

Rough Start



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 5:1–23, Rev. 11:8, Exod. 6:1–13, Ps. 73:23–26, 2 Cor. 6:16, Exod. 6:28–7:7.*

Memory Text: “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.” ’ 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.’ ” (*Exodus 5:1, 2, NKJV*).

Many believers think that when one decides to follow God, he or she will experience only happiness, prosperity, and success. That's not necessarily the case, however, as the Bible itself often shows. Sometimes many obstacles appear, as well as new difficulties. This can be very frustrating, and it prompts hard questions that don't always have easy answers or, it seems, any answers at all.

Those who trust in God will face numerous trials. When we persevere, however, God brings solutions that come on His terms and in His time. His ways may conflict with our expectations for quick and instantaneous solutions, but we must learn to trust Him regardless.

Thus, the topic for this week: Moses and the command to lead God's people out of Egypt—about as clear a call from God as anyone could have. Indeed, it included miracles, as well as God Himself speaking directly to Moses and letting him know exactly what He wanted Moses to do.

How much easier, then, could it have been for Moses, knowing that he had been called by God and even given a specific task?

It should have been simple then, right?

Read on.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 19.

Who Is the Lord?

Following God's orders, Moses goes to Pharaoh to begin the process in which he, Moses, would "bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (*Exod. 3:10, NKJV*).

What was Pharaoh's response to God's demand, "Let my people go" (*see Exod. 5:1, 2*), and what significance can be found in this response?

"Who is the LORD?" Pharaoh declares, not in any desire to know Him but, instead, as an act of defiance or even denial of this God, whom he admits that he does not know. " 'I do not know the LORD' " (*NKJV*), he says, almost as a boast.

How many people throughout history have uttered the same thing? How tragic, because, as Jesus Himself said, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (*John 17:3*).

Egypt, with the pharaoh as king, is symbolic of a power that denies God's presence and authority. It is an entity that stands in opposition to God, His Word, and His people.

Pharaoh's next declaration that "I will not let Israel go" reveals even more this rebellion against the living God, further making Egypt a symbol, not only for the denial of God but for a system that fights against Him.

No wonder many saw this same attitude, millennia later, in the French Revolution (*see also Isa. 30:1-3 and Rev. 11:8*). Pharaoh thought he was a god or the son of a god—a broad reference to a belief in one's own supreme power, strength, and intelligence.

"Of all nations presented in Bible history, Egypt most boldly denied the existence of the living God and resisted His commands. No monarch ever ventured upon more open and highhanded rebellion against the authority of Heaven than did the king of Egypt. When the message was brought him by Moses, in the name of the Lord, Pharaoh proudly answered: 'Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto His voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go,' Exodus 5:2, A.R.V. This is atheism, and the nation represented by Egypt would give voice to a similar denial of the claims of the living God and would manifest a like spirit of unbelief and defiance."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 269.

If someone asked, *Do you know the Lord?* How would you respond? If yes, what would you say He is like, and why?

A Rough Start

Though Moses must have known, even from the beginning, that what the Lord had tasked him with was not going to be easy (hence his attempts to get out of it), he probably had no idea of what was coming.

Read Exodus 5:3–23. What were the immediate results of Moses and Aaron’s first recorded encounter with Pharaoh?

Even before going to Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron gathered the elders and people of Israel, told them God’s words, and showed them God’s signs, which resulted in Israel’s believing that the Lord would deliver them from their slavery. Thus, they worshiped the Lord (*Exod. 4:29–31*). Expectations surely were high: the Lord was going to deliver the Hebrew people from their bondage—finally!

Moses then went to the king of Egypt with God’s demands, and things became even worse for the Israelites. Their suffering increased, and their daily labor became more burdensome and demanding. They were accused of being lazy; they were treated more harshly; and their service became more difficult than it had already been.

Their leaders were not happy, and the confrontation between them and Moses and Aaron was ugly, and (as we will later see) it simply portended the kind of conflicts Moses would have with his own people for years to come.

Read Exodus 5:21, and then put yourself in the place of these men as they confronted Moses and Aaron. Why would they say what they did?

It’s not that hard to see why they would have been upset with Moses (“ ‘Let the LORD look on you and judge,’ ” they said). They thought Moses was coming to free them from the Egyptians, not to make their lives under the Egyptians even harder.

Thus, besides dealing with the Egyptians, Moses and Aaron had to deal with their own people, as well.

What are some better ways you and others might be able to deal with local church leaders when disagreements arise, as they inevitably do?

The Divine “I”

Poor Moses! He first gets berated by Pharaoh, and now his own people all but curse him.

Thus, Moses brings his complaint to God. In his bitterness and disappointment with the worsening of Israel’s conditions, he asks: “ ‘Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all’ ” (*Exod. 5:22, 23, NIV*). Moses’ discontent with the Lord is obvious and, considering the situation, understandable.

God’s response, though, is powerful. He will act, and very decisively, as well. “ ‘Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh’ ” (*Exod. 6:1, NIV*).

Read Exodus 5:22–6:8. What is God’s response to Moses, and what important theological truths are revealed here?

God will no longer only speak; He will now mightily intervene in favor of His people. He reminds Moses of a few pertinent facts: (1) “I am the LORD”; (2) I appeared to the patriarchs; (3) I established My covenant with them; (4) I have promised to give them the land of Canaan; (5) I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel; and (6) I have remembered My covenant to give you the Promised Land.

Notice the repetition of the divine “I.” I, “*the LORD your God*,” I *have done such and such, and so you can trust that I will do for you what I have promised*.

The Lord now solemnly proclaims that He will do four great things for Israel because He is their living Lord: (1) “ ‘I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians;’ ” (2) “ ‘I will free you from being slaves to them;’ ” (3) “ ‘I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment;’ ” and (4) “ ‘I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God’ ” (*Exod. 6:6, 7, NIV*).

These four divine actions secure and reestablish His relationship with His people. God is the subject of all these activities, and the Israelites are the recipients of all these benefits and grace. God offers these gifts for free, out of love; He did it then, to them, and He does it now, for us, as well.

What other Bible characters have cried out in complaint before God—and with good reasons? Why is it OK, at times, to pour out your soul to God and even complain about your situation? Why, though, must you always do it in faith and in trust?

Uncircumcised Lips

The Lord had indeed given Moses some powerful promises about what He was going to do. Though that encounter must have encouraged Moses, his encouragement was probably short-lived, given the response that he received from his people.

Read Exodus 6:9–13. What happened next, and what lessons can we take from this story about times of disappointment and struggle in our lives?

The Hebrews are so disheartened by their grief, suffering, and hard labor that they do not listen to Moses' words of reassurance that God will act to fulfill what He promised. They have waited so long for it, and their expectations have not been met. Why should it be different now? They were losing heart and hope, which must have been even more bitter because, perhaps for the first in all their lifetimes, they saw real hope of deliverance.

And yet, who hasn't been in a similar place? Who hasn't at some point felt depressed, disappointed, dissatisfied—even abandoned by God?

Remember the story of Job? What about Asaph, a psalmist who struggled with his questions regarding the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous? Yet, regardless of his struggles, Asaph has one of the most beautiful confessions of faith: “Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (*Ps. 73:23–26, NIV*).

Through sacred history, God has assured His people that He is with them (*Isa. 41:13, Matt. 28:20*). He gives them His peace, His comfort, and He strengthens them to make it through life's challenges (*John 14:27; John 16:33; Phil. 4:6, 7*).

The covenant formula, “‘I will take you as My people, and I will be your God’” (*Exod. 6:7, NKJV*), expresses the intimate relationship that the Lord wanted to have with His people.

Think through the phrase “‘I will take you as My people, and I will be your God’” (*Exod. 6:7, NKJV*). Though the context was corporate, how does this apply to each one of us individually, and how should this relationship be manifested in our daily lives? (See also 2 Cor. 6:16.)

Like God to Pharaoh

Read Exodus 6:28–7:7. How does the Lord deal with Moses’ objection?

God presents Himself to Moses as Yahweh, which means that He is the personal and close God, the God of His people, and the God who entered a covenantal relationship with them.

This immanent God again commands Moses to go and speak with Pharaoh. With a lack of self-confidence, Moses again objects: “Why would Pharaoh listen to me?” Here again we can see not just Moses’ humility but, again, his desire to get out of the task, which so far has not gone too well.

“When God ordered Moses to go back to Pharaoh, Moses showed self-distrust. The term *‘aral sepatayim*—literally ‘uncircumcised lips,’ which is used here to express Moses’ lack of speaking ability (6:12, 30)—is similar to that found in Exodus 4:10: ‘slow of speech.’ ”—*Andrews Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, “Exodus” (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), p. 205.

God in His mercy gives Aaron to help Moses. Moses will speak to Aaron, who will then speak publicly to Pharaoh; thus, Moses will play the role of God before the Egyptian king, and Aaron will be his prophet.

This account provides an excellent definition for the role of a prophet. A prophet is a spokesperson for God; he or she is His mouthpiece to transmit and to interpret God’s word to the people. As Moses spoke to Aaron, and then Aaron announced it to Pharaoh, so God communicates with a prophet, who then proclaims God’s teaching to the people. This can happen verbally, in person; or, as was most commonly done, the prophet received the message from God and then wrote it down.

God also explains to Moses what he can expect from the encounters with Pharaoh. He warns him that the confrontation will be tense and long. For the second time God stresses to Moses that Pharaoh will be very stubborn and that He will harden his heart (*Exod. 4:21, Exod. 7:3*). The result, however, will end in something good, for “‘the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD’ ” (*Exod. 7:5, NIV*). That is, even amid the chaos that follows, God will be glorified.

Moses ran out of excuses for not following what God had called him to do. What excuses might we use to try to get out of what we know God wants us to do?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Plagues of Egypt,” pp. 257–265, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Look at how badly things started off for Moses and his people after Moses first approached Pharaoh.

“The king, thoroughly roused, suspected the Israelites of a design to revolt from his service. Disaffection was the result of idleness; he would see that no time was left them for dangerous scheming. And he at once adopted measures to tighten their bonds and crush out their independent spirit. The same day orders were issued that rendered their labor still more cruel and oppressive. The most common building material of that country was sun-dried brick; the walls of the finest edifices were made of this, and then faced with stone; and the manufacture of brick employed great numbers of the bondmen. Cut straw being intermixed with the clay, to hold it together, large quantities of straw were required for the work; the king now directed that no more straw be furnished; the laborers must find it for themselves, while the same amount of brick should be exacted.

“This order produced great distress among the Israelites throughout the land. The Egyptian taskmasters had appointed Hebrew officers to oversee the work of the people, and these officers were responsible for the labor performed by those under their charge. When the requirement of the king was put in force, the people scattered themselves throughout the land, to gather stubble instead of straw; but they found it impossible to accomplish the usual amount of labor. For this failure the Hebrew officers were cruelly beaten.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 258.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Think of a time that, as you heeded God’s call in your life, things did not go well, or certainly did not start off well. What lessons have you learned over time from that experience?
- ❷ Tell others how God intervened in your life when you prayed for His help or when you did not expect it. How can we believe in God’s goodness when bad things happen, even to those who trust the Lord?
- ❸ What would you say to someone who declares, “I do not know the Lord”? However, suppose the person said it, not in a way of defiance, but as a simple fact about his or her life? What could you do to help him or her know the Lord and explain to the person why it’s important that he or she do so?

Monkeys or Church?

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Monkeys threatened to destroy the crops of a family farm in Mozambique. António Cuchata received strict orders from his father to keep the monkeys away. However, António didn't want to guard the farm on Sabbath. He recently had given his heart to Jesus in baptism, and he wanted to spend the Sabbath worshipping in a Seventh-day Adventist church.

What would António do? He prayed and went to church.

Vervet monkeys were a severe problem for small farmers in the coastal province where António and his family lived in southeastern Africa. The monkeys, with black faces and gray body hair, stood at 16 to 20 inches tall. Tribes of 10 to 70 monkeys raided small farms for cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, peanuts, and other crops.

Father worried that the family wouldn't have food or income if the monkeys decimated their crops. He also didn't approve of his son going to the Adventist church. He had raised António in another faith, and he didn't understand why the boy wanted to worship on the seventh day, Sabbath. Father didn't mind skipping worship services on Sunday to watch the farm, and he told António that he also should help on Saturdays.

António loved Father. He hadn't planned to become a Seventh-day Adventist, but an Adventist cousin had studied the Bible with him. He had grown convinced that he needed to follow what he had learned, including the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work" (*Exod. 20:8-10, NKJV*).

So, António knelt and prayed, "Dear God, please stop the monkeys from coming to our farm while I am at church." Then he went to the Adventist church in Casa-Nova, located about 15 miles from the farm.

António wasn't sure what to expect when he returned home. To his joy, the monkeys stayed away all day. He prayed and went to church the next Sabbath, and again the monkeys did not come near the farm. Every



Sabbath while António lived at home, the monkeys avoided the farm while he worshiped at the church.

Father refused to acknowledge the miracle, but António was filled with gratitude to God. Even today, years later, he still marvels at God's care.

"The monkeys also kept the Sabbath," he said.

Pray for the gospel to be proclaimed in Mozambique and other countries in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the recipient of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.