

# CHAPTER 5

## INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 5

Moses and Aaron go in to Pharaoh, and desire leave for the children of Israel to go into the wilderness three days' journey, to sacrifice to the Lord, and are answered in a very churlish and atheistical manner, and are charged with making the people idle, the consequence of which was, the taskmasters had orders, to make their work more heavy and toilsome, (<sup><ref>Exodus 5:1-9</ref></sup>Exodus 5:1-9) which orders were executed with severity by them, (<sup><ref>Exodus 5:10-13</ref></sup>Exodus 5:10-13), upon which the officers of the children of Israel complained to Pharaoh, but to no purpose, (<sup><ref>Exodus 5:14-19</ref></sup>Exodus 5:14-19), and meeting with Moses and Aaron, lay the blame upon them, (<sup><ref>Exodus 5:20,21</ref></sup>Exodus 5:20,21), which sends Moses to the Lord to expostulate with him about it, (<sup><ref>Exodus 5:22,23</ref></sup>Exodus 5:22,23).

**Ver. 1.** *And afterwards Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh,* etc.] Whose name, some say, was Cenchres, others Amenophis, according to Manetho and Chaeremon <sup>f153</sup>; ((see Gill on "<sup><ref>Exodus 3:10</ref></sup>Exodus 3:10")) went into Pharaoh's palace, and being introduced by the proper officer at court for that purpose, addressed him in the following manner:

*thus saith the Lord God of Israel:* as ambassadors of him, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords; and so Artapanus <sup>f154</sup>, the Heathen, says that the Egyptian king, hearing that Moses was come, sent for him to know wherefore he was come, who told him, that the Lord of the world commanded him to let the Jews go, as it follows here:

*let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness;* in the wilderness of Sinai or Arabia, at Horeb there, where they might keep it more freely and safely, without being disturbed by the Egyptians, and without giving any offence to them; and the demand is just; they were the people of God, and therefore he claims them, and service from them was due to him; and Pharaoh had no right to detain them, and what is required was but their reasonable service they owed to their God. This feast was to be held, not for themselves, but to God, which chiefly consisted in offering sacrifice, as is after explained; the entire dismissal of them is not at once

demanded, only to go a little while into the wilderness, and keep a feast there to the Lord; though it was not intended they should return, but it was put in this form to try Pharaoh, and that he might be the more inexcusable in refusing to grant what was so reasonable.

**Ver. 2.** *And Pharaoh said, who is the Lord*, etc.] Jehovah, they made mention of, which, whether he took it for the name of a deity, or of a king, whose ambassadors they declared themselves to be, was a name he had never heard of before; and this being expressed and pronounced, shows that this name is not ineffable, or unlawful to be pronounced, as say the Jews:

*that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go?* he knew of no superior monarch to him, whose orders he was obliged to obey in any respect, and particularly in this, the dismissal of the people of Israel out of his land, though it was but for a short time:

*I know not the Lord*; who this Jehovah is, that made this demand, and required Israel's dismissal. The Targum of Jonathan paraphrases it,

“I have not found the name of Jehovah written in the book of angels, I am not afraid of him.”

An Egyptian book, in which, the paraphrast supposes, were written the names of gods and of angels; and no such name being there, he was the more bold and insolent:

*neither will I let Israel go*; determining he would pay no regard to such an unknown Deity, or King, be he who he would.

**Ver. 3.** *And they said, the God of the Hebrews hath met with us*, etc.] Perceiving that the name Jehovah was unknown to him, and treated by him in a scornful manner, they leave it out, and only say, “the God of the Hebrews”: a people that dwelt in his country, he well knew by this name, and could not be ignorant that their God was different from his; and it was he that had met Moses and Aaron; they did not seek to him to be sent on this errand, but he appeared to them as he did to Moses at Horeb, and to Aaron in Egypt. Some render it, “the God of the Hebrews is called upon us”<sup>f155</sup>; his name was called upon them, or they were called by his name; they were his servants and worshippers, and therefore under obligation to attend to what he enjoined them:

*let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert:* a request which was made in a very humble and modest manner, and not at all extravagant, nor anything dangerous and disadvantageous to him; for now they speak as of themselves, and therefore humbly entreat him; they do not ask to be wholly and for ever set free, only to go for three days; they do not propose to meet and have their rendezvous in any part of his country, much less in his metropolis, where he might fear they would rise in a body, and seize upon his person and treasure, only to go into the wilderness, to Mount Sinai there. And hence it appears, that the distance between Egypt and Mount Sinai was three days' journey, to go the straightest way, as Aben Ezra observes:

*and sacrifice unto the Lord our God:* which is what was meant by keeping a feast; some sacrifices the people, as well as the priests, feasted on; this was not a civil, but a religious concern:

*lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword:* this they urge as a reason to have their request granted, taken from the danger they should be exposed unto, should they not be allowed to go and offer sacrifice to God; though by this they might suggest both loss and danger to Pharaoh, in order to stir him up the more to listen to their request; for should they be smitten with pestilence, or the sword, he would lose the benefit of their bond service, which would be a considerable decline in his revenues; and besides, if God would be so displeased with the Israelites for not going, and not sacrificing, when they were detained, how much more displeased would he be with Pharaoh and the Egyptians for hindering them?

**Ver. 4.** *And the king of Egypt said to them,* etc.] For he was not struck dumb, as Artapanus<sup>f156</sup>, afore cited writer, says:

*wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works?* as they did when they gathered them together, and wrought signs before them; which Pharaoh it seems had heard of, and had got their names very readily:

*get you unto your burdens;* meaning not Moses and Aaron, ordering them to go about their private and family business, but the people they represented, and on whose account they came; and it is highly probable the elders of the people, at least some of them, were with them, to whom these words might be more particularly directed. (see ~~Exodus~~ Exodus 3:18).

**Ver. 5.** *And Pharaoh said, behold, the people of the land now are many,* etc.] 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 took off of their work, and allowed to go a feasting, they would be more so, which agrees with the next clause:

*and you make them rest from their burdens;* which was the way to make them more numerous still, and to frustrate the design of laying burdens upon them, which was originally intended to hinder the multiplication of them, (~~DOM9~~ Exodus 1:9-14).

**Ver. 6.** *And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people,* etc.] Who were Egyptians, and whom Pharaoh sent for the same day, to give them orders to oppress them yet more and more, so far was he from complying with their request:

*[and] their officers;* who were Israelites, and were under the taskmasters, and accountable to them for each man's work that they had the inspection and care of:

*saying,* as follows.

**Ver. 7.** *Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick,* etc.] Whether this was given and used to mix with the clay, as is done in some places <sup>f157</sup>, that the bricks made thereof might be firmer and stronger, or to burn them with in the furnaces, or to cover them from the heat of the sun, that they might not dry too soon and crack, is not easy to determine; though it is said that the unburnt bricks of Egypt formerly were, and still are made of clay mixed with straw. The Egyptian pyramid of unburnt brick, Dr. Pococke <sup>f158</sup> observes, seems to be made of the earth brought by the Nile, being of a sandy black earth, with some pebbles and shells in it; it is mixed up with chopped straw, in order to bind the clay together, as they now make unburnt bricks in Egypt, and many other eastern parts, which they use very much in their buildings. He says he found some of these bricks (of the pyramid) thirteen inches and a half long, six inches and a half broad, and four inches thick; and others fifteen inches long, seven broad, and four inches three quarters thick. But be the straw for what use it will, it had been dealt out to them by proper persons to be used in one way or another; but now it was forbidden to be given them,

*as heretofore* it had been done:

*let them go and gather straw for themselves*; out of the fields where it lay, after the corn had been reaped and gathered in, or in barns, where it had been threshed; to do which must take up a good deal of their time, and especially if the straw lay at any distance, or was hard to be come at.

**Ver. 8.** *And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, you shall lay upon them*, etc.] 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 labour in going to fetch straw from other places:

*for they be idle*; and want to be indulged in a lazy disposition, which ought 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.

**Ver. 9.** *Let there more work be laid upon the men*, etc.] Instead of lessening it, let it be increased, or “be heavy”<sup>f159</sup> upon them, that it may oppress and afflict them and keep them down, and weaken their strength and their spirits, and diminish them:

*that they may labour therein*; and have no leisure time to spend in idleness and sloth:

*and let them not regard vain words*; or “words of falsehood”<sup>f160</sup> and lies, such as were spoken by Moses and Aaron, promising them liberty and deliverance from their bondage, which he was determined never to grant, and so eventually make such words to appear to be vain and empty, falsehood and lies.

**Ver. 10.** *And the taskmasters of the people went out*, etc.] From the presence of Pharaoh, out of his court, to the respective places where they were set to see that the Israelites did their work:

*and their officers*; the officers of the Israelites, who were under the taskmasters, and answerable to them for the work of the people, and their tale of bricks:

*and they spake to the people, saying, thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw*; that is, any longer, as he had used to do.

**Ver. 11.** *Go ye, get ye straw, where you can find it*, etc.] Before it was provided by the king, and brought to the brickkilns, but now they are bid to go and fetch it themselves, and get it where they could, whether in fields or barns; and if they were obliged to pay for it out of their labour; it was a greater oppression still:

*yet not ought of your work shall be diminished*; they were to do the same work, and make the same number of bricks, as when straw was brought and given them; and no allowance made for waste of time in seeking, or expenses in procuring straw, which was very hard upon them.

**Ver. 12.** *So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt*, etc.] That part of it where they dwelt:

*to gather stubble instead of straw*; straw not being easy to come at, they were obliged to gather stubble that was left in the fields, after the corn was gathered in. Ben Melech observes, that the word signifies small straw, or small sticks of wood, and Kimchi<sup>f161</sup>, and if so, this must be to burn the bricks with in the furnaces.

**Ver. 13.** *And the taskmasters hastened them*, Kept them tight and close to their work, and were urgent on them to make 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 brickkilns, made the same number of bricks every day, as they used to do when they had straw at hand. (see <sup><0051></sup>Exodus 5:11).

**Ver. 14.** *And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them*, etc.] This makes it clear, not only that the taskmasters and officers were different persons, but that the one were Egyptians appointed by Pharaoh, and the other were Israelites, of the better sort of them, who were set over the poorer sort by the taskmasters, to look after them, and take an account of their work, and the tale of their bricks, and give it in to the taskmasters; now these

*were beaten* by the taskmasters, either with a cane, stick, or cudgel, or with whips and scourges, because there was a deficiency in their accounts, and the full tale of bricks was not given in:

*[and] demanded, wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick, both yesterday and today, as heretofore?* the first day they were deficient they took no notice of it, did not call them to an account for it, but this being the case the second day, they not only expostulated with them about it, but beat them for it, which was hard usage. They had no need to ask them the reason of it, which they knew very well, and must be sensible that the men could not do the same work, and be obliged to spend part of their time in going about for straw or stubble; or the same number of men make the same tale of bricks, when some of them were employed to get straw for the rest, and to beat those officers for a deficiency through such means was cruel.

**Ver. 15.** *Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh,* etc.] Made their complaints to him, perhaps with tears in their eyes, being used so very ill. They little thought it was by Pharaoh's orders; they supposed he knew nothing of it, and therefore hoped to have their grievances redressed by him, but were mistaken:

*saying, wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants?* so they call themselves, they living in his country, and being under his jurisdiction, though not properly his subjects; however, he had made them his slaves, and so indeed even bondservants.

**Ver. 16.** *There is no straw given unto thy servants,* etc.] As used to be, which they supposed Pharaoh knew nothing of, and by which it appears that the order given by Pharaoh, (<sup><u>Exodus 5:6,7</sup>) was not given in the hearing of the officers, only to the taskmasters, and by them to be made known to the officers, though indeed both are there mentioned, and both represent this to the people, (<sup><u>Exodus 5:10</sup>)

*and they say to us, make brick,* though they had no straw to make or burn it with:

*and, behold, thy servants are beaten;* because the same number of bricks is not made as heretofore, but the fault is in thine own people; the taskmasters, who sent the people abroad to get straw or stubble themselves, and therefore could not make the same bricks as before; or "thy people sin"<sup>f162</sup>, the guilt is theirs: or by thy people are meant the

Israelites, whom they call Pharaoh's people to gain favour with him; and then the sense is, either "sin" is imputed "to thy people"<sup>f163</sup>, the blame is laid upon them, or punishment is inflicted on them without cause, sin being often put for punishment; they are wrongfully charged with a fault, and wrongfully punished.

**Ver. 17.** *But he said, ye are idle, ye are idle*, etc.] 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 honour of God they regarded, as that they might have a leisure day from work and labour.

**Ver. 18.** *Go therefore now, and work*, etc.] Go about your business, 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, as the Vulgate Latin version has it; though in (<sup>(1188)</sup>Exodus 5:8), it is rendered in that version the measure of bricks, and so another word is translated by them, (<sup>(1154)</sup>Exodus 5:14), and perhaps both may be intended, both number and measure; that is, that it was expected and insisted on that they delivered the full number of bricks they used to make, and these of full measure; for bricks were made of different measures, as Vitruvius<sup>f164</sup> observes; some among the bricks were of two hands' breadth, others of four, and a third sort of five. (See Gill on "<sup>(1187)</sup>Exodus 5:7").

**Ver. 19.** *And the officers of the children of Israel did see that they were in evil case*, etc.] 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, in great bondage, misery, and distress, to be obliged to get straw to make brick, and carry in their full tale as before; but that they themselves were in a bad situation, since for the deficiency in their people they were like to be beaten for it 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.

**Ver. 20.** *And they met Moses and Aaron*, etc.] The officers of the children of Israel, who had been with their complaints to Pharaoh:

*who stood in the way as they came forth from Pharaoh*; they, had placed themselves in a proper situation, that they might meet them when they came out, and know what success they had, and which they were extremely desirous of hearing; by which they might judge in what temper Pharaoh was, and what they might for the future expect from him in consequence of their embassy.

**Ver. 21.** *And they said unto them, the Lord look upon you and judge*, etc.] Or, “will look upon you and judge”<sup>f165</sup>; and so it is either a prediction of what would be done to them, or an imprecation on them that God would take notice of their conduct, and punish them, or at least chastise them for acting the part they had, if not wickedly, yet imprudently:

*because you have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh*; or to “stink”<sup>f166</sup>; they were become vile, abominable, and hateful to him, he could not bear the sight of them, and treated them as the filth and offscouring of all things; they had lost their good name, credit, and reputation with him; for leave being asked for them to go three days’ journey into the wilderness, to offer sacrifice, and keep a feast, they were looked upon as a parcel of idle slothful fellows:

*and in the eyes of his servants*; not the taskmasters only, but his nobles, counsellors, and courtiers:

*to put a sword in their hands to slay us*; a proverbial expression, signifying that they by their conduct had exposed them to the utmost danger, and had given their enemies an occasion against them, and an opportunity of destroying their whole nation, under a pretence of disobedience and disloyalty.

**Ver. 22.** *And Moses returned unto the Lord*, etc.] Bishop Patrick thinks, that this not only intimates that the Lord had appeared to Moses since he came into Egypt, but that there was some settled place where he appeared, and where he might resort to him on all occasions, and therefore is said to

return to him; though it may signify no more, than that, instead of staying to give an answer to the officers, which he might be at a loss to do, he went to God, to the throne of grace, by prayer, as he was wont to do in cases of difficulty:

*and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people?* or afflicted them, and suffered them to be thus afflicted; which to ascribe to God was right, whatever were the means or instruments; for all afflictions are of him, and who has always wise reasons for what he does, as he now had; to try the faith and patience of his people; to make the Egyptians more odious to them, and so take them off from following their manners, customs, rites, and superstitions, and make them more desirous of departing from thence to the land of Canaan, nor seek a return to Egypt again; and that his vengeance on the Egyptians for such cruelty and inhumanity might appear the more just, and his power might be seen in the plagues he inflicted on them, and in the deliverance of his people when reduced to the utmost extremity:

*why is it that thou hast sent me?* he seems to wish he had never been sent, and could be glad to be recalled, something of the same disposition still remaining in him as when first called; since no end was answered by his mission, no deliverance wrought, yea, the people were more afflicted and oppressed than before; and therefore he was at a loss how to account for it that he should be sent at all, seeing nothing came of it to the good of the people.

**Ver. 23.** *For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name,* etc.] Had he come in his own name, it needed not be wondered at if he should not succeed, but coming in the name of God, it might have been expected he would, and that Pharaoh would have been prevailed upon, or obliged to use the people well, and let them go; but instead of that,

*he hath done evil to this people;* afflicted and oppressed them more than ever: (see <sup>4117</sup>Exodus 5:7), etc.

*neither hast thou delivered thy people at all;* there was not the least thing done towards their deliverance, their affliction was not at all mitigated, but increased: Moses expected that God would have made a beginning as soon as he had delivered his message to Pharaoh; that his mind would have been disposed in favour of the people, and he would have made their bondage lighter and easier, if he did not dismiss them at once; but, instead of that,

more work was laid upon them, and their burdens were heavier: now this was a stumbling and a temptation to Moses, to wish he had never been sent; but if he had called to mind, which he seems to have forgotten, that Pharaoh would not let the people go at first, until all the wonders were wrought he had given him power to do, (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 4:2-8) it would have relieved him, and removed his objections, and put a stop to his expostulation with God, who gives an answer to them in the following chapter, without expressing any displeasure at them.