

We are returning to our study in Exodus. Moses had met with some success. The people believed the signs that God gave him and were convinced that God had seen their misery and was about to fulfill His promises to Abraham. They were moved to worship as their faith and hope were restored. But just because God is in something, doesn't mean there won't be some major bumps in the road, at least from our human perspective. **Think of them as speed bumps to keep us from getting ahead of God.** God already told Moses that Pharaoh's heart would be hard and that God would have to compel him to let the people go. Moses was forewarned, as we are. (Acts 14:22)

Commented [Paul Wall1]: Acts 14:22 (ESV)
22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

They had success with the Hebrews, now they are going to their first encounter with the Pharaoh. ¹ *Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'"* They did it! Moses had tried so hard to get out of this. I wonder if they were shaking as they spoke? Did Aaron do the speaking? They had cast their life into the Lord's hands, stepped out in faith, and done what God had asked. Now, will they die? Will Pharaoh yield? Will God intervene? They had to be wondering what was next?

² *Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."* We have to hear this in the cultural context. We don't know if this is the first time Pharaoh had heard of YHWY as the God of the region of Midian, or if Moses had just told him the name for the first time. Moses identified YHWH as the God of the Hebrews. So Pharaoh is saying that he doesn't recognize this God. He has Ra, Osiris, Horus, the Nile and many others, but who is YHWY? "I don't know him, and I won't take orders from him!"

That is a great question. **"Who is the LORD?"** (John 17:3) God is about to reveal who He is. He will show Pharaoh that He alone is God. He will show that He is all-powerful, and can do as He pleases and none can stand against Him. (Job 23:13)

Commented [Paul Wall2]: John 17:3 (ESV)
3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

It's a fair question. After all, if someone came to you in the name of some god, and told you that this god orders you to do something, it would be prudent to ask who the god is. If He is the Creator of heaven and earth, to whom you owe your very existence, then you better obey.

Commented [Paul Wall3]: Job 23:13 (ESV)
13 But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does.

It is a question that every living person must ask when confronted by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. *Who is the Lord?* Is He the figment of someone's active imagination, or is He the One who brought everything into being, the architect of time and space, the beginning and the end? (Revelation 22:12) It is the ultimate question. (1John 5:20)

Commented [Paul Wall4]: Revelation 22:12-13 (ESV)
12 "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.
13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Commented [Paul Wall5]: 1 John 5:20 (ESV)
20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

However, I don't think Pharaoh is really asking a question. I think he is making a statement. Kind of like, "Who do you think you are? Don't you know that you are talking to a god?"

Pharaoh declared that he did not know YHWH, and he will not let Israel go. God says, "Let them go!" Pharaoh answers, "No way!"

Oppose a command of God and you will pay for your disobedience. It's not as if God wants to show who is boss, but He's telling you to do what is in your best interest. If Pharaoh would have just said, "Yes", consider the loss and pain that he would have been spared.

It is the same with every command. (Deuteronomy 10:13) After Jesus gave the new command to the disciples, He said, *"I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."* (John 15:11) His commands are for our good. So when we say, "I will not", we are setting ourselves up for a time of extra difficulty and pain. (Ezekiel 20:13)

³ Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword." I don't think the Lord was being deceptive in asking for three days, rather He was revealing how hardhearted Pharaoh was. There are records from that era of slaves being given permission to leave work for a short time of worship. This wasn't that unusual a request, but the whole work group at one time may have been unprecedented. Pharaoh wasn't willing to share his glory with God, even for just three days.

There is no record of God ever saying He would strike the Hebrews with plagues or sword. Was Moses using "us" as one who was raised Egyptian? Possibly? Or maybe he was relating the motivation for Egyptians' worship of their gods to that of the Hebrews for the sake of Pharaoh understanding the urgency of the request. Either way it was a warning that Pharaoh is going to be impacted if he will not yield to the demand. Either he will be plagued or his work force will be. He would never be able to say he wasn't warned of the consequences of saying no to God.

Remember, this was just the beginning of the bargaining between God and Pharaoh. Moses doesn't even call God the God of the whole earth, but simply the God of the Hebrews. How gently God begins this negotiation. God asks for a little deference, and Pharaoh says he will give none whatsoever. In fact, he is irritated at the gall of these Israelites to ask to worship any other god than him! (Daniel 5:23)

⁴ But the king of Egypt said, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!" ⁵ Then Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working." Though the text isn't clear, it sounds like the nation was standing

Commented [Paul Wall6]: Deuteronomy 10:13 (ESV) 13 and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

Commented [Paul Wall7]: Ezekiel 20:13 (ESV) 13 But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them.

Commented [Paul Wall8]: Daniel 5:23 (ESV) ²³ but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

behind Moses watching and wondering what was about to happen. I can see Pharaoh pointing over Moses' shoulder, "Look at all the labor that is being lost! You are a distraction! Quit wasting my time and theirs!"

⁶ That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: ⁷ "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. ⁸ But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' ⁹ Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies." What they may have feared came to pass. The conditions were made even worse than before. Apparently the Hebrews were responsible for making bricks for Pharaoh's building project, and some other people provided the straw. Pharaoh had to dissuade the people from listening to Moses, so he made the workload greater and blamed it on Moses. "If they have time to listen to Moses' fantasies, they have too much time on their hands. They can find their own straw for the bricks."

There is some very detailed information in the text that is completely accurate historically. The bricks of that era were made with straw. The oversight was exactly as described. The Egyptians worked though Hebrew overseers. There is even a portion of Pithom that is one of the store-cities that the Hebrews built that doesn't have straw in the brick. The Bible is historically accurate even when addressing a story over 3500 years ago.

We should note that the word Pharaoh used in this verse for "work" has the same root as the word for "worship" in 4:23. Pharaoh is saying, "If they want to worship another god, make them worship me even harder." In the first verse Moses declares, *"This is what the Lord says..."* and in verse 10, Pharaoh says, *"This is what Pharaoh says..."* as if he were a god. Pharaoh is setting up a competition between himself and the Hebrew God. Who is really in charge? Whose staff is the real symbol of authority? (1Chronicles 16:31)

If you relied totally on "open doors", on God making the way easy, to assure of God's favor, then you'd think that Moses was deceived. After all, if God were in this, if He saw our misery, why would things get worse? We have a tendency to think that if we are in God's will, everything will fall into place.

In 1813, one of America's first missionaries went to Burma. His name was Adoniram Judson. It took years to learn the language and translate the Gospel of Matthew. His first few converts took years to win. When war broke out with the British. He was suspected of spying and imprisoned. He was sometimes left hung by shackled feet with his head and shoulders touching the ground. His wife begged for his release. She had given birth to their first child. Before his release she and the baby had died. His second wife also died of a fever as well as three of their children. Who ever said God's will is easy? In his later years, because he had pulmonary disease, he had to whisper the message to someone who could

Commented [Paul Wall9]: 1 Chronicles 16:31 (ESV)

³¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!"

preach it. But before he died, there was the Gospel of Matthew in Burmese and many Christian churches.

God doesn't promise clear sailing, but He does promise to see us through to our destination! (Acts 27:23-26) Moses first storm had just hit. When the brick quotas weren't met, the Hebrew foremen were beaten. Remember that this is a confrontation about who is God. When the foremen were beaten did they cry out to God? They had just worshiped God who saw their misery, but when their misery increased where did they run, ...to Pharaoh. Three times in verse 15 and 16 they refer to themselves as "*your servants*." (Matthew 6:24) Why didn't they go to Moses whom they had recognized as one who met with God?

17 Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are--lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' 18 Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks." The implication is that if they keep asking, they will just make it harder on themselves. From Pharaoh's frame of reference, that was a smart thing to do. Now they won't listen to Moses and will blame him for their troubles.

You do realize that this is Satan's well-worn tactic. Blame God for your troubles. If you face difficulties in serving God, Satan suggests you quit listening so you won't have to face more trouble. Reality is that life is full of trouble regardless of whether you are with God or living selfishly. (Job 5:7) Trouble is a part of living in this world. You can walk through it with the God of all Comfort or you can face it on your own. (2Corinthians 1:3-4)

At the end of my first year at Wayside, I was tempted to throw in the towel. Complaints and discouragement can become overwhelming. We were growing, but some were leaving. Someone said, "We'll never have children here." Someone else said, "You are chasing all the older people off with that guitar music." Well, seven years have passed since those comments, and we are three times larger, sending out missionaries, ministering in a number of different outreaches and small groups, the web site is reaching over 4000 every month, books published and we could go on and on. But you have to weather the storms and persevere by the grace of God. He'll only give us what we can handle with His help. (1Corinthians 10:13) I'd never have survived what Adoniram Judson went through, so God put us in this easy place with difficulties that are trivial. (2Corinthians 12:9)

The Hebrews fell for Pharaoh's tactic and blamed Moses. *20 When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, 21 and they said, "May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."* Moses and Aaron were waiting to see the results of the meeting of the overseers with Pharaoh. Pharaoh seems to have won this battle. They looked on Aaron and Moses as the source of their new problem. They even asked that the God whose name had been revealed to them by Moses judge Moses.

Commented [Paul Wall10]: Acts 27:23-26 (ESV)

²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship,
²⁴ and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'
²⁵ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.
²⁶ But we must run aground on some island."

Commented [Paul Wall11]: Matthew 6:24 (ESV)

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Commented [Paul Wall12]: Job 5:7 (ESV)

⁷ but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

Commented [Paul Wall13]: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Commented [Paul Wall14]: 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Commented [Paul Wall15]: 2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

We can't be too hard on them. I've had something similar, where I was just doing as I knew the Lord was leading and had someone ask God to judge me. I think they honestly believed they were in the right and believed I was wrong. What do you do when people have the truth so twisted that they are convinced that wrong is right? (Isaiah 5:20-21)

Commented [Paul Wall16]: Isaiah 5:20-21 (ESV)
20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!
21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

Those people did see the signs. They did believe it at the time and worshiped God. They rejoiced that God had heard their misery. But now, they see Moses as the source of increased misery. They've been beaten. They have to work even harder than they have in the past. You have to feel sorry for them.

I imagine Moses felt like he had failed, and yet his conscience was clear. He had done what the Lord asked and he knew that it was only a matter of time before the Lord did what He had promised. God would keep His word and compel Pharaoh with a heavy hand. (Exodus 3:19)

Commented [Paul Wall17]: Exodus 3:19 (ESV)
19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.

That doesn't lessen the sting of rejection from these leaders of Israel. (Galatians 1:10) He probably flashed back to the first rejection and back to the bush and how he tried to get out of being put in this position. Those situations where you end up cursed by people if you do and cursed by God if you don't are the toughest of all. It seems no matter which way you turn it's painful. (2Tim 4:16) But God has a plan and has promised it will end differently, so you persevere in faith. (Revelation 3:21) You have to. If you love the Lord you have no other choice. (John 6:68)

Commented [Paul Wall18]: Galatians 1:10 (ESV)
10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Commented [Paul Wall19]: 2 Timothy 4:16 (ESV)
16 At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!

This is a very hard place in which Moses finds himself. It is a place every follower of God will eventually face in one way or the other. It is a place where faith grows strong and sinks its roots deep. (Ephesians 3:17) We are going to leave Moses there, but know this, his response to this trial is to run to God in prayer and honestly lay it out like he sees it. (Mark 14:36)

Commented [Paul Wall20]: Revelation 3:21 (ESV)
21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Commented [Paul Wall21]: John 6:68 (ESV)
68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,

22 Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, "O LORD, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all."

Commented [Paul Wall22]: Ephesians 3:17 (ESV)
17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

Commented [Paul Wall23]: Mark 14:36 (ESV)
36 And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

"Why did you ever send me!"

He didn't try to sound religious or spin it in a good light or even say that he had faith. He just poured out his heart to God. Moses expected things to go smoother even though God had told him they wouldn't.

Sometimes we get an idea in our head of how God should get something done. He often warns us that it won't go that way, but we imagine how we think it should go. And then, like Moses, we run whining to God with our complaint. (Psalm 62:8) God is so patient! He will answer. He will continue to have patience with Moses and you and me. He will be glorified, and we will be in awe. (Psalm 18:30)

Commented [Paul Wall24]: Psalms 62:8 (ESV)
8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

Commented [Paul Wall25]: Psalms 18:30 (ESV)
30 This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

Questions:

1. Why does God give us speed bumps?
2. What did Pharaoh mean in verse 2.
3. Why does God insist on obedience?
4. Why did they just ask for 3 days?
5. Why was Pharaoh's response clever?
6. Should we expect God to clear a path for His will to be done?
7. Who does Satan like us to blame in our difficulties? Why?
8. What was Pharaoh's clever move?
9. Who got blamed? How did he feel?
10. What was the catch 22 for Moses? Why is it so difficult? Relate.

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