



Leaders Note

Acts 7: 17-41 Moses

Thought

“No prophet has risen since in Israel like Moses, whom GOD knew face-to-face. Never since has there been anything like the signs and miracle-wonders that GOD sent him to do in Egypt, to Pharaoh, to all his servants, and to all his land—nothing to compare with that all powerful hand of his and all the great and terrible things Moses did as every eye in Israel watched.” Deuteronomy 34:10-12

The phrase Moses’ “all-powerful hand” in the Message Bible is striking, although when you think about it, you realize that that’s exactly how the Egyptians ultimately saw Moses (“You will be God to Pharaoh, and Aaron will be your prophet”) not to mention the Israelites. The irony is that Moses had a long list of reasons why he couldn’t do what God was calling him to do. It is typically ‘upside down’ that the (once exalted, educated and powerful) beaten down murderer, reject and now humble shepherd rises to become deliverer, miracle-worker, nation-builder, and lawgiver. Not bad for someone who viewed himself as incompetent. We can learn that, while Moses had a unique calling and role among his people, the challenge he embraced was not. It’s the challenge that comes to all of us to not merely rise above our inadequacies as we pursue God’s call, but to allow God to work through the very things we are convinced disqualify us from even trying.

Context

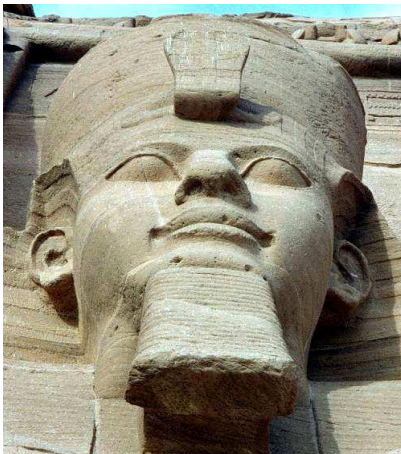
Date of the exodus: As to the date of the exodus, there is considerable debate. According to 1 Kings 6:1, the exodus took place 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon’s reign — which would make it approximately 1446 BC. This would make the pharaoh’s Thutmose III and his son Amenhotep II. However mention in Exodus 1:11 of the city of Ramesses has led some to argue for a later date, to fit in with the Ramesses II who ruled around 1290 BC. The fact is that at this point, we just really don’t know for sure.

Angel in a burning bush: “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire” said the psalmist (quoted in Hebrews 1:7). Angels could take on the full form of a human being and even eat a meal just as easily as assume the form of flame in a bush that simply won’t go out. Bushes in that desert landscape would be known to combust — a sudden flare-up followed by smoke. What catches Moses’ eye is the fact this bush just kept burning.

I AM WHO I AM: The divine name of God given to Moses was a four-letter word that we don’t even know how to pronounce now. All we have are the four consonants yod-heh-vav-heh or YHVH (or YHWH). For fear of misusing the name of God, readers of the ancient text would read the Hebrew word adonai “Lord” in its place. Inserting

the vowels of adonai into YHVH results in Yahovah which is where we got Jehovah (a non-existent word, actually). Most Hebrew scholars propose an original pronunciation of Yahveh or Yahweh. But the fact is we just don't know. It's perhaps better just to stick with the traditional "LORD" or translate it I AM — the one who is, who was and who shall be.

Does God harden Pharaoh's heart? Nine times in Exodus we are told that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh — as if it were God who was causing Pharaoh to stubbornly refuse to let Israel go. We might get the notion that Pharaoh was God's puppet, that he wanted to let Israel go, but God kept changing his mind. So was Pharaoh responsible? Our initial reaction is to come to God's rescue and assert that of course he would never force someone to do what they didn't want to do (how very democratic of him!). The fact is the ninefold statement "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" would tell the formerly enslaved people of Israel in no uncertain terms that their God was in fact the King calling the shots, not the oppressive Pharaoh. They would have been under no delusions that Pharaoh was really just a king trying to do the right thing but prevented from doing so by the application of unfair divine leverage. Their view of Pharaoh from under his lash was clear: he was an evil tyrant who oppressed them but was overruled by the Higher Power who simply amplified Pharaoh's innate stubbornness. This is reinforced by the fact that matching the nine-fold repetition of "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" is the nine-fold statement "Pharaoh hardened his heart." God can and does magnify our existing disposition — what we need to remember is that He knows the heart. God's judgement often is seen in this: 'He gave them over to the desires of their flesh' meaning that He withdraws his positive influence and lets someone embrace their evil desires wholeheartedly, resulting in hearts that are more hardened to Him. So in a sense, and in reality, He has hardened their hearts, but ultimately because that is what they have wanted in the first place.



Seated statue of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel



Learning Session

Read the passage and then share some context information. Split up into small groups and discuss the following questions:

1. What's the scariest, most intimidating task you've ever been asked to perform?
2. What reasons did Moses give for not carrying out this call? He seemed eager and ready before, why is he trying to excuse himself now?
3. How have perceived inadequacies hindered you from pursuing his call? How have you seen God show up in the midst of your inadequacies?
4. Anything stopping you at this moment?

Gather together for a time of feedback, there should be some good stories, hopefully. Some good point to stress during this time are:

- Stephen probably chose Moses because of what he said to the people (v37). By using this story Stephen is declaring that Jesus is that Prophet.
- God can use us regardless of our lack of gifting or inadequacies all we need to be is willing servants, He does the rest.
- Share one of your own stories.

Minister

Discussion Questions

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