

Shemot: Exodus 3:1-17 & 5:1-22

With friends like that...

5:4 Get to the work that you, Moses and Aaron, have to do in your homes. But the tribe of Levi was not put to slave labor in Egypt, as you can see by the fact that Moses and Aaron come and go as they please. *Rashi*

5:4 Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: The tribe of Levi was free of backbreaking work. Pharaoh said to them: Only because you are idle do you say, Let us go and sacrifice to our God. Get to your labor for Israel!” *Exodus Rabbah*

5:4 Moses and Aaron are representatives of Israel – all of you, get to your labors. *Ibn Ezra*

5:4 Go to your own work. Don’t neglect your own business and at the same time cause others to neglect my work. *Rashbam*

5:5 Pharaoh meant: The quota of bricks was set when they were fewer, so their task is easier now; but you still have them on strike. *Abarbanel*

5:5 *The people of the land are already so numerous.* This is Pharaoh’s answer to “lest He strike us” (v.3): Even if what you say is true, that pestilence or the sword shall come, I am not worried. For the population is so great that plenty of them would be left even after the disaster. *Ibn Ezra*

5:22 *Why do you bring harm upon this people* – And if you ask what business it is of mine, my claim is that I have a right to ask because it happened on account of Your sending me. *Rashi*

5:22 Moses here is passing on to God what the Israelites said to him. There are many similar occurrences. But God had already told Moses, “I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go, not because of a mighty hand.” That is, not because of one blow, or two, but only after I have performed wonders in his midst. But Moses was angry that God had not warned him that such distress would come upon Israel in the meantime. He had expected that at least their burdens would be lightened a bit; he was totally unprepared for them to be increased, and had no reply when the foremen complained to him. *Ibn Ezra*

5:22 Since God had told Moses twice (3:19, 4:21) that the king of Egypt would not let them go, why is he complaining? Ibn Ezra is wrong in his answer because in v.23 it says, “Still You have not delivered Your people.” *Delivering* can only mean “bringing them out of exile,” not a mere lightening of their workload. In my opinion, our master Moses thought God was telling him that Pharaoh would not heed them and let them go immediately at His command, or by a sign or wonder, until he had performed all of His many marvels. But Moses thought He would bring them upon Pharaoh right away, one after the other, within just a few days. But when Moses saw that things had stayed as they were for three days, with Pharaoh making things worse and worse each day, and that God did not rebuke him – and he had received no revelation about what he should do – then Moses thought it will be a long time. So what Moses meant was, “Why did you bring harm upon this people by sending me so long before the end of the exile? You ought not to have sent me until You were ready to rescue them! Now, rather than rescuing them, You have done harm to them! If this is how You deal with them, they will be finished off by the harm that finds them.” Thus God answered him as He did in the first verse of chapter 6. *Ramban*

5:22 If they were guilty of suffering such problems why did you make me the one to be the immediate cause of it? *S’forno*