

NOON BIBLE STUDY: EXODUS 4:24-6:9

Exodus 4:24-26 - But First This Message...

This is indeed an odd interaction. Moses and his family are traveling back to Egypt and all of a sudden the LORD wants to put someone in the family – most likely Moses – to death! The remedy for this serious moment is Zipporah (Moses' wife) circumcising their son. She does it, and throws the foreskin at Moses's feet saying "you're a bridegroom of blood to me". After this the LORD's anger subsides. "What is going on here?!"

To be honest, we don't really know! Apparently Moses had not circumcised his son, as was required by the children of Abraham, and God was not happy about it. Zipporah somehow knows what is going on and intervenes for Moses by doing the circumcision herself, which then appeases the anger of the LORD.

"We do not know why Moses had disobeyed, but what we do know is this, that the LORD in effect said to him, "you cannot go into my service until you are right with me." (J.A. Motyer, "The Message Of Exodus", page 93)

Scholar J.A. Motyer proposes based on the language of the Hebrew in this section that when it says "The LORD met him (Moses)" that something was happening to Moses that Zipporah interpreted as God's judgement. Maybe Moses was having a seizure or something and so Zipporah's intervention was literally to save Moses' life. He suggests that Zipporah touches the foreskin to Moses' feet as a way to indicate that her obedience was Moses' obedience. Her "you are a bridegroom of blood" was not some nag or insult, but a remark of a relieved wife who had just saved her husband from death. Interesting insight to an interesting story.

Exodus 4:27-31 - Moses Reunites With Aaron, Informs Israel

Moses reunites with his brother Aaron at the mountain. We learned earlier and read again here that God had actually stirred in Aaron's heart to go and visit Moses. It's possible that Moses and Aaron had some sort of communication while Moses was away in Midian. Maybe Moses even told Aaron where he was heading as he fled Egypt initially. However long it might have been, the brothers have a sweet reunion

and then head back to Egypt together. Aaron is going to play a leading role in the Exodus story from the start.

Once back in Egypt, Moses and Aaron assemble the “elders of the sons of Israel” and inform them of what God said to Moses. This would have been a very unique meeting. Moses, a man they may not have known, or at least had not seen in decades, has returned with a message from God regarding the bondage of Israel. We know the Israelites longed for freedom and now they hear an unlikely messenger say that God has indeed taken note of their affliction.

After the signs are performed in their presence (staff to snake, leprous hand, and Nile water to blood) they are convinced that what Aaron has spoken (on Moses’ behalf) is true and that God is with them. Realizing that God indeed has heard and seen leads the people to worship (4:31). Their prayers had been heard by God - perhaps their freedom and salvation is near.

Exodus 5:1-9 - First Appearance Before Pharaoh

Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh the first of what will become many times. They inform Pharaoh that “the LORD” (remember this is where in Hebrew it is actually God’s name, YHWH) has commanded that Pharaoh “let His people go.” They request permission to travel three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD, warning that disobedience could bring God’s judgment upon them (5:3). Moses and Aaron appeal to Pharaoh’s religious worldview and hope that he, a worshipper of many gods himself, will understand this request. But as we will discover, Pharaoh’s refusal becomes a repeated pattern. In fact, his opening reply is *“who is Yahweh? I do not know Yahweh! And besides, (aka it doesn’t matter who Yahweh is), I’m not letting my slaves go free.”*

Pharaoh concludes that if these Hebrew slaves have time to dream up a plan to go and have a feast, three days journey away from Egypt, they clearly have too much time on their hands and should be working harder and longer. And that’s what he commands to have done to the Hebrew slaves. He makes their jobs harder by no longer providing the straw to make bricks. The Hebrews will have to get the straw themselves and still make the same number of bricks each day.

Exodus 5:10-21 - The Slaves Hear Of The New No-Straw Policy

The news travels to the slaves and they are not happy. Same quota of bricks, now with the extra work of collecting their own straw makes their already difficult lives even harder. The foremen of the slaves even try and appeal directly to Pharaoh but he refuses their request.

They then find Moses and Aaron and are not happy and blame them:

Exodus 5:20-21 (NLT) - As they left Pharaoh's court, they confronted Moses and Aaron, who were waiting outside for them. 21 The foremen said to them, "May the LORD judge and punish you for making us stink before Pharaoh and his officials. You have put a sword into their hands, an excuse to kill us!"

"Perhaps the most diabolic side of the whole scheme was the calculated plan to divide the slaves into factions and sow inner discontent. Accordingly, the Hebrew foremen are pictured turning on their leaders (Moses and Aaron) with vicious resentment. Now Pharaoh does not have to discredit Moses directly. He is renounced by his own people, who would gladly trade the thought of freedom for a return to the earlier status quo, which suddenly was made to appear quite tolerable. (Brevard Childs, "The Book Of Exodus", Page 106)

And so the battle between Pharaoh and the LORD begins with Pharaoh feeling up for the challenge. Aaron's first word to Pharaoh was "thus says the LORD...(5:1)". Notice how Pharaoh arrogantly replies when taking away the straw, "Thus says Pharaoh..." (5:10). At once we see the "hardened heart" of this man who will try and resist the one true God.

Exodus 5:22-6:9 - Moses Goes Back To God

We see here a window into the personal relationship that Moses had with Yahweh. If we are honest, things have not gone well, and fast. The last verses of Exodus 4 said that "the people believed..." (4:31) and the last verses of chapter 5 speak of how the people are mad at Moses, with Moses' own confession: "you have not delivered your people at all (5:23)."

What does Moses do? He brings this concern to the LORD. Moses says "*God, why is this happening? Ever since I came here things have gotten worse! Why did I even come?!*"

And what does the LORD do? He responds to his servant's heart with a refresher course in who He is and what He's done. He tells Moses that this is what He knew was

going to happen and that He is going to complete the work He started through Moses, even though at first it seems like things are going wrong.

"I am Yahweh".

I am the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!"

I will bring my people out of Egypt.

I will deliver you and judge them!

I am taking you as my people!

I will be your God!

I will take you to the Promised land!

I am Yahweh!

WOW. That's quite the response. God actually tells Moses that He and the people of Israel right now are in a new season of understanding just who their God is. Abraham and the patriarchs knew him as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*) but now they are growing deeper knowing His name and seeing what He would do for them.

And so then Moses brings this message of encouragement back to the people and they essentially respond with *"blah blah blah...whatever Moses..."* The people who had "believed" in 4:31 had now become the people who were discouraged and despondent, unable to hear because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery. And so Moses is going to have to learn quickly that his own faith and obedience could not be tied to the response of Pharaoh nor the reaction of the people around him -- it had to be dependent on his relationship with Yahweh. And that is an important lesson for us.

Moses is experiencing God in a difficult season. His life is going to get harder before it gets better. But the difficulties he will experience won't be because he's doing something wrong - but because he is doing something right! A life of faithfulness is not a typical cause-and-effect life. Sometimes we do what is right and things around us go bad. Sometimes we look at people who are doing wrong and it seems like their life is going well!

We don't walk by sight; we walk by faith. And faith is rooted in the LORD and His word. Moses is learning that the measure of his obedience cannot be whether things are going well, whether Pharaoh cooperates, or whether the people approve. The question is whether he is being faithful to what God has commanded. That doesn't

always make sense when we look at things through natural eyes. But that's what it means to walk by faith and not by sight.

Who God is does not change just because things around us change. And that's why our faith must be rooted in who God is and not how things are going. Over and over again we will read in Exodus that God will often give one reason for *why* He is asking something of his people:

“for I am the LORD (YHWH).”

That's it. He is God, we are not. That is the reason why whatever He has spoken is what it is.

So, when we're experiencing a situation like this, what should we do when we don't understand why things are going a certain way? What did Moses do? Exodus 5:22-23 shows us that he took his concern and complaint directly to God and then God responded to Moses' honest heart. That process is what Moses is going to do over and over again and through these difficult days he is going to grow more and more dependent on God.

So what will you and I do when we don't understand what is happening in the world? What will we do when things get harder after we do what God wants? What will we do when the people around us make things difficult? What will we do when people who used to be encouraging us, are now discouraging us? What will we do when the answer to the prayers we're praying takes longer than we hope, want or feel it should? What will we do when we obey God and then results come that don't seem to make sense?

What will we do in those moments? That's for each of us to decide.

But what Moses models for us here in Exodus, is that we would be wise to decide to cultivate our relationship with the LORD, be convinced of His circumstance-transcending goodness, and take our worries, doubts, fears, concerns and even our complaints right to Him. He can handle your questions and confusion. He is Yahweh.