

Exodus Chapter 5

Exodus 5:1 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness."

“Let my people go”: With this command from Israel’s Lord, the confrontation between Pharaoh and Moses and between Pharaoh and God, commenced. It was a command Pharaoh would hear often in the days leading up to the Exodus.

Pharaoh’s response to Moses and Aaron’s entreaty should be read as contempt, not ignorance.

Pharaoh’s response to Moses and Aaron is very illuminating and sets the tone for the whole Exodus account.

Here we see Moses and Aaron going before the Pharaoh of Egypt boldly. We could take a lesson from this. We must be bold in the Lord. We must not back down from telling the truth, because of a person's station in life. We must learn to be bold in bringing the message of God. When Moses and Aaron gave the message to Pharaoh, they were explicit with him about what God this was.

In a land where there are so many false gods, this would be an important thing to do. God was specific in this request about what He wanted from Pharaoh (let my people go). This next verse lets you know how little Pharaoh really knew about the real God.

Exodus 5:2 "And Pharaoh said, Who [is] the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go."

“Who is the Lord”: In all likelihood Pharaoh knew of Israel’s God, but his interrogative retort insolently and arrogantly rejected Him as having any power to make demands of Egypt’s superior ruler.

Pharaoh was probably not completely ignorant of the name of the God of the Israelites. His name certainly had been used by the Israelites in the presence of the Egyptians for more than four hundred years in the land of Egypt. More likely, he refused to recognize the name of Yahweh, or the request brought in that name, because he did not recognize Yahweh’s authority for such a demand and therefore he says he would not obey. Thus, this was really a confrontation between gods: Yahweh versus Pharaoh. The word “know” was used in the ancient Near East in a technical sense to indicate international treaties as binding or not. And to relate the binding relationship between the suzerain (the great king), and his vassal.

The essence of Pharaoh’s statement indicates he did not recognize Yahweh’s authority, and as a result, needless to say, he was not saved (Isa. 45:4-5). (Isaiah 19), may preserve the technical sense when it refers to Egypt’s future conversion:

Isaiah 19:21 “And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it.”

Someday the Egyptians will submit to Yahweh and His authority and obey Him. It became Yahweh’s sole purpose throughout the rest of the encounter with Pharaoh that he and his people would know Yahweh, at least in the sense of submitting and letting His people go.

You can see that Pharaoh did not know the Lord God. He not only does not know Him, but had never heard of Him. It was a good question, why should he obey His voice. This Lord God was spoken of as Jehovah when Moses came back to Egypt after his encounter with God at the burning bush. The pharaohs thought of themselves as gods and really didn't obey even their false gods, so why should they worship these Hebrews' God? Even if Pharaoh was sure this was the real God, he probably wouldn't let them go because he was so proud of his own power that it would be highly unlikely that he would bow to the real God's demands.

Exodus 5:3 "And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword."

As a follow-up to Pharaoh’s rejection, the spokesmen rephrase, more specifically their request, together with a warning of possible divine judgment upon Israel from their failure to obey their God. Pharaoh saw this simply as a ruse to reduce the hours put in by his slave work force.

In the ruler’s disregard for the Lord’s commands, The Lord would “fall ... with pestilence”, and death, “sword”, on the Egyptians so that there would be no doubt regarding the answer.

Moses knew all too well what could happen to you if you did not obey the Lord's commands. Probably, the reason these plagues were mentioned here, is that the Pharaoh would be aware that these plagues, if they came upon the Hebrews, would fall upon the Egyptians, as well.

Exodus 5:4 "And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens."

These words were not addressed to Moses and Aaron, but to the Israelites, the elders of whom went with Moses, several others also probably following him, when he went in unto Pharaoh, impatient to see what the end would be.

We see here, one of the reasons why the Pharaoh would not do this was because he would lose three days’ work from this vast forced laborer crew of the Hebrews. Then he told Moses and Aaron to get on back to work themselves.

Exodus 5:5 "And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now [are] many, and ye make them rest from their burdens."

So that if some were taken off, as suggested, there were enough of them to do business and so he cared not; but if allowed to go, they might mutiny and rebel, and give a great deal of trouble to quell them. Or it may be, the sense is, they were very numerous, and too numerous already, and if they were taken off of their work, and allowed to go a feasting, they would be more so, which agrees with the next clause:

"And ye make them rest from their burdens": Which was the way to make them more numerous still and frustrate the design of laying burdens upon them, which was originally intended to hinder the multiplication of them (Exodus 1:9).

Pharaoh was aggravated because this great amount of people wanted to take three days off from their labors. We see many times in history, how great men (by the world's standards), come against the people of God and make it very difficult for the ministers of God to perform the tasks God has given them. Moses and Aaron might as well be talking to the wind, Pharaoh was not about to let these people go at this point.

Exodus 5:6-7 "And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying," "Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves."

Showing his authority to give orders to Israel, Pharaoh immediately increased their workload and the severity of their bondage, by adding, "and let them not regard vain words". ((n verse 9), he showed his negative evaluation of God's words.

Pharaoh's decree meant the Hebrews had to "gather straw" to make brick during the evening and early-morning hours and then still put in a full day's work, oppressive conditions. In ancient times, straw was added to the clay-and-mud mixture to give greater strength and cohesion to the sun-dried brick.

Here we see cruelty to the utmost. The Pharaoh wanted the people to know that he did not appreciate this request of Moses and Aaron, so exacted this extra work load as immediate punishment. These taskmasters here were from a different root word than the ones earlier mentioned, and probably were talking about officers close to the Pharaoh who would carry out the Pharaoh's orders. Straw was chopped up and used as bulk in the making of the brick. The job of getting enough straw to make bricks for a full day's work would require several extra hours of work each day. This punishment inflicted by Pharaoh was to deter any future requests from Moses and Aaron on behalf of the Hebrews.

Exodus 5:8 "And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish [ought] thereof: for they [be] idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go [and] sacrifice to our God."

Oblige them to make and bring in the same number of bricks they used to do, when straw was brought to them and given them; by which it appears that their daily task was such a number of bricks.

"You shall not diminish ought thereof": Not make any abatement of the number of bricks, in consideration of their loss of time and their labor in going to fetch straw from other places.

"For they be idle": And want to be indulged in a lazy disposition, which by no means to be connived at.

"Therefore they cry, let us go and sacrifice to our God": Suggesting, that this request and cry of theirs did not proceed from a religious principle, or the great veneration they had for their God, but from the sloth and idleness they were addicted to.

Pharaoh's idea was that they wanted to go to meet with God, because they have idle time. He thought if he wore them completely out with hard work, they would be too tired to plan a trip to meet with their God. Pharaoh made it very clear that they were to make just as many bricks as they did before, but they would have to furnish all of their own straw as well. His theory was to keep them too worn out to protest.

Exodus 5:9 "Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labor therein; and let them not regard vain words."

Those of Moses and Aaron, which he said were vain or false; that is, that they falsely pretended that their God had commanded them to go and worship when it was only a crafty design of their own to advance themselves by raising sedition.

Here, we see that Pharaoh had no regard at all for the feeling of others. He was saying in this, that regardless of what they said or did, he would not let them go.

Exodus 5:10 "And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spake to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw."

"Taskmasters ... and their officers": When combined with "the officers of the children of Israel" (in verse 15), a 3-level command structure is seen to have been in place, Egyptian section leaders and labor gang bosses, and Israelite foremen.

Exodus 5:11 "Go ye, get you straw where ye can find it: yet not ought of your work shall be diminished."

"Straw": Ancient documents for Egypt show that straw was used as a necessary component of bricks, it helped bind the clay together.

Exodus 5:12 "So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw."

Because straw was not readily available, the Hebrew slaves had to gather "stubble", small pieces of straw, and their production of bricks slowed while their quota remained.

These overseers were cruel as well. They spoke to the people about furnishing their own straw, and the straw close by had already been used; so they picked stubble instead of straw. As I said before, this caused them several extra hours of work every day.

Exodus 5:13 "And the taskmasters hasted [them], saying, Fulfil your works, [your] daily tasks, as when there was straw."

Kept them close to their work, and were urgent for them to make a quick dispatch of it.

"Saying, fulfil your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw": They insisted upon it, that they did the same business at the brick kilns, made the same number of bricks every day, as they used to do when they had straw at hand (see Exodus 5:11).

Exodus 5:14 "And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, [and] demanded, Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and today, as heretofore?"

The "Officers of the children of Israel" were their own work foremen.

We see here, that this was an impossible task to fulfill. This ended in beatings and accusations. These beatings were done to the Hebrews who were actually overseers themselves, under the Egyptians. Even working from sunup to sundown, there was no way to do this terrible task. Frequent beatings of the workers made it worse because sore bodies could not work as hard.

Exodus 5:15 "Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants?"

The formal labor complaint at the highest level was rejected with an emphatic evaluation of laziness on the part of Israel and a demand that production not slack.

Exodus 5:16 "There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants [are] beaten; but the fault [is] in thine own people."

The Egyptian task-masters, who, by sending us abroad to gather straw, they hinder us from doing the work which they require; and so they are both unjust and unreasonable. They charge the task-masters, not the king, either in civility and duty, casting his fault upon the people. Or because they did not know, or at best not believe, that this was the king's act. Others, thy people, i.e. the Egyptians, make their selves guilty, and will bring down the vengeance of God upon them for their cruelty.

This was an appeal directly to the Pharaoh, to not require more than they could possibly do.

Exodus 5:17 "But he said, Ye [are] idle, [ye are] idle: therefore ye say, Let us go [and] do sacrifice to the LORD."

Instead of expressing indignation at the taskmasters, and relieving the officers and the people, he insults them in a flouting sarcastic way, charging them with sloth and idleness; and which, for the certainty of it, or, however, to show how strongly persuaded and fully assured he was of the truth of it, repeats it, and gives the following as a proof of it.

"Therefore ye say, let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord": Suggesting that it was not so much the service and honor of God they regarded, as that they might have a leisure day from work and labor.

Exodus 5:18 "Go therefore now, [and] work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks."

Go about your business and attend to your work, even you officers, as well as your people. Work yourselves, as well as see that your people do theirs, and do not trouble me with such impertinent applications.

"For there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks": The usual number of bricks that is it was expected and insisted on that they delivered the full number of bricks they used to make.

Exodus 5:19 "And the officers of the children of Israel did see [that] they [were] in evil [case], after it was said, Ye shall not minish [ought] from your bricks of your daily task."

In a bad condition and circumstances, and that there was no likelihood of their getting out of them. Since Pharaoh treated them after this manner; they saw not only that the common people were in a bad condition and in great bondage, misery and distress. To be obliged to get straw to make brick, and carry in their full requirement as before. But that they themselves were in a bad situation, since for the deficiency in their people they were like to be beaten from time to time.

"After it was said, ye shall not minish ought from your bricks of your daily task": After this had been said and confirmed by Pharaoh, they had no hope of things being better with them, but looked upon their unhappy lot as irretrievable.

We see that, these Israelite officers got nowhere with Pharaoh. Pharaoh reminded them, that this punishment was because of the request of Moses and Aaron that they go in the desert to worship. These officers knew that they were in for a rough time and they blamed Moses and Aaron for this hardship placed on them.

Exodus 5:20-21 "And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh:" "And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savor to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us."

The leadership team evidently knew of the lodging of the formal labor complaint and waited outside the royal hall in order to meet Israel's representatives. The meeting was definitely not a

cordial one, with accusations raised both about the propriety of and the authority of the words and actions of Aaron and Moses toward Pharaoh.

“Abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh” literally means, “You have made us a stench in his presence.” Moses was accused of making the people’s situation worse.

Here these overseers were really upset with Moses and Aaron and told them that they were trying to get them killed. The Pharaoh and his men were blaming the Hebrew overseers and the Hebrew workers were blaming them too. They were caught in the middle and were beaten every day.

Verses 5:22 – 6:9: Four times here, the Lord reminds Moses of His sovereignty, identity and promises: “I am the Lord.” This is the same Yahweh of the patriarchs, the same Lord of the Abrahamic covenant, but in the events of the Exodus, His name would be fully “known”. With successive “I will” statements, God promised to: (1) rescue and redeem His people from Egypt; (2) make them His people; (3) be their God; and (4) bring them to the Promised Land.

Exodus 5:22 "And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou [so] evil entreated this people? why [is] it [that] thou hast sent me?"

“Moses returned unto the Lord”: Whether Moses and his brother remonstrated with the foremen about their strong and wrong evaluation remains a moot point. Rather, the focus is upon Moses, who remonstrated with the Lord in prayer.

Moses was very disturbed about what he heard. Moses was blaming God. Then he got brash enough to ask God why did he even send him? Moses and Aaron had been so confused by all of this, that they didn't even answer the Hebrew overseers. They probably, didn't know what to say. They knew that they had said exactly what God had told them to, but they had not gotten the expected results. Many times, when we do exactly what God tells us to, it seems we have failed for a good while. Perhaps, had not all these terrible things happened to the Hebrews, they might be reluctant to leave Egypt in search for the Promised Land. It was very difficult to figure God out.

Here, we see a bold Moses who cried out to God, "Why?" Trials come to all believers and we are told they come to make us strong. God has a purpose for sure and He really does not have to share that purpose with us. As Job withstood in the face of terrible happenings, these Israelites must stand for what was right too. Christians are no exceptions either. Sometimes we do not understand the hardships we must face either. Only God knows these answers. When the going gets rough, go in prayer to God, as Moses did here.

Exodus 5:23 "For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all."

Evidently, Moses did not anticipate what effect Pharaoh's refusal and reaction would have upon his own people. Confrontation with Pharaoh so far had provoked both the angry resentment of Israel by the Egyptians and of Moses by Israel. This was not the expected scenario!

Every minister who has spoken for God throughout all time has felt this frustration that Moses felt here. He felt that he had been a failure not only to these people, but to God as well. He was almost accusingly pointing a finger at God here. It is as if he was saying you told me you would deliver them, now why haven't you? We are an impatient people. God can see the end and knows they would be delivered. He doesn't count a few weeks as anything.

Exodus Chapter 5 Questions

1. Who did Moses and Aaron go to see to speak for the children of Israel?
2. What message did they bring from God?
3. For what purpose were they to go to the wilderness?
4. Why was it important for Moses and Aaron to be specific about what God this was?
5. What did Pharaoh ask them about God?
6. What did Pharaoh call God?
7. When did Moses begin to call God. Jehovah?
8. Why would it be highly unlikely that Pharaoh would bow to the demands of God?
9. They told Pharaoh, if they didn't go and sacrifice, what 2 things would happen:
10. Why were these 2 plagues mentioned to Pharaoh?
11. What did Pharaoh tell Aaron and Moses to get about?
12. What was one of the main reasons Pharaoh would not do this?
13. What did Pharaoh tell the taskmasters to do to the people in punishment?
14. When?
15. What was used for bulk in making brick?
16. What would this do to the Hebrews?
17. Why did Pharaoh use "vain" words when they were speaking to him?
18. What did they gather, instead of straw?

19. Who did the taskmasters beat?
20. Who came to Pharaoh, and cried out to him?
21. Who did they blame?
22. How did Pharaoh respond to their pleas?
23. Who did the Israelite officers blame?
24. Where did they find them?
25. What did the officers say was about to happen to them?
26. When Moses heard of this, what did he do?
27. What did he say to God?
28. What 2 complaints did Moses make to God?