

# “Pharaohitis”

## A Political Disease

By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

I once heard an old saying, “the only way to get the attention of a jackass is to hit him in the head with a “two-by-four” (a large piece of wood). These words always come to mind when I think of the Biblical Pharaoh, king of Egypt and how he stubbornly resisted both Moses and Heaven, much to the harm of his own people.



Sometimes, some people never seem to “get the message” about events occurring around them.

Today, we have more than just one Pharaoh. Many of our modern leaders seem to suffer from “Pharaohitis.” Many of them are similarly stubborn like the mule and in spite of being pushed and prodded, never seem to “get the message” to move on a matter until they proverbially get hit in the head with a political “two-by-four.”

We must be honest, in spite of all appearances, politicians must be intelligent individuals. They would never be able to rise to their positions of power and hold on to those positions if they were the unintelligent dolts some believe they are. Political leaders are usually very smart, clever and sometimes even wise. This still does not mean that they rule and act with these traits. A political leader has to worry about such a large variety of conflicting interests. He has to do what is best for his country, his political party, his special interests, and of course, him/herself. Sometimes juggling all these opposing interests leads to not much of anything getting done. Sometimes, politicians serve an agenda that meets the needs and desires of the few whereas the everyday people pay the price.

Why was Pharaoh, King of Egypt such a stubborn man? Granted, Torah does say that G-d hardened his heart, but this was only as punishment for his already hardened heart. Heaven merely reinforced his resolve, allowing Pharaoh’s twisted nature to take its course. Pharaoh wanted to be stubborn, so Heaven not only allowed his

stubbornness, it reinforced it. Still, as a human being, Pharaoh could have at any time changed his mind. In the end, he certainly did. Nowhere does it say that Heaven softened his heart or let him see reason. Heaven did no such thing. Instead, Heaven used the proverbial “two-by-four” and smacked Pharaoh right between the eyes, knocking some sense into his thick skull. And as usual, it is the people who paid the price of their leaders indiscretions.

Once Pharaoh “got the message” to let the Israelite people leave Egypt, there really was not much left of Egypt to leave. Pharaoh’s political concerns took precedence over what should have been his common sense. The entire people of Egypt paid the price for the arrogance, blindness and selfishness of their leader. Does it ever make you wonder which political leaders today among us suffer from “Pharaohitis”?

I have no interest to get involved with politics. I am not making subtle statements about any one government or politician. I do not believe that I have to. I believe that this message is so clear and unfortunately so generic that it will be seen to be applicable today and tomorrow, as well as yesterday. I am not critiquing any current day political situation or individual, rather, I am critiquing them all.

The Biblical model of Pharaoh was recorded for history not for the sake of record keeping, but rather to serve as a warning to all who would follow in his footsteps. Leaders can rise to positions of great power. They can bring either prosperity or ruin to their respective nations. In a moment of arrogance and blindness, they can cause a reversal. They can turn prosperity into ruin by simply making wrong choices; choices that appear to be addressing the needs of the moment, but pay no attention to the long term needs of the nation.

Ancient Egypt was not destroyed in a day. The ten plagues that hit the nation and its people occurred over a period of a year. For the most part, they all appeared to be very unfortunate natural disasters, strangely and coincidentally occurring one right after another. The spiritually minded among the Egyptians saw within this a Higher Hand, but their voices were silenced. Back then, like today, there is no room or tolerance for religion, when politics is involved. On one hand Pharaoh’s Egyptian government wanted to keep enslaved a free work force to maintain civil projects. He considered this vital for the Egyptian national economy. Yet, on the other hand, the economy was being ruined by all these “natural” disasters. Pharaoh would need his slave work force to pick up the pieces of Egypt once these “unfortunate coincidences” came to an end.

Pharaoh held out against common sense and against the will of his people for as long as he could. Finally, in the end, in a moment of, what for him, was political

weakness, he sent the Israelite nation out of Egypt. Then after the commotion died down, he came to his senses, realized his mistake and sent his armies to recollect his slave work force. We all know what happened then.

Modern day political Pharaohs are just as blind as their Biblical counterpart. They are so busy and inundated with all types of clashing political interests, threats and concerns, that sometimes they cannot see the proverbial “forest through the trees.” Sometimes issues become so complicated and confusing that the clear and right path becomes the most unworkable and undoable.

When politics and politicians do not “get the message” about what they need to do, Heaven still sends them little pushes and prods every now and then. They are signs of even greater things to come, if the problem before us now is not addressed now. Allow a problem to fester and it will only grow bigger and bigger until it is out of control. Pharaoh could have learned from the Nile turning into blood that he had a problem that he needed to address. Instead he entrenched his position until finally the lives of the Egyptian firstborn were lost. It did not have to be like this.

Biblical prophecy is an interesting blend of opposites. On one hand it is the Word of G-d and therefore will definitely come to pass. Yet, on the other hand, how it comes to pass, when and where is a matter that is rather fluid. G-d spoke to the prophet Yonah and commanded him to warn Nineveh of impending doom unless they changed their ways. The city listened, had a religious revival and indeed was saved, for a time. The imminent prophecy of destruction was postponed because of the national religious revival. Yet, once that dissipated, then the prophecy went back into effect in full force and Nineveh was ultimately destroyed.

We see the same thing with regards to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. His prophetic dream dictated that he was to succumb to psychiatric insanity. Daniel instructed the King that his righteous behavior could postpone the judgment. For a good while the King followed Daniels’s advice. Yet, the moment that this ceased, the Heavenly decree caught up with him and the King was inflicted with a terrible psychiatric malady.

We could have also mentioned here the example of Pharaoh, how he repented before G-d, listened to Moses and helped the Israelite people leave Egypt with fanfare, good wishes and gifts. Israel would have left on a high hand, and Pharaoh would have been praised for his political courage. Yet, this did not occur. Rather than foresee the consequences of his actions, Pharaoh stood stubborn until his legs were cut out from beneath him. He has become the perennial role model of the one who wants to stand smart, savvy and stubborn. His own attitudes were in the end his ruin. Have we not

seen this with our modern politicians, all of whom seem to be infected in one way or another with “Pharaohitis”?

Long ago our Sages have taught us that the behaviors of past serve as role models for today. The Torah is full of examples for us to follow and not to follow. In our lack of clarity, we often fail to recognize the resemblance between modern times and their Biblical counterparts. We think ourselves so modern and sophisticated. We believe ourselves to be so superior over the primitive ancients. We are different, we claim, what happened then will certainly not happen now. To believe the Bible would be childish superstitions. Only a fool would harbor such concerns as Biblical prophecies. Only an imbalanced madman would act upon such concerns. These are the voices spoken today. These are the words, feelings and political views of our modern day Pharaohs. Pharaohitis is alive and prevalent today, more than it was in ancient Egypt.

You do not need me to tell you that Heaven is preparing its “two-by-four” to smack modern day Egypt. Needless to say modern day Pharaohs will deny the Hand of Heaven and will again mourn an unfortunate rash of coincidental natural disasters. The nudges and the prodding have been coming for a while now, and still no national repentance Nineveh style on the horizon. When the time of reckoning comes, you will not need me to be there to say “I told you so,” for like in ancient Egypt, some things will just become rather obvious. But, of course, by then, it will already be too late, the damage will have been done, and the nation will be in ruins. Therefore, let me say it now, “I am telling you so, NOW, before it happens.”

Biblical prophecies seem to have a life of their own. History has long documented that Biblical prophecies do come true. One cannot say that the prophecies were written after the fact. There is enough historical evidence to document the falsehood of this and other such arguments used to dismiss what the G-d has spoken through prophecy. What the Bible has predicted about the past has indeed come about. This gives the Bible excellent odds that what it prophecies about the end of days, before the coming of Mashiah will also come true.

Indeed, end times prophecies are already being fulfilled around us on a daily basis. Like in Egypt, the religious see it, the secular are blind to it and the politicians deny it. Something tells me that a real big “two-by-four” Egyptian style smack is being prepared for all those who today refuse to “let my people go.”