

Exodus 5

In this chapter, Moses makes his first appearance before Pharaoh and is rejected. Subsequently, Pharaoh decides to increase the burden on the Israelites. Then the Israelites complain against Moses, causing Moses to return to God with his own complaint. Things do not always work out the way we hope.

TRANSLATION - 5:1-6:

1 And after Moses came and Aaron, that they spoke to Pharaoh, "Thus says Jehovah God of Israel, 'Send out My people and they will celebrate Me in the desert.'"

2 And Pharaoh said, "Who is Jehovah, whom I will hear His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Jehovah and also Israel I will not send out."

3 They said, "The God of the Hebrews has met us. Let us go, please, a path of three days in the desert and let us sacrifice to Jehovah our God, lest He fall on us with plague or sword."

4 And the king of Egypt said to them, "What [is] Moses and Aaron? You are hindering the people from their work! Go, to your labors!"

5 And Pharaoh said, "Behold how great now the people of the land! And You are stopping them from their labors!" **6** And Pharaoh commanded in that day the taskmasters of the people and their foremen saying, **7** "Do not continue to give straw to the people to build the bricks like yesterday, three days ago. They themselves will go and will gather for themselves straw. **8** And the measurement of the bricks which they themselves are making yesterday, three days ago, you will put on them. Do not reduce from them because idle ones they themselves are. Thus they themselves are crying, saying, 'Let us go. Let us sacrifice to our God.' **9** Let the labor be heavy on the men and they will do it and they will not think in words of falsehood."

HEBREW WORDS:

For "Pharaoh" (ver. 1), see at 1:11. On the verb "to send," see at 2:5. "To celebrate," used 16 times in the OT, can mean "to stagger." It denotes the celebration of a sacrifice, feast, or festival. It is used in Exodus at 5:1; 12:14; 23:14. The expression "God of Israel" is used 203 times in the OT; this is its first use in the Bible. It will be used again in Exodus at 24:10; 32:27; 34:23. Again, the verb "to know" (ver. 2), is one of the key verbs in Exodus; see comments at 1:8. This is its eighth use in Exodus. "To meet" (ver. 3) was used first at 1:10 in Exodus. "To sacrifice" was used earlier at 3:18. "To fall on" might mean "to meet," but it can also mean "to attack." It is used 46 times in the OT; in Exodus only at 5:3, 20; 23:4. "Plague" is used 46 times in the OT; it is often translated as "pestilence." In Exodus, it is used here and for the plague in 9:3, 15. "Sword" is used here; 5:21; 15:9; 17:13; 18:4; 20:25; 22:24; 32:27. It is used 413 times in the OT.

"To hinder" (ver. 4) is used 16 times; it can mean to "let go, to release, to neglect." In Exodus, it is used at 5:4; 32:25. "Labor" was used earlier at 1:11; 2:11. It will be used here at 5:4-5; 6:6-7. "Behold" (ver. 5) was used first in Exodus at 1:9. It is one of the most used words in the Bible, nearly 1,000 times. "To stop" is the verb "to rest" used at Genesis 2:3. It is used 71 times; this is its first use in Exodus. It is also used at Exodus 12:15; 16:30; 23:12; 31:17; 34:21. "To command" (ver. 6) was used earlier at 1:22; 4:28. "Taskmaster" is used 23 times. It comes from the verb "to oppress, force to work, to collect." This is a different word than the one used earlier at 1:11. This word is only used here in Exodus. This is also the only use of the word "foremen" in the OT.

"Straw" (ver. 7) is used 17 times in the OT; it was used earlier at Genesis 24:25, 32. It is used in Exodus only in this chapter: 5:7, 10-13, 16, 18. "To build" was used at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:4 and at Exodus 1:14 (see comments there). It is used here, at 5:7-8, 16, 18-19; 24:10. "To gather" is used 8 times in the OT; only here in Exodus (5:7, 12).

"Measurement" (ver. 8) is found here; 30:32, 37; Ezekiel 45:11; 2 Chron. 24:13. "To reduce" can mean to "shave or trim" a beard. It is used 21 times; in Exodus at 5:8, 11, 19; 21:10. "Idle

ones” is only used in this chapter (5:8, 17) in the Bible. “Crying” is used 10 times out of 55 in the OT; it suggests the idea of crying for help.

“To be heavy” (ver. 9) is the verb which can, in some contexts, carry the idea of “glory or honor.” The verb is used 114 times; the noun is used 200 times. In Exodus, the verb is used 10 times. “Labor” was used earlier at 1:14. It can also mean “service” or “worship” in some contexts. “To think, gaze at, look at, be concerned about” is used 13 times in the OT. It is only used here in Exodus. “Falsehood” is used 113 times in the OT. This is its first use in the Bible (5:9) and it will be used in Exodus again at 20:16; 23:7.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

Observe in this translation that “Israel” (ver. 2), in the last section of the verse, is put before the verb. This was to reflect the emphasis with which Pharaoh was refusing to obey Jehovah God.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

Satan also accused God of lying in Genesis 3:4-5.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The straw would bind together the ingredients for the brick and the decay of the vegetation would help “glue” the brick together.

COMMENTARY:

We do not know if the elders were present or not. They were instructed to go with Moses and Aaron in 3:18, but they are not mentioned again until 12:21. It could be they are present but not mentioned since it is Moses and Aaron who do the speaking and the miracles. Kings in the ancient world would allow visitors into their presence. Moses begins with the standard formula of a prophetic saying, “Thus says Jehovah God of Israel...” This imitates the words of the Egyptian texts when they are quoting their gods. Pharaoh uses the expression himself in verse 10. Jehovah God will use that expression in verse 1 and will use it 419 times throughout the Bible, 10 times in Exodus (see 4:22). In contrast to the gods of the Egyptians, the One behind Moses’ message is the “God of Israel,” the phrase’s first appearance in the Bible. God will be identified as the “God of the Hebrews” in verse 3.

God wanted Egypt to “send out” His people so they could “celebrate” God in the desert or wilderness. This celebration would have been some type of festival which might have included animal sacrifices. God has not yet given any specific instructions on what Israel would do in the desert. This verb (“to celebrate”) will not be used again until the institution of the Passover in chapter 12 (12:14).

Pharaoh was surrounded by his own gods, whose son (Ra) he was considered to be, so he was contemptuous of Jehovah God’s request. He did not “know” Jehovah God. Jehovah God was not among the pantheon of Egyptian gods. Therefore, Pharaoh did not know Him and did not care to know Him. Since he did not have a relationship with Jehovah God, he would not obey His voice. Yet simply because Pharaoh did not know Him does not mean he was not obligated to obey His voice. Pharaoh would not send out the Israelites; his heart was already hardened.

Moses and Aaron (and the elders if they are present) respond with the “God of the Hebrews (in contrast with the gods of the Egyptians) has met with us.” They are quite respectful: “Please, let us go...” They ask only for a journey of three days; again, we do not know why God specified three days (cf. 3:18). Mount Sinai was considerably further than three days. We do not know its purpose, however, because Pharaoh did not allow Israel to leave. Israel wanted to “sacrifice” (used here as a synonym for “celebrate” in verse 1) to Jehovah God. Otherwise, they feared that God would “fall” on them with plague and sword, two of the primary expressions in the OT of God’s wrath. The “them” on whom the wrath of God might fall could also have been interpreted as Pharaoh and the Egyptians, for not allowing Israel to leave. Indeed, that is exactly what happened. Pharaoh has been graciously warned.

Isn't it interesting that Moses and Aaron expected God to punish *them* if *Pharaoh* did not allow them to leave, to worship? Nothing should stop us from worshipping God! Of course, if God did strike Israel, then Pharaoh would lose slaves. God's actions recorded in chapter 4 (4:24) relative to circumcising Gershom has shown Moses how serious God is when it comes to obedience.

Pharaoh gives a response in verses 5-9. First, he states, "how great now the people of the land!" Who are the "people of the land?" If they are Egyptians, his next statement to Moses and Aaron (and the elders?) is: "You are stopping them from their labors!" The Israelites were influencing the Egyptians to stop working. However, it seems better to interpret "people of the land" to refer to the Israelites; perhaps the expression is a way of saying "slaves." Moses and Aaron were stopping the Israelites from working, because they are persuading them to go worship Jehovah God. Therefore, in verse 6, Pharaoh increases the workload on the Israelites. His predecessor had tried doing the same in 1:11-14 and it had not gone well (1:20). This Pharaoh will also come to regret his decision. The "taskmaster" was Egyptian; the "foremen" were Israelites.

To punish the Israelites for their desire to leave Egypt and worship God, Pharaoh takes away the straw which Israel had used to make the bricks in the past (ver. 7). The straw had been provided for them, but now they will have to gather it themselves. Yet, Pharaoh was not going to lower the expected quota of bricks. He accuses them of being "idle" (ver. 8) and that's why they are "crying" to go sacrifice to their God. The work needed to be "heavy" on the men to keep them busy so that they would not have time to "think in words of falsehood" (ver. 9). Pharaoh is not the last person who has ever accused God or His messengers of "falsehood."

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - The command "Send out My people" (5:1) is found throughout Exodus: 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3. God will present this interaction between Him and Pharaoh as a battle between "Gods/gods" in 12:12.

Verse 9 refers to the workload being "heavy." This description also applies to Pharaoh's heart (4:21). Observe these passages in Exodus where the same word is used: 5:9; 7:14; 8:15, 28; 9:7, 34; 10:1; 8:20; 9:3, 18, 24; 10:14; 12:38; 17:12; 18:18; 19:16. Remember that the word "to be heavy" also can mean "to honor." Because Pharaoh will not "honor" God, God will "harden" Pharaoh's heart through these "heavy" plagues on his land.

Other Jewish writers - The wiseman presents the idea that if we receive too many blessings for which we are not prepared in our hearts, then we could respond with the same response as Pharaoh: "Who is the Lord?" (Prov. 30:9).

NT writers - There are still people even today who think that worshiping God is "idle" activity; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25.

TRANSLATION - 5:10-23:

10 And they went out the taskmasters of the people and their foremen and they said to the people saying, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not giving to you straw. **11** And you, yourselves, go! Take for yourselves straw from which you will find that there is not a reducing from your measurement one thing.'" **12** And he scattered the people in all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for brick. **13** And the taskmasters were urging saying, "Complete your work day by day just as when there was brick."

14 And the foremen of the sons of Israel were beaten who put on them the taskmasters of Pharaoh saying, "Why did you not complete the task to build like yesterday, three days ago, both yesterday and today?" **15** And the foremen of the sons of Israel cried to Pharaoh saying, "What will you do thus with your servants? **16** Straw there is not being given to your servants and for bricks saying to us, 'Do!' and behold your servants [are] beaten and the sin [is] of your people."

17 And he said, “Idle ones you [are] - idle ones! Thus you are saying, ‘Let us go. Let us sacrifice to Jehovah.’ **18** And now, go! Serve! And straw will not be given to you. And the measurement of bricks you will give.” **19** And the foremen of the sons of Israel saw them in evil saying, “You will not reduce from the bricks from day to day.”

20 And they met Moses and Aaron, waiting to meet them when they came up from Pharaoh. **21** And they said to them, “Let Jehovah look on you and let Him judge that you have made to stink our smell in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants to give a sword in their hand to kill us.”

22 And Moses turned to Jehovah and said, “Master, what evil did you do to this people? What [is] this you sent me? **23** And from this I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people and to deliver you have not delivered your people.”

HEBREW WORDS:

“To find” (ver. 10) is used 457 times. It is found 22 times in Exodus. “To scatter” (ver. 12) is used 65 times, only here in Exodus. “Stubble” is used in 5:12 and 15:7, out of 16 uses. “To urge” (ver. 13) is used 9 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “To complete” (ver. 14) is used 207 times; in Exodus it is used at 5:13-14; 31:18; 32:10-12; 33:3, 5; 34:33; 39:32; 40:33. “Task” (ver. 14) can also be translated “statute, portion.” It is used 131 times in the OT, in Exodus at 5:14; 12:24; 15:25-26; 18:16, 20; 29:28; 30:21. “To cry” (ver. 15) was used at verse 8. “To be beaten” (ver. 16) carries the idea of receiving a “wound, injury, defeat.” Here and Exodus 21:19 are the only two places the word is used in the OT. However, it is related to the verb “to hit” which we saw earlier at 2:11-13. This is the first use of “sin” or “fault” in Exodus. It is used 298 times in the OT, first at Genesis 4:7. It is used in Exodus at: 5:16; 10:17; 32:21, 30-32, 34; 34:7, 9.

“To serve” (ver. 18) was used earlier at 1:13-14. It is one of the key verbs in Exodus. “Measurement” or quota is used only here and Ezekiel 45:11. “Evil” (ver. 19) means “trouble” in this context; the word is used 312 times in the OT. It is used at Exodus 5:19; 10:10; 21:8; 23:2; 32:12, 14, 22; 33:4. “To meet” (ver. 20) was used at 5:3. “To wait” was used earlier at 2:4. “To judge” (ver. 21) is used 204 times in the OT; in Exodus, it is used at 5:21; 18:13, 16, 22, 26. “To make to stink” is used 18 times in the OT. It denotes making someone or something hated. It is used in Exodus at 5:21; 7:18, 21; 8:14; 16:20, 24. “Scent” is used 58 times. It is not related to the prior verb. This word is used in Exodus at 5:21; 29:18, 25, 41. “To kill” was used earlier at 2:14-15.

“To do evil” (ver. 22) is used 98 times; it is related to the adjective “evil” or “bad.” The verb is used in Exodus only here (5:22-23). “To deliver” (ver. 23) was used earlier at 2:19; 3:8, 22.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

“To deliver you have not delivered” (ver. 23) translates an expression in Hebrew, which has the infinitive absolute followed by the same verb in the perfect tense. This denotes emphasis. For Moses to speak “in the name of” Jehovah God is for Moses to speak God’s message, with God’s authority.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

There might be a play on words in verse 19 as the Hebrew word for “evil” (*ra*) is similar to the Egyptian god whose name is spelled *Re* or *Ra*.

COMMENTARY:

Verse 10 begins the record of Pharaoh’s new effort at controlling the slaves’ behavior (see 1:11-13 for another failed attempt by Pharaoh). The “taskmasters” were Egyptian; the “foremen” were Israelites who worked under the supervision of the taskmasters. Notice their message in verse 10 begins with “Thus says Pharaoh...” in contrast with “thus says Jehovah,

the God of Israel..." Pharaoh was viewed as a god by the Egyptian people and perhaps by some Israelites who were intimidated by the Egyptians.

Israel is informed they will not be given straw. They will have to go and gather their own straw; yet the "measurement" or quota will not be reduced (ver. 11). Pharaoh, through the taskmasters, scattered Israel into all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for brick (ver. 12). This will discourage Israel from gathering together and talking about worship! The taskmasters' command for Israel was to "complete your work day by day just as when there was brick" (ver. 13).

God had warned, twice, that Pharaoh was not going to cooperate (3:19; 4:21). We do not know how much Moses meditated on that warning, but it is about to become real to him. It is also true that sometimes fulfilling God's commands are not easy, as He calls us to deny ourselves and the desires and lusts of the world (1 John 2:15-17).

The foremen, who were Israelites, were beaten as the Egyptian taskmasters challenged them. Why were they not completing the responsibilities as they had before (ver. 14)? At that point, the foremen went to Pharaoh crying for help, asking why Pharaoh was treating his servants this way? Notice that the Israelites consider themselves Pharaoh's servants (ver. 15-16). The Egyptians had caused the slow-down in the production because they no longer were providing straw (which is what Pharaoh had commanded, 5:7-8). The sin was Pharaoh's people, not Israel!

Rather than finding support and sympathy, Pharaoh accuses the Israelites of being "idle" or lazy (ver. 17). They wanted to go worship because they were lazy! Pharaoh commanded them to go back to work and he reiterated the fact that they would not be given straw nor would the quota ("measurement") be changed or reduced. The foremen knew they were in trouble ("evil") because of Pharaoh's attitude.

In verse 20, the foremen meet Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them when they returned from their audience with Pharaoh. Rather than hearing positive news, Moses and Aaron are accused of making matters worse. The foremen accuse them, "Let Jehovah look on you and let Him judge that you made our smell to stink in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants to give a sword in their hand to kill us" (ver. 21). Rather than Pharaoh driving out the Israelites under God's compulsion, (so far) Moses and Aaron have only made matters worse! The foremen call on Jehovah God to judge the two men; their behavior had made Israel stink or "odious" in the eyes of Pharaoh. Notice Moses mixes metaphors - you don't "see" a smell. But, Moses and Aaron had put a "sword" into the hand of Pharaoh, strengthening his hand against the nation of Israel.

Moses, as he needed to do from a spiritual perspective, turned to Jehovah in prayer. He refers to Him as "Master" (the real Hebrew word for "Lord"), and asked Jehovah what "evil" He has done to the people, making matters worse. The second question was why (in fact) has Jehovah sent him? Finally (ver. 23), Moses states to Jehovah God that he did exactly what God had commanded; he went to Pharaoh "to speak in His name." Yet the result was bad, even worse than before: "he has done evil to this people" (this is the fourth use of the Hebrew word for "evil" in this short paragraph: 5:16, 19, 22-23), and (in fact), He has *not* delivered His people! The Hebrew expression is emphatic (see under "Hebrew Grammar" above); God has not done what He promised He would do!

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - The land of Egypt will "stink" when God strikes them with blood (7:18, 21) and frogs (8:6, 14).

NT writers - Simply to *claim* to speak in the name of Christ does not mean one is speaking His message, with His authority if God's law is not behind the practice (Matt. 7:21-23). Jesus keeps His disciples in His name if they walk with Him (John 17:11-12). Paul will write in Colossians 3:17 that Christians must do *all* things religiously and spiritually with the approval of God.