

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



The Mighty Hand of God

KEY PASSAGE: Exodus 5:1-2 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Exodus 4:21; 7:14-25; 8:1-32; 9:1-35; 10:1-29

► SUMMARY

It's possible to read the Bible, know it is true, yet miss a lesson God wants to teach us in a particular passage.

For instance, the story of Moses and God's miraculous deliverance of the sons of Israel from Egyptian slavery is filled with valuable applications regarding trusting and obeying God. However, there is another character in the story from whom we can learn a lesson regarding what not to do. Pharaoh demonstrated a pattern of disobedience that we never want to follow.

► SERMON POINTS

The Hebrews were the extended family of Joseph who became a slave in Egypt and was eventually elevated by Pharaoh to a high position in the government. Pharaoh invited the family to come to Egypt and live in a choice area called Goshen. In time, that small group of 70 people grew to approximately 2 million.

When a new king arose in Egypt who didn't know Joseph, the Israelites were forced into slavery and hard labor. Moses was a Hebrew boy who grew up and was educated in the palace but was later forced to flee for his life. He spent the next 40 years as a shepherd in the desert until God called to him from a burning bush and told him to go back to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to let His people go.

God's mighty hand worked through Moses to accomplish His purpose.

"The LORD said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that

he will not let the people go'" (Ex. 4:21). God's purpose was not only to rescue the Hebrews, but in the process, He was also going to use Pharaoh's hard heart to bring Egypt into subjection so that they would know that He was the one true God.

When Moses and Aaron gave Pharaoh God's message, he said, "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" (Ex. 5:2). Then in response, Pharaoh increased their labor by withholding the straw needed for making bricks while demanding the same quota.

God began His work on Pharaoh's hard heart using plagues.

Since his heart was stubborn, God brought a series of nine plagues on Egypt, yet after each one, Pharaoh's heart grew harder, and he refused to let the Israelites go.

- **Blood** (Ex. 7:14-25). The Lord turned all the water in the Nile River to blood. The fish died, the river became foul, and the people had to dig in the ground to find any water to drink.
- **Frogs** (Ex. 8:1-15). God caused frogs to come up from the water and cover the land. They were in their homes, beds, ovens, and bowls. Pharaoh promised to let the people go, but when God removed the frogs, he changed his mind.
- **Gnats** (Ex. 8:16-19). Next, gnats covered the entire land of Egypt. Even the magicians declared this to be the work of God, but Pharaoh would not listen to them or the Lord.
- **Insects** (Ex. 8:20-32). Swarms of insects filled the houses and covered the ground, but God set apart His people in

the land of Goshen so that no insects were found there. In doing this, He demonstrated to Pharaoh that He was the powerful God of the Hebrews who controlled all these events in Egypt. Yet when He removed the insects, Pharaoh once again went back on his promise to free God's people.

- **Pestilence** (Ex. 9:1-7). The Lord sent a disease that killed all the livestock in Egypt, but He protected the livestock belonging to His people.
- **Boils** (Ex. 9:8-12). Painful boils broke out on both man and beast. God could have wiped out all the Egyptians with pestilence by now, but He let them remain in order to show them His power and make His name known throughout the earth (vv. 14-16).
- **Hail** (Ex. 9:13-35). Moses told Pharaoh a severe hailstorm was coming and warned him to have his people and animals seek shelter. The hail destroyed the crops and trees and fell on any people and animals remaining outside. However, in the land of Goshen, there was no hail. Although Pharaoh momentarily repented, when the storm stopped, he sinned again and hardened his heart.
- **Locusts** (Ex. 10:1-20). The Lord sent locusts to cover all the land of Egypt. There were so many that the sky grew dark. They filled the houses and ate every plant and all the fruit of the trees that were left after the hailstorm. There was nothing green left in the land of Egypt. Their food supply was gone, and all the people were suffering because of Pharaoh's hard heart. His disobedience affected the entire nation.
- **Darkness** (Ex. 10:21-29). The next plague was thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for three days. They couldn't see each other and didn't even leave their homes, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. Life in Egypt came to a standstill, yet Pharaoh's heart grew harder, and his anger burned toward Moses. He told him, "Get away from me! Beware,

do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!" (v. 28)

We must avoid following Pharaoh's pattern of disobedience.

Although he was repeatedly given opportunities to obey the Lord, Pharaoh responded with contempt for the God of the Hebrews. When the situations became bad enough, he suggested compromises to the Lord's command by restricting who could leave Egypt to worship Him. Time after time, he made promises to release the people, but as soon as relief came, he broke his word. His stubborn heart caused suffering for all the Egyptians, and resulted in the destruction of their land, water, and food supply. There was one more plague to come that would finally break Pharaoh's obstinate will, but even the death of all the firstborn in Egypt could not soften his hardened heart toward God.

Throughout this account, God shows us the danger of repeated disobedience. With each act of willful rebellion our hearts grow harder, and our self-will becomes stronger. The best time to obey the Lord is immediately upon conviction. This doesn't mean just making promises to Him but following through on our commitment to obey. We must also guard against setting conditions for our submission to the Lord because partial obedience is the same as disobedience in His eyes.

► RESPONSE

- Have you ever found yourself following Pharaoh's pattern of disobedience? What promises have you made to God in times of desperation? Which ones have you broken after relief came?
- How seriously do you take your obedience to God? What are the dangers of repeatedly hardening your heart against Him?

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