
Prayers

To God

All praise to you, holy God and master of all things. You can see into the mind of an academic, the body of a sportsman or sportswoman, the soul of an artist and the heart of a craftsman. You can appreciate all these because You created them in your own image; You who have supreme intellect, power, elegance and craft. Receive our praise, almighty Lord and God, for You are the source of all good and the object of our quest.
AMEN

For myself

Weekly theme: Personal faith

Place yourself in God's hands, for everything that is on your mind today. Let go of what worries you and trust in the Lord. It may seem hard, but this is your pathway.

For others

Pray for those preparing for the Paralympics; it is now a global phenomenon that means a great deal to thousands of people, and without it their lives would be significantly diminished.

Meditation

Lord, when there is nothing left and I feel poured out like water;
I come to You to renew my soul.

Lord, when my bones ache with weariness, stress and toil;
I come to You to heal my body.

Lord, when I have lost my way and fail to find my directions;
I come to You for guidance.

Lord, when the repeating nature of my earthly life oppresses me;
I come to you for restoration.

Lord, when I am troubled by the things I see around me every day;
I come to You for peace.

Lord, when the people around me fail to see me for who I am;
I come to You for affirmation.

Lord, when the world has lost its way and I do not know where to go;
I come to You for salvation.

You never let me down!

Bible Passage

Exodus 6:28-7:7

²⁸ Now, the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt ²⁹ and said to him,

'I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.'

³⁰ But Moses protested before the LORD,

'In truth, I am a poor speaker, why would Pharaoh listen to me?'

^{7:1} The LORD said to Moses,

'Look, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ² You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron will tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave his land. ³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will do more and more signs and wonders in Egypt. ⁴ Because Pharaoh will not listen to you, I will place my hand on Egypt, and with great acts of judgment, I will bring my people the Israelites out of the land of Egypt like an army prepared for war. ⁵ The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and lead the Israelites out from among them.'

⁶ So this is what Moses and Aaron did, just as the LORD commanded them. ⁷ Moses was 80 years old and Aaron was 83 years old when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Review

This reading straddles the end of chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 7, and marks the point at which the preliminary stories of Moses and the Israelites in Egypt come to an end. From tomorrow, the great story of the Exodus continues as Moses and Aaron again confront Pharaoh. But from this point onwards the battle is in earnest, and Egypt will suffer a series of deadly plagues as God strikes the land and its leader.

Our passage begins with God telling Moses what to do (6:28) and Moses complaining to God that because he is a poor speaker, he will find this task very difficult (6:29). But God never gives up and continues to tell Moses what to do and say, and we know from all that has happened previously that Aaron is ready to support Moses and act as his speaker when necessary. In comparison with the previous discussion about this very point, in chapter 4 (4:10f.), Moses and God appear to be more relaxed about the matter. It seems that the Lord was not as angry as before. Now was not the time for pursuing difficulties and arguing about details, it was the time for getting the job done.

So despite Moses' objections, God proceeds regardless. He gives Moses authority, saying *'I will make you like God to Pharaoh ...'* (7:1). He also confirms that Aaron will speak for him, declaring in a quite extraordinary phrase that Aaron will be Moses' *'prophet'* (7:1). This is a strange use of the word 'prophet', which reminds us that a prophet is someone who speaks for and on behalf of someone else; so a prophet in the church today is someone who speaks for and on behalf of God.

Our passage is dominated by the sense that God wants things done. God addresses Moses using His holy Name *'the LORD'* (6:28), and tells him to go again to Pharaoh. He is not to spend any more time trying to help the Israelites or attempting to deal with their anger at what they thought had gone wrong (5:1f.) he had to go directly to *'the King of Egypt'* (6:29) and

show him that he had not gone away. Moses had stood before this ruler once before and been dismissed (5:4-6), but this was no defeat; it was the beginning of an attrition, psychological and spiritual battle that would take some time. It was a battle that would not be lost and in which God would be the victor; Moses had to have this very conviction or he would not be able to carry out God's instructions in the coming battle, in which he would have a key role.

The bulk of God's speech to Moses sets out, once again, what must be done to get Pharaoh to release the Israelites (7:1-5). It all seems straightforward, though it contains some subtle emphases and additions to the instructions which are useful for our understanding of what was really happening between Moses and God. Nevertheless, a summary like this was an important part of the way that stories were told in ancient times. Great stories were recited from memory and when they were read out loud, a summary such as this served the purpose of reminding listeners of the main 'plot'. They helped keep the story line well focussed, and any changes of emphasis showed how the story was progressively moving on.

Again, the Lord God did not tell Moses and Aaron what lay ahead; He only told them that they should be faithful to what he was calling them to do. Verse 2 tells Moses and Aaron that they must not let go of the vision of Israel's liberation, for this was the reason why God called them. It is typical of many stories of the Old Testament that the great 'saints' of ancient times were required to exercise faith that could almost be called 'blind faith'. Although they knew what they had to do and a small amount about the end objective of God's will, they did not necessarily comprehend or understand. But in doing what God required they would find the answers to their problems and Israel's problems.

Most of what God says here in verses 2 to 5 has been revealed before; we know that Moses and Aaron are to confront Pharaoh yet again to demand the release of Israel, and we know that they must perform '*signs and wonders*' (7:3). But the new features of God's promises found here are these. The Lord prophesies Pharaoh's reaction to what will happen and says that He will '*harden*' Pharaoh's heart (7:3), making it necessary for the Lord to perform more and more '*signs and wonders*'. The simple signs and wonders already revealed to Moses (4:1f.) will not be enough and he and Aaron will have to ready for God to do new things through them at any time.

Then, the Lord reveals that because of Pharaoh's intransigence, the people of Israel will leave Egypt, '*like an army prepared for war*' (7:4). It is a remarkable promise; the rag-bag nation, incapable of coherence and living in abject poverty and subjugation, will find themselves under God a disciplined army trained for war! Such a transformation could be no natural event, only a supernatural work of God to bless His people and defeat the powers of Egypt!

No wonder therefore that at the end of God's mini speech here, he declares that the end result of Aaron's and Moses' work on His behalf will be that the great and mighty Egypt, one of the most ancient civilisations in the world, will '*know that I am the Lord*' (7:5). The Lord God Himself prophesies that he will have victory over Egypt and establish a degree of authority over this pagan land!

Throughout His speech, God accepted full responsibility and authority over all that would happen, and in this way, reassured Moses and Aaron. Throughout, the words '*I will ...*' recur at least four times (depending on translation), and this shows God's intent and His controlling power. What would be more comforting for Moses and Aaron? They would not know everything before it happens, but all they had to do was to place their trust in God and He would work through them.

The result of all this encouragement becomes clear at the end of this brief summary. In verse 6 we are told that Moses and Aaron were indeed able to do what they had been commanded, despite the odds against them. They were old (7:7), their own people had

followed them at first and then rejected them (5:15-23), Moses was ill at ease as a speaker (6:30), let alone before Pharaoh, and apart from the promises of God, they had nothing with which to confront the most powerful man on earth; Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Yet they did what God required, and as we now know, they were victorious!

Going Deeper

Further Comments

This passage contains an extraordinary promise to Moses that he would be made 'like God' to Pharaoh, and this needs further exploration. We will also find that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the mentioning of signs and wonders all bring out further matters of interest. God's plan to release His people was detailed and required complete obedience from Moses and Aaron. With reassurance, they were now ready to do exactly what they were told.

Final instructions before battle

For the second time in Exodus, the Lord spoke to Moses and told him that he was to be 'like God' to someone. Earlier (4:16), we read what God said to Moses about how he would use his brother Aaron as a prophet, adding 'you will be like God for him'. This is the most extraordinary thing for God to say, and Moses is the only person in the whole Bible to whom it is said. It sounds very dramatic, but what it means is that as far as Aaron was concerned, what Moses told him would be the same as receiving instructions straight from the Lord Himself, and Aaron's task was to pass this on directly to the people, as prophecy. Now, here in this passage, Moses is told 'I have made you like God to Pharaoh!' Again, this appears extraordinary, but there is a straightforward explanation. Pharaoh regarded himself to be a god, governing Egypt and doing what he wished with it, so the Lord decided to give Moses the qualities, power and signs that would make Pharaoh treat him like a god. As we have mentioned in earlier studies, Pharaoh would normally only speak with those who could demonstrate or claim divine status, so God's words to Moses were powerfully reassuring. God had prepared the way for everything that was about to happen.

As well as showing Moses that He was in control of events in this way, God also promised that He, the Lord, would also be in control when Pharaoh 'hardened' his heart. The Lord had already said this once before to Moses in their earlier discussion on the 'Mountain of God' (4:21), however, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart becomes a feature of the unfolding story of the plagues, creating a great deal of tension within the story (8:15,19,32; 9:7,12,34,35 etc.). What is not clear in English is that three different words are used in Hebrew for this 'hardening'. Mostly, the Hebrew word used is 'hazak' which has a core meaning of 'to be strong'; in other words, having appeared to give way to the Moses' demands after a plague hit the land, Pharaoh would become strong again, changing his mind and dashing the hopes of Israel that they would be freed.

A second word is also used to describe Pharaoh's 'hard' heart, and this is 'kabath' which means 'to be thick, or heavy', and numerous puns are made at Pharaoh's expense about the tardiness of his mind and reactions; jokes which are not obvious to us who read the passages in English! Christians who attend a Passover festival today will quickly learn that Jewish people find a great deal of humour and fun within some parts of the story of the plagues and the Exodus.

In this passage we have read today, however, a third and different word is used which is only used here. It is the Hebrew word 'qashah' which means 'to become hard', and it describes how a mud brick, for example, becomes hard in the glare of the sun's rays. The word is used

with considerable sarcasm, for the Pharaoh who forced the Israelites to 'harden' bricks of mud under conditions of slavery became so hardened himself that he could not recognise God's final warning about releasing the Israelites, leaving himself and all Egypt open to the most awful of plagues, the death of the first-born (Ex 12).

The plan of God revealed?

The second half of God's speech to Moses contains more about His plans than we might quickly realise. We are told that God will 'do more and more signs and wonders', with a clear emphasis on 'more and more' (7:3)! This is the first we hear about further miracles, for Moses had earlier been given three signs and wonders to perform (4:1-9) which were supposed to be used to convince the people of Israel (4:30,31) of the Lord's authority and power, and they were also told to use them when confronting Pharaoh (4:21). Up to this point in the story, nothing has been said about further miracles, so clearly, God intended to move matters on with much more dramatic force!

The Lord then spelt out in more detail the general pattern of what lay ahead for Moses and Aaron. When Pharaoh refused to listen to their plea to release the Israelites, God would act in 'judgment' (7:4). We are so used to the word 'judgment' that we read it without noticing whether it has any special significance; but in this instance it does. This is only the third mention of the word 'judgment' so far in the Bible, and all three references speak about God's judgment on Egypt for their enslavement of God's people. God clearly acted in some form of 'judgment' in a number of stories in Genesis (for example, at the time of the Flood, or Sodom and Gomorrah), but the word 'judgment' only begins to appear in stories which refer to the Exodus.

The first mention of judgement comes in God's prophecy about the enslavement of His people in Genesis 15:14, and the second is in Exodus (6:6). Piece by piece, the Bible introduces this major theme of God's power and work in the world, and most Christians do not spot the fact that the great plagues in Exodus are the first occasion the Bible specifically talks about judgment. As such, the plagues have much to teach us about God's nature and how He works, and when we read them, we will have to bear this in mind. The truth is that when God acts within the world, what He does will make evident what is right and what is wrong, showing the difference between good and evil. That is judgment. In Exodus, God separated out His own people because He had chosen them and had a task for them. His judgment came upon Egypt because their enslavement of the Israelites prevented them from doing God's will, and the story of Exodus is partly about the liberation of Israel and partly about the judgment of Egypt and the way the God demonstrated His glory by defeating the Egyptians.

There is no doubt, however, that God was going to extract His people from Egypt, and promised that He would do so in dramatic form. Israel was formed into a nation from the tribal clan of Jacob which went to Egypt to avoid the perils of drought (Gen 50), but they would leave the country standing tall and on full alert (7:5). In addition, God Himself would be at their head, leading them on according to His will (7:5). This great prophecy anticipated the time when the Lord would lead Israel 'in a pillar of cloud by day ... and in a pillar of fire by night' (Exodus 13:21).

Discipleship

Application

The pathway of Christian discipleship

If we are God's people, then His will cannot be avoided. God works with each of us patiently until we are ready to do what He wants. The path of Christian discipleship is often one by which we slowly realise more and more about what God requires of us, and we gradually gain the confidence to be obedient to His call. Just as the Lord repeatedly called Moses to confront Pharaoh, so He will repeatedly call us, especially when we feel uncertain about the nature of what we are called to do. The Lord will often give us reassurance through others. For Moses, this came through the support of his brother Aaron, but it is also true that the Lord's continued support of us is evidence of His faith and trust in us. It is my firm belief that God is calling people today to do all manner of things for Him, but in our rational world, people quickly turn away if they do not understand what they think God may be calling them to do, or they believe that others should be doing things, not themselves.

God is with us – for good

The miracle of God's grace is that He stays with us and does not give up on us, just as He did not give up on Moses. The Bible teaches us that God has confidence in all of us who are His people, and He will always seek to work through us. He never ceases to offer us assurance and help us by explaining things to us in new ways, often repeating things to us and offering us new insights to help us along the way. But in the end, we have to be willing to listen and obey!

God at work doing new things

None of us knows what lies ahead, and although we presume that things will continue as they are, sometimes the Lord does something or uses us in quite unexpected ways. It is wise for us to seek the Lord's guidance about our regular lifestyle and work, and be content with it. However, we should also be prepared for the Lord to do something new at any time, and maybe even require us to change direction in our work or our lifestyle. In this way, we can be secure in what we normally do, but always be ready for anything the Lord might call us to do.

Ideas for what to do

- Read carefully through this study and write down a list of what you can learn from this passage. For example, about trusting God, about having faith for the future, about letting God set the agenda. How can you put these lessons into practice?
- Where do you think God is wanting to confront the powers of the world and draw them out in confrontation, as He did with Pharaoh? How do you believe this will work, and why?

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In your opinion, what does this passage say which offers re-assurance to Moses. If you were Moses, what reassurance would you need?
2. Discuss the importance of receiving reassurance from the Lord today. How does this happen?
3. Why is it necessary for God to judge Egypt?

Final Prayer

You are the One who has brought me to this place, Lord Jesus. Guide me therefore to where You would have me go from here. Show me a sign, a light, a map; any guidance by which Your Word may lead me on, so that I may give glory to You in all I do, from this time on:
AMEN
