

## Exodus 5-6 - “When Things Go From Bad To Worse”

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### 1. Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh – 5:1-3

**5:1-3 - *Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’ ”<sup>2</sup> And Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.”<sup>3</sup> So they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days’ journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.”***

So we come to the encounter now with Moses and Aaron coming before Pharaoh with their demand – more so the command from the Lord.

It would seem Moses still has some clout here in the palace as he gains immediate access before Pharaoh, and Pharaoh called him by name (1:4).

Moses was well known at court not only because he was raised by the Egyptian princess but (according to Josephus) Moses excelled as an officer in the Egyptian army.

But what’s really remarkable is seeing this man Moses come before Pharaoh and speak so boldly. This was a man arguing with God about feeling under qualified to speak on His behalf. But now we see a very different Moses. Where has this courage come from? What gives!?!?

- Moses has met with the living God, and he’s a changed man! Chapter 3-4 provided the courage Moses needed to stand before a king like Pharaoh – He’s met the true and living God. God revealed Himself in the burning bush: “I AM WHO I AM”.
- Moses has encountered the powerful signs of God as the Lord commissioned him as His spokesman. Moses has seen the greatness of God. This is why he can say in verse 3: ***‘The God of the Hebrews has met with us.’***
- Remember the disciples were flailing, faulty individuals, right up to the resurrection of Jesus. Yet, when Jesus ascended into heaven these were mighty individuals that preached the gospel, turned the world upside down, and were willing to die for their faith with great courage and strength. What brought this change?
- No doubt the Holy Spirit filling and empowering them was a huge part of this. But when the crowd looked on at the disciples, their conclusion was: **Acts 4:13, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and**

*perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."*

- It wasn't their giftedness or training, it was the fact that they had been with Jesus. They had encountered the One worth living for and worth dying for. When they saw the resurrected Jesus, they were filled with courage and renewed faith to live for the glory of God.
- If you want to do great things for God, then spend time encountering the greatness of God! Have you spent time with Him, not just to get what you want, but just to discover how great He is!

So Moses comes in faith and strength as he tells Pharaoh to let God's people go to worship Him and hold a feast to Him.

Now even though Moses has encountered the greatness of God, Pharaoh hasn't. And he replies with, ***'Who is the Lord?'***

- [The Pharaoh at this time was most likely Amenhotep II]

The Egyptians were a very polytheistic nation. They worshipped many gods. In fact when we get into the plagues we'll see how the various plagues were a direct attack against their specific gods.

Pharaoh himself was a ruler who took on the role of much more than just king. It was believed that each Pharaoh was the child of the sun God, he was to be worshipped alongside their gods in their temples. He was of a supreme authority, sitting above the law.

- An inscription by a Pharaoh on an ancient Egyptian temple gives us the idea: "I am that which was, and is, and shall be, and no man has lifted my veil."

Yet this thinking, and the Egyptians worship of many gods, simply shows the futility of their thinking. As **Romans 1:21-23** says, *"because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."*

Everyone today must answer that question for themselves: ***'Who is the Lord?'***

It's a matter of life and death. Jesus posed that question to His disciples: *'Who do you say that I am?'* (Matthew 16:15).

- Have you come to the right conclusion of that today?
- "Until we come to know and love the one true God, we remain on the throne of our own lives. This may give us the illusion of power, but it is guaranteed to end in disaster."<sup>1</sup>

Pharaoh is going to have that question answered for him in the next few chapters as God begins to reveal Himself and His power. Pharaoh will be brought to his knees as he will begin to see his weakness and the Lord's might.

### ***Please, let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God...***

The request of Moses was not a big ask. Three days journey into the wilderness that they might worship Yahweh and celebrate the feast. Ultimately, God's will was to bring them out for good and bring about their deliverance out of Egypt. But before being brought out, they will be brought in to experience worship of God.

This will also serve as an opportunity for Pharaoh to do the easy thing. Letting them go for three days is certainly better than losing them for good. But this reveals the hardness of his heart by not letting them do the easy thing and it will bring the opportunity for God's might and power to be put on display.

- Three days separation between bondage and worship. We see this same timeline in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We were in bondage to sin, but through the death and resurrection of Jesus we've been forgiven. We've been brought into fellowship and relationship in Jesus Christ.

### ***...lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.***

Now God didn't say that there would be consequences for not going, yet Moses adds this here. Perhaps it was to let Pharaoh know that Yahweh ultimately holds the power over life. Pharaoh wanted to think he was in control, but Moses lets him know that by restricting them from going for three days, he might lose them altogether.

This did indeed turn out to be prophetic as Pharaoh's heart is in that hardening process right now. And with every decision made against the Lord, the heat will

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<sup>1</sup> Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God's glory* (p. 144). Crossway Books.

be turned up and the people of Egypt will indeed be hit with pestilence, and many will pay the price for Pharaoh's stubbornness.

## 2. Pharaoh's Harsh Reply and Increase in Labour – 5:4-14

**5:4-9 - *Then the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor."*<sup>5</sup> And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!"<sup>6</sup> So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying,<sup>7</sup> "You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves."<sup>8</sup> And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.'<sup>9</sup> Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words."**

Pharaoh's reply was to say that the people are just lazy, or that they have too much time on their hands. They're just wanting to have some vacation time. So instead of Pharaoh working with them, he works against them. And he turns up the heat on them to make things even more unbearable. Instead of having straw provided for them (which was useful in the making of bricks as it allowed the clay to hold together better) he makes the Israelites go and find their own straw. And to make things worse, he says you need to make the same amount of bricks each day.

Surely that would be the last straw for the Israelites! How would you respond to something like this?

- Think about some of the jobs you've had and if certain means to get the job done were taken from you (ie. tractor at driving range; cooking burgers at McDonalds).

Just as Pharaoh put the gears to the Israelites, and says, *work harder!* So the world often sounds off with the same mantra. *If you're idle you won't be productive or prosperous – you must work harder!* And people fall prey to the mentality of pushing and sacrificing to get ahead. But the Lord says, *you need to take time to be with Me or you will lose your head.* How we often find ourselves in an endless circle of playing catch up because we have failed to catch up with Jesus in quiet time and devotions. Does Jesus get pushed to the side so we can try to be successful?

- I love the story of the family that got together over Christmas and Grandpa was given a new watch. Through the events of the day he misplaced it and nobody could find it despite everyone chipping in to hunt for it. The next morning his young grandson presented it to his Grandpa, and the Grandpa asked, how did you ever find it? The young grandson said I got up before everyone else and just listened for the ticking.

It's **false words** to think that you're going to be happy by advancing in career, or riches, or fame. Your joy comes from Jesus. Don't skip over Him thinking that it will be found elsewhere. Pharaoh was the one pushing false words.

**5:10-14 - *And the taskmasters of the people and their officers went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh: 'I will not give you straw. <sup>11</sup> Go, get yourselves straw where you can find it; yet none of your work will be reduced.' " <sup>12</sup> So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw. <sup>13</sup> And the taskmasters forced them to hurry, saying, "Fulfill your work, your daily quota, as when there was straw." <sup>14</sup> Also the officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, Why have you not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and today, as before?"***

The Egyptians had taskmasters over the Israelites, but they dealt with various officers that came from the Hebrew people. This was the chain of command that was setup. So word is passed down that they're not going to be given any more straw to make the bricks, they would have to come up with it themselves now. And as production came to an obvious slowdown, the taskmasters began to beat the Hebrew officers and demand for the daily quota to be met.

This seems so cruel and ruthless. But it's a subtle picture for us of the demands of sin. This chapter teaches us that sin is a brutal taskmaster. We are all born in sin and the story of the Bible, especially evident in the Exodus account, is God's plan of salvation and deliverance from the demands of sin. "Exodus teaches that to be saved is to be rescued from slavery in order to serve the living God." <sup>2</sup>

Interesting archaeological note: "Naville (1883) and Kyle (1908) found, at Pithom, the lower courses of brick filled with good chopped straw; the middle courses,

<sup>2</sup> Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God's glory* (p. 153). Crossway Books.



with less straw, and that was stubble plucked up by the root; and the upper courses of brick were of pure clay, having no straw whatever. What an amazing confirmation of the Exodus account!”<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Israelites Complain and Blame Moses – 5:15-23

**5:15-19 - *Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why are you dealing thus with your servants? <sup>16</sup> There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, ‘Make brick!’ And indeed your servants are beaten, but the fault is in your own people.” <sup>17</sup> But he said, “You are idle! Idle! Therefore you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’ <sup>18</sup> Therefore go now and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks.” <sup>19</sup> And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, “You shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota.”***

The officers are legitimately confused as to why they were being beaten. They aren't sure why there's been a sudden shift in the supplies for them and yet still having to make the same amount. They blame Pharaoh's people for removing the straw and then saying make the bricks for us!

But now Pharaoh shares his heart and his reason. They are coming across as idle. Like they have all this extra time to go and worship God, so they might as well just do more work then!

These officers now begin to see that someone has gotten to Pharaoh first with the request to go and sacrifice to Yahweh.

The problem here is that these officers should have turned to God instead of to Pharaoh. It's like having Satan lead someone into addiction and they cry out to Satan for help in getting over it. There is no help to be found in calling out to the very one that puts us in this bondage. No substance is going to deliver. It may bring temporary numbness from the pain, but it will not free you from the pain. How we need to call out to the Lord in our moments of weakness, hurt, and need. He's our deliverer.

- **Psalm 86:6–7**, *"Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; And attend to the voice of my supplications. <sup>7</sup> In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, For You will answer me."*

<sup>3</sup> Halley, Henry H. (1965). *Halley's Bible Handbook* (p. 120). Zondervan.

To make matters worse, these officers now attack their leaders...

**5:20-21 - *Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. <sup>21</sup> And they said to them, “Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.”***

These officers place the blame on the shoulders of Moses and Aaron. They're the reason they're in this predicament. These officers say that they've become ***abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh*** and his servants. This means they've been like a big stench to Pharaoh, they've become repugnant.

- This will sadly become a common theme in the book of Exodus (and the Pentateuch for that matter). When things don't go well for Israel, they'll blame Moses and see it all as his fault.

Moses does the right thing and he takes this all to God.

**5:22-23 - *So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? <sup>23</sup> For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.”***

*Moses returned to the Lord.* I like that. Sometimes we get a little distracted, sometimes we get a little busy, and we need to get back in realignment with God. Moses returned to the Lord, the very place and person he knows he will find help, comfort and strength.

And I don't blame Moses for having some questions. He's done everything the Lord has asked of him and yet things have gone from bad to worse. We might look at these sorts of things and wonder, *'Where's God!?' He doesn't seem to be holding up His end of the deal.'*

Moses understandably asks why trouble is coming upon their people. He's also contemplating his calling – ***why have You sent me?*** Moses I'm sure is really wondering at this point if he's the right guy for the job. And Moses is doubting God's actions: ***neither have You delivered Your people at all.*** *This was the plan God, this seems like a pretty good time to do it!*

- But in all fairness, God did reveal that Pharaoh would not relent and it would be an opportunity for God to do something even greater in revealing His power.
- **Exodus 3:19–20**, *"But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. <sup>20</sup> So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go."*

We can easily look at the things happening around us that are less than ideal and wonder, 'God, why would you let this happen?' But what we have to take into account is that God is sovereign. He is in control. Nothing surprises Him, no curve balls are thrown at Him. He knows all that is happening. And His ways are not our ways. He's going to operate in ways that will ultimately be for the glory of God and for His power to be put on display.

That means when we see things happening that seem to run contrary to the expected outcome, trust the Lord.

- Remember, Moses walked in obedience and did what the Lord told him to do. The result was not the expected outcome. Does this mean that Moses was wrong, or God wasn't good? Nope! It means God is at work in ways that we don't always understand.
- We're not guaranteed to have a comfortable smooth ride here in this world.
- Again, Egypt is a picture of the world, and we will often go through pains and problems as a result of a fallen, sinful world. And yet in God's goodness He works through those things to bring about His purposes in our lives.
- **James 1:2–5**, *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."*

Things aren't always going to unfold as we would like, but they will always unfold as God has ordered. So when we come up against difficult things like this:

1. Trust Him to do what is best
2. Look for ways to honor and glorify God in the midst of it
3. Remember that God will see you through it
4. Watch expectantly for God's purposes to be fulfilled through it



It's not unlike what we see happening in our premises at Riverside (ie. fenced up parking lot).

This becomes an occasion to see God at work!

#### 4. God Is In Control – 6:1-5

**6:1-5 - *Then the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”<sup>2</sup> And God spoke to Moses and said to him: “I am the Lord.<sup>3</sup> I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name Lord I was not known to them.<sup>4</sup> I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers.<sup>5</sup> And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.***

“Moses thought that things had gone from bad to worse, but as far as God was concerned, everything was going perfectly according to plan. John Durham writes, “What has appeared to Moses and the Israelites as a serious deterioration of an already bad situation has been instead a careful preparation for what is to come.”<sup>4</sup> Even Pharaoh’s hard-hearted refusal was part of the plan of salvation. God was setting things up so that Pharaoh would not only let God’s people go but would help drive them out himself! The all-wise and all-powerful God had everything under control.”<sup>4</sup>

Now what’s interesting is that God reminds Moses of who He is: ***I am the LORD***. This should be all we need to remind ourselves when we are up against a problem, a setback, a quandry. When we are wondering how we’re going to get out of it or through it, we just need to remember, He is the Lord.

- **Jeremiah 32:27**, *“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?”*

Now God shows Moses how He revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But they were missing something. It’s to Moses and the Israelites in this day that God is known in a different way – by the name Lord, the I AM, the One who will provide their deliverance, and fulfill every promise.

<sup>4</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God’s glory* (p. 166). Crossway Books.

- “The patriarchs were privileged to know the God who made the covenant, but for them the covenant was barely fulfilled. The patriarchs knew God as the *Maker* of the covenant. Moses and the generation of the Exodus would know God as the One who *fulfilled* the covenant. The patriarchs knew the *name* Yahweh (it is used some 160 times in Genesis); but the great application of the name referred to God who kept *and* fulfilled the covenant.” <sup>5</sup>

## 5. God Will Keep His Covenant – 6:6-13

**6:6-8 - *Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. <sup>7</sup> I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup> And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord.’ ”***

The situation in Egypt looked bleak from a human perspective. But now God wants the children of Israel to look beyond what they see and look to the One who is able!

Here we have these glorious 7 I will statements of God. They’re the 7 “I Wills” of Redemption:

1. I will bring you out
2. I will rescue you from bondage
3. I will redeem you
4. I will take you as My people
5. I will be your God
6. I will bring you into the land
7. I will give it to you as a heritage

“Each of these verbs are in the Hebrew past (i.e., perfect) tense instead of the future tense, for so certain was God of their accomplishment that they were viewed as having been completed.” (Kaiser) <sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Guzik, D. (2013). *Exodus* (Ex 6:2–5). David Guzik.

<sup>6</sup> Guzik, D. (2013). *Exodus* (Ex 6:6–8). David Guzik.

These are all statements that God says are as good as done. And none of these are being relied upon Israel to fulfill or accomplish. This is all framed in by the phrase: ***I am the LORD***. He's the One that will accomplish this all.

And He's done it all for us as well. We see a wonderful spiritual application to each of these in what we have received in Jesus:

1. I will bring you out – We've been delivered and set free from the course of this world.
2. I will rescue you from bondage – We were in bondage to sin and the shackles have been broken.
3. I will redeem you – We've been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus.
4. I will take you as My people – We have received His adoption and become children of God.
5. I will be your God – Through Jesus we have been brought into a right standing with our Heavenly Father.
6. I will bring you into the land – Jesus is preparing a place for us that where He is we may be also.
7. I will give it to you as a heritage – **1 Peter 1:4**, *"to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,"*

**6:9-13 - *So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. <sup>10</sup> And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>11</sup> "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land." <sup>12</sup> And Moses spoke before the Lord, saying, "The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?" <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.***

When Moses shared this great news to the children of Israel, they couldn't bring themselves to get excited about it. And you can kind of sympathize with them because they've been broken over the heavy and cruel bondage they've been under. It's almost like it's too good to be true.

- You may encounter that with someone you're sharing the gospel with as they come under the weight of their sin and it becomes hard for them to hear the truths of what Jesus has done for them. Sometimes people are so mentally and emotionally crushed that they struggle to get it.

Moses is told to go speak to Pharaoh again, but Moses is feeling less than adequate. If the people of Israel won't respond to what he has to say, why would Pharaoh?

- To be of uncircumcised lips (6:12, 30) does not speak of some medical condition, this is about Moses' lack of confidence in his own speaking ability.

Now God commands Moses (and Pharaoh) to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt.

## 6. Genealogy Of Moses And Aaron – 6:14-27

Here we're injected with a genealogy of Moses and Aaron.

- "This passage puzzles some readers because it seems to be an unnatural insertion into the narrative. However, the genealogy was placed here to identify Moses and Aaron more precisely because of the prominent position they were assuming as representatives of the people before the Egyptian state. Verses 26–27, which close this passage, tie this unit with verse 13 and explain why the genealogy is given: **It was this same Moses and Aaron** (v. 26; repeated in v. 27), and **they were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh** (v. 27)." <sup>7</sup>

**6:14-27 - These are the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, were Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. These are the families of Reuben. <sup>15</sup> And the sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. These are the families of Simeon. <sup>16</sup> These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi were one hundred and thirty-seven. <sup>17</sup> The sons of Gershon were Libni and Shimi according to their families. <sup>18</sup> And the sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath were one hundred and thirty-three. <sup>19</sup> The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of Levi according to their generations. <sup>20</sup> Now Amram took for himself Jochebed, his father's sister, as wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of Amram were one hundred and thirty-seven. <sup>21</sup> The sons of Izhar were**

<sup>7</sup> Hannah, J. D. (1985). Exodus. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 117). Victor Books.

**Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. <sup>22</sup> And the sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Zithri. <sup>23</sup> Aaron took to himself Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Nahshon, as wife; and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. <sup>24</sup> And the sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These are the families of the Korahites. <sup>25</sup> Eleazar, Aaron's son, took for himself one of the daughters of Putiel as wife; and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families. <sup>26</sup> These are the same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, "Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies." <sup>27</sup> These are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt. These are the same Moses and Aaron.**

## 7. I Am The Lord – 6:28-30

**6:28-30 - And it came to pass, on the day the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, <sup>29</sup> that the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "I am the Lord. Speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you." <sup>30</sup> But Moses said before the Lord, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh heed me?"**

Moses is still struggling with how he's going to convince Pharaoh. But this isn't Moses' problem! The answer is given in verse 29 – ***I am the LORD***. He is all we need, and He is enough!