

LESSON 25 - June 23, 1888

GOD'S REQUIREMENT FOR ISRAEL.

1. WHO met Moses as he was on his way to Egypt ? Ex. 4 : 27.
2. What did Moses tell Aaron? Verse 28.
3. When they reached Egypt, what did they do ? Verses 29, 30.
4. How did the people receive the message, and what did they do ? Verse 31.
5. With what words did Moses and Aaron greet Pharaoh ? Ex. 5 : 1.
6. What reply did Pharaoh make ? Verse 2.
7. What further statement did Moses and Aaron make, showing the urgency of the case ? Verse 3.
8. Had God told Moses to make this request? Ex. 3 : 18.

9. Do you think that Moses expected Pharaoh to grant this request? Verse 19.

10. Then why was he directed to make it, and why did he ask that the people might be allowed to go and sacrifice, when they wanted complete deliverance ? See note.

11. What did Pharaoh charge Moses and Aaron with doing ? Ex. 5 : 4, 5.

12. What did he say was the reason that the people wanted to go and sacrifice ? Verses 8, 17.

13. How were their burdens increased in consequence ? Verses 6, 7, 17-19.

14. After the Israelites had been delivered, what exhortation was given to them, based on their hard usage in Egypt ? Deut. 5 : 14, 15.

15. What were they told to remember, in order that they might not be led to require their servants to work on the Sabbath? Verse 15.

16. For what purpose did God deliver them from bondage? Ex. 4: 23 ; Ps. 105 : 43-45

17. What does this indicate? Ans.—That they could not properly serve him in Egypt.

18. What may we conclude from this fact, and Pharaoh's statement to Moses and Aaron that they made the people "rest from their burdens," and the exhortation in Deut. 5: 14, 15?

NOTES.—It is not in accordance with God's plan to punish any man, no matter how wicked he may be, without warning him, and giving him a chance to repent. Therefore, although he knew that Pharaoh was so churlish and stubborn that he would not listen to reason, he did not begin to send judgments upon him, at first, to force him to let Israel go, but sent a simple request, instead. Thus his justice was manifested. In the demand, " Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness," an opportunity was offered to Pharaoh to recognize the God of Israel as the true God. It was, in fact, Pharaoh's chance for repentance. If Pharaoh had granted the simple request which Moses brought to him from the Lord, it would have indicated that he recognized the authority of God; and in that case he would have been willing to grant whatever else the Lord might demand.

FROM Ex. 4 : 23 and Ps. 105:43-45 we learn that the children of Israel could not serve the Lord in Egypt. In Deut. 5:14, 15 we find special emphasis given to that portion of the fourth commandment requiring the man-servant and the maid-servant to rest, and the Israelite was told to remember that he had been a servant in the land of Egypt; also in Ex. 5:5 we learn that Moses and Aaron made the people "rest from their burdens." From these facts we may conclude that the Sabbath was one of the things in which they could not serve the Lord in Egypt; and when Moses and Aaron came with the message of God (Ex. 4: 29-31), they attempted a reform, which only increased their oppression. The Israelites were delivered, that they might observe the statutes of the Lord, including the Sabbath, and this placed upon them an additional obligation to keep the Sabbath strictly, as well as to keep all the commandments. Compare Deut. 24: 17, 18.

Patriarchs and Prophets

Chap. 23 - The Plagues of Egypt (part 1)

Aaron, being instructed by angels, went forth to meet his brother, from whom he had been so long separated; and they met amid the desert solitudes, near Horeb. Here they communed together, and Moses told Aaron "all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him." Exodus 4:28. Together they journeyed to Egypt; and having reached the land of Goshen, they proceeded to assemble the elders of Israel. Aaron repeated to them all the dealings of God with Moses, and then the signs which God had given Moses were shown before the people. "The people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped." Verse 31. {PP 257.1}

Moses had been charged also with a message for the king. The two brothers entered the palace of the Pharaohs as ambassadors from the King of kings, and they spoke in His name: "Thus saith Jehovah, God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness." {PP 257.2}

"Who is Jehovah, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?" demanded the monarch; "I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go." {PP 257.3}

Their answer was, "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." {PP 257.4}

Tidings of them and of the interest they were exciting among the people had already reached the king. His anger was kindled. "Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let [hinder] the people from their works?" he said. "Get you unto your burdens." Already the kingdom had suffered loss by the interference of these strangers. At thought of this he added, "Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens." {PP 257.5}

In their bondage the Israelites had to some extent lost the knowledge of God's law, and they had departed from its precepts. The Sabbath had been generally disregarded, and the exactions of their taskmasters made its observance apparently impossible. But Moses had shown his people that obedience to God was the first condition of deliverance; and the efforts made to restore the observance of the Sabbath had come to the notice of their oppressors. [SEE APPENDIX, NOTE 1.] {PP 258.1}

The king, thoroughly roused, suspected the Israelites of a design to revolt from his service. Disaffection was the result of idleness; he would see that no time was left them for dangerous scheming. And he at once adopted measures to tighten their bonds and crush out their independent spirit. The same day orders were issued that rendered their labor still more cruel and oppressive. The most common building material of that country was sun-dried brick; the walls of the finest edifices were made of this, and then faced with stone; and the manufacture of brick employed great numbers of the bondmen. Cut straw being intermixed with the clay, to hold it together, large quantities of straw were required for the work; the king now directed that no more straw be furnished; the laborers must find it for themselves, while the same amount of brick should be exacted. {PP 258.2}

This order produced great distress among the Israelites throughout the land. The Egyptian taskmasters had appointed Hebrew officers to oversee the work of the people, and these officers were responsible for the labor performed by those under their charge. When the requirement of the king was put in force, the people scattered themselves throughout the land, to gather stubble instead of straw; but they found it impossible to accomplish the usual amount of labor. For this failure the Hebrew officers were cruelly beaten. {PP 258.3}

These officers supposed that their oppression came from their taskmasters, and not from the king himself; and they went to him with their grievances. Their remonstrance was met by Pharaoh with a taunt: "Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord." They were ordered back to their work, with the declaration that their burdens were in no case to be lightened. Returning, they met Moses and Aaron, and cried out to them, "The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savor to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us." {PP 258.4}

As Moses listened to these reproaches he was greatly distressed. The sufferings of the people had been much increased. All over the land a cry of despair went up from old and young, and all united in charging upon him the disastrous change in their condition. In bitterness of soul he went before God, with the cry, "Lord, wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that Thou hast sent me? 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." The answer was, "Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land." Again he was pointed back to the covenant which God had made with the fathers, and was assured that it would be fulfilled. {PP 259.1}

During all the years of servitude in Egypt there had been among the Israelites some who adhered to the worship of Jehovah. These were sorely troubled as they saw their children daily witnessing the abominations of the heathen, and even bowing down to their false gods. In their distress they cried unto the Lord for deliverance from the Egyptian yoke, that they might be freed from the corrupting influence of idolatry. They did not conceal their faith, but declared to the Egyptians that the object of their worship was the Maker of heaven and earth, the only true and living God. They rehearsed the evidences of His existence and power, from creation down to the days of Jacob. The Egyptians thus had an opportunity to become acquainted with the religion of the Hebrews; but disdainful to be instructed by their slaves, they tried to seduce the worshipers of God by promises of reward, and, this failing, by threats and cruelty. {PP 259.2}

The elders of Israel endeavored to sustain the sinking faith of their brethren by repeating the promises made to their fathers, and the prophetic words of Joseph before his death, foretelling their deliverance from Egypt. Some would listen and believe. Others, looking at the circumstances that surrounded them, refused to hope. The Egyptians, being informed of what was reported among their bondmen, derided their expectations and scornfully denied the power of their God. They pointed to their situation as a nation of slaves, and tauntingly said, "If your God is just and merciful, and possesses power above that of the Egyptian gods, why does He not make you a free people?" They called attention to their own condition. They worshiped deities termed by the Israelites false gods, yet they were a rich and powerful nation. They declared that their gods had blessed them with prosperity, and had given them the Israelites as servants, and they gloried in their power to oppress and destroy the worshipers of Jehovah. Pharaoh himself boasted that the God of the Hebrews could not deliver them from his hand. {PP 259.3}

Words like these destroyed the hopes of many of the Israelites. The case appeared to them very much as the Egyptians had represented. It was true that they were slaves, and must endure whatever their cruel taskmasters might choose to inflict. Their children had been hunted and slain, and their own lives were a burden. Yet they were worshiping the God of heaven. If Jehovah were indeed above all gods, surely He would not thus leave them in bondage to idolaters. But those who were true to God understood that it was because of Israel's departure from Him--because of their disposition to marry with heathen nations, thus being led into idolatry--that the Lord had permitted them to become

bondmen; and they confidently assured their brethren that He would soon break the yoke of the oppressor. {PP 260.1}

The Hebrews had expected to obtain their freedom without any special trial of their faith or any real suffering or hardship. But they were not yet prepared for deliverance. They had little faith in God, and were unwilling patiently to endure their afflictions until He should see fit to work for them. Many were content to remain in bondage rather than meet the difficulties attending removal to a strange land; and the habits of some had become so much like those of the Egyptians that they preferred to dwell in Egypt. Therefore the Lord did not deliver them by the first manifestation of His power before Pharaoh. He overruled events more fully to develop the tyrannical spirit of the Egyptian king and also to reveal Himself to His people. Beholding His justice, His power, and His love, they would choose to leave Egypt and give themselves to His service. The task of Moses would have been much less difficult had not many of the Israelites become so corrupted that they were unwilling to leave Egypt. {PP 260.2}