

Moses Lesson 4 Article

Moses and Aaron, having delivered their message to the elders of Israel, with whom they found good acceptance, are now to deal with Pharaoh, to whom they come in peril of their lives—*Moses* particularly, who perhaps was out-lawed for killing the Egyptian forty years before, so that if any of the old courtiers should happen to remember that against him now it might cost him his head. Their message itself was displeasing, and touch Pharaoh both in his honor and in his profit, two tender points; yet these faithful ambassadors boldly deliver it, whether he will hear or whether he will forbear.

I. Their demand is piously bold: *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go*, v. 1. Moses, in treating with the elders of Israel, is directed to call God *the God of their fathers*; but, in treating with Pharaoh, they call him *the God of Israel*, and it is the first time we find him called so in scripture: he is called *the God of Israel*, the *person* (Gen. 33:20); but here it is Israel, the *people*. They are just beginning to be formed into a people when God is called their God. Moses, it is likely, was directed to call him so, at least it might be inferred from ch.9:22, *Israel is my son*. In this great name they deliver their message: *Let my people go*. 1. They were God's people, and therefore Pharaoh ought not to detain them in bondage. Note, God will own his own people, though ever so poor and despicable, and will find a time to plead their cause. "The Israelites are slaves in Egypt, but they are my people," says God, "and I will not suffer them to be always trampled upon." See Isa. 52:4, 5. 2. He expected services and sacrifices from them, and therefore they must have leave to go where they could freely exercise their religion, without giving offence to, or receiving offence from, the Egyptians. Note, God delivers his people out of the hand of their enemies, that they may serve him, and serve him cheerfully, that they may hold a feast to him, which they may do, while they have his favor and presence, even in a wilderness, a dry and barren land.

II. Pharaoh's answer is impiously bold: *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?* v. 2. Being summoned to surrender, he thus hangs out the flag of defiance, hectors Moses and the God that sends him, and peremptorily refuses to let Israel go; he will not treat about it, nor so much as bear the mention of it. Observe, 1. How scornfully he speaks of the God of Israel: "*Who is Jehovah?* I neither know him nor care for him, neither value him nor fear him:" it is a hard name that he never heard of before, but he resolves it shall be no bug-bear to him. Israel was now a despised oppressed people, looked on as the tail of the nation, and, by the character they bore, Pharaoh makes his estimate of their God, and concludes that he made no better a figure among the gods than his people did among the nations. Note, Hardened persecutors are more malicious against God himself than they are against his people. See Isa. 37:23. Again, Ignorance and contempt of God are at the bottom of all the wickedness that is in the world. Men know not the Lord, or have very low and mean thoughts of him, and therefore they obey not his voice, nor will let anything go for him. 2. How proudly he speaks of himself: "*That I should obey his voice;* I, the king of Egypt, a great people, obey the God of Israel, a poor enslaved people? Shall I, that rule the Israel of God, obey the God of Israel? No, it is below me; I scorn to answer his summons." Note, Those are the children of pride that are the *children of disobedience*, Job 41:34; Eph. 5:6. Proud men think themselves too good to stoop even to God himself, and would not be under control, Jer. 43:2. Here is the core of the controversy: God must rule, but man will not be ruled. "I will have my will done," says God: "But I will do my own will," says the sinner. 3. How resolutely he denies the demand: *Neither will I let Israel go*. Note, Of all sinners none are so obstinate, nor so hardly persuaded to leave their sin, as persecutors are.¹

¹ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Ex 5:1–2). Peabody: Hendrickson.