

# A Stink and a Sword

## Pray

Amid the noise and confusion of this world, may I feel the quietness of being in Your presence, my Lord.

## Read

EXODUS 5:1-21

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • Sometimes hardship comes as a result of obeying God. Are you prepared?

**THINK FURTHER** • Picture the vast, ruthless pyramid of exploitation based on ranks of oppressors, including collaborators. Remember that such evils as concentration camps cannot be sustained without the cooperation of large numbers of ordinary people who love their children and give each other Christmas presents. Diabolical powers act indirectly through commandeered human agents. Do you notice in this chapter how the dialogue shoots up and down the chain of command, from God to Moses and Aaron, to Pharaoh, to his Egyptian superintendents, to the Israelite foremen? There is one deafening silence—the people say nothing. They are just out desperately looking for straw (12). They have no energy or art for speech. They are demoralized, helpless, uneducated, status-less. Do you see the systemic nature of this evil and how in this case the Bible needs to be read politically? We have here a centralized government and a nationalized industry (high-quality brick-making), bolstered by

an institutionalized racism. And Moses and Aaron, called by God to be liberators, seem to have made matters worse. What a stink (21)!

Think of your world and the pictures by which it is represented for your understanding. Can you see those who are enslaved by and to systems of evil—prisoners of tyrants, the sick, the starving, the landless, the slum-dwellers, the sex-workers? Two voices contend for recognition in this passage: “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says...” (1); and “This is what Pharaoh says...” (10). And a question echoes in the dark for the reader’s attention: “Who is the LORD...?” (2). This is a question *demanding* an answer; it does not just mean, “What is his name?” but also, “What is he *like*?”

**APPLICATION** • Moses and Aaron experienced rejection, not only by Pharaoh, but the people they came to save. Have you ever felt rejected because of your faith and witness? Don’t be discouraged, but press on. Remember, God is with you and will bless and use you. Are you prepared to be God’s messenger today—even in a hostile environment?

## Pray

Lord, as I face a new day, strengthen, encourage and use me as Your messenger, even in a hostile world. May I show Your love to someone who needs it.

# The Dark Before the Dawn

## Pray

Lord, today may I be encouraged that “the Lord is with me; I will not be afraid” (Psa. 118:6). Thank You.

## Read

EXODUS 5:22—6:12

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • What part does remembering play in your inventory of spiritual exercises?

**THINK FURTHER** • The turn events have taken inspires fury in Moses. He marches up to God, and although mentioning Pharaoh’s agency, accuses God of doing evil (cosmetically reduced in the NIV to “brought trouble” 5:22). He also whines, “...ever since...” (5:23). Does he expect a short contest? But his trials and his people’s are only just beginning; it will be 40 weary years before they enter their Promised Land. There is an obstinacy about true faith; sometimes we have to go on believing in the teeth of our senses and our imagination. The finger has got to hurt a good deal *more* before the thorn comes out.

God’s answer is so wonderfully generous that this section has been called *The Gospel of Exodus*. Trace out the twelve verbs of which God is the subject, and notice that four times he says, “I am the LORD” (6:2,6-8). The full significance of this name had not been revealed before (6:2), but now it is opened up. In the Jewish Passover celebration, four cups of wine are drunk,

corresponding to “I will bring you out...free you...redeem you...take you as my own...” One cup of wine is poured out but not drunk, because “I will bring you in...” indicates that the journey is still under way. Promises are needed because human beings lie; but in the Old Testament there is no specific word for “promise”—because God will certainly do everything he has said.

With relentless honesty, our passage concludes that the people did not listen to Moses or to God (9). Silent through ch. 5, they are devastated in ch. 6. Picture in your heart all those who cannot hear God because of broken spirit or cruel bondage.

**APPLICATION** • Moses was discouraged—the Israelites were discouraged—the problems were big! “Big problems” need “big faith.” What big problems are you facing? How big is your faith? Does it look beyond the problem and see God’s faithfulness (Heb. 11:1)? How will your faith help you meet today’s challenges?

## Pray

Lord, help me to look beyond my problems and see You at work. Make my faith “sure of what [I] hope for and certain of what [I] do not see” (Heb. 11:1).

# Trust Me—I'm Your God!

## Pray

Teach me to trust You, Lord, in every situation, even when I don't understand.

## Read

EXODUS 6:28—7:13

## Meditate

CONSIDER • As you read, prepare to be honest about your excuses.

THINK FURTHER • As we enter the drama of Exodus, we need to note both the central purpose of God—to deliver Israel from Egypt—and the two results of that event—that “I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh” and that “the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD” (14:4,17,18). All else is the means to those ends and must be interpreted in that light.

What lay behind God's “hardening” of Pharaoh's heart? If Pharaoh had simply allowed Israel to go at the first request, without the need for all the conflicts that followed, the whole purpose of the drama—that Israel gain the self-understanding of being a “redeemed people”—would not have taken place. But God knew that Pharaoh would not cooperate, that he would harden his own heart, so here at the beginning we are introduced to God's judgment on Pharaoh's attitude. There is an enlightening link-up in the Hebrew, which is difficult to translate. In Hebrew the word for Pharaoh hardening his own heart is *kaved*, which comes from the same

root as “glory” (*kavod*). In other words, what Pharaoh was doing was assigning to himself the glory that was due to God alone. In refusing to let Israel go, he was putting himself in the place of God. The word used when God hardens Pharaoh's heart is *chazaq*, which has the sense of confirming what was already in Pharaoh's heart. We also need to understand that in Hebrew thinking the heart is the seat of the will, not the emotions. What we see here is Pharaoh's calculated and deliberate challenge to the sovereign glory (*kavod*) which belongs to the Lord alone (Isa. 42:8; 48:11).

APPLICATION • Are you being faithful in your witness for the Lord, even when rejected? Is there someone that you've “given up” on that needs your continued witness—even though rejected? Press on—Jesus did for you!

## Pray

Lord, keep me from discouragement. Help me to press on in my witness, trusting You for results. In all things, may You be glorified.

# Then the Lord Said...

## Pray

By faith, "I trust in You, O Lord...My times are in Your hands" (Psa. 31:14a,15a).

## Read

EXODUS 7:14—8:7

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • "Signs and wonders." How important are they to you? Can you trust God without them?

**THINK FURTHER** • Reading this section of Exodus, we may well stand in awe at the power of God to achieve his wonderful purposes for his people. But we may also feel perplexed as to how to interpret and apply the miraculous, and even magical, content in the accounts of both Moses and Aaron on the one hand, and the Egyptian wise men on the other. This whole narrative is set in a context which may seem so different from our own that we may find difficulty in drawing lessons that we can apply practically to our everyday living; such a super-abundance of both miracle and magic is outside our experience. It is interesting to note, however, that our fellow-believers in many parts of the African and Asian continents do not seem to share our difficulty. This is something we shall continue to think through in the days ahead.

Three times in this drama we read that "the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts." The whole area of "signs and

wonders" is a topic through which we must walk with care. Signs and wonders are part of our Christian experience and proclamation (Acts 8:6; 14:3; Gal. 3:5), but we must heed the warnings and apply safeguards. Satan himself is a good imitator (2 Cor. 11:14). The test is not just "is it real?" but also, "is it in accord with wholesome biblical teaching and practice?" Does it build up the body (Deut. 13:1-4)? As here with Pharaoh, so also in the New Testament: those who seek only signs and wonders will not be convinced even when they occur before their very eyes (John 12:37).

**APPLICATION** • Are you able to trust God and his Word completely, even when everything seems to prove otherwise? Are your eyes "fixed on Jesus" (Heb. 12:2)? Is there a situation you are facing today that will require complete trust in Jesus to make you stand firm against the "evil one"?

## Pray

"Father, help me lean on You more through each valley, through ev'ry storm. / Help me when I cannot see, Your will is best for me..." (Ron Hamilton).

# “Why, God?”

## Pray

Heavenly Father, help me understand that Your timing and Your will is always perfect. Help me to wait patiently.

## Read

EXODUS 8:8-32

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • “Patience is the queen of virtues” (John Chrysostom). As you read and pray, allow your patience to be examined by God.

**THINK FURTHER** • As the battle of the wills between Moses and Pharaoh continues, several new aspects come into play. First of all, in order to remove any idea of the plagues’ departure being a coincidence, Moses challenges Pharaoh to name the time for the relief to come. God’s power can be shown not only in supernatural events, but also in their timing. Perfect timing is important in God’s outworking of his purposes, and we need to be in tune with him, even though it tests our patience (John 7:6). Second, with the plague of gnats, the Egyptian magicians are unable to replicate the sign, and have reluctantly to acknowledge that this is “the finger of God” (19). We can be reassured that though the powers of evil seem to operate freely in the world around us, in fact their freedom is circumscribed by the limit God places on them (Job 2:6). However, Pharaoh’s increasing hardness of heart is shown by the fact that he is now unwilling to lis-

ten even to his own advisors. Third, with the plague of flies, the community of Israel is spared, so that Pharaoh might know that God makes a distinction between his people and the Egyptians. While this may be a great comfort, we need also to realize that, except when God sovereignly makes this distinction, even though we are “in Christ” we also share fully in the human condition. We suffer the same illnesses, we experience redundancy and unemployment, we are killed and injured in the same wars, the same traffic accidents, though at times we can testify to God’s deliverance in these things. Why James suffered martyrdom and Peter experienced deliverance, for example (Acts 12:2,7), must remain a mystery while we only see “in part” (1 Cor. 13:12).

**APPLICATION** • Have you ever asked “Why, God, don’t You answer? Why don’t You change my circumstances?” Are you willing to trust him in all circumstances, knowing he is working out his purpose in your life (Phil. 1:6; 2 Cor. 4:16-18)? Upon what will you “fix” your eyes today?

## Pray

Lord, renew me today. May I keep my eyes on You, knowing that “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17).

# True to His Word

## Pray

Lord, "You are my refuge and my shield, I have put my hope in Your Word" (Psa. 119:114). Teach me, I pray .

## Read

EXODUS 9:1-26

## Meditate

**CONSIDER** • Whose timetable are you working on? Is the Lord wanting to say something about your priorities or your timetable?

**THINK FURTHER** • Moses and Aaron have used their staff, they have stretched out their hands (Num. 20:8-12), and now, in the plague of the death of the livestock, they are to trust in the power of the spoken word alone. Then for the next plague God instructs them to work out a prophetic drama (see Ezek. 4). Beware the rut of technique, both in prayer and in ministry! Patterns are a useful aid but rigid techniques can paralyze the Spirit.

We have noticed that for the first plagues, at least, the magicians of Egypt were able to replicate the plagues. What is important is that they were unable to replicate God's deliverance. Only Moses, through his intercession, was able to do that. So too today, it is easier to bring harm than to deliver people from it. There are many powers at work that bring harm, and God may even use them, or allow them, to bring his judgment. But God alone can bring deliverance. The increasing severity of the plagues shows not

only the awesome power of God's judgment, but also his patience and mercy. As Moses says, God could by now have totally destroyed all opposition, but by building up the pressure slowly he is giving many opportunities for repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). Gradually, the united opposition of the Egyptian leadership is cracking, as signs appear that some are listening to Moses. Moses also reflects God's patience. He knows that Pharaoh's spells of repentance are short-lived, yet he keeps the door open. Only God can call "time," and say when opportunities for repentance are over, and when his judgment must fall.

**APPLICATION** • "Tomorrow...I will send the...hailstorm" (18)—and he did! God's Word never fails, what he promises he will do (Heb. 10:23). How do his promises uphold you in this sinful world? He has promised to return some day—and he will. Are you ready, and how are you sharing the promise with those who have no hope?

## Pray

Your Word, Lord, is eternal and sure, and Your promises will never fail. Help me to be more faithful in sharing Your Word of hope with those without hope.