

CLOUD OF WITNESSES | 09:: Moses + the Passover

PRAYER: Take a deep breath. Hold it.... Now let it out. Use these first few moments to talk with Jesus and connect with Him for a second. Think about all the things we've learned about who He is over the last few posts. He is holy. He is powerful. He knows everything and is everywhere at once. Let that sink in – that the God who created the universe and orchestrates all things wants to sit here and have a relationship with you! He loves you!

Bring your cares and concerns to Him and maybe journal about them before you start this study. Sometimes, the very thing you bring to Jesus before you start studying His word is the very thing He planned to teach you as you study.

Pray that the Lord would reveal something new to you today, as we look at the Passover – a Jewish tradition that is so closely tied to the Gospel.



Do you remember from the last post how Moses felt compelled to save the Hebrews and attacked an Egyptian, killing him for the sake of justice? While it was unwise (and horrific), the incident shows he did feel some sense of connection to the Hebrews and a calling to save them. He may have been full of zeal, but his actions were pre-mature (40 years pre-mature, to be exact) because God had not yet called him to the task. Let that be a lesson to anyone who tries to take any step without the Lord's lead – we are doomed to fail if we try to do anything in the flesh that the Spirit needs to do. We see that in this last study, as Moses had to flee to Midian (a different country!) to hide from Pharaoh, who was trying to kill him for his recklessness.

We will see the other side of the coin as we study today – if we *follow* God's lead, we will *not fail*.

As we continue with Moses' story, we find him tending to his father-in-law's flocks.

READ EXODUS CHAPTER 3.

There's a lot to digest in that chapter, but we will get through this, as usual, piece by piece. The very first thing we read is that Moses was tending to Jethro's flocks, leading them up the Mountain of God. Moses was literally a shepherd, which would prepare him to lead God's people out of Egypt. The metaphor is so strong. All through the Bible people are



compared to sheep – especially in Jesus’ teachings. And girlfriend – that is no compliment. They’re cute and fuzzy but have you ever been around a sheep?

Think about this and see if you see yourself in any of these characteristics: sheep follow others blindly, sheep tend to go their own way and have no sense of direction, sheep are defenseless, sheep get anxious, sheep will settle for less and drink muddy water rather than looking for clean water.

Jesus doesn’t refer to us as sheep to be mean, He is trying to reveal to us that we are in need of a *Shepherd*! He protects us from danger (and sometimes from ourselves!). He guides us where we need to go. He leads us to the things that will nourish us rather than harm us. And He loves us just like a shepherd loves his flock – even more so, actually.

The Israelites needed a shepherd too – and God chose Moses to be His representation on earth and lead them out of Egypt.

It’s also interesting in this first verse that Moses was heading up the “Mountain of God” and there, at the top, he sees the burning bush!

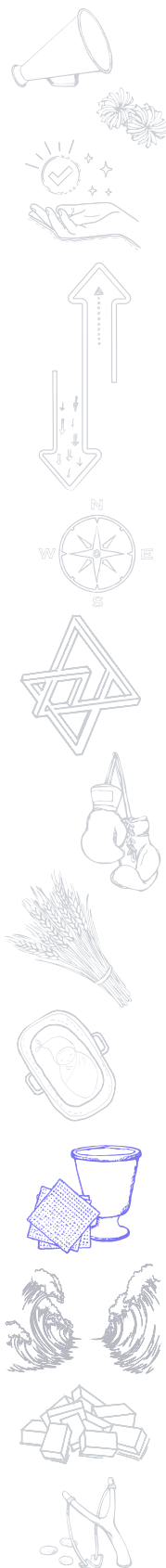
I love the metaphor that William MacDonald gives for the burning bush:

“The bush suggests the glory of God, before which [Moses] was told to stand [barefoot]. It might also foreshadow Jehovah’s dwelling in the midst of His people without their being consumed. And some have even seen in it the destiny of Israel, tried in the fires of affliction but not consumed.”¹

Isn’t that beautiful? We’ll see in a future post that Moses requests to actually see God, to which God responds, “No one can see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20). But we have the opportunity to invite the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts – the very same God that no mere human being can see and survive to tell the tale, *lives in us*! And we are not consumed! We are not struck down! He is so Holy (and this is the first time the word Holy is written in the Bible, by the way) that He burns with anger toward sin, but when we invite Jesus into our hearts, He is our forgiveness and our protection from judgement. Is that not the coolest thing?!

And the metaphor for God’s people to be tested in fiery trials and yet not destroyed is also beautiful. It reminds me of something Paul says in 2 Corinthians.

TURN TO THE NEW TESTAMENT AND READ 2
CORINTHIANS 4:8-9. READ EACH STATEMENT PAUL
MAKES AND THEN TRY TO ANSWER IN YOUR JOURNAL
“WHY?”



In this text, Paul is specifically speaking about trials that come to us because of our faith or our mission for God, but I think it can also apply to every day trials in life. But why are we not crushed? Why are we not in despair? Why are we not destroyed? One clue is found just a few verses down where we just read.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18. AND THEN FLIP TWO BOOKS BACK AND READ ROMANS 5:3-5. WHAT DO YOU THINK THESE TWO PASSAGES COULD MEAN, WHEN READ TOGETHER?

Verses 16-18 in 2 Corinthians 4 say that we don't lose heart (when we face trials) because our "light and momentary troubles" are producing an "eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all." I'll be the first to admit that when you're in a trial, it does *not* feel light and sometimes it feels like it's going to drag on forever. But Paul is contrasting our temporary suffering here on earth with our eternal experience in Heaven which will be glorious. And the value of following Christ (even in the hardship – because we've seen a lot in this series how following God can sometimes invite hardship, because the world does not take kindly to Christianity) is that we can draw near to Him and experience a little piece of Heaven now.

Stick with me here – Romans 5 clarifies this a bit for us. I like how simply the New Living Translation puts it:

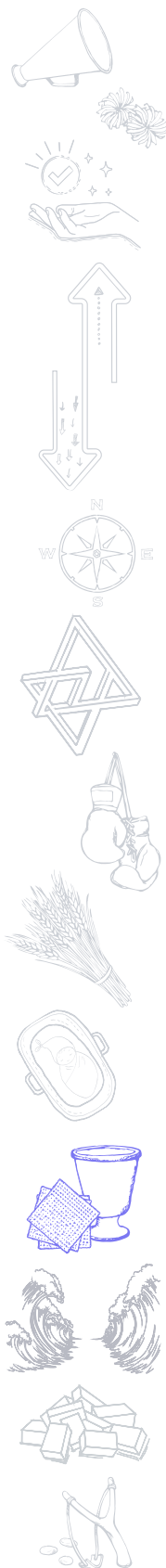
"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love."

I don't know about you... but *rejoicing in my sufferings*?! No thank you! But here's the deal: when you are facing hardship, as a daughter of the King you have the opportunity to run to Jesus. Like we discussed in the Joseph post, He will be your Refuge. He will encourage you. He will lift you up. And if you do that *consistently*, you will look back on those hard seasons and be *thankful* for the time you spent with Him and for everything He taught you during that time. And you might even see how you've grown. I know it's a bit backwards. But, that's the Kingdom of God. Everything is backwards from how it is on earth.

Before we look back to the burning bush, let's pick up one more stack of verses to study.

The English Standard Version of Exodus 2:23-25 reads like this:

"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.”

I love Beth Moore’s commentary on this set of verses:

“Three words: and God knew. He always does. But what exactly did it mean that He knew? That He loved them? That they belonged to Him? But hadn’t that always been true?

All that God knows, He has always known. Does that mean He simply knew it was time? They they’d borne the burden long enough? That He’d heard them wailing quite long enough?” ²

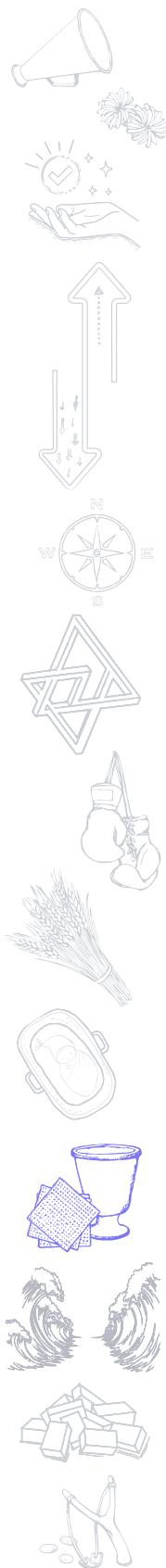
We always hear that God’s timing is perfect and, in this story, it seems God was waiting for a new Pharoah to take the throne. Because the moment Pharoah (the one searching to kill Moses) dies, “God knew.” And nothing is a loss, because we see that the hardships the Israelites faced were all used for God’s mighty display of splendor in the end.¹ Now was the turning point.

Looking back to the burning bush, Moses is intrigued and here we see God officially call Moses to his position of leadership. First, God calls Moses to the bush and reveals Himself – explaining that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Moses’ ancestors). Then God explains that He has seen the misery of His people in Egypt and has heard their cries of oppression and shares that He is concerned about their suffering. He tells Moses of the land that He plans to give the Israelites – sound familiar? This is actually the *same land* that He had given Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they left during the famine in Joseph’s time. During the 400+ years the Israelites lived in Egypt, 6 other nations had taken over the land and it wouldn’t be easy to claim the land again – but with God, all things are possible.

Finally, God invites Moses to take part in His plan for freedom. Moses shrinks back with a strong lack of confidence. I love the color one commentator adds to this scene:

“[Moses’] inventory of disqualifications covered lack of capability (3:11), lack of message (3:13), lack of authority (4:1), lack of eloquence (4:10), lack of special adaptation (4:13), lack of previous success (5:23), and lack of previous acceptance (6:12). A more complete list of disabilities would be difficult to conjure up. But instead of pleasing God, his seeming humility and reluctance stirred [God’s] anger... in point of fact, the excuses Moses [gave] to show his [inability] were the very reasons for God’s selection of him for the task.” ³

The man uses big words, but what he says is totally on point! Moses made a ton of excuses, but do you remember what we studied in the Jacob post? God uses our weakness to display His strength! And when we rely on Jesus in our weakness, He gets the glory



when we are victorious!

God didn't ask Moses to lead the people of Israel so Moses could be famous and powerful, God asked Moses to lead them because He, Himself, is powerful and deserves to be famous! He just invited Moses into the story.

LOOK BACK AT EXODUS 3:12. WHAT IS GOD'S RESPONSE TO MOSES' CONCERNS?

When Moses explains that he is inadequate for the job, God tells him He will be with Him. And then, from verses 15-22 God gives a play-by-play of how things are going to go and also tells Moses exactly what to say. You'll find this to be a theme in the next few chapters. God is basically holding Moses' hand through the whole ordeal. It's His plan – and like we learned in the last post – when God has a plan, He gives you everything you need to make His plan succeed.

READ EXODUS 4:1-23. HOW DOES GOD CONTINUE TO WORK WITH MOSES' CONCERNS?

Moses was clearly daunted by such a task. Put yourself in his shoes. His people had been in slavery for many, many years under Pharaoh and now Moses had to ask for their release? And on top of that – don't forget that Moses used to *live* in the palace, so now he has to return and see everyone he left behind?! But God was patient with Moses just like he was patient with Abraham, and Jacob, and is with us. He gave Moses signs and wonders to perform, but also a "partner in crime" – fittingly, his biological brother Aaron. Moses would hear from God, share the words with Aaron, and Aaron would speak to Pharaoh.

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO EXODUS 4:21-23. WHAT FORESHADOWS (WARNING OF A FUTURE EVENT) DOES GOD GIVE TO MOSES?

God shares two things with Moses in that passage. First - God warned Moses that despite the many wonders God would perform through Moses, God would harden Pharaoh's heart and he would be unaffected by them. Second - God considered Israel His "firstborn son." Probably because the Hebrew people were the first group of people that He called His own – the people who worshipped and loved Him. And because of the oppression the Israelites faced, God was prepared to take *Pharaoh's* firstborn son. With all of the plagues



God through Moses would unleash on the world, Moses should have known it wasn't the end until somebody died.

READ EXODUS 4:27-31. WHAT HAPPENS, HERE?

We don't know if this was Moses' and Aaron's first time meeting, but I'd like to imagine how special the moment was for the two of them to realize they are brothers. And what it would have possibly been like for Jochebed (Moses' mother) and Miriam (Moses' sister) to reunite with the baby, now man, that they once floated down the Nile.

We also see in this scene that the dynamic duo of Moses and Aaron share with the Hebrew people God's plans to free them from Egypt and everyone worships the Lord in thanks. And then... it was time for the showdown.

READ EXODUS 5:1-21.

At first glance, this first confrontation with Pharaoh was not successful. In his words, "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him? I don't know the Lord!" Sounds like the world, doesn't it?

We'll see in the next chapter that poor Moses felt defeated and went running to God with complaints. But remember, the Lord had warned Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart. We see why later on in Exodus 10:1-2: so that the Israelites would see that God is the Lord – meaning that God is in charge. He is supreme. He is top dog.

A while back, I was in church and maybe it was Pastor Louie, but someone said "I want a life story that can only be explained by, 'The Lord did this'." Want it or not, that's how a lot of our stories are. We are faced with impossible circumstances, *only* to come through victorious on the other end and the only explanation is that God brought us through. God healed the cancer. God defeated the bully. God helped me pass that math test I studied for hours but couldn't understand. God gave me that friend. God healed that relationship. God freed me from the grip of anxiety. God pulled me out of depression. Keep your eyes open – especially in hardship, because this is where God shines. And through this, you will know that God is the Lord.

READ EXODUS 6:1-12 AND THEN 6:28-7:13.

There's a lot in this section, but we'll breeze through it because we need to get to the 10 plagues about to befall Egypt. In the first few verses, Moses runs to God in distress over



his first encounter with Pharoah and the fact that the Hebrews now blamed him for their worsened suffering. "The Lord graciously answered Moses' petulant [childishly bad-tempered] speech first by assuring him that Pharoah *would* [eventually] let the Israelites go because he would be compelled by God's strong hand."1 He then reminded Moses that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but explained that He did not reveal Himself fully to them. "The thought here seems to be that [God] would now reveal Himself as Lord in a new way – that is, in new power in delivering His people."1 God also explains that He *will* free them from Egypt and He *will* get them to the Promised Land. Poor Moses, a lot like the forefathers before him, just didn't seem to get the point. But, after all that encouragement, Moses did comply with the Lord's commands and he met with Aaron to perform the first set of signs and wonders.

WHAT IS INTERSTING ABOUT THIS FIRST SIGN THAT THE LORD PERFORMED THROUGH MOSES AND AARON?

Do you see that kind of thing every day? I mean... we were prepared for Aaron's staff to become a snake because we had seen the Lord perform that same trick for Moses up on the mountain. And "no big deal" right? Because God can do anything. (Honestly, I'd still be in awe...) But what strikes me (no pun intended) is that the Egyptian sorcerers were able to perform the *same sign*! I don't want to get too deep into this, but sorcerers call on Satan's power to do some pretty icky things. But in this display of power, God shows that He is in ultimate control because Aarons' snake *swallows* the other two snakes. So, **BEAT THAT!**

It shouldn't come as a surprise, since Moses (and we) were all warned that Pharoah's heart would be hardened, that Pharoah wasn't impressed and everyone's performance didn't move him to release the Hebrews. And so... we witness the famous 10 plagues of Egypt.

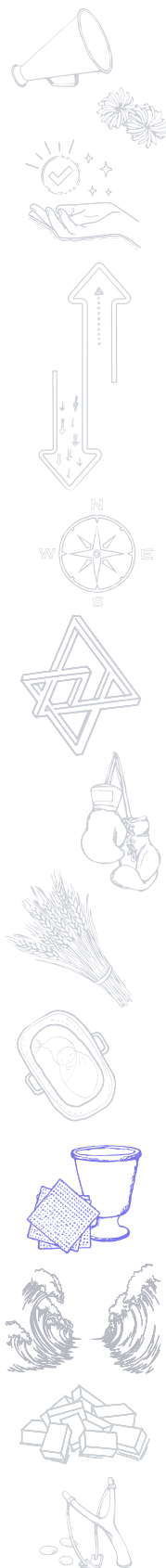


READ THE VERSES BELOW AND IN THE CHART LIST EACH PLAGUE AND HOW PHAROAH REACTED TO EACH ONE. IN THE LAST COLUMN, TAKE NOTE OF ANYTHING EXTRA YOU NOTICE IN THE NARRATIVE.

VERSES	PLAGUE	PHAROAH'S REACTION	NOTES
Exodus 7:14-25			
Exodus 8:1-15			
Exodus 8:16-19			
Exodus 8:20-32			
Exodus 9:1-7			
Exodus 9:8-17			
Exodus 9:18-35			
Exodus 10:3-20			
Exodus 10:21-29			
Exodus 11:1-10, 12:29-32			

There is so much to say on each of these plagues. Deep meaning, historical context, ties with Egyptian superstitions – it was like God was toying with their false beliefs trying to reveal even to the Egyptians that He was the one true God. But – they missed it all.

I think it's interesting that at some point, the Egyptian sorcerers couldn't keep up with God. And I love how a few plagues in, the Lord was like, "You know what? I'm going to spare My people this madness and only plague *you* guys, so that you can see that I am with the Israelites." It's pretty clear that God wins in the end. He gets what He wants. And what He tells about the future is true. Never doubt it if He ever shares a piece of it with you.



What we really need to focus on, in this, though, is this last plague – the Death of the First-Born Son. With this plague, came the establishment of the Jewish tradition, Passover. In the chart, we skipped part of Exodus 12, so let's read all about this Festival of Unleavened Bread!

READ EXODUS 12:1-30. MAKE A BULLET LIST IN YOUR JOURNAL OF THE DIFFERENT THINGS THE HEBREWS WERE TO DO FOR PASSOVER. WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THEY WERE TO DO?

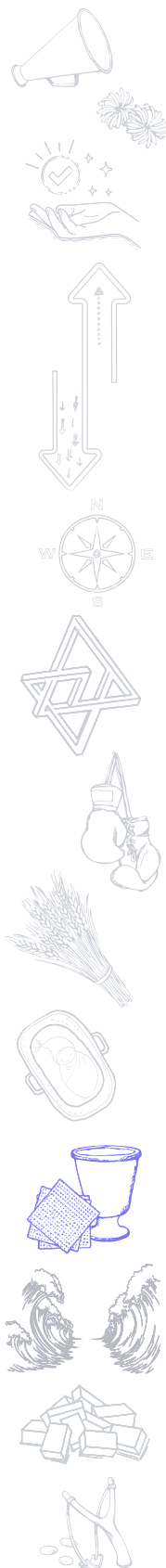
Passover has many elements to it, and we will get to those, but there is one thing above them all that was important – they had to sacrifice the spotless, first-born lamb (or goat) to God and then take its blood and wipe it across their doorpost. This would be a sign to the Lord as He passed by all the houses that they believed in God and were His people. Just like with the other plagues, the Lord would only spare His people from this plague, but this time – they had a role to play.

Let's look at the different elements of Passover – because while Christians don't celebrate Passover, there is a lot of theological significance to each part of the tradition... and it all points to Jesus. But before we look at all of that, let's gather a bit more information on the Passover.

READ EXODUS 13:1-16. WHAT ELEMENTS OF THE PASSOVER ARE DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER?

God is so detailed. Nothing goes to waste with Him. Every detail of this list of rules for Passover is deeply meaningful. Here are just a few of the details:

- * Each family was to take a lamb (or goat) into their household 4 days before Passover and slaughter them at twilight on the eve of Passover (Exodus 12:3, 12:6). Jesus arrived in Jerusalem 4 days before his death on a cross, which occurred on the eve of Passover (Matthew 12:1-11, Luke 19:29-38, John 12:9-16).
- * The lamb was to have no blemishes. No spots. No cuts or bruises. Perfect in every way. (Exodus 12:5) Jesus was perfect in every way. He had no sin (1 Peter 1:18-19).
- * As they cooked the lamb and ate it, no person was to break any of the lamb's bones (Exodus 12:46). Jesus bones weren't broken, either, as he was beaten and hung on the cross (John 19:31-36).



* Blood played a big part of the first Passover. The blood from the lamb was to be wiped across the top door frame as well as each side of the door frame and on the threshold. This shape forms a cross. And anyone who stayed behind the blood-painted door stayed safe from God's judgement of the Egyptians (Exodus 12:7, 12:12-13). Similarly, Jesus' blood saves anyone who trusts in Him from God's judgement for our sins.

The Israelites had no way of knowing that Jesus would come several thousands of years later, but if you study Leviticus, where God lays the groundwork for even more Jewish rituals, you'll see that the Passover lamb stood for a sacrifice for sins. And the unleavened bread is flat (unleavened) because it does not have yeast – which symbolizes sin in the Bible (Exodus 13:6-7). So, each year at Passover, the Israelites were reminded of their need for forgiveness of sins. The bitter herbs were a reminder of their slavery and slavery a picture of how we are chained to sin, to do as the flesh pleases until we come alive in Jesus.

Today, we have a new Covenant with God – it is that God sent Jesus to die as a sacrifice for our sins. Once and for all. Meaning, He died once and it was for the sins of *all* people. Your part in the covenant is simply to accept the free gift that Jesus is offering you and putting your faith in Him. When you put your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit moves into your heart and you receive "salvation," which is the forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. And God makes a new person in you, breathing life into your spirit, as we've discussed before.

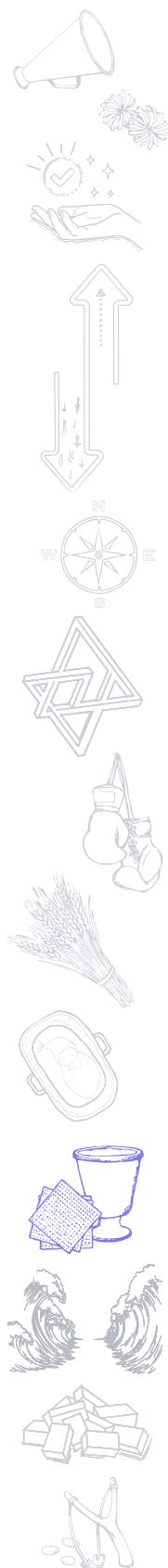
READ EXODUS 12:31-50. HOW DOES THIS SAGA END?

Shocker! Everything turns out just as the Lord told Moses that it would! Heartbroken over the loss of his son, Pharaoh released the Hebrews, the Egyptians gave them all of their silver and gold and clothing, and (my personal favorite) 430 years to the very day that they came to Egypt, they were found leaving. God likes completeness, let me tell you. Nothing comes a second to soon.

I'm sure you knew we'd get to Hebrews 11 somewhere in this post! Let's see how Moses' faith plays a role in this scenario.

READ HEBREWS 11:28. WHAT DOES THIS VERSE SAY ABOUT MOSES' FAITH?

By faith, Moses led the Hebrew people in Passover so that they would do as the Lord commanded and sprinkle blood on their door posts. Moses had to lead. Well... I take



that back. The Lord could have done all of this without Moses. Moses was *invited* to lead. And by faith, he did share God's commands with the people. It also took faith for each family to do as Moses had instructed from the Lord. Had they not believed, or thought the instructions were silly, they would have lost their sons too. Thankfully, everyone complied and not only were their first-born sons spared, but this was also the straw that broke the camel's back and Pharoah finally let the Israelites go, in precious freedom!



DIG A LITTLE DEEPER:

- * Have you ever felt inadequate? Write about this time in your journal. Looking back, how could God's strength been on display in your weakness?
- * Do you have a story that can only be explained by, "God did this" ? Write about this time in your journal. If you can think of more than one, write them all down. These are stories you can share to show that God overcomes *it all*!



- * Have you ever heard the phrase “it’s just one thing after another”? When you’re coming up against a sea of endless waves of hard things rely on the Lord and find refuge in Him. List in your journal some practical ways that you can run to the Lord for refuge.

- * How would you react to someone who said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?! I don’t know the Lord!!”? Can you think of anyone you know who might say something like that? Truth is, there are some things “the world” considers to be right or appropriate that stand against what God calls to be right. If you can think of someone, write a prayer asking the Lord to not only change their heart and lead them to Himself, but ask the Lord to give you the wisdom and discernment of what to say if a conversation like that ever arose.

Reference Notes

¹ William MacDonald, Believer’s Bible Commentary 2nd Edition

² Beth Moore, Chasing Vines, 2020

³ J. Oswald Sanders, On to Maturity, 1962

