The EXODUS Journey

Choosing Trust Over Anxiety on
Our Way to the Promised Land

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Chapter 1

God's Purpose

"Only this one time, ma'am!" the young security officer responded to my question. It all started a few minutes earlier, as we were having lunch right in front of the beautiful Taal volcano lake in Tagaytay, in the Philippines. I was enjoying this picturesque setting when suddenly I saw a thin thread of steam coming out of the volcano. Having pointed it out to my friends and to the waitress serving our meal, I got up to take some photos and videos. By then, whatever was happening in the volcano was definitely increasing in intensity, and we could even see black ash being spewed up in the air. We decided to leave, and on the way to the car, we met the young officer, and I asked him: "How often does this happen?" To which he replied, "Only this one time, ma'am," and informed us that, after decades of dormancy, an earthquake had just activated the volcano. This was the beginning of one of the most interesting weeks of my life.

I had traveled from the United States to the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS) in the Philippines to speak at a preaching lectureship and a week of prayer entitled "Blessed Assurance." Now we were in need of God's assurance more than I could have ever imagined

when planning this trip. The next morning, the campus was shrouded in a thick layer of volcanic ash; work and classes were suspended. So, now what? This was an unexpected turn of events, totally out of our control. As countless earthquakes kept rattling the Taal area and the volcanology department kept raising alert levels, we had only two choices, the same ones we all face when the tide turns and we find ourselves out of control, in desperate circumstances: Faith or fear. Assurance or despair. Trust or anxiety.

When the tide turns

The book of Exodus starts with a triumphant note that the descendants of Israel had multiplied and filled the land. What an impressive fulfillment of God's covenantal promise to Abraham (see Genesis 12:2)! A small group of seventy, consisting of Jacob's family, had immigrated to Egypt at the time of Joseph, and four hundred years later they had prospered in such a way that the land was filled with them (see Exodus 1:5–7). God can be trusted to fulfill His promises! Woo-hoo! Yet our excitement lasts only for a few verses because we soon receive the ominous news that "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not *know* Joseph" (verse 8; emphasis added). In the original language, the verb "to know" in this verse refers to an intimate knowledge. The new king might have heard of Joseph, but he did not *know* Joseph and did not acknowledge his contribution to Egypt in the past. And just like that, the tide turned. The new king, seeing that the sons of Jacob were numerous and mighty, feared that in the event of a war, they might turn

against Egypt, allying with the enemy and departing from the land. So, he devised a plan, which was to afflict them with hard labor, making mortar and bricks in the fields, thus making their lives bitter. But his plan didn't work, and the sons of Israel kept on multiplying.

Then the king came up with plan B: he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all the boys at birth, and let the girls live. But the midwives feared the Lord and let the boys live. When Pharaoh inquired about it, they said that the "Hebrew women" were not like the "Egyptian women," for they were strong and gave birth before the midwives arrived. We already get a foretaste of the two groups present in the narrative, which will have a central role in the rest of the story: Hebrews versus Egyptians. Plan B didn't work either, and the king came up with plan C, a terrible, unthinkable, and macabre plan: "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). Pharaoh enlists *all his people* in plan C, and the Nile is the chosen means for the death of the Hebrew baby boys. So, what happened to the promises of God? Would He still fulfill His purpose? Who is sitting on the throne? God or Pharaoh?

We will often find ourselves in seemingly dead-end situations on our way to the heavenly Promised Land. When we run out of wisdom, strength, and resources, we always face the same choice: will we trust God or be consumed by anxiety? Will we trust Him with all our hearts, or will we rely on our own understanding? Will we let go and let God take over or

try harder to control an uncontrollable situation?

Let go and let God

I can't imagine what his mother must have been thinking as she prepared the small vessel. How was she able to let him go? While Pharaoh's terrible plan C was being enforced, a young couple, descendants of Levi, had a baby boy. It meant that any Egyptian who found out about the baby was supposed to cast him into the Nile. Therefore, the baby's mother hid him for three months. *Three* months! She did all she could, but after three months she could conceal him no more. She got a basket, covered it with tar and pitch, placed the baby inside, and set the basket among the reeds in the Nile. Can you imagine that? Perhaps you too have done all you could for a child, a spouse, a friend, a family member, a coworker. And now it is time to let go and let God take over. Perhaps you are exhausted trying to *save* someone, and now you have hit a brick wall. You have tried for three months, three years or three decades, and now there is nothing else you can do, other than pray. I have discovered that it takes more faith to let go and let God do whatever He has purposed to do than to keep trying to hide "it," whatever "it" may be in your life. Do we trust God to take over our loved one's life?

There are interesting paradoxes in this narrative. For example, the boy's mother ultimately obeyed the king's edict to cast the boy into the Nile, with the small detail that she added the basket! Desperate times call for desperate measures! And the truth is that the baby's parents had faith in God, and that's

why they refused to be afraid of the king's edict (see Hebrews 11:23). The text also points out that the basket was set among the "reeds" by the bank of the Nile. Interestingly enough, the word *reed* is also used later on in the story when Israel will cross the "Sea of Reeds" (usually translated as "Red Sea"), as if a scene of the boy's destiny is starting to unfold. And perhaps the greatest paradox in this section of the story is the fact that the river Nile, purposed by Pharaoh as the place of execution for the Hebrew baby boys, now becomes the place of miraculous delivery for the *deliverer* of God's people.

> It takes more faith to let go and let God do whatever He has purposed to do.

Drawn out of the water

God's ability to turn a place of anguish into a place of deliverance always astonishes me. And not only in the river Nile but also in many other events later on in Israel's journey, for instance, when He turned the bitter waters into sweet waters (Exodus 15:22–27). But let's not get ahead of ourselves. I just want to point out that if you are facing a no-way-out (dead end) situation right now, be encouraged to know that God has the ability to turn that very spot into a place of deliverance for His glory. I need to remember this myself. Constantly.

Going back to Exodus 2, the baby's sister was standing at a distance watching over that precious cargo when the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile. She saw the basket

in the reeds, and her maid brought it to her. And it is interesting that as soon as she opened the basket and saw the baby crying, she recognized him as "one of the Hebrews' children" (Exodus 2:6). Right on the spot, the fast-thinking, intelligent sister approached the princess who had viewed this *Hebrew* child with compassion and offered to get a *Hebrew* woman to nurse the child. Pharaoh's daughter agreed, and I am sure the girl ran as fast as she could to get the baby's mother, who was still putting away the tar and pitch because all of this happened so fast! Can you imagine her surprise when her daughter explained to her what was happening? The princess told the woman to take the child and nurse him and that she would receive wages for this "job." Talk about God doing "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20, NIV)! This was beyond her wildest dreams! Now, this mother doesn't have to hide her baby any more. She will take care of him by the mandate of the house of Pharaoh! And she will get paid in the process! Pharaoh's decree has been turned upside down by his own daughter.

God will use for His glory everyone who surrenders to His will.

Pharaoh's daughter named her adoptive son *Moses.* This name, derived from the meaning "to be born," appears as part of the name of some Pharaohs, including *Ahmose* and *Thutmose*. This word also sounds like the Hebrew term for "draw out" as reflected in the biblical account: "She named him Moses, and said, 'Because I drew him out of the water' " (Exodus

2:10). What she did not understand at the time was that God was behind the scenes, orchestrating everything to fulfill His purpose, and that she had been an instrument in His hands to draw God's *deliverer* out of the water. Have you placed a "basket" with a precious cargo in the river of life? May you be assured that God has the amazing ability to work in "all things . . . for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, NIV).

At this point in the narrative, I must highlight how God utilized women to advance His redemptive plan and frustrate Pharaoh's scheme. In the first two chapters of Exodus, the narrative highlights the two midwives (Shiphrah and Puah), the strong Hebrew women who were giving birth, the mother of Moses, the sister of Moses, and the daughter of Pharaoh, all women who were instruments in God's hands to fulfill His salvific purposes. God will use for His glory anyone and everyone (young or old, male or female) who surrenders to His will, even in the midst of the bleakest of circumstances and during the darkest night. Don't despair when you don't see a way out. God is sitting on His throne.

God's way versus our way

Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian faith, preached a sermon before being stoned to death. It is found in Acts 7. In this sermon, he recounts redemption history and how God has been faithful to His covenant, and he provides some details about the life of Moses that we do not have in Exodus 2. "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians,

and he was a man of power in words and deeds. But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel" (Acts 7:22, 23). Moses was educated for about four decades in the court of Pharaoh. We can imagine that he learned all kinds of military strategies as well as arts, languages, philosophy and much more. When he was forty years old, he must have been an impressive prince of Egypt. One day Moses went out to see his Hebrew brothers and saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and wanting to defend him, he struck the Egyptian, killing him. Since no one was around, he simply buried the body in the sand. But the next day, when he tried to stop the fight between two arguing Hebrews, he realized that the incident of the previous day had become public. One of the Hebrews said to him: "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:14). And that's when, from a human perspective, everything fell apart. Pharaoh tried to kill Moses, who fled to the land of Midian by himself, not accepted by Egyptians and rejected by Hebrews. (We will continue exploring his journey in the next chapter.)

Moses wanted to liberate his people, but he tried to do it in his own way, with his own strength, in his own time, and with his own resources. Furthermore, he assumed that everyone else had accepted him as the chosen deliverer: "He supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, *but they did not understand*" (Acts 7:25; emphasis added). Trusting in our own understanding, wisdom, and strength is where most of our problems come from, even now,

in our own journey to the heavenly Promised Land. During the next forty years, Moses would have to learn *not* to lean on his own strength and understanding but to become absolutely dependent on God. That would be the only way he could be molded into God's chosen instrument to deliver Israel from slavery. And that is the only way we will be able to continue on our journey, choosing to trust God's way instead of forcing our own way and yielding to anxiety. And this brings us to the conclusion of this first chapter, which is of most importance in our journey to the heavenly Promised Land:

Conclusion #1: God's purpose is fulfilled in His own way and in His own time!

Blessed assurance

Moses, as well as many other biblical characters, was a symbol of Jesus Christ, who would come as the human-divine Deliverer of the human race. He came not to deliver us from Egypt but to deliver us from sin, taking upon Himself the penalty of our sin, which is death, and dying on the cross so that we may have eternal life. This chapter's lesson must be learned when it comes to our eternal salvation and our daily needs here and now. It is not about our wisdom and strength nor our understanding or timing. And this is where we found our "blessed assurance" back in

> Moses had to become absolutely dependent on God.

the Philippines when the Taal volcano erupted. That whole week, while wearing our face masks, we met twice a day to worship, to pray, and to study His Word, seeking God's peace and surrendering to His purpose, power, and protection. We entrusted our lives to the One who had given up His life for each one of us and who promised to be with us to the very end of this world. You and I have this *blessed assurance* as well: we will be saved because of what Jesus has done, not because we are strong or clever.

> *He* was pierced for *our* transgressions,
> *he* was crushed for *our* iniquities;
> the punishment that brought *us* peace was on *him*,
> and by *his* wounds *we* are healed (Isaiah 53:5, NIV; emphasis added).

Are you ready to trust in His sacrifice on your behalf and let God take away any anxiety you may have about the future?

My prayer: