

A Burden of Bricks

- 27 The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.
- 28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do.
- 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel.
- 30 Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people.
- 31 And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.
- 5:1** Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"
- 2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."
- 3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."
- 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens."
- 5 And Pharaoh said, "Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens!"
- 6 The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen,
- 7 "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves.
- 8 But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'
- 9 Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words."
- 10 So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw.
- 11 Go and get your straw yourselves wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced in the least.'"
- 12 So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.
- 13 The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw."
- 14 And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, "Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?"

- ¹⁵ Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, "Why do you treat your servants like this?"
- ¹⁶ No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people."
- ¹⁷ But he said, "You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.'
- ¹⁸ Go now and work. No straw will be given you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks."
- ¹⁹ The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they said, "You shall by no means reduce your number of bricks, your daily task each day."
- ²⁰ They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh;
- ²¹ and they said to them, "The LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

Exodus 4:27-5:21

New Conversion and Glad Worship

Atlas was a second generation Titan who sided with his father in the fabled clash of the Titans against the Olympians. When the Titans lost the great war, most were dispatched by Zeus to Tartarus. But Atlas was consigned to carry the sky on his shoulders for eternity. This early myth has evolved so that today Atlas' burden is often thought to be the earth, so that we normally think of his carrying "the whole *world* on his shoulders" (hence the phrase).

One of the more famous Atlas stories involves Heracles (Hercules). Hercules was given 12 tasks to atone for killing his children when he was tricked by Hera. One of those tasks was to fetch the golden apples of the Hesperides in Hera's garden. To get the apples, Hercules went to Atlas, since the Hesperides were his daughters. Hercules suggested that he would relieve Atlas' burden, if he would only go and get the apples from the nymphs for him.

When young Christians are first converted, they often feel as Atlas did during that singular moment when Heracles took his burden. [The weight of the world has been lifted off of their shoulders.](#) Nothing can stop them from performing their new-found God-given task, which they have at once received with reverence and joy.

Being confronted with the gospel of Jesus Christ tends to make new converts very bold, especially in their evangelistic zeal with unbelieving friends and family. They tell everyone about Christ, and they often don't care how they come across. Being

newly converted also tends to put a person on a mountain top, where he can't get enough Christian fellowship, Christian music, and Christian teaching.

When last we saw our friend Moses, he was being confronted by the Angel of the LORD for not circumcising his son. But because of his wife's quick thinking, the Angel quickly releases his death-embrace and Moses is allowed to resume his journey. This is hardly a mountain top experience, but we must remember that Moses has just come from the mountain. In fact, that is where the story picks up, on the slopes of Sinai. It is at this point that an embrace of another kind takes place. It is the embrace of two brothers, long estranged by the sovereign plan of God for Moses' life. It is a kind of coming home embrace, perhaps the kind you might give to your own brother if later in life he came to trust Jesus as you had done earlier.

The LORD had told Moses in his anger because of his constant refusal to accept his calling, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well" (Ex 4:14). But just as quickly the LORD calms Moses' fear, "Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart." This must have been a comforting word, considering the last time he had seen any of his brothers it was when they had confronted him for killing the Egyptian.

In Exodus 4:27, the LORD tells Aaron to go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And so Aaron went to the mountain of God, met Moses, and kissed him. Moses then tells Aaron "all the words of the LORD" that God had sent him to speak, and showed him all the signs that he had commanded him to do (vs. 28). Together, the two brave men make their way back to Goshen and assemble with the elders (vs. 29). Aaron, now the mouthpiece of Moses, speaks all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people.

And the people believed (vs. 31). When they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped. Everything is going just as God had said that it would. Their burden is about to be relieved. The world will no longer be on their shoulders. They are on the mountain top together. This is when belief is easy, at the beginning, when joy is high and testing, refining, and suffering have not been introduced. And we should praise God that he does not start the journey off in the middle of the desert, for who would be able to survive?

I Did It My Way

The story of Atlas and Hercules does not end here, and obviously neither does the story of Moses and Israel. As you can about imagine, after many long years of carrying such a heavy weight, Atlas rather liked having his burden relieved. So he devised a plan to make Hercules hold the sky forever. He told Hercules that [he would deliver the apples himself](#). Then, he just wouldn't come back and Hercules would be stuck holding the sky.

When we come to [Exodus 5:1](#) we are immediately struck by a few strange things. First, notice who goes (or rather does not seem to go) to the Pharaoh. It says, “[Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh.](#)” But there is a glaring absence here. In [Exodus 3:18](#) the LORD told Moses, “[You and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt.](#)” [Where are the elders?](#) This is a question that so perplexed the Jews that 1,000 years ago they came up with an excuse to exonerate Moses of any wrong doing. They said that the elders had intended to go, but one by one lost their nerve (*Exodus Rabbah* 5:17).¹ It wasn't Moses' fault. It was their own. But in my understanding, it seems to me that Moses wants to deliver the apples *himself*.

Once we see that something is afoot, the rest of [Ex 5:1](#) and [5:3](#) begin to make sense. In these verses you have two very different accounts of what the LORD said. In [Ex 5:1](#) Moses begins by saying, “[Thus says the LORD.](#)” This is the first time the very common prophetic formula is used in the entire Bible and it is important here. Moses and Aaron are *supposed* to be speaking for God.

“Israel” not “Hebrews”

But there are some peculiar inconsistencies with what they were told to tell the Pharaoh. For example, Moses was told to say, “[The LORD, the God of the Hebrews has met with us](#)” ([3:18](#)). Moses does reference the LORD, but he calls them *Israel*—the name the people use of themselves, [not Hebrews](#)—the name used of them by others. Moses was so bold that he would use his own terminology. I attended several schools where we were told to use “[gender inclusive](#)” language in our papers. That is what the teacher demanded. Students were graded down, and even called into the teacher's office if they continually used their own terminology. It was viewed as an act of defiance. If Moses would have used the term Hebrew, he probably would have at least not offended the Pharaoh with the name.

¹ Referenced in Peter Enns, *Exodus*, p. 152, n. 3.

No Theophany?

Moses likewise does not mention that the LORD “met with” them. This is important because evidence indicates that the Egyptians would have understood this as describing a theophany,² which indeed it was. Moses was met by the LORD in the burning bush, and he doesn’t seem to feel the need to tell Pharaoh about this.

Permanent Release

Moses was also supposed to report that the Hebrews were going to take a **three day journey** into the wilderness to “sacrifice” to the LORD their God (3:18). But Moses’ demand seems much more permanent than this. He doesn’t mention anything about “three days.” This sounds like an ultimatum. Also, Moses does not call it a “sacrifice,” but a “feast.”

The commentators are split on whether we should see these things as incidental or intentional. **Is Moses doing what he was supposed to be doing or is he acting like the Moses we have by now come to expect?** Is vs. 1 merely another way of saying the same thing as vs. 3? I don’t think so. We need to remember that in the previous verses it says three times that Moses said all that he was supposed to say. With four differences like this in one verse, I don’t think this is how anyone would describe what Moses said to Pharaoh.

Then we come to verse three where the two men suddenly say almost exactly what the LORD told them to say (although with one troubling addition). **Verse 3 is to be read in light of Pharaoh’s response. What does Pharaoh say?** “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go” (Ex 5:2). Only in response to the king do they say what the LORD had told them to say, and since vs. 3 is so similar to 3:18, vs. 1 can hardly be viewed as merely a summary.

Rather, as one commentary suggests, “**They are outclassed and overwhelmed by this Pharaoh.**” Because Pharaoh dismisses them with the swipe of his hand while simultaneously mocking the LORD, “**They now refer to ‘the God of the Hebrews; apologetically they explain that the command to pilgrimage was quite unexpected, they return to the three-day limit for the trip; and they plead fear of Yahweh’s**

² See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Magnes, 1967), 42, 66-67; cited in Motyer, *Exodus*, p. 99, n. 2.

reprisal, which would of course mean a loss to Pharaoh greater than the loss of three day's work. There is no hint now of any command; their confidence is gone, and they are begging favors from a powerful superior."³

It should be pointed out how in vs. 3, besides finally telling Pharaoh the LORD's words, **Moses and Aaron add their own.**⁴ Had God told them that they needed to sacrifice or else the LORD would "fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword?" No! **Moses and Aaron sound like Eve**, adding to the word of God what he had not said. And we all know where that little addition got the human race!

Rather, Moses was supposed to convey this message, "Israel is my firstborn son. Let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son" (Ex 4:22-23). Moses didn't say anything about God sending plagues upon Egypt, let alone killing Pharaoh's son! Instead, he makes it sound like God is mad *at Moses* rather than Pharaoh. He gets a martyr complex in order to make the Pharaoh feel sorry for him. It is well established in Egyptology that religious holidays were granted, even to slaves. There is a limestone tablet from the period of the early date of the Exodus that lists the names of slaves, together with reasons for their absence from work which include "has sacrificed to the god."⁵ Perhaps Moses figures that if he tells Pharaoh this little white lie that he will do what he has let other slaves do before, and go away for a short weekend retreat.⁶

At this point you might recall **Hebrews 11:27** which says, "By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." **Isn't Moses acting by faith here?** I think the answer is yes and no, and in this, Moses is acting like any true believer who has faith which is mingled with sin. Faith is God's recipe. Sin is our own ingredient. Yes, Moses is boldly approaching the Pharaoh, because he has seen the invisible God and nothing can derail his faith. Yes, later Moses tells Pharaoh about the firstborn son.

³ Durham, J. I. (2002). *Vol. 3: Word Biblical Commentary : Exodus*, p. 64.

⁴ So Fretheim writes, "At first he replaced the Lord's word with his own, then he added his own words to the Lord's." (T. E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, John Knox, 1991, p. 86.)

⁵ For example the Louvre Roll. See James Karl Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, p. 115. Also J. Cerny and A. H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca I* (Oxford, England: Printed for the Griffith Institute at the University Press by Charles Batey, 1957), pp. 22, 23, plates 83, 84.

⁶ Of course, the question of whether Moses was told to lie about the "three days away" comes into play here. If we understand the LORD to be commanding language that the Pharaoh would understand, and which would also be respectful to the king, then we can see the "three days journey" in a different light than a pure lie (see Stuart, "Exodus," *NAC* 124). But even if it is a lie, we are not to think that the king is owed the truth, given his dealings with God's people (cf. Ex 1:19).

Yet, though Moses goes to the king in faith, I am convinced he sins by doing this his own way. I want you to notice that nothing is said here of Moses doing “as the LORD commanded.” Yet, of all the books in the Bible, Exodus is the book that points out that Moses does what he is commanded to do when he does what he is commanded (over three dozen times in this book), of which, again, we have just seen three. Later, when they approach Pharaoh the second time we are told three times that they did “just as the LORD commanded” (7:6, 10, 20). But not here. Though they claim to speak for God, there are some real questions as to whether or not they are actually taking matters into their own hands.

So Moses goes with the wrong delegation, with the wrong understanding, and the wrong message such that one scholar concludes, “The Lord commanded a corporate approach, couched in understandable terminology, making a moderate and limited request in courteous terms. Moses adopted an authoritarian approach, alienating Pharaoh with incomprehensible talk, and laying down an absolute demand. When we sit loose to the word of God, in matters small or great, when we subtract what it does say (cf. Gen 3:4) and contribute what it does not (Gen 3:3), we doom ourselves to reap failure and disappointment.”⁷ Atlas has delivered the apples himself, his way. It is no wonder he was so disappointed with the outcome, which is something we will return to next week.

The Burden is Back?

In the meantime, let me return to Hercules and Atlas. Hercules suspected that Atlas was up to no good, that he would not return, and that he would be left holding the sky forever. Thus, he devised a way to trick Atlas into picking up the sky once more, before he went on his way for good. Hercules said, “Hold this while I rearrange my cloak so that I can get some padding for this great burden.” When Atlas foolishly obliged, Hercules picked up the apples and walked away forever. Atlas is left holding the sky to this day.

This is how many young Christians often feel fairly soon after their conversion, when it appears that no one is listening or cares about what has happened to them. Suddenly, they become pensive, timid, and doubtful. They wonder why God has not helped their friends convert the same way that he converted them. Those who live on the mountain forget that they have to come down to the valley. Moses and Aaron are finding that out now.

⁷ Motyer, *Exodus*, 99-100.

Other Christians are either never taught or seem to forget very quickly that this side of heaven, **God never promises a life in Hera's garden**. In fact, it is generally the opposite. The first words of the oldest book in the Bible have the LORD telling Satan to go and persecute Job in order that his faith might be tested and God glorified. Jesus tells his disciples, "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (**Matt 10:22**). Peter says, "To [suffering for Christ] you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (**1 Pet 2:21**). Paul says, "We rejoice in our sufferings, because suffering produces perseverance which produces character which produces hope" (**Rom 5:3-4**). Indeed, the whole Bible is filled with this singular word: If you want to be a Christian, life is going to be difficult! You *will* suffer for Christ. Early Christians like Ignatius and Polycarp took this so seriously that they believed if you didn't die as a martyr, there was reason to think you were not really saved!

How diametrically opposed is the message in our churches today? We have filled our pulpits with wolves telling sheep that God wants them to be happy, wealthy, healthy, rich, and trouble-free in this life. You are supposed to have "Your Best Life Now." If you don't there is either sin or ignorance to blame. And people who don't know any better think to themselves, "That sounds like it should be true," because they watch too many Oprah shows and Tony Robbins infomercials, but never bother to read their Bibles. People are worried right now about swine flu turning into a pandemic. I tell you that wolf flu is a pandemic that has swept through the Christian church already.

And it was a virus that was already present in Israel in Egypt. I have one final thing to tell you about Atlas. In her novel *Atlas Shrugged*, **Ayn Rand** uses Atlas to describe the people who produce everything in a society and so "hold up the world" in a metaphorical sense. **What would happen in a culture so completely dominated by government intervention, bureaucracy, regulation, and control that the people lost all desire and motivation to work, what would happen if suddenly "Atlas shrugged?"** What if those people stopped working? What if they disappeared? What if someone behind the scenes were convincing the workers, the engine of the world, to strike against their own government? The sky would start falling.

This story is appropriate for both Pharaoh and the people. On the one hand, Pharaoh is the tyrannical dictator that so completely dominates the Hebrew slaves that they have lost the will to work. **At least that is what he thinks.** He doesn't believe Moses that some god really wants to free these slaves. Pharaoh is God! This is just a ploy to stop working and go on holiday.

Unlike the previous Pharaoh, this man has seen the benefit of a large number of slaves. Look at the amazing cities they build at a cost of next to nothing. Look at how they improve Egypt's life. Thus, Pharaoh says to Moses and Aaron, **"Why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens" (Ex 5:4).** **"The people of the land are many. You are making them rest from their burdens" (vs. 5).** **"You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD'" (vs. 17, 8).** **"Go now and work" (vs. 18).** This king will not allow Atlas to shrug or to drop his burden.

In order to ensure it, he imposes an old military strategy against Moses and Aaron called **divide and conquer**. Some people think that Pharaoh has lost his mind and that he acts completely irrationally by imposing the now famous **"bricks without straw"** law. But that is not the case at all.

Here you need to know something about **how Egyptian forced labor was organized**, because while the story of Atlas is mythology, the story of the Exodus is meticulously recorded history that fits perfectly with what we know about ancient Egypt. Oversight of the slaves generally fell to Pharaoh's 'taskmasters' who **chose some of the Hebrews as 'foremen'** over their fellow slaves. The foremen were directly responsible to the royal 'taskmasters' for fulfillment of the daily quotas of bricks put out by their fellow Hebrews, and could be beaten as punishment for deficits.⁸ Thus, if Pharaoh can get the foremen angry, they will be able to persuade Moses and Aaron to stop this non-sense and get the people back to work.

He tells them that they are no longer to give the slaves straw for making bricks. The straw acts as a sort of glue that holds the bricks together. They will have to go and gather it in the fields of Egypt for themselves (**vs. 7, 12**). Interestingly, similar to the Tower of Babel where the people are scattered (*puts*) over the earth (*erets*) because of their brick-making, the Israelites are now scattered (*puts*) over the earth (*erets*) to find

⁸ K. A. Kitchen, "From the Brickfields of Egypt," *Tyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976), 137-147.
http://98.131.162.170/tyndul/library/TynBull_1976_27_06_Kitchen_BrickfieldsOfEgypt.pdf

straw to make bricks (cf. same verb form in **Gen 11:8** and **Ex 5:12**). But unlike Babel, the LORD is not punishing Israel, even though that is their interpretation. This straw turns out to be quite inferior to the straw normally provided for making bricks, besides the fact that it takes a long time to gather this stubbly stuff.⁹ Yet, the key to the whole plan is that the daily quotas of bricks would not diminish by even one (**vs. 8**).

Of course, the plan works perfectly. The foremen have to go and deliver this terrible news to their brothers in the fields (**vs. 10**). You can guess how well that went over. They deliver the message with these words that I will come back to at the end, “**Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. . . and your work will not be reduced.’**” It is possible that the Israelites tried to make some bricks without straw in order to meet the quota. In Tell el-Maskhutih (possibly the city of Pithom mentioned in **Exodus 1:11**), there are in fact bricks made without straw. One archeologist wrote, “**I carefully examined round the chamber walls, and I noticed that some of the corners of the brickwork throughout were built of bricks without straw. I do not remember to have met anywhere in Egypt bricks so made.**”¹⁰

Nevertheless, even that did not work. So, when the work is not completed (as it obviously could not have been), the taskmasters first urge (**vs. 13**) the foremen to get the people moving, and then beat them into submission (**vs. 16**). But though the taskmasters surely knew that this was an impossible task, they were told directly by Pharaoh not to listen to the complaints because the people are lazy. “**Pay no regard to lying words**” (**vs. 9**).

Thus, when the foremen go to their taskmasters with the question, “**Why do you treat your servants like this?**” (**vs. 15**), “**No straw is given to your servants, yet they say ‘Make bricks!’ and you beat us, but the fault is with the Egyptians for not giving us any straw**” (**vs. 16**), the reply is simply “**You are idle, idle, idle. And that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD’**” (**vs. 17**). Do you see how it is not merely the people who are complaining, it is the foremen, who are quite influential in the community who are beaten unjustly because Moses and Aaron, and not the people, went to Pharaoh and demanded to go on a vacation.

⁹ The straw that Egypt provided was תבן (*tbm*) וקש (*qsb*). The first is chopped straw. The second is trashy stubble blown about by the wind. See Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, 65.

¹⁰ Villiers Stuart, quoted in A. A. MacRae, “The Relation of Archaeology to the Bible,” *Modern Science and Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1950), pp. 215, 216.

With this, we read that the foremen meet Moses and Aaron who are waiting for them as they come out from meeting with Pharaoh (vs. 20), and they said, “The LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us” (vs. 21).

Here is the problem. Actually, there are probably two. First, **Moses did not do what the LORD had said**, and so in a sense, the people are right to complain against Moses. He really did make things worse by not obeying the LORD. Second, you must understand when reading this passage, this is **not a battle between Moses and Pharaoh!** Even if he had obeyed perfectly, the LORD had told him *twice* already that Pharaoh would not let the people go and that he would harden the king’s heart in order that he would not let the people go. Besides this, we are told that Moses told the elders everything that the LORD said, and so they must have known about it too!

Their expectations were not in line with the Word of God! And how much like them are you and I? Though we know what the word says about this life, we still think that we should be immune from suffering. At least, that’s what we think when we are actually called into the suffering. And we begin to think thoughts that are very out of line when it happens.

We wonder why God is angry when young people die tragically. We feel like God must be punishing us because we can’t find a job or sell our house. We try to figure out how to become a Christian nation again because our political leaders have abandoned our heritage. We question our salvation because sin continues to ravage us, though we have been promised that those who trust in Christ by faith alone have eternal life! It’s all about us.

But it isn’t about us. The world doesn’t revolve around you. If you suffer for Christ, then it is because you are children of the heavenly father! It is the opposite of your expectation. This is God’s war, and he has seen fit, in this life, to refine and test your faith to prove the quality of your mettle, to conform you into the image of his Son who suffered the very abandonment of the Father for your sake! This is made explicit in the text. This is **a battle between Pharaoh** (elsewhere called the dragon, a kind of antichrist, the embodiment of Satan) **and Jesus**.

It is Pharaoh's word verses Jesus' word. The taskmasters and foremen said, "Thus says Pharaoh."¹¹ Moses says, "Thus says the LORD." Sadly, neither one at this point actually does speak God's word truly. But the LORD will win this battle. It is only beginning. Very soon, the very plagues of heaven will come down upon Egypt and the Pharaoh who does not at present know the LORD will know power of the LORD and God will gain the glory.

But not before the refining in Egypt lasts a bit longer. God has been aware of their plight for 400 years, when he told Abraham that this would all occur. The LORD has seen and he is about to deliver. Jesus has died, and the devil has been defanged. But there is an interlude between the Moses' going to Pharaoh and the Exodus finally occurring, just as there is an interlude between the first and second comings of Jesus.

The question is, will you believe the word? When he tells you that what you see going on you must happen, will you have faith? Will you see your circumstances in light of God conforming you into the image of his Son, his only begotten firstborn of all creation? Israel in disbelief complained bitterly about God's ways. Moses (as we will see next week) forgot that God told him this would happen. Will you trust and believe in God, though things don't go the way you had planned? Do not harden your hearts as you did in Egypt. But learn to see and understand God's ways, that they are good, that he knows what he is doing, that he is in total control of all the circumstances in your life, that he has predestined them and is working all things out for the good of those who love him. And if you will, then it will be counted to you as righteousness.

¹¹ Douglas Stuart writes, "The Amarna Letters, mainly copies of correspondence to and from the pharaohs and various minor Near Eastern kings during the period roughly 1400–1360 BC, contain in many cases the expression "Thus says [name of king]," which the king's messenger would read before the pharaoh. A messenger formula makes the point that the person speaking the words is not making them up, but simply repeating them verbatim on behalf of the one who sent him to deliver his or her message" (Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 160, n. 134).