

**Exodus:**

The Redemption of God's People,  
a Covenant with God's People,  
the Renewal of the Covenant for God's people,  
and the Worship Center of God's People.

IV. Comment on the Writing

A. The Redemption of God's People, 1:1-18:27

1. The situation in Egypt, 1:1-22
2. The deliverer of Israel from Egypt, 2:1-4:31
  - a. The birth of the deliverer, 2:1-10
  - b. The flight to Midian, 2:11-25
  - c. The Return of Moses from Egypt, 3:1-4:31
    - 1) The call of Moses, 3:1-6
    - 2) The commission of Moses, 3:7-10
    - 3) The excuses of Moses, 3:11-15
      - a) The first excuse: Inadequacy, 3:11-12  
"Who am I?"  
(God's presence is the cause of human success)
      - b) The second excuse of Moses: Authority, 3:13-15  
"Who are you?"  
(the forever One)
    - 4) The instruction for Moses, 3:16-22
    - 5) The further excuses of Moses, 4:1-17
      - a) The third excuse: Fear of failure, 4:1-9  
"Who will believe me?"  
(two miracles and a promise)
      - b) The fourth excuse of Moses: Credibility, 4:10-17  
"I studder."  
(Who made you as you are?)
    - 6) The journey toward Egypt, 4:18-26
      - a) The instructions to return, vv. 18-20
      - b) The instructions for the confrontation with pharaoh, vv. 21-23

God told Moses that despite the signs of divine power he will perform before pharaoh, pharaoh will not respond because God would not allow him to do so until he lost his own son.

The reference to Israel as God's firstborn son is intriguing (v. 22). A firstborn son to the Egyptians was seen as sacred; Israel is sacred to God! The firstborn's of Egypt would later die and the firstborn's of Israel were delivered!

c) The episode with Zipporah, vv. 24-26

The Zipporah incident is strange and mysterious, scholars are left to speculation, speculation producing a wide variety of interpretations. It seems that Moses had neglected the circumcision of a son. Though some translations insert the name Moses (NIV) in the narrative (v. 26), only a pronoun (him) appears in the Hebrew text. Thus, a pivotal issue is the referent of the pronoun "him." It seems that the referent is in the context of death to firstborns (v. 23).

- (1) A pronoun is identified by its nearest antecedent normally. The "him" seems to be Gershom (v. 24).
- (2) The immediate context (vv. 23) is the dire warning of the death of pharaoh's firstborn. "Israel is my son, My firstborn.... I will kill you son your firstborn...". Gershom would have been among the firstborns but without the promise of the covenant. *Remember Gershom by this time was likely a mature adult. He likely had the faith of his parents, but not the sign of that faith.*
- (3) It seems illogical that God would seek the death of His servant, Moses, who has just been called to return to Egypt with the promise that he would lead His people out of bondage.
- (4) Moses' parents most likely circumcised him as the custom since they were pious Hebrews. If they had the conviction to prevent Pharaoh's murderous plot, devising one other their own, it would seem they would have followed the custom of circumcision as practiced since the time of Abraham, being the sign of embracing

the faith of Abraham (“a token of the everlasting covenant” [Gen 17:3]).

- (5) We know that between the birth of Gershom and Eliezer Moses seemed to have progress in spiritual perception (from an “alien, a sojourner” [Gershom] to “God is my helper” [Eliezer] in naming his sons. Moses had moved from prematurity in his perception as Israel’s deliverer (the killing of the Egyptian taskmaster) to trust in God and His ways.
- (6) If the circumcised person in the narrative was Moses, he would not have been able to immediately travel (remember the Shechem-Hamor-Jacob-Dinah episode [Gen. 34]). Zipporah and his sons did not travel to Egypt and only rejoined Moses in 18:1-5. This may have been due to Gershom’s circumcision that prohibited travel (in the least Gershom would have been in his twenties).
- (7) This would also suggest that Zipporah grew in her faith understanding the gravity of not having circumcised sons, not possessing the sign of the covenant. She took the initiative whereas Moses seemed unaware of a pending crisis. It is also likely that Eliezer had been circumcised.

Perhaps Douglas Stuart’s summary of the passage would help (*Exodus*): “Exodus 4:24-26 is a story showing how Zipporah, by performing as officially as she could a circumcision on her son—whom his father had failed so far to conform to the covenant requirements of Gen 17:10-14—saved him from the punishment required by the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision. Nothing can thwart God’s plan of redemption. Since Moses had not yet done his part regarding Gershom’s circumcision, God accepted Zipporah’s decisive and pious actions in circumcising her son as an appropriate substitute so that God’s chosen, yet reluctant and headstrong, prophet could continue his assignment to lead the Israelites out of bondage. God often relents if people repent. Right words and actions, if they

show the true intent of the heart, demonstrate right repentance. Moses might have lost his own firstborn son, just as Pharaoh would later lose his (predicted immediately prior to the present passage, in 4:23). Zipporah's intervention prevented that from happening."

"You are a bridegroom of blood" (vv. 25, 26) is not a negative comment on Zipporah's part. She is likely saying that she and Moses were joined as one through the blood of circumcision, a spiritual union, so that Gershom is her son. She spared his life! "The Lord let him alone" (v. 26).

The event at the border of Egypt would remind the original readers of Gen. 32 and Jacob's wrestling with God at Peniel on the Jabbok River upon his return to the land. In both cases there is a brush with death that was memorable. It is interesting that in the previous paragraph God threatened pharaoh's son with death and here he threatens "Gershom.

d. The Struggle of Moses with Pharaoh in Egypt, 5:1-13:16

Durham (*Exodus*, 99) summarized the conflict with pharaoh in this manner, "Each of the first nine of the mighty-act accounts may be said to have the same fundamental point, expressed in much the same way. That point, concisely summarized, is that Yahweh powerfully demonstrates his Presence to a Pharaoh prevented from believing so that Israel may come to full belief."

1) The preface to the struggle with Amenhotep II, 5:1-6:27

The theme of chapter five is the opposition that comes with obedience. The enthusiasm of the worshippers in chapter four disappears. The Hebrews recognized the mercy of God in Moses and worshiped (4:31), but the result, in the short term, was oppression and pain.

(a) The confrontation with pharaoh, 5:1-5

Moses and Aaron demanded that God's people be allowed to leave Egypt to worship. Pharaoh reacted in three ways: first, he doubted the authority of the God of Israel (5:2), second, he did not believe that the God of the Hebrews could do him harm (5:2-3), and third, he did not want to lose his labor force

(5:4-5). It must be remembered that the pharaohs viewed themselves as a god. While pharaoh claims not to know the God of the Hebrews (v. 2), the point of the coming plagues is that he might know Him a way that we must avoid since for pharaoh it was only in and through judgment. The real contest in this passage is between the God of Moses, the Lord of heaven and earth, and the gods of pharaoh. Pharaoh do not know the God of the Hebrews (v. 2), but he will to some degree

The request of Moses for a festival in the wilderness (v. 1, also 3:18) seems from our western literalistic approach to speech as deceptive. In Near Eastern culture, what was understood was a request for much more reflective of oriental bargaining procedures, which was dialectical (Abraham and Ephron the Hittite over a burial place for Sarah [Gen. 23]; or Jacob and Laban over a bride [Gen. 30]). Was Moses asking for a three-day journey? The paragraph suggests a complete deliverance. God promises His presence, power, and success. The request that Moses is asked to make of pharaoh most likely was a hypothetical request to determine his attitude toward the release of the Jews (v. 19). It seems that God would thereby reveal pharaoh's heart.

The three-day request is not found in God's instructions to Moses (3:18, 5:3); God only said that he would bring the people to the mountain, Sinai (3:12) and later enter Canaan (3:8, 17). The stated reason for the request to journey three days to worship was that God commanded it and their failure to comply would only bring judgment (v. 3). Pharaoh interprets the plea as laziness (v. 4)

(b) The increase of hardship on the Jews, 5:6-21

[1] The reply of pharaoh, vv. 6-9

Pharaoh's reaction was to increase the oppression making it clear that sometimes things get worse before they get better. The assumption seems to have been that the quest for a festival implied that the Israelites had free time; free

time lead to rebelliousness in an enlarging population; therefore, the people must be oppressed with greater requirements.

Straw was not so much a bonding agent to make bricks stronger; when it chemically decomposed an acid was released that gave clay a greater elasticity in brick molding.

[2] The demands upon the people, vv. 10-12

It is interesting that in the archeological work at Pithom, a city the Hebrews labored to build (1:11), revealed three strata or quality of bricks. The lower level of its massive walls revealed bricks with straw in the composition, a middle level the bricks were composed of reeds from the Nile, and the higher levels was made of bricks composed of only Nile mud.

[3] The harsh treatment of the people, vv. 13-14

[4] The complaint of the people, vv. 15-19

[5] The response of the Jews to Moses, 5:20-21

(c) The cry of Moses to the Lord, 5:22-23

In this crisis, Moses turns to the Lord in very graphic, heartfelt terms (v. 22). This shows Moses to be a godly man. This characteristic of the man will be evident in many instances throughout his life. Moses sees God as the cause of the problem, more so than pharaoh.

[1] The blaming cry, v. 22

[2] The blaming reason, v. 23

Moses' cry to God reveals the intimacy of relationship that he had with God. "Why did you ever send me?" Complaint is not necessarily wrong if God had not revealed the immediate consequences; it is not an accusation. Moses did not understand the implications of 3:19, 21. We can turn to God in our bitterness, but we must remember that it can be born of a lack of perspective and ignorance. It is a proper human emotional response to threat.

Applications:

1. Sometimes God concedes to our pleas and sends us solutions that prove problematic (Aaron, 4:14). It is better to trust God than ask for help sometimes, certainly if the motivation is within ourselves, fear. Aaron was perhaps more eloquent, but his character was flawed. Have you asked for help only to discover you inherited a burden in the process? What does this say about counseling our fears?
2. Often the view we have of ourselves is not true. Acts 7:22 indicates that Moses was powerful in words. You meet people with a larger-than-life ego, but there are also people that seem down on themselves. When you think about yourself in what ways is your evaluation too high and too low?
3. An interesting insight is that Moses at the bush is instructed to remove his shoes, an act of reverence, because God is holy. Israelite worship from the Tabernacle to the Temple was predicated on the absolute holiness of God, one who desires to dwell among His people. God is above us, absolute in power and perfection, yet has willed to be among us. While Moses is warned in the manner of his coming to God, he, nonetheless, was granted that privilege and so we. While God is holy and above us, He is not at all impersonal. This is the central theme of the entire Bible! Are you aware of the privilege you have of intimacy with God? Do you take off your shoes frequently before Him?
4. Reflecting on the excuses that Moses raised against his divine calling to lead God's people, F.B. Meyer (Deuteronomy, 71) wrote, "Cherish the lowliest thought you choose of yourself, but unite it with the loftiest conception of God's All-Sufficiency. Self-depreciation may lead to the marring of a useful life. We must think soberly of ourselves, not too lowly, and not too extravagantly. The one talent must not be buried in the earth." To think of yourself too highly (the cultural assumption that feeling good about yourself is the key to a productive life) is just as wrong as a profound and paralyzing sense of disqualification. Both extremes leave God out! Have you practically left God out of your life when you think of what He desires you to do? Do you measure your goals by your insufficiencies?
5. Sometimes God's work for us comes later in life: Moses was 80. Moses' life divides into three equal parts: 40 years in Egypt, 40 years in the wilderness as a shepherd, and 40 years leading God's people in the wilderness (Acts 7:23). Does this not suggest that we are never too old to serve the Lord? What does this tell us about retirement? Maybe your greatest service to God is ahead of you. What are you doing to prepare for that eventuality?
6. It is often the case that things get worse before they get better. Seeking to bring relief Moses became the cause of greater grief. To deal with this fact, we all

must take the long view and not judge our God by the immediacy of circumstances. Negative immediate consequences are often stepping-stones to better things. There is an old truism: “No pain, No gain.” Can you think of examples of this in your life? God wants us to live our lives that He will deliver us. Are you willing to trust Him when things seem to be going in reverse of your hopes and desires? Have you ever said these words to God? “O Lord why hast thou brought harm to this people? Why didst thou ever send me (5:22).”

7. The way of worldly people is that they frequently use threat and accusation to induce compliance. Fear is a dominant motivation in the secular affairs of men; it is not to be the case with us. Jesus said it this way: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.... It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve... (Matt. 20:26-28). Pharaoh used his power to threaten, but that is only the way of the world. We believe the greatest motivating force is love expressed in service to others. Is that true of you? Are you a manipulator or lover?