

Exodus Chapter Five

Read **Exodus 5:1-5** – God's First Demand

v.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.”

“AFTERWARD”, after the meeting with the elders of Israel Moses and Aaron proceed with their mission. They secure an audience with Pharaoh, who was probably in residence in his palace located in the city of Tanis (Zoan) where the daughter of Pharaoh found Moses as a babe.

God's message is for Pharaoh to let “MY PEOPLE” go. This reminds us again that God has raised up and sanctified unto himself a people, a people for the purpose of bringing a savior into the world. That people is what is now the nation of Israel:

Deuteronomy 14:2 “FOR THOU *art* AN HOLY PEOPLE UNTO THE **LORD** THY GOD, AND THE **LORD** HATH CHOSEN THEE TO BE A PECULIAR PEOPLE UNTO HIMSELF, ABOVE ALL THE NATIONS THAT *are* UPON THE EARTH”

Today, we are God's chosen people. Not because he chose us specifically as individuals but rather because we have chosen to follow Him and through our obedience to his commandments placed ourselves under His rule.

v.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.”

The king of Egypt is either ignorant of the God of heaven or does not recognize him as a god. The common belief of Moses day, especially among the heathen, was that each region had its own gods, or that each people or group of people had their own gods that they worshiped and honored. Egypt had a multitude of gods as we have noted in earlier study and they did not include the Lord God of heaven.

So Pharaoh is not of a mind to listen to any demands made by anyone, even a god a Israel might serve.

v.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.”

Moses and Aaron are not finished with their request. They present the argument that their God requires them to provide a sacrifice to Him. Throughout the history of mankind worship has been accompanied and/or accomplished through sacrifices. We see this from the very beginning of time:

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Genesis 4:3-4 “AND IN THE PROCESS OF TIME IT CAME TO PASS THAT CAIN BROUGHT OF THE FRUIT OF THE GROUND AN OFFERING UNTO THE **LORD**. AND ABEL, HE ALSO BROUGHT OF THE FIRSTLINGS OF HIS FLOCK AND OF THE FAT THEREOF. AND THE **LORD** HAD RESPECT UNTO ABEL AND TO THIS OFFERING:”

And we know the rest of the story; how that God accepted the blood offering that Abel made, because it was made in faith (**Hebrews 11:4**). We also understand how that God has demanded blood sacrifices throughout all ages. The blood sacrifice for you and I was made by his son. What is our sacrifice to God to be?

Romans 12:1 “I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, THEY YE PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY, ACCEPTABLE UNTO GOD, *which is* YOUR REASONABLE SERVICE.”

Our sacrifice is our bodies, our entire being, in service to God.

v.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.”

Apparently the Israelites, in anticipation that Pharaoh would be agreeable had ceased to work. So the king is angry because Moses and Aaron have caused this problem. Kings, since most of them are absolute rulers, tend to become irate when someone or something displeases them. As the wise man writes:

Proverbs 16:14 “THE WRATH OF A KING *is as* MESSENGERS OF DEATH: BUT A WISE MAN WILL PACIFY IT.”

But the mission of Moses and Aaron is in service of a much greater King than Pharaoh.

v.5 “AND PHARAOH SAID, BEHOLD, THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND NOW *are* MANY, AND YE MAKE THEM REST FROM THEIR BURDENS.”

In his anger Pharaoh lays the blame for all of these thousands of people stopping their work at the feet of Moses and Aaron.

Read **Exodus 5:6-14** – Israel’s Burdens Increase

v.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.”

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The taskmasters over Israel were Egyptian but the officers, the title of which can also be translated scribes, or record keepers were Hebrew helpers who served the taskmasters.

In the modern world bricks are made by molding them into the proper shape and size and then burning or baking them in a kiln. In the ancient world they could be burned but frequently were shaped by molding the mud into the proper shape and size while kneading straw into the mud as a binding agent. Then they were dried in the sun. Bricks made by this method have been found, not only in Egypt, but in Babylon and various other places as well.

Up until now the Hebrew brickmakers were being provided the straw that they needed for this purpose but as punishment for their stopping work Pharaoh has ordered his taskmasters to no longer provide that material, the Hebrews will have to gather it themselves.

v.8 “AND THE TALE OF THE BRICKS, WHICH THEY DID MAKE HERETOFORE, YE SHALL LAY UPON THEM; YE SHALL NOT DIMISH *ought* THEREOF: FOR THEY *be* IDLE; THEREFORE THEY CRY, SAYING, LET US GO *and* SACRIFICE TO OUR GOD.”

The tale (we spell it tally today), or number of bricks that they were required to produce each day was not to be reduced because they Hebrews now had to gather their own straw. This, in effect, probably doubled their work load.

The reason that Pharaoh gives for increasing their workload is that since they have time to think about and make requests to go and worship their God they must not have enough to do. So he provides the means to keep them busy.

In doing so Pharaoh completely ignores, or completely discounts the statement that Jehovah, God of the Hebrews, had spoken to them and requested that he let them worship. Or that God had any power over him.

v.9 “LET THERE BE MORE WORK BE LAID UPON THE MEN, THAT THEY MAY LABOUR THEREIN; AND LET THEM NOT REGARD VAIN WORDS.”

Pharaoh doesn't want his Hebrew slaves to have any time to spend on what he calls “VAIN WORDS”; to even be able to think about anything other than meeting their quota of bricks.

v.10 “AND THE TASKMASTERS OF THE PEOPLE WENT OUT, AND THEIR OFFICERS, AND THEY SPAKE TO THE PEOPLE, SAYING, THIS SAITH PHARAOH, I WILL NOT GIVE YOU STRAW,”

So Pharaoh's edict is passed on to the Hebrew people.

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v.11 “GO YE, GET YOU STRAW WHERE YE CAN FIND IT: YET NOT OUGHT OF YOUR WORK SHALL BE DIMISHED.”

Fearing the wrath of the king, even the Hebrew officers pass on the exact instructions of Pharaoh. Get your straw wherever you can find it and, oh, by the way make the same number of bricks as before.

v.12 “SO THE PEOPLE WERE SCATTERED ABROAD THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT TO GATHER STUBBLE INSTEAD OF STRAW.”

This verse tells us something about the season of the year as well as the burden that was laid upon Israel. The Hebrews had, until now, to the extent that we are told have been concentrated in the land of Goshen in northeastern Egypt. Now in order to fulfill the demands of their taskmasters they have to roam the entire land of Egypt. There is little or no straw to be had, so they are reduced to pulling up the stubble left in the fields after the harvest is complete.

v.13 “AND THE TASKMASTERS HASTED *them*, SAYING, FULFILL YOUR WORKS, *your* DAILY TASKS, AS WHEN THERE WAS STRAW.”

Pharaoh’s taskmasters “HASTED” them, I’m sure this was done with the scourges and whips of their trade adding to what was already a miserable existence.

v.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 YOU TASK IN MAKING BRICK BOTH YESTERDAY AND TO DAY, *as* HERETOFORE?”

As would be expected the wrath of Pharaoh falls most heavily on those Hebrews who have been given the oversight of the workers. They are beaten for not meeting their daily output quotas. Adam Clarke describes a common method of punishment as placing the victim on their stomach with their legs bent upward and then pounding on the bottoms of their feet with a stick. This was very painful, frequently rendered them unable to walk until their feet healed or crippled them permanently.

Read **Exodus 5:15-23** – The Hebrews Appeal

v.15 “THEN THE OFFICERS OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL CAME AND CRIED UNTO PHARAOH, SAYING, WHEREFORE DEALST THOU THUS WITH THY SERVANTS?”

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The officers of the children of Israel don't go to Moses and Aaron, they don't go to God seeking relief from their labors; they go to Pharaoh. The verses that follow indicate that they probably went without even making Moses aware of what they are doing.

v.16 "THERE IS NO STRAW GIVEN UNTO THEY SERVANTS, AND THEY SAY TO US, MAKE BRICK; AND, BEHOLD, THY SERVANTS *are* BEATEN; BUT THE FAULT *is* IN THINE OWN PEOPLE."

They complain to Pharaoh that they are being treated unfairly and they are; they are being punished for asking to go and worship God. At the same time we see some of the nature of these people coming out. They dare to charge an absolute ruler and his people with being at fault for their failure to meet their quotas. It's true, nonetheless, they are being obstinate to a king who has the power of life and death over them.

v.17 "BUT HE SAID, YE *are* IDLE, *ye are* IDLE: THEREFORE YE SAY, LET US GO *and* DO SACRIFICE UNTO THE **LORD**."

It would appear that Pharaoh really believes that idle hands are the devils tools. We're told by Bible and secular scholars that in the Egyptian religion those who were idle were held in contempt. In fact, under their particular religion idleness was mentioned twice among the great sins that would cause an Egyptian to be condemned at the day of judgment.

But we know that, in reality, Pharaoh is accusing the Hebrews of being idle because, they want to go worship God, they have the time and the tenacity to complain and accuse his taskmasters of being at fault when they cannot meet their quote of bricks.

v.18 "GO THEREFORE NOW, *and* WORK; FOR THERE SHALL NO STRAW BE GIVEN YOU, YET SHALL YE DELIVER THE TALE OF BRICKS."

Pharaoh will give them no relief. They will have to gather their own straw and still deliver the same "TALE" or number of bricks that they delivered before.

v.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."

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The language in this verse can be confusing, or at least I found it to be so. Basically the officers or those Hebrews who served the Egyptian taskmasters determined that they could expect neither justice nor mercy from Pharaoh. They had listened to Moses, Aaron, Caleb and their elders concerning that they were going to get away from Egypt. They were trying to follow that course of action but it had only brought greater oppression.

It is also interesting to note that apparently they went to Pharaoh without Moses and Aaron and probably even without their knowledge. This would indicate that, as noted earlier, they are still not ready to accept God's representatives as their leaders.

v.20 "AND THEY MET MOSES AND AARON, WHO STOOD IN THE WAY, AS THEY CAME FORTH FROM PHARAOH:"

As they leave Pharaoh they meet Moses and Aaron.

v.21 "AND THEY SAID UNTO THEM, THE **LORD** LOOK UPON YOU, AND JUDGE; BECAUSE YE HAVE MADE OUR SAVOUR 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 murmuring and complaining that characterizes the Israelites during the entire sojourn in the wilderness now begins. We have several examples we could turn to but we will only look at the occasion where Pharaoh has followed them to the Red Sea with his army:

Exodus 14:11 "AND THEY SAID UNTO MOSES, BECAUSE *there were* NO GRAVES IN EGYPT, HAST THOU TAKEN US AWAY TO DIE IN THE WILDERNESS? WHEREFORE HAST THOU DEALT THUS WITH US, TO CARRY US FORTH OUT OF EGYPT?"

Moses and Aaron have barely begun the mission that God has given them. There is much to do before Pharaoh is ready to let Israel go and much to do before Israel is ready to go anywhere. Only one demand has been made to Pharaoh. When their burdens were increased they apparently bypassed God's chosen leaders and went directly to Pharaoh themselves. They succeeded only confirming what they already knew. They are looking for a scapegoat and have found them and they blame their troubles on Moses. They say that Pharaoh despises God; that God should judge Moses because all he has done is to incite Pharaoh to destroy them.

v.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?"

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Moses, in turn, confronts God. Why have you treated your people so? If all we're going to do is stir up Pharaoh to increase the oppression of Israel, then why did you send me to them? We find a similar situation much later in:

Numbers 11:11 "AND MOSES SAID UNTO THE **LORD**, WHEREFORE HAST THOU AFFLICTED THY SERVANT? AND WHEREFORE HAVE I NOT FOUND FAVOUR IN THY SIGHT, THAT THOU LAYEST THE BURDEN OF ALL THIS PEOPLE UPON ME?"

Only in Numbers it is Moses going to God. The Israelites have grown tired of manna and are asking for meat to eat. Their murmuring and complaining are wearing Moses out. So he complains to God. He goes on to say in **v.12** that he didn't begat these children, he has not chosen to be a father to them, why does he have to carry them like a "SUCKLING CHILD" to the land that God has promised.

v.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."

Moses complains that he has come to Pharaoh as God has commanded. He has spoken those things that God has commanded. But all that it has accomplished is to increase the misery that the children of Israel are enduring. God hasn't kept his promise to deliver them:

Exodus 3:8 "AND I AM COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM OUT OF THE HAND OF THE EGYPTIANS, AND TO BRING THEM UP OUT OF THAT LAND UNTO A GOOD LAND AND A LARGE, UNTO A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY; UNTO THE PLACE OF THE CANAANITES, AND THE HITTITES, AND THE AMORITES, AND THE PERIZZITES, AND THE HIVITES, AND THE JEBUSITES."