

# EXODUS—WEEK 1

## GOD BUILDS A LEADER



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Moses Abandoned by Nicolas Poussin (~1593 – 1665)  
On display at Museum Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden*

Due to the Pharaoh's paranoid delusions, the descendants of Israel are enslaved.

Then it gets worse. Pharaoh starts a crazy genocidal campaign against them. An Israeli child named Moses is miraculously delivered and, as an adult, finds himself standing before God Himself.

The plot moves fast in this book.

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Thank you.

Exodus 1:1–3:6 — God Builds a Leader  
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1 Exodus 1:1–14

*Now these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt; each man and his household came with Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. All those who were descendants of Jacob were seventy persons (for Joseph was in Egypt already). And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.*

*Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.*

Notice how there isn't much difference between being residents of Egypt and being slaves. The *people of Israel* didn't lose a war or something; they just woke up one morning to discover they were slaves.

Nice, eh? Welcome to life in a dictatorship.

This is why we put the Ten Commandments on courthouse walls in America. People object to this as some kind of violation of church and state, but they miss the point. We do this for perfectly good, historical reasons.

Prior to the Ten Commandments, the law was simply whatever *this* king says. So, when *there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph*, everything changed. Bang, you're a slave.

But the Ten Commandments display the principle of permanent law—law above whoever's in power right now. This is foundational to our justice system. Laws and court rulings can't change with the whims of whoever's in power this year or whoever's the judge in a particular case.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stare\\_decisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stare_decisis)

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Always pray for our nation and our nation's leaders—especially those you disagree with. Open disagreement is one of our great strengths. Yes, some folks need to get a speck out of their eye—but you know the rest. God has blessed us massively.

Praise Him for that.

Also, please lift up our military. While our nation is far from perfect, we often find ourselves up against forces of genuine evil. We can't win these battles on our own.

2 Exodus 1:15–22 (ESV)

*Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”*

Some commentators struggle to try to explain away the fact that the midwives here are lying. Sure, it’s possible that the Hebrew women actually did give birth before they arrived, but that’s a stretch. The text states that the midwives did what they did because they feared God. That wouldn’t make sense if they were telling Pharaoh the truth. Besides, if the Hebrew women gave birth that fast, what did they need midwives for?

This passage teaches that when one is faced with committing a great evil, it’s permissible (even praiseworthy) to avoid it by committing a lesser evil. Not surprisingly, this can get complicated. Also, given our sinful nature, there’s lots of potential for abuse here.

Of course, this also means that not all sins are equal. That’s the really tough bit. History is filled with tales of the Church getting all tangled up trying to figure out which sins are worse than other sins.

But there’s one simple rule that helps; the stuff that’s obvious is obvious. Genocide is worse than lying.

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I like to challenge my students to think, using tough questions like, “Can you sin in a dream?”

That one leads to a lesson on the difference between sins (the actions) and sin (the root condition underlying the sins). I also like to startle them with statements that start off sounding offensive—like, “Jesus didn’t die to deliver us from our sins; He died to deliver us from sin.”

The lesson is that our sins aren’t the problem; our sin is. Sure, some sins are worse than others—because of the damage they cause—but the underlying sin is the same. That leads to an important application.

Suppressing sinful actions is good, but it doesn’t do much to rid you of sin. “You can’t cure a cold by suppressing a sneeze.” Of course that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t suppress, or cover, a sneeze, but that’s because of its effect on others, not because of its effect on you.

Only the Holy Spirit can cure sin.

So, yes, you can sin in a dream.

3 Exodus 2:1–10 (ESV)

*Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."*

Notice how much this story sounds like the Holocaust. "*When she could hide him no longer ...*" From whom, the Gestapo? No, from every single Egyptian—who had been ordered to cast every son born to the Hebrews into the Nile. And, obviously, they were obeying that order.

But for what? Why did the Pharaoh order this?

Like the Holocaust, this was "reasonless." Pharaoh's paranoid delusions lay at the heart of this wickedness. He was worried that *in the event of war*, the Hebrews might *join our enemies and fight against us*. (Exodus 1:11) The Hebrews had never done anything to justify that fear.

This is an incredibly depressing situation for the Hebrews. Where is God's blessing? Where is God's promise? Where is God?

Of course we know how this ends, so we know where God, His promise, and His blessing are. Everything's right on track. Pharaoh's daughter adopting Moses is a sign of that.

But think about how you would feel if you were right in the middle of this nightmare and couldn't see how it's going to play out.

That's how life works for God's people.

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The key to getting through tough times like these is to trust God, really trust Him. You can't just want to trust Him. Trust takes time—not simply time being alive, but time with Him. That's why daily devotions like this one are a good idea. These messages are written to draw you closer to God.

But if you just read these devotions and don't spend some time in quiet prayer, you're missing out. Pursue a closer and more challenging relationship. That's one of the main themes of Exodus.

4 Exodus 2:11–22 (ESV)

*One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, “Why do you strike your companion?” He answered, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.*

*Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come home so soon today?” They said, “An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock.” He said to his daughters, “Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.” And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”*

Here we see two early examples of Moses standing up for righteousness. Moses is a strong fighter, and when he sees an injustice, he violently cleans house—too violently in the first case. We know he intended to be this rough because he looked around for witnesses first.

But there had to be at least one witness—the Hebrew who was being beaten. Not surprisingly, word got around, and Moses ends up on the lam in Midian—where he’ll have plenty of time to think about controlling his temper.

There he encounters the injustice of a bunch of shepherds picking on the daughters of the priest of Midian by driving them away from the watering troughs. Single-handedly, *Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock*. When their father hears about this, he asks his daughters, “Why’d you let this guy get away?”

Sure enough, Moses marries “the farmer’s daughter” and the rest is history.

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Anger at injustice channels the image of God in us. Violence in response to that anger channels our sin.

The problem is always the same; we want to play God—to take matters into our own hands. We’re not content to let God be God of His own creation.

Everyone wants to be in charge. That’s how man fell into sin. That’s how the Devil became the Devil.

Funny thing is, God eventually does put Moses in charge—and he’ll whine and pout about it.

5 Exodus 2:23–3:6 (ESV)

*During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.*

*Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

Is Moses talking to *the angel of the LORD* or is he talking directly to *the LORD*?

It seems to be both. In verse 3:2, *the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush*, but in verse 3:4, *God called to him out of the bush*.

Experts have struggled to understand this. How can it be both? Is this a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ? Is it a theophany?

That’s just a search for the right label. Presumably, even if God were to explain exactly how this works, we wouldn’t understand it. The Hebrew word for angel (מַלְאָךְ, mal-akh) is just the word for messenger. Somehow, when Moses is talking with the angel, he’s talking directly with God.

More strikingly, verse 3:6 implies that when Moses is looking at the angel, he thinks he’s looking at God. So, the angel’s role as a messenger is much more sophisticated than just delivering words.

He’s not a video, and he’s not a talking hologram.

It’s way beyond our understanding.

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This gives me fits. I’m never comfortable with not understanding something.

I don’t like it when people say things like, “That’s just a mystery.” It feels like they don’t care. I want to fire back, “Aren’t we at least supposed to try?”

Yes, we’re supposed to try (to understand the great things of God). Never stop trying.

In failing, we learn something about who we are. This is a valuable humbling.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is the greatest blessing God has bestowed on this country?
2. Are some sins particularly foreboding—indicating that the underlying sin is worse?
3. Has your relationship with God grown over the last year?
4. How should we fight injustice?
5. What is your most troubling unanswered question?