• While in Midian, Moses received God’s call (or commission) to return to Egypt and lead Israel free from bondage
  o At hearing God’s instructions, Moses asked questions and raised objections
    ▪ God answered the questions, rebutted the objections, and gave Moses assurances
    ▪ All that remains is for Moses to obey the word of the Lord
  o So Moses makes arrangements to leave Midian

Ex. 4:18 Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, “Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”
Ex. 4:19 Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.”
Ex. 4:20 So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.

• The Lord appeared to Moses at Mt. Horeb, so the first thing Moses does in response to the Lord’s directions is return to his father-in-law’s home
  o Moses asks Jethro’s permission to return to Egypt with his family in obedience to God’s call
    ▪ Moses served Jethro in his home, so the customs of the day required Moses to gain Jethro’s permission to leave
    ▪ Furthermore, Jethro was the patriarch, the head of the household, so Moses must respect his authority
  o Jethro, a priest of God, naturally grants Moses his blessing to leave
    ▪ I say “naturally” because if God has called Moses to leave, then we can naturally expect God to pave the way for Moses
    ▪ God was no doubt working in the heart of Jethro to ensure his agreement with Moses’ request
  o Interestingly, while Moses is still in Midian preparing to leave, the Lord appears to Moses a second time
We don’t know what form the Lord took in this appearance, but the message He delivers Moses is clear enough
  • The Lord repeats the instructions for Moses to go back because the Pharaoh who was seeking Moses’ life is dead

Why did God give Moses this second appearance I wonder?
  • Perhaps Moses was wavering in his determination to obey the Lord’s call?
  • If so, then this moment is an encouraging example of God’s persistence and His patience in compensating for our weaknesses in responding to God’s call

If God has called us to accomplish something in His name, then we can trust He will equip us to meet the demands of the call
  • And equipping means not only talents and gifts for the work but also sufficient focus, conviction and urgency to stick with His mission
  • If Moses was reconsidering departing Midian, God’s second appearance ensured Moses put all doubts aside

I think we all benefit this kind of prodding
  • God’s equipping will always be sufficient to meet the demands of our mission

2Cor. 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;
  • Our test is whether we will accept the opportunity to join in the work
  • Moses accepted God’s call, so he took his family, including his two sons, mounted them on a donkey, took hold of God’s staff and started for Egypt

Ex. 4:21 The LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.
Ex. 4:22 “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.
Ex. 4:23 “So I said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.’”’
Now the Lord appears to Moses a third time as he is traveling to Egypt

In this appearance the Lord reminds Moses to perform all the signs God required

- God gave these wonders and powers to Moses for specific reasons
- Just as God will equip us for the work He has appointed for us, God also expects us to use what He has given
  - In same way that we are disobedient to refuse God's calling, we are equally disobedient if we neglect the gifts He has given us for our ministry
  - Moses was told to use all the miracles God gave him

- Were Moses to appear before Pharaoh and choose not to perform all these miracles, God's purposes in Moses' calling could not be met
  - God not only prescribes the object of our ministry, but He also prescribes the manner of our ministry
  - We do not have the latitude to invent our own methods, but we are called to labor according to the same Spirit that equipped us and called us

By the same token, when we obey our call, follow the Spirit's lead, and use the gifts God has given us, are we assured everything will work smoothly?

- Not necessarily...consider the rest of God's revelation to Moses
  - God tells Moses He will harden Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh will not allow Israel to leave

Can we imagine any statement more confusing to Moses' ears?

- He was sent with a mission to free Israel, and God gave Moses a promise that this mission would succeed
- God even gave Moses special powers to ensure that Pharaoh pays heed to Moses' message
- But now God tells Moses He will be working behind the scenes to prevent Pharaoh from responding affirmatively
When we serve the Lord, we need to guard against running ahead of Him in assuming too much about how God defines success

- Moses knew God intended to free the Israelites...God said as much
  - But now God informs Moses that the plan is a little more complicated than that
  - There would first be a period of frustration and delay as God’s purposes in Pharaoh were met in his refusal to comply
  - God graciously revealed this detail to Moses to help him maintain a proper perspective
    - How easily Moses could have been discouraged if he hadn’t understood this detail
    - In fact, Moses still experiences doubts despite this detail

- Becoming disappointed in the results God gives us in ministry can lead to a mindset I call the Elijah Complex
  - It refers to 1King 19 where Elijah fails to lead Israel out of their idolatry using his miraculous power to call fire down from heaven
    - So Elijah runs from Israel to the mountain of God pouting about how his mission had been a failure
  - At the mountain Elijah demands that God take his life, since there was no one left in Israel who would respond to his ministry
    - Elijah has a pity party because he assumed his purpose in ministry was to bring the entire nation to repentance
    - Elijah was mad at God for not bringing him the results he anticipated
  - God answered Elijah saying everything was going as planned
    - God had 7,000 faithful men in Israel just as God had intended
    - God’s purpose in Elijah’s ministry was different than Elijah assumed, and the consequence for Elijah’s self-pity was his removal as prophet

- Don’t succumb to the Elijah Complex
• Don't prejudge God's purposes in your call or evaluate the results you obtain against some personal objective

  o God tells Moses to prepare for nine rounds of disappointment in his confrontation with Pharaoh

    • Moses must eventually tell Pharaoh that Israel is God's firstborn, and as a result, Pharaoh will lose his first born

    • As we will learn, God is speaking of the tenth and final plague against Egypt

      • And it's this judgment that finally brings about the Exodus

  o You may also know that this tenth plague leads to the Jews' Passover observance

    • When we get to Chapter 12, we'll examine all the ways in which this final judgment pictures Christ and our salvation

    • Obviously, God's eternal purposes were being served in Pharaoh's recalcitrance

    • Without it, we would have no Passover memorial

  • As we look a little more closely at God's methods, many Christians find difficulty with God's words in v.21

    o The difficulty is not in understanding what the text says...the meaning is plainly clear

      • The difficulty comes in the willingness to accept what the text says

    o In v.21, God says He will harden Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh will resist Moses' call to set Israel free

      • The hardening won't change the ultimate outcome

        • But it is an important part of God's plan for determining the way the events play out

      • Throughout the entire account of the exodus, the Bible has 20 mentions of Pharaoh's heart begin hardened

        • Ten times God hardens the heart
• Four times, Pharaoh hardens his own heart

• And another six times, we hear of Pharaoh’s heart being hardened without an actor being identified

  o Some students and teachers are uncomfortable with the prospect of God directing Pharaoh in this way, so they search for a cause and effect relationship

    ▪ They point to Pharaoh’s choice to harden his own heart during the initial plagues as justification for God further hardening Pharaoh’s heart during later plagues

    ▪ It suggests that God required some provocation by Pharaoh before He would be right to harden Pharaoh’s heart

    ▪ As if without such justification, God would have been wrong to act in this way

    ▪ These explanations parse the text in unhelpful and inaccurate ways, and they misrepresent God’s sovereignty and character

  o Clearly in this verse, God declares from the start that He intends to prevent Pharaoh from agreeing too quickly

    ▪ Therefore, we shouldn’t make too much of who does the hardening first or who does it most, etc.

    ▪ Early on in the confrontation, Pharaoh’s hard heart naturally resists Moses’ requests without any help from God

    ▪ Later as the plagues take their toll, God will intercede to prevent Pharaoh from giving up too soon

    ▪ The main issue we must wrestle with is the simple fact that God actively prevents Pharaoh from relenting until the moment God desires

• To make proper sense of God’s actions, notice that God’s hardening is not for the purpose of preventing Pharaoh’s salvation

  o We’re told that God’s hardening is for the purpose of ensuring Pharaoh would not let Israel go too soon

    ▪ More importantly, there is no need for God to harden Pharaoh against believing and being saved
Like all men, Pharaoh was born lost and by his own nature, he will remain lost forever unless God intervenes to grant mercy and bring faith:

- God doesn’t harden a heart to make someone unbelieving and lost
- Men are born lost and unresponsive to the Gospel, and they remain that way apart from God’s merciful intervention
- Paul said in Romans 2:

\[\text{Rom. 3:11} \text{ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;}\]

- And Jesus said in John 6:

\[\text{John 6:65} \text{ And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”}\]

So God’s purpose in hardening Pharaoh’s unbelieving heart was simply to ensure Pharaoh’s behavior follows God’s plan:

- The power of God’s miracles are so great that a man like Pharaoh might have been compelled to relent sooner than God preferred
- Perhaps 4 or 5 of the plagues would have been enough to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites
  - But God wants to release ten plagues and show His power in a mighty way
  - So He hardens Pharaoh’s heart to prevent a premature change of mind
- And this, too, is God’s sovereign right, as Paul reminds us in Romans 9:

\[\text{Rom. 9:17} \text{ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.”} \]

\[\text{Rom. 9:18} \text{ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.}\]

- Paul quotes from Exodus 9:16 where God says He raised up Pharaoh for the sole purpose of making him an object onto which God could project His power.
And by demonstrating His power against the Pharaoh’s stubborn refusals, God’s name would be proclaimed throughout the entire world

- God had mercy on Whom He wishes and hardens Whom He wishes
- Israel was receiving God’s mercy while Pharaoh was being hardened
  - In neither case are we speaking of personal salvation
  - The nation of Israel was to be set free from bondage
  - And the nation of Egypt was to endure 10 plagues before that freedom was granted
  - And God worked in Pharaoh’s heart to ensure this plan came about
- Paul’s point is that God has absolute authority over the events of the world and of individual lives
  - God has all the right and power to decide who receives His mercy and who He hardens
  - In this way, all events in human history transpire according to God’s eternal plan and will

Rom. 9:16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

- God can and will use everything in His creation to bring Himself glory
  - Some men are called to receive God’s mercy, so they might glorify Him in their faith and obedience
  - Other men are left in their sin so that God may receive glory for His perfect justice in displaying them as objects of His wrath
    - This was God’s plan for Pharaoh; he was raised up to be an object of God’s wrath and power
    - And Moses needed to understand that plan so that he wouldn’t become discouraged by the Pharaoh’s stubbornness
• With this clarification, Moses is almost ready to enter Egypt and serve God in this calling
  
  o But before Moses can serve, God must address an issue of obedience in Moses' life

Ex. 4:24  Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.
Ex. 4:25  Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, “You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.”
Ex. 4:26  So He let him alone. At that time she said, “You are a bridegroom of blood” — because of the circumcision.

• In this passage, we find one of the most enigmatic passages in the Old Testament

  o Moses is traveling to Egypt with Zipporah and his two sons
    
    ▪ As they lodged somewhere along the trail, the Lord appears before them and seeks to put “him” to death
    
    ▪ In response, Moses' wife performs a circumcision on the second son, and then the Lord relents

  o The passage is difficult to interpret because of a feature of Hebrew grammar
    
    ▪ Hebrew often leaves out pronouns (e.g., he, his, her)
    
    ▪ Under these circumstances, the actor and the object of an action are assumed and must be determined by the context
    
    ▪ The assumptions we must make in assigning pronouns can have a dramatic impact on our interpretation

  o In v.24 my Bible says that the Lord met “him” and sought to put “him” to death
    
    ▪ In Hebrew this literally reads, “The Lord encountered and sought to take life”
    
    ▪ So who is the Lord meeting and whose life is He seeking to take?

  o Many interpreters have assumed that the “he” was Moses
    
    ▪ Moses was traveling with his wife Zipporah and his two sons and it appears likely the second son wasn't circumcised
So interpreters assume the Lord is angry at Moses for not circumcising the second boy as required

• All Jews were bound by the covenant made with Abraham to circumcise their children on the eighth day

Gen. 17:10 “This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

Gen. 17:14 “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

  - If someone was not circumcised, they were to be cut off from his people

    - In Hebrew, the meaning of cut off is literally destroyed or killed

    - But notice in Gen 17 who is commanded to die for failing to be circumcised

    - The penalty of death is to be applied to the one who wasn’t circumcised

      • That is, the child is to be put to death

  - Circumcision was an outward sign in the body of Jewish men to remind the nation of God’s promise to make a nation of Abraham’s seed

    - If a parent refused to circumcise their son, they were disobeying God and excluding their son from inclusion of the promises God made to the nation

    - God created the nation by His promise to Abraham, so Jewish male who lacked this sign of the covenant could not enjoy membership in the nation formed by that promise

  - Secondly, God has given Moses a mission that will announce the death of Pharaoh’s son as penalty for Pharaoh’s failure to obey God’s command

    - So it makes sense for God to threaten Moses with the death of his son for Moses’ failure to obey God’s commandment

  - Therefore, the “him” who is in danger of dying is not Moses but Moses’ child
Zipporah understands the situation, so she promptly circumcises her son on the spot, then she throws (or touches) the skin at “his” feet.

- Again, we’re left guessing a little about what’s happening, but here’s what I think happened:
  - Moses’ wife Zipporah was not a Jewish woman; she’s a Midianite.
    - Moses had met her in Midian, present day Saudi Arabia.
    - She knew nothing of this practice of circumcision.
  - Then after the birth of their first son, Gershome, Moses would have explained the Jewish practice of circumcision.
  - Zipporah probably didn’t object at the time either because she wasn’t familiar with the practice or simply hadn’t seen it performed.
  - But after having seen it the first time, Zipporah had seen enough.
    - Perhaps she was appalled by the bloody affair.
    - So she forbids it when the second son, Eliezer comes along.
    - But now that the Lord is threatening to take the child’s life, Zipporah has no choice but to comply.
  - This would explain the peculiar way she performs the circumcision.
    - She circumcises the child and throws the skin at “his” feet in disgust.
      - As she does this, she calls Moses a bridegroom of blood, so she was probably throwing the skin at Moses.
    - She meant that her marriage to Moses required a spilling of blood every time their marriage brought forth new life.

- Do you see a picture of Christ in this portrayal?
  - Once again, Moses represents Jesus, Who is our bridegroom.
    - And we are His Bride by faith, and that faith produces new spiritual life in each of us.
    - But that new life came only by the blood of Christ on the cross.
  - He is a bridegroom of blood for each of us as well.
But while Zipporah reacted in disgust to the spilling of blood, we respond in joy for the live it brings.

More significant and troubling, however, was Moses’ failure to contend with her decision:

- Here’s a man God has appointed to lead God’s nation of people
  - To represent God to Pharaoh and to the nation of Israel
  - Yet it wasn’t leading spiritually within his own home on an issue as basic as obedience to God’s commandment to circumcise
  - Only after God threatens the child with death does Zipporah take appropriate action
- Moses must have learned his lesson, because after her display of disgust and disrespect, Moses sends Zipporah and the boys back to Jethro
  - Moses goes alone into the land of Egypt, and we hear nothing of her again until Exodus 18 when Jethro brings the family to meet Moses at Mt. Sinai
- God demands that those who might lead His people lead first in their own lives and families
  - Paul expresses this same expectation for leaders in the church
  
  **1Tim. 3:4** He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity
  **1Tim. 3:5** (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),

- Moses deferred to his wife’s ignorance concerning a major issue in the family’s spiritual life, and his abdication of leadership almost led to the death of his son
  - Don’t assume Moses’ situation is an extreme example
    - A man’s failure to lead his family spiritually may eventually place his children in life or death circumstances
    - At the very least, it will lead to discord, dissension and disobedience within the family
  - And mothers play an equally important role in a family’s obedience to the Lord
Apart from her responsibility to show respect and support for the husband’s leadership, a wife and mother is also a leader over the children.

A mother must model obedience, godliness while handing out correction to ensure her children’s obedience.

Most importantly, godly parents please the Lord and curry blessing for the entire family.

- God brought Moses and his family to this point because it wasn’t not enough that Moses heard and responded to God’s call.
  - Nor was it enough that Moses relied on God’s power to equip him for the task.
    - Those things are important, but they’re not enough.
  - Moses also needed to conform his own life to God’s commands and expectations.
    - Moses had to demonstrate obedient in his own life before He could be useful to God in calling other men to obedience.
  - Consider the irony had Moses gone to Pharaoh and to the Jewish people and demanded they God’s commands, and all the while Moses was failing to keep the most basic of commandments in his day.
    - What is your readiness to serve God in ministry?
    - We all have a calling to serve God in various places and in various ways.
    - But our personal ministry as a disciple is our first and most powerful testimony, and it goes everywhere we go.
      - It goes to office, to school, to the ball field...
      - And certainly to the mission field.
    - I believe many men find their opportunities in ministry restrained by God because of continuing disobedience.

*Ex. 4:27* Now the LORD said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.

*Ex. 4:28* 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.
Ex. 4:29 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.

Ex. 4:30 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.

• We remember God assured Moses he would have Aaron’s assistance
  o Now Moses tells how God brought Aaron to leave Egypt (how Aaron arranged to leave Egypt, we don’t know)
    ▪ Aaron reaches Moses in the desert at Mt. Sinai near the beginning of Moses’ trip
    ▪ Moses greets Aaron and explains the whole story to him
    ▪ From this point, Aaron becomes Moses’ spokesman
  o They both travel to Egypt and assemble the elders of Israel
    ▪ While in captivity (or because of their captivity), Israel maintained not only its identity but also its leadership structure
      • They had elders over the tribes, and the elders held authority over the people
      • The people followed their leaders’ judgments
    o In this case, the leaders hear the testimony of Aaron and they see the miraculous signs Moses performs
      ▪ Consequently, they’re convinced Moses was sent by God
      ▪ So they respond by declaring that God has visited His people, then they bow and worship God
  • Here is a beautiful example of how we measure the success of our service
    o Moses went as God directed
      ▪ He went to the people God directed
      ▪ He went in the company of those God delivered
      ▪ He took advantage of the gifts God provided
- And he relied on the support God provided
  - And by these things, Moses prompted God’s people to worship and praise God’s name
- The truest measure of our service to God is whether by that service we inspire others to worship and serve the Lord

**Ex. 5:1** And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”

**Ex. 5:2** 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.”

**Ex. 5:3** 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, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.”

**Ex. 5:4** 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!”

**Ex. 5:5** Again Pharaoh said, “Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!”

**Ex. 5:6** So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying,

**Ex. 5:7** “You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves.

**Ex. 5:8** “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.’

**Ex. 5:9** “Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words.”

- In chapter 5, Moses has his initial encounter with Pharaoh, Amenhotep II
  - Moses speaking through Aaron demands that Pharaoh let Israel go to the wilderness and celebrate a feast
    - This request was the one God directed Moses to deliver to Pharaoh
  - As we noted previously, Moses’ request implied Israel was seeking to be set free
    - Asking to walk a threes-days journey into the wilderness meant walking to the Egyptian border with Canaan
Imagine if the slaves of a Southern plantation in the U.S. had asked their master to allow them to travel to the Mason-Dixon line to worship the Lord

- The slave master would have have understood he would never expect to see those slaves return
- Similarly, the Pharaoh knew such a journey would mean the end of this plentiful pool of cheap labor

Therefore, the Pharaoh’s response to Moses and Aaron was entirely expected and logical

- Pharaoh begins by declaring he has never heard of a god called Lord (“hayah”) and therefore, he has no need to obey such a God
  - No doubt this was true
  - Egypt had over 80 gods, but none were known by this name
- After the Pharaoh’s initial refusal, Aaron persists adding that the Jews were required to obey the Lord lest He bring judgment
  - Aaron explains that failure to obey the Lord brings the Lord’s wrath and judgment
    - Interestingly, Moses was acutely aware of the relationship between disobedience and God’s wrath as a result of failing to circumcise his son
  - Aaron’s statement to Pharaoh is interesting, because it serves as a prophetic warning to Pharaoh himself
    - Pharaoh will experience the judgment of God for failure to comply
    - So not only does Pharaoh know God’s will, but he’s also understands that failure to comply will bring judgment
- Pharaoh still denies Moses’ request just as God said would happen
  - But what God didn’t tell Moses was Pharaoh would react harshly to the request
    - Pharaoh brings a retribution against the Hebrews as a result of Moses’ request
Pharaoh commands that the Hebrews would no longer have straw provided to them for the making of bricks

- Straw was the binding agent in clay bricks, and without straw, the bricks would be brittle and useless
- Previously the Hebrews had straw provided to them, but now this would cease
- The Hebrews would have to go throughout the land of Israel to collect their own straw
  - This required considerable time and effort, reducing the labor and time available to make bricks
  - Nevertheless, the daily quota for bricks remains the same

- So Pharaoh's command makes life considerably harsher for the Jews

- Pharaoh's response is more than mere spite; there was political wisdom here
  - Pharaoh linked the Jews' harsh circumstances to Moses' actions
    - Pharaoh wanted the Jews to blame Moses for their situation
    - As a result, the people would then reject Moses and Aaron's leadership and refuse to follow them further
  - This is often the technique of despots trying to hold onto to power
    - By setting their opponents against one another, the king can weaken the resolve of the opposition
    - This will be a challenge for Moses and Aaron

Ex. 5:10 So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen 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.’”

Ex. 5:11 So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.

Ex. 5:12 The taskmasters pressed them, saying, “Complete your work quota, your daily amount, just as when you had straw.”

Ex. 5:13 Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s 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?”
Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why do you deal this way with your servants? There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your own people.” But he said, “You are lazy, very lazy; therefore you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’ So go now and work; for you will be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks.” The foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, “You must not reduce your daily amount of bricks.” When they left Pharaoh’s presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them. They said to them, “May the LORD look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh’s sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.” Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all.”

- Egyptians had three levels of authority ruling over the Hebrew slaves
  - Officers, taskmasters, and foreman
    - The officers and taskmaster were Egyptians
    - The foreman, however, were Jews appointed to oversee the labors of their fellow slaves
  - The taskmaster and foreman delivered the bad news to the Jews: no more straw
    - Naturally, the extra work made it impossible for the Jews to meet the daily quota for brick
    - As a result, the Egyptian taskmasters began beating the Jewish foreman
      - Not all Jews were beaten, but the foreman were as punishment for the Jews’ failure to meet quota
  - To the foreman, the who situation makes no sense, so they go to Pharaoh hoping to reason with him
They want to know why Pharaoh would make their job harder since it wasn’t in Pharaoh’s own interests to slow their work

- Pharaoh gives them the reason for the harsh treatment
  - Moses’ request to let the Jews go into the desert meant the slaves were lazy and had spare time
  - So Pharaoh places the blame at Moses’ feet

- So the foreman fall for Pharaoh’s trick, and they meet with Moses and Aaron
  - In v.21 they tell Moses and Aaron that God will judge them for bringing this outcome upon the people
    - The meet disturbs Moses greatly, so he goes before the Lord and laments his situation
    - Moses went expecting to bring a blessing and relief to the people
    - Instead, he sees that his work is bringing greater misery to the people and leading them to resent him for it
  - Furthermore, Moses begins to prejudge the outcome of God’s work
    - In verse 23 Moses accuses God of not delivering the people as God promised
    - Isn’t it remarkable how quickly Moses has lost his composure despite all the assurance and prophetic knowledge God gave Moses?
  - Moses assumed his arrival would mean great relief for Israel
    - He probably expected he would be met by cheering crowds hoisting him on high their shoulders, naming children after him
    - Instead, they’re cursing his name

- God calls us to serve His people, but our service usually isn’t intended to make peoples’ lives easier, happy or more comfortable, at least not in this world
  - We may hope to bring a blessing to people through our service, but too often we equate “blessing” with physical or emotional comfort or some material benefit
But the Bible equates blessing with suffering, hardship, persecution, testing, trials and self-sacrifice.

Those we serve or lead may not always like what God calls us to deliver, whether in what we say or call them to do, but don’t let that distract you.

- Ministry isn’t a popularity contest

- And our leaders bear the worst of this burden
  
  - They must serve as examples of these truth in their own lives and as those with the unenviable task of calling others to live likewise
    
    - Moses and Aaron can’t make excuses for their words and actions
    - Nor can they remove these burdens from the people
    - They can’t soften the message or back down from God’s calling
      
      - What is happening is according to God’s will
  
  - Unfortunately, some leader choose the easy path with their people
    
    - Rather than declaring the reality of sin and the need to crucify the flesh, they tickle ears with teaching that pleases the flesh
    - Rather than demanding we each walk according to the faith we have been given, we make excuses for sin and create exceptions for every commandment in Scripture
    - When we make the spiritual walk of those we lead easier beyond what God permits, we do them a serious disservice
      
      - And we bring the prospect of judgment upon ourselves