



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 21, 2009
Released on Wednesday, June 17, 2009**

"Recognizing True Authority"

Lesson Text: Exodus 5:1-9, 22-23; 6:1
Background Scripture: Exodus 5:1-6:1
Devotional Reading: Psalm 10:1-14

Exodus 5:1-9, 22, 23

1 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.

2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.

3 And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.

4 And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens.

5 And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens.

6 And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying,

7 Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves.

8 And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof: for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God.

9 Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labor therein; and let them not regard vain words.

.....
22 And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me?

23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.

Exodus 6:1

1 Then the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.

Today's Aim

Facts: to see what happened when Pharaoh refused to obey God's demand to let the Israelites leave Egyptian bondage.

Principle: to realize that the people of God must patiently wait for him to fulfill His promises.

Application: to help believers today to persevere even when situations appear to be hopeless.

Introduction

Since 1988, novels written by Frank Peretti have shaped how many Christians think about spiritual warfare. Books such as *This Present Darkness* depict a fictional world where large armies of angelic hosts and demonic forces constantly battle one another for human souls. The more fervently Christians pray, the better the angels fare, as well as the humans they defend. Peretti thus has influenced popular Christian thinking about the “principalities and powers” discussed in Scripture. This has been a positive development insofar as it has encouraged Christians to take seriously the power of prayer for winning spiritual battles.

But evil influences are nothing new, of course. The apostle Paul acknowledged such influences (c.f. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6). In Exodus 5–14, Moses encountered “principalities and powers” as he faced down demonic elements of Egyptian magic. The political powers of the Pharaoh cult and the economic powers of slavery and oppression found a comfortable home alongside this demonic magic. Such powers beset the Israelites on all sides.

Evil powers still exert influence. Sometimes we feel helpless to do anything about them. The experience of Moses can help us to distinguish between godly and ungodly power structures.

Lesson Background

In Exodus 3 and 4, God called Moses to the seemingly impossible task of freeing the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. God used miracles to overcome Moses’ anxieties about his mission. God empowered him with words to speak, signs to perform, and support from his brother. The Israelites’ initial response was favorable (4:29–31). Then came time to confront Pharaoh.

The Stubbornness of Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1-5)

1. What reason did Moses give Pharaoh for releasing the Israelites from Egypt? (v. 1)

Appearing before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron demanded that the Egyptian ruler let God’s people go. This, however, was not merely their personal demand. Like the later prophets, they prefaced their message with the words “Thus saith the Lord God” (Exod. 5:1).

Back when he was first commissioned, Moses had been instructed to demand the people’s release for a three-day feast in the wilderness (Exod. 3: 18). “The demand is just; they were the people of God, and therefore he claims them, and service from them was due to him; and Pharaoh had no right to detain them, ... This feast was to be held, not for themselves, but to God” (Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*).

2. How did Pharaoh respond to Moses’ request? (v. 2)

Before we answer this question, we must be reminded about the philosophy of the Pharaoh in Egypt. During this time, Pharaoh was considered a deity. In other words, the Pharaoh was not only considered the supreme ruler of the land, he was also considered a god.

Knowing this, we can have a better understanding of Pharaoh’s response. He first questions Moses about the identity of Moses’ God. He stated “I know not the LORD.”

The Egyptians served many gods, so Pharaoh knew of many different gods. But Pharaoh apparently did not know the one true God.

He also added, "Neither will I let Israel go." Since Pharaoh did not recognize the LORD God's authority, it should be no surprise that Pharaoh did not honor Moses' request. After all, why should he be intimidated by a God he doesn't believe in?

3. What was the significance of referring to the LORD as the "God of the Hebrews" (v. 3)?

Rather than apologize for insulting Pharaoh and quickly retreating, Moses and Aaron hold their ground and reword their request. This time they cite nearly verbatim the words God originally gave Moses in Exodus 3:18. Do they think their initial request failed because they did not use the right words?

The rewording of the request to line up with 3:18 should soften the appeal, making it more acceptable to Pharaoh. God is now introduced as *the God of the Hebrews*; perhaps Pharaoh will accept the existence of what he may view as a more limited deity of a specific group. Second, Moses now highlights the temporary nature of this trip. The people will be gone only *three days*. A short trip should be more appealing to Pharaoh.

A third softening presents itself. Moses and Aaron clarify that the purpose of their trip is to make sacrifices of appeasement (this is an addition to 3:18). If the Hebrews do not make these sacrifices, God may afflict *us*. But who is included in that word *us*? If Moses and Aaron are referring only to the Hebrews, the appeal is for Pharaoh not to take a chance on having his precious workforce depleted. Should the Israelites perish, Pharaoh himself will lose out.

On the other hand, the *us* of the affliction may be broad enough to include Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Given the overall softer tone of this second attempt, the threat implied by this idea seems less likely.

4. What did Pharaoh accuse Moses and Aaron of doing? (vs. 4,5)

Pharaoh does not budge an inch. Instead, he puts his own spin on the request of *Moses and Aaron*. Pharaoh responds, "Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works?" Here Pharaoh implies that Moses and Aaron are simply trying to get the Hebrews out of doing their hard labor. According to Pharaoh, the two standing in front of him are rebels trying to unsettle Pharaoh's smooth economic machine. So he sends them back to work.

Pharaoh's observation that the Israelites are numerous can be taken in two ways. From an economic perspective, he may be concerned about the loss of productivity. From a national-defense perspective, he may be worried about rebellion. Either way, we have no record that Moses and Aaron are allowed time for rebuttal. Pharaoh has the last word (so he thinks). The question is whether or not Moses and Aaron will accept Pharaoh's spin.

The Oppression of Israel (Exodus 5:6-9)

No one challenges Pharaoh's authority and then escapes with only a verbal rebuke! If that were the only consequence, then Pharaoh would soon be flooded with trivial complaints from "nobodies." His failure to retaliate would be perceived as weakness, and his oppressive grip over the people would be diminished.

5. How did Pharaoh make the work of the Hebrew slaves more difficult? (vs. 6-9)

Pharaoh knows that slaves must not be allowed to have hope. This is why he acts *the same day* to crush any rebellion before it can grow.

Pharaoh devises a scheme. He knows that one of the best ways to punish Moses and Aaron is to alienate them from their own people. Pharaoh immediately instructed the taskmasters to make their work even more difficult. Up to this point, straw had been provided to the workforce for making bricks. Now, however, the Hebrews were going to have to gather straw for themselves (v. 7).

In addition, the Hebrews must still maintain the same pace of making bricks as before (v. 8). This was Pharaoh's penalty for wasting time and asking to worship their God.

6. What happened to the Hebrew foremen as a result? (vs. 14-17, not in lesson text)

Since the Hebrews were required to maintain the same quota of bricks for the day without any additional help from the Egyptians, many of the servants were unable to maintain quota. As a result, the Hebrew foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten (v. 14).

When they complained to Pharaoh, Pharaoh accused them of being idle. They were also warned against listening to the empty promises of Moses, which the Egyptians characterized as lies.

Finding no relief by appealing to Pharaoh, the Israelite officers turned against Moses. They complained that he had made them odious to the Egyptians. They even feared for their lives, all because Moses had demanded their right to worship God.

7. How can Christians protect against feeling disappointed when setbacks occur in the church?

Unrealistic or unwarranted expectations can create a certain vulnerability. It is very possible that the Israelites jumped to the conclusion that the arrival of Moses and Aaron meant their plight in Egypt would be resolved immediately. When their condition worsened instead, they turned against their new leaders.

We can review the successes and apparent setbacks in the Bible as these reveal God's character. As we face an unpleasant situation, we can position ourselves for God to act either slowly or quickly. In this way we prepare to grow spiritually in the midst of difficulties. We develop perseverance if God takes longer than anticipated (see Galatians 6:9, 10; James 1:2-4).

The Omnipotence of God (Exodus 5:22-23; 6:1)

8. How did Moses feel about Pharaoh's unwillingness to release the Hebrew slaves? What did Moses say to the Lord regarding this? (vs. 22,23)

Moses is definitely "feeling the heat." Moses knows for certain that God has spoken to him. But the pressure is so great that Moses now questions that calling.

We may find it difficult to blame Moses at this point. He has done what God asked him, and the end result is the opposite of what Moses expects. The *people* are still enslaved, and things have gotten worse. So Moses rightly seeks God and asks Him to make sense of this scandalous turn of events. He is wrong, however, to blame God for Israel's misfortunes (v. 23). It is one thing to question what is happening and why; it is another to claim that one already knows the answer and that God is lacking.

Moses commits Job's error. Job was right that God was somehow connected with the miseries that befell him and his household. Job went too far, however, when he assumed that God caused it all. Job prided himself in being immune to all charges concerning the situation (Job 40:8). So God rebuked Job for speaking out of ignorance (Job 38).

Christians today tend to toggle between two extremes in bringing their concerns to God. Some read passages such as Job 38 and conclude that it is never appropriate

to question God about what they are experiencing. Others speak presumptuously to God, as Moses and Job did.

Biblical books such as Job, Psalms, Lamentations, and Habakkuk help us chart a better path. They teach us that it is appropriate to voice our concerns to God. But they also show us that we must do so as ones who know we do not see the big picture. We must trust that God will work all things for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

9. How was the Lord going to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt? (6:1)

God does not chide Moses for his complaint. Moses' concerns are valid from the perspective of someone in the midst of a crisis who does not see the end. God has indeed allowed *Pharaoh* to do everything he has done. God does, however, set the record straight. Pharaoh certainly will *let* the people *go*. In fact, Pharaoh himself will *drive* the Israelites *out of his land*.

Notice the emphasis God places on His own action. When Pharaoh releases the Israelites, it will be God's work. If Pharaoh thinks this is a contest of divine authority, he is right! In the end, Pharaoh will experience the authority and power of Yahweh.

We must not think of this contest as a mere battle of egos. God is not as concerned with teaching Pharaoh a lesson as He is with instructing Israel. God is creating Israel to be a priestly nation to mediate the glory of His reign. For the Israelites to succeed in this mission, they must learn firsthand that none can compare with Him. God will demonstrate His power over Pharaoh so that Israel may not be tempted to defer unduly to other human rulers later on, whether they be Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, or even Israelite.

Furthermore, God is teaching His people that they are to depend fully on Him for their deliverance. If the first attempt at softening Pharaoh's heart had convinced him to release the Israelites, they may be tempted to think of Moses and Aaron as the source of deliverance. Instead, God hardens Pharaoh's heart (see Exodus 4:21) to the point that God will have to intervene with signs and wonders that one may attribute only to the Lord of all creation.

Conclusion

In Egypt, the Israelites found themselves confronted by powers that were far beyond their control. They struggled against a hierarchy of self-serving political powers, from local foremen to Pharaoh himself. They struggled against oppressive economic powers fueled by Pharaoh's insatiable desire to build architectural monuments. They struggled against ideological powers of manipulators who twisted reality and spread powerful lies that pitted victims against one another.

However, God taught Moses that such powers remained wholly subservient to the God who allowed them to have power only temporarily. When the right moment came, God turned His eternal might against them.

Christians today also face powerful authority structures that seek to exert undue influence over their lives. In many parts of the world, political powers persecute Christians for their faith. In other parts, Christians face economic powers whose persecution is subtler but no less real. We are often called to work all hours of the day and all days of the week, since the economic machine cannot rest. We lose standing and compensation at work for refusing to compromise our faith for the good of the business.

In various parts of the world, Christians appear to be losing a lopsided battle in the war against false ideologies. Those endowed with the power to dispense information routinely misrepresent Christ and His bride (the church) by highlighting the church's failings and ignoring the church's positive contributions. Thus they flood the world with faulty views of reality.

Yet Christ reigns at God's right hand. In that position, Christ has dominion over all power and authority. He will indeed reign until all modern pharaohs are subjugated under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:24, 25). May we recognize daily that He alone is our ultimate authority.

Prayer

Lord, we confess to You that we, like Moses, sometimes lose sight of Your power. The powers that we face are so real and immediate that we often forget that they are temporary. Remind us continually that You alone reign supreme. Guard us against the lies of this world and keep us in Your Word and truth. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thought to Remember

God's power and authority are final.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

It has been said that Israel's crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground was the Old Testament's greatest miracle. Study Exodus 14:15-25,30 as we explore how God saved Israel at the Red Sea.

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