

Two men; two totally different worldviews. One in charge: King, president, CEO, Pharaoh. He rules Egypt, one of the greatest military powers on earth. The other one, Moses, prophet of God, represents God's oppressed people, boldly challenges him by faith. Today we look at two men in opposition to one another in every way – a man in charge; a man of faith. How does their worldview affect their lifestyle?

Pharaoh rules a land dominated and sustained by the Nile River. The river valley supports rich agricultural fields and lush vegetation. Deserts, which are uninhabitable, surround the valley on both sides. Egypt is completely dependent upon this river for its livelihood.

The religious system included about 500 gods, gods of the Nile, gods of fertility, gods of the desert, and of just about everything. And, priests were a central part of the court. They informed the king about foreigners and religious practices. There were three levels of priests. One maintained the temple and sacrificial system for the practice of religious duties. The next level was the magicians. They were educated, respected, and responsible for the liturgy and the running of religious ceremonies. Magicians could manipulate reality and make it into something else. These were probably the priests Moses encountered. There were also high priests who pronounced oracles about the future to the pharaoh. So pharaoh relied on these priests. They were a core part of the social and political structure.

Egyptian religious activity included

- dream interpretation to understand the future, which only priests can de-code.
- observing natural phenomena such as stars, or when you are born, which will affect your lifespan and what you do.
- watching the movement of sacred bulls. They would take a bull, mark it with special symbols and release it to see where it would go, and how it holds its body. Priests would discern patterns for the society as a result.
- observing the movement of statues – for example, Horus (the falcon). They would pull the strings on the wing of Horus and watch to see how fast it fell. Would it fall at an alarming rate? Sometimes they would put someone beneath it and see if that person was able to escape before the collision. If so, you have favor with the gods.

This was religious life in Egypt and it was core.¹

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Have you heard of people doing this today? I'm sure those of you who have been in Africa have encountered some of this. What about here? Ever check your horoscope or talk about your sign? Now you know the source. What about Domsday, December 21, 2012? That prediction is based on a calendar carved on the Aztec "sun stone?" This Mayan prediction has roots in Egyptian pagan religion.

The movie, "The Sin Eater," which many of you watched here last night, is an example of such pagan religious belief, a belief system built on fear.

The Torah, the first five books of the Bible, says *do not do this!* You should not manipulate the

¹Class notes, Mignon Jacobs, *OT 502 Hebrew Prophets*, Fuller Theological Seminary, Winter 2007.

situation to see what God is going to give you or to see the future. Just wait until God lets you know.

Jesus addressed the same thing with the disciples. They wanted to know the future; when the end of the world would come. Jesus said, "That is not for you to know." Jesus said, "I don't even know; angels don't know; only the Father knows."

But Pharaoh's entire society was bound up in seeking that kind of information from those gods, who predicted the future and performed magic acts.

That's Pharaoh's mindset; his worldview. That's the platform on which God meets Pharaoh. Now let's hear the Word of the Lord. READ Exodus 7:14-25.

God is going to have a battle with that worldview; with those gods. God is going to judge those who follow those gods and show idols to be inadequate.

So Moses is sent to meet Pharaoh at the Nile, the source of livelihood for Egypt. God equips Moses with the staff that becomes a snake. God meets Pharaoh right where he is and in his realm. Moses' magic staff validates him as a prophet. You might think, that's weird, why would God stoop to magic? But this is no magic; this is no professional "stock in trade." This is not Moses' norm or his way of going about things. This plan is God's divine deliberation. It's the strike of God.

God gives Pharaoh a chance to change. He is forewarned about what's coming, but to no avail. Pharaoh refuses to listen. And "sure enough, there was blood everywhere" (7:21) just like Moses proclaimed.

When it says the river was turned to blood, it does not say "like blood" or "red like blood." The river wasn't "algae-laden" as sometimes happens to the sea along the coast of southern California; this was not a natural phenomena, but the extraordinary, powerful act of God. Sometimes people try to make all these plagues natural phenomena - something that we can understand - but the language does not support our doing that. The Hebrew language says the water was turned into דָּם ("dom"), blood. Psalms 78 and 105 tell us the same thing, using the same word. Blood - that life flow in humans and animals filled the one asset that kept the whole society going.

Blood everywhere would have been shocking. I can barely look at the blood that comes from my own arm when I have a blood test! So seeing that massive amount of blood would have been dreadful. It was a strike against the gods of the Nile river; gods thought to control fertility and life. Water everywhere was turned to blood which killed the life in the river. The river became putrid and the water unusable.

But when his own magicians could do the same thing, Pharaoh turned tail. This was just one more god - big deal. He couldn't see beyond himself and human control.

Interesting that the Egyptian priests didn't reverse the damage to help the people, they just duplicated what Moses and Aaron had done. Therefore they simply made matters worse.

Now let's contrast this pagan ruler with a man of God.

Moses saw a difference in the God of the Hebrews. That's why he refused to be identified with Egypt when he grew up (Heb 11:24-25). This was a God of hope, not fear. Now he was on this road of faith. He had been called. He had encountered God who said, 'I'm going to free my people from this man and this way of thinking.' Moses said yes, and even though it was hard. He did what God said, whether the results were good or bad. He persisted. He worked in tandem with God. Moses kept constantly connected with God in prayer, and followed God's instructions exactly.

You might wonder, how did he hear God's voice? We are going to talk about that over the next four weeks as we gather on Wednesday nights. Many people learn to hear God's voice. It is possible for you to hear God's voice, as opposed to following stars, birth order, magic, having your palm read, or seeking predictions from someone, all of which are idols.

But you cannot hear it without staying constantly connected to God. That's why our mission statement includes "connecting with God." Moses was connected and he did not break that connection when life got hard. Instead he drew closer. Nothing is more fulfilling than following a God who talks to us. Even when he came up against a formidable foe, he was assured of victory because he relied on what God said. Together he and Aaron did exactly as God commanded. They didn't waiver; they didn't say, *we tried that before and it didn't work*; they didn't say *Pharaoh is too powerful for us*. They stood on the word of God.

Who are you more like, Moses or Pharaoh?

God called Pharaoh stubborn. The literal translation of that is "a mind which is heavy and dull like a lump of lead." Moses on the other hand listens to God and obeys.

It's not hard to say, "I want to be like Moses!" How do we get there? We think about these contrasting worldviews. There's one in which we are dependent on magic and a multitude of gods to bring us good luck. That is truly idol worship and involves a huge amount of fear. Just look up 2012 on the internet and you will see.

The other worldview is much more hopeful. The one true God gives all people, even the pharaohs of this world a chance to turn away from sin, believe, and be set free from bondage.

As believers, what is your view of God? Do you obey easily, trustingly because you see God as powerful? Or, do you believe God really doesn't have much power to help you at all?

The more we connect, the more we'll see God's presence and power in our lives. Let's connect to a powerful God who loves us and wants to set us free.

AMEN

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February 21, 2010

God's First Strike: Blood Everywhere
Exodus 7:14-25

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