

Exodus 5

What did Moses and Aaron request of Pharaoh (v. 1)? At Moses and Aaron's first audience with Pharaoh, they simply presented God's command ("Let My people go ...") and asked for permission to leave Egypt for a brief period of time to worship their God.

How did Pharaoh respond (v. 2)? He rejected the God of Israel as having no authority. Pharaoh was a proud and powerful king. He and his people thought that he was a god. In addition, they had their own Egyptian gods. As far as Pharaoh was concerned, the Lord was the God of his slaves. At this time, he could not know that their God was greater than his gods. Therefore, in his mind there was no reason to obey the Lord.

How did Moses and Aaron respond (v. 3)? In their second appeal to Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron used milder, more humble terms. They did not mention the name of their God (Yahweh) that was "unknown" to Pharaoh, or the name Israel, that would have struck him as arrogant. They did not demand but requested. Moreover, they gave reasons for their request: their God had appeared to them and they feared His wrath if they disobeyed Him.¹

It would have been impossible for the Hebrews to sacrifice to their God in Egypt, because they sacrificed the very animals that the Egyptians worshipped! All kinds of riots and commotion would have followed any such action.

Moses warned Pharaoh about what might happen. If the Israelites did not obey, God might do something terrible. He might send terrible diseases. He might even send an army to attack them. If this action would be against the Israelites, it would be a great loss to the Egyptians. They would lose their slaves for much more than just three days.

How did Pharaoh respond (v. 4)? He didn't care about the possibility of any harm that might come on the Israelites for disobeying their God.² He was only concerned for his own loss of labor productivity.

Pharaoh looked upon Moses and Aaron as mere rabble-rousers, labor leaders looking to improve working conditions. He considered them to be his slaves and ordered them back to their jobs.

What order did Pharaoh give to the Egyptian slave drivers and Israelite foremen (v. 15) in charge of the Israelite workers (vv. 7-9)? The main task of the Israelite slaves was to make a lot of bricks every day to build Pharaoh's buildings. They mixed mud from the Nile River and straw and the bricks were dried in the sun. Up until then, the Egyptians had supplied the straw for them. But now the king was demanding that the Israelites must go out and gather their own straw. To collect the straw would take them a lot of time. But they must still produce the same number of bricks each day. Pharaoh's argument seems to be – Keep them busy. People in bondage dream of freedom only when they have a lot of free time to think about it. He accused them of being lazy (v. 17). To solve this problem, he told the slave masters to require the same number of bricks but don't help the people by bringing the straw.

How did the Egyptian slave drivers and Israelite foremen respond (vv. 10-14)? Pharaoh's orders were carried out. The people must get the straw from wherever they could find it. That meant that they must search all over Egypt. The work that had been already very hard would become much harder. The

work was so much more demanding and time-consuming that the daily quota of bricks could not be met. As a result the Israelite foremen were beaten by Pharaoh's slave drivers.

Why would Pharaoh place Israelites in a position of authority as foremen over their fellow Israelites? They would be the first to be punished when quotas were not met. The Jews would feel badly to see one of their own punished and would be motivated to follow orders. Or so Pharaoh thought. That strategy may have worked for a while but the longer term effects were the opposite.

What did the Israelite foremen do next (vv. 15-16)? The Israelite foremen went directly to Pharaoh to complain about the situation. They were polite. They said that they were his servants. They asked why he had introduced this no-straw rule. They noted that they had not received any straw but must produce the same number of bricks. And the slave masters beat them because they were not making as many bricks as before. Pharaoh most likely did this because of Moses and Aaron's visit. His purpose was to turn the people against Moses.

What did Pharaoh say in response (vv. 17-18)? Pharaoh insulted them. He said that they were lazy. They did not want to work. They kept on asking him to let them go. They wanted to go to sacrifice to the Lord. He told them to go not to the desert but to their work. He would give no straw to them but they must produce the quota of bricks.

Their attempt to "go around" Moses and Aaron had not ended well, but there was a tremendous plus in this for the Israelites. The treatment of the Israelite foremen brought them into sympathy with their enslaved Jewish brothers. Israel closed ranks! This development was absolutely a prerequisite for their deliverance. God's plan was already working, even though it didn't seem like it at the time. Pharaoh was trying to create division within the Jewish ranks but he actually brought about unity between the foremen and the people.

The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble so what did they say to Moses and Aaron (vv. 20-21)? They were very angry with Moses and Aaron. They blamed Moses and Aaron for Pharaoh's actions. They prayed that the Lord would punish Moses and Aaron. The slave masters would now have an excuse to kill Israelites. The people had been severely oppressed before Moses' return, but this added pressure was simply too much to bear.

What was Moses' response to the accusations of the foremen? Did he direct his frustration to them (vv. 22-23)? No. Moses immediately turned to the Lord and was very direct. He agreed with the foremen that the latest oppression of the Israelites resulted from his confrontation with Pharaoh. They said that he was the cause of their trouble. But it was not Moses, it was the Lord. He now questioned God for sending him to do it. Moses' query was motivated by a heavy heart, not distrust of God, though his language ("You have not rescued Your people at all") is abrupt.³

In that dark moment, Moses did what every child of God should do in moments of frustration and discouragement..... He went straight to God with the problem.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Exodus, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 63.

² John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 115.

³ Ibid., 116.