

# Exodus 05 - "Let My People Go"; Pharaoh Gets Tougher

I. Exodus from Egyptian bondage: Israel's redemption, liberation, and preservation (Ex 1:1—18:27)

(1) Redemption from Egypt (Ex 1:1—12:30)

(C) God's sovereignty over Pharaoh and the Egyptian pantheon (Ex 5:1—12:30)

(a) First meeting with Pharaoh (5:1-23)

(i) Request of Pharaoh (5:1-3)

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## Exodus 5

(C) God's sovereignty over Pharaoh and the Egyptian pantheon (Ex 5:1—12:30)

(a) First meeting with Pharaoh (5:1-23)

(i) Request of Pharaoh (5:1-3)

**1** And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "**This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'Let My people go** so that they may celebrate **a feast** to Me in the wilderness.'"

**1** And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'"

**1** After Moses and Aaron arrived, they told Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'Let my people go so they may make a pilgrimage for me in the desert.'"

**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.

- "...This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says" - when Aaron asked Pharaoh to obey the command of *YHWH*, Pharaoh saw the request as a threat to his sovereignty

- "...Let My people go" - in their first audience with Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron simply presented God's command; they simply asked permission to leave Egypt temporarily (Cf. 3:18)

— This is an interesting request. Moses is eventually going to ask that these people be freed as slaves and turned loose; but that is not what he asks here.

— By Egyptian law, the Israelites could only worship Egyptian gods while in the land; they had to leave the land to worship a non-Egyptian God.

— The whole issue is for God to demonstrate the unreasonableness of Pharaoh. Part of what God is doing here is positioning the contest between God and Pharaoh. The first position is to point out that Pharaoh was unreasonable.

- "...a feast" - what is Israel going to do when they get to the wilderness? A sacrifice to God on Mount Sinai. God views this as a feast.

### **Five Reasons God permitted the Conflict Between Moses and Pharaoh**

1. In this conflict, God displayed His superior power and sovereignty over Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt (Cf. 7:5; 10:2).
2. God strengthened the faith of His people, so that they would trust and obey Him, and thereby realize all of His gracious purposes for them as a nation.
3. God also used these events to heighten anticipation of, and appreciation for, the redemption He would provide. The Israelites would forever after look back on the Exodus as the greatest demonstration of God's love at work for them.
4. These conflicts show how divine sovereignty works with human freedom. God exercises His sovereignty by allowing people a measure of freedom to make choices, for which He holds them responsible.
5. They also clarify how God hands people over to the consequences of the sins they insist on pursuing—as punishment for their sins.

2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go."

2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go."

2 Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should listen to him and let Israel go? I don't know about the LORD, nor will I let Israel go!"

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.

- Pharaoh knew and had respect for the gods of Egypt, but he did not know or have respect for Yahweh, the God of his foreign slaves

— If God identified Himself with these slaves and had not by now delivered them from slavery, why should Pharaoh fear and obey Him?

3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness so that we may **sacrifice** to the LORD our God, otherwise He will strike us with plague or with the sword."

3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, otherwise He will

fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God so he does not strike us with pestilence or sword."

**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.

- Aaron's second request of Pharaoh used milder terms...they presented themselves not as ambassadors of Yahweh but as representatives of the people

— They did not mention Yahweh, who was unknown to Pharaoh, or the name Israel, which would've struck Pharaoh as arrogant

— They did not command, but requested ("Please"), and gave reasons for their request: that God "met with us" and they feared His wrath if they disobeyed Him

- "...sacrifice" - the Egyptians regarded the sacrifices that the Israelites would offer as unacceptable since almost all forms of life were sacred in Egypt

— They believed their gods manifested themselves through cows, goats and many other animals

#### (ii) Response by Pharaoh (5:4-19)

4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you let the people neglect their work? Get *back* to your labors!"

4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get *back* to your labors!"

4 The king of Egypt replied to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you keeping the people from their labor? Go back to your work!"

**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.

5 Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!"

5 Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!"

5 Then Pharaoh said, "Look, the people in the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working."

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

- Pharaoh's reply to the second appeal was even more harsh than the first

6 So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying,

6 So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying,

6 That day Pharaoh ordered the taskmasters of the people and their officials,

6 And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying,

7 "You are no longer to give the people **straw** to make bricks as previously; have them go and gather straw for themselves.

7 "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves.

7 "You're no longer to give the people straw for making bricks, as in the past. They must gather straw for themselves.

7 Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves.

- "...straw" - part of the corn or grain stalk that remained standing in the field after harvest  
— As a punishment for Moses' and Aaron's demand, Pharaoh now required the Israelites to gather their own straw for brick-making

8 But you shall impose on them the quota of bricks which they were making before; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, for that reason they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.'

8 But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.'

8 But you're to impose the previous quota of bricks that they're making. You're not to reduce it! It is because they're lazy that they're crying out, 'Let's go offer sacrifices to our God.'

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.

9 Let the labor be heavier on the men, and have them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words."

9 Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words."

9 So increase the work load on the people,<sup>8</sup> and let them do it so they don't pay attention to deceptive speeches."

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

**10** So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, "This is what Pharaoh says: 'I am not going to give you *any* straw.

**10** So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not going to give you *any* straw.

**10** Then the taskmasters of the people and their officials went out and told the people, "This is Pharaoh's response: 'I'll no longer give you any straw.

**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.

11 You go, get straw for yourselves wherever you can find *it*; but none of your labor will be reduced.'" "

11 You go *and* get straw for yourselves wherever you can find *it*, but none of your labor will be reduced.'" "

11 Go get straw for yourselves wherever you can find it, but your work quotas won't be reduced at all.'" "

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

At this point, as a way of increasing their burden, they were no longer provided with straw; they had to find some for themselves. At the same time, their quota for production was not lowered. In other words, they were given a significant increase of task with no relief in output. A specific move by the administration to show who was in charge, and to serve as a lesson for the religious interruption and distraction.

12 So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.

12 So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.

12 So the people scattered throughout the entire land of Egypt to collect stubble for straw.

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

13 And the taskmasters pressed them, saying, "Complete your work quota, *your* daily amount, just as when you had straw."

13 The taskmasters pressed them, saying, "Complete your work quota, *your* daily amount, just as when you had straw."

13 The taskmasters pressured them by saying, "Finish your work—each day's quota—just as when you were given straw."

13 And the taskmasters hastened them, saying, Fulfill your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw.

14 Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and asked, "Why have you not completed your required task of making bricks either yesterday or today, as before?"

14 Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, "Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?"

14 The Israeli supervisors whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had appointed over them were beaten and told, "Why didn't you, both yesterday and today, fulfill your quota for making bricks as before?"

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 to day, as heretofore?

The Papyrus Anastasi, an ancient Egyptian document, contains the lament of an officer who had to erect buildings on the frontier of Egypt, probably in the region of the present day Suez Canal. He could not work, for he says, 'I am without equipment. There are no people to make bricks, and there is no straw in the district.' This document indicates that the overseer of building operations could not progress in his work because of lack of straw for brick-making.

**15** Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you deal this way with your servants?"

**15** Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you deal this way with your servants?"

**15** The Israeli supervisors came and cried out to Pharaoh, "Why are you doing this to us?"

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

- For relief, the Israelites turned to Pharaoh, the leader of the world

16 There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your *own* people."

16 There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your *own* people."

16 No straw is being given to us, yet they're saying to us, 'Make bricks!' Look, we are being beaten. It's wrong how you are treating your people!"

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.

17 But he said, "You are lazy, *very* lazy; for that reason you say, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.'

17 But he said, "You are lazy, *very* lazy; therefore you say, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.'

17 Then Pharaoh said, "You are lazy, lazy! That's why you're saying, 'Let's go offer sacrifices to the LORD.'

**17** But he said, Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the LORD.

18 So go now *and* work; for you will be given no straw, but you must deliver the quota of bricks."

18 So go now *and* work; for you will be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks."

18 Now, go! Get to work! And straw won't be given to you, but you are to deliver the same number of bricks!"

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

19 The foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble, since they were told, "You must not reduce your daily amount of bricks."

19 The foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, "You must not reduce *your* daily amount of bricks."

19 The Israeli supervisors realized they were in trouble when he said, "You won't reduce each day's quota of bricks!"

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.

(iii) Israel complains to Moses (5:20-21)

20 When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them.

20 When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them.

20 As they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron standing there.

**20** And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh:

21 And they said to them, "May the LORD look upon you and judge *you*, because you have made us repulsive in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us!"

21 They said to them, "May the LORD look upon you and judge *you*, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."

21 The supervisors told them, "May the LORD look on you and judge you! You have made us repulsive to Pharaoh and his servants. You have put a sword in their hands to kill us."

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 Israelites now turned on Moses and Aaron, just as the Israelites in Jesus' day turned on *their* Savior

(iv) Moses complains to God (5:22-23)

**22** Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "**Lord**, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me?"

**22** Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me?"

**22** So Moses returned to the LORD and asked him, "**LORD**, why have you caused trouble for this people? Why have you sent me here?"

**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' prayer reveals the weakness of his faith at the time; he, along with the Israelites, needed the demonstrations of God's power that followed

- "...Lord" [NASB20] - *adonai*

- "...LORD" [ISV] - should not be all caps, as it translates the Hebrew word *Adonai*, not *Yahweh*

23 Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all."

23 Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all."

23 Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has caused trouble for this people, and you have done nothing to deliver your people."

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 is frustrated by God's seeming inaction, and by the fact that the Israelites are now worse off than before Moses arrived back in Egypt

— We must always remember Ps 103:14: For He Himself knows our form; He is mindful that we are nothing but dust.

— God knows what man can handle; He will push us seemingly to the brink, and maybe over it (at least in our minds), but it's always for a divine purpose (Cf. 1 Cor 10:13)

- In every case where God brings judgment, He brings someone to give warning and an opportunity to turn

— Enoch was a preacher to the pre-flood people

— Enoch's son, Methuselah was the longest living person in history; his name means "when he dies it shall come"; the year Methuselah died, the Flood came

— Noah preached for 120 years about the Flood to come

— Jonah preached to Nineveh...

— You can go through the whole Scripture and see that there was always someone sent to warn of impending destruction

This section climaxes with the apparent failure of Yahweh's plan to rescue Israel. This desperate scenario provides the pessimistic backdrop, and the bleak circumstances, for the supernatural demonstrations of Yahweh's power that follow.