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You Must Produce Your Full Quota of Bricks

5: 10-21

You must produce your full quota of bricks DIG: How would you characterize the response of the people when faced with extra work? Now who is surprised? Why? How is Isra'el's vision and Moses' leadership now tested?

REFLECT: How do you respond to temporary setbacks? To what extent do you respond like Isra'el here? When have you suffered for what someone else has done? When this happens, what reassurance can you draw from Isra'el's experience here?

Then the Egyptian slave masters and the foremen went out and told the people that Pharaoh said they would not be given **any more straw**. **Moses** and **Aaron** were not able to mediate anything with **Pharaoh**. **The King of Egypt** even attempted to prove **his** power as a god (**to see link click Bc - Pharaoh as god and upholder of Ma'at**) by dictating how the slaves should work. **Pharaoh's** commands were arrogantly announced in the same manner in which **Moses and Aaron** proclaimed **His** words when **they** first met.⁸³ **They** had said: **This is what ADONAI, God of Isra'el says: Let My people go (5:1)**. But then, this was what **Pharaoh**, god of **Egypt** said: **Go and get your own stubble wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all (5:10-11)**.

So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble left in the fields **to use for straw (5:12)**. **Stubble** is the mere leftovers of **straw**, and therefore of poorer quality, making their work even more difficult. But in spite of everything, they were not permitted to reduce their daily quota **of bricks (5:8, 11, 13-14, 18-19)**. The **straw** itself is not so much a binding agent, but its chemical decay in the clay released an acid (like glutamic or gallic acid), which gave the clay greater smoothness for brick making. It should be pointed out here that **Moses** did not present the Hebrews as making bricks without **straw** as is sometimes stated. The decree of **Pharaoh** clearly instructed them to use **stubble**, but the difference was that they had to gather it themselves.⁸⁴

The slave drivers kept pressing the Hebrew **foremen**, saying: **Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw**. **The Israelite foreman 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 (5:13-14)? Out of sheer spite, they were given an impossible task and beaten when they did not complete it. **Moses and Aaron** had given **Pharaoh** a reason to destroy **the Israelites**, and **he** was taking advantage of it. This doesn't seem like a logical thing to do. Why would **he** destroy **his** work force? But we must never forget that Satan is always behind the scenes working against **the people of God**. **He** knew what was at stake. If he could destroy **the Jews, the Savior** could not come.

But the task of meeting **brick quotas** by gathering **stubble** became too much for the already weary **Israelites**. Sometimes slaves were permitted to make their complaints directly to **Pharaoh**, bypassing **the slave masters**. Sometimes their complaints were successful, as Egyptian records show. So instead of going to **God** the Hebrew **foremen** cried out to **Pharaoh** saying: **Why have you treated your servants this way? 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** who refuse to give us **straw** as before **(5:15-16)**. They were not loyal to **God**, but to **Pharaoh**. Three times **they** refer to **themselves** as **Pharaoh's servants**, thus showing **their** true colors. **They** try to convince **him** that it was not **their** fault, but **their** cries fell on deaf ears. This is what happens to us when we go to the world **(First John 2:15-17)**, when we should be going to **the LORD**.

Pharaoh not only refused to listen to **their** cry, but **he** mocks them as well. **He** not only made **their** work harder by providing no **straw**, but **he** also rubs salt in **their** wounds by accusing them of bringing this whole situation on **themselves** by saying: **Lazy, that's what you are - lazy! That is why you keep saying, "Let us go and sacrifice to ADONAI."** **Pharaoh** repeats **his** same accusation as in **verse 8**. **He** refuses to give an inch. **His** heart has truly been hardened. **He** said: **Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks (5:17-18)**.



Therefore, **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" (5:19)**.

The beginning of this verse literally says: **The Israelite foremen realized they were in evil.** Consequently, **the Hebrew foremen finally realized** that **Pharaoh** represented the Evil One or Satan.

For now, **Pharaoh's** strategy of disparaging **Moses'** reputation among **the Israelites** was working. **When the foremen left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron** and confronted **them.** **They** bitterly complained to **them** saying: **May ADONAI look upon you and judge you!** It was hypocritical that **they** called upon **ADONAI** to **judge Moses and Aaron,** when **they themselves** did not believe that **He** could, or would, save **them!** **They** literally said: **You have caused our smell to stink in the eyes of Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us (5:20-21).** But **Moses and Aaron** were not to blame; **Pharaoh** was at fault. Jacob said the same thing to Simeon and Levi after they slaughtered the men of Shechem. **He** said: **You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed (Genesis 34:30).** *How many times have we done the same thing and blamed God for something that Satan has done?*

It wasn't like **they** were hanging tough and seeing what **God** would do in **their** horrible situation. **They** first complained to **Pharaoh,** and when that didn't work, **they** complained to **Moses and Aaron.** **Moses** did not attempt to answer the charge of **those** who stood before **him,** but in the quietness of the hours that followed we are informed that **Moshe returned to God** and brought **his** case before **the One** who had sent **him.**⁸⁵

At no time did **God** promise that **Moses' and Aaron's** task would be easy. Here we see that **their** work was fraught with danger and difficulties. **Pharaoh** responded to **their** demands by making life even more miserable for **the Hebrews** by forcing **them** to gather **straw** for making **bricks.** **The Hebrew foremen** were no consolation. **They** attacked **Moses and Aaron** as the source of **their** misery. The two **prophets** seemed to be standing alone.

When **the LORD** calls us, the road is not always easy, straight or simple. One need only think of a missionary like J. Hudson Taylor, whom **God** called to evangelize China in the mid-nineteenth century. He suffered great deprivations in his life and ministry, loss of loved ones in the field and illness. Yet **ADONAI** did wondrous things through that man, as many Chinese became believers. During one serious illness, Taylor admitted to a friend, "I believe that **God** has enabled me to do more for China during this long illness than I might have done had I been well." He knew his mission was wholly dependent upon the power of **God.** Even today, a century and a half later, Taylor's work lives on and is reaping great rewards in



China. In our lives and ministries we are also to rely and depend upon **God's** power and the strength given by **the Holy Spirit**. Like **Moses**, we are called to live by faith, and not by sight.⁸⁶