



God's Promise

TEXT: Exodus 5:1 - 6:13

Big Idea: God's Promises are sure

STUDY

*** Before interacting with this guide, all leaders should study the referenced texts using the HEAR Method. It's also important to encourage your group members to read the text using the HEAR Method. ***

H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- **Why was this written?**
- **To whom was it originally written?**
- **How does it fit with the verses before and after it?**
- **Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?**
- **What is He intending to communicate through this text?**

A: Apply the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

R: Respond to God in prayer.



Text

Read the scripture below. Use this copy to make observations, ask questions, and ask how God might be challenging you to move in response to his word.

Making Bricks Without Straw

5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” 2 But Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.” 3 Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens.” 5 And Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens!” 6 The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, 7 “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ 9 Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.”



10 So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. **11** Go and get your straw yourselves wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced in the least.’” **12** So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. **13** The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw.” **14** And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?”

15 Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, “Why do you treat your servants like this? **16** No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.” **17** But he said, “You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’” **18** Go now and work. No straw will be given you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks.” **19** The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they said, “You shall by no means reduce your number of bricks, your daily task each day.” **20** They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh; **21** and they said to them, “The Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

22 Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? **23** For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.”



God Promises Deliverance

6 But the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”

2 God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. 4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. 6 Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 7 I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.’” 9 Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.

10 So the Lord said to Moses, 11 “Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land.” 12 But Moses said to the Lord, “Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?” 13 But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the



people of Israel and about Pharaoh king of Egypt: to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Lesson

Point No. 1 Opposition produces opportunity

“Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” Exodus 5:1

Just last week we talked about Exodus 14:13 where Moses begs “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” Moses felt that surely there was someone else to get the job done and he had no idea why God had chosen him.

God has a way of doing such a thing. He chose Abraham who didn’t do anything to deserve it, He chose Jacob, He chose Joseph, and He even chose you and I. This is not a conversation of Calvinism or Arminianism. This is a reminder to stand in awe and praise for God that He has chosen to show His affection to those who are so undeserving. He is worthy of praise.

Moses is speaking to the superior authority over Egypt and telling him “Thus says the Lord... Let my people go.” There were thousands upon thousands of Israelite slaves that Moses is commanding to be let go.



Recognize the boldness in this. Put yourself in Moses and Aaron's shoes, going to the powerful ruler of Egypt, getting a meeting, and saying, "Let all these people go." What a statement.

While the circumstances are different in very many ways, God has called us to speak with the very same boldness in the proclamation of His name. Acts 1:8 says "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We have the power to speak on behalf of God just as Moses and Aaron did to Pharaoh. Where we work, where we live, where we go to school, where we play sports, we have been called and entrusted by God to share the good news of His love for sinners, to share the good news of how people can be saved from their sin by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus, who died on the cross, who rose from the dead.

Discuss:

What sticks out to you most about this scripture?

In what spheres of influence in your life could you speak more boldly?

When was the last time you spoke boldly the name of Jesus?



Point No. 2 Obedience and doubt are constantly fighting for real estate

“Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, “Oh, Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people and you have not delivered your people at all.” Exodus 5:22–23

This is a really low point in both Moses’ leadership and his life. He begins to doubt God’s calling, question God’s presence, and even question God’s character. You can probably relate. Moses has obeyed God’s voice, in spite of his insecurities, and went to Pharaoh to tell him to let the Israelites go. However, in Moses’ obedience, things have only seemed to get harder for himself and the Israelites in bondage.

The truth of the matter is that obedience sometimes results in worse circumstances temporarily. You’ve probably heard the question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” or maybe you’ve wondered why things seem to get harder as a Christian in this world. Well, Jesus actually promises in the New Testament that following Him will lead to all sorts of challenges and difficulties here on earth. So, we must step back and realize that we can not judge God’s ways in the short term. Just as Moses and the Israelites will eventually discover, we must trust God’s long term plan is to work for the good of His people and for the glory of Himself.



God is still working despite the awful situation going on here in Exodus. God is all wise, and all good, and all loving, and always faithful to work his plan for the good of his people and the glory of his name so we must trust and believe that He will remain the same. We must trust in God despite the circumstances.

Discuss:

Why is obedience so hard in times where circumstances are hard?

Do you think things seem harder as a Christian in God's will sometimes?

Why is being a Christian worth it?

Point No. 3 I Will because I Am

“Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will deliver you from slavery to them. And I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people and I will be your God. And you shall know that I am the Lord your God who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.” Exodus 6:6–8



In this portion of scripture, what phrase do you notice is repeated over and over? 8 times to be exact?

It's the phrase "I will." God's very first words in this passage are "I am the Lord." It's almost like He is reminding Moses and His people of who He is from Exodus 3. By these statements of himself, we are reminded that for those who are in Christ, God has promised peace, wisdom, and strength.

God says "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people. I will be your God. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession." I will because I am.

God indeed does all of these things. He is the God who makes promises and always comes through on them. If He is your Lord, He has made promises to you and will keep them.

Promises of God:

God promises to strengthen you - Ephesians 3:14-16

God promises to take care of all your needs - Philippians 4:19

God promises to answer your prayers - Matthew 7:7

God promises to work everything out for good - Romans 8:28

God promises to be with you - Isaiah 43:2



God promises to protect you (Psalm 91:2)

God promises freedom from sin (1 John 1:9)

God promises that nothing can separate you from Him (Romans 8:38-39)

God promises everlasting life (John 3:16)

God promises to give you rest (Matthew 11:28-30)

God promises to give you peace (Philippians 4:7)

Discuss:

What sticks out in this scripture in Exodus?

Which of these promises stick out most to you in your life?

Which of these promises have you struggled to believe?

Leader Guide

Summary

Moses has come face to face with his insecurities from last week of being inadequate. In our text this week, Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, and tell him that God has commanded to let the Israelite slaves go. Pharaoh responds by questioning who God even is. According to Pharaoh, he himself is King!

Many lost people are just like Pharaoh in the sense of not knowing who the Lord is. They sit on the throne of their own lives. In Pharaoh's



pride, he resorts to increasingly mistreating the Israelites. Moses begins to question why he was ever even sent for such a task. The Israelites are blaming him for making things worse, nothing seems to be going right, and God seems to have done evil to His own people.

However, Pharaoh does not realize that this message has been sent from the King of Kings. God reminds Moses in his confusion and depression that He is the Lord. He fulfills His promises and He surely will not stop now.

Commentary

Tyndale Old Testament Commentary

[5:1–5](#). The mission to pharaoh. **1.** *Thus says YHWH* This is the typical form of utterance of a Hebrew prophet (cf. [Amos 1:3](#)); the analogy would be seen by later Israel. The phrase *the God of Israel* is not often used in the early days, when ‘Israel’ still means a man rather than a people. ‘Sons of Israel’ ([rsv](#) ‘people of Israel’; [av](#) ‘children of Israel’) is the usual early term ([Exod. 5:14](#), etc.) *Hold a feast*. This is literally ‘keep a pilgrimage festival’. It clearly seems to refer to the great religious occasion of Sinai. This is the root that gives ‘Haggai’ as a proper name, and ‘Hadji’ as an Islamic title, meaning ‘one who has performed the pilgrimage’. Perhaps (as in the phrase ‘God of the Hebrews’, verse [3](#)) the brothers are using terminology which would convey their meaning more readily to pharaoh. The Egyptians must have been well used to the sudden exodus of desert Arabs gone for a pilgrimage to some desert shrine. The editors quote such worship as the reason for absenteeism of workers in Egyptian records, and [Genesis 50](#) is a good parallel, with the burial of Jacob.

2. *Who is YHWH?* This question may include ignorance of the very name of what pharaoh must have considered as some new god of the desert people. In the main, it expresses incredulity at the sheer audacity of the challenge to his absolute authority. Compare the amazed question of Moses, ‘Who am I?’ on receipt of God’s call ([Exod. 3:11](#)).

3. *Lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword*. Here the urgency of the desert festival is explained to pharaoh. Disobedience to the vision of God (presumably that at the



burning bush) will bring punishment to the whole nation of Israel. The *three days' journey* has already been discussed (see commentary on [3:18](#), above): it is probably best to take it as a vague indication of distance.

4. *Get to your burdens.* Pharaoh's reaction to these agitators is quick and violent. Pharaoh is a picture of all totalitarian rulers, states or individuals, and he shows it clearly here. There are only two ways of dealing with unrest: either an increased unreasoning authoritarianism, or a careful consideration of the reasons. Pharaoh chooses the first: that was how he 'hardened his heart' ([Exod. 4:21](#)) and made collision (and therefore disaster) inevitable.

5. *The people of the land* usually means 'the common people', as opposed to the nobles. It also has the derogatory meaning of 'non-Israelites' as opposed to the returned exiles ([Ezra 4:4](#)). Here, pharaoh is probably referring in both senses to the alien labouring class of Egypt, the state slaves, largely Semitic in origins and including Israel. *Are now many* echoes the old fear ([Exod. 1:10](#)) of the indigenous people who see themselves swamped and outnumbered by newcomers. Many modern immigration restrictions stem from this fear. Christians should carefully ponder their attitudes to such laws on the basis of Scripture, noting how readily fear leads to hatred and cruelty, as here.

[5:6–19](#). Bricks without straw. The daily work quota is fixed, and pharaoh will not, or dare not, raise it. But by refusing the 'chopped straw' normally used for reinforcing the sun-dried brick, he can greatly increase the work-time needed to attain the target. Sun-dried mud brick is a cheap and favourite building material in Africa and Asia today: when reinforced, and where protected by overhanging eaves from direct rain, it lasts very well. Bricks of all sorts have been found in Egypt, some with regularly chopped straw, some with rough roots and oddments, some without straw at all. Perhaps pharaoh was not the first employer to use this method to quell labour troubles.

6. *The taskmasters ... and their foremen.* The first are Egyptian, the second Israelite. For *šōtērîm* (Israelite 'gangers') the [lxx](#) has 'scribes, accountants', so must have read *šōpērîm*, which is possible.

7. *To make bricks.* The process interested the later Israelites, who normally built in stone (as in West Asia to this day), since stones lay everywhere and had to be cleared from the field in any case. For similar interest, see the account of the building of the Tower of Babel in [Genesis 11:3](#).



8. *They are idle*: literally ‘they are slack’, a common complaint of employers about employees from that day to this.

9. *Lying words*: probably referring to God’s promise that he would deliver Israel. Aaron had brought this news to Israel ([Exod. 4:30](#)) and pharaoh would have heard of it indirectly at least.

12. *Stubble for straw*. ‘Stubble’ suggests uneven, rough material, a poor substitute for the regular ‘straw’. The use of the cognate verb along with the noun (both in verse [7](#) and here) underlines the contemptuous attitude. ‘Stub themselves stubble’ would be an attempt to reproduce the effect in English.

13. *The taskmasters were urgent*. These, of course, were the Egyptians. A sympathetic ‘ganger’ might have eased the difficulty, but not pharaoh’s men. The whole purpose was to break Israel’s hope of freedom.

14. *The foremen*, being Israelites, were beaten: not, of course, the Egyptian ‘overseers’ or ‘taskmasters’.

15. *Cried* is the very verb already used of their cry to God, which God has heard and is answering ([Exod. 2:23](#)). Now they ‘cry’ in real earnest, to pharaoh himself: but he, unlike God, will neither hear nor answer. Doubtless his purpose (which he certainly achieved) was to set them against Moses and Aaron ([Exod. 5:21](#)).

16. *The fault is in your own people*: i.e. in the Egyptian overseers. The phrase is obscure, and could be also translated ‘you are at fault’ or ‘you are sinning against your own subjects’ (with the [lxx](#) and the Syriac), i.e. the Israelites. However taken, the general sense of the protest is clear: the treatment of Israel is not fair. But since the treatment is intended to be unfair, such a protest is bound to fail from the start. See [Hyatt](#) for a full discussion of possible meanings of the phrase.

[5:20–6:1](#). The discouragement. 20. *They met*. This is the same pregnant word as Moses and Aaron had used to pharaoh to describe the encounter with YHWH ([Exod. 5:3](#)) at God’s mountain. *Waiting for them*: more than ‘standing’; perhaps ‘stationed’ would be better. Were the two leaders full of hope? or were they determined to bear the consequences of failure?

21. (May) *YHWH look ... and judge*. This is the traditional prayer of the innocent sufferer (cf. [Gen. 16:5](#)). It must have stung Moses to the quick, as we can see from verse [22](#). *Made us*



offensive: literally ‘made us stink’. The Hebrew foremen may be direct and crude, but they communicate their meaning very plainly. Clearly, they look only for worse things to follow.

22. *Why didst thou ever send me?* The protest of Moses is one of the most human documents in the whole Bible. God has not yet kept his promise: so far from being delivered, the Israelites were worse off. All Moses’ forebodings about his own lack of success seem to be confirmed by events.

6:1. *Now you shall see.* Here comes a renewed promise of God, which goes further than before. Not only will pharaoh release them from his land, which he has so far refused to do. He will actually ‘expel’ them. The verb seems a definite reminiscence of Moses’ ‘expulsion’ to Midian and probably contains a play on the name of Gershom, his son ([Exod. 2:22](#)).

6:2–13. Renewed calling by God. Some scholars regard this as a second account of Moses’ initial calling: but certainly in the present context it fits well as renewed encouragement and reassurance of call, at a moment when Moses is most conscious of failure.

2. *I am YHWH.* The speech begins and ends (verse 8) with this sonorous declaration, which guarantees all the contents. *I appeared.* This is to assert that the patriarchal experience of God was just as valid as that of Moses. It also asserts, in spite of some modern views, that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all worshipped one and the same God. Further, it is to assert the identity of the God worshipped by the patriarchs with the God experienced by Moses at Sinai. This is fundamental to the understanding of the Mosaic revelation.

3. *God almighty* (Heb. *’ēl šadday*). The use of this name or title for God in patriarchal days can be proved independently, from the occurrence of archaic proper names like Ammi-shaddai ([Num. 1:12](#)) alongside Ammiel ([Num. 13:12](#)). The name was not used later, except in poetry as a conscious archaism, so its very meaning was forgotten. Later Hebrew orthodoxy translated it as ‘the all-sufficient One’, but this is impossible philologically. It appears to be an old Mesopotamian divine title, connected with the root ‘mountain’: compare the way in which ‘rock’ is often used as God’s title in early days ([Deut. 32:4](#)), perhaps as a symbol of stability and as a place of safety. In view of patriarchal origins in Mesopotamia, such a linguistic ‘fossil’ is not surprising.



By my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them. This seems a very clear statement that the name YHWH had not been used by the patriarchs as a title for God. This is borne out by the fact that YAH or YO (in either case the shortened form of YHWH) does not appear as a formative element in Israel's personal names before the time of Moses (with the one possible exception of the name of Moses' mother, Jochebed, [Exod. 6:20](#)). In the generation after Moses, such names appear only slowly, but religious conservatism could account for the continued use of 'El'. An example is Hoshea, son of Nun, whose name was deliberately changed by Moses to Joshua, thus containing the new name YHWH ([Num. 13:16](#)). From then onwards, such forms are increasingly common in the Old Testament, convincing proof of the date of introduction of the new title. But if this is so, how do we explain the use of YHWH as a divine name from [Genesis 2:5](#) onwards, whether by itself or in connection with Elohim, the more general word for God? or what appears to be the specific statement of [Genesis 4:26](#) that, in the primeval days of Enoch, the name YHWH was first used? The first is not a serious question: it would be natural to use the later name when telling the earlier story. Indeed, even had it been done consciously, it might be seen as an assertion of the identity of the God worshipped in early days with the God of the Mosaic revelation (see [Hyatt](#), p. 80, for a possible explanation of the combination of the two names). The common critical division of the Pentateuchal material into the so-called 'sources' J and E derives from the belief that one recorder of tradition (J) prefers the later 'particularized' name, even when its use is strictly an anachronism, while the other (E) uses the 'generalized' and earlier name throughout. Even the most extreme critic would admit that both J and E knew the later name since, on his count, both lived well after Moses. [Genesis 4:26](#) is a problem of more substance: it seems to say that, in the primeval days of Seth or Enosh, men began to 'call upon the name of YHWH'. Either it means that the name was known from a very early age, but not in Israel (only a tiny fraction of Enosh's descendants being reckoned as Israel), or the phrase 'call on the name of YHWH' must be used in its later and general sense ([Ps. 116:17](#)) meaning 'pray'. In that case, the reference might simply be to the origins of organized worship, known to be of vast age, here attributed to the time of Seth and Enosh. (See [Hyatt](#), p. 79, for possible use of similar forms to the divine name among early Amorites, presumably related to Israel.)

4. *I established my covenant with them:* as in [Genesis 17:1–8](#), where the land of Canaan is promised to Abraham. 'Established' probably refers back to this initial covenant made with Abraham. It could conceivably, however, refer to what God is doing now for Israel through Moses. Israel's occupation of Canaan is always seen in the Bible as a fulfilment of the promise



made to Abraham ([Gen. 15:18](#)). On the other side the expulsion of the Canaanites is seen as God's punishment for their wrongdoing: compare [Genesis 15:16](#).

5. *I have remembered my covenant.* Henceforward, every 'saving act' of God will be seen as 'remembering' this initial binding relationship which he had freely established. 'Remembered' does not mean that God had previously forgotten. Anthropomorphisms are freely used in Hebrew to describe God. Also, words which we should think of as describing emotional states are often used to describe actions, not emotions ('love' and 'hate' are a good pair of examples). Thus 'to remember the covenant' is to act in a way which can be seen by man to be a fulfilment of the promises of that covenant.

6. *I will redeem:* literally 'I will act the redeemer-kinsman' or *gō'ēl*. The best illustration of this is Boaz' actions directed towards Ruth ([Ruth 4](#)). For the legal formulation, see [Leviticus 25:25](#). [Driver](#) suggests 'reclaim as a right' or 'vindicate' as possible translations on these grounds. Unlike the verb *pādā*, *gā'al* suggests a close personal relationship between redeemer and redeemed: it is thus appropriate of the God of the covenant.

7. *I will take you for my people.* This is one of the clearest statements of the mutual relationships brought about by the covenant. For an amplification, see [Exodus 19:5, 6](#), at the actual covenant-making between God and Israel. *Who has brought you out.* This is the beginning of the great credal statement of Israel's faith, which can best be seen in the introduction to the ten commandments ([Exod. 20:2](#)). As Israel grew in her experience of God, fresh 'articles' would be added to this creed, but this basic 'article' would remain the same throughout her history.

9. *But they did not listen.* This is very true to life. Moses' confidence was apparently restored by this recommissioning, but Israel (once bitten, twice shy) will no longer listen to him. *Broken spirit:* better 'impatience', 'anger' over what they must have considered a betrayal of trust.

12. *How then shall Pharaoh listen to me?* Small wonder that Moses, conscious of inadequacy so great that even his own fellow countrymen will not listen to him, demurs at the thought of bearding pharaoh again, with his clumsy speech. Perhaps the 'uncircumcised lips' has a reference to Moses' mysterious experience at the caravanserai. His body may now be circumcised and dedicated to God, but can his lips be, if even his own people turn away from him?



Matthew Henry's Commentary

Chapter 5

Moses and Aaron are here dealing with Pharaoh, to get leave of him to go and worship in the wilderness. I. They demand leave in the name of God (v. 1), and he answers their demand with a defiance of God (v. 2). II. They beg leave in the name of Israel (v. 3), and he answers their request with further orders to oppress Israel (v. 4–9). These cruel orders were, 1. Executed by the task-masters (v. 10–14). 2. Complained of to Pharaoh, but in vain (v. 15–19). 3. Complained of by the people to Moses (v. 20, 21), and by him to God (v. 22, 23).

Verses 1–2

Moses and Aaron, having delivered their message to the elders of Israel, with whom they found good acceptance, are now to deal with Pharaoh, to whom they come in peril of their lives—*Moses* particularly, who perhaps was out-lawed for killing the Egyptian forty years before, so that if any of the old courtiers should happen to remember that against him now it might cost him his head. Their message itself was displeasing, and touch Pharaoh both in his honour and in his profit, two tender points; yet these faithful ambassadors boldly deliver it, whether he will hear or whether he will forbear.

I. Their demand is piously bold: *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go*, v. 1. Moses, in treating with the elders of Israel, is directed to call God *the God of their fathers*; but, in treating with Pharaoh, they call him *the God of Israel*, and it is the first time we find him called so in scripture: he is called *the God of Israel*, the *person* (Gen. 33:20); but here it is Israel, the *people*. They are just beginning to be formed into a people when God is called their God. Moses, it is likely, was directed to call him so, at least it might be inferred from ch. 9:22, *Israel is my son*. In this great name they deliver their message: *Let my people go*. 1. They were God's people, and therefore Pharaoh ought not to detain them in bondage. Note, God will own his own people, though ever so poor and despicable, and will find a time to plead their cause. "The Israelites are slaves in Egypt, but they are my people," says God, "and I will not suffer them to be always trampled upon." See Isa. 52:4, 5. 2. He expected services and sacrifices from them, and therefore they must have leave to go where they could freely exercise their religion, without giving offence



to, or receiving offence from, the Egyptians. Note, God delivers his people out of the hand of their enemies, that they may serve him, and serve him cheerfully, that they may hold a feast to him, which they may do, while they have his favour and presence, even in a wilderness, a dry and barren land.

II. Pharaoh's answer is impiously bold: *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?* v. 2. Being summoned to surrender, he thus hangs out the flag of defiance, hectors Moses and the God that sends him, and peremptorily refuses to let Israel go; he will not treat about it, nor so much as bear the mention of it. Observe, 1. How scornfully he speaks of the God of Israel: "*Who is Jehovah?*" I neither know him nor care for him, neither value him nor fear him;" it is a hard name that he never heard of before, but he resolves it shall be no bug-bear to him. Israel was now a despised oppressed people, looked on as the tail of the nation, and, by the character they bore, Pharaoh makes his estimate of their God, and concludes that he made no better a figure among the gods than his people did among the nations. Note, Hardened persecutors are more malicious against God himself than they are against his people. See [Isa. 37:23](#). Again, Ignorance and contempt of God are at the bottom of all the wickedness that is in the world. Men know not the Lord, or have very low and mean thoughts of him, and therefore they obey not his voice, nor will let any thing go for him. 2. How proudly he speaks of himself: "*That I should obey his voice;*" I, the king of Egypt, a great people, obey the God of Israel, a poor enslaved people? Shall I, that rule the Israel of God, obey the God of Israel? No, it is below me; I scorn to answer his summons." Note, Those are the children of pride that are the *children of disobedience*, [Job 41:34](#); [Eph. 5:6](#). Proud men think themselves too good to stoop even to God himself, and would not be under control, [Jer. 43:2](#). Here is the core of the controversy: God must rule, but man will not be ruled. "I will have my will done," says God: "But I will do my own will," says the sinner. 3. How resolutely he denies the demand: *Neither will I let Israel go*. Note, Of all sinners none are so obstinate, nor so hardly persuaded to leave their sin, as persecutors are.

Verses [3–9](#)

Finding that Pharaoh had no veneration at all for God, Moses and Aaron next try whether he had any compassion for Israel, and become humble suitors to him for leave to go and sacrifice, but in vain.

I. Their request is very humble and modest, v. 3. They make no complaint of the rigour they were ruled with. They plead that the journey they designed was not a project formed among



themselves, but that their God had met with them, and called them to it. They beg with all submission: *We pray thee*. The poor useth entreaties; though God may summon princes that oppress, it becomes us to beseech and make supplication to them. What they ask is very reasonable, only for a short vacation, while they went three days' journey into the desert, and that on a good errand, and unexceptionable: "*We will sacrifice unto the Lord our God*, as other people do to theirs;" and, *lastly*, they give a very good reason, "Lest, if we quite cast off his worship, he fall upon us with one judgment or other, and then Pharaoh will lose his vassals."

II. Pharaoh's denial of their request is very barbarous and unreasonable, v. 4–9.

1. His suggestions were very unreasonable. (1.) That the people were idle, and that therefore they talked of going to sacrifice. The cities they built for Pharaoh, and the other fruit of their labours, were witnesses for them that they were not idle; yet he thus basely misrepresents them, that he might have a pretence to increase their burdens. (2.) That Moses and Aaron made them idle with vain words, v. 9. God's words are here called vain words; and those that called them to the best and most needful business are accused of making them idle. Note, The malice of Satan has often represented the service and worship of God as fit employment for those only that have nothing else to do, and the business only of the idle; whereas indeed it is the indispensable duty of those that are most busy in the world.

2. His resolutions hereupon were most barbarous. (1.) Moses and Aaron themselves must get to *their burdens* (v. 4); they are Israelites, and, however God had distinguished them from the rest, Pharaoh makes no difference: they must share in the common slavery of their nation. Persecutors have always taken a particular pleasure in putting contempt and hardship upon the ministers of the churches. (2.) The usual tale of bricks must be exacted, without the usual allowance of straw to mix with the clay, or to burn the bricks with, that thus more work might be laid upon the men, which if they performed, they would be broken with labour; and, if not, they would be exposed to punishment.

Verses 10–14

Pharaoh's orders are here put in execution; straw is denied, and yet the work not diminished. 1. The Egyptian task-masters were very severe. Pharaoh having decreed unrighteous decrees, the task-masters were ready to write the grievousness that he had prescribed, [Isa. 10:1](#). Cruel princes will never want cruel instruments to be employed under them, who will justify them in that



which is most unreasonable. These task-masters insisted upon the daily tasks, as when there was straw, v. 13. See what need we have to pray that *we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men*, 2 Th. 3:2. The enmity of the serpent's seed against the seed of the woman is such as breaks through all the laws of reason, honour, humanity, and common justice. 2. The people hereby were dispersed throughout all the land of Egypt, to gather stubble, v. 12. By this means Pharaoh's unjust and barbarous usage of them came to be known to all the kingdom, and perhaps caused them to be pitied by their neighbours, and made Pharaoh's government less acceptable even to his own subjects: good-will is never got by persecution. 3. The Israelite-officers were used with particular harshness, v. 14. Those that were the fathers of the houses of Israel paid dearly for their honour; for from them immediately the service was exacted, and they were beaten when it was not performed. See here, (1.) What a miserable thing slavery is, and what reason we have to be thankful to God that we are a free people, and not oppressed. Liberty and property are valuable jewels in the eyes of those whose services and possessions lie at the mercy of an arbitrary power. (2.) What disappointments we often meet with after the raising of our expectations. The Israelites were now lately encouraged to hope for enlargement, but behold greater distresses. This teaches us always to rejoice with trembling. (3.) What strange steps God sometimes takes in delivering his people; he often brings them to the utmost straits when he is just ready to appear for them. The lowest ebbs go before the highest tides; and very cloudy mornings commonly introduce the fairest days, Deu. 32:36. God's time to help is when things are at the worst; and Providence verifies the paradox, *The worse the better*.

Verses 15–23

It was a great strait that the head-workmen were in, when they must either abuse those that were under them or be abused by those that were over them; yet, it should seem, rather than they would tyrannize, they would be tyrannized over; and they were so. In this evil case (v. 19), observe,

I. How justly they complained to Pharaoh: They *came and cried unto Pharaoh*, v. 15. Whither should they go with a remonstrance of their grievances but to the supreme power, which is ordained for the protection of the injured? As bad as Pharaoh was his oppressed subjects had liberty to complain to him; there was no law against petitioning: it was a very modest, but moving, representation that they made of their condition (v. 16): *Thy servants are beaten* (severely enough, no doubt, when things were in such a ferment), and yet *the fault is in thy own*



people, the task-masters, who deny us what is necessary for carrying on our work. Note, It is common for those to be most rigorous in blaming others who are most blameworthy themselves. But what did they get by this complaint? It did but make bad worse. 1. Pharaoh taunted them (v. 17); when they were almost killed with working, he told them they were idle: they underwent the fatigue of industry, and yet lay under the imputation of slothfulness, while nothing appeared to ground the charge upon but this, that they said, *Let us go and do sacrifice*. Note, It is common for the best actions to be mentioned under the worst names; holy diligence in the best business is censured by many as a culpable carelessness in the business of the world. It is well for us that men are not to be our judges, but a God who knows what the principles are on which we act. Those that are diligent in doing sacrifice to the Lord will, with God, escape the doom of the slothful servant, though, with men, they do not. 2. He bound on their burdens: *Go now and work*. v. 18. Note, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked; what can be expected from unrighteous men but more unrighteousness?

II. How unjustly they complained of Moses and Aaron: *The Lord look upon you, and judge*, v. 21. This was not fair. Moses and Aaron had given sufficient evidence of their hearty good-will to the liberties of Israel; and yet, because things succeed not immediately as they hoped, they are reproached as accessaries to their slavery. They should have humbled themselves before God, and taken to themselves the shame of their sin, which turned away good things from them; but, instead of this, they fly in the face of their best friends, and quarrel with the instruments of their deliverance, because of some little difficulties and obstructions they met with in effecting it. Note, Those that are called out to public service for God and their generation must expect to be tried, not only by the malicious threats of proud enemies, but by the unjust and unkind censures of unthinking friends, who judge only by outward appearance and look but a little way before them. Now what did Moses do in this strait? It grieved him to the heart that the event did not answer, but rather contradict, his expectation; and their upbraidings were very cutting, and like a sword in his bones; but, 1. He returned to the Lord (v. 22), to acquaint him with it, and to represent the case to him: he knew that what he had said and done was by divine direction; and therefore what blame is laid upon him for it he considers as reflecting upon God, and, like Hezekiah, spreads it before him as interested in the cause, and appeals to him. Compare this with Jer. 20:7–9. Note, When we find ourselves, at any time, perplexed and embarrassed in the way of our duty, we ought to have recourse to God, and lay open our case before him by faithful and fervent prayer. If we retreat, let us retreat to him, and no further. 2. He expostulated with him, v. 22, 23. He knew not how to reconcile the providence with the promise and the commission



which he had received. “Is this God’s coming down to deliver Israel? Must I, who hoped to be a blessing to them, become a scourge to them? By this attempt to get them out of the pit, they are but sunk the deeper into it.” Now he asks, (1.) *Wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people?* Note, Even when God is coming towards his people in ways of mercy, he sometimes takes such methods as that they may think themselves but ill treated. The instruments of deliverance, when they aim to help, are found to hinder, and that becomes a trap which, it was hoped, would have been for their welfare, God suffering it to be so that we may learn to cease from man, and may come off from a dependence upon second causes. Note, further, When the people of God think themselves ill treated, they should go to God by prayer, and plead with him, and that is the way to have better treatment in God’s good time. (2.) *Why is it thou hast sent me?* Thus, [1.] He complains of his ill success: “Pharaoh has done evil to this people, and not one step seems to be taken towards their deliverance.” Note, It cannot but sit very heavily upon the spirits of those whom God employs for him to see that their labour does no good, and much more to see that it does hurt eventually, though not designedly. It is uncomfortable to a good minister to perceive that his endeavours for men’s conviction and conversion do but exasperate their corruptions, confirm their prejudices, harden their hearts, and seal them up under unbelief. This makes them go in the bitterness of their souls, as the prophet, [Eze. 3:14](#). Or, [2.] He enquires what was further to be done: *Why hast thou sent me?* that is, “What other method shall I take in pursuance of my commission?” Note, Disappointments in our work must not drive us from our God, but still we must consider why we are sent.

Chapter 6

Much ado there was to bring Moses to his work, and when the ice was broken, some difficulty having occurred in carrying it on, there was no less ado to put him forward in it. Witness this chapter, in which, I. God satisfies Moses himself in an answer to his complaints in the close of the foregoing chapter (v. 1). II. He gives him fuller instructions than had yet been given him what to say to the children of Israel, for their satisfaction (v. 2–8), but to little purpose (v. 9). III. He sends him again to Pharaoh (v. 10, 11). But Moses objects against that (v. 12), upon which a very strict charge is given to him and his brother to execute their commission with vigour (v. 13). IV. Here is an abstract of the genealogy of the tribes of Reuben and Simeon, to introduce that of Levi, that the pedigree of Moses and Aaron might be cleared (v. 14–25), and then the chapter



concludes with a repetition of so much of the preceding story as was necessary to make way for the following chapter.

Verses 1–9

Here, I. God silences Moses's complaints with the assurance of success in this negotiation, repeating the promise made him in ch. 3:20, *After that, he will let you go*. When Moses was at his wit's end, wishing he had staid in Midian, rather than have come to Egypt to make bad worse—when he was quite at a loss what to do—*Then the Lord said unto Moses*, for the quieting of his mind, "*Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh* (v. 1); now that the affair has come to a crisis, things are as bad as they can be, Pharaoh is in the height of pride and Israel in the depth of misery, now is my time to appear." See [Ps. 12:5](#), *Now will I arise*. Note, Man's extremity is God's opportunity of helping and saving. Moses had been expecting what God would do; but now he shall see what he will do, shall see his day at length, [Job 24:1](#). Moses had been trying what he could do, and could effect nothing. "Well," says God, "now thou shalt see what *I* will do; let me alone to deal with this proud man," [Job 40:12, 13](#). Note, Then the deliverance of God's church will be accomplished, when God takes the work into his own hands. *With a strong hand*, that is, being forced to it by a strong hand, *he shall let them go*. Note, As some are brought to their duty by the strong hand of God's grace, who are made willing in the day of his power, so others by the strong hand of his justice, breaking those that would not bend.

II. He gives him further instructions, that both he and the people of Israel might be encouraged to hope for a glorious issue of this affair. Take comfort,

1. From God's name, Jehovah, v. 2, 3. He begins with this, *I am Jehovah*, the same with, *I am that I am*, the fountain of being, and blessedness, and infinite perfection. The patriarchs knew this name, but they did not know him in this matter by that which this name signifies. God would now be known by his name *Jehovah*, that is, (1.) A God performing what he had promised, and so inspiring confidence in his promises. (2.) A God perfecting what he had begun, and finishing his own work. In the history of the creation, God is never called Jehovah till the heavens and the earth were finished, [Gen. 2:4](#). When the salvation of the saints is completed in eternal life, then he will be known by his name Jehovah ([Rev. 22:13](#)); in the mean time they shall find him, for their strength and support, *El-shaddai, a God all-sufficient*, a God that is enough and will be so, [Mic. 7:20](#).



2. From his covenant: *I have established my covenant*, v. 4. Note, The covenants God makes he establishes; they are made as firm as the power and truth of God can make them. We may venture our all upon this bottom.

3. From his compassions (v. 5): *I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel*; he means their groaning on occasion of the late hardships put upon them. Note, God take notice of the increase of his people's calamities, and observes how their enemies grow upon them.

4. From his present resolutions, v. 6–8. Here is line upon line, to assure them that they should be brought triumphantly out of Egypt (v. 6), and should be put in possession of the land of Canaan (v. 8): *I will bring you out. I will rid you. I will redeem you. I will bring you into the land of Canaan, and I will give it to you.* Let man take the shame of his unbelief, which needs such repetitions; and let God have the glory of his condescending grace, which gives us such repeated assurances for our satisfaction.

5. From his gracious intentions in all these, which were great, and worthy of him, v. 7. (1.) He intended their happiness: *I will take you to me for a people*, a peculiar people, and *I will be to you a God*; more than this we need not ask, we cannot have, to make us happy. (2.) He intended his own glory: *You shall know that I am the Lord.* God will attain his own ends, nor shall we come short of them if we make them our chief end too. Now, one would think, these good words, and comfortable words, should have revived the drooping Israelites, and cause them to forget their misery; but, on the contrary, their miseries made them regardless of God's promises (v. 9): *They harkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit.* That is, [1.] They were so taken up with their troubles that they did not heed him. [2.] They were so cast down with their late disappointment that they did not believe him. [3.] They had such a dread of Pharaoh's power and wrath that they durst not themselves move in the least towards their deliverance. Note, *First*, Disconsolate spirits often put from them the comforts they are entitled to, and stand in their own light. See [Isa. 28:12](#). *Secondly*, Strong passions oppose strong consolations. By indulging ourselves in discontent and fretfulness, we deprive ourselves of the comfort we might have both from God's word and from his providence, and must thank ourselves if we go comfortless.

Verses 10–13

Here, I. God sends Moses the second time to Pharaoh (v. 11) upon the same errand as before, to command him, at his peril, that he *let the children of Israel go*. Note, God repeats his precepts



before he begins his punishments. Those that have often been called in vain to leave their sins must yet be called again and again, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, [Eze. 3:11](#). God is said to *hew* sinners by his prophets ([Hos. 6:5](#)), which denotes the repetition of the strokes. *How often would I have gathered you?*

II. Moses makes objections, as one discouraged, and willing to give up the cause, v. [12](#). He pleads, 1. The unlikelihood of Pharaoh's hearing: "*Behold the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me*; they give no heed, no credit, to what I have said; how then can I expect that Pharaoh should hear me? If the anguish of their spirit makes them deaf to that which would compose and comfort them, much more will the anger of his spirit, his pride and insolence, make him deaf to that which will but exasperate and provoke him." If God's professing people hear not his messengers, how can it be thought that his professed enemy should? Note, The frowardness and untractableness of those that are called Christians greatly discourage ministers, and make them ready to despair of success in dealing with those that are atheistical and profane. We would be instrumental to unite Israelites, to refine and purify them, to comfort and pacify them; but, if they hearken not to us, how shall we prevail with those in whom we cannot pretend to such an interest? But with God all things are possible. 2. He pleads the unreadiness and infirmity of his own speaking: *I am of uncircumcised lips*; it is repeated, v. [30](#). He was conscious to himself that he had not the gift of utterance, had no command of language; his talent did not lie that way. To this objection God had given a sufficient answer before, and therefore he ought not to have insisted upon it, for the sufficiency of grace can supply the defects of nature at any time. Note, Though our infirmities ought to humble us, yet they ought not to discourage us from doing our best in any service we have to do for God. His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

III. God again joins Aaron in commission with Moses, and puts an end to the dispute by interposing his own authority, and giving them both a solemn charge, upon their allegiance to their great Lord, to execute it with all possible expedition and fidelity. When Moses repeats his baffled arguments, he shall be argued with no longer, but God gives him a charge, and Aaron with him, both to the children of Israel and to Pharaoh, v. [13](#). Note, God's authority is sufficient to answer all objections, and binds us to obedience, without murmuring or disputing, [Phil. 2:14](#). Moses himself has need to be charged, and so has Timothy, [1 Tim. 6:13](#); [2 Tim. 4:1](#).