

Lamar E. Cooper, Sr.
Executive Vice President & Provost
Criswell College

A Compendium of Compromise And An Ultimatum

Exodus 8:25-27, 28
10:9-11, 24, 26, 28

Introduction

Before leaving the plague narratives, there is one matter of importance that is worthy of attention. On at least four occasions, Pharaoh in fact did agree to let the Hebrews go as requested, but the affirmation of God's request as delivered by Moses, was conditional. The conditions for gaining release of the Hebrews required by Pharaoh were not acceptable. Not only were these compromises designed for minimal or no compliance with God's request, but also to keep the Hebrews under Pharaoh's authority and control. A surrendering general does not dictate the terms of the surrender. God's revealed purposes are never negotiable. Both God the Father and our Lord Jesus, His Son, require total surrender from every believer. He wants to be Lord of all, or not at all! God never compromises His demands providing or our receiving His redemptive will for the lost, which is salvation. He never compromises regarding the necessary ingredients for spiritual growth. God is unwavering in His demands on us, and also His demands on lost humanity regarding both the availability and means of salvation.

The four encounters with Pharaoh have a familiar ring to them. Often those who wish to come to God would like to dictate the terms. God alone reserves the right to determine the conditions for providing salvation and sanctification. Pharaoh's four offers for compromise clearly illustrate this principle. The nine plagues close with the ultimatum and God's announcement of the death of the firstborn.

1. **Compromise One: Serve God in the Land, 8:25-27**

Pharaoh's first compromise was to offer to let the people sacrifice to their God, Yahweh, but to do so without leaving the land of Egypt. As noted in the lesson on the fourth plague, Moses' quick reply pointed out that this would not be possible. Such a move would be detestable to the Egyptians. There were at least 1200 gods in the Egyptian pantheon. Every little village had its own patron god. All of them were in some way tied to the animals of the land. Anubis was the jackal. Apis was the bull. Hathor was the hawk. Sebek was the crocodile. Every little village venerated some animal. The idea of killing any animal as a sacrifice to the gods was totally repulsive to the Egyptians. So, Moses was right and Pharaoh knew it, v. 26. So, he repeated the demand that they take a three-day journey into the desert and there outside the border of Egypt, they could safely offer sacrifices to Yahweh, v. 27.

This is comparable to trying to do God's work in the ways of the world. It refers to anyone who would attempt to serve God and live in bondage to sin. Egypt in Scripture is a type of bondage to sin. Deliverance from Egypt is a type of redemption, see Deut 3:6; 7:8; 8:4; 13:5, 10; Josh 24:17; Judg 6:8, Micah 6:4; Heb 3:16; 8:9; and Rev 11:8. Believers especially are warned not to fall in love with the world of material things and not to fall in love with this life, 1 John 2:15. The word "world" is the Greek κόσμος, and it is used in several ways in the Bible.

- It can refer to the material universe or the whole created order as in Matt 13:35; John 17:24.
- It refers to the planet earth, 1 Tim 1:15.
- It refers to the realm of humanity, Acts 24:5.
- It refers to unbelievers, Rom 12:2.

The point here is that believers are in the world but not to be of the world or live like the world. In his admonishing the Corinthians to seek holiness in 2 Corinthians 6:11-18, the apostle quotes Numbers 35:51-56 and Isaiah 52:11, when he says, "Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you," 2 Cor 6:17. Holiness is part of the character of God, and He calls upon us to seek to appropriate His holiness into our life and conduct, Lev 11:15; 19:2.

One of the reasons that Christians are rebuffed and persecuted today is that the lives of so many professed believers appear to be no different than the culture. If we think like the world, look like the world, act like the world, talk like the world, live like the world, and smell like the world, then the world will pay no attention to us. The unsaved will consider us to be no different than the billions of other people who are just like us.

Paul, in his letter to Titus, wrote about the qualities of a church built on holiness of character and holiness that would showcase the character of God and His transforming power. Writing to his trouble shooter, Titus, Paul, in Titus 2:1-15, sets forth the four main qualities that a God-honoring church should have:

- Sound doctrine that conforms to the Word of God, 2:1
- Sober men and women who are an example to the immature, 2:2-5
- Stable believers, who do good works, live with integrity, reverence, incorruptible lives, wholesome speech, and an unblemished witness, all as an evidence of their salvation, 2:6-8.
- Steadfast workers who have an excellent record on the job, no theft, impeccable honesty, whose character adorns the doctrine of God in all things, 2:9-10.

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." **Titus 2:11-14**

Lesson

Egypt in Scripture is a type of bondage to sin, and deliverance from Egypt is a type of redeeming grace. Therefore, one who tries to serve God "in the land" is trying to worship and serve God while living by the rules and standards of the world. Such an attempt means either the person who does this is still lost, or they are a backslidden believer who is in bondage to sin, see Isa 57:17; Jer 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22; 31:22; 49:4; Hos 11:7; 14:14. Jesus warned that no person can serve two masters, Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13. For a true believer to live in bondage to sin would be like trying to get a dead person to walk, talk, eat, and function as living. Paul, in Romans 6:1-23, points out the impossibility of living in Egypt and living in a state of redeeming grace. For such an one, the wages of sin is death, Rom 6:23. In such cases, the true believer is hardened against the conviction of the Holy Spirit and in some cases may forfeit his life, see 1 Cor 5:1, 5. The answer to having the power to live a life pleasing to God is found in the assistance we receive from the Holy Spirit, read Rom 8:1-39. Living in the power of the Holy Spirit, nothing and no one can separate us from God in Christ Jesus, Rom 8:38-39.

2. Compromise Two: Go, But Don't Go Far, 8:28

Pharaoh again agreed to let the Hebrews depart but warned that they must not go too far. The qualification suggested that they should be ready and willing immediately to return to the land of Egypt and resume their duties as slaves of the state. Moses repeated the words of the Lord given first in 3:18 that they be allowed to journey into the wilderness to an undefined location where they would sacrifice and worship Yahweh, their God. The context for the recurring use of the "three days' journey" qualification suggests that it was proverbial for complete deliverance. Having gone a "three days' journey" in the wilderness, they would be free from any legal claim on them by Pharaoh or the Egyptian taskmasters.

The "three days' journey" principle first appears in Genesis 30:36 when Jacob makes a covenant with Laban. He agreed to take the brown, the spotted, and the speckled among the goats as his wages, Gen 30:32. Jacob kept the females that were unblemished a "three days' journey" apart to show total separation so that when the flocks of Laban continued to bear brown and spotted young, he could not be accused of cheating his father-in-law. Exodus 3:18 is the second use of this phrase and also

suggests total separation. God told Moses to ask to go a "three days' journey" but he should expect the idea to be rejected by Pharaoh, obviously because he would view it as a call for total separation. The use in 8:27 is the fulfillment of God's prediction of 3:18.

In the Hebrews' departure from Sinai after all the events at the mountain, their departure from the mountain is described as a "three days' journey" into the wilderness, and it indicated the final separation from Sinai to move to the land of promise. Numbers 33:8 again uses the phrase, a "three days' journey" to describe the departure from Sinai and the movement of the people to the wilderness of Etham where they encamped at Marah.

Pharaoh's statement that they could leave the land, but they must not go far away in 3:28, should be seen as a compromise. The actual statement in verse 28 is emphatic. Pharaoh literally said, "I myself will let you go." This was his way of indicating that he was in charge and the choice to let them go was his, and it was not based on pressure from the plagues. In so doing, Pharaoh revealed his true motive. He did not want to lose the conscripted work force to which the economy of Egypt had become accustomed. Having agreed to this demand, Pharaoh asked Moses to pray for him that the plague might be lifted. But, Moses also used the emphatic form of reply. He said, "I myself am going out from you and I myself will pray for you," v. 29. So Moses departed, prayed for Yahweh to remove the plague, and it was done. Not one of the insects remained, v. 30-31. For the fourth time, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the Hebrews leave.

Lesson

This is one of the areas where Satan is most effective with us. *Go*, but don't go too far. So, you want to be religious? Okay, attend church, join the church, attend a Bible study, do good things, and try to be a better person. *Get involved*, but don't go too far. You don't need to take a "three days' journey" going overboard, as some do, with the matter of righteousness. I am reminded of one of Paul Harvey's classic editorials entitled, "If I Were the Devil," that first aired March 16, 1993, a copy of which is attached.

3. Compromise Three: Go, But Leave the Women and Children, 10:9-11

Obviously, if the women and children were left behind, the men would not go far, and they would return as soon as possible. This was a calculated response, designed to make a compromise that might at least be considered. Moses, however, made it clear that when they left on this excursion, no family member would be left behind. Addressing this compromise to the Hebrew men brought into focus the importance of the husband's responsibility as the spiritual leader in the home. The man was

created first and was charged with the responsibility for the spiritual direction of the home.

In *Genesis 2:15-17*, God gave specific instructions to Adam, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (literally 'dying you shall die')." When the temptation in the garden came, as recorded in *Genesis 3:1-8*, Adam allowed Eve to be the spokesperson. Eve encountered the suggestion of the serpent that she take from the fruit of the forbidden tree. She repeated the prohibition as Adam had communicated it to her. But Eve added another dimension to the prohibition, namely, that they should not even touch it lest they die, *3:3*.

This was a subtle but clear signal to the serpent that Eve felt God was being unfair with them. She responded by examining the fruit and noting it seemed good. She looked at the tree and fruit and found it to be pleasant to look at. She concluded it was desirable to make one wise. So she gave it to Adam, who was with her and he took and ate of the tree also. The consequences were immediate. Their eyes were opened. They knew they were naked, so they made a covering for themselves. They heard God approaching and feeling alienated, they ran and hid themselves. In this exchange, Adam had abdicated his spiritual responsibility to Eve by not stopping the contest before the sin was committed.

Lesson

It is not enough to be rescued from sin by the Lord through faith in Christ. Every husband and father should be keenly aware of his responsibility to be the spiritual leader of his own household. The spouse and the siblings should be under his spiritual care, and he should be the primary focus for leading all family members to discover the will of God in all matters. *Genesis 3:1-8* reveals that Adam failed in his responsibility as the spiritual leader of his home. He could have and should have stopped the interchange between Eve and the serpent. He sinned in that he failed to lead. Perhaps he too believed that God had been unfair and may have told Eve not to touch the tree. It is very clear that he allowed Eve to be the guinea pig and try the fruit as suggested by the serpent, Satan. When she ate it and did not fall over dead, he decided to follow her and also ate the fruit.

The serpent's admonition in *3:4*, "You will not surely die," is a telling statement in the Hebrew text that literally means, "dying you shall begin to die." It clearly meant that death would not be instantaneous, but they would indeed be mortal, susceptible to death. It is the responsibility of every father to see to it that his family is not left in Egypt, but through Christ is delivered from death unto life, as so clearly presented by Paul in *Romans 5:18*, "Therefore, as through one man's

offence [Adam], judgment came to all men, even so resulting in condemnation, even so by one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men resulting in justification and life."

4. Compromise Four: Go, But Leave Your Possessions, 10:24, 26

In a final attempt to compromise with God, Pharaoh told the Hebrews they could go, but they must leave their flocks and herds. This, of course, was unacceptable because it would deprive the Hebrews of the ability to offer sacrifices to God. It is tragic but true that many are delivered from the Egypt of sin, but leave their possessions behind. By this I mean that their possessions never count anything for the Kingdom but are used for personal desires. The very things that are necessary to worship, offer, and sacrifice to God wind up counting for the world and not for God. His plan is that "... not a hoof shall be left behind," Exod 10:26.

It is significant that the great passage on stewardship of things in Matthew 25:1-46 comes immediately after the passage on the second coming of our Lord and the end of human history. It is a sobering fact that we will be held accountable for how we as believers have used our lives and our possessions. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says it well, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." When God delivered us from sin, it was to be a total deliverance. All our possessions are to count for the Kingdom. Our total surrender must include all we are and all we have.

5. Ultimatum: Get Away From Me! Take Heed, 10:10, 28

After the third compromise in the announcement of the plague of locusts, Pharaoh made a veiled threat when he said, "The Lord [Yahweh] had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go! Beware, for evil is ahead of you," Exod 10:10. The word "evil" is the Hebrew **עָוֶל**, which means something malignant, unpleasant, painful, or evil in the sense of a bad and unwelcome event. Not only does this suggest that Pharaoh's mind is still unyielding to the demands of Yahweh, but also it signals that perhaps he already is formulating a plan for some form of retaliation. Even after the death of the firstborn, we will see that Pharaoh regains his negative composure and pursues the Hebrews with a plan to annihilate them.

In Exodus 10:28, Pharaoh declares what amounts to a death threat. He says, "Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!" An earlier Pharaoh also had sought to put Moses to death, Exod 2:15. The king's heart [will] had not only been hardened against God, it also was hardened against Moses. Repeatedly, God had said that he would harden Pharaoh's by revelations, signs, miracles, and the words of Moses. But as Stuart points out, killing

Moses was Pharaoh's own idea, and it was consistent with his rebellion against the will of Yahweh.

Stuart goes on to show that this threat was outrageous for three reasons: (1) It violated the immunity Moses should have enjoyed as the messenger of God. This was a threat to kill the messenger and hopefully silence the message. In the Ancient Near East, the prophets held immunity for what they preached. Therefore, this was a serious breach of the religion and law of the day. (2) It was mean-spirited and vindictive. It was Pharaoh who repeatedly had defied the will of God. Pharaoh refused to honor the will of God and instead threatened the messenger of God with death for having continually brought the word of God to him. (3) It was a cowardly act. This threat represents an attempt to intimidate Moses with a death threat in the hope that he would be able to intimidate all the Hebrews, the idea being that the Egyptians would kill Moses and anyone else who openly promoted the idea of release as slaves in the land of Egypt, see Stuart, *Exodus*, p. 261.

Lesson

Every time a person suppresses the conviction of the Holy Spirit, they are hardening their will against God. Constant rejection of the Holy Spirit's conviction leads to a spiritual numbness that no longer is sensitive to the call of God. Proverbs 29:1 says it best, "He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." This is a spiritual process called reprobation that clearly is revealed in Romans 1:18-32. A great example of hardening may be found in the life of Herod Antipas 4 BC-AD 39. He married Herodias, who divorced her husband, Herod II, and married Antipas as a political alliance. She had a daughter, whom she named Salome. John the Baptist had told Herod that he was living in sin because it "was not lawful" for him to marry his brother's wife. Because of John's boldness, Herodias conspired to kill him, but Herod feared him and would not comply, see Mark 6:18-20. So Herodias tricked Herod by having her daughter dance for Herod on his birthday, at which time he offered to grant her any wish. Having been coached by her mother, she chose the head of John the Baptist, Mark 6:21-29.

Herod not only silenced the voice of John the Baptist that day, he silenced the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Later when Jesus was taken before Herod, he was glad. He wanted to see Jesus because he had heard of the great things attributed to Him. Luke 23:6 says that Herod asked him many questions and hoped to see some miracle performed by Him, but Jesus "answered him nothing." When he killed John the Baptist, he crossed the line. He had hardened his heart against the convicting voice of John; he also silenced the voice of the Holy Spirit. God never spoke to him again as affirmed by the silence of Jesus when taken before him during the trials leading up to the crucifixion.