



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Exodus

Lesson 4: Exodus 5:1-6:27

As Exodus chapter four ended, the Israelites had bowed their heads and were worshipping the Lord. Using the miraculous signs God had given them, Moses and Aaron had been able to convince the Israelites that God had seen their affliction and was coming to save them. It is important to note that their immediate reaction to God's promised deliverance was to worship. Having convinced the Israelites of God's presence and willingness to act, now Moses and Aaron will approach Pharaoh.

Think About It: God has yet to take action, He has only promised deliverance at this point, yet the Israelite's immediate reaction was to worship. We have so much more in the deliverance through Jesus Christ, do we respond in the same way?

Read Exodus 5:1-2

Based on the text, it does not appear that it was difficult for Moses and Aaron to have an audience with Pharaoh. There could be several reasons for this, but it is important to keep in mind Moses' history, and the way rule was passed down in ancient Egypt. In 4:19 the Lord tells Moses that all those who were seeking his life are dead, which means this Pharaoh is not the same man who ordered all of the male Hebrew babies to be thrown into the Nile, and whose daughter rescued Moses and took him into her home.

However, since rule was typically passed down from father to son, it is likely that this Pharaoh is Moses' adopted brother or uncle. Regardless of the exact relationship, even though Moses has been gone for 40 years, it is likely that Pharaoh knew exactly who Moses

was, and potentially even had a relationship with him when they were children. We see in Acts 7:22 that Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. If nothing else, it is likely that Moses and this Pharaoh would have shared the same tutors if they were anywhere close to the same age. Yet regardless of the exact reason, Moses and Aaron are given an audience with the king.

Moses' initial request of Pharaoh in no way implies a mass Exodus or rebellion, God has Moses begin with a simple request that his people be allowed to hold a feast in the wilderness. Yet note Pharaoh's response; he begins with "Who is the Lord..." and twice makes the statement, "I do not know the Lord." He responds with complete disdain for the God of the Israelites. (Not terribly surprising since, as we will see later, he viewed himself as a god.)

There are many lessons about God's perfect timing in sending Jesus to deliver all of mankind. For just a few examples: He came when there was a common language, but Koine Greek would soon become a dead language and therefore the words would no longer change meaning. He came when Rome had built roads all across the continent for ease of travel. He came when Rome was in charge, thus ensuring death by crucifixion.

Yet the same is true for God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. As we will see in Exodus 12:40, they had been in the land of Egypt for 430 years. Although not all of that time had them enslaved, it is safe to assume they had been enslaved for hundreds of years. However, God chose to act at the exact right time. A time when: the Israelites were tired enough of the oppression that they had begun to call out to Him, when Moses' very life being preserved



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would be a testament to His provision, when the leader of His people would be familiar with the language and customs of the Egyptians, and closely enough tied to the royal household to have direct access to Pharaoh, and when the current Pharaoh was arrogant and hard-hearted enough that it would be clear throughout all of history that the Israelites were delivered by the hand of the Almighty God of creation.

Read Exodus 5:3-9

Even though he is likely speaking to someone he grew up with, in using the pronoun “us,” Moses is making it clear that he has embraced his Hebrew heritage. He specifies a “three day journey” in order to get far enough away that their sacrifices would not be offensive to the Egyptians. In both Exodus 8:26 and Genesis 46:34 Scripture tells us that shepherds and such livestock were an abomination to the Egyptians. In his request, Moses is being very intentional to be respectful of the Egyptian culture and belief system.

As further evidence of the bond between Pharaoh and Moses, when he responds to the request the king calls both Moses and Aaron by their names. His excuse for denying their request is that the people are lazy. Verse four is particularly interesting, as Pharaoh speaks to Moses and Aaron as nothing more than slaves when he tells them both to get back to their burdens.

Verse six mentions both taskmasters and foremen. It appears that the “taskmasters” are the Egyptian overseers of the slaves, while the “foremen” are Israelites who have been tasked with overseeing their own countrymen. Verse 14 makes this differentiation more clear.

Pharaoh’s response to the request for the Israelites to be allowed to worship; he made their work harder. Rather than the time-consuming task of firing the bricks, ancient Egyptian mud bricks were often allowed to dry and harden in the sun. By adding straw,

the bricks were strengthened, much like adding rebar to concrete today.

Verse nine implies that Pharaoh suspected the Israelites of trying to escape captivity, when he accuses Moses and Aaron of lying. It appears his goal in increasing their workload was to keep them too tired and too distracted for them to have any energy left for rebelling. While in some ways that makes sense, there is a certain lack of logic in making your slaves even more miserable in order to convince them not to rebel and run away.

From thousands of years in the future, it is easy to see the lack of rational thought in Pharaoh’s decisions here. It is easy to see how his behavior is counter-productive and ultimately leads to the fall of his nation. Yet are there times when our actions are also counter-productive? We pray that God will send souls to us, then are too afraid to offer to study with them in our daily lives, or too distracted to intentionally seek out visitors and invite them to lunch when they walk right through the doors of our church buildings? Situations where, as our children get older we are concerned because they are less interested in spiritual things, yet as they were growing up we would miss worship for extracurriculars, or because we were tired. We didn’t study the Bible on a regular basis in our home, and we did talk bad about the minister, the elders, or our other brethren.

Take Action: Take some time to really sit and think about ways that your current lifestyle and mindset may be counterproductive to your ultimate goal of getting to Heaven, and taking as many people with you as you can. Write down 2-3 specific changes you can make to minimize those inconsistencies in your life.



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Read Exodus 5:10-14

This section is just awful, in particular verse 14. As previously discussed, the foremen are Israelites who have been given charge of their countrymen. At Pharaoh's command, the taskmasters have made it impossible for the Israelites to keep up, and they know they have made it impossible, yet when they inevitably fail to meet their quota, the foremen are beaten. This is the epitome of a situation going from bad to worse.

Read Exodus 5:15-22

Verses 15-16 are particularly interesting. Although they are Israelites, the foreman are also allowed to have direct access to Pharaoh. When addressing Pharaoh they are certainly politically correct, as they refer to themselves as servants rather than the more accurate "slaves." While I know absolutely nothing about Hebrew, this word is different from the word used for, "slaves" in chapter one. Finally, and most shocking of all, when speaking directly to him they place the blame squarely at Pharaoh's feet, yet do not appear to be punished for this.

Despite their legitimate complaints, Pharaoh once again puts the blame on the Israelites for being "lazy," and refuses to lessen their load. Moses and Aaron clearly knew what was happening, as they were waiting for the foremen when they came out of their meeting with Pharaoh. However at this point, they have gone from blaming Pharaoh and his taskmasters to blaming Moses and Aaron. The phrasing of, "The Lord look on you and judge," is interesting. This implies that at this point they either did not believe that God had actually sent them, or if they do still believe that God sent them, they also believe that somewhere along the way Moses and Aaron messed up God's plan.

Blame shifting continues: it began with the foremen blaming Pharaoh and the taskmasters, then went to the foremen blaming Moses and Aaron, and now Moses is going to turn the blame on God. Notice the personal pronouns in verses 22-23: "why have *you*

done evil..." "why did *you* send me..." "to speak in *your* name..." "*you* have not delivered *your* people at all." In spite of the amazing signs that God has done directly through him, when things did not go smoothly Moses immediately began to doubt and question God. Verse 23 in particular is reminiscent of Genesis 3:12, "The woman *you* gave me."

Think About It: We are not that dissimilar to Moses. Oftentimes when things get hard, despite the innumerable ways He has blessed us, it can be easy to blame God. To His honor and glory He was patient with Moses, and He is patient with us. Yet these are the moments with the greatest potential to either weaken or strengthen our faith. What are some practical ways we can focus on leaning on God rather than blaming Him when life gets hard? What are some practical ways we can help brethren who are struggling, and may be blaming God, without invalidating their struggle and emotions?

Read Exodus 6:1-9

When God responds to Moses it isn't with anger, it's with affirmation. God has made His people a promise, and He will follow through. That being said, we also need to remember that our timeline and God's timeline are not the same thing. God is about to start moving and working in powerful, incredible ways. Yet it's going to take 10 plagues and an extended period of time before freedom will come. Perhaps, in our own lives at times, it's not that God isn't working, it's that we aren't being patient enough to wait for His whole plan for us to unfold.

In verse three God makes an interesting, and exegetically difficult statement when he declares, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord (Yahweh) I did not make myself known to them." This is interesting



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because the name “Yahweh” is actually found all throughout Genesis. There are a few important things to note.

First, in all of those references, it is man referring to God as Yahweh, not God referring to Himself as Yahweh. In addition to this, we need to consider the point God is making to Moses. Throughout Genesis God is seen as the provider. He consistently provides food, clothing, spouses, safety and children for His people. Yet the provider is only half of who Yahweh is, He is also the ultimate deliverer. God never made Himself known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as powerfully and irrefutably as He is about to make Himself known to the entire world. Even hundreds of years later, in Joshua 2:10, Rahab the harlot protects the spies because of the powerful way God delivered His people from Egypt.

Throughout this text God makes seven promises to His people:

1. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.
2. I will deliver you from slavery to them.
3. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.
4. I will take you to be My people.
5. I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God.
6. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.
7. I will give it to you for a possession.

These are incredible, powerful promises of hope and a future, yet verse nine tells us that the people would not listen. At this point their spirits are completely broken. It is harder to have hope, and then have that hope dashed, than to have never had hope at all. Yet once again, God knows His people. He knows that their spirits are broken, and once again he responds with affirmation, not anger.

Read Exodus 6:10-13

God has given Pharaoh a chance. He offered to just have His people worship and return. However, that offer was rejected, and there won't be another. At this point God has transitioned from letting the people go worship, to His people completely leaving the land of Egypt.

Moses' phrasing in verse 12 is interesting, when he states that he is a man of uncircumcised lips, particularly since he almost lost his own life for not circumcising his sons in 4:24-26. When looking at this text, the two statements about Moses' uncircumcised lips are the bookends to the chiastic structure of the genealogy which follows.

Read Exodus 6:14-25

Remembering that Exodus is written as a narrative, this section of the text could be thought of as the intermission. God has set the stage. He has tried to be nice, yet Pharaoh has made it abundantly clear that he has nothing but disdain for the God of the Israelites, and no intention whatsoever of listening to Him. At this point God is going to reiterate the genealogy of His people, culminating in establishing the house of Levi in preparation for the coming Levitical priesthood. In verse 20 we have Moses' parents named for the first time, although here since the focus is on the sons Miriam is not mentioned.

Once again, with the genealogy we find another chiastic structure:

A. And Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?" (vs. 12)

B. Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron ... for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. (vs. 13)



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C. Families of Reuben and Simeon
(rejected as leaders) (vs. 14-15)

D. Genealogies of Levi
"according to their
generations." (vs. 16-19)

X. The family of
Moses and Aaron.
(vs. 20)

D'. Houses of Levi
"according to their families."
(vs. 21-25)

C'. Moses and Aaron (selected as
leaders). (vs. 26-27)

B'. The LORD spoke to Moses... "Speak to
Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you."
(vs. 28-29)

A'. But Moses said before the LORD, "Behold, I am
of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh heed
me?" (vs. 30)

By way of reminder, whenever the author uses a
chiastic structure, his goal is to emphasize the
statement in the middle. In this chiasm, it's the family
of Moses and Aaron. This accomplishes three things:
it emphasizes their tie to Levi for the establishment of
the Levitical priesthood, it emphasizes God's
faithfulness to His promises, and establishes them as
an authority as ancient near eastern cultures
authenticated messengers through their pedigree.

Read Exodus 6:26-30

God has firmly established exactly who Moses and
Aaron are through this genealogy. It's a little amusing
for us, however, with the constant emphasis of, "this
Moses and Aaron." It makes one wonder, was there
another famous brother pair named Moses and Aaron
somewhere along the way?

God tried to play nice with Pharaoh and simply asked
that His people be allowed to go a short distance away
and worship Him, yet Pharaoh disdainfully rejected
this request. After this, God reiterated His promises to
His people, and reinforced Moses and Aaron's
qualifications to be His spokesmen. What will follow is
God giving Pharaoh and the Egyptians chance after
chance to repent, and His increasing displays of
dominance and authority in return.