

3. Rough Start (3Q 2025 Exodus)

Biblical material: Exod. 5:1–23, Rev. 11:8, Exod. 6:1–13, Ps. 73:23–26, 2 Cor. 6:16, Exod. 6:28–7:7.

Quotes

- The exodus is the greatest redemptive event in the Old Testament to which subsequent revelation points to again and again and again. *Don Carson*
- Moses should have said “Let my people go. Please.” *Christopher Moore*
- Poor Old Pharaoh,/ He knows all the knowledge of Egypt,/ Yet never knew — He never knew/ The one and the living God. *James Weldon Johnson*
- Get out and worship God in the desert. *N.T. Wright*
- What Moses and Aaron ask is very reasonable, only to go three days' journey into the desert, and that on a good errand. We will sacrifice unto the Lord our God. Pharaoh was very unreasonable, in saying that the people were idle, and therefore talked of going to sacrifice. He thus misrepresents them, that he might have a pretence to add to their burdens. *Matthew Henry*

Questions

Do you think there were other ways Moses and Aaron could have approached Pharaoh without ending up in this “rough start”? Why the dialogue anyway? Couldn't God have simply taken the Israelites out of Egypt by supernatural means? What lessons are meant to learn from this story? How does this conflict illustrate issues in the great controversy?

Bible summary

Exodus 5:1–23 records the first interaction of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh. Not unexpectedly Pharaoh rejects the request, as God had predicted (Exodus 3:19), and makes the requirements placed on the Israelite slaves even worse. Revelation 11:8 references Egypt in “spiritual symbolism.” In Exodus 6:1–13 God sends Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh, with Moses complaining that it was pointless to do so as even his own people weren't listening to him. In Psalm 73:23–26 the psalmist Asaph states his conviction that God is with him and tells him what to do. 2 Corinthians 6:16 is the promise that he will be our God and we will be his people. In Exodus 6:28–7:7 Moses is still saying that Pharaoh won't listen to him and repeats again that he's a poor speaker. But God tells them to just do as he says.

Comment

Once again we look beyond this showdown between Moses and Pharaoh and see this as an example of the conflict in the great controversy. We also note the very human reaction of Moses, who already doesn't see himself as an eloquent speaker, alarmed at the fact that Pharaoh responds by making things even worse for the Israelites. The Israelite supervisors also tell Moses that he's made them like a bad smell to Pharaoh and put a sword in Pharaoh's hand to kill them (5:21). They call on God to judge Moses and act accordingly.

It's interesting that the request made to Pharaoh is only to go a three day journey into the desert to present sacrifices to God rather than to leave completely. This is not a pretext made up by Moses and Aaron, but is what God has told them to say (3:18). Interestingly they add the part “Otherwise he'll kill us by disease or by the sword.” Why would they say that when God never told them to? Was to convince Pharaoh of the very great importance of their request? To intimidate Pharaoh regarding God's power? (As if Pharaoh would really be concerned over the death of some Israelites.) Because both Moses and Aaron don't have a great concept of God's nature and character? Something worth thinking about...

But even this relatively minor request is rejected out of hand by Pharaoh, as God already knows. Maybe this is to heighten Pharaoh's total opposition to any alleviation of the Israelites' misery and his total rejection of God: "Who is this 'Lord' that I should listen to his request to let Israel go?" Pharaoh replied. "I don't know the Lord and I certainly won't let Israel leave!" (5:2). (In the Hebrew the word translated "Lord" is the usual name of God, "Yahweh." Presumably Pharaoh saw him as just another deity among many, and this an unknown one worshiped by the Israelites.) He sees this request as an attempt to get out of work, and so increases the demands made on the Israelites, calling them "lazy, lazy people." (5:17).

Remember who Pharaoh claims to be: a God in human form, the son of Ra (the sun god). Just like Lucifer he sets himself up in God's place and says, "I will raise my throne above the stars of God." Isaiah 14:13. Ellen White talks about Pharaoh's "heaven-daring pride" {PP 280}, and certainly he really did think he was supreme over everyone, even these other "gods" of other nations.

The parallel with Lucifer is remarkable, and clearly he was working to defeat God's purposes, first in trying to destroy Moses at birth, and then in attempting to prevent God's people from escaping their slavery. In this he had a willing servant in the form of Pharaoh, who was as proud and arrogant as his master, and also as cruel and vindictive.

The conflict here, and over the millennia, arises from the choice of Lucifer to go his own way and to challenge the character of God and the legitimacy of divine government. The story is told briefly in Ezekiel under the representation of the King of Tyre: "You're so proud of yourself, saying, 'I'm a god! I sit on my throne like a god in the middle of the sea.' But you're only a man. You're not a god, even though you think you are one." Ezekiel 28:2. Sounds exactly the kind of thing Pharaoh as "the son of sun-god Ra" would be saying...

Ellen White Comments

The more Pharaoh resisted and rejected the light, the greater was his stubbornness; for as he sowed unbelief and stubbornness, he reaped again that which he sowed... All are left free to choose whom they will serve. They may listen to the suggestions of Satan, and come to look upon matters as he does, reasoning after the same manner, and the result will be that they will follow the same course of stubborn resistance to the light that Satan pursued in the courts of heaven. Those who reject the light which God sends them, will walk in sparks of their own kindling, and will lie down in sorrow at last. {PH152 28}

The Master of the Christian and the master of the unbeliever are in deadly conflict; and so the contest goes on in many homes. While the Christians are pleading earnestly with God that their relatives and friends may be drawn to Christ, while their hearts are breaking with longing that their loved ones may share His joy and peace, the hearts of the unbelieving are bound as with fetters to Satan's car, and they are asking, as did Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" Again and again Jesus has knocked at the door of their hearts, and asked admission; but they have locked the door, and refused to receive Him. They cherish pride, envy, and hatred, and contention springs from these evil passions.

Satan deceives the soul with false pretensions. He leads the unbelievers to think that they are badly used, treated unkindly. He perverts the judgment and misleads the mind, so that the very best motives of those that serve God are misinterpreted; their actions are misjudged, and they themselves are persecuted. Christ is the believer's hope and consolation, the one about whom his best affections are woven. He confesses Christ in word and deed, in spirit and actions, and the enmity that is created in the unbelieving heart against the children of God is not against men simply, but against Christ. {BEcho March 19, 1894, par. 3 }