

Exodus 012
Divine Discipline
Exodus 4:21-26
August 10, 2025
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Let us take our Bibles if we could, and turn them to Exodus 4:21-26. We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Exodus. The title of our message this morning probably is not the most popular topic on the block these days: "Divine Discipline."

We are moving into that first major section and subsection of the Book of Exodus, where God is in the business or the process of redeeming His nation. In fact, we do not even have a clear picture of redemption before we get to the New Testament until we read the Book of Exodus. Redemption is the purchasing of someone from bondage through the blood of an innocent scapegoat. The innocent scapegoat, as we will see in the Book of Exodus, is the Passover lamb.

This is a great book to study because it involves the redemption of God's nation, which in and of itself is a type, if you will, for His redemption of us as His people. It is the same pattern. Here, He is doing it with his own nation, the Nation of Israel.

When God does a work, typically He selects an instrument through which to work. In this case, His instrument is Moses. That is what is going on in Exodus 2-4. Moses, at age 40, thought that he was ready to go. After all, he had the education, and he had the naturalistic training. So he stepped out and he murdered an Egyptian who was abusing a Hebrew. He was not authorized by God to do that. He stepped out and tried to do the work of God through human power, and that shifted Moses into the second phase of his education there.

That middle tier is where he is given what I have been calling his B.D. degree—backside of the desert degree. It is in that section of his life, aged 40 to 80, that he is no longer a prosperous prince, but he is an obscure shepherd, reduced to almost nothing there in Midian. He is married at that point to Zipporah. They have, through that union, two children. We are going to read about them a little bit later.

It is at that stage of his life—when he is not filled with ambition, or pride, or self-sufficiency—that God now discloses Himself to Moses, who was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro at age 80. They manage to go to the mountain of God—called Horeb, or sometimes called Mount Sinai, a very important mountain where God is going to disclose His Law to His people after He brings them out of Egypt, down the road a little bit in the Book of Exodus.

It is there that Moses sees this bush that was burning, but it would not be consumed. This draws Moses' attention. God uses this to disclose Himself to Moses. He gives Moses His calling, which is to be the deliverer of the Nation of Israel through God's power. Moses coughs up every excuse you can cough up to get out of the job, and God answers each of his objections.

Now Moses is ready to go, so there he goes with his wife Zipporah, and his family (Exodus 4:20). They are headed back to Egypt to speak not only to the Jewish leadership, the Hebrew leadership in Egypt, but also Pharaoh, who was the leader of the known world at that time. "Let my people go," will be Moses's message.

He leaves Midian, Arabia, and he heads back to Egypt. It is at that point, as he is making this trip, that God begins to speak to Moses, and he basically tells Moses, beginning in Exodus 4:21, "Your are going to have opposition as you seek to fulfill your mission, because I am going to take Pharaoh's heart and I am going to harden it."

Moses' Calling (Exodus 4:1-31)

- V. God to harden Pharaoh (21-23)
 - A. God's hardening (21)
 - B. Israel's sonship (22)
 - C. Covenant reciprocity (23)
- VI. Moses' refusal to circumcise Gershom (24-26)
 - A. God's anger (24)
 - B. Zipporah's action (25-26)

This is very instructive to us because a lot of times we think that if we are in the will of God, doing the plan of God for our lives, then there should not be any problems, there should not be any opposition. It should be like tiptoeing through the tulips—no problem. When we get pushback, as it is sometimes called, we think we are outside of God's will. Yet it is predicted here that Moses is going to get a ton of pushback. Some of it is caused by God, as we will see, but that does not mean you are outside of His will.

Notice what God predicts in Exodus 4:21:

"The Lord said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power'" (Exodus 4:21).

Those signs and wonders are coming in the ten plagues. But in spite of seeing these signs and wonders, which are going to be awesome:

"...but I will harden his heart so that he will not let my people go" (Exodus 4:21).

A lot of theological systems grab that verse and use it as proof that God picks this guy but sends this other guy to hell. After all, it says right there in the Bible that God will

harden Pharaoh's heart. I would encourage you to do the following when you put your theology together: Do not camp on a verse. Look at what the totality of the book says about Pharaoh's hardening. When we look at the totality of a book, not just a verse or two, we learn that, yes, God did harden Pharaoh's heart, but only after a fairly long process where Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God. That is what the totality of the book will reveal.

Charles Ryrie says this concerning Exodus 4:21:

"'Harden his heart.' Ten times it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15), and ten times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). Paul uses this as an example of the inscrutable will of God and of His mercy toward men (Rom. 9:14-18). Seven times pharaoh hardened his own heart before God first hardened it, though the prediction that God would do it preceded all."¹

This is not saying that God took Pharaoh's heart and made it spiritually hard, giving Pharaoh no opportunity to respond favorably to God or to the grace of God. This is just a prediction of what is going to happen in the end game. What is the end process going to look like? Pharaoh is going to harden his heart so aggressively against God through his own volition, through his own will, that God will finally give Pharaoh over to what he already wants to do. These are some of the most frightening words of the Bible. That is what a complete study of the Book of Exodus, rather than just focusing on a verse or two, will reveal.

Dr. Ed Hindson, in his commentary on the Book of Exodus says the same thing about Exodus 4:21. His numbers are a little bit different from Dr. Hindson's, but they are both communicating the same point:

"'I will harden his heart.' An expression meaning 'to strengthen his will.' The text identifies the heart as the location of volition, man's decision-making ability. On seven occasions in the narrative, God hardens Pharaoh's heart (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8) or foretells that He will harden Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3), and nine times in the text, Pharaoh hardens his own heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34-35). For the initial five plagues, the text registers Pharaoh as the agent of hardening. Not until the sixth plague does God participate in the confirmation of Pharaoh's own volitional choices."²

If these are right, what it is saying is this: Plague number one, Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God; plague number two, he hardened his own heart against God.

¹ Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, page 96.

² Hindson, E. E., & Mitchell, D. R., eds. (2010). *King James Version Bible Commentary for Today: The Most Up-to-Date Commentary on the Time-Honored Text of the King James Version* (p. 86). Thomas Nelson.

The same is true with number three, with number four, and with number five. I think what he said here is not until you get to number six, which deals with the boils, does God finally step in and cement Pharaoh's heart in a direction it already wanted to move.

This is a teaching that you will find not just in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament as well. Paul talks about it in Romans 1:18-20:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness"
(Romans 1:18).

You will notice that God is not doing anything yet; it is people taking the obvious disclosure of God in creation and suppressing it. They come up with funny, intellectually inconsistent theories to explain it away. From the goo to you through the zoo, over billions of years. Everything came about accidentally, even though I have never seen a hurricane go through a junkyard and assemble a 747 airplane. People say, "Given billions of years, anything could happen."

This is what is taught as naturalistic evolution. It is a way to dismiss the Creator, from the thinking of men and women, because they do not want to be accountable to a higher being. If that is your mindset and you want to be your own god, then you need a way to explain away the obvious disclosure of God in creation. It is not God causing people to do this; people are suppressing it on their own.

"Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them" (Romans 1:19).

"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1).

It is very obvious that God exists. Look at the design in our world and even in our own bodies. You cannot have design without a designer.

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through that which has been made, so that they are without excuse"
(Romans 1:20).

When people do not want anything to do with God they dismiss Him from their thinking. That is very convenient because it removes accountability. They come up with these implausible explanations as to how we are living in a created world, a designed world without a designer. It really has very little to do with the great scientific debates of the day; it has to do with an attitude which is within the heart of men.

You know what God eventually does with people? He says, "Have it your way. You do not want Me? I will not bother you anymore." He gives people over to what they already want to do. This is why I said these are some of the scariest words in the Bible.

After this process that we have just read has run its course, Romans says:

"Therefore God gave them over in the lust of their hearts to impurity..."
(Romans 1:24).

"For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural"
(Romans 1:26).

"And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to those things which are not proper"
(Romans 1:28).

That is how you read the Bible: You look for patterns. Not once, not twice, but three times it says in the Book of Romans that you can go so far in your rebellion against God, denying what is obvious, that three times it says, "God gave them over." God gave them over (Romans 1:24); God gave them over (Romans 1:26); God gave them over (Romans 1:28).

"You dismiss me, I dismiss you," God says. "But I do not just do it carte blanche in terms of starting. I give grace to everybody." Some people are uninterested in grace. It does not matter how much God knocks on the door; it does not matter how much God tries to get their attention; they do not want anything to do with God. So God says, "Have what you want."

That is what is happening with Pharaoh. Depending on whose numbers you follow, six times Pharaoh hardened his heart against God. "Pharaoh hardened his heart against God. Pharaoh hardened his heart against God." Then you keep reading, and it reaches a point where it changes and it says, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." We are no longer dealing with self-hardening; we are dealing with divine hardening.

"My Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (Genesis 6:3). That is what God said before the flood. "You have 120 years before judgment, but *"My Spirit shall not strive with man forever"* (Genesis 6:3).

It is not that God overrides free will; he is respecting the decisions that people make. That becomes a frightening prospect, does it not?

*"A man who hardens his neck after much reproof
Will suddenly be broken and beyond remedy"* (Proverbs 29:1).

We play a real gamble when we think that the grace of God is something that is going to continue on forever. Yet the Bible is very clear: God's Spirit, although He loves everyone and desires none to perish, will not strive with man forever.

What is being described there in Exodus 4:21 is the end game. God is predicting that this is how it is going to end up with Pharaoh. "He is not going to give you an easy path to victory, Moses. He is going to fight you every single step of the way. Do not worry about it. I am sovereign over this, and the day is going to come when I am going to give Pharaoh over to what he already wants to do."

God is in control and sovereign over any opposition that Moses faces, and the same is true in your life with any opposition you are facing. God understands the opponent. He understands the opposition. He understands the mentality of those that seek to come against you. He has their hearts, if you will, within the very palm of His hand.

How could God do anything less for the Nation of Israel? Because Israel is God's firstborn son:

"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, 'Israel is My son, My firstborn'''" (Exodus 4:22).

I was sent a recording of a pastor recently who made a statement to the effect of: "Israel is not special. After all, God had to pick somebody, so He just picked Israel, but there is nothing significant about the Jews." You are seeing all of this now developing in foreign policy, as even members of the MAGA movement are upset that Trump has made a few moves in support of the Nation of Israel, for which I praise the Lord.

"Let us treat Israel like any other country, because Israel is just one of many amongst the nations of the earth. There is nothing unique about Israel, nothing special. Do not put Israel first, Make America Great Again," that kind of mentality. This type of thing comes from the left politically, and it comes from the right. It comes from Republicans, and it comes from Democrats.

I am here to tell you that you cannot look at the Nation of Israel just like any other country—she is different. The reason that she is different is that she is God's firstborn. He is not just saying that "Israel is My son," but "My firstborn." Who would say that about their children? "I have this kid over here, and I could have had another kid." That is your child, and that is your firstborn. Any father paternally understands this. That is how God looks at the Nation of Israel.

"But they are a bunch of Christ rejectors over there." Today they are, but read the rest of the Bible. They are not going to be in that condition forever. In fact, there is coming upon the Nation of Israel, something that has never happened in the history of the world: a national conversion. When you get to the very end of the Tribulation period, every single Jew—every single physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that is living on the earth at that time—will be born spiritually and regenerated.

*"Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things?
Can a land be born in one day?
Can a nation be brought forth all at once?" (Isaiah 66:8).*

That is what is coming for Israel. It is not coming for the French or the Canadians or for Americans, as much as I love America. You cut me open, and I bleed red, white, and blue. I love America; I am a very patriotic person. But that type of a promise is not even given for the United States of America or any other country. It is given for the Nation of Israel because as far as God is concerned, Israel is unique. Israel is special. Israel is His firstborn son.

*"When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I have called My" (Hosea 11:1).*

*"...On a straight path in which they will not stumble;
For I am a father to Israel,
And Ephraim is My firstborn" (Jeremiah 31:9).*

*"Is Ephraim, My dear son?
Is he a delightful child?
Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him,
I certainly will remember him;
Therefore My heart yearns for him;
I will surely have mercy on him,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:20).*

"Yes, but you are looking at Israel through a lens." You bet your bottom dollar I am. I do not look at Israel the way the world community looks at Israel. I do not look at Israel the way politicians look at Israel. I look at it through the lens of the Word of God. These are not my thoughts; I am getting it from what God said.

Why is God going to do the greatest act of redemptive history in the Book of Exodus, other than the cross of Christ, for His nation which has been in bondage for 400 years? Because they are His firstborn son. Does not any father stand up for their firstborn? Does not any father advocate for their firstborn? This reveals the heart of God for Israel.

This is why I do not really fit in in a lot of these MAGA type circles. I am a very conservative voter. I am not trying to get into politics, but I just do not look at foreign policy, foreign affairs, the way they do, as if Israel is just another nation that is in the way and that we should not show any type of mercy towards them. I look at it through the eyes of God, and God says Israel is very significant.

It is not this idea that if God did not pick Israel, He could have picked anybody. That is not what the Bible says. The Bible says, "Israel is My firstborn."

Now watch this play out in Exodus 4:23 where it deals with covenant reciprocity.

"So I said to you [Pharaoh], 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn" (Exodus 4:23).

Wow! "You take out My firstborn, Pharaoh, then I am going after your firstborn." That is pure Bible. This is an outworking of Genesis 12:1-3. God, informing the Nation of Israel, calling Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans, who would become the progenitor of the Nation of Israel, gave to Abram certain promises that later become ratified in a formal covenant. Abram is promised a land; he is promised that he would become a great nation; he is promised personal blessing, a great name, a blessing to others.

We would not even have a Scripture or a Savior if God had not set aside the Nation of Israel and formed them. They are the only nation in the history of mankind that God has created.

*"And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3).

When God says, "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you," how literally do you take that?

*"And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3).

What do you do with this language here that says, *"And the one who curses you I will curse"*? Is that some kind of generic statement or is that ironclad? Literal? The way this plays out in Scripture, it is scary how literal this is.

Let me give you one other example. We are going to come, later on in the Book of Exodus, to the account where God is going to drown the pursuing Egyptian army in the Red sea. You know the story. The Israelites pass through a wall of water, and Israel is safe. God closes the walls of water at the Red sea upon the pursuing Egyptians and they all drowned—no more Egyptians.

Ask yourself just a simple question: God could have killed the Egyptians any way He wanted. There could have been an earthquake; it could have been a giant hole that opens up in the ground. That does happen later on in the Moses story. People were complaining about Moses' leadership, and God says to Moses, "Do not worry about it. This one's on Me." The whole ground opens up and all the disgruntled people disappear. Wow, talk about blessed subtraction, rather than blessed addition.

God could have used that; he could have used an earthquake; he could have used, like the Book of Job talks about, whirlwinds; he could have used a storm; but He chose drowning. Why drowning? I believe the answer is found in Exodus 1:22:

"Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, 'Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive'"
(Exodus 1:22).

That is drowning; it is infanticide. Egypt had a policy: We are going to take all of the Jewish male infants, and we are going to cast them into the Nile, presumably drowning them. God says, "You drown My people, and I am going to drown you." That is Genesis 12:3: *"And the one who curses you I will curse."*

What do you do with this: "I will kill your firstborn son, Pharaoh"? By the way, this happens in plague number ten. All of the firstborn all over Egypt are dead. The only people that were exempted from that plague were the Hebrews who took the blood of the Passover lamb and applied it to the doorposts. When God came in judgment, as we will see in plague number ten, those homes that He saw the blood of the Passover lamb sprinkled on, His judgment passed over their homes. Hence the language "Passover." That is where "Passover" comes from.

It is an obvious type of Christ, because the Passover lamb had no broken bones, was genetically pure, had no spot or blemish. Of course, that is who Jesus was. None of His bones were broken, we are told in the New Testament. He was the sinless sacrifice. When God comes in judgment, which is going to happen, those that have His blood applied to them by way of faith alone, His judgment will pass right over. I do not know about you, but I sure want to be in that number. I want to get that issue fixed because I want to be on the right side of the Lord.

In plague number ten, God comes after the firstborn all over Egypt. The question is, why would God kill the firstborn all over Egypt? The answer is right there in Exodus 4:23:

""...but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn"" (Exodus 4:23).

"You come against My firstborn, I come against your firstborn."

To be frank with you, the whole rest of the Bible reads this way. It is an outworking of Genesis 12:3, which to the best I can tell is extremely literal. *"And the one who curses you I will curse"* (Genesis 12:3).

You want me to look at the Israelis and Israel as if they are just another nation? How can you do that? God means what He says and says what He means.

Cheer up, folks. It gets worse because now we move into Exodus 4:24-26 where it looks like Moses either refused to or neglected to circumcise one of his sons. Some say it was Gershom; some say it was the other son, Eliezer. I am not sure if it is one or the other. Maybe some of you can show me some kind of proof, but one of these sons was not circumcised.

This kind of reading is so surreal to me that I wonder, "Is this really part of the Bible that I am reading?" I like all the stuff about Pharaoh, and I like to talk of the ten plagues and the Passover lamb, but who in the world put Exodus 4:24-26 in the Bible? When was the last time you heard a sermon on Exodus 4:24-26? Only in a weird church like ours. If you are in a normal church, they would not touch this with a ten-foot pole.

It says this regarding Moses' negligence to circumcise one of his sons:

"Now it came about at the lodging place on the way..." (Exodus 4:24).

What way? Remember that Moses and his family have submitted to the calling of God going from Midian back to Egypt.

"Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death" (Exodus 4:24).

What is going on here? In Genesis 17:10, when God formed the Nation of Israel, this is what He said to Abraham:

"This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised" (Genesis 17:10).

This goes back to God's dealings with Abram, who later became Abraham. He gave him the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15. Then in Genesis 17 He says, "If you want to be part of the Abrahamic Covenant and identify with the Abrahamic Covenant, which is unconditional, then every male needs to be circumcised at the age of eight days."

You will notice that this command for circumcision is in Genesis 17, and the Abrahamic Covenant is in Genesis 15. The last time I checked, Genesis 17 comes after Genesis 15. So the Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional, but whether you want to identify with the Abrahamic Covenant or not is conditional.

Genesis 17 did not give them the covenant. They had it, but if you want to identify with the covenant that already exists, then circumcision for all males on the eighth day needs to be practiced. Moses let this slip off his calendar, and it was not some kind of light thing where God says, "We will work it out later. Let us have a dialogue about it. How do you feel, Moses?" And then God says, "This is how I feel. Let us meet in the middle."

No. God was going to kill Moses. God was going to take Moses out of this world because Moses failed to fulfill what God wanted done with circumcision. There is a parallel with water baptism—I do not want to push it too far. Just as with circumcision, Genesis 17 comes after Genesis 15, Paul says it is the same principle with water baptism.

Water baptism does not save anybody. Evidence is the thief on the cross. As the thief on the cross is dying and he exercises faith in the Messiah. Jesus said to him, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Jesus did not shout down, "Throw water on the guy quickly before he dies, so he can go to heaven." It is hard, if not impossible, to get water baptized, join a church, fill out a card, raise your hand, walk an aisle, go on a missions trip or anything like that, when you are nailed to a cross.

Water baptism saves absolutely no one. If you go into heaven without being water baptized and you are still in heaven, praise the Lord. So why be water baptized? Because water baptism is a public confession of who you belong to. We will water baptize you in this church. Not today, but we will do it. We have you take a little class first, taught by Pastor Jim, so that you are not confused that water baptism does not save you. We will water baptize you, but not to save you.

We will water baptize you because you are making a public confession. It is necessary for your growth. Really, it is the first step of obedience that a Christian involves himself in that you identify with the message of Jesus Christ. Paul is very clear on this concerning circumcision and water baptism: they do not save anybody. Genesis 17 comes after Genesis 15. Do you know when Abraham was saved? It is in Genesis 15:6:

"Then [Abram] believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

There is no circumcision in that chapter; that comes later. So his righteousness was declared before God on the basis of faith alone in the promises of God.

That is how you are saved, in the same way. To show a watching world who you now belong to, a very important step of growth, is water baptism. Growth is different from birth—birth and growth are two different things. You can be born but not be maturing correctly in the natural world. The same is true in the spiritual world. You can be born again, but you are not developing the way you should until you start obeying His will for your life through God's power.

Paul makes a big deal of this in Romans 4. He says that salvation, justification, has always been through faith alone. It has nothing to do with circumcision, because Genesis 17 comes after Genesis 15. However, circumcision apparently is very important. Moses had neglected a direct command of God to circumcise his son.

Paul says this in Romans 4:9-12, as he is dealing with legalists that think you are circumcised and go to heaven. Paul points out that Genesis 15, where Abraham was justified, comes before Genesis 17.

"Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, 'Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.' How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of

circumcision, a seal of righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow the steps of faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised" (Romans 4:9-12).

Abraham was totally made right with God in Genesis 15; the command of circumcision was not given until Genesis 17. An important command? Yes. A salvific command? No way.

Water baptism is the same way. Is it important to be water baptized? Absolutely. Am I going to say that if someone suffers a car accident on the way home from the church service after they receive Christ and is never water baptized, and therefore they are on their way to hell? We will never say that, because that would be teaching works. We do not teach that salvation is by works; we teach that salvation is a free gift by faith alone.

Does that mean water baptism is unimportant? It is very important. It is a major step for your development and your growth. In fact, it is the first step of obedience that you take as a Christian, but whether it happens in your life—and we want it to happen in your life—or it does not happen in your life, has nothing to do with your ultimate arrival in heaven.

Here God is moving into Moses with maximum divine discipline, even though Moses is saved and on his way to heaven, because he did not follow the instructions in Genesis 17. How in the world can you be the deliverer of the Nation of Israel when you cannot even follow instructions that are very clear, and given to all those who want to identify with the Abrahamic Covenant?

Dr. Ed Hindson on Exodus 4:24 writes this:

"Apparently, Moses failed to circumcise his second son, Eliezer, in violation of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:9-14). It would have been flagrantly inappropriate for God's chosen representative, the deliverer of His people, not to comply with such a basic command, the very sign and symbol of the covenant relationship itself."³

When I got saved at the age of 16 and I announced that to my father, who is now with the Lord, he thought I was joining a cult because I had been reared in Episcopalian. He specifically did not like it when I started talking about my need to be water baptized as a new believer in Jesus Christ. He brought out the scrapbook, and there I was as a little infant in the Episcopalian church, with water being poured on me. I was apparently,

³ Hindson, E. E., & Mitchell, D. R., eds. (2010). *King James Version Bible Commentary for Today: The Most Up-to-Date Commentary on the Time-Honored Text of the King James Version* (p. 86). Thomas Nelson.

from the picture, screaming as if there was no tomorrow. I could tell I was not a happy camper.

He said to me, "I will tell you what: before you go through with this, you need to go talk to the priest about this." What 16-year-old wants to talk to a priest? I did not, so I put the whole issue off, probably for ten years until I moved out of their house. Around the age of 27, I said to the guy that led me to Christ, "I want to be baptized." He came over to our apartment complex—we had a Jacuzzi there—and he immersed me in water, and I was baptized. It was a wonderful experience.

I remember almost immediately after I finally made that decision to go forward—because I was intimidated to do it—I remember almost like clockwork, ministry opportunity after ministry opportunity started opening up to me. It is almost like God was waiting until I took that initial step of faith before He trusted me with something else.

Is that not what the Bible says? The Bible says, if you are faithful to something little, he can give you something bigger because you have demonstrated your character of faithfulness and look (Luke 19:17). You can resist water baptism and you will go to heaven because it is not a salvific issue. But I wonder, what things does God want to do in your life that He is not doing because you have not taken that first little baby step?

You cannot write a paragraph until you know how to write a sentence, and you cannot write a sentence until you learn the alphabet. You cannot do long division and multiplication and all of that stuff until you learn how to add and subtract and you learn the numbers. There are so many people I believe that are very talented, and yet they are on the bench where they should not be.

You say to yourself, "Look at all the gifting in so-and-so. Why aren't they doing more for God?" I have a tendency to think that it has to do with some kind of issue of continued disobedience. Only the Lord can surface in your mind those kinds of things, but one of them could be as simple as this issue of water baptism, which is a parallel with us.

Apparently to God this was a big deal. Not only was Moses not qualified for leadership, but the Lord was going to exercise discipline on Moses to the point of death. You continue on there in Exodus 4:25, where Moses' wife Zipporah gets into the act here. She does the difficult work.

"Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, 'You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me'"
(Exodus 4:25).

A lot of people will look at that—it says, "I did what God said." She threw it at Moses' feet because she is mad at Moses. Now there are some commentators that say she is mad at God. Maybe it is both, she is saying to Moses: "Why didn't you do this basic thing?" It is almost out of anger that she throws this foreskin, bloody foreskin, at his feet.

Yes, this is in the Bible. This is what verse-by-verse teaching does. Do you think I picked this subject? These are things that you run into when you are committed to a verse-by-verse approach. It does not allow the preacher to escape the hard sayings, the things in the Bible that really are weird to us, that do not make any real sense to us. I am trying to give some sense to the meaning.

"Moses, you did not take care of this?" Zipporah seems mad that she is the one that had to do it, I guess. Thank God for Zipporah's actions, because look at Exodus 4:26:

"So He let him alone. At the time she said, 'You are a bridegroom of blood'—because of the circumcision" (Exodus 4:26).

Notice that language: God let Moses alone. Moses' discipline has been averted because of the steps Zipporah took, even though obviously Zipporah does not really look to me like she is a happy camper at this point. Zipporah takes this radical action and it now introduces into the Bible something that God uses with His people constantly. It is called divine discipline, hence the title of this sermon.

Divine discipline. If you want an expanded title, "The Reality of Divine Discipline." Apparently, God disciplines His own people, and it has nothing to do with whether they are going to heaven or not. He disciplines them because He loves them. In fact, later on in the Moses story, we are going to get to Deuteronomy, and they are going to be taken into the land of Canaan. There are going to be two mountains in Canaan: one is called Mount Ebal, one is called Mount Gerizim. What is going to be read on Gerizim are the blessings for obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). What is going to be read on Mount Ebal are the curses for disobedience, nationally (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

I have to say that if you look at the relative size of those Scriptures, there are many more curses than there are blessings. It is almost as if God knew what was going to happen. These curses related to crop failure, droughts—all of these kinds of things are going to roll up like a snowball. They are going to get so bad that a foreign power, "*a nation whose language you do not understand*" (Jeremiah 5:15), will come and evict you from your land.

Read the rest of the Scripture. That is exactly what happened with His disobedient nation. The northern kingdom was scattered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The southern kingdom was taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

The blessings and curses are not only in Deuteronomy 28; there is a parallel passage in Leviticus 26. My professor, Dr. Charles Dyer, says those two chapters are the spine of the Old Testament. If you can understand those two chapters—blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience—you will understand what every single prophet, with the exception of Jonah, is talking about, because the prophets show up and they file a lawsuit.

There is actually a word for that in Hebrew: it is called "rib (רִיב)." Here is the Lord's indictment of His people. The covenant lawsuit is filed, and the prophet starts saying, "Here comes this curse, or here comes that curse, because God told you it would happen all the way back at Mount Sinai." The reality of divine discipline explains the whole history of the Nation of Israel. It explains why Israel, even today, has been regathered to their land, but they are still being pushed around and bullied by the Gentile powers of the earth. The kingdom has not come yet because they have not met God's condition to avert discipline, which is obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

Who does the Mosaic Covenant point to? It points toward Jesus. So the nation today, although God's firstborn, although loved, is a nation under discipline. Here is the thing I want us to understand: just because they are under discipline does not mean they are not God's nation anymore. Do you see that? In fact, the fact that they are under discipline proves they are His nation because you do not discipline the neighbor's kids (although I have been tempted to do that on a few occasions). You discipline your own.

When you understand this, you can understand exactly God's dealing with you and His dealings with me. We are not a nation the way Israel is, but it is the exact same principle. There is absolutely nothing that can take away your salvation. That is by grace; that is eternally yours. People say, "Well, I am just going to go out and live like I want then." I would not do that if I were you, because I myself have been under the disciplinary hand of God. It is not a fun place to be. It is not a fun place when God Himself takes you to the woodshed.

The reason God takes us to the woodshed is because He knows what sin is going to do in our lives. It is going to destroy us, so He does what any parent does: He applies momentary pain to a situation. Believe me, God is really creative on how He can do this. The next time you think about sinning, you will associate the momentary pain with the sin and you say, "I do not think I am going to do that today." It is like a child that runs out in the street without looking. A loving parent, grandparent, whatever, will apply discipline to the child, not to destroy the child but so that the next time the child thinks about running out into the street without looking, they are going to associate the pain of discipline with that action, and they are not going to get hit by the truck.

The most loving thing you can do is discipline your children. This is a principle that God is introducing here as He is dealing with Moses. "You are My child. You are My deliverer. The Nation of Israel is My firstborn son, but you neglected a basic requirement. Had it not been for the intervention of Zipporah, you would be dead."

You should cross reference this with Hebrews 12:5-13. It lays this whole principle out relative to God's dealings with us:

"And have you forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

*"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
Nor faint when you are reproved by Him;*

*For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
And He scourges every son whom He receives"* (Hebrews 12:5-6).

You know what the Book of Proverbs says over and over again? If you will not discipline your children, you are letting them self-destruct. If you will not discipline your children, the Book of Proverbs says that you hate your children. How would it be any different in God's dealings with us?

"It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which of you have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much more rather be subject to our Father of spirits, and live?" (Hebrews 12:7-9).

I remember we had a telephone pole in the back of my house, and I could climb up it as a little kid. I remember climbing up it, and I was a pretty good climber, believe it or not. I was a little lighter back then, and I could climb anything. I remember getting to the top near where the live wire was, and I remember my father saying, not Andy, but "Andrew!" When they called me Andy, things were cool, but when he called me Andrew, then it was different.

When I heard his voice, I got down as fast as I could because he knew what was going to happen to me. If I was going to touch that live wire, I would be dead. I remember discipline that he had given me when I rejected the exhortation "Andrew." I did not want it repeated, and my life was spared. That is how God is working with us as His children. The whole principle is laid out here in the Book of Exodus.

"For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed" (Hebrews 12:10-13).

The purpose of discipline is not punishment, although it seems somewhat harsh. The purpose is preservation and restoration. This is God now interacting with Moses on this.

When God gave to Israel the Mosaic Covenant, which is coming in our study, He outlined for them in Deuteronomy 28 the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. No matter which way Israel went, it never invalidated who they were as God's firstborn. Even today, Israel is under discipline, but is still His child.

I do pray, Lord, that if anyone is here today and they do not know You personally, that today would be the day of salvation for them, just like Abraham, they would hear the truth, the gospel, and believe it, meaning trust in it and consequently be justified before You. I just pray, Lord, that many people within the sound of my voice would be placing their personal faith in the finished work of the Savior for their salvation.

I pray, Lord, if anyone is here today and they are ambiguous about salvation and whether they have it, I pray that they would seek me out afterwards so I can help them. Truly, the Bible says "today is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). I pray many, many people would come into a right relationship with You. We will be careful to give You all the praise and the glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name, and God's people said, Amen.