

BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

BIBLE TEXT : Exodus 5:1-23

LESSON 50 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry" (Psalm 34:15).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Exodus 5:1-23

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

¹⁰ And the taskmasters of the

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Moses and Aaron's Appearance before Pharaoh

1. Israelites request permission to worship God, using the Word of the Lord as their authority, Exodus 5:1;

Exodus 3:12, 13

¹² And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

¹³ And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them?

2. Pharaoh denies knowledge of God and refuses to obey Him, Exodus 5:2;

Exodus 3:19

¹⁹ And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.

3. Moses and Aaron repeat the request, Exodus 5:3;

II Peter 3:9

⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

4. Pharaoh rebukes Moses and Aaron for hindering the work of the Israelites, Exodus 5:4, 5;

Exodus 1:7-9

⁷ And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.

⁸ Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.

⁹ And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we:

Psalms 105:24

²⁴ And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies.

II The Added Burdens on the Israelites

1. Pharaoh, rebelling against God, issues a despotic decree Exodus 5:6-9;

Proverbs 14:31

³¹ He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

Ecclesiastes 3:16, 17

¹⁶ And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, *that* wickedness *was* there; and the place of righteousness, *that* iniquity *was* there.

¹⁷ I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work.

Psalms 37:12-17, 35, 36

¹² The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.

¹³ The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming.

¹⁴ The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, *and* to slay such as be of upright conversation.

¹⁵ Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.

¹⁶ A little that a righteous man hath *is* better than the

people went out, and their officers, and they spake to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw.

¹¹ Go ye, get you straw where ye can find it: yet not ought of your work shall be diminished.

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

¹³ And the taskmasters hasted *them*, saying, Fulfil your works, *your* daily tasks, as when there was straw.

¹⁴ And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, *and* demanded, Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and to day, as heretofore?

¹⁵ Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants?

¹⁶ There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants *are* beaten; but the fault *is* in thine own people.

¹⁷ But he said, Ye *are* idle, *ye are* idle: therefore ye say, Let us go *and* do sacrifice to the LORD.

¹⁸ Go therefore now, *and* work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks.

¹⁹ And the officers of the children of Israel did see *that* they *were* in evil *case*, after it was said, Ye shall not minish *ought* from your bricks of your daily task.

²⁰ And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh:

²¹ And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of

riches of many wicked.

¹⁷ For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous.

³⁵ I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.

³⁶ Yet he passed away, and, lo, he *was* not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.

2. The Egyptian taskmasters enforce the edict, Exodus 5:10-13.

III The Complaint of the Oppressed

1. The impossibility of the task causes suffering for the Israelite leaders Exodus 5:14;

Ecclesiastes 5:8

⁸ If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *he that is* higher than the highest regardeth; and *there be* higher than they.

2. The leaders complain to Pharaoh, Exodus 5:15, 16.

3. Pharaoh retains his cruel attitude, Exodus 5:17-19.

4. The distressed leaders temporarily question the prudence of Moses' and Aaron's actions, Exodus 5:20, 21.

5. "And Moses returned unto the LORD," Exodus 5:22, 23;

Exodus 32:11-14

¹¹ And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?

¹² Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.

¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit *it* for ever.

¹⁴ And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Numbers 11:11-15

¹¹ And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?

¹² Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?

¹³ Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

¹⁴ I am not able to bear all this people alone, because *it* is too heavy for me.

¹⁵ And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

NOTES:

We can hardly understand or appreciate the great man, Moses, unless we see him in his many-sided character of learned man and shepherd, leader and legislator, soldier and statesman, aggressive man and yet the meekest of men. Each event in the story of his life teaches us some new and valuable lesson.

We saw how quick he was to turn aside from his own way to hear the voice of the Lord at the burning bush, and yet how reluctant he was to assume the responsibilities that were given to him there. This hesitation was, no doubt, because of the enormity of the assignment and the almost certain refusal he was to receive from Pharaoh when Israel's petition was presented.

Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us.

²² And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou *so* evil entreated this people? why *is* it *that* thou hast sent me?

²³ For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.

But Moses obeyed and we now see him at the royal court pleading the cause of an oppressed people.

All Egyptian kings, or rulers, took the name of Pharaoh in addition to their regular given name. This term was used in one sense much the same as we use the word king or monarch. But there is another sense that might have also governed their choice of it for themselves. In its literal meaning it signifies a crocodile, which was a sacred animal among the Egyptians, and its addition as a sacred name to the name of the ruler might have been intended to secure him greater respect and reverence.

In Egypt the people worshiped many gods and goddesses. Excavations being made are adding more and more to the already crowded list of deities they revered. They felt that every nation had its guardian god, and the importance of each god among the thousands they supposed existed was determined by them in observing the relative strength of the people of the nation to whom the god belonged. Since Egypt was a world power at that time, controlled a great amount of the world's wealth, and was master over hundreds of thousands of slaves and subjugated peoples, they considered that the gods of Egypt were the greatest of all.

Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh in the name of the Lord God of Israel and requested that the Israelites be granted permission to go into the wilderness to worship and sacrifice to their God, Jehovah. But Pharaoh did not honour the God of Israel. He had a multitude of gods to worship that he considered greater than the Jehovah of Israel, and, no doubt, he reasoned that the God of so lowly and oppressed a people as the Hebrews could not be a powerful God or worthy of much consideration from so great a ruler as he considered himself to be. His answer was, "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." But God had told Moses, when he stood before the burning bush, that Israel would worship in that place, so Moses knew God would fulfil His Word.

God, from the beginning when man sinned, required and honoured sacrifices when they were offered in faith; no religious acts or worship were acceptable to Him without them. And since the Egyptians worshiped almost every kind of animal, it would be impossible to offer those animals as burnt sacrifices in Egypt because of the obvious reaction it would cause.

A portion of the herds and flocks must accompany the Israelites so that offerings could be selected from them; and since the Egyptians looked down upon herdsman as men who abused the gods of Egypt, the Egyptians could not be depended upon to care for the remaining flocks when the Israelites were away. None of the Israelites could be left behind as herdsman because the Lord had commanded all to go worship Him. So the course was clear. There could be no compromise or arbitration. The whole command of the Lord must be obeyed; and all flocks, herds, and people must go.

True to God's prediction, Pharaoh refused to grant the request. But God's foreknowledge of that haughty monarch's decision did not take from him the power of making it. Pharaoh chose his own course and hardened his heart against God; and because his choice was deliberate, God let him go according to that choice. Pharaoh accused Moses and Aaron of agitation among the Israelites that hindered them in their work, and he ordered Israel to return to their tasks, adding to those duties as only an unreasonable despot would do. (The word *let* appearing in Exodus 5:4 is an old English word that was in common use when our Bible was translated from the original languages. It means to

hinder.)

"Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick" added a tremendous burden to the already staggering load they were carrying; but the command that "the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof" made the task impossible of fulfilment. The Israelite leaders complained to Pharaoh after they had been severely beaten and had received no grant of leniency, only a reiteration of his despotic order and the charge that because they were idle they had begun to think of what he considered the absurd idea of worshiping their God.

This chapter of Israelitish history has been verified by archaeologists in the past few years. In the ruins of one of the buildings of ancient Egypt, which appears to have been a storehouse, the lower and first laid courses of brick were well filled with good chopped straw that served as a binder to hold the sun-baked clay together. The middle courses of brick had less straw in them, and that was clearly identified as stubble plucked up by the roots. The upper courses, or last bricks used in the building, were made of pure clay without any straw whatever. This remains a mute testimony of oppression and tyranny unequalled for many centuries.

The Israelites now felt that their burdens were more than they could bear. The leaders complained to Moses and Aaron, calling upon God to judge them because of the apparent failure of their attempt to free Israel. Perhaps the Israelites were much disturbed at the prosperity and success of the sinful, idolatrous nation of Egypt and their own oppression and poverty. God had promised to bless Israel and curse those that cursed His people; but neither that blessing nor the curse was evident at the moment. Looking ahead, all they could see with their natural perception were years of servile labour that could be terminated only by their own welcomed and long-delayed death.

There were several times in the history of Israel that great crises were met by the God-fearing Moses. This is one. Notice how he reacted when the stinging accusations were levelled at him, after he had faithfully performed all God had told him to do. A few simple words of Scripture tell us of the great Fount of help that Moses resorted to in such times of need: "And Moses returned unto the LORD." By this means Moses was sure of the correct course to take. He could make no mistake when he went to the Lord for help. The Lord never failed him, and neither will He fail us! There will always be a path through the sea and a way through the depths, if we, as Moses, in times of sunshine or storm turn to the Lord!

QUESTIONS

1. What favour did Moses and Aaron ask of Pharaoh at this time?
2. What did they give as their reason and authority for this request?
3. What was Pharaoh's answer?
4. Did Moses know beforehand what attitude Pharaoh would take?
5. What accusation did Pharaoh make against Moses and Aaron?
6. What reason did Pharaoh give for the Israelites' desire to worship God?
7. What was Pharaoh's attitude toward the God of the Israelites?
8. Describe the decree Pharaoh made.
9. How did the decree react upon the leaders of the Israelites?
10. What did Moses do when the Israelites complained to him?