

We were so excited that we would no longer be slaves! Aaron and Moses went straight to Pharaoh and requested that he let us hold a festival in the wilderness to honor our God. We would be gone about a week.

I am an elder of the tribe of Judah in the time when the Jews were slaves of the Egyptians.

Pharaoh blew a gasket! He ordered the slave drivers to take away the straw that was essential in making bricks. If we had time for parties in the wilderness, we had time to find straw for the bricks.

We were furious. Furious at Aaron and Moses. They promised to deliver us, but they only made our lives worse. Much, much worse. Pharaoh's hatred for us had intensified.

Moses and Aaron returned to the Lord and asked what was going on. Why had he allowed the lives of the Israelites to get worse? The Lord reaffirmed to them that he would surely bring the Israelites out of Egypt. The more Pharaoh refused, the more God would punish him. Eventually he would let the Israelites go.

Now, that sounds all well and good in retrospect, but at the time, we were profoundly suffering. We were disheartened, demoralized, beyond anything you can imagine. We didn't believe Moses. We didn't want words, we wanted action.

God commanded Moses and Aaron to go Pharaoh and demand he let the Hebrews go. Not just go to the wilderness for a festival, but to leave the country for good. If not, the consequences would begin.

Let me remind you of something. This battle was not between God and Pharaoh, as is so often assumed. Pharaoh was just a representative of the Egyptian gods. This wasn't even a battle between the One True God and the Egyptian gods. This was a supreme showdown before the very eyes of both cultures to witness who was the supreme being.

You can see this in the form of the signs and plagues that God sends on the Egyptians.¹

When Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave, Aaron threw his staff on the ground and it became a snake. Pharaoh's magicians did the same thing, but Aaron's staff swallowed their

¹ Much of this lesson is based on a well-documented Bible study lesson, "Gods @ War" taught by Clint Hill.

staffs. This was not just unfortunate but a powerful symbol to them. *Wadjet* was an Egyptian goddess depicted as a snake-headed woman, or a snake. She sometimes took the form of *Uraeus*, the snake on Pharaoh's crown. She was responsible for the protection of the kingdom and Pharaoh himself. By this sign, God was communicating that *Wadjet* could not protect the kingdom, that God alone had the power to free the Hebrew slaves.

In the first plague, God allowed Aaron to turn all water from the Nile River into blood, killing all the fish. The Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate this event using their secret arts. *Hapi* was the god of the annual flooding of the Nile. This annual flooding and the fish of the Nile were necessary for prosperity. *Khnum*, an early Egyptian god, was thought to be responsible for water and procreation. *Osiris*, an Egyptian god of the dead, was associated with resurrecting dead vegetation to bring life. By this plague, God was asserting his power of life and death. And...he was making the Egyptian gods detestable to all the inhabitants of the land.

The second plague was for the land of Egypt to be overrun by frogs. Everywhere. There were frogs everywhere. Stinking, slimy frogs... everywhere. *Heqet* was an Egyptian goddess of fertility in the form of— a frog. By this plague, God showed that *Heqet* was a goddess taking away life, not giving it. And again, he was making the Egyptian gods detestable to all the inhabitants of the land.

The rest of the plagues similarly demonstrated how God was ultimate power, much more powerful than Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods. It wasn't even a competition. Only in the minds of the people was it a war. The same pattern over and over. God plagued the Egyptians in a way that showed his power undermining the supposed power of the Egyptian gods. Still, Pharaoh would not let God's people go.

Let me remind you that Moses is eighty years old when he confronts Pharaoh. For the last forty years, Moses has been a shepherd in the desert. Wiry, rock-hard...physically and mentally. When he tells Pharaoh to let the people go, you can imagine that cushy, insulated Pharaoh trembles a little.

Now remember, Moses grew up in the court of a previous Pharaoh. He probably grew up with this Pharaoh and knows his strengths, and weaknesses. Pampered in every conceivable way, this Pharaoh is most likely fat and soft, and superstitious beyond belief. He is supposed to be a god himself, but he knows he is not. He knows, and this may have led to doubt about the Egyptian gods themselves. Pharaoh trembles as he understands that the God of Moses is awesome in power.

Let's jump to the tenth plague, the last plague needed. If God's instructions weren't followed, the first-born children and animals of the inhabitants of Egypt would die. The Israelites were instructed to paint blood on their doorways in a specific way. The Egyptians, including the Pharaoh, did not do so. *All* of their firstborn died. The Israelites did so, and their firstborn were saved. This is the basis of the Israelite's annual Passover festival.

The plague created a disaster. Pharaoh was so anxious to get rid of the Israelites that he summoned Aaron and Moses in the middle of the night to beg them to leave. Not only did the Israelites get to walk right out of slavery, but they took their herds and flocks with them. The Egyptians were so anxious for the Israelites to leave that they showered them with clothing, silver, and gold. Just as God had promised, the Israelites plundered the Egyptians.

God wanted to take the Israelites straight to Canaan, but to take the direct route, meant going through dangerous Philistine country. They had been slaves for a very long time, God knew they were not prepared to face war, or, temptation. So, God led them by the desert road toward the Red Sea.² God led them with a cloud during the day, and a giant column of fire at night to give them light.

Pharaoh's grief subsided, and he came to a stark realization. Egypt had lost its workforce: Israelite slaves, innumerable valuable slaves, and valuable assets along with them. Like any good politician, Pharaoh changed his mind and decided to get them back. He led all of the chariots of Egypt, along with horsemen and troops, to chase the Israelites down.

Pharaoh's spies knew exactly where the Israelites were. Pharaoh was ecstatic when he saw the Israelites trapped in front of the Sea. It was going to be an easy task to drive them back to Egypt. That night, the column of fire in front of the Israelites moved between the two groups, preventing them from seeing each other.

The Israelites were in a panic. They berated Moses, "Weren't there enough graves in Egypt for us to die there?" "Didn't we tell you to leave us alone in Egypt and serve the Egyptians there?" It was obvious that we were not prepared to battle against Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. In fact, we were more than willing to return to being slaves rather than trust God.

Moses told us not to be afraid, but to watch the deliverance from the Lord... "the Lord will fight for you, but you have to be still."

"Why are you waiting," the Lord asked Moses, a heavenly smile on his face. "Tell them to move on. Raise your staff and the sea will part, and the Israelites will pass through on dry ground. Then, I will punish the Egyptians so everyone will know that I am the Lord."

Moses stretched out his staff over the sea, and the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land, all night long. The Israelites went across on dry land with a wall of water on each side.

The Israelites were nearly finished crossing, when the column of cloud moved. Pharaoh saw the Israelites escaping, and he went into a raging frenzy. All of the chariots and horsemen raced across the dry land. At least it was dry for a while. The chariots started bogging down in the sand, and the Egyptians realized the Lord was against them. It was their turn to panic, they

² Exodus 15:22

retreated, but Moses lowered his staff and as the waters crashed over them, they drowned. Not one survived.

When the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord crush the army of Pharaoh, they understood who God was. They put their trust in him and in Moses. That day, God demonstrated complete victory over the gods of Egypt.

My people have been slaves for so long that they don't know how to be free. And, they have worshiped the gods of Egypt so long that they default to worshiping them. As an elder of the Israelites, I am skeptical. *Today*, they know who God is. God was able to take the Israelites out of Egypt, but I fear he won't be able to get the Egyptian gods out of the Israelites' hearts. The war with Egypt may be over, but the war for the hearts of my people...is far from over.