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You Are No Longer to Supply the People with Straw

5: 1-9

You are no longer to supply the people with straw **DIG: Carefully read verses 2 and 3. Compare and contrast Pharaoh's response to that of Moses in 3:4 and 11, 4:1 and 10, 13, 19-20, and of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-4, 22:1-3), after each one hears a word from God.**

REFLECT: When have you ever tried to serve the LORD faithfully, only to have things seemingly blow up in your face? How did you handle it? Did you blame ADONAI or Satan? Did you retreat or carry on? Did you put on the armor of God (Galatians 6:10-18), or turn to the world?

This must have been an exciting meeting. **Moses** and **Aaron** fully expected a quick end to **Pharaoh's** destructive plan. But that's not what happened. Things would get worse before they got better.⁷⁷ **The Egyptian ruler**, an absolute monarch, was proud and unyielding, and believed that he was a god. Therefore, **he** refused to listen to **God** and **His** servant **Moses**. As **his** resistance stiffened, the way was prepared for the horror of the ten plagues.⁷⁸

Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said confidently: **This is what ADONAI, the God of Isra'el says: Let My people go, so that they may hold a festival to Me in the desert (5:1).** But where are **the elders of Isra'el** who were to accompany **Moses** and **Aaron** to **the Egyptian** court (**3:18**)? **Their** failure to show up was in direct disobedience to the command of **God**. Maybe this was a foreshadowing of **their** unbelief. The request: **Let My people go**, will be made seven times (**5:1, 7:16, 8:1 and 20, 9:1 and 13, 10:3**).

There's going to be a wedding. In **Exodus 6:7**, **YHVH** tells **Isra'el** "I will take you." This was the **engagement**. Here we see **the separation of the bride**. Thus being engaged, **the bride, Isra'el**, was not permitted to pursue other grooms. To help **her**, **God** began a separation process with the purpose of making **her** unreachable for other pursuers and helping to remove any temptations on **her** part.

This process culminated with the **Exodus**. The theological terminology is called “sanctification,” a separation from everything else to serve only **YHVH**. Accordingly, notice that **Moshe’s** main plea to **Pharaoh** throughout the Ten Plagues was: **This is what ADOANI says, “Let My people go, so that they may serve Me.”** Next we see *the segulah*, the **LORD** telling **His** would-be **bride, Isra’el**, that **she** is **His beloved treasure** (see [De](#) - **The Calling of Isra’el**).

The ultimate purpose of **God** was the total freedom **of Isra’el** from the slavery **of Egypt**. But at this point **Moses** presents a very understated request, just **a three-day journey** to Mount Sinai to sacrifice to **God in the desert**. Work-lists from Deir el-Medina in Thebes reveal that workers had days off for a variety of reasons, including *offering to one’s god*. Thus, the request made by **Moses** and **Aaron** was not all that remarkable or unexpected.⁷⁹ The purpose of this request was to show the unreasonableness of **Pharaoh**. **He** would not grant even that very minimal request, let alone the freedom of the entire nation. Therefore, **he** deserved the punishment that would be given to **him**.

Pharaoh, of course, paid no attention to **their** demands and responded: **Who is ADONAI that I should obey Him and let Isra’el go? I do not know ADONAI and I will not let Isra’el go (5:2)**. This is a rhetorical question with no answer expected. **Pharaoh** simply regarded **himself** as the true god of **Egypt** and was far superior to **the God of the Hebrews**. Yet, **God** would introduce **Himself** by bringing the ten plagues upon **the land of Egypt (7:5)**.

Did **Pharaoh** not know **the God of Isra’el**? Of course he did. **The Egyptians** had ruled **the Hebrews** for some time, and while not agreeing with **them**, **they** knew exactly what and **Whom they** believed in. However, unlike other rulers in the ancient Near East, **the Egyptian Pharaoh** did not merely rule for the gods, but **he** was in a literal sense one of the gods. **His** birth was considered a divine act. In light of this, it is not difficult to see why **Pharaoh** reacted as **he** did to the initial request of **Moses** and **Aaron**. **The king**, as a god, was to have sole rule over **his** people. In fact, **the Egyptians** well-being was directly associated with that of **the king** (see [Bc](#) - **Pharaoh as god and Upholder of Ma’at**). It was **his** duty to maintain *Ma’at*, which would bring justice, peace and prosperity in **the land**.⁸⁰

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 ADONAI our God, or He may strike you with plagues or with the sword (5:3)**. It is almost as if the two **Hebrew** leaders were throwing **themselves** on the mercy of **the Egyptian**

king.⁸¹ Unfortunately, the demand of **Moses and Aaron** backfired. **Pharaoh** decided to use it as an excuse for making the work of **the Israelites** harder. Now **they** had to find the **straw** to make the **bricks** on **their** own.

But kings do not respond well to threats, and here **Amenhotep II** makes no concessions whatsoever. In fact, **he** becomes the accuser. **He** declared: "**Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!**" (5:4).

Then Pharaoh said: "**Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working**" (5:5). Literally, *your people are now more numerous than the Egyptians*. **The Hebrews** were so **numerous** that **they** posed a military threat. If **they** stopped their **work**, **they** would have time to align themselves with an enemy or plot sedition. **He** thought that **he** could smother **their** desire to leave **Egypt** by increasing **their** workload.

So **that same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people (5:6)**. There were three levels of **the slave** labor supervision. First there were **the slave masters**, who oversaw the labor camps (1:11), and **they** were all **Egyptians**. Secondly, underneath **them** there were **the slave drivers**, or **overseers**, who were also **Egyptian**. Thirdly, below **the slave drivers** were **the foremen (5:10, 13-15)**, or **Hebrews** who were in charge of the different labor groups doing the actual work.



He said: **You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw (5:7)**. **Straw** was the glue that held **the bricks** together. **They** made **bricks** by combining mud from the Nile Valley with **straw** and chaff, placing the mixture in rectangular molds. Then **they** let **them** bake in the sun.⁸² Up to this point the **straw** had been provided to **the Hebrews** for the purpose of making **bricks**.

But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; this is why they are crying out: **Let us go and sacrifice to our God (5:8).** Pharaoh doesn't even consider the possibility that there is any truth or reality in the **God of the Hebrews**. In **his** mind **he** was a god and would not tolerate any other! **They** had the same quota **of bricks**, but now **they** had to find **their own straw**. This amounted to more work, with less time to do it. **Pharaoh** was going to show **Moses** and **his God** who was in charge!

Make the work harder, or heavy, **for the men so that they will keep working and** not have time for what **he** perceived to be the **lies** of the two brothers **(5:9)**. **He** accused **Moses and Aaron** of lying about **their** encounter with **God**. **They** were false prophets in **his** eyes, promising a salvation that could not be delivered. The actual verb used here for heavy is *kabed*. It is the same verb used later in **10:1**, where **God** hardens **Pharaoh's heart**. **The king of Egypt** sensed that **the Hebrews** had hope in the message of **Moses and Aaron**, so **he** wanted to stop it before it began. However, because **Amenhotep II** oppressed **the Hebrews**, **God** oppressed **him**.

Like **the king of Egypt**, today there are those who say that they don't know **God** or can't find **God**. They use this as an excuse to carry on with their sinful ways **and suppress the truth by their wickedness**. But the Bible says that **what may be known about God is plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men and women are without excuse (Romans 1:18b-20)**. Every time we see a sunset, every time we hear the waves crashing and smell the salty air, we see Him **from what has been made**. **Pharaoh** was blinded because he thought he was a god. Do you have an excuse to reject **Him**?