

Commentary Session 4 – Day 2

Commentary

Confronting Pharaoh

Moses asked Pharaoh’s permission for the Israelites to make a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to God. Pharaoh rightly suspected the Israelites would never return, so he refused the request.

Moses and Aaron, struggling with Pharaoh, performed signs and wonders as persuasion, but Pharaoh’s magicians countered. Then the struggle began in earnest. Faith wrestled with unfaith; freedom fought against bondage. Ten plagues occurred—plagues not unknown to Egypt but occurring with severity, rapidity, and preannounced by Moses: pollution of the Nile, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock disease, boils, thunderstorms with hail, locusts, thick darkness, and finally death of the firstborn. Until the last plague, Pharaoh refused to let the people go.

In Exodus 4:21, we read that God had warned Moses that Pharaoh would not listen, that God would “make him stubborn.” What does this mean? It means that willful resistance to God’s intentions makes a person calloused. God allows us to resist God’s word. When we make that choice, it is the beginning of a heart closed to God. Pharaoh’s heart became stubborn and hard.

Hundreds of years later the prophet Isaiah described the same frame of mind in the people of Israel:

“Make the minds of this people dull.
Make their ears deaf and their eyes blind,
so they can’t see with their eyes,
or hear with their ears,
or understand with their minds,
and turn, and be healed.”
(Isaiah 6:10)

Jesus used this passage from Isaiah to describe the same condition in his time (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 8:17-18). A resisting heart, as it continues to encounter the word of God, becomes even more resistant.