

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #125: PHARAOH'S FOUR COMPROMISES

By John Temples

It was 1500 BC. The Israelites had come to Egypt many years before to escape a famine. When they came, Joseph, one of their own, was Prime Minister of Egypt. The Pharaoh of Egypt at that time had welcomed them and treated them kindly (Genesis 45-47).

But a later Pharaoh made slaves out of the people that had once been welcomed to Egypt. The book of Exodus begins with this ominous statement: “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.’ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage — in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor” (Exodus 1:8-14).

Finally, God sent Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. God told him to say to Pharaoh, “The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go” (Exodus 3:18-20). Sure enough, when Moses obeyed God, Pharaoh's arrogant reply was, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go” (Exodus 5:2).

God proceeded to bring four plagues upon Egypt: blood in the Nile River, frogs, lice, and flies. At that time Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron. This time, he did not say, “I do not know the Lord”! Rather, he said, “Go, sacrifice to your God in the

land” (Exodus 8:25). (No need to go three days’ journey into the harsh wilderness--just stay where you are and worship.) What is this? We call it COMPROMISE. Compromise is where two parties have a dispute, and each side gives a little. The dictionary defines compromise as “a settlement of differences in which each side makes concessions.” Compromise is good in matters of human judgment. Your wife wants to go shopping, you want to watch TV, so you compromise--your wife goes shopping and you watch TV at the furniture store.

But compromise is NOT good in matters of principle or matters of survival. A hunter met a bear in the woods. The bear asked him why he was in the woods (he was a talking bear). The hunter said, “I want a fur coat.” The bear said, “I’m hungry and I want a good meal; let’s sit down and talk.” They talked for a while, a compromise was reached, and the bear walked away. The bear had his dinner, and the hunter had his fur coat. (Think about it.)

How did Moses respond to Pharaoh’s compromise offer? Exodus 8:26-27 says, “And Moses said, ‘It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us? We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He will command us.’” (When Moses said “we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians,” he probably was saying that the Israelites’ killing of cows or sheep would have deeply offended the Egyptians.)

Actually, this was only the first of four compromises that Pharaoh offered Moses. The others are:

- You may go, but do not go very far away (Exodus 8:28)
- Let only the men go (Exodus 10:11)
- You can go, but you have to leave your flocks and herds behind (Exodus 10:24)

Here is what is interesting about these four compromises: *they are still being used by Satan today to dissuade people from obeying God.* Burton Coffman summarizes them thusly:

- I. If you must serve Christ, do so in the world. Why bother with belonging to the church?
- II. If you must be religious, then don't be a fanatic. Do not go very far! This is the motto of all lukewarm, indifferent Christians, who fancy that they are serving Christ, but they have not gone very far!
- III. Only the males must go. Leave your families out of it. If you must be a Christian, do not attempt to take others with you. Let everyone make up his own mind. Keep your religion to yourself!
- IV. Let the flocks and herds stay behind. If you must be a Christian, go ahead, but don't invest any money in it.

(from Coffman's Bible Commentary, Copyright © 1971-1993 by ACU Press, Abilene Christian University. All rights reserved.)

Let's examine these four compromises further:

THE FIRST COMPROMISE: WORSHIP, BUT STAY IN THE LAND

Satan has won over many people who were thinking about obeying God by telling them, "You can serve God where you are. You can be 'religious' and still stay in the world. You don't have to change your life or become a church member." If you ask people "are you religious?", the vast majority will answer yes. But if you ask them if they attend church, the percentage drops drastically. But Jesus says, "you are either in Me or not in Me--you are either for Me or against Me--you are either in My kingdom or Satan's kingdom." Serving God is more than just a warm-fuzzy "religious" feeling--it is a legal change of standing before God. Paul said in Romans 6:17-18, "God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Notice that Paul says you were a slave of sin, now (as a Christian) you are a slave of righteousness. There has been a formal change of ownership, a change of masters.

Another way Satan plays this compromise is this: you can worship at home. (You really don't like those church people anyway.) Just be a good parent/spouse/child, just be a good moral person and you will go to heaven. But Christ did not die for your home--He died for the church.

Moses' reply to Pharaoh's first compromise was, "We must go three days' journey away." The lesson for us is, there needs to be a clean break with the world, a distancing of ourselves from our old state. Recall some of the words of the old song: "Buried with Christ, my blessed Redeemer, dead to the old life of folly and sin; Satan may call, the world may entreat me, there is no voice that answers within. Dead to the world, to voices that call me, living anew, obedient but free; dead to the joys that once did enthrall me, yet 'tis not I--Christ liveth in me." Those sentiments need to be ours.

THE SECOND COMPROMISE: DO NOT GO VERY FAR

Stay close to the fleshpots of Egypt; don't be a fanatic. Satan actually doesn't mind if you have a little religion. And that's all a lot of people want. I had a woman call me once and ask about our worship service times. I told her the times for Bible study and worship. She ignored the reference to Bible class and said, "So church is at 11 am? Are you sure we'll be out by 12 noon?" She wanted to make sure she didn't spend one second more in church than was necessary. That is like going to the Super Bowl and saying, "Now, is this game going to be over in two hours? We won't have to stay three hours, will we?" Or going on a cruise and asking, "We won't have to stay on board an extra day, will we?"

Unfortunately, we preachers sometimes unwittingly feed into this compromise by making it seem too easy to become a Christian. We tell people, "The water is warm; you can become a Christian in just a few minutes." We sing "Just As I Am" and proclaim that folks can come just as they are. Yes, you can "come as you are"--but you can't stay that way! How far does God want us to go? Hebrews 6:1, answers, "Let us go on to perfection." How far did He want Paul to go? To the point of saying, "For me, to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21).

THE THIRD COMPROMISE: LET ONLY THE MEN GO

Satan says, "Okay, go ahead, be a Christian; but leave your family out of it." It's all right for you to be a church member, but don't try to impose your religion on your spouse or children. Let everybody make up their own mind. Keep your religion to yourself.

These attitudes may be politically correct, but God is not into political correctness. He honored Joshua when he said, “You Israelites can do what you want to; but as *for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*” (Joshua 24:15). God also paid Abraham a great compliment in Genesis 18:19--”I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord.” But people will say, “I don’t want to impose my will on my children--if I make them go to church, they will rebel.” Do you say that about taking baths...going to school...or eating? God told the Israelites to teach their children every waking moment of their lives.

THE FOURTH COMPROMISE: LEAVE YOUR POSSESSIONS BEHIND

Pharaoh knew that where the Israelites’ possessions--their flocks and herds--were, their hearts would be also. Satan is still preaching this message today: If you must be a Christian, go ahead; but don’t invest any of your hard-earned money or time in it. I love Moses’ answer to that compromise: “Not a hoof shall be left behind” (Exodus 10:26). I also love the answer a man gave to a preacher who was about to baptize him. The preacher said at the entry to the baptistry, “Oh, you forgot and left your billfold in your pocket.” The man said, “I didn’t forget--I want my money baptized and dedicated to God, too.”

So Pharaoh’s four compromises are still with us, and we must be ever vigilant not to be swayed by them. They are:

- *Worship God in the land.* Stay where you are; no need to leave the world behind and become a Christian. Worship God on your terms, not His.
- *Do not go very far.* If you do become a Christian, don’t get too involved; don’t be a fanatic. (I remember once being thought of as a fanatic because I attended Sunday night services as well as Sunday morning.)
- *Let only the men go.* Don’t try to influence anyone else to be a Christian, not even your own family. Keep your religion to yourself.
- *Leave your flocks and herds behind.* Have the attitude, “God may own me, but He doesn’t own my toys and my stuff.”

Moses and the Israelites did not compromise, and were thus delivered out of Egyptian bondage by God. Let us learn from their example. --John Temples

