

### Moses' First Encounter with Pharaoh

#### Exodus 5

Exodus 5 – *“Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”*<sup>2</sup> *And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.’”*<sup>3</sup> *So they said, ‘The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days’ journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.’”*<sup>4</sup> *Then the king of Egypt said to them, ‘Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor.’”*<sup>5</sup> *And Pharaoh said, ‘Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!’”*

<sup>6</sup> *So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying,*<sup>7</sup> *“You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves.”*<sup>8</sup> *And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’”*<sup>9</sup> *Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words.”*<sup>10</sup> *And the taskmasters of the people and their officers went out and spoke to the people, saying, ‘Thus says Pharaoh: ‘I will not give you straw. ‘Go, get yourselves straw where you can find it; yet none of your work will be reduced.’”*<sup>12</sup> *So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw.”*<sup>13</sup> *And the taskmasters forced them to hurry, saying, ‘Fulfill your work, your daily quota, as when there was straw.’”*<sup>14</sup> *Also the officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, ‘Why have you not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and today, as before?’”*

<sup>15</sup> *Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, ‘Why are you dealing thus with your servants?’”*<sup>16</sup> *There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, ‘Make brick!’ And indeed your servants are beaten, but the fault is in your own people.”*<sup>17</sup> *But he said, ‘You are idle! Idle! Therefore you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’”*<sup>18</sup> *Therefore go now and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks.”*<sup>19</sup> *And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, ‘You shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota.’”*<sup>20</sup> *Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them.”*<sup>21</sup> *And they said to them, ‘Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.”*<sup>22</sup> *So Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me?’”*<sup>23</sup> *For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.”*

## Background Notes

At the end of Exodus 4, Moses returned to Egypt after his forty years in the land of Midian. He had started the journey from Midian with his wife and two sons, but apparently after the circumcision of the two boys along the way, Moses had sent his family back to Midian. We learn from Exodus 18 that Moses' family rejoined him in the wilderness at Mt. Sinai. Exodus 18:2-5: *After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have become a stranger in a foreign land"; and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my helper; He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the desert where he was camped near the mountain of God."*

When Moses returned to Egypt and shared with his fellow Hebrews all that the Lord was going to do for them, at first they believed and worshipped the Lord. Exodus 4:31 – *"...and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped."* However, in chapter 5 we see that things do not go well when Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh. In fact, from the human perspective, the situation got much worse! As a result, the people no longer worshiped the Lord, but rather they bad-mouthed Moses.

When Moses and Aaron first confronted Pharaoh, he said to them: *"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"* (v2). But Pharaoh did not realize that the Lord has ways of changing a person's mind—then and today! And it doesn't matter who that person is. Even a pagan king of Egypt is under God's control. Proverbs 21:1 says, *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases."*

Moses and Aaron responded to Pharaoh in verse 3: *"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."* Now this statement to Pharaoh was not deception by Moses and Aaron. Neither was it deception when they asked to go and celebrate a feast in the wilderness (v1). God directed them to request this of Pharaoh. This was a testing of Pharaoh's heart and attitude. God knew that Pharaoh would refuse, and the end result would be the complete exodus of the nation of Israel from Egypt.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Physical abuse does not mean that God has lost control.

After Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh on behalf of the children of Israel, the conditions of slavery became more severe. "No more government straw!"—that was the word. Straw was used as a reinforcement and binder for the bricks that the Hebrew slaves were required to make. (By the way, there are paintings in the Egyptian tombs of Semitic slaves making bricks. This is certainly evidence in support of the biblical account of the children of Israel making bricks as slaves in Egypt.) Now Pharaoh said the Hebrew labor force would have to find the straw for the bricks -- no more help from the

Egyptians. So the Hebrews began using stubble for straw (v12) in order to keep up with the required quota of bricks. And the physical abuse was increased. The Hebrew foremen were beaten, and were asked, *“Why didn’t you meet your quota of bricks yesterday and today, as before?”* (v14).

It certainly seemed that God was not in control in this situation. God’s people were not being delivered from Egypt -- in fact, the physical abuse of His people had increased! But we know the rest of the story, don’t we? God had reasons for allowing His people to be abused. One reason was that it certainly made the people want to leave Egypt! For sure! Later on, even after suffering this kind of abuse, most of the people later complained in the wilderness -- and actually wanted to return to Egypt! Can you imagine how much more they would have complained and wanted to return if there had been no physical abuse? If there had been no misery and physical abuse in Egypt, the people certainly would have gone back to Egypt. God had his reasons for allowing the oppression, even including the physical abuse of His people in Egypt. We know that God had not lost control.

This is true today as well. We don’t know all the reasons why God may allow His people to be abused, even physically abused. But God knows, and He never loses control. This does not mean that we don’t have a responsibility to stop physical abuse whenever and wherever it occurs. But sometimes God permits it to happen, even to His faithful people, for reasons that we may not know until we get to heaven.

God is still in control. Physical abuse does not mean that God has lost control.

## **2. Personal attack does not mean that God doesn’t care.**

In verses 20-21 we see Moses under personal attack by his own people. Moses was putting his life at risk, going before Pharaoh on behalf of God’s people -- and what kind of credit did he get? He got blamed for all the problems!

Has that ever happened to you as a parent, as a leader, as a servant in the church? Here you are, trying to do your job and help people, and they turn on you and blame you for all the problems. A number of years ago I led a church youth group, and I sacrificed a lot of my time to do it. And then I got blamed, of all things, for not providing enough entertainment!! (Give me a break!) Personal attack when we’re trying to do the right thing doesn’t seem fair. Does God care? Yes, He does care.

God cared for Moses and He cares for you. Personal attack does not mean that God doesn’t care. We know from the rest of the story, and from the rest of the Bible, that God greatly cared for His servant Moses, and Moses will be greatly rewarded in Heaven.

The apostle Paul was personally attacked and criticized, even by fellow believers, about his looks and his speech! Some of the Corinthian believers said that Paul’s letters were weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible (2 Corinthians 10:10)! This same type of criticism will come into our lives from time to time. We will undergo personal attack, even by people we’re trying to help. But this does not mean that God doesn’t care. He does care, and you will be rewarded for your faithfulness.

In 1 Corinthians 15:58 we read, *“My dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”* You may undergo personal criticism and attack as you labor for the Lord, but take heart: God cares, and you will be rewarded for your faithfulness. Personal attack does not mean that God doesn't care.

## **Practical Application**

### **Take it to the Lord in prayer.**

What should we do when we are personally attacked, as Moses was personally attacked? We should take it to the Lord in prayer, just as Moses did. Notice that Moses laid the whole situation out before the Lord in verses 22-23: “Lord, why did you let this happen? And why did you ever call me? I've gone to Pharaoh as you said, but he won't let the people go. In fact, he's hurting the people even more!”

Now it was not wrong for Moses to say this to the Lord. Moses didn't have a bad attitude -- he was simply being honest before the Lord. It's not wrong for us to lay all our doubts and problems out before the Lord in honest prayer. As long as we have an honest and humble attitude, it's not wrong to ask God, “What's going on?” The Lord will hear and answer our prayers, just as He did for Moses, as we'll see in chapter 6.

So if you come under personal attack, and you can't understand why God is allowing certain things to happen in your life, ask the Lord to give you some insight. And He will! Take it to the Lord in prayer.