

Leader Guide

Week 2: Israelites in Egypt

Exodus 5:1-23

Of the estimated 21 million we think are enslaved in the world today, it's estimated that 78% of those are enslaved in labor trafficking¹. This isn't a new issue. It was happening in the Bible too.

Story Synopsis:

Once honored guests in Egypt, the Israelites eventually became slaves. The Israelites suffered under the violence and oppression of the Egyptians. God heard the cries of His people and sent Moses as a deliverer. Yet when Moses approached Pharaoh, Pharaoh responded with threats, intimidation, and blame. It took God's direct action for the Israelites to be set free. Through this study we are going to look at labor trafficking, God's heart for the oppressed, and how we can stop the demand for cheap labor.

The Story:

Four hundred years had passed since Joseph's rise to prominence in Egypt. As the Hebrew people grew in number, Pharaoh and the Egyptians grew increasingly fearful. Eventually, the Egyptians forced the Hebrews into slavery and attempted to control the population by killing infant boys (Exodus 1:8-11, 16). God heard the cries of His people (3:7-8). The Lord sent Moses to deliver His people from bondage. That put Moses into direct conflict with Pharaoh. Who would triumph?

Moses and Aaron's first approach to Pharaoh was not a subservient request but a divine command. The Word of the Lord was for His people to worship Him in the wilderness. It may have been that the Egyptians would have been offended by the Hebrew sacrifices (8:26), but it may also have been that the Hebrews wanted to worship God at His "home"—the mountain of the Lord. Pharaoh refused the request—not because he was unaware of Yahweh's identity, but because he did not consider this Hebrew God worthy of his attention.²

¹ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_181953.pdf

² Bruce Wells, "Exodus," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 180.

Pharaoh responded to Moses' repeated request by accusing the people of laziness. Pharaoh refused to allow the people to stop their work for any reason. If the people wanted time off to worship, Pharaoh would work them so hard that they had no time or energy to worship or to dream of bettering their conditions.

After refusing Moses and Aaron, Pharaoh's next move was to punish the people for their request. He ordered his taskmasters to stop supplying the people with straw to make brick but kept the brick-making quota the same (5:6-7). Straw was an essential component for brick making. The straw tripled the strength of the finished product. One scroll dating from the time of Ramses II lists brick quotas and how many bricks each worker delivered. Out of 35 workers, not one worker met the quota. Penalties were not listed on the scroll.³

Pharaoh shifted the blame from the oppressor to the oppressed by accusing them of being "lazy" (5:8). In this twisted psychology, the people's complaints are only an indicator of their unwillingness to work. It's not that they are truly mistreated—they just claim to be so they don't have to work so hard. They have brought their mistreatment on themselves by their laziness and complaints. By blaming the victims and increasing their workload, Pharaoh expects to have no more trouble from his Hebrew slaves.

The rest of the passage shows the effectiveness of Pharaoh's oppressive system. The taskmasters place the burden on the Hebrew foremen, who are now caught in the middle between Pharaoh and the people. The foremen are beaten and complain to Pharaoh, who mocks them and accuses them of laziness (5:17). Pharaoh used the same tactics traffickers still use today: work their victims so hard they have no time or energy to dream of a better life; use violence and threats so they fear to challenge the system; and attack their sense of self-worth until they come to believe they deserve to be treated this way.

In this case Pharaoh's tactics worked. The Hebrew foremen accused their would-be liberators of making conditions worse. Pharaoh shifted the blame to the foremen; they shifted it to Moses, and Moses shifted it back to God (5:21-23). Only God could break Pharaoh's oppression. The Lord's response was clear. If Pharaoh refused to acknowledge Yahweh's superiority, God would force his hand.

Points of Application

- God hears the cries of the oppressed. God sent Moses to lead the Hebrew people to freedom because he had heard the cries of his people. Today, God still seeks justice for the oppressed.

³ Ibid.

- Pharaoh's actions show the classic tactics of oppressors: blame the victims, wear them down, and convince them they deserve their harsh treatment. God judged Pharaoh for his abuse and misuse of power.

Group Guide

Week 2: Israelites in Egypt

Exodus 5:1-23

Opener

Around the World: The leader begins by saying the name of any country, city, river, ocean or mountain that can be found in an atlas. The person next to him must then say another name that begins with the last letter of the word just given. Each person has a definite time limit (e.g. three seconds) and no names can be repeated. Try to think of places related to the Bible, but any place is fair game. For example - First person: Jerusalem, Second Person: Mount Sinai, Third Person: Israel

Study the Scripture

Read through Exodus 5:1-23 as a group

Less time? Read the synopsis in the leader guide.

Questions for Reflection

- Moses' first request wasn't to free the Israelites from slavery, but to give them a chance to worship God. When Pharaoh didn't comply, God upped the ante. Have you ever seen anything like this play out in your own life? Someone didn't give a little willingly so they were forced to give a lot?
- Is there a time you tried to stand up for justice, but you just seemed to make things worse (like Moses in 5:6-7)? How did you respond to the accusation that you were causing more trouble than helping?
- God heard the cries of the oppressed and intervened to rescue them. What groups in our world today are victims of oppression and exploitation?
- What is our responsibility in seeking justice for the oppressed?
- How do you define stewardship? We often think of stewardship in terms of managing our money well, but is there more to it than that? Does spending our money on the right products, such as slave-free products, also play a role in good

stewardship? What is our responsibility when our quest for cheaper goods makes it harder for the people that produce those products to earn a living wage?

Labor Trafficking

We tend to think that slavery, like the Hebrews faced, doesn't exist anymore. The sad truth is that it does, and the even scarier truth is that you and I are both part of the demand. No matter who you are, you have probably employed a trafficker as a result of your purchases.

Today, there are an estimated 21 million persons in forced labor around the world⁴. The majority of these people work in traditionally labor-intensive industries such as agriculture, domestic labor, or construction.

Human trafficking is driven by the *law of supply and demand* or the law of buying and selling. Whenever you purchase a product like a chocolate bar, a magazine, or athletic shoes, you are the buyer and you create the demand.

Every time you go to the store and buy something, you are giving someone a job. Who are you employing? Is the person who sews your shirt or soccer ball an adult being paid a fair wage? Is it possible that by purchasing your product you are actually employing a trafficker? Here are some things you can do to employ adults being paid a fair wage:

- Purchase fair trade or slave free products whenever possible, especially non-essential goods such as chocolate or coffee. Many of our most popular brands are not guaranteed to be slave free. For example, Hershey Chocolate, the largest chocolate producer in the world, has only verified 1% of their chocolate to be slave free. Whenever we eat a Hershey's Kiss, Reese's Peanut Butter Cup, Rolo, or Almond Joy, we are employing traffickers.
- Also, some of your favorite coffee shops are probably using coffee picked by slaves. We implore you to learn more so you can help adults be paid a fair wage for their work. By paying adults a fair wage we empower them to send their children to school and help end global poverty.

⁴ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_181953.pdf

Group Activity

You will need:

- 7 people (a leader and 6 volunteers)
- 24-piece chocolate bar (Divine Chocolate bar or any Fair Trade)
- 6 poster boards

The game demonstrates the way trade works in favor of the rich and how producers in poor countries end up with a very small share of what we pay for a bar of chocolate!

Line up the volunteers and give them each a role, based on the list below. Start by giving the cocoa farmer, who owns a plot of land about the size of a football field, a chocolate bar that represents the money we pay for a normal bar of chocolate. He/she is invited to open the chocolate bar but warned that before tucking in to the fruits of their labor there are some payments to be made.

Each person will represent one of the people who has to be paid. Make signs for them to hold up so that people watching can understand what is going on. As you read off the percentages below, the farmer should hand that number of squares over to the relevant person. You can ask the cocoa farmer how he or she feels as they lose their chocolate. They normally feel that an injustice is being done! Hold a discussion on justice.



Who?	How much?
Non-cocoa ingredients	3 squares (13%)
Government	4 squares (15%)
Shops	5 squares (22%)
Chocolate Companies	10 squares! (43%)
Middleman	about half of what remains (3%)
Farmer	That leaves the farmer with just 1 square of chocolate (3%) to pay farm workers, pay for inputs into the farm and support his or her family with food, shelter, healthcare, education etc.

Source: <http://peopleandplanet.org/fairtrade/guide.php/choc>

Closing Prayer

God of the impossible,
we pray for justice, peace and reconciliation.
And when the challenges seem too many,
remind us of your resurrection power,
and the miracles of your love that happen
whenever injustice is dismantled and rebuilt with peace.
Help us to hope that the impossible can happen
and live as if it might do so today.
Amen

- from Christian Aid⁵

Taking it home

Do these activities with your children, friends or even by yourself:

- Log on to www.slaveryfootprint.org to see how many slaves you employ! You'll never shop the same.
- Download one of these apps: Buycott, Free2Work or the Better World Shopping app (iPhone only). Both of these apps can help you make wise choices when shopping
- Let organization's know. When you aren't buying a product anymore (Hershey Chocolate) write them a letter and let them know if they offered more slave free products you would buy them. They can't change if they don't know.
- Find stores around you that have transparent supply chains such as Starbucks, New Balance, Timberland, Trader Joes, or Whole Foods so that you know where to shop. Let them know you are buying from them because they are slave-free. They even post their supply chain audits online for people to see. That level of transparency gives you confidence that you aren't employing a trafficker by purchasing their products.

⁵ <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/prayer/ending-poverty.aspx>

Family activities

Watch this video about labor trafficking in the US. Child Labor On Commercial Blueberry and Strawberry Farms in Northwest, USA: <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/child-labor-farms-caught-tape-14286458>

Talk to your children about how they would feel if their lives looked like the people in this video. Discuss the importance of slave-free goods and brainstorm ways you can do this as a family.

This week as a family, utilize one of the slave free guides above to plan and prepare a slave-free meal. If you can't do an entire meal, there are tons of ways to get fair trade chocolate! Plan a fair trade dessert! Talk about ways that your family is helping those who grew the crops that made your meal. Think about other things you buy besides food and how you might be able to purchase those items slave-free also, helping those who work hard and need to support their families.