

Fighting against God

7 Aug. 2011 Bulleen BC
Exodus 5:1-9

Do you enjoy stories?

I must confess that I always enjoy a good story!

Some stories may be based in history, while others may be pure fantasy. Some may be designed for teaching, while others may be for pure enjoyment.

I enjoy reading stories in books; I enjoy listening to them, from people who know how to tell them well;

I enjoy watching them in well made movies; AND,
I have always enjoyed reading them from the Bible.

Over the next month or so, we will be looking at some of the many wonderful stories of the Bible, not just to remind ourselves that God involves himself in the lives of people, but to see if there are some lessons and applications for our lives today.

Today we are going to look at one of the many stories of Moses, in particular the story of when Moses and Aaron first went to Pharaoh, the ruler of ancient Egypt, with the request to set God's people free from slavery.

Read: Exodus 5:1-9

Of course, the story really began in the desert wilderness while Moses was tending Jethro's sheep. Jethro was the priest of the Midianites and his father-in-law (Ex.3:1).

When Moses was near Mount Horeb he saw a bush that was on fire, but not consumed by the fire.

This was most unusual, to say the least. As he drew near, God spoke to him from the bush. We call this a theophany - God presenting himself in a form that could be understood, though mysterious (vs.4).

God said, *'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt .. And I am concerned about their suffering.'* (vs.7) God then outlined his plan for the salvation of the people, and it involved Moses.

Now, Moses was an excellent candidate because, though he also was born an Israelite, he had been adopted and raised by the daughter of Pharaoh.

As such, he knew the Egyptian language, culture and workings of government. It must also be said that, if Moses had stayed in Egypt, he could have been the next Pharaoh, but certain events changed this course of history.

The next chapter, chapter 4, involved Moses arguing with God because he didn't think he was good enough to do what God was asking (a familiar story, I think).

Following this heated exchange, the outcome was that God provided Aaron, Moses' brother, to assist him in the task at hand.

We now come to the story we have read in Ch.5.

It began with Moses and Aaron standing before Pharaoh and saying that God wanted Pharaoh to let the people go, to hold a festival in the desert. (vs.1)

What kind of request was this?

As far as Pharaoh was concerned, **HE** was one of the most powerful men in the then known world, and an old man and his older brother had come out of the desert to say that the god of **HIS** slaves was asking **HIM** to let them go to have a party.

As an aside, look at Ex.7:7, *'Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.'* I like this verse, because it tells me there is no age discrimination, or age limit, in the Lord's service.

Pharaoh's reply seems to be rather predictable: *'Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.'* (vs.2)

Moses ignored Pharaoh's ignorance of God and persisted in his line of argument.

His argument was simple: God **has not just** spoken to us, but **MET** with us. If we do not obey there may be consequences to pay.

Now this sounds very much like my parents when I was young, and like Cheryl, when our children were young.

Does it sound a little like you as parents? **Yes??**

Then you understand what God was saying.

The message is simple - **Don't mess with God!**

Pharaoh however was unmoved by this threat/truth.

His answer to Moses and Aaron was in the form of a question: *'... why are you taking the people away from their labour? Get back to your work!'* (vs.4)

It would seem that short term profits were more important to Pharaoh than long term consequences.

To demonstrate his supreme authority and power over the people of Egypt, Pharaoh gave orders to make the slaves working conditions even harder. They had to make the same number of clay bricks only now they had to also gather their own straw (vs.7). As far as Pharaoh was concerned the people were lazy, and they needed to be taught a lesson (vs.8). He would show them who had ultimate power over their lives.

Because of the efforts of Moses and Aaron, the hardship of the people was greater than before and they complained: *'You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.'* (vs.21)

Of course, the story does not end here.

This was only the beginning.

From this moment on, the lines were clearly drawn.

Pharaoh, as a ruthless tyrant, had declared himself in opposition to the revealed will of God.

And so began the battle of wills: God in his might and power; Pharaoh in his selfish stubbornness and obstinacy. It reminds me of Gamaliel's speech to the Sanhedrin after they had seized the Apostles for preaching about Jesus in the Temple courtyard:

He said, *'.. In the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! .. For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will find yourselves fighting against God.'* (Acts 5:38-39)

From Ch.7:8 until the end of Ch.14 we have the record of this dramatic contest between God and man. It is a contest that is still, so often, played out in the lives of many people even today.

At first Pharaoh played 'hard ball', and would not yield an inch. Then he tried to match wits with Moses and Aaron, only to see that the power of the God of Moses and Aaron was greater than the power of his own magicians.

The record of Aarons staff becoming a snake and swallowing the staffs of Pharaoh's magicians did not impress him.

Neither did the Nile River turning to blood.

Ch.7:23 says, '*.. Pharaoh turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart.*'

Even though his own family and people suffered, because of **HIS** arrogance and disobedience to God, Pharaoh remained obdurate, unrelenting and unrepentant.

Then came the plague of frogs (8:1-15).

Once again, Pharaoh's magicians were able to replicate the calling up of frogs (vs.7), however, they were unable to get rid of them.

Finally Pharaoh relented .. **a little**.

In Ch.8:8 he said; '***Pray to the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.***'

Wow! This was Pharaoh's first acknowledgement that the God of Moses was more powerful than his own magicians. However, true to form, as soon as the frogs were dead, Pharaoh went back on his promise. Vs.15 says; '*Pharaoh hardened his heart*'.

What do you do with someone who repeatedly makes promises and does not keep them?

Now things get very serious. The next plague was that of gnats. The **BIG** difference now was that Pharaoh's magicians were unable to replicate what Moses and Aaron have done (vs.18).

In vs.19 we have this amazing statement by the magicians; '*This is the finger of God.*'

They were convinced! The God of Moses was **definitely** more powerful than them. Now Pharaoh stood alone in his defiance against God.

Once again the Lord sent another plague, this time of flies. Pharaoh tried to bargain or compromise with God. In vs.25 he said; '*.. sacrifice to your God **HERE** in the land.*'

When this was rejected Pharaoh relented, but, as soon as the flies departed, so did Pharaoh's promise. **Again** he hardened his heart (vs.32).

How many chances does God give us when we lie, cheat and deceive him? If nothing else, this story is one of God's patience in the face of evil.

What followed then was a series of plagues, each one worse than the last, and each with a new feature of judgement. The plague on the livestock of the Egyptians was terrible, while the animals of the Israelites were untouched.

Pharaoh's heart was unyielding.

Next was the plague of boils. Painful, festering boils! Again the Israelites were not affected (vs.11).

The notable thing now was that; *'the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.'* (vs.12)

Pharaoh was not only losing his kingdom, the loyalty of his people, but also his own will to decide.

This was followed by the plague of Hail; the plague of locusts; the plague of darkness, and finally the death of the first born males of each household.

Because of one man's greed for power, countless others were forced to suffer.

Doesn't this ring true even today!

Finally, in Ch.12:31 Pharaoh had had enough.

The death of his son and heir had brought him as low as he could go. He was utterly broken.

He could not resist God anymore.

But, was this repentance? No!

At no time did Pharaoh acknowledge that he had been wrong. At no time did he ask God's forgiveness and seek a true change of his heart and mind to the will of God.

For Pharaoh it was simply an acknowledgement of defeat. He had waged war against God and lost.

Of course, we know that Pharaoh later tried to pursue Moses and the Israelites, and this eventually cost him, not only his army, but his life.

This is a story that speaks of the cost of defiance against God, and unrepentance for sin.

How long will the Lord contend with mankind?

God's solution to all of mankind's rebellion against God is found in Jesus, who died on the cross for us all. When we yield to Him, we exchange a life of defiance for a new life of joy and peace.

May we never forget Jesus. Amen