

FREEDOM PROMISED

Exodus 5:1-4; 6:2-9

The idea of “freedom” is certainly appealing to most people. What freedom means to some people could be “do anything, at anytime, at anyplace without regard to the impact on anyone else and without any accountability.” A better term of that description would be anarchy that results in chaos. In a Biblical context, “freedom” would generally be understood as “to not be enslaved” but would certainly not include a license to do things that would harm others. In a world where many people were subject to various forms of constraint that ranged from outright slavery to being an indentured servant, the desirability of freedom over slavery should be obvious.

Because of a famine, the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob relocated from Canaan to Egypt during a time that Joseph (Jacob’s favorite son) was an important leader in the government of Egypt. Joseph was thirty-nine years old when his extended family joined him in Egypt. After the famine was over, all Joseph’s brothers and his parents continued to live in Egypt and they flourished in that fertile land. Of course, they were treated favorably since Joseph was in such a high place of leadership. About seventy years later, Joseph died at the age of one hundred ten and about twenty years later, Levi, the last of the sons of Jacob passed away. After that, things began to change. Conditions had been favorable for these “children of Israel” for the ninety years they had been in Egypt. Not long after Levi died, the king of Egypt died and the new king who took his place had not known Joseph.

The children of Israel had not been integrated into the Egyptian culture but remained separate since they were shepherds who were deplorable to the Egyptians. They had also grown significantly in their population. Consequently, the new king saw them as a potential threat to his nation since they were different and it was feared that they would eventually outnumber the Egyptians.

If we look back several decades from that time to the time of the great famine, we see that the government of Egypt used the crisis of the famine (and the fact that they controlled the source of available food) to confiscate all the money of their citizens, all their livestock and all their land. By the time the famine was over, everything was owned by the government and the people were taken care of by the government. If the government was benevolent, then that could work out; however, if the leaders became malevolent, then everyone was essentially in slavery. It was a situation similar to that described by Orwell in *Animal Farm*, where “all the animals were equal, but some were more equal than others.” In the situation in Egypt, where everyone essentially worked for the government, the enslavement was more pronounced for the children of Israel who were still living there.

If slavery was the norm, then why would they value freedom? Why would freedom be attractive to someone who had never experienced freedom? As it turned out, the governmental control of the children of Israel was very oppressive and that oppression which caused suffering was the motivation for them to want to make a change. The major difference in the slavery of the children of Israel and the slavery of the Egyptian people was that, even though the Egyptians owned nothing and were dependent on the Egyptian overlords, they were part of the system that was administering the control of the lives of the entire population.

Confronted – 5:1-4

¹ 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.” Exodus 5:1–4 (ESV)

The idea that our purpose is to worship the One Who created us is important in the initial exchange Moses had with Pharaoh when he requested permission for the Israelites to go into the wilderness to hold a festival and make sacrifices to God. The fact that our purpose in life is directly related to God is found in the relationship we have with Him. Simply stated, we are His people. Not only did God create us, but He has redeemed us to restore us to the intended relationship. Since we are His people and as part of our worship of Him, we are to show evidence of Who God is as we interact with others so that they will know Him and worship Him also.

Prior to talking with Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron went to the Hebrew people and told them what God had instructed them to do. God also gave Moses several signs so as to provide convincing evidence to the people that God's power was with Moses. You remember that one sign was that when Moses would throw his staff on the ground that it would turn into a snake and when he would pick it up it would become a staff again. The Hebrew people accepted and believed and Moses and Aaron then went to Pharaoh with their proposal.

Some forty years had passed since Moses fled Egypt after having killed an Egyptian and there was a new Pharaoh ruling in Egypt who did not know about the incident and likely did not know nor care that this Moses had been raised by an Egyptian princess. Moses’ source of authority for what he was doing was based simply on “thus saith the Lord God of Israel.” To Moses this was all the authority that he needed. But, notice the response of the Egyptian: “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice..?” We find ourselves in just such a situation today as Moses was in. When we guide our lives and attempt to influence society by the principles we find in the Bible (the Word of God), we find the world asking the same kinds of questions that the Pharaoh asked: “Why should I follow what that says – I can find other advice written by philosophers and psychologists. Why is the Bible any more correct than these people?” Our response is that “the Bible is the Word of God” and they think that we are not rational for believing in the supernatural.

Pharaoh decided that he would do what he wanted to do and did not choose to accept what God wanted. This is the choice that billions of people make each day and most people choose to do that which pleases themselves and not what is required by consideration of what is right and holy.

Notice that Moses appealed to Pharaoh on the basis of what God would do to the Israelites and no threat was made against the Egyptians. The reason for going away some three days’ journey came up later (in Exodus Chapter 8) and there it was stated that the sacrifices of Hebrews would be detestable to the Egyptians. The rituals probably involved sprinkling the people with a mixture of blood and water and that probably would not be very appealing to the Egyptians. This practice, of course, points to the shed blood of Jesus Christ and we sing such songs as “I am washed in the blood of the Lamb.” If you stop and think about it, that concept is probably not appealing to a non-Christian. It is also likely that once Moses and the Israelites were three days’ journey away that they would keep on going. That’s probably what Pharaoh thought, also.

Pharaoh's response was typical of tyrants throughout the history of mankind: “What do the people know? If you have time to think about such things, then you must not be working hard

enough, so I will give you more to do." It would appear that Moses' efforts had backfired. He did not get what he wanted and the people were the ones to suffer for it. That makes it difficult for someone who is not part of the establishment who is really concerned about people. This is reality, though. There are prices to be paid for things that are worthwhile. When Moses confronted God with the setback, God was not concerned because He knew the outcome and knew that He was in control. Initially, there was no pressure on Pharaoh, no threats but now God was going to show the people of Israel what He will do to Pharaoh so that Pharaoh will be glad to see the Israelites leave.

Moses was in need of some reassurance to restore his confidence. After his foray with the Pharaoh and the resulting increase in the burden on the Israelites, he was not the most popular man in town. Starting in verse 22 of chapter five, Moses asked God what was happening. He essentially asked "Why have You done this to the Israelites? Is this why you sent me?" This conversation led to God revealing more of what He would do to Pharaoh and reminding Moses again that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and that the covenant He made with them was still valid.

Reminded – 6:2-5

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. Exodus 6:2-5 (ESV)

The reassurance that God gave Moses started with God repeating the name that defined His eternal, transcendent nature – I am Who I am. Since God never changes, He reminded Moses of all He had done in the past for the true descendants of Abraham. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob identified the One True Most High God as the One who was all powerful or the One who was unlimited in what He could do. That understanding of God's nature was the basis of their trust in Him.

We have pointed out that God's revelation of Himself to mankind is progressive and when God began directly interacting with Moses, He reveal additional information about His being. That new information was important for Moses to know since the situation involving the descendants of Abraham had certainly changed (they were now slaves) since God first called Abram to leave Ur of the Chaldees. However, since God never changes, the covenant that had been established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was still in effect and would be fulfilled. The fulfillment of that covenant would require these descendants to be freed from slavery and return to the land of Canaan.

God also repeated the same message He had given to Moses at the burning bush regarding that He was fully aware of the current situation of the people being enslaved and He was fully aware of the covenant promises He had made.

Promised – 6:6-9

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. Exodus 6:6-9 (ESV)

Because of that covenant Moses was given a list of God's actions that would be done on their behalf. There are seven assurances from God of what He would do for the Israelites. These all begin with "I will." (Parenthetically, Young's Literal Translation renders each of these as "I have" which would indicate that as far as God was concerned, these were already completed.) These seven can be grouped in three general broader promises. The first is deliverance from Egypt (I will bring you out, free you from slavery, and redeem you), the second is God's possession of the Israelites as His own people (I will take you to be my people and I will be your God), the third is the gift of the land (I will bring you to the land and I will give it to you as a possession).

The deliverance from Egypt was a threefold salvation – relief of burdens, freedom from slavery, and redemption. If the deliverance from Egypt is a picture or type of the salvation we have through Christ, then we should be able to relate these three things to our salvation experience.

The mental picture we get when "relief of burdens" is mentioned is that something is taken off us that we had been carrying around that was weighing us down. For the unsaved, the major burden a person has is the "law of sin and death" and the realization that Judgment Day is appointed to every person. In addition to this (which many refuse to acknowledge), there are burdens that people can encounter that are related to broken relationships, financial burdens, health issues and identity issues that can result from being alienated from God and not living according to His precepts. Some of these burdens can also affect those who are saved since many of these things are not necessarily a result of choices a person makes.

Slavery is an excellent picture of the condition of man apart from the salvation available in Christ. We could name an extensive list of things and conditions to which people find themselves enslaved. Addictions to drugs, pornography, sex, eating, stealing, lying, and who knows what else can literally enslave people. Many find relief from such slavery through sheer self-control; however, deliverance is found only in the power of the Holy Spirit to set us free.

We normally think of redemption as a payment to purchase a slave from the slave owner and that slave then become the property of the new owner. In the case of our salvation, we refer to the fact that Christ paid our debt to redeem us from the enslavement to sin and the devil. In the redemption of the Israelites from Egypt, we don't see any payment being made to purchase the release of the captives. What we do see in the series of ten plagues (that were specifically chosen by God to show his power over the Egyptian gods) is a "pay back" or revenge on behalf of those who had been abused. "Revenge" is an alternate definition of the word that is normally translated "redeem."

The descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob had been (in fact) God's chosen people; however, the reality of this relationship had not been openly evident to them for hundreds of years. The Most High God had been their God for all this time; however, the expression of this relationship was not found in any kind of organized or ritualized religious exercises. That was about to change in that their very identity would be related to being the people of God and they would identify God as the One who delivered them from Egypt.

The last two promises related to the "land" which God had promised to Abraham and his descendant some 400 years earlier. The first promise was to bring them into the land. That involved a journey and required a generational change in order to have a people who were prepared to actually occupy the land. The old generation had a slave mentality, and that generation had to die. This is a picture of what happens in our salvation experience in that the natural man has to die and we must be born again with a new spiritual life that is suited for the

Kingdom of God. The second promise involved the actual possession or ownership of the land. Abraham and his descendants had been (or dwelled) in the land for a period of approximately 200 years before moving to Egypt, but did not have any ownership of the land. This new relationship with the land was conditional upon their obedience in following God's will. This conditional aspect was not spelled out until much later and is found in Deuteronomy 28. Since their possession of the land was conditional, then we can conclude that the real ownership was with God and they were to be His stewards and to act on His behalf. They were to "occupy" the land and have control over it and enjoy the benefits of the bounty of the land.