EXODUS

Chapter 5

*Bricks Without Straw*

**Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.’ ” 2 Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.” 3 Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword.” 4 But the king of Egypt said, “Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!” 5 Then Pharaoh said, “Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working.” 6 That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: 7 “You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. 8 But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don’t reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’ 9 Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies.” 10 Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, “This is what Pharaoh says: ‘I will not give you any more straw. 11 Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.’ ” 12 So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. 13 The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, “Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw.” 14 The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh’s slave drivers were beaten and were asked, “Why didn’t you meet your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?” 15 Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: “Why have you treated your servants this way? 16 Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, ‘Make bricks!’ Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.” 17 Pharaoh said, “Lazy, that’s what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’ 18 Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.” 19 The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, “You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.” 20 When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, 21 and they said, “May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”**

**5:1** *Pharaoh.* See note on 3:10. (CSB)

*Thus says the Lord.* The Lord had directed Moses to use this prophetic introduction (4:22). (TLSB)

*Let My people go.* Resounds repeatedly (9:1, 13; 10:3). A “property” dispute with Pharaoh. (TLSB)

*hold a feast*. Cf 3:18; 5:3. A dispute about how and where to worship. Egyptian work registers record festival days when workers could make sacrifices. It seems Moses’ request as a community representative was not exceptional. (TLSB)

**5:2** Pharaoh was not familiar with “Yahweh” as a god, nor did he recognize His authority. Later, he would come to know about the Lord very well (7:5, 17). (TLSB)

**5:3** See 3:18 and note. The reason for sacrificing where the Egyptians could not see them is given in 8:26 (see note on Ge 43:32). (CSB)

*Please*. Note Moses’ humble regard for Pharaoh; the Lord had told him to use this word (3:18). (TLSB)

*lest He fall upon us*. Moses argued that Pharaoh would lose his slaves if the Hebrews suffered death. (TLSB)

**5:4** Pharaoh regarded the request to worship the Lord simply as a way of avoiding work (vv 8, 17–18). (TLSB)

**5:6** *slave drivers.* Probably the same as the Egyptian “slave masters” in 1:11 (see note there). (CSB)

*foremen.* Israelite supervisors whose method of appointment and whose functions are indicated in vv. 14–16. (CSB)

Probably Israelites who served under Egyptians in the chain of command. (TLSB)

**5:7** *straw.* Chopped and mixed with the clay as binder to make the bricks stronger. (CSB)

Egyptians mixed clay, straw, and water, and shaped the mixture with brick molds. The bricks dried in the sun. An Egyptian scroll (c 1275 BC) at the Louvre, Paris, mentions brick making, overseers, and a complaint about the lack of straw for the bricks. (TLSB)

**5:9** *lies.* The pharaoh labels all hopes of a quick release for Israel as presumptuous and false. (CSB)

**5:11** Previously, the Egyptians provided straw, but now the slaves needed to search for it.

**5:12** *stubble for straw*. Chaff (cf Is 5:24; 40:24). (TLSB)

**5:14** *foremen* … *were beaten*. The foremen were both despised as collaborators by their own people and abused by the Egyptians. (TLSB)

**5:16** *the fault is in your own people*. They boldly complained to Pharaoh about being beaten for the shortage when the Egyptians were at fault. (TLSB)

**5:17** *You are idle*. Pharaoh blamed the foremen for Moses’ requests. Cf v 8. (TLSB)

**5:19** *in trouble*. With their own people, because Pharaoh would not allow a reduction in the daily quota of bricks. (TLSB)

**5:21** *May the Lord look upon you and judge you!* See Ge 16:5; 31:49 and notes. (CSB)

*stink in the sight*. Mixed metaphor. The term for “smell” can also mean “reputation,” which was in view. (TLSB)

*a sword in their hand to kill us*. Hyperbole, indicating their anger and fear. At this point, they fear Pharaoh more than the Lord. (TLSB)

*God Promises Deliverance*

**22 Moses returned to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? 23 Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.”**

**5:22** *done evil*. A victim’s accusation. Moses has the same questions as the foremen (“Why?”; v 15) and expresses utter frustration. (TLSB)

**5:23** *Pharaoh … has done evil*. Moses softened the accusation by assigning the evil to Pharaoh. (TLSB)

*not delivered.* Moses accused God of failing to fulfill His initial promise at the burning bush (3:8). (TLSB)

**Ch 5** The Lord sends Moses to deliver the people, but Pharaoh only makes their burdens heavier. Why does God wait and put people through such suffering? Luth: “Faith does not despair of the God who sends trouble. Faith does not consider Him angry or an enemy.… Faith rises above all this and sees God’s fatherly heart behind His unfriendly exterior” (AE 14:59). • Lord, forgive my accusations and inaction in view of Your Word and the obstacles I face. Grant me confidence in Your fatherly heart. Amen. (TLSB)