

YOUR MOVE

exodus 7.8-25

Find your way to Exodus chapter 7. We'll begin at verse 8 and finish out the chapter.

In chess, the opening moves can reveal a lot about your opponent. For most of us it shows that if the person you're playing knows *how to do* an opening gambit, you're probably going to lose.

But these different openings that players use at the start of a chess match reveal certain styles of play. How aggressive they're going to be, how important king safety is to them. How they plan to control center board.

The Lord planned on opposing Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt. Pharaoh, rather than surrendering, took up the contest and now all the pieces were in place to begin.

As we read through the moves and plagues, the defenses that Pharaoh tries to employ and the advances that God makes against the idols of Egypt, we can learn a lot about the Lord, our ministry and the people that we're called to reach out to.

So, let's look at our text and see what we see.

Exodus 7.8-25 - Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Show a miracle for yourselves,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.' " So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the Lord commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. So the Lord said to Moses: "Pharaoh's heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand by the river's bank to meet him; and the rod which was turned to a serpent you shall take in your hand. And you shall say to him, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness"; but indeed, until now you would not hear! Thus says the Lord: "By this you shall know that I am the Lord. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river." ' "

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone.' " And Moses and Aaron did so, just as the Lord commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters

that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this. So all the Egyptians dug all around the river for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the river. And seven days passed after the Lord had struck the river.

There are 3 players that we can zoom in on from this text.

The first is God Himself. As we see Him moving against the nation that was afflicting His children, we learn about His justice, but also the greatness of His mercy.

First of all, His grace is demonstrated in the sign of the rod. Remember, Pharaoh had already rejected Moses' appeal to let God's people go at least once. Now, despite that refusal, before God starts pouring judgment out on Egypt, He gives Pharaoh *one* more chance to surrender and submit. This miracle of the rod turning into a serpent, which, most commentators believe should actually be translated 'crocodile', was a non-painful way of revealing God's power. The Lord could've gone straight to the plagues, straight to the judgment, but He held back His wrath for one more day to give Pharaoh and the people around him the opportunity to realize that God has power over all things.

Then, after that, when this second appeal was rejected, the Lord moved into the next phase, bringing the first plague of blood to the waters of Egypt.

But in verses 14 through 25 we still see God's graciousness and mercy. This was a severe judgment on Egypt, but we see that leading up to it God gave them notice. He didn't bring this plague without explaining to those effected why it was happening or without explaining how they could get out from under it. He said, "This is happening so you will know that I am God and if you want this to stop, you have to obey what I'm commanding." Very simple.

We also see that the Lord placed limits on this plague. It impacted water all over the nation, even what they had stored in pots and basins, but it only lasted 7 days and He spared the water that was in the river banks. Our God is incredibly gracious. In wrath, He remembers mercy, which these people did not deserve. They worshiped this river, they boasted in it, they had used to to drown Hebrew babies. But God, in His longsuffering showed mercy to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

But then, on the other side of the board, we have the 2nd player, which is Pharaoh. Certainly here he represents the enemy of God, the enemy of God's people. But he also represents to us any unbeliever that God brings us to in order to share the Gospel. And if we take a look at his heart and his actions, hopefully it will help us see into the hearts of the unbelievers around us.

First of all, the overall impression we get of him through these scenes is the absolute hardness of his heart. Despite the wonders he's seeing and the messages he's receiving from God, none

of those things really made an impact, because he had set his mind and his heart to reject the God of Israel.

For example - he says to Moses and Aaron, "Ok, give me a sign. Show me a miracle so that I can believe." This is a common technique people use to try to stall when they come to that moment of decision and repentance. The Pharisees did it to Jesus. Pharaoh does it here. But you see in those situations that the people who demand a sign or a miracle aren't really interested in discovering God. They're just trying to put the believer on the defensive and they're just trying to find an excuse to dismiss what they're being told. Pharaoh saw 2 incredible, impossible miracles, yet it didn't phase him in the slightest.

Now, God always sends His word, but He doesn't always send wonders. Sometimes He does. We may not see it a lot here in the States, but God still works miraculously.

But Pharaoh's example shows that the issue is not whether a miracle has happened, the issue is the condition of a person's heart. He wasn't really interested in finding the truth about God. Compare him to the Ethiopian Eunuch in the book of Acts. The Lord brought each of them a servant to explain His word. There were two very different outcomes because one of those people had a heart who was seeking the Lord and the other had a heart that was in active rebellion against Him.

So, does that mean we don't minister to people who are hard-hearted? No. We'll see how we can reach out to those people in a moment by looking at Moses and Aaron. But understanding Pharaoh helps us roll back the curtain on the hearts of a lot of people who are living in unbelief. They're looking for excuses. Above all they're worshipers of self. Pharaoh claimed to be a worshiper of the gods of Egypt, he claimed to believe in them, but, notice how nothing changed when those deities were proven false. Nothing changed. The Egyptians had a couple of crocodile gods. The Lord showed that they were powerless against Him. Pharaoh should've been impressed and terrified at the sign of the rod, but he just kept going about his regular schedule. He claimed to believe in the god of the Nile. In fact, some commentators suggest that there in verse 15 he's out by the Nile in the morning to do his morning ritual, his morning devotion to the river god. The true God of heaven absolutely shows His greatness over creation, over the false idols of Egypt, but what you see is that Pharaoh didn't actually believe. He only cared about what he wanted and his own desires.

We also see in his example that unbelievers are truly held captive by the devil. There's a sad stupidity demonstrated in his actions. He had these magicians with certain demonic powers. They were able to replicate God's miracles, but not overcome them. So, Moses and Aaron turn the water to blood and Pharaoh's response is, "Yeah, we can do that too." A heart that is in rebellion against God will do terrible, stupid, self-destructive things. Things that don't make sense.

So how do we reach out to a heart like Pharaoh's? Is it even possible to minister to someone like that?

As we look at Moses and Aaron we find that the answer is yes.

First of all, the Lord specifically sent them to Pharaoh. The work of God is never futile. Not everyone will believe, but everyone needs the Gospel. And, though a Pharaoh in your life may never believe in Jesus, there may be a Nebuchadnezzar who will.

If we look at people and say, "Well, their heart is too hard, they hate too much, they're too evil to minister to," then eventually we won't be reaching out to anyone. That's essentially the same argument Moses kept trying to use with God when he would say, "Lord, Pharaoh isn't going to listen, so don't even bother sending me."

The truth is, people like Nebuchadnezzar and Rahab and Paul and Chuck Colson and David Berkowitz can and *do* get saved. Because the Gospel has power. We're not responsible for the decisions of someone else's heart, but we are responsible to deliver the message God has given us.

Just a few days ago I was coming out of church and there were a couple of high schoolers sitting on the lawn. I thought, "Should I go over there and witness to them or invite them to church?" And then I thought, "Nah. They wouldn't come to church. They're not going to read a tract. They're not going to talk to me." And I got in my car, and graciously the Lord rebuked my heart and I thought to myself, "You're not even going to give them an invite? You've got an invite *right here* and you're not going to just walk over and hand it to them?"

And even then I sort of hesitated until finally I just laughed at myself and got out of my car and walked over, asked them if they go to church, told them they were welcome and gave them the invite.

Now, I don't know if they're going to get saved, but that's not my business. My business is proclamation at all times to all people.

Another thing we learn about ministry from Moses and Aaron is that it's important to go meet people where they're at. Sometimes God brings people to you, but that's the exception to the rule. The rule is: Go and tell the world. You go to Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. Moses and Aaron, *you* go and find this guy down by the river and talk to him for Me.

Sometimes the Lord brings people directly to you. Naaman coming to see Elisha comes to mind. Sometimes God does a hybrid thing where He sends you *somewhere* and thing brings *someone* else to that place as well. Philip and the Eunuch. But *regularly* the Lord sends us out to go and find people on the river bank. *Cold calling*. Because God wants to get His word out all the time. We need to go and cold call people, because on a spiritual (or a physical) level, they may have water today, but it could be blood tomorrow.

The Nile was said to be the life-blood of Egypt. Ironically, God turned it *into* blood. And now they had a serious problem. We've got to remember that people who rely on the world or themselves or anything other than the Lord, whatever it is, those things are eventually going to fail. They're going to turn rancid. Even on a very basic level, it's important that we explain to people that you may be healthy and strong right now, but sooner or later you're going to die. And whatever god you're pretending to worship has no power to save. But we know who is the Author of life and the Sustainer of all things. And He *must* be acknowledged and obeyed or you will perish.

The last idea we can pull out of Moses and Aaron's example is that they didn't need a lot to do the Lord's work. They only needed mouths, a rod and the power of God.

Now, at first I thought, "Yeah, easy for them because they're performing miracles left and right!" But that didn't really matter, did it? Pharaoh still didn't believe. People didn't believe Jesus despite the fact He was raising corpses from the dead.

It's not easier to minister when you have miraculous power in ministry. Most of the time that got people killed in the Bible.

All we need to do is walk in the leading of God, with His word on our lips and His power working through His rod.

What is His rod in our lives? Well, His rod is our lives!

Ephesians 2.10 says we are His craftsmanship, created to do good works. Philippians says that God works through our lives to fulfill His purposes so that we can shine as the light of the world.

Which is why it's important that we live a blameless life. So that God's rod can be profitable and effective when the Lord desires to move. So that people see the power of God working through our lives.

God does use credentials to establish Himself as true and powerful like He did with Moses and Aaron. *We* are His credentials.

His plan is to break through the distractions and defenses to get to the heart with the Gospel, which means that we as Christians need to be focusing on the hearts of the people around us. Ministering with grace. Ministering on a personal level. Not being drawn off by the excuses and distractions and debates and the counterfeit nonsense that the devil is conjuring up. We're to identify people who need the Lord and speak the Gospel right to their hearts. Some will reject it, but we're to hang in there with them until the Lord sends us on our way.

Those are the moves the Lord makes. So, let Him move you today.