

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

by

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## Exodus 5 - Exodus 6

The effect of the first appeal to Pharaoh seemed ought but encouraging. The thought of losing Israel made him clutch them with greater eagerness and watch them with greater vigilance. Whenever Satan's power becomes narrowed to a point, his rage increases. Thus it is here. The furnace is about to be quenched by the hand of redeeming love; but, ere it is, it blazes forth with greater fierceness and intensity. The devil does not like to let go any one whom he has had in his terrible grasp. He is **"a strong man armed,"** and while he **"keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace."** But, blessed be God, there is **"a stronger than he,"** who has taken from him **"his armour wherein he trusted,"** and divided the spoils among the favoured objects of His everlasting love.

**"And afterward, Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness"** (Exodus 5:3).

Such was the Lord's message to Pharaoh. He claimed full deliverance for the people, on the ground of their being His; and, in order that they might hold a feast to Him in the wilderness. Nothing can ever satisfy God in reference to His elect, but their entire emancipation from the yoke of bondage. **"Loose him, and let him go"** is, really, the grand motto in God's gracious dealings with those who, though held in bondage by Satan, are, nevertheless, the objects of His eternal love.

*When we contemplate Israel amid the brick-kilns of Egypt, we behold a graphic figure of the condition of every child of Adam by nature.*

There they were, crushed beneath the enemy's galling yoke, and having no power to deliver themselves. The mere mention of the word liberty only caused the oppressor to bind his captives with a stronger fetter, and to lade them with a still more grievous burden. It was absolutely necessary that deliverance should come from without. But from whence has it to come? Where were the resources to pay their ransom? or where was the power to break their chains? And, even were there both the one and the other, where was the will? Who would take the trouble of delivering them?

Alas! There was no hope, either within or around. They had only to look up, their refuge was in God. He had both the power and the will. He could accomplish a redemption both by price and by power. In the Lord, and in Him alone, was there salvation for ruined and oppressed Israel.

Thus is it in every case. **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

The sinner is in the hands of one who rules him with despotic power:

- He is **“sold under sin”**
- He is **“led captive by Satan at his will”**
- He is fast bound in the fetters of lust, passion, and temper,
- He is **“without strength”**
- He is **“without hope”**
- He is **“without God.”**

Such is the sinner’s condition. How, then, can he help himself? What can he do? He is the slave of another, and everything he does is done in the capacity of a slave. His thoughts, his words, his acts, are the thoughts, words, and acts of a slave. Yea, though he should weep and sigh for emancipation, his very tears and sighs are the melancholy proofs of his slavery. He may struggle for freedom; but his very struggle, though it evinces a desire for liberty, is the positive declaration of his bondage.

Nor is it merely a question of the sinner’s condition; his very nature is radically corrupt - wholly under the power of Satan. Hence, he not only needs to be introduced into a new condition, but also to be endowed with a new nature. The nature and the condition go together. If it were possible for the sinner to better his condition, what would it avail so long as his nature was irrecoverably bad?

A nobleman might take a beggar off the streets and adopt him; he might endow him with a noble’s wealth and set him in a noble’s position; but he could not impart to him nobility of nature; and thus the nature of a beggarman would never be at home in the condition of a nobleman. There must be a nature to suit the condition; and there must be a condition to suit the capacity, the desires, the affections, and the tendencies of the nature.

Now, in the Gospel of the grace of God, we are taught that the believer is introduced into an entirely new condition; that he is no longer viewed as in his former state of guilt and condemnation, but as in a state of perfect and everlasting justification; that the condition in which God now sees him is not only one of full pardon; but it is such that infinite holiness cannot find so much as a single stain. He has been taken out of his former condition of guilt, and placed absolutely and eternally in a new condition of unspotted righteousness. It is not, by any means, that his old condition is improved. This was utterly impossible. **“That which is crooked cannot be made straight,” “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?”** Nothing can be more opposed to the fundamental truth of the Gospel than the theory of a gradual improvement in the sinner’s condition.

He is born in a certain condition, and until he is “**born again**” he cannot be in any other. We may try to improve. He may resolve to be better for the future turn over a new leaf” - to live a different sort of life; but, all the while, he has not moved a single hair’s breadth out of his real condition as a sinner. He may become “religious” as it is called, he may try to pray, he may diligently attend to ordinances, and exhibit an appearance of moral reform; but none of these things can, in the smallest degree, affect his positive condition before God.

The case is precisely similar as to the question of nature. How can a man alter his nature? He may make it undergo a process, he may try to subdue it, to place it under discipline; but it is nature still. “**That which is born of the flesh is flesh.**” There must be a new nature as well as a new condition. And how is this to be had? By believing God’s testimony concerning His Son. “**As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God**” (John 1:12, 13). Here we learn that those who believe on the name of the only-begotten Son of God, have the right or privilege of being sons of God. They are made partakers of a new nature. They have gotten eternal life. “**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life**” (John 3:36), “**Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life**” (John 5:24), “**And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent**” (John 17:3), “**And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son**”, “**He that hath the Son hath life**” (I John 5:11, 12).

Such is the plain doctrine of the Word in reference to the momentous questions of condition and nature. But on what is all this founded How is the believer introduced into a condition of divine righteousness and made partaker of the divine nature? It all rests on the great truth that “**Jesus DIED AND ROSE AGAIN.**”

That Blessed One left the bosom of eternal love - the throne of glory - the mansions of unfading light came down into this world of guilt and woe - took upon Him the likeness of sinful flesh; and, having perfectly exhibited and perfectly glorified God, in all the movements of His blessed life here below, He died upon the Cross, under the full weight of His people’s transgressions.

By so doing, He divinely met all that was, or could be, against us. He magnified the law and made it honourable; and, having done so, He became a curse by hanging on the tree. Every claim was met, every enemy silenced, every obstacle removed. “**Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.**” Infinite justice was satisfied, and infinite love can flow, in all its soothing and refreshing virtues, into the broken heart of the sinner; while, at the same time, the cleansing and atoning stream that flowed from the pierced side of a crucified Christ, perfectly meets all the cravings of a guilty and convicted conscience.

The Lord Jesus, on the Cross, stood in our place:

- He was our representative.
- He died, “**the just for the unjust.**”
- “**He was made sin for us**” (II Corinthians 5:21; II Peter 3:18).

- He died the sinner's death,
- He was buried, and rose again, having accomplished all.

Hence, there is absolutely nothing against the believer. He is linked with Christ and stands in the same condition of righteousness. **"As he is so are we in this world"** (I John 4:17).

This gives settled peace to the conscience. If I am no longer in a condition of guilt, but in a condition of justification; if God only sees me in Christ and as Christ, then, clearly, my portion is perfect peace. **"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Romans 5:1). The Blood of the Lamb has cancelled all the believer's guilt, blotted out his heavy debt, and given him a perfectly blank page, in the presence of that holiness which **"cannot look upon sin."**

But the believer has not merely found peace with God; he is made a child of God, so that he can taste the sweetness of communion with the Father and the Son, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

The Cross is to be viewed in two ways:

- first, as satisfying God's claims;
- secondly, as expressing God's affections.

If I look at my sins in connection with the claims of God as a Judge, I find, in the Cross, a perfect settlement of those claims. God, as a Judge, has been divinely satisfied - yea, glorified, in the Cross. But there is more than this. God had affections as well as claims; and, in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, all those affections are sweetly and touchingly told out into the sinner's ear; while, at the same time, he is made the partaker of a new nature which is capable of enjoying those affections and of having fellowship with the heart from which they flow. **"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God"** (I Peter 3:18). Thus we are not only brought into a condition, but unto a Person, even God Himself, and we are endowed with a nature which can delight in Him. **"We also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement"** (Romans 5:11)

What force and beauty, therefore, can we see in those emancipating words, **"Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness."**

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised"** (Luke 4:18). The glad tidings of the Gospel announce full deliverance from every yoke of bondage. Peace and liberty are the boons which that Gospel bestows on all who believe it, as God has declared it.

And mark, it is **"that they may hold a feast to me."**

If they were to get done with Pharaoh, it was that they might begin with God. This was a great change.

Instead of toiling under Pharaoh's taskmasters, they were to feast in company with the Lord; and, although they were to pass from Egypt into the wilderness, still the divine presence was to accompany them; and if the wilderness was rough and dreary, it was the way to the land of Canaan. The divine purpose was, that they should hold a feast unto the Lord, in the wilderness; and, in order to do this, they should be "let go" out of Egypt.

However, Pharaoh was in no wise disposed to yield obedience to the divine mandate.

**"Who is the Lord," said he, "that I should obey his voice to let Israel go. I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2).**

Pharaoh most truly expressed, in these words, his real condition. His condition was one of ignorance and consequent disobedience. Both go together. If God be not known, He cannot be obeyed; for obedience is ever founded upon knowledge. When the soul is blessed with the knowledge of God, it finds this knowledge to be life, (John 17:3) and life is power; and when I get power I can act, it is obvious that one cannot act without life; and therefore it is most unintelligent to set people upon doing certain things, in order to get that by which alone they can do anything.

But Pharaoh was as ignorant of himself as he was of the Lord. He did not know that he was a poor, vile worm of the earth, and that he had been raised up for the express purpose of making known the glory of the very One whom he said he knew not. (Exodus 9:16; Romans 9:17).

**"And they said, The God of the Hebrews has met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword, And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their work? Get you unto your burdens . . . let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words" (Ver. 3-9).**

What a development of the secret springs of the human heart we have here! What complete incompetency to enter into the things of God! All the divine titles and the divine revelations were, in Pharaoh's estimation, "**vain words.**" What did he know or care about "**three days journey into the wilderness,**" or "**a feast to the Lord?**" How could he understand the need of such a journey, or the nature or object of such a feast? Impossible. He could understand burden-bearing and brick-making; these things had an air of reality about them, in his judgment; but as to ought of God, His service, or His worship, he could only regard it in the light of an idle chimera, devised by those who only wanted an excuse to make their escape from the stern realities of actual life.

Thus has it, too often, been with the wise and great of this world. They have ever been the most forward to write folly and vanity upon the divine testimonies. Hearken, for example, to the estimate which the "**most noble Festus**" formed of the grand question at issue between Paul and the Jews: "**they had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive**" (Acts 25:19).

Alas! How little he knew what he was saying! How little he knew what was involved in the question, as to whether “Jesus” was “dead” or “alive!” He thought not of the solemn bearing of that momentous question upon himself and his friends, Agrippa and Bernice; but that did not alter the matter; he and they know somewhat more about it now, though in their passing moment of earthly glory they regarded it as a superstitious question, wholly beneath the notice of men of common sense, and only fit to occupy the disordered brain of visionary enthusiasts. Yes; the stupendous question which fixes the destiny of every child of Adam - on which is founded the present and everlasting condition of the Church and the world which stands connected with all the divine counsels - this question was, in the judgment of Festus, a vain superstition.

Thus was it in Pharaoh’s case. He knew nothing of “**the Lord God of the Hebrews**” - the great “**I AM**,” and hence he regarded all that Moses and Aaron had said to him, in reference to doing sacrifice to God, as “**vain words**.” The things of God must ever seem vain, profitless, and unmeaning, to the unsanctified mind of man. His name may be made use of as part of the flippant phraseology of a cold and formal religiousness; but He Himself is not known. His precious name, which, to a believer’s heart, has wrapped up in it all that he can possibly need or desire, has no significance, no power, no virtue for an unbeliever. All, therefore, connected with God, His words, His counsels, His thoughts, His ways, everything, in short, that treats of, or refers to, Him, is regarded as “**vain words**.”

However, the time is rapidly approaching when it will not be thus. The judgment-seat of Christ, the terrors of the world to come, the surges of the lake of fire, will not be “**vain words**.” Assuredly not; and it should be the great aim of all who, through grace, believe them now to be realities, to press them upon the consciences of those who, like Pharaoh, regard the making of bricks as the only thing worth thinking about - the only thing that can be called real and solid.

Alas! that even Christians should so frequently be found living in the region of sight, the region of earth, the region of nature, as to lose the deep, abiding, influential sense of the reality of divine and heavenly things. We want to live more in the region of faith, the region of Heaven, the region of the new creation. Then we should see things as God sees them, think about them as He thinks; and our whole course and character would be more elevated, more disinterested, more thoroughly separated from earth and earthly things.

But Moses’ sorest trial did not arise from Pharaoh’s judgment about his mission. The true and Whole-hearted servant of Christ must ever expect to be looked on, by the men of this world, as a mere visionary enthusiast. The point of view from which they contemplate him is such as to lead us to look for this judgment and none other. The more faithful he is to his heavenly Master, the more he walks in His footsteps, the more conformed he is to His image, the more likely he is to be considered, by the sons of earth, as one “**beside himself**.” This, therefore, should neither disappoint nor discourage him. But then it is a far more painful thing when his service and testimony are misunderstood, unheeded, or rejected by those who are themselves the specific objects thereof. When such is the case, he needs to be much with God, much in the secret of His mind, much in the power of communion, to have his spirit sustained in the abiding reality of his path and service. Under such trying circumstances, if one be not fully persuaded of the divine commission, and conscious of the divine presence, he will be almost sure to break down.

Had not Moses been thus upheld, his heart must have utterly failed him when the augmented pressure of Pharaoh's power elicited from the officers of the children of Israel such desponding and depressing words as these:- **"The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us."**

This was gloomy enough; and Moses felt it so, for **"he returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came unto Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all."**

The aspect of things had become most discouraging, at the very moment when deliverance seemed at hand; just as, in nature, the darkest hour of the night is often that which immediately precedes the dawn of the morning. Thus will it assuredly be, in Israel's history, in the latter day. The moment of most profound darkness and depressing gloom will precede the bursting of **"the Sun of Righteousness"** from behind the cloud, with healing in His fingers, to heal eternally, **"the hurt of the daughter of His people."**

We may well question how far genuine faith, or a mortified will, dictated the "wherefore?" and the "why?" of Moses, in the above quotation. Still, the Lord does not rebuke a remonstrance drawn forth by the intense pressure of the moment. He most graciously replies, **"Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land"** (Exodus 6:1).

This reply breathes peculiar grace. Instead of reproving the petulance which could presume to call in question the unsearchable ways of the great I AM, that ever gracious One seeks to relieve the harassed spirit of His servant, by unfolding to him what He was about to do. This was worthy of the blessed God - the unupbraiding Giver of every good and every perfect gift. **"He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust"** (Psalm 103:24).

Nor is it merely in His actings that He would cause the heart to find its solace, but in Himself - in His very name and character. This is full, divine, and everlasting blessedness. When the heart can find its sweet relief in God Himself - when it can retreat into the strong tower which His name affords - when it can find, in His character, a perfect answer to all its need, then truly, it is raised far above the region of the creature-it can turn away from earth's fair promises - it can place the proper value on man's lofty pretensions. The heart which is endowed with an experimental knowledge of God can not only look forth upon earth, and say **"all is vanity,"** but it can also look straight up to Him, and say, **"all my springs are in thee."**

**"And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the Lord: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty; but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them. And I have also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant."**

**“JEHOVAH”** is the title which He takes as the Deliverer of His people, on the ground of His covenant of pure and sovereign grace He reveals Himself as the great self-existing Source of redeeming love, establishing His counsels, fulfilling His promises, delivering His elect people from every enemy and every evil. It was Israel’s privilege ever to abide under the safe covert of that significant title - a title which displays God acting for His own glory, and taking up His oppressed people in order to show forth in them that glory.

**“Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments. And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land concerning the which I did swear to give it unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord”** (Ver. 6-8).

All this speaks the purest, freest, richest grace. The Lord presents Himself to the hearts of His people as the One who was to act in them, for them, and with them, for the display of His own glory. Ruined and helpless as they were, He had come down to show forth His glory, to exhibit His grace, and to furnish a sample of His power, in their full deliverance. His glory and their salvation were inseparably connected. They were afterwards reminded of all this, as we read in the book of Deuteronomy: **“The Lord did not set His love upon you nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”** (Exodus 7:7, 8).

Nothing is more calculated to assure and establish the doubting, trembling heart than the knowledge that God has taken us up, just as we are, and in the full intelligence of what we are; and, moreover, that He can never make any fresh discovery to cause an alteration in the character and measure of His love. **“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end”** (John 13).

Whom He loves and as He loves, He loves unto the end. This is an unspeakable comfort. God knew all about us:

- He knew the very worst of us, when He manifested His love to us in the gift of His Son.
- He knew what we needed, and He provided it.
- He knew what was due, and He paid it.
- He knew what was to be wrought, and He wrought it.
- His own requirements had to be met, and He met them.

It is all His own work. Hence, we find Him saying to Israel, as in the above passage:

- **“I will bring you out”**
- **“I will bring you in”**



- **“I will take you to me”**
- **“I will give you the land”**
- **“I am the Lord.”**

It was all what He could do, as founded upon what He was. Until this great truth is fully laid hold of, until it enters into the soul, in the power of the Holy Ghost, there cannot be settled peace. The heart can never be happy or the conscience at rest until one knows and believes that all divine requirements have been divinely answered.

The remainder of our section is taken up with a record of **“the heads of their fathers’ houses,”** and is very interesting, as showing us the Lord coming in and numbering those that belonged to Himself, though they were still in the possession of the enemy. Israel was God’s people, and He here counts up those on whom He had a sovereign claim. Amazing grace!

To find an object in those who were in the midst of all the degradation of Egyptian bondage! This was worthy of God. The One who had made the worlds, who was surrounded by hosts of unfallen angels, ever ready to **“do his pleasure,”** should come down for the purpose of taking up a number of bondslaves with whom He condescended to connect His name.

He came down and stood amid the brick-kilns of Egypt, and there beheld a people groaning beneath the lash of the task-masters, and He uttered those memorable accents, **“Let my people go;”** and, having so said, He proceeded to count them up, as much as to say, “These are mine; let me see how many I have, that not one may be left behind.” **“He taketh up the beggar from the dunghill, to set him amongst the princes of his people, and to make him inherit the throne of glory”** (I Samuel 2).

~ end of chapter 5, 6 ~

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