

Exodus 4:18 -5:23

Last week you will recall Moses' reluctance to do what God TOLD him to do. Finally, after tossing the "Hot Potato" back and forth a couple of times, Moses crossed that invisible line and the LORD became angry with him. In His grace and mercy, He didn't tell Moses to go back to his sheep but rather He was sending his brother Aaron to help him. That seemed to calm Moses down. But, as the old adage goes, "be careful what you ask for". Aaron was not the perfect person for Moses and he certainly was a thorn in his side during their desert trek around the wilderness.

This week we will see Moses returning to Jethro to pack up the family and head out to Egypt and what happened to him when he arrived back in Egypt.

The journey was interesting, to say the least. Let see what happens to our timid deliverer. Sometimes, the lessons we are to learn are placed on a silver platter before us; Some times, we learn by hardship and the heavy hand of God. Oft-times, our choices add to the difficulty.

In addition to seeing how Moses acts and reacts, we will see how God hardened Pharaoh's heart to resist Moses. Many have great difficulty with this concept, so, we'll spend some time discussing it.

(Exodus 4:18 NKJV) So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please let me go and return to my brethren who *are* in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

The timidity of Moses is seen in his request. Instead of saying, "Jethro, the LORD has called me to go to Egypt to free my brethren from bondage", it's more like, "Jethro, I miss my brethren and I want to know if they are still alive because of the heavy-handed cruelty of the king". The sad thing is, Moses knows that they are alive, so the request is based in a lie.

Perhaps, he is thinking that his father-in-law won't let him go because of his shepherding responsibilities.... But, if his father-in-law is a priest of Midian, you'd might think that he would understand.

(Exodus 4:19 NKJV) Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead."

The LORD tells him once again, to go, perhaps as if to say, "It's not you brethren that are dead but the very ones who wanted you dead are gone". In other words, "I heard what you said to Jethro...nice try Moses".

(Exodus 4:20 NKJV) Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

Moses wants his family with him. His first son is Gershon. We are not told the name of the second but considering the incident on the road to Egypt, he must have been recently born.

Moses also remembers to take the rod...Note that it says, "**the rod of God**". The LORD does NOT want Moses or anyone else to think that Moses was behind its miraculous powers.

(Exodus 4:21 NKJV) And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all

those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. **But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.**

Once again, the LORD tells Moses what to expect. You will perform the wonders that I showed you on the Mountain. But, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will not let my people go!

People make much of this. Here and in Chapter 7 verse 3, the LORD clearly states that He will do the hardening. However, the LORD was speaking predictively – something Pharaoh would do. Then there comes 7 more references that clearly show that it was Pharaoh's own will that hardened his heart before God is said to have hardened it. In other words, was God confirming to Pharaoh what he did of his own free will?

As it turns out, there are an equal number of verses that clearly state the Pharaoh hardened his own heart and God hardening it for him. This, once again, gets into the paradox of free-will vs the sovereignty of God. It's a discussion whose answer lies with God. Reserve your questions and comments for when you see him face to face. One point that might be obvious but I'll state it anyway: God's choices are NEVER arbitrary and there is no divine "eeny-meeny-miny-moe". All of His choices are planful and reasonable to Him even when we can't understand Him. Not only are His Plans and Purposes NOT capricious, but they ARE in fact, good.

(Exodus 4:22 NKJV) Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "**Israel is My son, My firstborn.**" (Exodus 4:23 NKJV) So I say to you, let **My son** go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn." ' ' "

Israel was chosen by God, adopted by God, redeemed by God for a purpose. As the first-born son, he had many spiritual responsibilities as well as material ones. This "first born" son was, first and foremost, to bring Christ into the world. The pure and holy Words of God were given to Israel and meticulously maintained by them throughout the centuries.

Romans 9:3-5 NKJV For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen **according to the flesh**, (4) who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises; (5) of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.

I don't see any scripture that shows that Moses said this to Pharaoh. Not even with the final plague was this phrase "Israel is My son, My Firstborn" spoken. However, that doesn't negate its truth. "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29 NKJV)

(Exodus 4:24 NKJV) And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him.

Many believe that the LORD struck Moses with a grave illness. This is very strange because Moses was headed to Egypt to deliver God's Chosen People. The LORD doesn't say exactly why He sought to kill him, so we need to look at the context.

(Exodus 4:25 NKJV) 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!**"

It appears that Moses neglected to circumcise his son. It was either the most recent son or perhaps the older Gershon. It appears that Moses understood why the LORD was so angry. He explained it to Zipporah, his wife and she had to perform the circumcision for Moses. In her disgust, she took the bloody foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet. She was not happy with her husband's neglect of his duty.

(Exodus 4:26 NKJV) So He let him go. Then she said, "*You are* a husband of blood!"—because of the circumcision.

Seems like she retained her anger and disgust with Moses AND repeat the phrase "husband of blood".

It is believed that when Moses recovered, he sent his wife and sons back home to Jethro. Not everyone agrees with this timing and some say he sent them home sometime after his confrontations with Pharaoh and the impending plagues!

Why was this so important to the LORD?

(Moses neglected the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant and made it seem as if it were not important). The sign of the covenant was a token that spoke of God's faithfulness to His promises throughout all of the generations of the Children of Israel).

(Exodus 4:27 NKJV) And the LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him on the mountain of God, and kissed him. (Exodus 4:28 NKJV) So Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him.

Aaron finally meets up with Moses. It was a joyous reunion between brothers who had been separated for 40 years!

Moses fills his brother in regarding the "mission", including all of the signs that the LORD commanded Moses to perform.

(Exodus 4:29 NKJV) Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. (Exodus 4:30 NKJV) And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. (Exodus 4:31 NKJV) So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.

The elders were tribal leaders and heads of families. They were gathered together to hear from Moses and Aaron. Aaron was the spokesman. This makes sense since they may or may not have remembered Moses (and if they did, those memories may have not been too flattering). Aaron tells them about the LORD's care and compassion towards them and had sent the brothers to deal with the situation. Moses performed the signs that God had given him and it was enough to cause the elders to bow their heads and worship their God for hearing their cries and responding to their affliction.

Isn't it interesting that the elders readily accepted what was told to them? There was no push back, no "ok, but what's the name of this God you speak of". No, Moses doubts and uncertainties were fear based and certainly not faith based.

But faith needs exercise.

And Moses is about to get a real workout! This chapter might be subtitled, “Hey Moses, with a friend like you, who needs an enemy”.

(Exodus 5:1 NKJV) 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.**' "

Recall that Exodus 3:18 said that when they came to Pharaoh, Aaron or Moses was to say to him, “The LORD God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God”.

Perhaps the brothers decided to “shoot the moon” and ask that the people go into the wilderness to worship God without any time limits...

(Exodus 5:2 NKJV) 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."

This is a stark contrast to Moses' question of “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?”. Pharaoh was considered a god by the people. The question is immediately clear: “Who is this god that I should obey him”. The use of “LORD” is just repeating the name Moses used, and not in any way an admission of Him being Yahveh.

If Pharaoh seems put out by the request, it is certainly understandable. Not only did he think of himself as a god, he had absolute authority in Egypt. There was no constitution, there was no law higher than he and there was nothing like a legislature who had the kind of power that he had.

Archeologists found an inscription on an ancient temple in Egypt that reads, “I am that which was, and is, and shall be, and no man has lifted my veil”. **This is the man that Moses and Aaron faced.**

(Exodus 5:3 NKJV) So they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the LORD our God, **lest He fall upon us** with pestilence or with the sword."

Moses clarifies that they are only asking for three days. Then he adds something that God didn't say, namely, if you don't let us go, our God will strike us with pestilence or with a sword. Perhaps, Moses was trying to solicit some pity or compassion but more likely he was anticipating Pharaoh's response. Three days is a lot less time away than your workforce being quarantined because of a plague! Add to that the cost of masks, gloves, sanitizer and social distancing then you'll have quite a mess on your hands.

Perhaps the phrase “lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword” was meant to tell Pharaoh that the three-days that they were requesting was a lot better than having a huge slave pool decimated by a plague.

(Exodus 5:4 NKJV) Then the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the

people from their work? Get *back* to your labor." (Exodus 5:5 NKJV) And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land *are* many now, and you make them rest from their labor!"

Pharaoh isn't fooled by their request. They don't want to sacrifice, they want a three-day weekend to par-tay. Or so he thinks...

Get back to work!

(Exodus 5:6 NKJV) So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, (Exodus 5:7 NKJV) "You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves.

Why straw? Straw was used for 2 reasons. First, it would add some structural strength to the clay and second, it evidently had an acidity that made the bricks stronger. Archeologists have found bricks with various types of straw and some without it at all.

Some of us remember that "horse-hair" was used in preparing plaster for use in walls. The hair provided strength to the plaster but it required weekly brushing to keep it looking nice.

The Egyptians used to provide the straw for the bricks...but Pharaoh became vindictive and now the Hebrews would have to get the straw themselves and therefore it would take a lot longer to make the bricks.

(Exodus 5:8 NKJV) And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to our God.'

(Exodus 5:9 NKJV) Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, **and let them not regard false words.**"

Just to add salt in an open wound, Pharaoh orders that their daily quota of bricks will be the same even though they would have to spend much time looking for straw.

Pharaoh taunts the Hebrews for wanting to sacrifice to their God. He wants them to believe that their God has lied to them.

Pharaoh is probably feeling pretty good about himself; he's taking on the God of the Hebrews. He's showing Him a thing or two!

(Exodus 5:10 NKJV) And the taskmasters of the people and their officers went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh: 'I will not give you straw. (Exodus 5:11 NKJV) Go, get yourselves straw where you can find it; yet none of your work will be reduced.' " (Exodus 5:12 NKJV) So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw. (Exodus 5:13 NKJV) And the taskmasters forced *them* to hurry, saying, "Fulfill your work, *your* daily quota, as when there was straw." (Exodus 5:14 NKJV) Also the officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten *and* were asked, "Why have you not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and today, as before?"

And so, things take a turn for the worse. The Hebrews are forced to meet their quotas and were beaten because they fell behind. (plus, the straw they collected wasn't full bushels but just the leftovers from gleaming or winnowing), Apparently, from the next verse (15), the

orders from Pharaoh were given to his taskmasters and not to the Hebrew officials. They just don't understand why the straw has hit the fan!

(Exodus 5:15 NKJV) Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why are you dealing thus with your servants? (Exodus 5:16 NKJV) There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, 'Make brick!' And indeed your servants *are* beaten, **but the fault is in your own people.**" (Exodus 5:17 NKJV) But he said, "You *are* idle! Idle! Therefore you say, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.'" (Exodus 5:18 NKJV) Therefore go now *and* work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks." (Exodus 5:19 NKJV) And the officers of the children of Israel saw *that they were* in trouble after it was said, "You shall not reduce *any* bricks from your daily quota." (Exodus 5:20 NKJV) Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them.

So, the officers of the Hebrew lay their complaint at the feet of Pharaoh. They don't understand why the straw was taken away and they lay the blame squarely on his taskmasters. Note that the word "fault" is the translation of the Hebrew for "sin". That's quite an accusation coming from a bunch of slaves. Pharaoh is not pleased with their assessment! He repeats what he told Moses and Aaron – you are slothful and lazy! That's the only reason you want to sacrifice to your so-called God. Therefore, your quotas are NOT being reduced! That was enough to convince the Hebrew officials that they were in a heap of trouble (the language seems to say that they understood that they were the objects of the evil intentions of Pharaoh).

When they left Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them. Wouldn't you love to be a fly on the wall for that meeting?

Oh wait...we can be:

Exodus 5:21-23 NKJV And they said to them, "Let the LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us." (22) So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why *is* it You have sent me? (23) For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all."

They squarely lay the blame on Moses and Aaron. And Moses turned to the LORD (presumably in private), and proceeded to blame Him. And, oh by the way, why did you send me to deliver Your people when obviously You haven't done it!

There's a lot going on here. First, I saw a picture of the Garden where Satan is deceiving Eve and challenging her beliefs about God. Pharaoh is doing the same. He too believes he's a god. He too taunts God. And Moses, like Adam and Eve, end up blaming God.

But there's a lot to say here about how a calling of God works (or doesn't work)

What did Moses expect would happen? Did he expect an easy time because he was doing God's will?

When things get hard, do we automatically assume that we've misunderstood the call? Or, do we automatically blame Satan?

Is there any time when we should call it quits? Or what would be a reason to quit?

These are important questions for any calling – now, consider our callings as Christians?