



## Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 5:1-23

Topic

Unable to meet the quota of bricks unreasonably demanded by Pharaoh, the Hebrew crew chiefs are beaten by their Egyptian taskmasters

Title

*"Brick or Beat"*

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Memes are captioned photos or videos on social media that are intended to be funny by ridiculing human behavior.

Have you encountered any with the caption, *The Struggle is Real?*

- There's one that is a picture of someone desperate to cook a slice of bacon using a hairstyling flat iron.
- Another shows a compact car with a home window air-conditioner installed, plugged-in to a gasoline generator bolted on the trunk lid.

There are a slew of *Struggle is Real* meme's involving T-Rex's trying to do things with their tiny arms.

In our verses, Moses confronts Pharaoh for the first time. For Moses and the Hebrews, the struggle **is** real:

- Instead of letting the Hebrews go on a three-day religious holiday, Pharaoh orders them to meet their regular quota of bricks while withholding the necessary straw to make them.
- Instead of rallying behind Moses as their deliverer, the Hebrew foremen blame him for their worsening predicament.

God had promised He would lead His people out of Egypt. Why put-up with Pharaoh's refusals?

One reason for it is something we mention quite a lot, but that is so important we can't emphasize it too much. I'm talking about God's longsuffering. God was longsuffering towards Pharaoh.

One thing we should realize about God's longsuffering: By virtue of our relationship with Jesus, *we are active participants with God in His longsuffering*. As He waits, we wait with Him. As such, we can find ourselves in *peril* like the Jews, and *perplexed* like Moses.

I'll organize my comments about longsuffering around two points: #1 Your Participation In God's Longsuffering Will Lead You Into Peril, and #2 Your Participation In God's Longsuffering Will Leave You Feeling Perplexed.

## #1 Your Participation In God's Longsuffering Will Lead You Into Peril

(v1-19)

There are always two primary reasons for God's longsuffering:

1. The first is to give every sinner genuine opportunities to repent and be saved.
2. The second is to show that God gave those genuine opportunities in abundance so that the unrepentant sinner has no argument about God being unfair in His eventual judgment.

The waiting that Moses and the Hebrews were called upon to endure while God dealt with Pharaoh illustrates our own waiting while God strives with sinners to be saved. That's the application.

Exo 5:1 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.' "

You don't need to say much to say a lot. Some of history's greatest speeches were incredibly short. God's message to Pharaoh is right up there with the best of them.

If the goal was to deliver Israel from Egypt, why start by asking permission to take a long weekend to celebrate a religious feast?

What they were asking was reasonable, and would not have hurt Egypt or its economy. Pharaoh's refusal establishes that he was against God from the beginning. He was making a willful choice to disobey God.

Exo 5:2 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."

The Egyptians worshipped many gods - Anubis, Isis, Ra, and Set are some we've heard of. I saw one list of forty-nine Egyptian gods. The nations surrounding Egypt had their multitude of deities.

Pharaoh probably knew that the Hebrews had a 'god,' but he may not have known His name.

More to the point - The 'god' of Israel would have seemed puny and powerless to Pharaoh. After all, who was the master? Who were the slaves? For Pharaoh, it was case closed.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we must embrace the fact that our Lord seems puny and powerless to nonbelievers. They look around at the evil state of the world and declare that there either is no God, or that He doesn't care. They think it's case closed.

Little do they know our God has power to save, and that the evil in the world is something He tolerates in order that more lost and perishing humans can hear the Gospel and receive eternal life.

Exo 5:3 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."

Moses and Aaron let Pharaoh know that something had happened to trigger their request.

The God of the Hebrews, who had been silent for the past four centuries, had appeared to Moses. He was commanding worship.

Lest God bring judgment upon the Hebrews for disobeying His call to worship, Pharaoh ought to let them go, or risk losing his work force to some judgment of God upon them for their disobedience.

Moses had experienced firsthand the seriousness of obeying God when God had recently sought to kill his firstborn son for being uncircumcised.

Worshipping and sacrificing in the desert was a command - not an invitation. Without passing over into legalism, it might be better for us to think in terms of commands rather than invitations. For example in the Book of Hebrews we read,

Heb 10:25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Each of us must decide for ourselves where to attend church, and how often. But we should never think it merely an invitation to meet with the Lord when everything is just right. It's a command - a blessed one, having our best interests in mind.

Jesus is so incredibly gracious that it's easy to think His commands are mere invitations.

Exo 5:4 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."

Exo 5:5 And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land *are* many now, and you make them rest from their labor!"

Pharaoh was too well informed to not know who Moses was. Still he addressed Moses as if he were just another one of the Hebrew slaves.

You and I are citizens of Heaven who are ambassadors to the nonbelievers of earth. They mostly reject our authority. It's to be expected.

There's some political drama in Pharaoh's use of the word "labor." You might remember that the previous Pharaoh thought that the population of the Hebrews was getting dangerously high, so he ordered the murder of the male infants. That didn't work, so the Egyptians went another route. They put the Hebrews to hard labor so that they could better control them.

Exo 5:6 So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying,

Exo 5:7 "You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves.

Exo 5:8 And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it...

There's a lot of explanation in the commentaries about brick making. I can't imagine any of us are interested in knowing more than that the Hebrews needed lots of straw, and that it was withheld. Thus the Hebrews had to work overtime to gather straw and still make their daily quota of bricks.

Exo 5:8 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.'

Pharaoh's reasoning was that if they had time for worship, they weren't working hard enough.

Pharaoh wanted the people of God to be so busy serving him that they had no time for worship. The world will try its best to keep you too busy for God. For example - So many family activities and kid's sports now interfere with church.

Once again, I'm not here to judge your calendar. I'm simply suggesting that since the world is geared toward destroying your family, *you're not going to strengthen your family by spending more time busy in the world than with the Lord's family.*

Exo 5:9 Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words."

Pharaoh reasoned that time away from brick making could only put ideas of freedom and civil rights in their heads.

Exo 5:10 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.

Exo 5:11 Go, get yourselves straw where you can find it; yet none of your work will be reduced.' "

So far this deliverance-thing wasn't going very well. Instead of packing a picnic basket for their weekend of worship, the Hebrew's work load had been increased exponentially, and there would be no relief.

Exo 5:12 So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw.

Apparently the powerful straw lobby would not allow the Hebrews access to their fields. They instead had to venture far to find inferior “stubble” wherever they could.

By the way - the Hebrews also had to tend to their own fields and flocks. Their situation reminds me of that old Tennessee Ernie Ford song,

*You load sixteen tons, what do you get  
Another day older and deeper in debt  
Saint Peter don't you call me 'cause I can't go  
I owe my soul to the company store*

Exo 5:13 And the taskmasters forced *them* to hurry, saying, "Fulfill your work, *your* daily quota, as when there was straw."

Exo 5:14 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?"

The “taskmasters” were Egyptian officials who oversaw the work. The “officers of the children of Israel” were Hebrews who acted as crew chiefs.

When the quotas fell short, the Egyptians beat the crew chiefs. And I mean that they whipped or scourged them. This was no payroll deduction or loss of vacation days or reduction of health insurance benefits.



Exo 5:15 Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why are you dealing thus with your servants?"

Exo 5:16 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."

It sounds like the officers had no idea that Pharaoh was reacting to what Moses had asked. At the very least, they had not yet put together that it was because of God's message that they were being mistreated.

Christians are still tortured; still martyred. The struggle is real for our brothers and sisters around the world. Let's not insult them by thinking some minor first-world setback is a struggle.

Exo 5:17 But he said, "You *are* idle! Idle! Therefore you say, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.'

Exo 5:18 Therefore go now *and* work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks."

Pharaoh's perspective was that they were demanding religious freedom. He wasn't going to grant it. After all, the God of the Hebrews was obviously a lightweight. Just look at them.

Exo 5:19 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."

Their trouble was not going to be abated. If anything, it would get worse.

I've told you this before, but often my counsel to people is that their situation is going to get worse before it gets better - if it ever gets better.

God could have fast-freed the children of Israel. It was nothing for Him to overcome Pharaoh and the so-called 'gods' of Egypt.

But God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. He waits so men can repent. There are many biblical examples of this.

Early in the Book of Genesis, God "saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

But He also said that mankind's "days shall be 120 years." The apostle Peter refers to this and comments, "the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" (First Peter 3:20). God's longsuffering waited.

In a very real sense, God's longsuffering has been waiting ever since Adam and Eve sinned in Eden. God has tolerated evil, and withheld His judgment, even until today.

In Romans 9:22-23 we read,

Rom 9:22 What if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

Rom 9:23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

At the heart of those words is the fact that, because He is longsuffering, God “endures” evil in order that men might have opportunities to be saved “for glory.”

That all sounds great - **until you realize you are a participant in God’s longsuffering.** While God’s longsuffering waits, you might *triumph*; or you might be *tortured*.

For sure, you are going to be mistreated and misunderstood by the nonbelieving world. They consider Jesus puny and powerless, and His followers fools.

The apostle Paul explained it like this:

1Co 4:11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.

1Co 4:12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;

1Co 4:13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

“Offscouring” is the stuff that sticks to your cook pan, that needs to be scraped-off. It’s worse than “filth.”

It is your portion as an agent of God’s longsuffering to face peril.

God's longsuffering is not limitless. It waits; but as in the days of Noah, judgment comes.

I'll say this for a third or fourth time this morning: **God tolerates evil for the sake of giving sinners opportunities to be saved.**

He has a plan to eradicate evil once-and-for-all. But when He finally, fully implements it, it will be too late for the lost. They will pass on to eternal conscious torment.

Let's do our part to hasten the end by serving the Lord as His agents of longsuffering, bringing the Gospel to the lost.

## #2 Your Participation In God's Longsuffering Will Leave You Feeling Perplexed

(v21-23)

It's an effective strategy to get your opponents to fight amongst themselves. In the last Avengers movie, *Civil War*, the bad guy devised a plan for revenge that pitted the heroes against each other... And it worked. In the end, Captain America fought Iron Man, and the team was divided into two factions.

Pharaoh was no dummy. He recognized Moses as a potential threat. By increasing the work, he hoped to drive a wedge between the Hebrews and their would-be deliverer. And it worked.

Exo 5:20 Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them.

Exo 5:21 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."

These crew chiefs were getting the brunt of the punishment. Not only were they beaten by the Egyptians, but they had to drive their own people much harder - making them unpopular, to say the least.

In the New Testament, when the believers got beaten for representing Jesus, they rejoiced for being worthy to suffer in His Name (Acts 5:41). These officers had a long way to go in their spiritual understanding. To them, the beating was a defeat.

God's longsuffering - It's not just about the unsaved. It provides opportunities for Christians to get their spiritual ducks in a row.

The Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk, called upon God to judge the wickedness of the Jews. I'm not sure what Habakkuk thought God should do, but it wasn't what God did. God disciplined Israel by making them subject to Babylon.

It was God's longsuffering at work toward His own people. It gave them the incentive to repent.

To say that this course of action troubled Habakkuk - well, that would be an understatement. In the end, as he participated in God's longsuffering toward Israel, Habakkuk could exclaim,

Hab 3:17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls -

Hab 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

When you receive Jesus Christ, it's just the beginning. It starts a process called *sanctification*, wherein you are changed day-by-day to become more like the Lord. It won't be complete - YOU won't be complete - until the resurrection and rapture of the church. Mean time, while God's longsuffering waits, He uses the time in which He is striving with sinners to mold and shape **you**.

The Hebrew officers described Pharaoh as having a sword in his hand to kill them. **Might that be a slam against the staff in Moses' hand, which was supposed to be so powerful?**

They saw it as a case of sword-beats-staff. Sword might beat staff in the material world, but not when it's the staff of God in the hands of His called servant.

We must get it through our heads that spiritual weapons beat material ones, and that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual.

This wasn't a case of losing round one to make a Rocky-esque comeback. No, **this was a win.**

I'll say that again: This was a win. It was a win for the longsuffering of God. He could easily have overcome Pharaoh. It was much harder to tolerate Pharaoh in order to give him opportunities to be saved.

The crew chiefs, and the Hebrews in total, had a lot to learn about God. But so did Moses.

Exo 5:22 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why *is* it You have sent me?"

Exo 5:23 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."

We want to say, "Cry me a river." Call the Waambulance. God had said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But... **he will not let the people go**" (4:21).

Moses should have expected Pharaoh to refuse, at least at first. Instead he was shocked, and he complained.

Let me address something inquiring minds might be wondering about. I've been saying God's longsuffering was giving Pharaoh opportunity to repent. But God also said, "he will not let the people go." Is that a contradiction?

No; not at all. For one thing, God's foreknowledge of what Pharaoh would ultimately choose does not mean God determined Pharaoh's choice. He was free to choose.

For another thing, there are instances in the Bible where, from our perspective, God seems to change His mind. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell them in 40 days, they'd be overthrown. But when they repented, God - acting according to His nature - relented from His prophesied judgment.

God's offer to Pharaoh was genuine. His offer to "whosoever will believe" in Jesus for eternal life is genuine.

Discouragement in your Christian walk is to be expected. No matter how much we are reminded that we will suffer, and have trials, and be afflicted, it stills stops us in our progress.

God never stops. He began this good work in you, and He will be faithful to complete it.

Egypt wasn't delivered in a day. You won't be finished in a day - but you will be, in the Day you stand before the Lord and He says, with much joy, "Well done, My good and faithful servant."

God's longsuffering waits... And you wait with it. Wait patiently, with endurance, knowing God is saving whosoever will believe.