

MOSES: The Servant of God

F. B. Meyer, B.A

No Copyright

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

CHAPTER SEVEN

FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

“And Moses said, Lord, wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that Thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all” (Exodus 5:22, 23).

IN loving interchange of thought, the noble and venerable brothers reached Egypt; and in pursuance of the Divine command proceeded to summon the elders of Israel to a conference, at which they should present their credentials, and give utterance to the Divine message with which they were entrusted.

I. THE INTERVIEW WITH THE ELDERS

It must have been a very remarkable meeting, perhaps the first of the sort ever held. Never before had this downtrodden nation produced men daring enough to take such a step, the first, indeed, towards national autonomy.

We are not told whether there was any disposition on the part of any of these elders, who were probably the heads of the Hebrew families and tribes, to question the right of the brothers to convene them. In all likelihood, they were but too glad to merge all prior and selfish claims in a united effort on their people's behalf; and there were probably many stories afloat of Moses life and deeds, before his strange and sudden self-expatriation, which predisposed them to obey his call, and gather at some convenient spot within the territory allotted to them to inhabit.

When all were gathered Aaron recited on the behalf of Moses, who probably stood beside him without a word, the magnificent words spoken at the bush (Exodus 3:16-22).

We do not know how they were received. Perhaps Moses own fear was partly realized when he said to God, **“They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, the Lord hath not appeared unto thee.”**

The long years of bondage may have so quenched their hopes and quelled their spirits that they were unable to realize that the hour of deliverance had come. As the inmates of the house of Mary could not believe that Peter, for whose release they had been praying, really stood outside the door; so it was almost impossible to believe that the days of slavery were nearly ended, and that the hands of the clock of their destiny were at last pointing to the hour of release.

At this juncture the brothers would probably give the signs with which God had provided them; the serpent changed into a rod; the leprous hand made natural and whole; the water of the river becoming blood as it was poured out upon the land (Exodus 4:2-9). These won conviction; and from that meeting the tidings spread throughout the nation, whispered from hut to hut, told in under-breaths from slave to slave among the brick kilns.

“And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.”

II. THE AUDIENCE WITH PHARAOH

The next point for the brothers was to go to Pharaoh, with the demand that he should let the people go to hold a feast in the wilderness. This was according to the Divine direction (Exodus 3:18); and was moreover a reasonable request. So fastidious a people as the Egyptians could well understand how Israel would prefer to carry out their rites apart from the inspection of strangers, and the contagion of the predominant religious cult surrounding them. Besides, it was like asking for a brief holiday, after an unbroken spell of centuries of incessant toil. It did not set forth all they wanted; but inasmuch as it was a foregone conclusion that Pharaoh would grant nothing, even care was taken to deprive him of the excuse of saying that their demands were preposterous.

It was probably in an audience-room of some splendid palace, where the lordly Pharaoh received deputations and embassies, that they met him. How mixed must Moses feelings have been, entering as a suppliant the precincts in which he had played no inconspicuous part in those buried years! And then Aaron and he uttered the words, which pealed as a thunder-clap through the audience, **“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.”**

In order to appreciate the audacity of the demand, we must remember the unbridled power and authority which were claimed by the Egyptian monarchs. Each Pharaoh was the child of the sun. He is depicted as fondled by the greatest gods, and sitting with them in the recesses of their temples to receive worship equal to their own. “By the life of Pharaoh,” was the supreme oath. Without Pharaoh could no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. For him great Egypt existed. For him all other men lived, suffered, and died. For him the mighty Nile flowed from its unexplored fountains to fructify the soil. For him vast armies of priests, and magicians, and courtiers, wrought and ministered. From his superb throne he looked down on the wretched crowds of subject peoples, careless of their miseries. What were their tears and groans, and the wail of their bondage, but a fitting sacrifice to be offered to his exalted majesty!

In addition, the present monarch had recently, through his generals, achieved certain great victories; and these successes had greatly enhanced his arrogant pride, so that it was in a paroxysm of supercilious scorn that he answered the Divine demand: **“Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.”**

The point of the reply lies in that word obey.

He saw that these men did not present him with a request, but with a mandate from One of greater authority than himself. This stung him to the quick. He also was a god. Who was this other God, stronger than himself, who dared to issue such a summons! A God of whose existence till that moment he had been unaware! The God of a parcel of slaves! How dare they speak of their paltry Deity in his presence, and in the midst of priests, courtiers, and high officers of state!

The brothers met this outburst with a reiteration of their message, telling how the God of the Hebrews had met with them; and requesting, in a softer tone, that they might be permitted to do as He had enjoined. But the king refused to believe that their plea was genuine; and insisted on regarding the whole matter as a desire to escape from their labours, and as a plea for idleness.

Turning sharply on the two brethren, he accused them of hindering their people's toils, and bade them begone to their own share in the clay-pit, or the brick-kiln: **"Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? Get you unto your burdens."**

What a bitter taunt there was in that last sentence! How the royal lip curled as it was uttered! Already the heart had begun to harden! And so the audience ended, and the brothers came down the crowded corridors amid the titter of the court.

A very different scene was to be enacted a few months later, as the news came there of the overthrow of the monarch in the Red Sea the last stage of the conflict between himself and the God of the Hebrews, whose name he heard that day for the first time.

III. FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

That same day a new order was issued from the palace, emanating from Pharaoh himself, to the taskmasters of the people. And probably, ere the evening fell, the ominous word had passed from the task masters to the head-men who were set over their fellow Hebrews, and were, therefore, responsible for the daily delivery of a certain tale of bricks, that they must expect no more straw, though the daily returns must be maintained. **"Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw; go ye, get you straw where ye can find it. Yet not ought of your work shall be diminished."**

Then ensued a time of awful anguish.

The Hebrew head men told off some of the people to scatter themselves over the country, collecting straw from every quarter, and to do it with all haste.

And in the meantime they urged on the rest of the people to compensate for the absence of the straw-gatherers by their added energy. Every nerve was strained to the uttermost. From early morning to the last ray of light the whole nation sought to do the impossible beneath the scorching sun, and with never a moment's pause. And yet as the tale of bricks was counted it fell inevitably short. In vain did the taskmasters haste them, saying, **"Fulfil your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw."**

In vain were the officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, beaten, and such beating as they would get might mean death. It was as when a whole crew, stripped to the waist, works at the pumps; but they cannot pump out the water as quickly as it pours in; the water-line will not fall, and at length drowning is preferable to the agonized suspense.

Finally, they could stand it no longer, and resolved to make an appeal direct to Pharaoh. **"The officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh"** (ver. 15).

It was a bitter day for the two brothers when the people took the matter into their own hands, and, without using them as intermediaries, went direct to the king to get him to put them back to the point at which they stood before that well-meant, but disastrous interference. But it was evidently better that Moses and Aaron should wait outside the palace to learn the result of the interview (ver. 20).

It happened just as it might have been expected, the king would not listen to the appeal made to him. **"He said, Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord. Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given to you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks"** (verses 17, 18).

It may be that he referred again sarcastically to the **"vain words,"** on which the brothers had caused them to hope (ver. 9). And so they came forth from Pharaoh, at the very extreme of agony, dreading the lingering death from exhaustion and stripes, which apparently awaited their whole nation; and as Moses and Aaron stood there they poured on them the bitterness of their spirit.

What must it not have been for them to hear from those lips the bitterest reproaches they could frame, cutting them as knives, although they would have gladly given their lives to alleviate the circumstances out of which they sprang?

"The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to stink in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword into their hand to slay us."

As we look back on that scene, we can somewhat understand the reason for it all.

God can afford to bring us through passages like this, because of "the afterward" to which they lead.

It was necessary that Moses, Aaron, and the Hebrews, should come to see that their case was desperate, and that no appeals or reasonings or remonstrances could alter it.

It was necessary that the leaders should be weaned from the enthusiastic loyalty of the people, that they might lean only on the arm of the living God, and venture forth depending on Him alone.

It was necessary that the people should see that they could not better their position by any efforts of their own.

Yes, and their thoughts would henceforth be directed past the leaders, who were discredited in their very first endeavor, to the hand and heart of the Almighty.

IV. THE RESORT OF THE BAFFLED SOUL

“And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that Thou hast sent me?” (ver. 22).

There is no other help for us when passing through such stern discipline; and the man who cannot flee thither in similar straits is pitiable indeed. When we see our hopes blasted, our plans miscarry, our efforts do more harm than good, whilst we are discredited and blamed, pursued with the taunts and hate of those for whom we were willing to lay down our lives, we may preserve an outward calm; but there will be a heart-break underneath, and the noblest part in us will wither, as corn blasted by an east wind, unless we are able to pour out our whole complaint before God.

The agony of soul through which Moses passed must have been as death to him.

- He died to his self-esteem,
- He died to his castle-building,
- He died to pride in his miracles,
- He died to the enthusiasm of his people,
- He died to everything that a popular leader loves.

As he lay there on the ground alone before God, wishing himself back in Midian, and thinking himself hardly used, he was falling as a corn of wheat into the ground to die, no longer to abide alone, but to bear much fruit.

Ah, but dying is not pleasant work!

It is not easy nor pleasant to forego one's own plans, to cease from one's own works, to renounce one's own reputation, to be despised and flouted by the very slaves you would save. What corn of wheat enjoys having its waterproof sheath torn from it, its elements disintegrated, its heart eaten into, as it lies helpless, exposed to the earth-forces, in the cold, damp, dark soil? And yet this is the necessary condition which must be fulfilled, ere it can put forth the slender stalk, like a hand holding to the sun thirty, sixty, or a hundred grains like itself.

“That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die; . . . but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.”

It is a lesson for us all.

God must bring us down before He can raise us up. Emptying must precede filling. We must get to an end of ourselves before He can begin in us.

But what a beginning He makes!

“Then the Lord said unto Moses, Now thou shalt see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land” (Exodus 6:1).

And as those words of encouragement and promise broke on his ear, he must have forgotten the averted looks and bitter words of the people, and risen into a new world of restful expectation. Deliverance was sure, though he had learned that it did not depend on anything that he could do, but on that all-sufficient God, who had announced Himself as the **I AM**.

And out of the whole story there comes to us this lesson: we must never suppose that the difficulties which confront us indicate that we are not on God’s path, and doing his work.

Indeed the contrary is generally the case. If we are willing to walk with God, He will test the sincerity and temper of our soul; He will cause men to ride over our heads; He will bring us through fire and through water. But out of all He will bring us into a large room, and give us the very thing on which we have been taught to set our hearts.

The further banks of the Red Sea with their song of victory will wipe out the memory of those bitter disappointments, those sharp speeches, those hours of lonely anguish.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
