

## Exodus I – Notes

### VI. *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*

9-Jul-06 Exodus 4:18-5:21

*Theme:* God's plan to redeem Israel from slavery in Egypt is set in motion; although Pharaoh resists and Israel complains, God's plan is moving forward.

*Key Verses:* Exodus 5:1-2 <sup>1</sup>Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" <sup>2</sup>And Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go."

#### Review

Last week we concluded our study of the burning bush passage and God's call of Moses, the "reluctant hero." We looked at our passage in two parts. The first section (3:16-22) was entitled "Preview of Coming Attractions." God encourages Moses by letting him know what's in store. Everything that is going to happen in the next ten chapters has already been ordained by God. God's *command* (3:16-17) to have Moses go to the elders of Israel is obeyed at the end of chapter 4. God's *demand* (3:18) is delivered to Pharaoh in chapter 5. Pharaoh's refusal to comply (3:19) first occurs in chapter 5 and is an ongoing theme throughout chapters 7-11, which describe the ten plagues – God's *wonders* (3:20). Finally God's *favor* (3:21-22) is fulfilled in chapter 12, when the people of God finally leave the land of slavery carrying the wealth of Egypt.

The second section we studied (4:1-17) I entitled "Litany of Ongoing Objections." Moses continues to object to the call of God, but his objections get weaker and more self-centered and self-serving. The third objection is a direct contradiction of what God had just told him. Moses says, "Suppose they don't believe me," just after God got through saying the elders of Israel would believe him. Moses also complains about the way God made him ("I have a heavy mouth"), and finally he just flat out refuses to go. Despite all of Moses' objections, God deals graciously with him. Consider these evidences of grace given to Moses: 1) the *promise* of God's presence (3:12); 2) the *privilege* of God's covenant name (3:14-15); 3) the *providence* of God's plan being worked out in the redemption of Israel (3:16-22); 4) the *practice* of God's power in the three confirmatory signs (4:1-9); 5) the *proclamation* of God's truth through Moses' heavy mouth (4:12); and 6) the *provision* of his brother Aaron to help him along the way (4:14-17). Moses didn't deserve any of these blessings; it was all due to the grace of God.

#### Introduction

How many of you thought when you "signed up" for the Christian life that it would be a cakewalk? That all of your problems would instantly disappear and you would immediately be transported to paradise restored? Well, sorry to disappoint you, but that is not the way things work out. Yes, paradise will one day be restored and we will live in perfect harmony in the presence of our God and Savior forever. But in this fallen world of sin in which we currently live, we are still subject to sorrow, pain, failure, and suffering.

This is the teaching of the Scriptures, and it is the experience of the heroes of the faith. For example, Noah endured ridicule for 120 years and then watched God destroy His creation in the Flood. Abraham left everything he had ever known for a promise, and then waited and waited and waited, eventually seeing the first-fruits of God's promise, but never experiencing the full

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extent of it on earth. Jacob fled the wrath of his brother and the ire of his father-in-law. Joseph was hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, cast into prison, and forgotten.

Moses was also no stranger to disappointment, suffering, and loss. After being rejected by Israel, he abandoned his rich lifestyle in Egypt and ended up spending forty years as a shepherd in the desert. Surely Moses should have realized that fulfilling his calling to deliver Israel would not be easy. After all, God had already told him that Pharaoh would resist (3:19-20). In the passage before us today, God tells Moses again that Pharaoh would not listen (4:21). But still, Moses and the Israelites seem surprised at the lack of immediate success. Apparently, they hadn't counted on progressing three steps forward and two steps back.

The second half of Exodus 4 describes Moses' trip back to Egypt after forty years of exile in Midian. Despite Moses' objections, he is finally obeying God and moving forward. In chapter 5 we have the first confrontation with Pharaoh. It reminds me of several business meetings I've had that have gone spectacularly poorly. Definitely, two steps back.

### A. Moses Goes to Egypt (4:18-31)

#### 1. *Moses in Midian (4:18-23)*

Before Moses can pack up and go to Egypt, he has to put his personal affairs in order. Remember, he was taking care of his father-in-law's sheep in the backside of the wilderness (3:1). He couldn't abandon the sheep in the desert, so he returns home to his family. Jethro was both the head of the household and Moses' employer, so Moses asks his father-in-law for permission to go to Egypt. It is interesting to note that Moses did not use his commitment to Jethro as an excuse. "Sorry Lord, I would love to go to Egypt, but Jethro needs me to take care of the sheep. I can't let him down." At the same time, Moses shows respect to his father-in-law by seeking his permission to leave. Moses thus balances his duty to God with his responsibilities toward others.

Commentators have remarked that Moses' "story" of why he wants to go back to Egypt is not a full disclosure of what happened to him at Horeb. They claim he failed to mention the burning bush, God's call, and his reluctance to go. All of that is hidden by a vague request to see how his family is doing back in Egypt. It may well be true that Moses did not share the entire story of the burning bush experience with Jethro. Perhaps Moses needed more time to reflect on God's call. Perhaps Moses thought Jethro wouldn't believe him. Perhaps Moses still doubted what had happened to him. Or perhaps, Moses did tell Jethro everything and simply did not record it.

Theologically, I believe Moses' description to Jethro of his desire to return to Egypt is significant. Remember what started him on this road forty years previously: Moses "went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens" (2:11). Moses had gone out in his own strength to help remove the burdens of his people. Now, he is once again going out to his brethren in Egypt in order to remove their burdens. However, this time, he is going in the strength of the LORD. He has matured and grown.

As Moses sets out, God gives him three messages. The first message in 4:19 is a repetition of what we have already been told in 2:23 – namely, the old pharaoh is dead. This is combined with the command to "go, return to Egypt." Some commentators have felt that Moses must have been delaying departure from Midian, and that God had to "push" him to leave by telling him it was safe for him to go – he was no longer on the Ten Most Wanted List. If so, the prodding worked,

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because Moses loads up the family donkey and sets out for Egypt with his wife Zipporah and their sons. The birth of Gershom was announced in 2:22. Moses' second son, Eliezar, is not mentioned by name until 18:4. However, he had obviously been born by this time. Most people have the impression that Gershom and Eliezar are “wee lads,” but I think we have to assume they are grown men, since Moses has been married for forty years already.

The last thing that Moses took with him in obedience to God's command was his shepherd's staff (*cp.* 4:17). Significantly, that staff is now called the “rod of God.” This is the staff that will display God's power to Pharaoh. God will use it to bring forth the plagues that will shake Egypt. God tells Moses as much in verse 21: “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand.” The power to do the “wonders” of God is in the staff of God held in the hand of Moses.

God's second message to Moses is a reminder that the job won't be easy: Pharaoh will not let the people go. God had already told Moses that in 3:19 – “But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go.” However, God gives us some new information about the obstinacy of Pharaoh in 4:21: “But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.” Here we have our first introduction to a major theme in the exodus narrative – the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart does not refer to his emotions but rather to his will. It means he is stubborn, obstinate, and unwilling to change his mind. His heart is hard in the sense that he refuses to listen to the words of God and submit himself under God's authority. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is described in three general ways: 1) God hardens Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8); 2) Pharaoh hardens his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34); and 3) Pharaoh's heart was hardened (7:13, 14, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35). What do these three descriptions teach us? God is 100% sovereign, and man is 100% responsible. In God's sovereignty, He hardens Pharaoh's heart, in order to increase His glory through the display of His power via the plagues. But Pharaoh is ultimately responsible for his own sin, stubbornness, and rebellion against God. Bentley puts it this way:

This shows us that this hardening was not something imposed on Pharaoh that was contrary to his will or nature. Rather it is a question that those who deliberately turn aside from God's ways discover that God Himself will turn against them in judgment.

God gives Moses one more message for Pharaoh, a message full of significance. First, he calls Israel His firstborn son. This is the first time in Scripture that Israel is called God's son. It speaks to the deep spiritual relationship that God's people are to have with their Creator. He is more than our God; He is our Father. Thus, the story of the exodus is an extremely personal one.

At the very deepest spiritual level, the exodus is a story about sonship, about a Father's love for His only son. Thus it is not simply a story of *emancipation* — the release of a slave — but also of *repatriation*, the return of an only son to his father's loving care (Ryken).

Not only is this the story of sonship, but it is also about the firstborn son. The firstborn had special privileges, including the right of double inheritance (Dt. 21:17). Thus, Israel was to receive a special inheritance from God. That inheritance was the redemption of God for the purpose of worship: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me” (4:22b-23a). We are called to serve God, to worship Him. That is our highest calling and our ultimate inheritance in heaven.

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But notice that Pharaoh will resist God. Although the text says “if you refuse” we’ve already peeked ahead in the story and know that it really is “when you refuse.” God will harden Pharaoh’s heart so he will refuse to obey God’s demands. Therefore, God invokes the *lex talionis*: the law of reciprocation. If Pharaoh refuses to release the firstborn of God, then God will destroy the firstborn of Pharaoh and even of all Egypt. Thus, we have here the prophecy of the tenth plague and its theological foundation. God is not being vindictive; He is being just. He is delivering to Egypt exactly what they deserve: “an eye for an eye, a son for a son” (Ryken).

### 2. *Moses on the Way (4:24-26)*

Now we come to the most difficult passage in the entire book. The Hebrew of this passage is difficult and the meaning is obscure. But we will do our best to understand it.

<sup>24</sup>And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. <sup>25</sup>Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses’ feet, and said, “Surely you are a husband of blood to me!” <sup>26</sup>So He let him go. Then she said, “You are a husband of blood!”—because of the circumcision (Exodus 4:24-26).

At some point during their journey from Midian to Egypt, “the LORD met him and sought to kill him.” Questions abound. Why does God seek to kill him? Who is the “him” God is seeking to kill? Which son does Zipporah circumcise? Why does circumcision appear to appease the wrath of God? Why does Zipporah do the circumcision instead of Moses? What is the “husband of blood” comment all about anyway? What does all of this mean?

Most commentators believe that the “him” of verse 24 is Moses. That is, God sought to kill Moses. The reason is that he had failed to circumcise one or more of his sons, probably Eliezar, the younger. Because Moses had failed to observe the covenant sign, he was considered unfit by God for his duty. Therefore, while Moses was in the grips of some mysterious ailment or illness inflicted by God, Zipporah somehow figured out that the key to saving Moses’ life was circumcising her son, which she promptly did. Some commentators believe that Zipporah did this grudgingly, flinging the bloody foreskin at Moses in anger, while others see in her words affection and renewal of their relationship.

It may not surprise you to learn that I see the passage somewhat differently (following Jordan and Currid). Although I believe that circumcision is a key reason for the “attack” of God, I believe that the “him” in verse 24 is not Moses, but Gershom. In context, God has just finished telling Moses of the value of the firstborn son and threatening death of the firstborn of Pharaoh for disobedience. Now, in the very next sentence, we have God threatening the death of “him.” In context, it makes more sense if the “him” is the firstborn son, in this case of Moses. Moses has apparently failed to obey God in the matter of applying the covenant sign upon his oldest son (and perhaps the younger one as well, but in context it is the firstborn who is the key). I don’t know why Moses failed to circumcise his son(s), but he should have known better. God is showing Moses how serious He is about obedience. We expect God to judge pagans like Pharaoh and Egypt, but remember that judgment begins in the house of God (1 Pe. 4:17).

In some fashion Zipporah realizes the problem, and she is able to circumcise her eldest son Gershom. The next phrase in the text is actually mistranslated. Instead of casting the foreskin at the feet of Moses, the text literally says that Zipporah touched it to “his” feet or legs. Again, the name of Moses is NOT mentioned in the Hebrew. Translators *assume* the “he” is Moses and

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insert his name in the text where it doesn't belong. What I believe is happening here is that Zipporah is smearing the blood of circumcision on the legs of Gershom as a sign. Why is she doing this? Because the act of one sacrament is previewing another.

In the Passover, blood from a sacrificial lamb is smeared on the doorposts of the house as a sign for the Angel of Death to pass over the house and spare the firstborn son. Likewise, here God as the "Angel of Death" sees the blood of the sacrament of circumcision smeared on the legs or "doorposts" of Gershom, and so He passes over and spares the firstborn son of Moses.

If this is what is actually occurring, then how do we understand Zipporah's words "you are a husband of blood to me"? Certainly she wouldn't have called her son a "husband of blood." Currid explains:

The Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament not only to refer to a bridegroom, but to a son-in-law, a father-in-law and even a mother-in-law. It is used of Jethro in 3:1 and 4:18 to describe his family relationship to Moses. The basic idea of the word stresses that a person has been made part of a family, that he or she has become a blood relative through a covenant relationship. Thus, Moses' son has been circumcised as a symbol of his entrance into the covenant community/family.

What does this incident teach us? First, it reminds us not to take God and His commandments lightly. God is holy and righteous; He is not to be trifled with. By failing to place God's covenant seal on his firstborn son, Moses placed Gershom in great danger. Second, it demonstrates the need for the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). God's wrath was turned aside, or propitiated, by the proper shedding of blood. This will be further amplified in the Passover, where the blood of a substitute turns away the wrath of God. Ultimately, the principle of blood atonement finds its fullest and final expression in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Finally, this encounter "on the way" makes a profound impact upon Moses and his ministry. Moses is now aware that the only difference between Israel and Egypt is that God chooses to show His love to Israel and enter into a covenant relationship with the Hebrews. If it were not for the love of God, Moses and all Israel would be no better off than Pharaoh and all Egypt. It comes down to God's sovereign election and mercy. Later on, Moses will tell Israel:

<sup>6</sup>For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup>The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; <sup>8</sup>but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

### **3. Moses and Aaron in Egypt (4:27-31)**

The next time we meet Zipporah and her two sons, it is after the exodus. Apparently, Moses had sent her back to Jethro along with their sons, sometime before the exodus occurred. It may have even been after this incident on the way to Egypt.

In any event, the rest of Moses' return to Egypt proceeds uneventfully. Moses meets Aaron at Mt. Sinai, reviews everything that God has told him and shown him (including the signs), returns

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safely to Egypt, and meets with the elders of Israel. At this point, Aaron takes over as the “mouthpiece” of Moses and he relates to the elders all the words that God has spoken to Moses. Aaron also apparently performs the three signs that God had given Moses in 4:1-9.

Guess what happens? Exactly what God told Moses would happen. In 3:18, God says of the elders, “Then they will heed your voice.” What does 4:31 say? “So the people believed.” Moses had asked God several questions casting doubt on his acceptance by Israel. Moses had left Egypt after being rejected by Israel once. He was afraid of being rejected again. But that didn’t happen. God’s word is proving true right in front of Moses’ eyes. First Aaron appears, exactly as promised. Then the elders of Israel believe right off the bat. Two for two. This pattern of God’s word coming true will continue in the next chapter and throughout the rest of the exodus (and in fact, the rest of Scripture!).

Chapter 4 ends on a great note. When the people of God realized that their prayers had been heard and answered, they did exactly what they should have done. They got it right at this point. They worshipped God. That’s the whole point of the exodus narrative. God saves His people for service – to worship Him and bring Him glory. And that is what the elders of Israel do. They thank and praise God for answering their prayers and promising to deliver them. Remember this posture. Remember this response. Remember their attitude of worship. Because it won’t take very long for a different attitude to spring up within the children of Israel.

So far, so good. Everything is proceeding according to plan. Moses has taken three giant steps forward. The first step was to accept the call of God and step out in faith, returning to Egypt. The second step was to learn to obey God completely, especially in the matter of the covenant sign of circumcision. And the third step was to be welcomed and received by his brethren, and to have them accept him and his message. Moses has taken three steps forward; now he needs to be prepared to take two steps back.

### **B. Round One Goes to Pharaoh (5:1-21)**

Chapter 5 describes the first encounter of Moses with Pharaoh and the aftermath of that initial interview. The text (5:1-21) can be divided into 5 sections describing the interaction between two individuals or groups of people.

#### *1. Moses and Pharaoh (5:1-5)*

Our first interaction is between Moses and Pharaoh. Many commentators love to jump all over Moses, citing any number of things he did wrong. For example, here is a list of Moses’ blunders from Motyer:

Moses’ failure to listen attentively led to failure to obey precisely in the following ways: 1) He took *the wrong delegation*. He had been commanded to take ‘the elders of Israel’ with him (3:18), but he took only Aaron. 2) He adopted *the wrong approach*. There is nothing comparable in 3:18 to the ‘this is what the LORD, the God of Israel says’ of 5:1. 3) He used *the wrong terminology*. ‘Hebrews’ is used in 3:18, and this was the recognized name for the people (*cf.* 1:16; 2:6), whereas Moses spoke of Israel (5:1). 4) He made *the wrong request*. Instead of the moderate request for three days leave of absence which the Lord had put into his mouth as his opening gambit (3:18), Moses made an absolute demand for national emancipation. 5) As if this catalogue of mishandling God’s word was not enough, Moses went on to add what the Lord had never said by threatening plagues and slaughter (5:3).

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Later, when the damage had been done, Moses said what he had originally been told (5:3), but this only served to compound his error. At first he replaced the Lord's word with his own, then he added his own words to the Lord's. The Lord commanded a corporate approach, couched in understandable terminology, making a moderate and limited request in courteous terms. Moses adopted an authoritarian approach, alienating Pharaoh with incomprehensible talk (5:2), and laying down an absolute demand.

Wow! Did Moses do anything right? Of course he did. I think the purpose of describing all of Moses' "mistakes" is to justify the reaction of Pharaoh and the failure of this first overture for freedom. But God has already told Moses twice that Pharaoh would refuse to listen (3:19; 4:21). So the result of this first confrontation is not due to the ineptness of Moses but the obstinacy of Pharaoh, as governed by the overarching sovereignty of the LORD God.

Let's inspect the objections of Motyer. Moses and Aaron go to meet Pharaoh. God had told them to bring the elders of Israel (3:18), but they are not mentioned. Jewish tradition, trying to exonerate Moses, explains their absence by describing how they intended to go but they lost their nerve and dropped out one by one (Enns). A far simpler explanation is that the elders of Israel went with Moses but are not mentioned. As Mackay points out, when Pharaoh accuses Moses and Aaron of taking the people away from their work (5:4), the context of that statement makes more sense if a whole bunch of Israelites are standing in front of Pharaoh not working!

The second and third objections are flimsy. "Thus says the LORD God of Israel" is a standard prophetic opening (*cp.* Am. 1:3). Moses as the prophet of the LORD God is announcing the word of the LORD God. There is nothing contrary to his commissioning in this statement; in fact it is the expected declaration from a prophet of God. Substituting "Israel" for "Hebrew" is just semantics – they mean the same thing.

What about Moses initial request? Was it "an absolute demand for national emancipation"? In verse 1, Moses asks Pharaoh to let Israel go to hold a feast in the wilderness. In verse 3, Moses asks the same thing, clarifying that it was a three-day journey to sacrifice. These requests are essentially the same thing. A religious feast would include sacrifice. The goal is clearly stated: to worship the LORD God of Israel. There is no confusion here, no deviation from the demand of God.

Finally, did Moses add his own embellishment when he claimed that God would fall upon Israel with the pestilence and sword if they did not obey God? I don't think so. Moses had already had a personal experience of this kind as he journeyed on the way to Egypt. God had taught him well to obey the commandments of God or else suffer quick punishment. Moses is verbalizing to Pharaoh what he has experienced firsthand from God. In addition, these words are prophetic against Egypt, since this is exactly what God will do and had already promised to do through his "wonders" (3:20). All in all, I think it is ludicrous to accuse Moses of disobedience in this first interview – the failure is a result of Pharaoh's hard heart, not Moses' faulty obedience.

Pharaoh's initial response is instructive. After hearing the initial words of Moses, he replies in verse 2, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go." This response of Pharaoh gets to the crux of the whole exodus. Who is the LORD? Pharaoh rightly says he does not know who the LORD is. But he will soon learn, at great cost to himself, his family, and his entire nation. If Moses demonstrated humility in asking "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (3:11), then Pharaoh demonstrates utter arrogance by asking, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice?" Right here, the battle is

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enjoined. Who is the master of the Hebrews? Is it Pharaoh, or is it the LORD God? Pharaoh throws the gauntlet down. From this point on, it will be all out spiritual war.

Pharaoh dismisses Moses and Aaron, accusing them of causing the people to cease or rest from their labor. Pharaoh wants no part of an Israelite “rest.” Of course, this is theologically significant, because the Hebrew word for “rest” here in verse 5 is *sabat*, which is the root word for the *Sabbath*. “Pharaoh does not give the Hebrews leave to rest, stop, or desist” (Currid). Pharaoh does not want to give the Hebrews a Sabbath rest from their labor. However, that is exactly what God intends to give to His people (Ex. 20:8-11).

### 2. *Pharaoh and the Taskmasters (5:6-9)*

Pharaoh fires the first salvo in the spiritual war by instructing his Egyptian taskmasters to change the working conditions of the Hebrews. Apparently they had too much idle time on their hands, if they could just stand around with Moses and Aaron and make demands of the king. Therefore, Pharaoh increased their workload by commanding the Israelites to gather their own straw for brick making. We often hear the phrase “bricks without straw,” but that is not an accurate picture of the situation here. The Hebrews will still make their bricks out of Egyptian clay and use straw as a binding and strengthening agent. However, the previous practice had been that straw was provided for them in their labor. The change is that the Hebrews will now have to gather the straw themselves. Pharaoh has increased the workload, but not increased the pay – so the living conditions have gotten worse.

In verse 9, the word for “more” work is *kabed*, which literally means “heavy.” Pharaoh makes the work of the Hebrews heavy. Later on, this same Hebrew word (which can also symbolize God’s glory) is used of Pharaoh’s hard heart – God makes Pharaoh’s heart “heavy” (e.g., 10:1).

### 3. *Taskmasters and the Israelites (5:10-14)*

The taskmasters are quick to enforce the words of Pharaoh. “Thus says Pharaoh” (5:10) is an ironic echo of Moses’ introductory words: “Thus says the LORD God of Israel” (5:1). God wants the people to rest and worship him; Pharaoh wants the people to work under heavy labor. Who will win? Thus far, it looks like Pharaoh is winning. The taskmasters set a hard schedule upon the Israelites. The Israelites are reduced to using “stubble” or “chaff” instead of the full straw. There is not enough time in the day to gather the straw and make their quota of bricks. It’s like that old *I Love Lucy* show where Lucy and Ethel are working at the conveyer belt of the candy factory. The candy is coming out faster than Lucy can box it up, so she starts shoving it in her pockets and her mouth in order to prevent the candy from backing up. The same sort of thing was happening to Israel: the harder they worked, the further behind they got in meeting their quotas, and so the taskmasters take out their frustrations on the officers of the Israelites. Apparently, these Israelite officers were Hebrew foremen who provided a buffer between the Egyptian taskmasters and the Israelites.

### 4. *The Officers and Pharaoh (5:15-19)*

The situation got so bad that the Hebrew officers “cried out to Pharaoh” (v. 15). This is theologically significant. In chapter 2, under the oppression of Egypt the Israelites had “cried out” to God in prayer (2:23). Now, when the oppression of Egypt has once again increased, this time they “cry out” to Pharaoh. The Israelite officers have sold themselves out to Pharaoh,

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calling themselves his “servants.” However, unlike God, who heard and saw and knew the oppression of His people, Pharaoh does not care and will not listen. Ryken points out:

Rather than praying for God to deliver them, they begged Pharaoh to make their bondage easier to bear. If this had simply been a labor dispute, the foremen could be commended for taking their grievance to Pharaoh. There is nothing wrong with asking for better working conditions. But remember that in this case the real conflict was spiritual. The central question of the book of Exodus was, “Whom were the Israelites made to serve: God or Pharaoh?” At the end of chapter 4, the Israelites bowed down to worship their God. But at the first sign of trouble, they ran right back to Pharaoh.

### *5. The Officers and Moses (5:20-21)*

As the officers leave from their disastrous interview with Pharaoh, they pass by Moses and Aaron. Not willing to miss an opportunity to pass blame, these Israelite officers accuse Moses of causing all their problems. It is Moses who has made the Israelites “abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants” (5:21). Literally, the officers say that Moses made them “stink” and that their “stench” has gone up to Pharaoh.

How quickly the Israelites turn in the face of adversity! At the end of chapter 4 they believed in Moses and worshiped God. Now, as events didn’t turn out quite like they wanted (although according to God’s plan), they kiss up to Pharaoh and blame Moses. Their attitude here will recur again and again throughout the book of Exodus as the people grumble and complain and blame Moses every time they are confronted with difficulty.

This is where we are leaving Moses today, with the sting of these words of rejection ringing in his ears. Moses had taken three steps forward in chapter 4, in accepting his call, in obeying God’s word, and being received by his people. But now in chapter 5, we’ve seen him take two steps back. First, Pharaoh has rejected his mission as the spokesman of God demanding the release of the Israelites. Of course, this was fully expected, but nonetheless it must have caused Moses great pain. But the second step backward was even more painful. After first being received by the Israelites, he is once again rejected by them. Moses is seen by Israel as the cause of the problem, not the source of the cure. Still, despite the initial setbacks encountered here in chapter 5, God’s plan is at last underway to redeem His people: three steps forward, two steps back.

### Conclusion

#### *1. Theological*

In conclusion, let us first consider the righteousness of God in election. God chooses whom He wills for the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:4-6). We’ve already seen that the only reason God chose Israel was because He loved them, not because of any inherent holiness or righteousness in them (Dt. 7:6-8). So we can appreciate with wonder His sovereign election of His children. But what about those He does not elect? What about those He chooses to leave in their sin? Is God just in doing so? Of course He is. Paul deals with this subject in Romans chapter 9:

<sup>14</sup>What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! <sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, “*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.*” <sup>16</sup>So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. <sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to the

## Exodus I – Notes

Pharaoh, “*For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.*”<sup>18</sup> Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens (Romans 9:14-18).

The chief end of man is “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” God is glorified through our election. We give Him the praise and the glory, because we could never do it ourselves. We cannot will our salvation or earn our salvation; it is only through the grace and mercy of God (Rom. 9:16). Likewise, God is also glorified through those that are not saved. God raised Pharaoh up to display His power and His glory and His name. Let us praise God for His mercy in electing His church and for His justice in not electing the reprobate. God is righteous!

### 2. *Christological*

Next consider how the sonship of Israel, declared by God in 4:22, is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Israel was called to be God’s firstborn son, but Israel never lived up to the demands of sonship. Israel failed to obey God’s law and keep God’s covenant, just like Adam, another “son of God” (Luke 3:38) who broke God’s law and covenant. The entire story of the Old Testament people of God is one of failure. But the story doesn’t end in failure, because God sends Jesus Christ, the Son of God, into the world. Jesus keeps the law and the covenant perfectly. He is the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45), the true Israel, the firstborn son of all creation (Col. 1:15). As we’ve already seen in previous lessons, Matthew compares Jesus’ exodus out of Egypt as an infant to the exodus of Israel: “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Mt. 2:15, quoting Hos. 11:1). By quoting this Old Testament passage about the nation of Israel, Matthew is telling us that the true Israel has come, the true Son of God – Jesus Christ.

### 3. *Practical*

Finally, consider two points of practical application. First, just as Old Testament Israel enjoyed a special relationship to God as His son, so the New Testament church is in the same relationship to God. He is our Father; we are His sons. Our sonship comes from and is based upon our relationship to Jesus Christ. Because we are in union with Jesus (Rom. 6:5-11), we can call God “Our Father in heaven.” What a wonderful privilege it is to have a heavenly Father! We know that He loves us and will take care of us. Of course, if we stray or disobey, we can be sure that He will chastise us, because that is what a loving Father does.

Knowing that we have a heavenly Father gives us great assurance, especially in times of adversity. This leads us to our final lesson – how to respond to adversity. God had promised Moses and the Israelites that He would redeem them from Egypt. However, the first effort of Moses led to the situation getting worse, not better! How did Israel respond? By running to Pharaoh and by blaming Moses. Instead, they should have run to God in prayer. Israel still had a lot to learn about their Father God. Fortunately, Moses was ahead of them on the learning curve. He had already seen the power of God and experienced His mighty wonders. As we will see next week, while the Israelites sought relief from Pharaoh, Moses went to the right place – he prayed to God. How do you respond when adversity comes? Do you blame others? Do you seek help from others? Or do you run to your heavenly Father in prayer?

Close in Prayer.

Next week: Lesson 7 – Prelude to a Mess – Ex. 5:22-7:7