**Session 6: Week 4a**

***God of Deliverance***

**Exodus 4:1-17**

**19-20 September 2022**

**Review** – We have seen Moses give two poor objections to God’s revelation of “I am”. God has shown that He is self-existent, self-sufficient, and eternal. He is the unconsumed burning bush. Yet Moses responds to these declarations with a series of objections. But God is patient with him and allows him time to work through his objections and begin to absorb all that God has told him.

**The Sign of the Serpent** – Moses begins chapter four by saying that his people will not listen to him or believe him when he tells them what all God has told him. He is apparently reliving the time when he tried to intervene in a quarrel between two Hebrew men, and they said, “Who made you a prince over us?” and so he is anticipating rejection again. God responds to this by asking Moses a question that will draw him into discussion and show him an object lesson: “What is that in your hand?” And then He turns the staff into a serpent. Why? The staff is now far more than just a shepherding tool. It now symbolizes Moses’ authority delegated to him by Yahweh Himself. The serpent symbol would have been very familiar to Moses’ original audience because the Pharaoh’s headdress had a cobra in the center of it. That cobra was a picture of Wadjet, the snake god who the Egyptians believed was the protector of Pharaoh. So when Moses throws his staff to the ground and it becomes a serpent, and then he picks it up and it becomes a staff again, it answers the questions of *who has authority* and *who grants protection*. It also demonstrates that God has authority over the natural order of things: He can turn one thing into another.

**The Sign of the Leprous Hand** – Next God causes Moses’ hand to become leprous and then healed it again. We are not sure exactly what disease is indicated by the word *leprosy* in this passage, but we do know that it was incurable and was sometimes even deadly. So God has authority over disease.

**The Sign of Turning Water from the Nile to Blood** – The Nile was the Egyptians’ river of life, providing water for crops in the midst of an arid land. They even wrote hymns to it, as their source of life. So when Moses would pour some of the water from the Nile onto dry ground and it would turn to blood, He was demonstrating that God is the one who grants life and death.

**Foreshadows of the True and Better Moses** – All three of these signs foreshadowed the ministry of Christ. The very first recorded miracle Jesus performed was turning water into wine, showing His authority over the natural order. And then He began to heal people’s diseases. And one of His last miracles was raising Lazarus from the dead, showing that He has authority over life and death.

**The Hand of God** – There have been twelve mentions of the hand of Moses acting as the hand of God in the narrative so far. Moses needs to understand that his hand can accomplish nothing on its own, but God can act through him in a powerful way to deliver His people. Yet Moses continues to raise objection after objection, culminating with the plea, “Please send someone else!”

**God’s Anger and Patience** – The Lord has shown extraordinary patience with Moses up to this point, but He knows that the time has come to take action. He tells Moses that Aaron is on his way to meet him, once again providing reassurance and proof to His very hesitant servant that He will do exactly what He has said He would do. So now He tells Moses to take his staff and go to Egypt. He says in effect, “Go with *My* words, in *My* authority, and *take someone (Aaron) with you*.” This is very reminiscent of Jesus’ sending out the twelve in Matthew 10 and Luke 10. Jesus sent His disciples out two by two, and He gave them a very specific message, giving them authority to do miraculous things. Jesus sent them “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” And Moses and Aaron were to go *first* to the elders of Israel when they returned to Egypt. As they went, God told them to “bring these signs with you, that they may know that I AM is in their midst. The kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

**The Return to Egypt** – Moses went to his father-in-law to ask permission to return to his brothers—his fellow Israelites—in Egypt. Up to this point he has referred to them just as “they” or “them”, but now he calls them his family, his brothers. Jethro gives his assent, and so Moses sets out with his family.

**Two Parallel Birth Narratives** – At this point in the narrative in Exodus, Moses writes that the Lord had told him that “all the men who were seeking your life back in Egypt are dead.” This should remind us of something that occurred sometime after the birth of Jesus. There was Herod, a wicked ruler who tried to kill all the male children that might threaten his throne. The parents of Jesus took Him to Egypt to keep him safe. And when they later learn that Herod is dead, there is a return to Israel.

**The Staff of God** – As Moses writes about his return to Egypt with his family, he says that he “took the staff of *God* in his hand.” It is no longer Moses’ staff, but God’s symbol of power and authority in Moses’ hand.

**Killing the Firstborn** – God reveals to Moses once again that Pharaoh will not allow the Israelites to leave, and He gives Moses one final message for Pharaoh: “You refused to let my firstborn son (Israel) go, so now I will kill *your* firstborn son.” This is a fitting judgment. Pharaoh has already tried to kill all the male children born to the Hebrews. So God now says, “No more! Now it will be *your* sons who die.”

**Hardening Pharaoh’s Heart** – Does God harden Pharaoh’s heart to accomplish His purposes? Romans 9:17-18 tells us that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that the world might know Who He was, but what does that mean? The question we need to consider is, “*How* was the heart of Pharaoh hardened?” As the account of the plagues progresses, there are repeated references to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Sometimes it says that *God* hardened his heart; sometimes it says that *Pharaoh* hardened his own heart toward God; and sometimes it just says that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. So what do we take from this? Pharaoh hardens his heart toward God; Pharaoh possesses a heart that was hard in the first place; and God allows the heart of Pharaoh to continue on its natural course. What does God have to do to harden the heart of Pharaoh further? Does He have to find ways to do so? No, God just continues to be Who He is, and Pharaoh resists Him more and more. To all who possess a heart of stone that has not been transformed to a heart of flesh by the work of the Holy Spirit, when God does what God does, when He reigns and rules and says, “All authority is given to Me,” when He says, “All glory belongs to Me,” do you know what that does to someone who has a heart of stone? It just makes their heart even harder, without God doing anything directly to that person, because a hard heart sets itself in opposition to God. James 4:6 says that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Why does God oppose the proud, i.e. the “hard hearted”? Because the proud first oppose Him. Remember that apart from the work of the Spirit, we would *all* be proud opponents of the Lord. **The natural response of a hardened heart to the revelation of who God is, is that it gets even harder.**