

### Acknowledge Your Enemy

Have you ever made a decision in the heat of the moment without thinking through the consequences of that decision? When the emotions are involved, it's easy to make a decision that you wish you could take back once you have time to think it over. That is where we find Pharaoh and the Egyptians in today's lesson.

As you recall, Israel spent its first years in Egypt living in peace as landowners and neighbors of the Egyptians. But then *Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.* (Exodus 1:6-7) The new king, unfamiliar with the family, said, *“Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. <sup>13</sup> So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.”* Their goal was to keep Israel miserable and under subjection. The Egyptians easily became accustomed to a certain way of life, having a multitude of slaves to wait on them and do the heavy labor that needed to be done. Then Moses showed up!

Certainly their lives became disrupted by the plagues the God of Moses sent to Egypt. When the Nile was turned to blood, they lost their main source of water for both drinking and irrigation. The crops were attacked by pestilence and then the locusts finished off what was left. Their livestock had been wiped out and the economy was not in good shape. The Egyptians suddenly needed to rebuild their nation. Every industry had been affected: farming, construction, mining, metals, and food. These plagues could have been avoided at any time by simply letting the Israelites leave Egypt but the hearts of Pharaoh and his people had only grown harder with each one. They dug in their heels and refused to release Israel.

However, when the tenth plague took all of their firstborn, the Egyptians were finally moved with profound grief and despair and relented. Pharaoh demanded Israel leave and the people agreed wholeheartedly, freely giving their riches to the departing slaves: anything to get them to go!

As we come to verse 5, it had been a couple of days and we find, *Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, “Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”* As their grief lessened, they had time to think about the consequences of what they had done. Their economy needed to be rebuilt and now they had to deal with the loss of their

labor force plus the loss of their wealth. Remember there were over 600,000 Israelite men alone and most had large families. Imagine the impact of losing more than two million slave laborers, all either cheap or free. Moreover, there was the gold, silver and other things the Egyptians gave as parting gifts to the Israelites. The combined wealth would have amounted to millions of dollars. When the full impact of their choice became clear, *their hearts were turned against the people*. Their hatred consumed them and all they thought about was getting their slaves and their riches back!

When they heard that the Israelites were camped between the sea and the desert, it's easy to imagine the rage of Pharaoh and his officials and the desire for revenge. Pharaoh asked, *"Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"*

"It is easy to imagine what a rage Pharaoh was now in, roaring like a lion disappointed of his prey, how his proud heart aggravated the affront, swelled with indignation, scorned to be baffled, longed to be revenged: and now all the plagues are as if they had never been. He has quite forgotten the sorrowful funerals of his firstborn, and can think of nothing but making Israel feel his resentments; now he thinks he can be too hard for God himself." Matthew Henry

Verses 6-8 give us Pharaoh's response, *<sup>6</sup> So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. <sup>7</sup> Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness.*

Pharaoh mobilized his massive army for an immediate and hot pursuit:

- choice chariots - the king's guard, amounting to six hundred; three men in each chariot, the driver and two warriors; they were the latest to be built for warfare
- chariots of Egypt - mobilized for battle; two persons on the chariot, one for driving and one for fighting
- mobilized his horsemen and the troops that supported them; they numbered in the tens of thousands

God gave Pharaoh up to the passions of his own heart and so hardened it. Pharaoh saw Israel trapped, with no way out, and thought he would show himself greater than the God of Israel. After all, he was battle ready and Israel was had few if any weapons and *went out with boldness*; with a great deal of courage and bravery, resolved to break through the difficulties that lay in their way. It can also be translated *with a high hand* - an arm lifted in defiance. The idea behind the Hebrew words *with boldness* includes the idea of rebellion against authority. The rebellious nature of Israel was good when it was against Pharaoh and all he stood for; it was bad when it was against the Lord, Moses, and all they stood for.

*So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon. Vs. 9*

As fast as he could, Pharaoh pursued the Israelites and found them exactly where God had placed them - trapped on all sides. Pharaoh had visions of an easy victory but God's plans were totally different.

Some thoughts for us from the lesson:

We need to remember the things the Lord has done for us. Sometimes we so quickly forget how He has moved in our lives before and shown Himself strong on our behalf. Like the Egyptians, we forget the power God has. He spoke the world into being and holds everything in His hands. There is no one greater or more powerful than our God and He loves us with an everlasting love.

We need to remember that just like Pharaoh was relentless in his pursuit of the Israelites, our enemy mercilessly pursues us. His goal is to enslave us or cause us to fall. That is why we must be alert to discern his attempts and seek the Lord for victory over him.

God will allow us to be "trapped" - to close every possible avenue of escape but Him. He wants us to come to the end of ourselves and our resources and simply trust Him. He wants us to see that he can make a way when there is no way. He wants us to know that He alone is our deliverer just as He was for Israel.



*for the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies,  
to save you.  
Deuteronomy 20:4*