

## **The People Believed, Worshiped and are Afflicted**

**Exodus 4:27–5:14**

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus 4, verse 27. Now we're continuing our study in Exodus. We have seen throughout this message of God's deliverance, especially in the first eighteen chapters it is emphasized that we are redeemed by God, and we are within the first of three parts in those first eighteen chapters, focusing on the trials and the bondage of Israel. In Exodus 1, we said that God's sovereignty was emphasized. In Exodus 2, Moses, the future deliverer of Israel, is introduced and put in a good light. At the end of Exodus 2 we learn that the redemption of Israel is rooted in God's prior covenant commitments. In Exodus 3 God manifests Himself to Moses at Sinai, tells him that He will appoint him to be the deliverer of His people. And it's in Exodus 3 that we learn that the purpose of God's delivering the people of Israel out of Egypt is that they may worship. That's not a trick, it's not a side light, it is a central focus of God's work of redemption in bringing Israel out of Egypt.

Last week we said that God showed Himself to be the redeemer of Israel, sovereign and holy, as we looked at Exodus 4, 18 through 16. Moses was the appoint deliverer by the command of God, but he was dependent on God's power to accomplish the task.

So the Exodus itself is about God. It's about His sovereignty, His worship, His kingdom. Pharaoh is in the way. The battle is ultimately between Pharaoh and God. The God of Egypt and the God of Israel. The true God, and this false God of Egypt, and Pharaoh is no match. The Lord will show Himself to be sovereign, and He will determine who sits even on the throne of Egypt.

And then at the very end of our study as we looked at those strange verses in Exodus 4, verses 24 through 26 we saw that God is holy, and He will not be trifled with. Even in His messengers He demands righteousness. In fact we might say especially in His messengers, He demands righteous. Those who would serve the Lord must serve Him in clothing of holiness. So tonight we come to Exodus 4, verse 27, and we'll read all the way to Exodus 5, verse 14. This is God's word for you. Hear it expectantly:

Now the Lord said to Aaron, "Go meet Moses in the wilderness." So he went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do. Then, Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel, and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped. And afterward, Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go that they may celebrate a feast to me in the wilderness.'" But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go. I do not know the Lord and besides, I will not let Israel go." 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." But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors." Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors?" So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foreman saying, "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore, they cry out 'Let us go, and sacrifice to our God.' Let the labor be heavier on the men and let them work at it that they may pay no attention to false words." So the taskmasters of the people and their foreman went out and spoke to the people saying, "Thus says Pharaoh. 'I am not going to give you any straw. You go and get straw for yourselves, wherever you can find it. But none of your labor will be reduced.'" So the people scattered over all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. And the taskmasters pressed them saying, "Complete your work quota, your daily amount just as when you had straw." Moreover, the foreman of the sons of Israel whom Pharaoh taskmasters had set over them were beaten and were asked "Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?"

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy word. May He add his blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord, this is Your word to us. But simply for Israel did You write this word down, but for us upon whom the end of the ages have come. You have written it for our instruction that we might be taught to trust, that we might be taught to obey, that we might see Your glory. And that in this great redeeming work of the Exodus, we might see a foretaste, a fore glance of the redeeming work that You

have now accomplished in Jesus Christ. By Your spirit apply it to our hearts, enable us to seek Your word even now and to listen quietly to hear it. We pray, O God, that we would respond in faith, in trust, and in holiness, sensing our obligation to You and sensing the privilege to serve You. This we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

This is a passage about God's providence. This is a passage about the challenge to believe. This is a passage about God manifesting His glory, and this is a passage about Satan battling against God and against his people. And I'd like to look at each of those four things with You for a few moments tonight.

### **I. God encourages Moses by His providence.**

First, in verses 27 and 28, we see the brothers, Aaron and Moses, meet at Sinai and prepare for the journey and for the mission that God had given them. But I want you to see even in this little incident which begins the story which will unfold as we talk together tonight. Even in this little incident God encourages Moses by His providence. By divine revelation, the Lord comes to Aaron in verse 27 and tells him to meet Moses in the wilderness. Moses had asked for a spokesman. God gave him a spokesman in his brother Aaron, but Moses does not have to seek out Aaron. God does that for him. They greet one another with a kiss. This was the common manner of greeting between relatives in the Old Testament. And what a providential encouragement that must have been to Moses. He doesn't have to go find his brother. God has already spoken to his brother and his brother has found him. He's not only found him, he finds him at the mountain of God. The very place where God had first met with Moses, where He had revealed himself to Moses, where He revealed his plan to Moses, where He had revealed Moses' place in that plan, where He had revealed the words that Moses was to say, both to his people and to Pharaoh, where He had revealed the signs that Moses was to show both to his people and to Pharaoh. It is precisely at that point where Aaron and Moses meet. And at the meeting we are told in verse 28 Moses taught Aaron everything the Lord had told him to say. And he shows to him the revealed signs that the Lord had given to him. Facing the enormity of the challenge before him, Moses was surely encouraged by this indication of God's providence that He was with him. That He was looking out for him. That he was going to provide for him every step of the way.

And we, too, ought to peruse God's providence and study encouragement and thanksgiving in it. Do you look at God's providences? Do you seek to see the encouragement that God has unfolded in your own experience? Whether He has called you to a specific mission or whether He has called you to study faithfulness. Are you looking for the signs of God's encouragement in that? As you do, I think you will find ample opportunity for thanksgiving to God. And if you don't, you will miss opportunities for thanksgiving to God which will actually slacken your faith, because in the very process of thanking God for His

encouragements and providence, we are reminded how actively He is involved in our everyday experience. God encourages Moses this way. God continues to encourage His people by providence today. That's the first thing we see. God manifesting Himself for encouragement in providence.

## **II. The people's biggest challenge in all their forthcoming trials is to believe God.**

In verses 29 through 31 Aaron speaks to the elders, and Moses performs the divine signs before the elders and the people. But I want to suggest to you that it becomes very apparent even in these three little verses that the people's biggest challenge in the Exodus, the people's biggest challenge in all the trials that are ahead of them, and those trials are going to start in the very passage that we are studying tonight at a new level. They had already been enduring much. Now the temperature is going to be turned up. God's redemptive work has actively begun, and things don't get better, they get worse. But the biggest challenge is not going to be Pharaoh, it's not going to be the taskmasters, it's not going to be keeping up with a quota in unreasonable settings, the biggest challenge that the children of Israel face is to believe God's word. That's the biggest challenge that they have before them. And I want to suggest to you that you see that in verses 29 through 31.

Let me try and extrapolate that for you. In verse 29 Moses and Aaron gather, and they speak to the elders of Israel. The elders of Israel were those who were heads of families, they were representatives of the people. And God had told Moses that he was to speak to them, and he was to reveal to them God's concern and God's plan; and to show them the signs that they might recognize God's appointment of Moses as deliverer of His people. So in verse 30 we are told that Aaron and Moses did exactly what God told them to do. They spoke the words of the Lord to them, and it's probably Moses rather than Aaron who performs the signs (the "he" is ambiguous, but it probably refers back to Moses) since Aaron was designated as the one who was the spokesman, not the sign shower.

We also said as well, of course, that the one who was the staff bearer in the ancient near East was usually the prophet. And so it makes sense since that Moses was the one performing the signs, even as Aaron was the one saying the words of God. Notice the four things that Moses and Aaron have done in verses 29 and 30. They set off for Egypt, in obedience to God's command. They gather the elders, in verse 29, in obedience to God's command. They speak all the Lord's words, verse 30, in obedience to God's command, and they do the signs, verse 30, in obedience to God's commands. Now, that whole event seems to presuppose that Israel is going to have a hard time believing God's promises and plan. Why would that be, and especially the showing of the signs, have been such a main feature, apart from the need to identify Moses as the divinely

appointed deliverer of Israel. Why would this have featured in such a way if there was not going to be a struggle to believe on the part of Israel? Now, as a matter of fact, as we continue to read through this story, that is precisely what manifests itself. And I want to suggest to you that what God had already told Moses and Aaron to do indicates that this was a point of struggle that God was already preparing to address before it begins to manifest itself in the kinds of active rebellion that we're going to see in Exodus 5:15 and following on the part of the children of Israel as they really do begin to go through very difficult trials.

It's interesting, isn't it, that God grants signs because of the weakness of their faith. And it's not surprising then that we meet troubles in the area of faith and perseverance. The areas of faith and perseverance figure prominently in the story to come. God is already preparing to deal with His people in these areas. He begins by dealing very graciously and caringly and carefully.

Now the initial response in verse 31 is very encouraging. The people joyfully believe what Moses announces to them. They joyfully believe the gospel of the Exodus we might call it. And they naturally, the instinctively respond in worship, especially, we are told, in verse 31 to the message that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel, and that He had seen their affliction. And isn't it interesting that that core of the Exodus gospel is also at the core of the gospel of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has seen and is concerned for the affliction of His people. And so He has sent a redeemer. This moves the people of God, and it moves them to worship.

Let me make a couple of comments about the worship and the belief in this passage. Notice that belief leads to worship. They believe and they worship. But notice also two more things. The next time we are told in Exodus that the people worship will be on Passover night, as God delivers them from the angel of death. The next time that we will be told in the Exodus story that God's people believe will be on the other side of the shores of the Red Sea. God has inextricably linked their belief, the Passover, their redemption and worship all together in this verse to show us the centrality of faith in the Exodus, to show us the centrality of worship in the Exodus, to show us the connection between Passover and faith, and the plan of God for the children of Israel to worship Him in spirit and truth.

This verse pushes ahead to the full realization of this word of God and ties the Passover, the crossing, the liberation of the Red Sea together. In this verse, it is as if it has been announced by Moses, in fact it has been announced by Moses and Aaron to the elders and to the people of Israel, that the liberation of Israel has begun. Now those kinds of announcements are stirring things. Perhaps you remember such announcements in your own lifetime. Maybe you were a Gulf war junkie and sat in front of CNN night after night receiving moment by moment report of exactly what was going on in Desert Shield and in Desert Storm. Were you there when the announcement came from General Swartzkoff's office at midnight tonight Operation Desert Shield become Operation Desert Storm? The

liberation of Kuwait has begun. I was listening to it, and I must say I was moved by that. The thought that redemption was coming for a people that had been invaded. How much greater is the emotion of God coming to the rescue of His people, and Moses and Aaron announcing the liberation of Israel has begun. This we see right here in verses 29 through 31.

But it is clear that in all of this, the biggest challenge for Israel is going to believe that God's word is true. Trials are going to get more difficult for them, not less. They're going to be tempted to discount what God has said. And so the great challenge for them is to believe, to trust in God. And I want to put it to you. It's the same way with us today. You know, I have noticed over the course of time, put someone in a tight spot, and there is something inherent even in Christians where we begin to think of ourselves as the exception to the rule; and we're the one person that doesn't need to do it the way that God has said it in His word. We need to do it differently because our situation is entirely of a different magnitude. And what do we really need to do? We really need to trust God's word. He didn't make a mistake when He put down His promises. He didn't make a mistake when He put down His law. He knew what He was talking about. And He requires of us, trust in His word. To walk in His ways. And I don't care what circumstance you are in. If you're in a difficult marital circumstance, the prime thing that you need to do is trust God's word. If you are in a difficult circumstance with your business and vocation, if things are falling in around your ears, the prime thing you have to do is trust God's word. That's always the biggest challenge for God's people. Pharaoh made it seem like a huge challenge.

Let me say that over the next few chapters, God is going to make a mockery of Pharaoh. Pharaoh is going to be shown to be a fool. Moses with delicious delight writes down Pharaoh's, "Thus saith Pharaoh," because knows that God is going to make a monkey out of him over the next few chapters. Pharaoh isn't Israel's problem. Israel is Israel's problem. And God's manifestation and His glory, and we're going to focus on this in the next section, is going to be dual. He's going to manifest His glory in Israel, He's going to manifest His glory in Egypt, those manifestations of glory are both going to exalt the Lord God of Israel, but in different ways. And the way He is going to manifest Himself in glory in Israel is in teaching them that He is worth trusting. And when He says it, He will do it. And that's their great challenge, to trust the Lord. And that's our great challenge as well.

### **III. The Exodus is about the glory of God being manifested.**

In verses 1 through 5 of Exodus, chapter 5, Aaron and Moses move from this audience with the elders and the people of Israel, and they go before Pharaoh, himself. And here it becomes even more clear. And this has been building for some time in the book of Exodus, but in these verses it becomes more clear that Exodus is about the glory of God being manifested. In verse 1 Aaron and Moses

come and they pronounce, "Thus saith the Lord." We said the last time that that was the classic introduction of the words of a deity by a prophet in the near East. Even Pharaoh would have understood this formula. He would know that what Aaron is about to say to him, he is claiming to be the words of a god. This is not Aaron's word, it's not Aaron's idea. It's the words of a god speaking to Pharaoh. As Aaron speaks, as he addresses Pharaoh, he says to him that the God of Israel is demanding that His people be let go in order that they may celebrate a feast in the wilderness.

Notice again, not for the first time and not for the last, the release of Israel is directly linked to worship. Let me say it again. That's not a trick. It's true. It is totally true. The release of Israel is in order that they may worship. In verse 2, the response of Pharaoh mirrors the response of the serpent's challenge in the Garden to Eve. Pharaoh says, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?" He says, "I don't know who the Lord is. Why should I let Him go?" Now he doesn't mean that he literally doesn't know who they're talking about. He knows perfectly well that this Lord is the God of Israel. This is not his problem. What he is saying is that he does not recognize Him. He doesn't recognize His authority. He is calling the word of the Lord into question. Sound familiar?

Now this is so important for you to recognize because Pharaoh is a pawn of Satan. This becomes increasingly clear and Moses makes it increasingly clear as he tells this particular story. Pharaoh is the incarnation of Satan's work in the lives of God's people in the event of the Exodus. And so even as the battle of the Exodus is much about God verses Pharaoh behind that battle divine and human is the divine and angelic battle. The battle between God and Satan himself.

Now apparently in verse 3 Moses and Aaron were a bit taken back by the force and the brazenness of Pharaoh's retort to them. And so they actually begin to grovel a little bit. "Please, please let us go. Three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Otherwise He will fall with pestilence or with sword." They begin to beg to the king of Egypt, Pharaoh, to release the people of God. It's very interesting though. And there are some delicious ironies. Moses and Aaron stress to Pharaoh how serious this is that God will visit judgment on His people if they are not faithful to go and worship. That's how important for the people of God to worship Him. But if it is Pharaoh who impedes the worship of the people of God on whom will the pestilence and sword fall, let me ask you? Now you know the end of the story. On whom does the pestilence and sword fall? So even as Moses and Aaron humbly beg, Pharaoh is writing his own death warrant and the destruction of his people.

Notice that they ask Pharaoh to allow them to go on a pilgrimage into the wilderness. Even Egyptian documents have records of Arabian slaves going into the wilderness to perform pilgrimages to holy places. There were even technical phrases used for it. And one is used here. This is a *Haj*. Anybody remember the cartoon Johnny Quest? Nobody's going to admit this, are you? Do you remember

Johnny Quest's sidekick, Ali Hadji Sheik? Ali Haj means one who has made a pilgrimage. Muslims who make pilgrimages are often given that title, Haj. One who has made a pilgrimage. The word in the Bible, *Haggai*, has the same root. Moses and Aaron are asking Pharaoh to do something that he would have understood perfectly. Going into the wilderness to worship, a pilgrimage. And Pharaoh's response is emphatic. "I will not let Israel go." God's glory is going to be manifested in Israel as Israel's heart is softened, as Israel believes God, and as Israel comes to worship God. God's glory is going to be manifested in Egypt as Pharaoh's heart is hardened as he continues to disbelieve God, as he continues to impede the worship of the children of God, and as he is ultimately destroyed. What we are witnessing in the Exodus event is a contest between the God of Israel, the true God, and the God of Egypt, Pharaoh. Pharaoh speaks as a sovereign. "Thus saith Pharaoh," he says. "I do not recognize the God of Israel." He speaks as a sovereign. He will be shown to be an ineffective pawn of Satan and an unable foil for the one true God in the chapters to come. But the story of Exodus is about God manifesting His glory in His people as they believe against Egypt and to Egypt as Egypt refuses to bow the knee. Don't miss the point of that contest.

#### **IV. Pharaoh seeks to demoralize Israel and discredit Moses.**

And then finally in verses 6 through 14, we see specifically Pharaoh's attempt to demoralize Israel and to discredit Moses. This is the oppressive response and reaction to this interview with Aaron and Moses on the part of Pharaoh. Look especially at verse 9 because it sums up Pharaoh's goals in what he does in this whole section. "Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words." Pharaoh wants the people of Israel not to believe the words of Moses. And everything that he's doing in this passage is designed to do that, to discredit Moses and to demoralize Israel.

Two or three things that I would comment on in this passage. First of all in verses 6 through 8. Pharaoh's strategy regarding bricks and straw has been much commented upon. And according to my friend, Duncan Rankin, has been much incorrectly commented upon by the commentators. Oftentimes you'll find the commentators saying that somehow it was harder to make bricks without straw or that the straw was needed to give a good consistency in the bricks. Well, my friend, Duncan Rankin, is a brickologist. He's a ceramic engineer, and ceramic engineers know a little bit about bricks. Straw was needed for sun-dried bricks in order to allow the water in the center of the bricks to seep out, so there was even drying. Otherwise, you had a lot of broken bricks. Without straw, you had twice as many broken bricks as you would have had with straw. When Pharaoh stopped giving the supply of straw, it not only meant that Israel had to go out and find straw, but it also meant that they had to go out and use substandard straw, which led to substandard bricks, which led to more brick breakage. And so their labor was increased on both ends. Finding straw, they had to settle to stubble,



and having to produce more bricks. No wonder they couldn't keep up. They had far more breakage than they would have other times. Now if I've explained that incorrectly, Duncan, you can correct them all afterward. But that's my short summarization about what you've taught me that fact.

The second point is much more work. Look at verse 4, verse 5, verses 7 and 8, verse 9 and verse 11. In all those passages, what is Pharaoh saying? "Work, work, work, hard work, more work, heavier work." Isn't it interesting friends, the god of Egypt says, "Work, no rest, no Shiva." The true God says, "Rest." Now that's a battle we still fight today. The god of this world says, "Work, work, work, no rest." The God of heaven and earth, the one true God says, "On My day rest." My friends, that's not oppression, that's liberation. Can you imagine the children of Israel after being under this regime being told by God in the fourth Commandment. "And by the way for you there will there will be seven and a half weeks of mandatory vacation every year." Do you think there would have been any grumbling there? No, because God gives His people rest.

And finally this, notice that Pharaoh dares to call God's words false. "Don't listen to these false words. Make them worker harder so that they won't listen to these false words." Just as Satan did in the Garden. As we've said before, the Exodus is a battle between the Lord and Satan. Vanderwaal says this: Pharaoh is an Old Testament Herod; he represents the seed of the serpent, which seeks to kill the seed of the woman." But as we see Pharaoh attempting to demoralize Israel and discredit Moses, we learn one more thing for ourselves. We must not fail to factor the work of Satan himself in the difficulties and trials of our own lives and ministries. Oh, I know that there are people out there that find Satan literally under every rock. And I know that there are people out there that blame Satan for things that they have done themselves. But we would be foolish not to factor in the reality of the evil one and his stratagems working against the people of God, working against the plan of God, working against the deliverer of God. And what we see here in Pharaoh's actions is nothing but the designs of the old serpent against the seed of woman.

Now in your own lives, I don't know how that works out in every particular circumstance. But it does mean this: In your own difficulties and trials, you must never, ever forget that there is one who prowls about like a roaring lion who seeks to devour you. But the one who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. And that in and of itself, doesn't it, presses us right back to the great challenge of Israel; to trust in God, trust in His word, walk in His ways. May God bless you as you do so. Let's pray.

*Our Lord and our God, we bow before You, in awe and love, and we thank you for what You have revealed to us. This is not just an old story or an interesting story, or a history or even a story of what You have done in the past. It's something for us, even today. Help us to take its lessons, to walk in Your ways, and above all to trust in Your promises. These things we ask in Jesus' name,*

Amen.

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