

The Israelites Receive Cruel Treatment

Exodus 5:1–6:1

Before going to Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron met with the elders of Israel. Upon seeing the miracles Moses performed and hearing that God was concerned about them, they bowed down and worshipped. Unfortunately, the Israelites' faith didn't last when things got worse instead of better.

In view of common practices of the day, Moses' request for his people to go to the desert to worship God was quite reasonable. However, Pharaoh's response to Moses is understandable. Pharaoh had gods of his own—gods he considered the gods of the mighty Egypt. He knew nothing of Israel's God and, if anything, looked upon the Lord as a third-rate god since his people were lowly slaves. Pharaoh just wanted to make sure the bricks kept coming for his building projects!

The "straw" that the Israelites were forced to gather for making bricks was likely the stubble that remained after corn or other grain was reaped. The Israelites used this stubble in the bricks to make them stronger, much as steel mesh or fibers are used to strengthen concrete slabs today.

It's easy to criticize the Hebrew foremen for their lack of faith when they lashed out at Moses and Aaron, but they were really caught in the middle. They tried to get their own people to meet the quotas of bricks, and when the quotas were missed, the foremen were beaten. When they complained to Pharaoh about the unreasonable demands, they were accused of being lazy and were told that the increased work was due to Moses and Aaron's request to go to the desert to worship. This seemed a no-win situation, and the foremen had little to look forward to besides further beatings by the Egyptian slave drivers. They had never seen the Lord's power, so they had no way to know if he could rescue them.

Moses, however, had seen God's power at the burning bush. God had performed miracles before his eyes. His plea to God was sincere: Why have you let this happen? His complaint was not an accusation, but a simple question about the facts. The people had not been freed!

The Lord's response reminded Moses of the purpose of the rescue. The rescue was intended to show Egypt and the world who God is and to demonstrate his power. Yes, God was certainly concerned with the Israelites' cries. But God answered in a way that would show the world that he truly is God. Essentially he told Moses, "Relax and watch. Just wait until you see what I'm going to do!"

Devotion for Leaders

The One Thing: God doesn't promise his followers a trouble-free life, but in a growing relationship with Jesus, we have hope—even in difficult circumstances.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: The Hebrews lost hope, and we can certainly understand why! Yet God never stopped planning for their future. What are you hoping for today? Remember that God is working out *your* future—even when it seems impossible. Thank Jesus for his constant involvement in the events of your life.