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CHAPTER *One*

A THICK FOREST OF FACIAL HAIR

In the well-known parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus gives us a glimpse of the afterlife. Though most of us are familiar with His statements about Heaven and Hell, we may have missed a surprising key to reaching our loved ones. As the rich man is begging for someone to go and testify to his family so they wouldn't end up in torment, Jesus said,

“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”
(Luke 16:31)

What has Moses got to do with the gospel? After all, we are not under law, we're under grace. The law of Moses is the Old Testament; we are now in the new.

These are legitimate thoughts and questions, and there are legitimate (and biblical) answers. The moral Law (the Ten Commandments, often called the law of Moses) has everything to do with the gospel. If it wasn't for God's Law, there would be no need for the cross. Jesus suffered and died to satisfy the demands of eternal justice. If it wasn't for Moses, we wouldn't need Jesus. He saves us from the wrath of the Law. The apostle Paul said that if it wasn't for Moses, he

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would have had no idea of the nature of sin (see Romans 3:19,20; 7:7). Moses is as relevant to the gospel as a diagnosis is to the cure of a disease.

So let's back up a little and look closely at the life of Moses to see what we can learn from him, and then study how Moses can also be used to bring sinners to Jesus.

For past generations the name of Moses conjured up images of Charlton Heston, lost behind a thick forest of gray facial hair, with great melodrama opening the Red Sea. But there was much more to Moses than Hollywood would have us believe.

The account of his amazing life begins in Exodus 2, when a man of the house of Levi took a wife from his own tribe and she became pregnant (vv. 1,2). Most of us began life that way. I say "most" because the one Person Moses foreshadowed was conceived when God overshadowed His mother:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”
(Matthew 1:18)

Both Moses and Jesus were Israelites by birth and began life with all the drama of an action-packed movie. Under the threat of death, Jesus was whisked away into Egypt. A paranoid King Herod had heard rumors of the promised Messiah being born and, in an insane effort to protect his throne, decided that he would cover his bases by slaughtering every male child under the age of two (see Matthew 2:16). That terrible slaughter could have been averted had he searched the Scriptures and found it was merely a harmless Lamb that was expected by Israel. This was no lionhearted conquering King—not yet.

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Approximately 1,400 years earlier, Moses too was threatened in his infancy by the insecurities of a king of Egypt. After Joseph died in Egypt, his descendants “were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7). This caused a new historically ignorant king, who didn’t know of Joseph or his descendants, to feel (like Herod) that his throne was threatened. 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.” (Exodus 1:9,10)

Consequently, the Israelites were forced to become slaves in Egypt and were used to built cities for their cruel taskmasters. But the more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew, causing increasing paranoia among their afflictors:

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. (Exodus 1:12–14)

In both incidents, God was invisibly at work to fulfill His purposes, and no one could thwart the purposes of God. Not Herod, and not the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Then, like godless Herod would later do, the Egyptian king decided to slaughter children. The mind boggles at such evil. Before we confine such wickedness to history, we see the

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same ancient demons still inspiring killers today. Rather than be overthrown by inconvenience, millions in contemporary America have slaughtered children in the womb through abortion. Nothing stands as a bloody testimony to the evil of the human heart as much as those who kill their own offspring.

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; and he said, “When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.” (Exodus 1:15,16)

This created quite a midwife crisis. How would these women respond to such a horrendous order?

But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?”

And the midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them.” (Exodus 1:17–19)

AN IMPORTANT POINT

In this short passage we see an answer to a loaded question often thrown at us by skeptics. They say,

“You are in Germany in 1941. The Nazis come to your home and ask if there are any Jews in the building. You are hiding a Jewish family behind a false wall upstairs. Do you lie to them and sin against your God, or do you

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tell the truth and let the Nazis know where they are hiding?”

There is another aspect to telling the truth to the Nazis. In doing so, I would be helping their cause by informing on the whereabouts of Jews (in this case, my loved ones). If I knew that my neighbors were also hiding Jews in their home, if asked, should I tell the truth about their location? Should I become an informant, and give aid to the enemy?

If I were a soldier, should I help the enemy by giving him the truth when asked for sensitive military information? If I did so, I would be considered a traitor. Would that also be the case if I considered myself a soldier in a battle against evil, by being part of the resistance and hiding Jews?

Like the skeptics, the Pharisees often tried to create “Aha!” scenarios for Jesus, hoping to trap Him in His speech. But they never did:

Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words. When they had come, they said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?”

But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it.” So they brought it.

And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s.”

And Jesus answered and said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

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And they marveled at Him. (Mark 12:13–17)

We know that they were insincere by Jesus' reaction to the question. He said, "Why do you test Me?" And He obviously didn't lie. He simply outwitted their wickedness.

However, the midwives didn't have divine wit; they outright lied to the Egyptian king. But Scripture tells us that they lied to him *because* they feared God. They chose to not tell the truth rather than be a party to the murder of babies. And we don't have to guess what God's response was to this supposed sin:

Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. (Exodus 1:20)

The midwives feared God and refused the king's command. How could anyone who feared the Lord be a party to the murder of Jews, or of innocent children? And there lies the problem with modern America. We have lost the fear of God, and when that precious virtue is removed, the dam of evil eventually bursts onto any nation.

The cracks had been growing for a long time, but they became larger just after the Second World War when thoughts of God were exchanged for an idol. With the threat of the evil of Nazi domination suddenly gone, many believed divine protection was no longer needed. The restraint of Hollywood's Hays Code, governing morality in movies, was removed in the 1960s and sin flooded a generation.

The world found their freedom from restraint in the sexual revolution of the 1950 and 1960s. In the following generations the fear of God eventually became a despised doctrine. But it is the fear of God to which we must return—not to get America on its feet, but to get it on its knees. The gospel is

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only for the humble (James 4:6), and unregenerate humanity will never be humbled until it fears God. To fear Him is the beginning of wisdom.

Those God-fearing midwives who didn't fear the king put themselves in danger to save human lives. And if we fear God, we will do all we can to stop the holocaust of abortion in America.

When I have questioned college students about a woman's right to take the life of her unborn child, many, knowing full well that it is a baby in the womb, still condone killing for convenience. Moving goalposts, not being honest, or being unreasonable isn't confined to the issue of abortion.

Skeptics (especially atheists) dream up scenarios to argue about, not because they care about truth, but because they love their sins. If they can disprove the Bible or trip us up with questions, in their minds they have us conquered. Their questions are often statements: "Who made God?" or "Why is there suffering?" They don't think we have an answer. Neither do they want an answer, and they walk away thinking they have won the game.

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When the Pharisees asked Jesus if an adulterous woman should be stoned for her sin, they thought that they had put Him between a rock and a hard place (see John 8:3–11). But Jesus turned the rock toward them. They too were sinners and had to face the same Law of Moses that they were seeking to use to condemn the woman. And in that wonderful narrative we have the soul-stirring story of God's amazing mercy toward sinners. Each of the

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accusers went away accused by Moses, but only God knows how many of those men eventually stood with penitent hearts at the foot of the cross as the Savior suffered for their sins.

More often than not we can turn these scenarios into opportunities to testify about the mercy of God. Just give their question the best answer you have and then share the gospel. It's the gospel that has the promised power (see Romans 1:16) and not your answer. When the accusing religious leaders hounded a blind man whose eyes had been miraculously opened by the Savior, the man didn't argue about whether Jesus was sinless. He simply testified to what He had done:

So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner."

He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." (John 9:24,25)

There are ways to answer difficult questions without falling into the set trap. Take, for example, the question of the exclusivity of Christianity. That is normally a difficult question. Surely saying that Jesus is the only way to God is arrogant, intolerant, and even hateful, isn't it? If we are not wise in our words, it can sound as though it is. The key is to answer the question with patience and with sound doctrine.

The way to do that with this question is to sympathetically show that all humanity has a big problem: death.

Death is cold, hard, and irrefutable evidence that God is serious about the issue of sin. Death is our terrifying and earned wages (see Romans 6:23). Without a Savior to save

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us, our last breath will be breathtakingly frightening. The question we must ask the unsaved is, “What are you doing to prepare yourself for this, your biggest moment in life? And what are you doing to prepare yourself for what comes after death?”

If the world thinks dying is a problem, after death they will have an even bigger problem: the judgment. Most of the world’s religions believe that there will be a Day of Judgment, but they believe the way to fix the problem of sin is with good works. They have sinned against God but think they can balance the scales with religious deeds, such as good works, prayer, penance, fasting, etc. But that won’t even work in a court of law with an earthly judge. A good judge will consider the crime committed, not any good deeds done by the criminal, especially if they were done with the intent of swaying the judge’s mind about the crime—“I raped and murdered that woman, but look at how much money I just gave to charity.”

Such a pathetic attempt to bribe the judge would bring nothing but wrath from the bench. And so it is with God. He will not be swayed to pervert justice by our good works, our giving to charity, sitting on hard pews, praying at certain times each day, etc. Nothing can save guilty sinners from the demands of Eternal Justice but the mercy of God. And that was extended only in the suffering death of Jesus Christ.

These religions rely on human sacrificial works to try to earn salvation. However, in the gospel we see that the necessary sacrifice was made by God Himself, *and that’s good news for the whole of humanity*, whether they be Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, churchgoer, atheist, or agnostic. The gospel is a universal invitation to guilty sinners to be cleansed of sin, to escape the terror of Hell, and to find absolute assurance of

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immortality and eternal pleasure. If you are a skeptic, jump without a parachute, stand on your own oxygen hose, but please, oh please, don't be so foolish as to damn yourself by creating silly scenarios to reject the gospel and hinder your own eternal salvation.

The Egyptian midwives' choice to lie rather than to murder (and be blessed by God for doing that) shows us that our Creator is reasonable in the truest sense of the word. The Judge takes into account extenuating circumstances.

The first chapter of Exodus then ends with a terrifying decree from Egypt's paranoid leader demanding that everyone participate in his murderous plot:

So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive." (Exodus 1:22)

Here begins a real-life scenario that reveals a glimmer of the omniscient mind of God. He knew what was about to take place in Egypt, and He was of course ready. There are times when I think about the divine omniscience—that God knows, sees, and hears everything. How could that be? I can only register one or two thoughts at once. If someone talks to me when I'm writing or watching news, I lose my train of thought. It's completely derailed. So when I think of God having trillions upon trillions of thoughts at the same time, my mind implodes. That thought vanishes because it's too much for my tiny brain and I find refuge in the words of the psalmist:

O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,

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And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it. (Psalm 139:1–6)

While Pharaoh was plotting his genocide, God was overruling his evil plan with a plan of His own.

BEAUTIFUL BABE

In Exodus chapter 2 we are told of Moses' birth. Every mother, no matter how ugly her newborn, thinks the baby is beautiful, but this one truly was (v. 3), and because he was a male and therefore in danger of his life, she hid him for three months. But you can only hide a baby for so long. As infants grow bigger, so do their lungs, and their cries can become louder than an airbus in full throttle. So his mother, in an effort to save her precious child from being slaughtered by the Egyptians, put him in a mini-ark and launched him into the hands of God. We pick up the story from Scripture:

Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"

And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the maiden went and called the child's mother. Then Phar-

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aoh'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. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water." (Exodus 2:5-10)

This ark's maiden voyage had titanic consequences because Almighty God had condescended to fulfill His plans through a young girl. In using Moses' sister, He was delivering Israel's deliverer into the hands of the very one who had given him up: his mother. That is so often the way God works. If we give up something to God, He often gives it back with extras. He gives it back better, leaving our limited human minds boggling at His love and infinite ability. He let Lazarus die, and then presented him alive to his mourners. He allowed Jesus to be crucified and then presented Him alive three days later to His unbelieving disciples. God's ways are beyond understanding:

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HAD GIVEN HIM UP:
HIS MOTHER.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

"For who has known the mind of the LORD?

Or who has become His counselor?"

"Or who has first given to Him

And it shall be repaid to him?"

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For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

God deeply cared for the mother of Moses, for his sweet sister, and for the nation of Israel, and He cared for you and me *way back in the annals of time*. He saved baby Moses so that through him He could save the children of Israel, so that through their descendants He could send the Messiah to save you and me from death and Hell. He had us in mind way back then.

The reason the mother of Moses entrusted God with her son was that she feared for his death. And consequently the daughter of Pharaoh adopted him and guaranteed his life. Moses' mom was then given back her beloved son and was even paid to raise him as a child of the Pharaoh himself. Who in their wildest dreams could have thought that such a thing would happen? But it did, and you and I can step into that same realm of the miraculous, if we also trust God. No matter what life throws at us, we have this immutable promise:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

The moment we let go of our safe plans and abandon ourselves to “Not my will, but Yours be done,” we can stand on that precious promise. It is ours because we are then “called according to His purpose.” It becomes ours in Christ. This promise is the brightest of lights in the darkest of times. It's even more than that. It's there as a light when there's no natural light at the end of the tunnel. That means we can have a steadfast hope in the lion's den. It is in that promise that we see His loving hand, and can say with Paul,

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Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35–39)

WAS IT PREMEDITATED MURDER?

Scripture leaves us in the dark about the youth of Moses. Neither do we know anything about the youth of Jesus—other than the famous incident when He was twelve and His parents unwittingly left Him in Jerusalem. We are told that when they found Him,

He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:49–52)

Jesus was without sin, because He was divine. But not so with Moses. It is evident that, like the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam, sin ran like a river in the blood of Moses.

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When he reached manhood, Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and he killed him. Scripture says that before Moses did this “he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand” (Exodus 2:12).

Taking the life of another human being would seem to have been premeditated. Then Moses buried the body in an effort to cover his crime. A God-fearing man doesn't look “this way and that way.” He looks toward the heavens. His actions are governed by the knowledge that God's holy eyes see everything. He is a witness to our every thought and deed. It seems that Moses let sin come through the door; anger blinded his reason.

There is, however, another thought. Perhaps this wasn't premeditated murder, because he didn't intend to kill the Egyptian. Perhaps his looking “this way and that way” was because, as an Egyptian, he simply didn't want to be seen defending a Hebrew slave—giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

Later on in Scripture we see that God's Word distinguishes between premeditated murder, *which was given the death penalty* (Exodus 21:12–14) and someone who *accidentally* killed another person (Exodus 21:13). Whatever the case with Moses, God used him despite that incident.

We need not concern ourselves with the vessels God chooses to do His bidding. He chose to use Saul of Tarsus, who in rage took the lives of Jesus' followers, and Moses who took the life of an Egyptian. God doesn't make mistakes or make bad choices. He chooses sinful men and women to do His will, because none of us in the Adamic race is without sin. Each of us can look back at our lives before our burning bush encounter, or our road to Damascus experience, and

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see a different person. We were once ruled by our sinful passions. But God was rich in mercy, and in retrospect, we can even see His merciful hand guiding us before we came to the cross. We, like Moses, thought we had buried our sin and that there were no witnesses. But Scripture informed us that all things are naked and open before the eyes of God (Hebrews 4:13).

The day after Moses took the life of the Egyptian, he saw two Hebrews fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, “Why are you striking your companion?” Then the man replied, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” (Exodus 2:13,14).

There had been a witness:

So Moses feared and said, “Surely this thing is known!”
When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.
(Exodus 2:14,15)

While we are not sure exactly when Moses came to faith—when he refused Egypt’s pleasures and trusted in God—we do know that this happened “when he became of age”:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. (Hebrews 11:24–26)

No doubt the seeds of godly influence sown by his faithful mother grew as Moses grew. The pleasurable sins of

Egypt never fully extinguished the light of conscience in Moses. He chose to deny himself, because he saw Him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27).

THE DAILY BATTLE

As Christians, we choose daily to deny ourselves the pleasures of sin. The eyes, the ears, the mind, and the very heart of our sinful nature are attracted to Egypt's titillating pleasures. Lust, the pride of life, tantalizing gossip, the sparkling lure of money, and a thousand other evils promise endless pleasure. But we refuse to serve the devil because his wages are but nothing but a dirty drain's deadly dregs compared to the endless pure water of life:

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5)

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We have far greater riches in Christ. We don't live by a blind faith as the world so often says, but we have entered

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into a living trust when we are partakers of the divine nature, because that's the means to our inheritance. We have riches that will never fade.

Choosing to follow Jesus is a calculated decision. It is reasonable in the truest sense of the word. We choose life over death, Heaven over Hell, glorious light instead of darkness, and everlasting pleasure rather than terrible pain. Choosing to follow the Savior is reasonable, sensible, and sane. It is the same calculation that brought the Prodigal Son to his senses (see Luke 15). He could choose to stay and starve in the stinking pigsty, or he could choose to return to his father.

Choosing Christianity over the pleasures of this world is a no-brainer, as we will continue to see in the next chapter.