

## A Hard Start



### SABBATH—JULY 12

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Exodus 5:1, 2; Exodus 5:3–23; Exodus 5:22–6:8; Exodus 6:9–13; Exodus 6:28–7:7.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “After Moses and Aaron talked to the people, they went to the king of Egypt. They said, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: “Let my people go so they may hold a feast for me in the desert.” ’ But the king of Egypt said, ‘Who is the Lord? Why should I obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord. And I will not let Israel go’ ” (Exodus 5:1, 2, ICB).



**When God commanded Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, God told Moses exactly what He wanted him to do.**

**MANY CHRISTIANS** think that when they decide to follow God, life will be easy and happy. They will always enjoy riches and success. The Bible shows us that things don't always happen this way. Sometimes our problems get worse. When that happens, we often feel hopeless. We start to ask hard questions about life and God that don't always have easy answers or any answers at all.

For sure, when we trust in God, we will have hard times. But if we continue to trust in God, He will solve our problems in His way and in His time. Often, we expect God to fix things fast and solve our problems right away. But we must learn to wait and trust Him.

Moses knew about trusting in God during hard times. When God commanded Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, God told Moses exactly what He wanted him to do. So things should be easy for Moses, right?

But as we shall see, things aren't always that easy.

**WHO IS THE LORD? (Exodus 5:1, 2)**

**Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh, king of Egypt, “ ‘The LORD, the God of Israel, says, ‘Let my people go’ ” (Exodus 5:1, ERV; also read verse 2). How did Pharaoh answer? What does his answer say about him?**

Pharaoh answers, “ ‘Who is the LORD?’ ” (Exodus 5:2, ERV). Pharaoh isn’t asking this question because he wants to learn about the Lord. Pharaoh’s question shows what is really in his heart: he rejects God as His Lord and Savior.

When Pharaoh says, “ ‘I do not know the Lord’ ” (Exodus 5:2, ICB), he is bragging. He is full of pride.

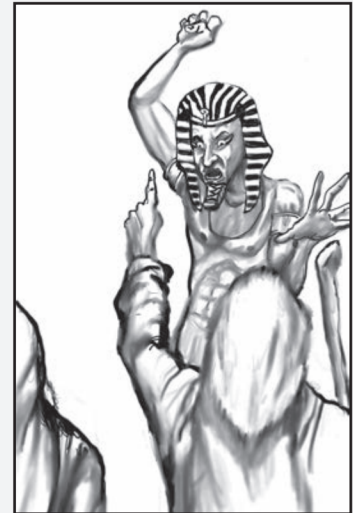
How many people in history said the same thing that Pharaoh did? The answer should make us feel sad because when people reject God, they reject everlasting life. As Jesus said, “ ‘And this is eternal [everlasting] life: that people can know you, the only true God, and that they can know Jesus Christ, the one you sent’ ” (John 17:3, ERV).

Egypt is a symbol for any group of people who rejects God’s control and His saving power. These people stand against God, the Bible, and His people.

Next, Pharaoh says, “ ‘I will not let Israel go’ ” (Exodus 5:2, ICB). These words show more of his war against the living God. So, we can see that Egypt is a symbol for anyone who rejects God and also fights against Him.

Many Christians saw this same spirit in the French Revolution (also read Isaiah 30:1–3 and Revelation 11:8). A revolution is a complete change in government. Pharaoh thought he was a god or the son of a god. When someone believes he is a god, he believes that his own power, strength, and wisdom are above everyone else’s.

“More than any other country in Bible history, Egypt rejected the living God and refused to obey His commands. The king of Egypt fought against God’s control more than any other king or leader. When Moses announced the Lord’s message to the king, Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord? Why should I obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord. And I will not let Israel go.’ Exodus 5:2 [ICB]. This answer shows that Pharaoh didn’t believe in God. Later in history, another country would say the same thing as Pharaoh. This country [France] also would refuse to accept God’s control or believe in Him. The people of this country would fight against Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 269, adapted.



**The king of Egypt fought against God’s control more than any other king or leader.**

**TWO REASONS TO HONOR THE SABBATH  
(Exodus 5:3–23)**

Moses must have known that the work God gave him to do wasn't going to be easy. But Moses did not know what would happen next.

**What happened after Moses and Aaron's first meeting with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt? Read Exodus 5:3–23 for the answer.**

Before Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, they met with the leaders and the people of Israel. Moses and Aaron told them God's message and showed them God's signs. Israel believed that the Lord would help them escape from slavery. So, the people worshiped the Lord (Exodus 4:29–31).

Next, Moses went to the king of Egypt with God's message. Then things got worse for the Israelites. The Israelites suffered more each day. Their daily work got harder. The Egyptians blamed the Israelites for being lazy. The Egyptians were mean and nasty to the Israelites.

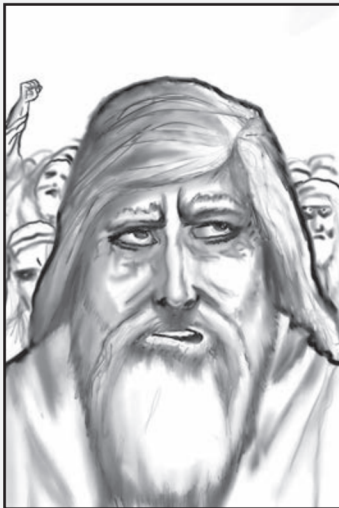
The Israelite leaders weren't happy. They met with Moses and Aaron. The meeting between them was ugly. This meeting showed the type of problems that Moses would have with his own people for years to come.

**Read Exodus 5:21, and imagine in your mind that you are these men who challenge Moses and Aaron. Why do you think these men said what they did to Moses and Aaron?**

We can easily see why these men were upset with Moses. (The men say, " 'May the LORD judge and punish you for what you did!' " [Exodus 5:21, ERV].) The Israelites expected Moses to help them escape from the Egyptians. The Israelites didn't expect Moses to make their lives under the Egyptians harder first.

So, Moses and Aaron not only had problems with Pharaoh. Moses and Aaron had problems with their people, too.

**Sooner or later, disagreements will happen in the church. What are some things that you and other church members can do to make peace when disagreements with local church leaders happen?**



**The Israelites didn't expect Moses to make their lives under the Egyptians harder at first.**



**I AM THE LORD (Exodus 5:22–6:8)**

For sure, we easily can feel sorry for Moses. First, Pharaoh scolds him. Now his own people are angry with him.

So, Moses brings his complaint to God. “Then Moses prayed to the LORD and said, ‘Lord, why have you done this terrible thing to your people? Why did you send me here? I went to Pharaoh and said what you told me to say. But since that time he has made the people suffer, and you have done nothing to help them!’ ” (Exodus 5:22, 23, ERV). We can understand why Moses is unhappy with the Lord.

God’s answer is powerful. God will act in a strong and powerful way, too. “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh’ ” (Exodus 6:1, ERV).

**What does God say to Moses? Read Exodus 5:22–6:8 for the answer. What important Bible truths do we learn from God’s answer?**

God will now act to save His people. God helps Moses remember a few important Bible truths: (1) I am the LORD. (2) I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (3) I made my Promise with them. (4) I promised to give them the land of Canaan. (5) I heard the complaints and suffering of the Israelites. And (6) I remembered my promise to give you the Promised Land.

Do you see that God says the word “I” again and again? I am the Lord your God. I did this and that. So you can trust that I will do for you what I promised.

The Lord now announces that He will do four big things for Israel because He is their living Lord: (1) “ ‘You will no longer be slaves of the Egyptians’ ” (Exodus 6:6, ERV). (2) “ ‘I will use my great power to make you free’ ” (Exodus 6:6, ERV). (3) “ ‘And I will bring terrible punishment to the Egyptians’ ” (Exodus 6:6, ERV). (4) “ ‘You will be my people and I will be your God. I am the LORD your God’ ” (Exodus 6:7, ERV).

These four actions show God’s relationship with His people. God offers to do these four things for free for His people because He loves them. He offered these gifts to His people back then. He offers us the same gifts today.

**What other people in the Bible cried out in complaint to God? Why is it OK to tell God what’s in your heart? Why must you always talk to God with faith and trust?**



**Moses brings his complaint to God.**



## A VERY BAD TALKER (Exodus 6:9–13)

The Lord gave Moses powerful promises about what He will do next. For sure, these promises gave Moses hope.

**What happened next in the story? Read Exodus 6:9–13 for the answer. What lessons does this story teach us? How can these lessons help us during hard times and disappointment in our lives?**

The Hebrews are so sad because of their suffering and hard work. So, they don't listen to Moses or his encouraging words. Moses tells the Hebrews that God will do what He promised. The Hebrew people have waited so long for God's help. But they continue to be slaves. Why should things be different now? The Hebrews are losing hope.

We all have felt this way in the past, right? Each one of us, at times, has felt sad, disappointed, and unhappy. We may have felt that God left us all alone.

Remember the story about Job? What about Asaph? Asaph was a Bible poet. Asaph wondered why evil people enjoyed success while good people suffered. Yes, Asaph asked hard questions. At the same time, these questions helped him to write one of the most beautiful poems about faith:

“But I am always with you.  
 You have held my hand.  
 You guide me with your advice.  
 And later you will receive [accept] me in honor.  
 I have no one in heaven but you.  
 I want nothing on earth besides you.  
 My mind and my body may become weak.  
 But God is my strength.  
 He is mine forever” (Psalm 73:23–26, ICB).

All through the Bible, God promises His people that He is with them (Isaiah 41:13; Matthew 28:20). God gives His people His peace and His comfort. God makes them strong so that they may solve life's problems better (John 14:27; John 16:33; Philippians 4:6, 7).

God's Promise with His people says: “ ‘You will be my people and I will be your God. I am the LORD your God, and you will know that I made you free from Egypt’ ” (Exodus 6:7, ERV). This verse shows us that God wanted a close relationship with His people, Israel.



**All through the Bible, God promises His people that He is with them (Isaiah 41:13; Matthew 28:20).**

**THE SAME AS GOD TO PHARAOH, KING OF EGYPT  
(Exodus 6:28–7:7)**

**How does the Lord answer Moses? Read Exodus 6:28–7:7 for the answer.**

God appears to Moses as Yahweh. The name Yahweh shows that He is a God who wants a close, personal relationship with His people. As part of this relationship, God made promises to His people.

This same God again commands Moses to go and talk with Pharaoh. Moses again tells God why he can't do what God asks: " 'I don't speak very well. So why would Pharaoh listen to me?' " (Exodus 6:30, NIV). Again, we see that Moses has no pride in his heart. At the same time, we also see that Moses doesn't want to do what God asks Him to do. So far, things haven't gone very well for Moses.

"When God ordered Moses to go back to Pharaoh, Moses showed that he didn't trust in himself. The words 'don't speak very well' come from words in the Hebrew language that are much the same as Moses' words in Exodus 4:10: " 'I speak slowly' (ERV)." —*Andrews Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, "Exodus" (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), page 205, adapted.

God in His mercy sends Aaron to help Moses. Moses will tell Aaron God's messages. Then Aaron will speak in public to Pharaoh. So, Moses will be the same as God in front of the Egyptian king. Aaron will be Moses' special messenger.

This story gives us an excellent understanding of the work that a special messenger or prophet does. A prophet speaks for God. A prophet communicates God's word to His people and explains His messages. Moses talked to Aaron, and then Aaron announced Moses' words to Pharaoh. In the same way, God communicates with the Bible prophets. Then the prophets announce God's teaching to the people. Sometimes the prophets hear God's message and then announce it. More often, the prophets wrote down God's message first and then shared it with the people.

God also explains to Moses what he can expect from his meeting with Pharaoh. God warns Moses that the meeting will be long and difficult. For the second time, God tells Moses that God will cause Pharaoh to be stubborn (Exodus 4:21; Exodus 7:3). Everything will turn out well because the Egyptians will learn that the Lord is God (Exodus 7:5). So, in the end, the Egyptians will honor and respect God.



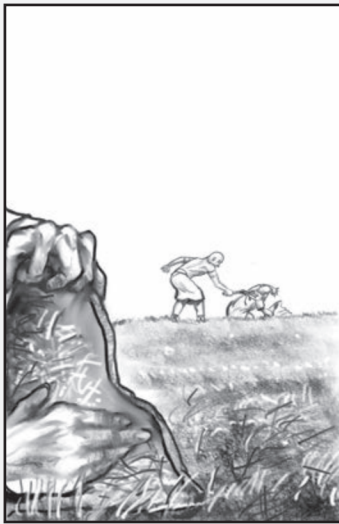
**Moses talked to Aaron, and then Aaron announced Moses' words to Pharaoh.**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Plagues of Egypt,” pages 257–265, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Look at how badly things started off for Moses and the Israelites after Moses went to Pharaoh, king of Egypt:

“The king was very upset. He believed that the Israelites were trying to get out of serving him. He thought the Israelites were lazy. Pharaoh believed the Israelites made plans against him because they weren’t working hard enough. Pharaoh would make sure that the people had no time left to make plans against him. Right away, Pharaoh gave orders to make their slavery worse and to destroy their spirit of independence. In Egypt, the buildings were made of sun-dried bricks. The finest buildings were made of these bricks and then covered with stone. Many slaves were needed to make all these bricks. The bricks were made with cut straw. The straw held the bricks together. So, the slaves needed a lot of straw to make the bricks. The king now ordered the Egyptians to stop giving straw to the Israelites. The Israelites must collect their own straw. At the same time, the Israelites must continue to make the same number of bricks as before.

“This order upset the Israelites everywhere. The Egyptian masters put Hebrew managers in charge of the work of making the bricks. These Hebrew managers were responsible for the work of the Hebrews under them. When the slaves learned about the king’s order, they went everywhere in the land to collect the straw. But they couldn’t find enough straw to get their work done. So, Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew managers to be beaten.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 258, adapted.



**“The Israelites must collect their own straw. At the same time, the Israelites must continue to make the same number of bricks as before.”**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Think of a time when you did what God wanted and things didn’t go well or start off well. What hard lessons did you learn from that experience?
- ❷ Share how God helped you when you prayed for His help or gave you help when you didn’t expect it. How can we learn to trust in God to help us when bad things happen?
- ❸ How can you help someone who doesn’t know the Lord? How can you help him understand why knowing God is so important?



## MONKEYS OR CHURCH?

**M**onkeys tried to destroy the crops of a family farm in the country of Mozambique, in Africa. Antônio Cuchata's father gave his son strict orders. Guard the farm to keep the monkeys away. But Antônio didn't want to guard the farm on Sabbath. Not long ago, Antônio gave his heart to the Lord. He was baptized. Now he wanted to spend Sabbath worshipping in a Seventh-day Adventist church.

What should Antônio do? Antônio prayed and went to church.

Vervet monkeys were a big problem for small farmers. The monkeys stole sweet potatoes, beans, peanuts, and other crops. Father was worried that the family wouldn't have food or income if the monkeys ruined their crops. Also, Father didn't like his son going to the Seventh-day Adventist church. Antônio grew up in another faith. So, Father didn't understand why the boy wanted to worship on the seventh-day Sabbath. Father often didn't go to church on Sunday so that he could watch the farm. Father told Antônio that he also should help on Saturdays.

Antônio didn't plan to become a Seventh-day Adventist. But a Seventh-day Adventist cousin studied the Bible with him. Antônio became convinced about Bible truth when he read: "Remember to keep the Sabbath as a holy day. You may work and get everything done during six days each week. But the seventh day is a day of rest to honor the Lord your God. On that day no one may do any work: not you, your son or daughter, or your men or women slaves. Neither your animals nor the foreigners living in your cities may work" (Exodus 20:8–10, ICB).

Antônio loved Father. But Antônio also loved the Lord and Bible truth. He didn't know what to do. So, he knelt and prayed. "Dear God, please stop the monkeys from coming to our farm while I am at church." Then Antônio went to the Seventh-day Adventist church in Casa-Nova. The church was 15 miles away.

Antônio wasn't sure what to expect when he got home. He was so happy to learn that the monkeys stayed away all day! Antônio prayed and went to church the next Sabbath. Again, the monkey didn't come near the farm. Every Sabbath while Antônio lived at home, the monkeys stayed away from the farm while he worshiped at church.

Sad to say, Father refused to believe that God worked a miracle. But Antônio was thankful to God. Today, years later, he continues to feel amazed at God's care.

Antônio says, "The monkeys also kept the Sabbath!"

*Pray for our worldwide church's work in Mozambique and other countries in Africa and India. This quarter's 13th Sabbath Offering will support our church's work to share the Good News about Jesus in these areas.*

INSIDE  
*Story*  
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**The monkeys stole sweet potatoes, beans, peanuts, and other crops.**

