

Moses and Aaron have their first meeting with Pharaoh and, as the LORD predicted, Pharaoh did not respond well to the news that the LORD wanted the children of Israel to leave Egypt. In fact, Pharaoh's response was to increase the already intense labors of the children of Israel. However, the LORD promises deliverance in spite of Pharaoh's determination to keep them in bondage.

Exodus 5

1 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.

“And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh” – After informing the children of Israel of the LORD's plans, Moses and Aaron go to see Pharaoh.

“Thus saith the LORD [Jehovah; Yahweh] God of Israel” – Moses and Aaron speak to Pharaoh in the name of the LORD, using the name He made known to Moses: “Yahweh” (Ex. 3:14). Pharaoh would obviously not be familiar with a god with this name.

“Let my people go [to send away], that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness” – The Hebrew word for “go” indicates that this command is not for some time off for the children of Israel but for their permanent departure from Egypt. The LORD is calling His people out to worship Him in a manner that they could not do while in Egypt with all its gods.

2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

Pharaoh recognizes the gods of the Egyptians but he is unfamiliar with the name “Yahweh” and does not recognize His authority. For all he knows, Moses has created a fictitious name of a god in order to convince him to allow the children of Israel to leave. Pharaoh is not convinced and refuses to let Israel leave.

3 And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.

Moses and Aaron clarify that the LORD is the God of the Hebrews and He has met with them to give them these instructions (Ex. 3:18). The Hebrews are to go “three days' journey” into the desert and offer sacrifices to the LORD and they risk the punishment of God if they do not obey. Apparently the journey to Mt. Sinai would take three days from where they resided in Egypt (Ex. 3:13).

4 And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. 5 And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now *are* many, and ye make them rest from their burdens.

“And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let [to cause to refrain] the people from their works?” – Pharaoh considers this meeting with Moses and Aaron to be a waste of time and asks why they are distracting the Israelites from their work.

“get you unto your burdens” – This is likely directed toward the elders of Israel because the LORD had instructed Moses and Aaron to take these elders with them when they met with Pharaoh (Ex. 3:18). Pharaoh is telling them to “get back to work!”

“And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now *are* many, and ye make them rest from their burdens” – Pharaoh's point seems to be that the demands of Moses, Aaron, and their God would make an enormous impact on the work being done due to the size of the Hebrew workforce. If the Hebrews left Egypt then a lot of work would go undone.

6 And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, 7 Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish *ought* thereof: for they *be* idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go *and* sacrifice to our God. 9 Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words.

Pharaoh appears to be annoyed at the audacity of the children of Israel to want to be relieved of their burdens and so he punishes them by making their burdens even heavier. He instructs the taskmasters to no longer provide the straw for making bricks (an essential ingredient) and place that responsibility on the children of Israel. They are to gather their own straw and still meet the same quota of bricks that was required before. Pharaoh mockingly says that they must not have enough work to do since they have time to whine about sacrificing to their God. He says they should be given more work so that they do not have time to listen to the empty talk of people like Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 5:10-23: Gathering straw for the making of brick takes so much time that the children of Israel are unable to meet the required quota of bricks and the taskmasters punish the Israelite foremen. When these foremen complain to Pharaoh, he appears to lose his temper, crying out “Ye are idle, ye are idle!” and refuses to give them any relief. The foremen then go to Moses and Aaron and blame them for making things worse for them. Moses prays to the LORD and asks why He has allowed things to happen this way. Instead of the LORD delivering the people, things has only gotten worse. This often happens when we ask the LORD for help in a particular situation. However, this is usually because the LORD wants us to know that He is the One solving the problem and not human hands or random chance. He lets things get worse before they get better in order to strengthen our faith. Jesus did this when Lazarus was sick (John 11:1-45).

Exodus 6

1 Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.

“Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh” – After complaining to the LORD that things are worse rather than better because they had obeyed Him (Ex. 5:22-23), the LORD assures Moses that He has everything under control. The LORD had predicted that Pharaoh would be stubborn and would not let the children of Israel go without being forced (Ex. 3:19-20). Now Moses will be able to see the LORD fulfill the remainder of the prediction through the signs and wonders He will perform.

“for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land” – The LORD’s strong hand will convince Pharaoh to let the people go. In fact, when the LORD is done with Egypt, Pharaoh will be so anxious for the children of Israel to leave that he will drive them out “with a strong hand.” Pharaoh will be as strongly motivated for them to leave as he is for them to stay at this time.

2 And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I *am* the LORD: 3 And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by *the name of* God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.

The LORD identifies Himself again to Moses, declaring His name as the “LORD” and being the same God that appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The name “LORD” in v. 2 and “Jehovah” (more correctly translated as “Yahweh”) in v. 3 are the same Hebrew word, meaning “the self-existent one.” The name is derived from the Hebrew word translated “I AM” in Ex. 3:14 when the LORD answered Moses’ question about the name of Who sent him. Here the LORD says that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob only knew Him as “God Almighty.” Commentators point out that the name “Yahweh” (Jehovah) was known prior to the LORD revealing it to Moses in Ex. 3:14, so the LORD was apparently speaking of experiential knowledge. They point out that “God Almighty” (El Shaddai) is a title and not a name, so the patriarchs understood the LORD as the all-powerful God but they had not experienced Him as the eternal self-existent God. Moses and the rest of Israel will now see the LORD in a way that they have not seen before (“Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh”).

4 And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. 5 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant.

The LORD is prepared to reveal Himself as the eternal self-existent God by remembering the promise to give Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan over 400 years after their deaths. He has heard the groaning of the children of Israel (a result of their suffering) and is ready to start fulfilling the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Many times our suffering is an opportunity for God to work in our lives as we’ve never seen Him work before.

6 Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I *am* the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments:

The LORD instructs Moses to deliver this message to the children of Israel: the LORD promises to free them from the burdens of Egypt, redeeming them with “a stretched out arm” (an arm of action) and great judgments against their oppressors in Egypt.

7 And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I *am* the LORD.

The LORD defines the relationship between Himself and the children of Israel. They will be His people and He will be their God. He will take responsibility for watching over them because they are His people and they will worship Him and Him alone because He is their God. The confirmation of this relationship will be the fact that He will rescue them from their bondage in Egypt and fulfill the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by bringing them into the land that He promised to them. It will not be a temporary occupation of the land, but He will be giving it to them “for an heritage.” They will possess the land forever.

9 And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.

Moses delivers the message of what the LORD said to the children of Israel, but they would not listen. The last time he and Aaron had gotten the children of Israel’s hopes up things did not turn out so well. The situation had actually gotten worse for them and now they were not willing to listen to what Moses and the LORD had to say for fear that their situation would degrade even more. Discouragement can make us ignore the things that ought to give us hope.

Exodus 6:10-30: The LORD then commands Moses to go speak to Pharaoh once again about setting the children of Israel free. Moses complains, saying that if the children of Israel would not listen to him, why should he think that Pharaoh would listen, considering his inability to speak? The passage then summarizes the heads of the families (tribes) of the children of Israel for Jacob’s three eldest sons: Reuben, Simeon and Levi. It follows the family of Levi until it gets to Moses and Aaron and their children and we discover the names of Moses’ parents: Amram and Jochebed.