

Exodus 3:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.

Analysis

And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God (וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלִי... יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים נִקְרָה עָלֵינוּ וְעַתָּה נֵלְכֶה-נָּא דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים) —God assures Moses: **they shall hearken to thy voice** (וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלִי)—Israel will believe. The delegation: **thou and the elders**—corporate leadership confronting Pharaoh. The message: **The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us** (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים, YHWH Elohei ha'Ivrim)—first use of "Hebrews" identifying Israel ethnically to Egyptians. The request: **three days' journey... to sacrifice**—initially seems like a temporary religious observance. Was this deception or a test? God knew Pharaoh would refuse even this modest request (v. 19), exposing his hardness.

Historical Context

The three-day journey request appears repeatedly (5:3, 8:27). Some interpret it as initial, tactical request that would be expanded; others as testing Pharaoh's

willingness to permit any worship. Ancient Near Eastern protocol required respectful initial requests before escalating. The phrase 'sacrifice to the LORD' (זָבַח לַיהוָה) emphasizes worship as Israel's purpose—they're not just escaping slavery but pursuing covenant relationship with YHWH.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the phased approach—starting with a three-day journey request—illustrate wisdom in confronting opposition gradually?
2. What does the emphasis on sacrifice/worship as the purpose for leaving teach about prioritizing relationship with God over mere circumstantial improvement?

Interlinear Text

וְשָׁמְעוּ And they shall hearken H8085	לְקוֹלִי to thy voice H6963	וּבָאתָ and thou shalt come H935	אֵתָהּ H859			
וְזִקְנֵי י thou and the elders H2205	אֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל ל of Israel H3478	אֶל מֶלֶךְ unto the king H4428	מִצְרַיִם of Egypt H4714	וְאָמַרְתֶּם and ye shall say H559		
אֵלָיו H413	לַיהוָה ה to the LORD H3068	אֱלֹהֵינוּ: God H430	הָעִבְרִיִּים of the Hebrews H5680	נִקְרָא ה hath met H7136	עַל יָדוֹ H5921	וַעֲתָה ה H6258
נִלְכָּה H1980	נֶאֱמַר H4994	דֶּרֶךְ journey H1870	שְׁלֹשָׁת we beseech thee three H7969	יָמִים days H3117	בְּמִדְבָּר into the wilderness H4057	
וְנִזְבְּחָהּ H2076	לַיהוָה ה to the LORD H3068	אֱלֹהֵינוּ: God H430				

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 9:1 (References God): Then the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me.

Exodus 7:16 (References God): And thou shalt say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear.

Exodus 9:13 (References God): And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me.

Exodus 10:3 (References God): And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me.

Psalms 110:3 (Parallel theme): Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.

Joshua 1:17 (References God): According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.

2 Chronicles 30:12 (Kingdom): Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD.

Numbers 17:4 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you.