

## Moses Lesson 6 Article

### Moses vs. Pharaoh

Moses' old enemy, Thutmose III, was dead. The new Pharaoh, Amenhotep II, was probably about 22 when confronted by the 80-year-old Moses. More than age contrasted when these two men met. There was a confrontation between lifestyles and attitudes as well: a confrontation between meekness and pride. Moses had been 40 years in Egypt, nurtured to be a *somebody*. For 40 years in the desert he had learned that he was a *nobody*. Now God would show what He could do with a *somebody* who was willing to be a *nobody*.

Not so the young Pharaoh. In Egypt, society was structured around religion: a religion in which secular and sacred distinctions were lost, and the Pharaoh was himself considered a god. In official monuments the Pharaoh was often called *neter nefer*, the perfect god. We even have records in which a courtier describes Amenhotep II, this young man confronting Moses, as *neter aa*, the great god! Imagine the pride of Amenhotep. Imagine Moses speaking in the name of the Lord God of Israel (e.g., "God of slaves!"). How easy it is to visualize the haughty pride that moved Amenhotep to respond, "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" (Ex. 5:2).

Through the succeeding judgments we watch the Pharaoh coming to know the Lord ... and struggling against Him. At first judgments fail to move Pharaoh. Then, under the pressure of the supernatural, Pharaoh promised to yield ... only to return to his pride and obstinacy when a miraculous plague was removed. Even after the ultimate judgment, striking against his son and the firstborn of every Egyptian, Pharaoh changed his mind and sent an army to pursue freed Israel.

In the confrontations between these two men we see in stark contrast the patience and steadfastness of faith against the backdrop of a self-exalting pride. It is this kind of pride which will not permit men to bow to God, even when it is clearly for their own good.

### Israel vs. Egypt.

One of the purposes expressed in the design of the plagues which the Lord brought on Egypt was so that "you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel" (Ex. 11:7). Anyone looking at the two peoples would have made a distinction between them. But not the distinction the Lord made!

The Israelites themselves were conditioned to evaluate ... and to bow in shame, before the culture and power of Egypt. Everything that men tend to value ... the evidences of accomplishment, all the wealth, the education ... were there in a high degree in Egypt. Archeologists still wonder at the mechanical feats of that people. Mathematicians and astronomers are amazed at the precise measurements that allowed great pyramids to mark with various architectural features the exact time of summer and winter solstices.

The Israelites were slaves. Mere tools to be used by the master race, then tossed aside when they had served their purpose. Worthless. Poor. Subhuman. The Jews were beneath the notice of men.

But God made His own distinction between Egyptian and Jew! And God's value system is different than man's! God affirmed the worth and value of the slave people. In doing so, God not only kept the covenant He had made with Abraham, but God also shouted out for all to hear that no man is "nothing" to Him.

### We value what men do. God values what men are.

The Prophet Hosea beautifully revealed God's attitude and helps us see that the distinction God drew between Egypt and Israel was no mere legal act, performed to honor a previous contract. It was that. But God also acted in compassion, expressing deep love and concern for the suffering.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love, I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

Hosea 11:1, 3-4

The confrontation between these two peoples is important for us to see. We too are forced to choose between the value system each represents. We too are challenged to have compassion on the downtrodden of this world ... and in compassion to reflect the character and the values of our God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987). *The teacher's commentary* (81-82). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.