back, etc. This is more of God multiplying his glory over the Egyptians as a motif of folklore. Look in 7:14 for Moses not to make any headway initially. "Then the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened. He refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, stand by the riverbank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. Say to him, 'the Lord, the God of the Hebrews sent me to you to say 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.' But until now you have not listened. Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord." See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile and it shall be turned to blood.'" Here's the upshot. Moses and Aaron did just as he had commanded, and the water was turned to blood, but Pharaoh said the magicians in his court could do the same thing with their secret art, so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened. He turned and went into his house; he didn't take it to heart.

So then God tells Moses to go to Pharaoh again, and tell him that he's going to bring a plague of frogs upon Egypt, and they're going to overrun everything. Which he does, but Pharaoh says the same thing, the magicians can do the same thing with their arts, but now Pharaoh is budging a bit. He calls Moses and Aaron to him and asks them to have God take away the frogs and he will let the Israelites go make their sacrifices. Moses does that, and the frogs go away, but when Pharaoh saw that they were gone, and there was a respite he hardened his heart again, just as the Lord said he would. And on and on we go in this vein. Look at the fourth plague. The Lord tells Moses to present himself to Pharaoh *again* and tell him there will be a swarm of flies if he won't do as he's told, and naturally he won't so there's a great swarm of flies all over Egypt. Now we're going to get a little variation in Pharaoh budging. He tells Moses they can go make their sacrifices, but they need to stay within the land of Egypt, not go out into the wilderness. Moses tells him it wouldn't be right to do that because the sacrifices they are going to make would be offensive to the Egyptians, and they would all get mad. Pharaoh equivocates and tells him, "Ok, you can go, but just go far-ish, not too far, not three days away." So then Moses asks the Lord to remove the swarms of flies, but once they're gone Pharaoh hardens his heart again and won't let the people go.

It goes on like this for some time, back and forth until the last plague. The last plague is the death of all the first-born sons in Egypt. There might be a naturalistic root, scholars say, maybe a plague or other disease that's being described. Others say this is just some stylized poetic justice, because Israel is sort of like God's first-born son, and so God is getting revenge on the Egyptian first-born sons in return for the treatment of his first-born. Regardless, one way or another the first-born of all the Egyptians is going to die and that's going to be the impetus to let the Israelites go. Pharaoh is sure to realize that if God can kill the first-born, he could kill everybody. Look in Exodus 11:1. The Lord said to Moses I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt and afterwards he will let you go. He tells Moses that after midnight he's going to send out a plague and all these first borns are going to die and there will be a huge cry from Egypt like there's never been before. It's in this context that the first Passover is instituted and the people of Israel are ordered to slaughter a lamb and put its blood on the door frame so that when the angel of death comes for the firstborn of the Egyptians he'll pass over the houses of the people of Israel. So that's what you see play out in chapter 12. The plague takes place in 12:29. At midnight the Lord struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the prisoner who sits in the dungeon to the firstborn of the livestock. Pharaoh rose in the night and discovered this and there was in fact a loud cry from all over Egypt because there was not a house without someone dead. Pharaoh summoned Moses then and said, "rise, go away from Egypt, take everything you have and go." All the Egyptians urged the Israelites to get the heck out because they were figuring that they were all going to be dead soon.

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, and according to the bible they numbered about 600,000. Now, *every* scholar says that 600,000 is a simple exaggeration. They think it's probably closer to 600, if that, maybe even 60. The reason they disprove that number is that the Egyptians kept censuses. We're not without external historical archaeological records from this era. The Egyptians kept very meticulous records. Scholars say, that if there were really 600,000 man (and that's a number that discounts women and children), you'd have to at least quadruple that number for the total of the Egyptians, and that if that were true they could have marched five abreast in a continuous line from Egypt all the way up to Syria, that's how many people that would be. This is a very small territory after all, less than the size of New Jersey. Plus, you'd have the problem of control of all those people. How would Moses even have talked to everyone at once, there was no such thing as a PA system back then. But like we said, the bible is a human document, and it bears the marks of its humanity. It's hard to say how many there were exactly, 16, 60, 600, maybe 1600, but we know it's not 600,000.

We get back to the narrative in Exodus 13:18. God led the people by a roundabout way toward the Red Sea, at least that's what our bible says. Now what's written in the Hebrew here is: יַם סוּף, which means 'sea of reeds'. The Hebrew then means *specifically* the Sea of Reeds, not the Red Sea. It's not clear why most of our modern

bibles are maintaining an inaccurate translation from the Septuagint (the Greek translation from the second century BCE). The Septuagint translators didn't know what the Hebrew meant, because they didn't know where this Sea of Reeds was so they assumed it must be the Red Sea. But now we know what the literal translation is, and it's not the Red Sea, it's the Sea of Reeds, so why the ongoing translations keep carrying forward this mistranslation is a mystery. The reason this is pertinent is because reeds only grow in very shallow water, which we'll discuss in a minute.

So we read that Moses lead the people by a roundabout way through the wilderness to the Sea of Reeds. The Lord went in front of them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night so that they could keep moving. And now, for one last time we have the grand finale of Pharaoh's constant mind changing, and God gets to multiply his glory and wonders one more time. Pharaoh hardens his heart again and grabs a bunch of soldiers and 600 chariots and takes off after the Israelites to get them back. It's at this point we see the nature of the Israelites revealed, and it's not good. When they see Pharaoh hot on their trail, they lodge their first of many complaints. They actually complain and complain and complain all through the narrative and are generally shown to have pretty bad character. I mean, you don't hear people ever talking about how Abe Lincoln or Martin Luther King, Jr. complained constantly. So here the Israelites say to Moses, "Weren't there any graves in Egypt that you needed to drag us out here in the wilderness to die?" And naturally Moses turns to God and say, "What do I do now?" In chapter 14:15, God tells him to stretch out his staff and part the Sea so that the Israelites can go out onto the sea on dry ground. At this point the pillar of cloud and fire moves behind the Israelites to guard their retreat across the sea. Here the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind and turned the sea into dry land. This is really just screaming out the naturalistic nature of this 'miracle'. The Egyptians pursued them, but their chariot wheels just clogged in all the mud. Naturally the Israelites crossed on the same mud, but they are only one person heavy, and their feet are wider than chariot wheels, so it's no surprise that Pharaoh's soldiers, all loaded into chariots pulled by heavy horses, would find themselves bogged down.

Now the exodus was successful, the Israelites are out of Egypt, and we have this long song following it, which luckily Miriam (Moses' older sister) was thoughtful enough to shorten for us: "Sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." Now we're past the exodus and into the wandering. The wandering is characterized by two things: non-stop, endless complaining, and more of these naturalistic miracles. Let's look in Chapter 15:22 – Moses ordered Israel to set out from the sea of reeds, and the wandered for three days and found no water, until they came to Marah, which means bitter water. When they get there, they naturally find the water bitter and undrinkable, because of course it's not named Marah for no reason. As expected, the first thing they do is complain to Moses. Luckily the Lord showed Moses a piece of wood he could throw in the water to make it sweet, and we see again the naturalistic root of the miracle. Just like your grandmother taught you when you over-salt your stew, you peel a potato and throw it in there and it will absorb all the salt. So too, apparently, there was some kind of piece of wood that would absorb whatever was making the water bitter. In Chapter 16 we see them move on to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai. Here the whole congregation complains against Moses again, because they had loads of food in Egypt, and now they have no meat or bread. One more time, the Lord speaks to Moses and tells him that they will get their meat to eat in the evening and bread in the morning. That evening loads of quail flew in and covered the camp. quail are still indigenous to that area, so there is your naturalistic root. In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp, and when the dew dried there was a fine flaky substance that could be made into bread. This still occurs in the area. Scholars say it's some combination of insect secretions mixing with the pollen in the area and the morning dew, all coming together to make something that can be used to make bread. They called this manna.

So now they've got their bread and they've got their meat, but look what's going to happen in chapter 17, more complaining and more naturalistic miracles. In 17:2, the people quarreled with Moses and said they needed

water to drink and complained *again* about being dragged into the desert to die of thirst. Moses is instructed to strike a rock and water will flow out. The naturalistic root of this miracle probably has to do with either natural springs, or certain kinds of rocks that are actually mostly underground and so stay cool and cause condensation to form on them as the air starts to warm in the morning. In this way, complaining and naturalistic miracles, and complaining and naturalistic miracles, the Israelites lurch back into the Sinai wilderness where God told them to go.

In chapter 19 they've finally made it to Mt. Sinai, and God tells Moses that if they obey his voice and keep his law covenant (which he's going to give them), they will be his most treasured people out of everyone in the whole world. God tells him the Israelites will become his priestly nation. In chapter 19:7, Moses summons the elders of the people and tells them all this, and they're all like, "Yes! We'll do anything the Lord tells us to do!" Have they given us any basis to believe them so far? Nothing has happened yet that would make us believe they are going to keep any covenants, so that's unlikely from the start. Everyone has this idea that there's this kind of neat transaction where Moses goes up the mountain and comes down with these tablets, but that's not really what's happening here. He goes up there and he gets this general request from God to let the people know that if they keep his covenants, they will be his priestly people, and he comes down and they're all in. So he goes back up and he gets the law covenant, verbally, and he goes back down and tells the people, "Here's the law covenant that I got," and the people are all like, "Oh awesome! Are we ever gonna keep this!" and they start slaughtering bulls and throwing the blood around, because they're so enthusiastic about keeping this law. Then Moses goes back up again and God gives Moses the law codified in these two tablets, and he brings them back down and finds the people all reveling around a golden calf. So then Moses smashes those things and yells at the people for not getting it at all. Then he goes back up again, and gets a new set, etc. The only way to describe what's going on up top of that mountain is rigamarole. This is the beginning of the rigamarole.

Now Moses is going to go get the oral law, the oral law covenant. This whole thing takes place with so much moment and fanfare. The Lord tells Moses to have the people purify themselves for this great event. And it really is a great event, look in Exodus 19:16... On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning as a thick cloud on the mountains and the blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people in the camp trembled. That's God announcing himself. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. Now Mt. Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended upon it in fire. The whole mountain shook violently, and Moses would speak to the Lord and the Lord would answer in thunder, so drama is building and building. The Lord summons Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up alone, so now he's going to get the ten commandments. In chapter 20 Moses gets the commandments, and because this is The ten commandments, we're going to have to pause here for some time, so we'll pick up in two weeks at the ten commandments.

We should note here that there are three central theological voices in the new testament. There's the voice of Paul, there's the voice of John, and then there's the combined voice of Mathew, Mark and Luke. And all three of these voices throw the law out. So the law given here, which we'll talk about next time, is provisional, but it's still important in its historical context, so we'll pause for some time here next class. We will particularly discuss the form of the law, which discloses just as much as the content of the law. We'll also spend a little more time on the golden calf piece next time as well, because the golden calf piece is the place where the bible really describes what a leader is. A leader is not someone possessed of this trait or that trait. It's very evocative, but it's also downright funny because of the level of their transgression. We'll get through that saga next time, and then we'll be poised for the real monster genre that follows it.