

Introduction

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you did the right thing only to face opposition, suffer for it, and get discouraged as a result?
2. There's a great example of this from the Bible in the Prophet Elijah:
 - a. Summary the confrontation on Mount Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophetesses of Ashera
 - b. You would think after such a great victory that things would start looking up—but instead, Elijah became a marked man as Jezebel set out to kill him
 - c. Instead of celebrating, Elijah flees a day's journey into the wilderness in despair and asks the Lord to take his life (1 Kings 19:4): **“But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, ‘It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.’”**
3. We see something similar in our passage today as Moses and Aaron confront the Egyptian king for the first time:
 - a. God had called Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let His people go
 - b. God has promised them that while the Pharaoh would initially refuse, he would let the Israelites go under compulsion and they would pillage the Egyptians as they left
 - c. However, things didn't work out that way initially because their first visit to Pharaoh led to opposition, an increase in suffer for Israel, and discouragement
4. Sometimes, the same can be true of us as Christians as we seek to obey God:
 - a. Sometimes our obedience leads to opposition
 - b. Sometimes our obedience leads to suffering
 - c. Sometimes our obedience leads to discouragement

A. Moses's and Aaron's confrontation with Pharaoh led to opposition (READ 5:1-5)

1. Moses and Aaron did just as God commanded and delivered His personal message to Pharaoh (5:1-3):
 - a. They began by revealing to Pharaoh that the message came directly from **“Yahweh”** who was **“the God of Israel”** and **“the God of the Hebrews”**:
 - 1) God even identified Israel as **“My people”** in His message to Pharaoh
 - 2) All of this was important because Egypt was a polytheistic nation with 100's (possibly 1000's) of different gods but Yahweh wasn't one of them
 - b. They also revealed to Pharaoh God's intent or purpose for Israel:

- 1) It was so that they could go into the wilderness to worship Him: “**celebrate a feast**” (1) and “**sacrifice to Yahweh**” (3)
- 2) They even suggested that God would punish them with “**pestilence and the sword**”:
 - a) This isn’t recorded anywhere in the previous verses so it’s unclear if it came from God
 - b) It’s possible Moses may have added it based on the common Egyptian belief that their gods would punish them with such things for disobedience
2. The Pharaoh’s response revealed two things: (RE-READ 5:2):
 - a. First, he himself did not know Yahweh: “**I do not know the LORD (Yahweh)**”
 - b. Second, no matter who Yahweh was, He did not intend to obey Him:
 - 1) “**Who is the LORD (Yahweh) that I should obey His voice?**” (2)
 - 2) “**besides, I will not let Israel go**” (3)
 - c. His arrogance and obstinance might be explained by the fact that Egyptian pharaohs were considered divine and not subject to foreign gods:
 - 1) There’s debate regarding whether they were considered actual gods
 - 2) Ancient Egyptian writings refer to them as sons of the gods so at a minimum they were thought to possess divine qualities and served as intermediaries between the Egyptian gods and the people
3. Not only did Pharaoh oppose Moses and Aaron by refusing God’s command, but he accused Moses and Aaron of using worship as a ruse to free Israel from their work (RE-READ 5:4-5):
 - a. We know the Pharaoh thought this because he referred to Israel’s desire to go worship Yahweh as “**false words**” in v. 9
 - b. He accused Moses and Aaron of trying to “**draw the people away from their work**” and demanded that they themselves “**Get back to your labors!**” (4)
 - c. In essence, he accused Moses and Aaron of threatening his massive building project (5)—they were the main labor force for building the cities of Pithom and Ramses so if they were to leave to worship Yahweh construction would stop
4. Takeaway: Obeying God often leads to opposition:
 - a. The world not only hates the things of God, but it also hates it when God’s people seek to obey Him
 - b. We saw this with Pharaoh when he refused God’s command, despised Israel for wanting to go worship God, and retaliated against them
 - c. It’s no different for the body of Christ today—admittedly, things are far worse for many Christians outside the United States, but hatred toward Christians here at home is growing
 - d. This shouldn’t surprise us:

- 1) In John 15:18-20 Jesus warned us that we'll be hated because the world first hated Him (READ)
 - 2) In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul warned Timothy, **"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."**
- e. But, the good news is our obedience in the midst of the opposition and persecution will not go unrewarded (READ Matthew 5:10-12)

B. Moses's and Aaron's confrontation with Pharaoh led to an increase in suffering (READ 5:6-18)

1. Pharaoh wasn't satisfied with simply defying God's command; he decided to retaliate against Israel by increasing their labor:
 - a. They were already suffering tremendously under their enslavement (SEE 1:11-14)
 - b. In response to Moses's and Aaron's visit, he ordered the taskmasters and foremen to stop providing Israel with the straw they needed to make bricks:
 - 1) This increased Israel's hardship even further because straw was critical for making bricks and they were now responsible for finding their own
 - 2) It's not like Israel had their own straw farms—instead, according to vs. 11-12 they had to scour all land of Egypt for **"stubble"** to use as straw (this was the leftover stalks and stems left on the ground after grain was harvested)
 - 3) To add insult to injury, even with all the added labor they were still expected to produce the same quota of bricks every day (repeated six times; SEE 5:8, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19)
 - 4) When they failed to meet the impossible quota, the taskmasters beat the foremen
2. The Pharaoh's intent is made clear in v. 9—he wanted to make their labor **"heavier"** (weighty or burdensome) so that they would **"pay no attention to false words"** (9):
 - a. The **"false words"** was an obvious reference to the message Moses and Aaron delivered from God
 - b. He believed it was all a ruse to get out of work—it wasn't about worshipping or sacrificing to Yahweh; it was simply laziness and a way to avoid work (5:8, 17)
 - c. Rather than grant their wish to go worship Yahweh, Pharaoh retaliated and increased their suffering
3. Takeaway: Obeying God sometimes leads to suffering:
 - a. When Bob K. shared the Gospel with me back in 1984 he used CCC's Four Spiritual Laws which began with "God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life"—I don't remember him mentioning the part about suffering
 - b. The Bible makes it clear that suffering is part of the Christian life:
 - 1) Philippians 1:29 says that for us **"it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."**

- c. But according to the Bible, we should rejoice in our suffering for Christ's sake:
 - 1) In Acts 5 when Peter and the Apostles were arrested, imprisoned, threatened, and beaten for preaching the Gospel it says, **"...they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name"** (Acts 5:41)
 - 2) 1 Peter 4:12-16 (READ)
- d. But, again, there's good news: our suffering in this life doesn't compare to the glory that will ultimately be revealed to us and in us:
 - 1) Romans 8:16-19 (READ)
 - 2) John described what this would be (1 John 3:2): **"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we see Him just as He is."**
 - 3) No amount of suffering we endure in this life will compare to that!

C. Moses's and Aaron's confrontation with Pharaoh led to discouragement (READ 5:19-23)

1. The foremen obviously understood their dire predicament—v. 19 says they **"saw that they were in trouble"**
2. However, rather than cry out to God as they had done before back in 2:23-24, they blamed Moses and Aaron (5:21):
 - a. They rebuked them and called for the LORD to judge them: **"May the LORD look upon you and judge you,"**
 - b. They blamed them, rather than Pharaoh, for their increased hardship and suffering: **"for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us"**
3. At this point, we might have expected Moses and Aaron to defend themselves—"Hey, we're just the messengers!" but instead, just as the foremen had blamed Moses and Aaron, Moses now blamed God for what had transpired:
 - a. He accused God of bringing harm to Israel (5:22a): **"O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people?"**
 - b. He questioned God's motives in sending him to Pharaoh (5:22b): **"Why did You ever send me?"**
 - c. He accused God of not doing anything to deliver Israel (5:23): **"Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all."**
4. Moses was clearly discouraged by how things had turned out:
 - a. God told Moses he was sending him to Israel and the Pharaoh to deliver His people—but that didn't happen

- b. God told Moses Israel would believe Him (“pay heed to what you say”)—but they were now accusing him of causing their suffering
 - c. God told Moses that the Pharaoh would initially resist, but that He would stretch out His hand and strike Egypt with all sorts of miracles so that the Pharaoh would ultimately let Israel go under compulsion—but God didn’t seem to do anything, Pharaoh was still in control, and Israel was suffering worse than ever
 - d. Can we really blame Moses for being discouraged? NOTE: it had probably been months (not weeks or days) since Moses had approached Pharaoh
5. Now, the good news is that none of this was outside of God’s plan; as we’ll learn next week in chapter 6, God was merely setting the table for what He was about to do next so Moses (and Israel) didn’t really have anything to be discouraged about
6. Takeaway: Obeying God can sometimes lead to discouragement:
- a. In the introduction we saw how Elijah faced discouragement after obeying God
 - b. In Numbers 11:14 Moses faced discouragement with the weight of caring for Israel and all their whining and complaining and said to God **“I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness”** (Numbers 11:14-15)
 - c. There are other examples in Job, David, Jonah, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, Haggai—all of whom faced discouragement after doing the right thing and obeying God
 - d. Most often, we experience discouragement because we focus on the immediate circumstances or situation around us instead and can’t see how it fits into God’s bigger purpose and plan:
 - 1) Maybe we did the right thing, but the situation didn’t turn out the way we hoped or wanted
 - 2) Maybe we obeyed God and things seemed to get worse
 - 3) This was certainly the case with Moses and Israel—they obeyed God, but things didn’t immediately turn out as they expected, and in fact got worse
 - 4) What they didn’t see, however, was God’s bigger plan to deliver Israel
 - e. King David’s answer to despair is found in Psalm 42 (READ)

Conclusion

1. When we obey God we are likely to face opposition, but it can remind us of Who’s side we’re on
2. When we obey God we may suffer, but it doesn’t mean God has abandoned us or forgotten us; rather, it is an opportunity to join in the sufferings of Christ and look forward to the day when we receive our reward
3. When we obey God we may face discouragement but in such cases we need to remember to hope in God knowing that He’s still in control working all things according to His purpose and plan

Summary of Elijah's victory over the Baal prophets

The account of [Elijah](#) and the prophets of Baal is recorded in [1 Kings 18](#). After Israel had gone more than three years without rain as a judgment for their idolatry, the prophet Elijah confronts the evil king Ahab and challenges him to a spiritual showdown. The king was to have all Israel gather at Mt. Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of the false god [Baal](#) and the 400 prophets of the false goddess [Asherah](#) (verse 19).

On Mt. Carmel, Elijah said to the people of Israel, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him” ([1 Kings 18:21](#)). The people remained noncommittal at that point. Elijah then challenged the prophets of Baal to prepare a bull as an offering for their god—Elijah would do the same—with this catch: they could light no fire on their altar. The God who answered with [fire from the sky](#) would be considered the true God (verses 22–25).

The people agreed that this was a good plan, and the prophets of Baal went first. The pagan prophets cried out and danced around their altar from morning till noon with no answer from Baal. Elijah began to mock them, saying, “Shout louder! . . . Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened” ([1 Kings 18:27](#)).

So the prophets of Baal “shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice” ([1 Kings 18:28–29](#)). Despite hours of effort, nothing happened. The historian's comment hints at the emptiness of Baal-worship: “There was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention” (verse 29).

Elijah then called the people to him as he repaired the altar of the Lord. He used twelve stones and dug a trench around the altar. He then placed wood on the altar and laid the cut pieces of the bull on it. Elijah then had the people douse the altar with twelve large jars of water. The water soaked the sacrifice and the wood and filled the trench ([1 Kings 18:30–35](#)).

Once the sacrifice was ready, Elijah prayed, “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again” ([1 Kings 18:36–37](#)). Then God did what Baal could never do: the fire of the LORD fell from heaven and consumed the burnt offering *and* the wood *and* the stones *and* the dust, “and also licked up the water in the trench” (verse 38). The people of Israel bowed down and declared the Lord as God (verse 39).

Elijah then commanded the people to put the prophets of Baal to death, in keeping with God's command in [Exodus 22:20](#). Following this event, the Lord finally ended the drought and sent rain upon the land ([1 Kings 18:45](#)).

The miraculous event of fire from heaven was an answer to the prayer of Elijah. God was seeking to turn the hearts of His people back to Himself. He used a time of drought to get their attention and then, through His prophet, performed a dramatic miracle right before their eyes. No one who witnessed that event doubted that the Lord was God and that Baal was a powerless wannabe. The repentance of the Israelites was soon followed by God's provision of rain.

James teaches us that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" ([James 5:16](#)), and he uses Elijah's prayer life as a case in point: "Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops" ([James 5:17-18](#)).