

**Reformation Fellowship Notes • December 6, 2015**  
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**Handout #9**  
**Exodus 4:27–5:23**

**I. Introduction**

- A. God is ready to fulfill the promises he had made to Abraham a half a millennium ago.
  - 1. He has heard the groaning of his people.
  - 2. He is going to bring them out of their slavery in Egypt.
  - 3. To do this, he raised up Moses.
- B. Moses is uniquely positioned to be able to help.
  - 1. He was an Israelite raised as the grandson of Pharaoh.
  - 2. But when he tries to help, the Israelites reject his leadership.
    - a) He flees to the desert to save his life.
    - b) He marries a shepherdess and herds sheep for 40 years.
  - 3. God appears to him and persuades him to return to Egypt and lead his people out.
- C. Moses is reluctant to take on the project; he was hurt.
  - 1. But God promises to help him and to establish his authority.
  - 2. So Moses sets out.
  - 3. But God inflicts a fatal illness on him.
    - a) He recovers only after his first-born son is circumcised.
    - b) At this point, Moses fully identifies with the Israelites.
- D. When we pick up the action at the end of chapter four, Moses is still in the desert.
  - 1. But we begin by following the activity of Aaron.

**II. Exodus 4:27-31**

- A. God spoke to Aaron and told him to go meet Moses.
  - 1. This is an act of faith on Aaron's part.
  - 2. How did Aaron get out of Egypt?
    - a) He was an old man by now.
    - b) It may have been easy for the old to leave.
  - 3. How did he find Moses?
    - a) How did Aaron know where Moses had gone?
    - b) Had there been correspondence?
- B. Atmosphere in Egypt among the Israelites
  - 1. Probably an atmosphere of salvation expectation

- a) Death of the Pharaoh
- b) If they remembered the promise made to Abraham, it is time.
2. Israelites may have sensed something was afoot, but they did not know exactly what.
  - a) Similar to Messianic expectation during the time of Jesus
3. This is when Aaron received a message from God to go meet Moses.
  - a) God had told Moses that he was sending Aaron. (Genesis 4:14)
- C. Aaron went to Sinai.
  1. They met at the mountain of God.
  2. He kissed Moses.
    - a) True affection
  3. Moses filled Aaron in on all that God had said and done.
    - a) Aaron had probably been prepared by all that had happened to reunite him with Moses.
      - (1) God telling Aaron to go out and meet Moses had to be significant.
      - (2) Just locating Moses was a minor miracle.
- D. Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt.
  1. They gathered the elders.
    - a) They said what God told them to say.
      - (1) Notice that Aaron did the speaking.
    - b) They performed the signs that God told them to perform.
      - (1) The people believed.
    - c) They told them that God was concerned about them and had seen their affliction.
    - d) They worshipped God.
  2. What is the nature of their belief?
    - a) What they wanted to hear
    - b) Impressive signs
    - c) Requires something of them
      - (1) They did risk being punished as rebels.
      - (2) But that risk is not immediate nor definite.
    - d) This is temporary belief.
      - (1) “That sounds about right” response
      - (2) No indication of enduring, life-changing faith
        - (a) I think this is often the meaning of “believe” in Gospel accounts.

### **III. Exodus 5:1-9**

- A. Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh.
  1. They make a request (first try).
    - a) This request is from Yahweh.
      - (1) “Thus says the Lord”
        - (a) First time a prophet uses this phrase in the Bible.
      - (2) “God of Israel”

- (a) Clarification as to who YHWH is
  - (3) Let Yahweh's people go ("Send my people out" command)
  - (4) To celebrate a feast to Yahweh
  - (5) The feast will be in the wilderness.
2. Points of interest
- a) Pharaoh had probably heard little or nothing about Yahweh.
  - b) Yahweh is claiming to be the God of a group of people who are in the service of Pharaoh.
    - (1) And those people are just slaves.
      - (a) This would have indicated that Yahweh was a weak god.
  - c) This appears to downplay what God really intends to do.
    - (1) God is making a lesser request now, but he will make a greater request later.
  - d) This is different from what God said Moses should say to Pharaoh earlier (3:18).
    - (1) In historical narrative, exact repetition in such cases is common.
      - (a) When they don't match exactly, it can be very significant.
      - (b) Other times it is not significant.
    - (2) Some commentators understand Moses and Aaron as being disobedient here.
      - (a) Their second appeal is closer to the 3:18 version.
      - (b) The first try might have been shaped by some overconfidence.
3. Pharaoh's response is harsh.
- a) Who is Yahweh to order Pharaoh around?
    - (1) Pharaoh was the ruler of the greatest power in the world.
    - (2) Pharaoh was also thought to be a god.
    - (3) Pharaoh sees no reason to listen to the voice of Yahweh.
  - b) Pharaoh does not know Yahweh.
    - (1) Should he have known Yahweh?
  - c) Pharaoh will not let the people go.
    - (1) He is not open to investigating the merits of the case.
      - (a) He asks no questions; he thinks he knows what is going on.
    - (2) He stands to lose much.
      - (a) Manpower loss
      - (b) Prestige loss
4. Moses' response (second try)
- a) The response is milder and explanatory.
    - (1) Moses and Aaron were apparently taken aback.
      - (a) They expected Pharaoh to wither at the first proclamation.
      - (b) But he was more hostile than before.
      - (c) Now they are pleading, whereas earlier they were commanding.
  - b) God of the Hebrews
    - (1) This is a partial answer to the question who this god is.
    - (2) This would not have been impressive to Pharaoh.
  - c) "Met with us"
    - (1) It was at God's initiative that this happened.

- (a) This was not their idea.
  - d) Three days journey (a temporary loss of manpower)
  - e) “that we may sacrifice”
    - (a) They could not sacrifice to their god in Egypt without defiling Egypt.
  - f) “lest he fall upon us with pestilence or the sword”
    - (1) This would be a loss for Pharaoh also.
  - g) There have been no threats to Pharaoh up to this point.
- 5. Pharaoh’s second response is even harsher.
  - a) Note the use of “King of Egypt.”
    - (1) Pharaoh—leader of Egypt
    - (2) King of Egypt—powerful ruler
  - b) Pharaoh addresses them directly, “Moses and Aaron. . .”
    - (1) He sees this as a scheme dreamed up by the two brothers.
      - (a) He is holding them personally responsible.
      - (2) Not something initiated by a real god
  - c) “Why do you draw the people away?”
    - (1) This is an accusation, not a real question.
    - (2) This distracts the people from being productive.
      - (a) Productivity will not prove to be what is most important to Pharaoh.
    - (3) The Hebrew word “draw away” sounds like “Pharaoh.”
      - (a) Why do you “Pharaoh” the people away?
      - (b) This is an usurpation of Pharaoh’s power.
  - d) “Get to your burdens”
    - (1) If they were doing their jobs, they would not be disrupting things.
  - e) The reasoning behind Pharaoh’s words:
    - (1) Cassuto says when the verb “said” with the same subject is repeated, the second thing said describes the thinking behind the first.
      - (a) The people are many, and you would have them stop working.
        - (i) Fear of loss of control of so many people?
- 6. Pharaoh issues a new decree.
  - a) “the same day”
    - (1) Pharaoh is motivated to act quickly.
      - (a) Anger?
      - (b) Fear?
      - (c) Indignation?
  - b) No more straw
    - (1) Important for making good bricks
    - (2) So the Israelites will have to go and gather their own straw.
      - (a) This will require additional time and effort.
    - (3) The quota of bricks per day will remain the same.
  - c) Pharaoh’s assessment as to why Moses and Aaron came to them:
    - (1) Israelites are lazy.
    - (2) Moses and Aaron came to get them relief from their work.
    - (3) Pharaoh will use more force.

- (a) Pharaoh is afraid that any concessions will cause people to see him as weak.
- (4) “pay no attention to false words”
  - (a) He fears the Israelites have hope Moses’ ploy will get them some relief.
  - (b) He wants to stamp this rebellion out immediately.
  - (c) He is referring to what God said as “false words.”
    - (i) Israelites must decide what to believe.
    - (ii) On one hand—promises and signs
    - (iii) On the other hand—the “facts on the ground” (Pharaoh is in control)

**IV. Exodus 5:10-14**

- A. The taskmasters and the foremen announced the new decree to the Israelites.
  - 1. “taskmasters and foremen”
    - a) Taskmasters were mentioned in 1:11.
    - b) Taskmasters were probably Egyptian.
    - c) Foremen were Hebrews (cf. 5:14).
      - (1) This same thing was done during the Holocaust.
      - (2) Jewish “foremen” were sometimes more cruel than the Germans.
        - (a) They did not want to lose their privileged positions.
  - 2. The terms are exactly what Pharaoh had said.
  - 3. “Thus said Pharaoh”
    - a) There is clearly a competition going on.
- B. Israelites were forced to find stubble.
  - 1. Straw is long; stubble is short.
  - 2. This produced a worse product and fewer bricks.
    - a) Pharaoh is acting to his detriment.
    - b) This is a kind of insanity.
- C. Pharaoh thinks that the only reason they are claiming they must go sacrifice to God is because they want to get out of work.
  - 1. Pharaoh misunderstands his adversary.
    - a) So he will act foolishly.
- D. Israelites cannot meet their quotas.
  - 1. They failed to meet quotas for two days.
  - 2. Foremen were beaten.
    - a) This was to make the foremen more demanding.

**V. Exodus 5:15-21**

- A. The foremen complained to Pharaoh.
  - 1. These are privileged Hebrews.

- a) Most loyal to Pharaoh
  2. They stress their loyalty to Pharaoh by calling themselves “servants.”
  3. They can’t imagine that Pharaoh would punish them, if he knew the situation.
    - a) Ignorance, not cruelty, is the problem.
  4. They blame Pharaoh’s people.
    - a) They stop short of blaming Pharaoh.
    - b) They are being punished for not doing that which is impossible.
- B. Pharaoh responds.
1. The Israelites are lazy.
    - a) This is why they want to go worship their god.
  2. Pharaoh did not budge.
    - a) Go back to work.
    - b) The terms will remain unchanged.
- C. Foremen report to Moses and Aaron.
1. Moses and Aaron were eager to hear what had happened.
    - a) They were probably hoping Pharaoh would become more reasonable.
  2. Foremen report that Pharaoh is not backing down a bit.
    - a) They ask Yahweh to punish Moses and Aaron.
      - (1) Moses and Aaron provoked Pharaoh to act harshly.
        - (a) They hardened his heart against the Israelites.
        - (2) Pharaoh will use this to work the Israelites to death.
        - (3) Therefore Moses and Aaron cannot be doing the will of God.
          - (a) They should be punished.
  3. Example of use of terms to flag an association.
    - a) Two words from Moses’ statement to Pharaoh are used in the description of the exchange with the foremen:
      - (1) “Fall upon” (*paga*) is used to describe the following:
        - (a) How God would confront the Israelites;
        - (b) How the foremen (representing Pharaoh) confronted Moses and Aaron (representing YHWH).
      - (2) “Sword” (*herev*) is used to describe the following:
        - (a) The fate of the Israelites at the hands of God, if they don’t go to worship him.
        - (b) The fate they are being threatened with by Pharaoh if they don’t go to work.
- D. Moses’ worst nightmare
1. He had feared the Israelites would not accept his leadership.
    - a) He was persuaded to go and lead Israelites.
  2. Meeting with elders went well.
    - a) That was encouraging.
  3. But meeting with Pharaoh went poorly.

- a) So Moses' actions have made the situation worse.
  - b) The foremen blame Moses.
4. Relationship between leader and the led is always tested when the leader's actions make the conditions for the led worse.

**VI. Exodus 5:22-23**

- A. Moses appeals to God very honestly.
- 1. Why did you harm this people?
    - a) You came under the pretext of helping them, and now you end up hurting them.
  - 2. Why did you involve me?
    - a) I acted thinking I would help my people, but I have brought them more harm.
    - b) Things have only gotten worse since I came to "save" them.
  - 3. You said you were going to deliver them. That has in no way happened.
- B. Moses is performing the role of a prophet.
- 1. He is identifying with the people.
    - a) He feels their pain.
  - 2. He appeals to God on their behalf.
- C. In the next chapter, God responds graciously to Moses.

**VII. Conclusion**

- A. God is not a tame lion.
- 1. Incident in the desert
    - a) God persuades Moses to go lead the Israelites out of Egypt.
    - b) Moses reluctantly agrees and starts out.
    - c) God brings him to the brink of death.
    - d) God then restores Moses after his son is circumcised.
  - 2. Response of Pharaoh
    - a) Moses gets the support of the elders of Israel.
    - b) Moses is told to command Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.
    - c) Pharaoh refuses (they were warned about this).
    - d) Pharaoh makes their working conditions worse.
      - (1) This was not expected.
      - (2) The foremen blame Moses.
  - 3. Moses had to wonder whether he was doing what he should.
    - a) God did not help his self-doubt with unbroken successes.
    - b) Moses had to learn to ignore the circumstances and the criticism.
      - (1) He just had to do what he had been called to do.