

EXODUS

Chapter 5

Making Bricks Without Straw

Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” 2 But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.” 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, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens.” 5 And Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens!” 6 The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, 7 “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ 9 Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.” 10 So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. 11 Go and get your straw yourselves wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced in the least.’” 12 So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. 13 The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw.” 14 And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?” 15 Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, “Why do you treat your servants like this? 16 No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.” 17 But he said, “You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’ 18 Go now and work. No straw will be given you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks.” 19 The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they said, “You shall by no means reduce your number of bricks, your daily task each day.” 20 They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh; 21 and they said to them, “The LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” 22 Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.”

5:1 *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 *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 *taskmasters.* Probably the same as the Egyptian “slave master.s” (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 *lying words.* 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 *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)

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)