

Moses and Pharaoh: A Clash of Titans

By Mark Mayberry

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INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, we contrast the lives of two great characters of the Old Testament: Moses and Pharaoh. One was a man of low degree who rose to great heights; the other a man of high degree who fell to great depths. Let us learn from their examples (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11).

Appearing to Moses in a burning bush on Mt. Horeb, God said, "I have seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt. I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and bring them to the land of promise" (Exod. 3:7-9).

Commissioning Moses, God said, "Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:10). Though initially hesitant, Moses complied with God's command. Afterwards, Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go...'" However, Pharaoh refused, saying, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go" (Exod. 5:1-2).

With the stage thus set, God unleashed ten plagues upon Egypt: water to blood, frogs, flies, gnats, pestilence upon livestock, boils on man and beast, thunder and hail, devouring locust, darkness and death of the firstborn. These disasters were designed to break the stubborn will of Pharaoh, to execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, to demonstrate the surpassing power of the Lord, and to bring about the deliverance of the Hebrew people from Egyptian servitude (Exod. 6:1-9; 12:12; Num. 33:3-4).

MOSES WAS FAITHFUL

Moses demonstrated faith in God: choosing properly, enduring adversity, keeping His commandments, trusting His promises (Heb. 11:23-29). Moreover, Moses proved faithful as a servant (Heb. 3:1-6), as a prophet (Exod. 7:6; Num. 12:6-8), and as one who followed God's pattern (Exod. 25:8-9, 40; 40:16).

PHARAOH WAS REBELLIOUS

God sent Moses to Egypt, carrying the command, "Let my people go!" Yet, God warned him to not expect an immediate positive response from Pharaoh: "I will harden his heart..." (Exod. 4:21-23; 7:1-7). Pharaoh's stubbornness and rebellion was evident from their first meeting (Exod. 7:8-13).

Moses demonstrated God's power by turning the waters of the Nile into blood. When the magicians of Egypt seemingly duplicated the miracle, Pharaoh's heart was hardened (Exod. 7:20-25).

Moses demonstrated God's power by sending frogs upon the land of Egypt. Pharaoh pled for mercy, saying to Moses, "Entreat the Lord that He remove the frogs." Yet, when He did so, Pharaoh hardened his heart (Exod. 8:1-15).

Moses demonstrated God's power by sending a plague of gnats. Unable to duplicate this miracle, the magicians said, "This is the finger of God." In response to their failure, Pharaoh's heart was hardened (Exod. 8:16-19).

God sent a great swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh and upon all the land of Egypt. Afterwards, Moses made supplication to the Lord on behalf of Pharaoh, resulting in their removal. Yet, once again, Pharaoh hardened his heart, and would not let the people go (Exod. 8:30-32).

Moses demonstrated God's power by sending severe pestilence upon the livestock in Egypt. Despite this terrible loss, the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go (Exod. 9:1-7).

Moses demonstrated God's power by causing boils to break out upon the bodies of man and beast. The magicians of Egypt, who valued personal cleanliness and ceremonial purity, could not stand before Moses. Yet, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses (Exod. 9:8-12).

Moses demonstrated God's power by sending a destructive plague of hail. Afterwards, Pharaoh confessed, "I have sinned..." and asked Moses to make supplication on his behalf. However, when the thunder, hail and rain ceased, Pharaoh hardened his heart, he and his servants, and he did not let the people go (Exod. 9:33-35).

Informing Moses of the coming plague of locust, God said, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them..." (Exod. 10:1-2, 18-20).

Moses demonstrated God's power by sending thick darkness over the land of Egypt. Pharaoh partially relented, permitting the Israelites to depart, but not their livestock. Partial compliance with the Lord's will was not enough; God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go (Exod. 10:24-29).

In the tenth plague, God smote the firstborn of man and beast, bringing death upon the land of Egypt. Yet, Pharaoh's heart remained unrelenting and unchanged (Exod. 11:9-10).

The last occurrence of this phrase led to the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the waters of the Red Sea: "Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." And they did so" (Exod. 14:1-4).

CONCLUSION

Like Moses, we should be faithful (Luke 12:42-44; 1 Cor. 4:1-2). Unlike Pharaoh, we should be receptive (James 1:21-25). The Bible speaks of those who harden their hearts, necks, and minds (Mark 6:51-52; Prov. 29:1; 2 Cor. 3:14). What causes such callousness and hardening? It is the inevitable result of rejecting the truth, and persisting in a state of sinful and willful rebellion (Prov. 28:13-14; Eph. 4:17-24).

God rewards us according to our works, rendering to each according to his/her deeds (Rom. 2:5-11). If we, like Pharaoh, refuse to comply with the commands of the Lord, continuing in a state of defiant disobedience, God Himself will send a strong delusion, that we must be condemned (2 Thess. 2:10-12). Therefore, let us obey God, while there is time and opportunity; let it be today, lest we be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-19).