

EXODUS CHAPTER 5-6

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In the previous chapters, the Lord took notice of Israel in bondage and commissioned a reluctant Moses to confront the king of Egypt and tell this Pharaoh to let Israel go peaceably. God had also foretold that Pharaoh wouldn't agree.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH PHARAOH

(5:1.) After this presentation to Israel's leaders, Moses and Aaron went and spoke to Pharaoh. They told him, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Let My people go so they may hold a festival in My honor in the wilderness."

- The script given by the **Lord** was followed exactly. **Moses** was taking the role of a prophet from God. He was speaking to a Pharaoh who may have considered himself to be a god. Notice that there was *no suggestion* of God's power through miracles. That came later.
- **The Lord** had promised that **Pharaoh** would refuse. Exodus 3:19. This request was an insult to Pharaoh because he viewed these slaves as belonging to *him*, not some other deity.

(2.) "Is that so?" retorted Pharaoh. "And who is the LORD? Why should I listen to Him and let Israel go? I don't know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go."

- The king was quick to respond and his answer was as expected. *NO*. **The LORD** was not a god that he knew about and would not obey.

(3.) But Aaron and Moses persisted. "The God of the Hebrews has met with us," they declared. "So let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness so we can offer sacrifices to the

LORD our God. If we don't, He will kill us with a plague or with the sword."

- **Aaron** repeated the request, giving Pharaoh one more chance to change. He made it clear that he's talking about **the God of the Hebrews**.
- The request was reasonable. **Wilbur Fields** writes:

Every nation presents sacrifices and worship to its gods. Work-journals belonging to the New Kingdom period (time of Moses) in Egypt have furnished, among other reasons for absenteeism, the offering of sacrifices by workmen to their gods.

Pharaoh's refusal shows his complete lack of consideration for people, and his lack of fear of God. By refusing a small request, his real heart-nature was exposed and his conduct condemned. His heart did not need very much hardening to be totally solid!

"GET BACK TO WORK"

(4.) Pharaoh replied, "Moses and Aaron, why are you distracting the people from their tasks? Get back to work! (5) Look, there are many of your people in the land, and you are stopping them from their work."

- **Pharaoh** didn't want any time off **work** for the Hebrews, not even **Moses and Aaron**. He was thinking about the money that he would lose in granting this request to go worship a god that he did not even acknowledge.

FIND YOUR OWN STRAW BUT KEEP UP YOUR QUOTA

(6.) That same day Pharaoh sent this order to the Egyptian slave drivers and the Israelite foremen: (7) "Do not supply any more straw for making bricks. Make the people get it themselves! (8) But still require them to make the same number of bricks as before. Don't reduce the quota. They are lazy. That's why they are crying out, 'Let us go and offer sacrifices to our God.'

- **Pharaoh** even made an immediate order that the **Israelites** should gather their own **straw** used in **brick** making. The



order had a punishment component to it. Bricks were used for residential and public construction in Egypt. These mud **bricks** work well in Egypt that has only a tiny rainfall. The **straw** contained an enzyme that made the mud much easier to mix and handle.

(9.) Load them down with more work. Make them sweat! That will teach them to listen to lies!"

- The Hebrew men will be expected to work harder and not pay any attention to the **lying** words of Moses and Aaron. This response of requiring even more production must have been disappointing to the Hebrew workmen. They had backed Moses and Aaron at first. Now, Pharaoh is driving a wedge between Moses and Aaron on the one hand and the leaders of Israel on the other hand. It worked for a while.

(10.) So the slave drivers and foremen went out and told the people: "This is what Pharaoh says: I will not provide any more straw for you. (11) Go and get it yourselves. Find it wherever you can. But you must produce just as many bricks as before!" (12) So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt in search of stubble to use as straw. (13) Meanwhile, the Egyptian slave drivers continued to push hard. "Meet your

daily quota of bricks, just as you did when we provided you with straw!" they demanded.

- The Egyptian **slave drivers** and Hebrew **foremen** (would they be called **straw** bosses?) did just as commanded and the people worked harder than before.

(14.) Then they whipped the Israelite foremen they had put in charge of the work crews. "Why haven't you met your quotas either yesterday or today?" they demanded.

- Even the **Israelite foremen** were beaten when the daily **quota** of bricks was not reached.

(15.) So the Israelite foremen went to Pharaoh and pleaded with him. "Please don't treat your servants like this," they begged. (16) "We are given no straw, but the slave drivers still demand, 'Make bricks!' We are being beaten, but it isn't our fault! Your own people are to blame!"

- The Hebrew **foremen** denounced the beatings to **Pharaoh's** face and **blamed** the Egyptians for not supplying the **straw**.

(17.) But Pharaoh shouted, "You're just lazy! Lazy! That's why you're saying, 'Let us go and offer sacrifices to the LORD.'

- **Pharaoh** said they weren't working hard enough and that's why they wanted time off to **sacrifice to the Lord**.

(18.) Now get back to work! No straw will be given to you, but you must still produce the full quota of bricks." (19.) The Israelite foremen could see that they were in serious trouble when they were told, "You must not reduce the number of bricks you make each day."

- Pharaoh repeated his edict.

THE FOREMEN BLAME MOSES AND AARON

(20.) As they left Pharaoh's court, they confronted Moses and Aaron, who were waiting outside for them. (21) The foremen said to them, "May the LORD judge and punish you for making us stink before Pharaoh and his officials. You have put a sword into their hands, an excuse to kill us!"

- Now the **foremen** blamed **Moses and Aaron** for their plight. They even invoked **the Lord's** name against the two leaders. They should have asked for support from the **Lord** instead of blaming the prophets whom the Lord had sent. This was very discouraging to Moses and Aaron in their quest to release their nation from bondage.

(22.) Then Moses went back to the LORD and protested, "Why have You brought all this trouble on Your own people, Lord? Why did You send me? (23) Ever since I came to Pharaoh as Your spokesman, he has been even more brutal to Your people. And You have done nothing to rescue them!"

- Discouraged **Moses** was ready to resign his new job of being a spokesman for the **Lord**. He knew he was making life worse for his **people** and the **Lord** had not yet **rescued** His **people** from bondage. Read on to hear the **Lord's** response.

THE LORD PROMISED DECISIVE ACTION

(6:1.) Then the LORD told Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. When he feels the force of My

strong hand, he will let the people go. In fact, he will force them to leave his land!"

- The **Lord** says that **Pharaoh** will **force** Israel out of **his land**. That's a complete reversal for him. This would not be a simple agreement for Israel to leave. Pharaoh would drive them out with a **strong hand**.

(2.) And God said to Moses, "I am Yahweh—'the LORD.' (3.) I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El-Shaddai—'God Almighty'—but I did not reveal My name, Yahweh, to them.

- **God** carefully identifies himself with the Hebrew Patriarchs. His is the Creator of the universe. This pusillanimous Pharaoh guy is a very small challenge for the Lord.
- We find the name Jehovah back in Genesis. How is it that God did not make his name known **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**? **Wilbur Fields** answer this question:

The explanation seems to be that to God knowing that his name is Jehovah means knowing what that name implies. It implies knowing his eternal nature, and how He will deliver his people.

Abraham knew Jehovah by name; but he never lived to learn the glorious Jehovah-type fulfillment of His promises or how He delivered His people. Even we do not really know a person when we know only what his name is.

In our language and idiom we do not speak of people as not knowing our names just because they do not know our works and personalities. But God so speaks of His name.

- God did not do any massive miracles during the time of the Patriarchs, but just wait. **Moses** will see miracles like have never been heard of before.

(4.) And I reaffirmed My covenant with them. Under its terms, I promised to give them the land of Canaan, where they were living as foreigners.

- God restates the **covenant** with the Patriarchs. There will be massive miracles to accomplish that.

(5.) You can be sure that I have heard the groans of the people of Israel, who are now slaves to the Egyptians. And I am well aware of My covenant with them.

- God has heard Israel's **groanings** and remembered the **covenant** of old. He has the absolute power to accomplish His goals.

(6.) "Therefore, say to the people of Israel: 'I am the LORD. I will free you from your oppression and will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment.

- The earlier promise to deliver the nation is restated. The Creator of the universe can handle this. He will deliver **Israel** from **slavery**. They haven't seen anything yet. The Lord is telling Moses to get back to work on the project of getting Israel out of Egypt.

(7.) I will claim you as My own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt.

- The **Lord** again claims Israel as His **people** and repeats His promise to get the **burden** of the Egyptians off of their backs.

(8.) I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you as your very own possession. I am the LORD!"

- God also restates their destination as the **land** promised to **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**.

PEOPLE WOULD NO LONGER LISTEN TO MOSES

(9.) So Moses told the people of Israel what the LORD had said, but they refused to listen anymore. They had become too discouraged by the brutality of their slavery. (10.) Then the LORD said to Moses, (11) "Go back to Pharaoh, the king of

Egypt, and tell him to let the people of Israel leave his country."

- The **Lord's** new request was far stronger than the first. This time **Pharaoh** would be asked to release the nation **Israel**. Let them leave **Egypt** permanently.

(12.) "But LORD!" Moses objected. "My own people won't listen to me anymore. How can I expect Pharaoh to listen? I'm such a clumsy speaker! "

- **Moses** said the **people** would not **listen** to him. How could he expect **Pharaoh** to **listen**? He's still wanting out of his assignment.

(13.) But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them orders for the Israelites and for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The LORD commanded Moses and Aaron to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

- The entire project is restated by the **Lord** to His prophets and they are again ordered into action.

SUMMARY OF KEY FAMILIES

Moses now inserts a brief genealogy into the record that covers some of the tribe of Reuben, Simeon and especially Levi. The entry for Levi shows that Moses and Aaron were from this family group. We have used enlarged print, underlining and color so the reader can quickly grasp the purpose of the list.

Albert Barnes writes: "We have in the following verses, not a complete genealogy, but a summary account of the family of the two brothers. Moses records for the satisfaction of Hebrew readers, to whom genealogical questions were always interesting, the descent and position of the designated leaders of the nation."

(14.) These are the ancestors of some of the clans of Israel:

The sons of Reuben, Israel's oldest son, were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. Their descendants became the clans of Reuben.

(15.) The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar, and Shaul. (Shaul's mother was a Canaanite woman.) Their descendants became the clans of Simeon.

(16.) These are the descendants of Levi, as listed in their family records: The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. (Levi lived to be 137 years old.)

(17.) The descendants of Gershon included Libni and Shimei, each of whom became the ancestor of a clan.

(18.) The descendants of Kohath included **Amram**, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. (Kohath lived to be 133 years old.)

(19.) The descendants of Merari included Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites, as listed in their family records.

(20.) **Amram** married his father's sister Jochebed, and she gave birth to his sons, **Aaron** and **Moses**. (Amram lived to be 137 years old.)

- In this genealogy **Aaron** is listed first, but the younger brother is selected by the Lord for leadership. This relationship is verified in Numbers:

The Libnites, the Hebronites, the Mahlites, the Mushites, and the Korahites were all subclans of the Levites. Now Kohath was the ancestor of Amram, and Amram's wife was named Jochebed. She also was a descendant of Levi, born among the Levites in the land of Egypt. Amram and

Jochebed became the parents of Aaron, Moses, and their sister, Miriam.

(Numbers 26:58-59 NLT)

- There are commentators who believe that the Amram of verse 18 is an earlier and different person than the father of Moses.

(21.) The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg, and Zicri.

(22.) The sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri.

(23.) Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she gave birth to his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

(24.) The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. Their descendants became the clans of Korah.

(25.) Eleazar son of Aaron married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she gave birth to his son, Phinehas. These are the ancestors of the Levite families, listed according to their clans.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

(26.) The Aaron and Moses named in this list are the same ones to whom the LORD said, "Lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt like an army." (27) It was Moses and Aaron who spoke to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, about leading the people of Israel out of Egypt.

- Now the story leaves the abbreviated genealogy and returns to **Aaron and Moses.**

(28.) When the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, (29) He said to him, "I am the LORD! Tell Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, everything I am telling you." (30) But Moses argued

with the LORD, saying, "I can't do it! I'm such a clumsy speaker! Why should Pharaoh listen to me?"

- Verses 28-30 are best discussed in the next lesson and so will be repeated there. The written text of Exodus is inspired by the Lord, but the chapter divisions are a tool of later workers and are *not* inspired. Our English chapter divisions were put in place by Steven Langton of England who died in 1228.