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DHW

LESSON 5

EXODUS

Chapter 5

INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon for many Christians to misunderstand the ways of God. How many "whys" in life have many of us asked God? Why is our child born blind or deaf or retarded? Why is the father taken away in death when his family needs him so desperately? Why am I suffering when I have been so faithful to God? Why are there famines, diseases, sufferings and deaths because of earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods? Is He not in control of these? The answers to these questions may not be easy to find or discern. Even if there are answers they may not be readily accepted.

In this chapter Moses also was confronted with the same dilemma. Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh and requested Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go to serve the LORD their God. Moses would expect the encounter with Pharaoh short and sweet and God would quickly deliver Israel. The response Moses and Aaron got from Pharaoh was expected but not to the extent of his harshness and defiance.

Let us now turn to the inspired page and discover what valuable and permanent lessons which we can learn to meet the difficult and hard challenges in our daily life. The following is an outline of the chapter:

1) Let My People Go (5:1-3);
2) No More Straw to Make Bricks (5:4-9);
3) The Taskmasters Oppressed the Slaves (5:10-14)
4) Complaints Fell on Deaf Ears (5:15-19); and
5) LORD, Why Send Me? (5:20-23)

STUDY HIS WORD

Let My People Go

Having been well received by the people as their leaders as God promised, Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh. They presented themselves as the spokesmen of the LORD God of Israel. They were direct and authoritative. They declared to Pharaoh (v.1): *Thus saith the LORD*. This is the first time

this phrase is used. They told Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go to *hold a feast unto me in the wilderness*. This *feast* is not the kind which we usually have in mind—eating, drinking, and merry-making. The word is derived from the Hebrew root word, which means to go on a pilgrimage.

But Pharaoh's response was both insolent and arrogant. He retorted (v.2): *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*. Did Pharaoh genuinely admit his ignorance of the God of Israel, or was he being insulting because of his pride? He openly expressed his indifference and did not even care to know the LORD. He defiantly opposed God and would not let Israel go. This is an open challenge to the LORD God of Israel. It was tantamount to who was in control – Yahweh or Pharaoh, and to whom should the people obey. When Pharaoh's Egyptian taskmasters went out to the Hebrew slaves, they declared to them using a similar declaration as Moses used of the LORD *Thus saith Pharaoh* (v.10). This was an open rebellion against God. God had to deal with Pharaoh and to vindicate His commandment through His spokesmen, Moses and Aaron. God's plan and purpose cannot be thwarted by man, not even Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

When Moses and Aaron answered that the *God of the Hebrews* had told them to do so, they also asked Pharaoh for a *three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD*, meaning that, they could worship the LORD God of Israel. And if they did not do this the LORD would punish them with *pestilence or with the sword* (v.3). The distance of a three-day journey into the desert would be far enough from where they were so that they would not offend the Egyptians when they make sacrifices unto their God.

No More Straw to Make Bricks

Pharaoh seemed to understand what they were asking for a three-day journey into the desert to hold a feast and sacrifice unto the LORD. It means a complete departure from Egypt. Pharaoh rejected the request. He knew that he would lose his slaves whom he had used to build his temples and houses. He thought of a wicked and unjust plan. He said that the slaves were now many and accused their leaders of distracting the people and causing them to stay away from their work (v.4). He accused them for being idle because there were too many of

them (v.5, 17). So Pharaoh commanded his Egyptian taskmasters to increase the burden of work on the Hebrew slaves. The supply of straw, which was previously given to the slaves to make bricks, was to be withdrawn. In Egypt bricks were made by mixing clay with straw. The bricks were either shaped by hand or with a wooden frame and then to be dried in the sun.[1] All these were done in the open field under the hot sun. The Hebrew slaves now had to collect the straw themselves. In addition to this extra burden, the quota of bricks for each day must be maintained and not diminished. What Pharaoh was demanding was almost impossible. It required the Hebrew slaves to work much harder. They should not be indulging in foolish talk.

The Taskmasters Drive the Slaves

The Egyptian taskmasters, who used the name of Pharaoh, accordingly ordered the *officers of the children of Israel*. These officers were Israelite foremen or section-leaders, who were directly responsible for the daily quota of bricks (v.10). These Israelite foremen would then press their own people to meet the quota. This was the pyramid system of management. Instructions came from the top. They were filtered down. A discontent and complaint would be directed at the lowest management level. In this case the Israelite foremen. The imposition to produce the same quota of bricks was quite impossible. These foremen were *beaten* by their Egyptian taskmasters for failure to meet the daily quota of bricks (v.14).

Complaints Fall on Deaf Ears

These foremen went to Pharaoh and complained to him with the hope that their plea would be heard. They hoped that Pharaoh would entertain their complaint against their taskmasters. But how naïve they were. They seemed to be oblivious to the fact that the order to make bricks with no straw which was previously given to them came from Pharaoh himself (v.16)! And they blamed their Egyptian taskmasters for their failure to produce the daily quota of bricks.

Of course, Pharaoh told them off and charged them for being idle and lazy and because they were idle they indulged in asking for permission to go and offer sacrifice to their God. Pharaoh repeated the order given to the taskmasters that the slaves should meet

[1] F. B. Huey, Jr., *Exodus*—A Study Guide Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House,1978), 36.

the daily quota without being given any straw, which they had to get it themselves unlike previously (v.18). They then realized that this *evil* was originated from Pharaoh himself.

LORD, Why Send Me

What do we expect the Hebrew slaves to do now? Naturally, they stomped their way to Moses and Aaron. They were angry and furious for they declared that the LORD would judge and punish Moses and Aaron for bringing about this *evil* upon them. They also charged Moses and Aaron for making them *to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh* and their taskmasters, and for giving their Egyptian taskmasters a reason to slay them (v.21).

We can clearly see the conflict and confusion. Now can you not hear the sound of murmuring of the slaves working in the blistering burning sun looking and collecting straw? Then imagine the back-breaking work of making bricks in the open field in the sun. Hear their sighing and groaning. Now listen to the Israelite foremen pouncing and pressing over their shoulders to work faster to produce the required number of bricks for the day. And when they could not achieve it, they were punished by their taskmasters. Their plea for help was summarily dismissed. They turned to Moses and Aaron and blamed them. The people were oppressed and unhappy. The Israelite foremen were frustrated and furious. In such a situation, how could the people have the hope to prepare to leave Egypt and go *into the desert and sacrifice unto the LORD our God?*

Moses turned to the LORD. Moses asked the LORD (v.22-23): *Wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me? And why had not thou delivered thy people at all?* Three times "why".

In the first "why" Moses referred to the difficult and hard work that they were experiencing. The word *evil* used in this context does not mean moral evil. It refers to the afflictions and sufferings of the slaves, in particular, their present extra burden which had been unfairly imposed upon them. And why did Moses blame God when he should be blaming Pharaoh? To the mind of the children of Israel, God was Sovereign and He was in control of everything. God had earlier revealed to Moses that He had seen and heard and cared for the plight of the children of Israel (3:23-25). The second "why" refers to God's promise to Moses that He would come down and visit the

people and deliver them (3:7-8). He wanted Moses to be the leader to lead the people out of Egypt (3:10). God predicted that the people would listen to him and believe him, and had warned that Pharaoh would not at first let them go (3:18, 19). God could only know all these things because He was in control of everything.[2] And the third "why" refers to the deliverance of the children of Israel seeing no glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.

The blame should be placed rightly on Pharaoh, who because of his pride hardened his own heart and insulted the God of Israel. However, God could have shut him off right-away even before he uttered his first insolent remark. But the LORD God permitted him to do so, and Paul the Apostle commented that it was for the glory of God. God wanted to vindicate His power and His Word.

So Moses' "whys" to God were legitimate. He asked because he was also confused. He did not expect the kind of response from Pharaoh, or even if he had remembered what God had warned him about Pharaoh, it would be a brief opposition against him, and they would soon be delivered. However, that was not the case for God had better plans.

PRACTICAL VALUE

How do we then live with the sufferings and conflicts in life? Is it not true that our experiences in life actually produce precious lessons in preparing our spiritual, emotional, and mental growth and maturity? The outcome of conflicts and sufferings in life, the misunderstanding, the confusion, the trying times, the hardships, the difficult relationships may seem *evil* at first but they are good for us. Learn to be patient with all the questions in life, but try not to ask for the answers for they may never come. Remember who our great God is.[3] Later, on hindsight, if we are patient and humble enough we will find the answers to the bad experiences of our life.

We also learn that pride leads to the hardening of the heart and this will

[2] Later, through the prophets God revealed more explicitly that He is sovereign and completely in control over the affairs of men and everything: Amos 3:6 *Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?* Isaiah 45:7 *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.*

And our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized this fact when He taught: Matthew 10:28 *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

[3] Maxie D. Dunnam, *Exodus* (Waco, Texas: Words Publisher, 1987), 99.

lead to foolish thoughts and actions to our great loss. We need to be humble and teachable especially to the Word of God. Pharaoh is an example of one who built the barriers to the grace of God for himself. God is never unjust in His dealings or relationships with us. Our actions are always the cause of our own downfall and punishment. And if God permits the same kind of *evil* in our lives particularly through no fault on our part, it is always for a good purpose. The blessings would far outweigh the sufferings and hardships.

Moses turned to the Lord when the going was tough and rough. He went to the right person. So must we. In life's struggles and storms, turn to God our Father in Heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ first, for He is the only Source of power and strength, life and happiness, hope and the reason for living.

The devil's objective is to draw us away from worshipping and serving the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil was active then in the Garden of Eden, and also when Moses pleaded for the release of the children of Israel from slavery, and he is still the same today. He will create conflict and division in the Church whether universal or local. He will set the leaders and members against each other. He will entice them with every kind of beautiful and attractive work and pastime. He will cause them to be so weighed down with many attractive offers of work, monetary and material rewards so that God's children find no time to worship and serve their God. Are you a victim of the devil's subtle ploy? Do not be taken unaware by the wiles of the adversary. Pray for God's grace and enabling power. AMEN