

Part 3: A Pharaoh in the Church

So much of this story surrounds what seems to be a trivial object—a brick. As I shared previously, Pharaoh's identity was in the expansion of his kingdom, a kingdom built with bricks.

Further, the Israelite's identities were based on the bricks themselves. That's what they did. If they made a good brick, life was good, if they made a bad brick, life was bad. They were as good as the bricks they made with their hands.

In the confrontation with Pharaoh, Moses was declaring that there was no need for bricks where God was taking the Israelites. Yet, because the Israelite's security and livelihood were tied to the bricks, they couldn't see beyond that. The idea of a life void of the very thing that gave them their security and identity was too much to bear. The Egyptian system is very good at giving leaders and the people a measure of security, identity and community. However, it's a significantly flawed system, a self-serving system.

God, through Moses, was working overtime to communicate that they didn't need bricks to build a tent! Not only were they being called to drop their bricks, the very thing they were building was about to change! What an amazing opportunity to move from building a kingdom for Pharaoh to building the tent that would house the very presence of the Living God!

Additionally, they didn't need bricks to make an offering—God won't accept a brick as an offering! In fact, in Isaiah he rebuked them for making a sacrifice on top of brick!

"I have spread out My hands all day to a rebellious people who walk in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me continually to My face, presenting sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on altars of brick"

(Is. 65:2-3).

God's plan was to remove their bricks and replace them with gold to take into the wilderness! The plunder of Egypt was theirs if they would only drop their bricks!

"Now the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses, and they requested of the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing. And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they gave them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians" (Ex. 12:35-36).

As in any transitional period, there will be a time of insecurity and struggle as both personal and corporate identity is threatened.

"I've made bricks my whole life. I make a great brick. I am helping build something greater than myself. I'm taking classes on how to make better bricks much faster. My leaders like me. I don't like change. Why are you making my life harder?"

This reformation requires a complete paradigm shift. It's a brand new wineskin for a brand new season of revolution. As we release our control over the people God placed under our care, we simultaneously put to death that spirit of Pharaoh and take on the prophetic and apostolic mantle of Moses.

As we do this, oh my! Are you ready for what is coming? God's chosen people, you and me and the people we are leading into the wilderness of encounter, will finally drop the heavy, dusty bricks of yesterday and take on the precious metals of God's Kingdom! It's time to drop the bricks! It's time to move out into a mysterious and fresh place full of wonder and promise.

The Power of a Declaration

I'll again highlight the connection between my previous book, *Covens in the Church*, and this one, *Pharaoh in the Church*.

What is the body's right response to challenge within their local church? For one, it's to honor their commitment and refuse to flee. At the moment of conflict, the inescapable reality that we are called to lovingly submit to authorities in our lives can't simply be ignored or invalidated. However, the cry of the people from their caves of oppression is to be free, to encounter God. Their cry is tearing at God's heart. They are sure to have their cries heard, and you are the Gideon, the Moses, with the call of the Lord to lead them into life.

In the midst of this chaos and crisis, the wrong response of the body would be to leave, to vacate their assignment to serve, and to look elsewhere for what they desire. Church hopping and church shopping is not an option at this point.

Additionally, God won't simply force change in the current church structure without our participation. Consider this truth—God so honors the authorities (good and evil) that he put into position that he will not violate himself by taking lightly the call for people under their leadership to honor them—even at terrible times of crisis. So, we can't just move to another church. There's process. We need to humbly pray and serve and hold up the arms of our leaders. However, leaders beware. God won't casually sit back and allow an Egyptian system to keep his Beloved in slavery. Using people to build kingdoms of man instead of leading them into the glory realm of God's presence will bring increasingly severe and convincing judgment.

God's Judgment

For those of you whose theological perspective causes you to struggle with the concept of the judgment of God in the New Covenant, allow me to explain what judgment really is.

If we hold to an accurate definition of judgment there's no way we'd ever think of living a single day without it. Judgment is simply making wrong things right. For example, when God heals a sick person, he's declaring judgment on disease. We are crying out for judgment on a murderous system of abortion in America. That wrong must be righted.

If a church is Egyptian in structure, or if there are imperfections in the system, it's OK to agree with a process of judgment. We want wrong church structures to be made right.

The risk, fear and trembling come when we resist God's often difficult, yet loving process of calibration.

However, hear me very clearly and be warned. The biblical principle for judgment is that whatever we embrace for others will visit us first. If we declare judgment on a religious system that's oppressing us, prepare to have religious attitudes in our own lives addressed.

"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God, and if it begins first with us, what shall the end be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17).

If we are praying for wrong things to be made right in our churches, we must be ready to receive the force of God's correction in our lives first. Humility, love and determination to serve throughout the process are mandatory.

The Wild Process Toward Freedom

Now, with all of that being said, let's look at the wild process that God took Pharaoh through. The Hebrews wanted to be free, and God wanted them to be free. They cried out, and God brought a prophet, Moses, to deliver them. It's a done deal; they are moving into the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land.

"In the passing of time the king of Egypt died. And the

children of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out, and their cry came up to God on account of the bondage. God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked on the children of Israel, and God had concern for them” (Ex. 2:23-25).

However, since God won't violate his own principle of established authority, he had to compel his delegate Pharaoh to agree with his plans and to make a governmental declaration that only Pharaoh himself could deliver—the people of God may go!

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: Let My people go, so that they may serve Me’” (Ex. 8:1).

We've heard this passage of scripture countless times, yet have you ever stopped to consider just what's being said? We're in the middle of this huge drama where some of the most bizarre signs and wonders ever recorded are taking place. By now in the story we have already had confrontations, staffs turning to serpents and a bold messenger of God risking his life by irritating the most powerful person in Egypt.

I'll ask the question again—why in the world was all of this necessary? Why didn't God simply snap his fingers and translate all of the Israelites into the wilderness (or directly to the Promised Land for that matter)?

Let's look at one portion of the above passage again:

... Let My people go ...

Is that not interesting? God didn't say, “I'm taking my people, see ya!” He is making a demand on Pharaoh to let His people go.

Pharaoh had God's rightful possession in his control. Because

of Pharaoh's governmental position, a position that God created and honored, he had to be the one to release the Israelites.

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom. 13:1-2).

So, if God asked the Israelites to rebel against Pharaoh, clearly a very evil authority indeed, it would actually result in judgment landing upon them!

"Otherwise, if you will not let My people go, indeed I will send swarms of flies on you, and on your servants, and on your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies and also the ground wherever they are. 'I will in that day set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth'" (Ex. 8:21-22).

So, instead of receiving judgment for prematurely leaving Egypt and rebelling against Pharaoh, God protected them from the judgment that hit the rest of the nation. A miracle occurred.

Leaders, please understand how devastating this entire process can be. If we refuse, as Pharaoh did, to release people from their brick-making duties, the pressure will increase.

But even more tragic, those who are craving to move into God's presence will not have that opportunity without enduring quite an ordeal. Or, if we cause people to abdicate their responsibilities of staying through the process of transition to leave for another church, the results can be devastating for all parties involved—sometimes for years or decades.

OK, let's really dig in and look at the process that was necessary, since God was honoring his established authority, Pharaoh.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, 'Say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their canals, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, so that they may become blood. And there will be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.' " Moses and Aaron did so, just as the Lord commanded. And he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants, and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river. Blood was everywhere throughout the land of Egypt" (Ex. 7:19-21).

So, the pressuring continues. However, while Pharaoh was certainly impacted, he was not yet ready to relent—not even close.

"Nevertheless, the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said. Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not concern himself with this either" (Ex. 7:22-23).

His concern was clearly not for any of the people of Egypt. All he cared about was the advancement of the great Egypt building project.

"So all the Egyptians dug all around the river for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the river" (Ex.7:24).

Pharaoh returned to the safety and comfort of his house while the people under his charge went without water. Many in the church today might complain (which is a sin) about a leader

that doesn't nourish the body. While their analysis may be correct, their gossip and complaining is very incorrect. As leaders, we have to know that a malnourished people will become desperate. They will seek refreshing and water, and it's our job to lead them to it. Of course, Pharaoh couldn't care less.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: Let My people go, so that they may serve Me. But if you refuse to let them go, then I will plague all your borders with frogs'" (Ex. 8:1-2).

Again, God's cry is for his people to be free so they can be with him. So, pressure again increases.

"Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, 'Entreat the LORD, that He may take away the frogs from me, and from my people, and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD'" (Ex. 8:8).

Well, isn't that interesting? It looks like God has won! God's leader, Pharaoh, seemed to come into agreement with the plan of the ages. However, notice that there is no official decree here. Let's read on:

"Moses said to Pharaoh, 'Glory yourself over me: When shall I entreat for you, your servants, and your people, to destroy the frogs from you and your houses, that they may remain in the river only?' And he said, 'Tomorrow.' Then he said, 'Be it according to your word, in order that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God'" (Ex. 8:9-10).

Oops. Pharaoh wasn't as determined as it appeared. Even in the midst of great trial, he decided to delay obedience to God's directive to let the people go until the next day. This slight hesitation gave ample room for the enemy to haunt Pharaoh and to cause his heart to change. Delayed obedience is disobedience.

"But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the LORD had said"(Ex. 8:15).

Next we have the plague of lice, which didn't work. Maybe some flies would get the point across?

"Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God in the land." Moses said, 'It is not right to do so, for what we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God would be an abomination to the Egyptians. If we shall sacrifice what is an abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and then we will sacrifice to the Lord our God, as He shall command us.' Pharaoh said, 'I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness. Only you shall not go very far away. Make entreaty for me.' Moses said, 'Indeed, I am leaving you, and I will plead with the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people tomorrow. But let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.'" Moses went away from Pharaoh and entreated the Lord. Then the Lord did according to the word of Moses, and He removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. Not one remained. Nevertheless, Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, nor would he let the people go" (Ex. 8:25-32).

Here we have Pharaoh starting to bend. He even asked for prayer! However, he placed conditions on the release of the Hebrews. This is a very important point that we have to consider. When God is calling us to transition, it truly is a call to the extreme. There will be a lot of temptation to compromise and to avoid as much static and risk as possible. When we take this approach, we are giving way to the enemy. We're providing an opportunity for the enemy to counsel us in our place of wavering commitment to change.

Pharaoh agreed to let the Israelites go, but just a short

distance. That way, when they were done, things could return to normal. The bricks would be made again and the kingdom would be built again.

Understand, this movement is not a slight adjustment or a momentary redirect. This is massive reformation and the old will be left behind to fade away. The coming church will look nothing like the current.

Next God takes out the cattle of the Egyptians while saving the cattle of the Israelites. Pharaoh's heart remained hard.

Would the spread of nasty boils throughout Egypt work? Nope. Pharaoh almost gave in again when the hail or the locusts came, but, once again, his heart hardened.

When the darkness came, we again see Pharaoh relent—to a degree.

“Then Pharaoh called to Moses and said, ‘Go, serve the Lord. Only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even let your little ones also go with you.’ But Moses said, ‘You must also give us sacrifices and burnt offerings, so that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock will go with us also. Not a hoof will be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the Lord our God. And we do not know with what we must serve the Lord, until we get there.’ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let them go” (Ex. 10:24-27).

God's call was for everyone and everything. This was not a conditional request. It's all or nothing. Churches that attempt to keep one foot in Egypt while allowing another in the wilderness will end up with a hard heart. It just can't work. We see this happen often when pastors provide a certain level of liberty for the resident intercessors to call the people to prayer—in a small room on a day, any day, other than Sunday.

It's a compromise that results in the main purpose of the church, prayer for the nations, being relegated to an extracurricular activity. The prayer rooms will remain empty until the prayer meetings become the main meetings. The church is a place of night and day prayer and ministry to God. Building the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God side by side just can't work.

"Except the LORD build the house, those who build labor in vain; except the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

The Necessary Declaration

Now, the point of this message is before us:

"At midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon and all the firstborn of livestock. Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not someone dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, 'Rise up, and get out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel, and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also.' The Egyptians urged the people, so that they might send them out of the land in haste, for they said, 'We all will be dead'" (Ex. 12:29-33).

It happened. Pharaoh finally released them. It was his choice and he chose to agree with God's desire for his people. The risk of further loss was too great, and Pharaoh went from one who violently opposed God's plans to one who then relented to a degree, yet placed conditions on the release of the Israelites, to one who wanted them gone—and fast. God's pressure was sufficient. Throughout the entire process, the Israelites did not rebel. They stayed and submitted, and God

protected them throughout. Now, as they were leaving, the freedom they were experiencing was indescribable.

After the declaration by Pharaoh, the authority transferred from him to Moses. Pharaoh would attempt to chase after the people he no longer had any authority over, but now, due to his decree to transfer leadership to Moses, God then had full governmental cause to refuse his advance. Moses was now in charge. This is why the concept of seeking blessing from pastors prior to moving from one church to another is so important. We must transfer the authority and responsibility to serve and lead those God placed in our care to another.

"Now the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses, and they requested of the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing. And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they gave them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians" (Ex. 12:35-36).

Their new journey had begun, and God gave them everything they would need to bring an offering into the wilderness of encounter. Can you imagine how it must have felt to leave the heavy, dusty bricks in the sand while carrying gold and silver?

As this message closes, I want to drive home the point one more time. Since the body cannot rebel against authority and improper church systems, it's up to the leaders to relent and make the governmental declaration that, yes, God's people can go. The Egyptian system of old is done and we're apostolically moving into a place of intercession, life and freedom.

*This is part 3 of a three-part series; click [here](#) for part one and [here](#) for part two. This excerpt is taken from **John Burton's** book Pharaoh in the Church, the follow up to Covens in the Church. (Covens in the Church is a message about the body's responsibility to submit to authority and Pharaoh in*

the Church is a message calling leaders to stop using people to build their own kingdom).

John Burton has been developing and leading ministries for over 25 years and is a sought-out teacher, prophetic messenger and revivalist. John has authored ten books, has appeared on Christian television and radio and directed one of the primary internships at a major international prayer ministry. Additionally, he planted two churches, has initiated two city prayer movements and is currently directing an online prayer and revival focused ministry school called the School of Revival. John also produces prophetic equipping media that can be watched or listened to most every day at .

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