

## The Mouth of the Righteous and the Heart of the Wicked

In this week's reading from Parashat Va'era (*Shemot / Exodus 6:2-9:35*), the very presence of God and His power is made available to deliver His people from slavery and bondage. The Lord God spoke to Moshe declaring that He is revealing Himself in a new way to His people. The Lord says, וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם לְתַת לָהֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ, ד' 6:4 *'I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. (NASB)* reaffirming the covenant promise and declaring that we will be His people and He will be their God. The Lord instructs Moshe and Aaron to go to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt. Moshe goes and performs many signs and miracles; the sign of the staff turning into a serpent (7:8-10), turning the Nile River to blood (7:15-24), the plague of frogs (8:1-15), turning dust into gnats and swarms of insects (8:16-31), the livestock are struck with pestilence causing them to die (9:1-7), boils break out on all of the Egyptians (9:8-17), and the Lord brought a plague of hail mingled with fire (9:18-35). Pharaoh realizes that he has sinned saying, 9:27 ... *'I have sinned this time; the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. 9:28 'Make supplication to the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.'* (NASB) When the hail ceased the Scriptures continue saying that Pharaoh sinned again and hardened his heart both he and his servants. Based upon this week's portion, troublesome times brings repentance and return, whereas times of blessing can cause a man to build up within his heart a god of his own making to trust and rely upon himself rather than upon God. Is this what Pharaoh did before and following each plague? Have you ever done this? Is that what is being described by the one who forgets what the Lord has done and then sins?

### ספר שמות פרק ז *Shemot / Exodus 7:13-16*

יג וַיִּחַזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: ס יד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה כְּבֹד לֵב פַּרְעֹה מֵאֵן לְשַׁלַּח הָעָם: טו לֵךְ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה בַּבֹּקֶר הַזֶּה יֵצֵא הַמַּיִמָּה וַנִּצְבֹּתָ לִקְרֹאתוֹ עַל-שְׂפַת הַיָּאֵר וְהַמַּטֵּה אֲשֶׁר-נִגְהַפְּתָה לְנַחֵשׁ תִּקַּח בְּיָדְךָ: טז וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר שְׁלַח אֶת-עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהִנֵּה לֹא-שָׁמַעְתָּ עַד-כֹּה:

7:13 Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said. 7:14 Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. 7:15 'Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water; and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. 7:16 'You shall say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now.' (NASB)

Just previously to these Scriptures (*Shemot / Exodus 7:13-16*) we read of the miracle Moshe and Aaron performed of the staff turning into serpent. When the Lord God turned

Moshe's staff into a serpent, Pharaoh had his magicians turn their staffs into serpents too. The Scriptures say that Pharaoh's heart was hardened because his people could do the same thing that the God of the Hebrews could do. According to the rabbinic commentary, the rabbis describe Pharaoh as a man, one of four, who believed himself to be divine in Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 8, Part 2 (מדרש רבה שמות פרשה ח סימן ב)

***Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 8, Part 2***

*Pharaoh was one of four men who claimed divinity and thereby brought evil upon themselves. These were Hiram, Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, and Joash, King of Judah. Hiram, as it says, say unto the prince of Tyre because your heart is lifted up, and you have said, I am a god (Ezekiel 28:2). Whence do we know that he brought destruction upon himself? Because it says, Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness; I have cast you to the ground, I have laid you before kings, that they may gaze upon you (Ezekiel 28:17). How do we know that Nebuchadnezzar claimed divinity? Because it says, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High (Isaiah 14:14). God replied to him, Yet you will be brought down to the netherworld, to the uttermost parts of the pit. What did God do unto him? He exiled him into the wilderness while he was still on his throne and fed him on grass (Daniel 4:30). To the cattle and beasts he appeared in the form of a female beast, for it says, And the destruction of the beasts, which made them afraid; because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land (Habbakkuk 2:17), with which we may compare, Neither will you make marriages with them (Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:3). For all this, a human heart was given to him, as it is written, And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned unto me (Daniel 4:31). Whence do we know that Pharaoh claimed to be a god? Because it says, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. (Ezekiel 29:3). God delivered him into the hands of his enemies, as it says, Thus says the Lord, behold I will give Pharaoh Hophra King of Egypt into the hands of his enemies (Jeremiah 44:30). What is the meaning of Hophra? Similar to that of, And he, the priest, will let the hair of the woman's head go loose (para) and put the meal offering of memorial in her hands (Bamidbar / Numbers 5:18), and it is written, In that day will Egypt be like unto women (Isaiah 19:16). Whence do we know that Joash claimed to be a god? Because it is written, Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and prostrated themselves before the King (1 Chronicles 29:17). Why did they prostrate themselves to the king? Because they made him as a god. They said to him, Were you not a god, you could not have left the Holy of Holies after seven years unscathed. He agreed with them*

*allowing himself to be acclaimed a god and thus brought destruction upon himself, as it says, And it came to pass, when the year was come about, that the army of the Arameans came up against him, and it is written, So they executed judgment (Shefatim) upon Joash. Do not read it Shefatim, but Shephutim; and it is written, and when they were departed from him they left him in great diseases, and he died, but they buried him not in the sepulchers of the kings. What caused Pharaoh to be smitten? His boast, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. Hence did God say to Moshe, Behold I have made you a god unto Pharaoh. For one higher than the high watches and there are higher than they (Ecclesiastes 5:7). Go and take him that made himself a god an abomination in the world, because he exalted himself, as it is said, He looks at all the high things; he is king over all the sons of abomination (Job 41:26).*

Notice how the rabbis say that four men claimed divinity and brought evil upon themselves. Hiram was the king of Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and Joash, king of Judah who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. According to the midrash, these men claimed to be divine. The midrash continues providing examples for each man who corrupted their ways before God. *Ezekiel 28* states explicitly that the king of Tyre had exalted himself as a god. Nebuchadnezzar said that he will be exalted above the heights of the clouds (*Isaiah 14:14*). Pharaoh claimed “*my river is mine own and I have made it for myself,*” the midrash references *Ezekiel 29*. Joash king of Judah is said to have considered himself divine by reason that following the death of Jehoiada, the princes of Judah came and prostrated themselves before him, making him as a god (*1 Chronicles 29:17*). The central tendency of these characters from the Scriptures is to glorify the works of our own hands and to attribute things to their own name that only rightly belong to the Lord God in heaven. The Lord brought judgement upon these men because of their pride, the midrash concludes saying, “*Go and take him that made himself a god an abomination in the world, because he exalted himself, as it is said, He looks at all the high things; he is king over all the sons of abomination (Job 41:26).*” The Apostle Paul describes someone similar whom he calls “*the man of lawlessness*” according to *2 Thessalonians 2:3-12*.

### ***2 Thessalonians 2:3-12***

*2:3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 2:5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 2:6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. 2:8 Then that lawless*

*one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 2:9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 2:10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 2:11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 2:12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (NASB)*

Notice how Paul gives the people a future expectation of a man who sets himself up as a god, whom he calls the man of lawlessness and the son of destruction, the man who opposes God's ways and exalts himself above every god or object of worship. This man exalts himself in such a way, and makes himself so great in his own mind, that he sits himself in the Temple of God making himself equal to the Lord God in heaven. Paul says *2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. (NASB)* The mystery of lawlessness being at work, what is the mystery of lawlessness? Could it be the struggle we are in, as men of faith, to live spiritual lives living in these bodies that crave sin? (*Romans 7*) This man of lawlessness will come with false power, signs and wonders to deceive, and Paul says that a powerful delusion will come upon those who do not desire the truth but practices falsehood and deceit. The man or person who sets himself up as a god in his own heart is the one who does not love the truth, who is prideful and arrogant.

The Psalms of David speaks of two types of people, the wicked and the righteous. The wicked are described by David saying, *"An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong" (Tehillim / Psalms 36:1-4).* The wicked do not fear God, they do not hate their own sin, in fact, they are unable to see their own sins, their words are deceitful, their hearts are planning evil and choose what is wrong and not what is right. In addition to this, David says, *"In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, "Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble." His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue" (Tehillim / Psalms 10:2-7).* Another Psalm states, *"What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son" (Tehillim / Psalms 50:16-20).* King Solomon says, *"A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like*

*a scorching fire.” (Mishley / Proverbs 16:27). Many references to the Psalms may be found to characterize the unrighteous who do not choose to listen to the Lord or walk in His ways. Many more examples may be found in the psalms such as in Tehillim / Psalms 17 and 31:*

***Tehillim / Psalms 17:10** They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance. (NASB)*

***Tehillim / Psalms 31:18** Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous. (NASB)*

The righteous on the other hand, the Psalms say, *“The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just.” (Tehillim / Psalms 37:30)* King Solomon said, *“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.” (Mishley / Proverbs 10:11)* and *“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.” (Mishley / Proverbs 10:31, 32).* Solomon also said, *“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.” (Mishley / Proverbs 10:20)* and *“The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools.” (Mishley / Proverbs 15:7).* These Scriptures reveal the characteristics of the unrighteous man, that one’s words are connected to one’s actions. Rightly so David says in *Tehillim / Psalms 59:12* *On account of the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, Let them even be caught in their pride, And on account of curses and lies which they utter. (NASB)* The actions and the words reveal the intent of the heart and the spiritual condition of the ungodly. Does your life exhibit these characteristics?

The Apostle Paul speaking to the Colossians said in *Colossians 3:1* *Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (NASB)* Paul says to seek the things which are above. Many times, much error in doctrine and practice is introduced into one’s faith by looking for the truth in the wrong places. People put their trust in leadership and in money, and seek peace and security in these things. We read in the Psalms how the wicked do these things, and by doing these things they rely upon themselves rather than upon the Lord God in heaven. The problem is one of looking for things in the context of what this world values and when disappointment comes, one’s world is shaken because their basis for security has been destroyed. This is why Pharaoh suddenly repented and acknowledged that the Lord in heaven is God. The rabbis note this in *Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 12, Part 5.*

***Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 12, Part 5***

*And Pharaoh sent (Shemot / Exodus 9:27). The reason that he said, I have sinned this time; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked, was because God had said to him, Now send, bring in your cattle (Shemot / Exodus 9:19). Thus He had dealt righteously (chari-*

*tably) with them by warning them, but he and his people were wicked, paying no attention to the word of the Lord and leaving their men and cattle in the field, with the result that all of them died.*

The Lord dealt righteously with Pharaoh even when he was unrepentant having zero faith. When a person accepts the Messiah Yeshua, believing in what He has done, and making Him Lord of his life, the Lord produces a change in direction as Paul says, to seek the things above rather than the things below. The concept of repentance involves turning from sins, turning from the things that are involved in this world, and turning towards the things which are from above, turning to God's ways of truth, justice, righteousness, and holiness. The word used for seek in *Colossians 3:1* is ζητεῖτε (<sup>1</sup>Εἰ οὖν συνηγήθητε τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος) is a verb from the Greek stem, ζητέω (zay-teh'-o) meaning "*1) to seek in order to find 1a) to seek a thing 1b) to seek [in order to find out] by thinking, meditating, reasoning, to enquire into 1c) to seek after, seek for, aim at, strive after.*" The aorist verb describes an action that is on going in nature. "Seek" implied in the English language is present tense, but in the aorist tense it means to "*continually seek.*" Paul is literally saying that those who have come to a faith in the Messiah should be continually seeking after those things of God. Paul continues saying in *Colossians 3:2* *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (NASB)* This statement is a continuation of the previous and carries a similar message, we are to set our minds on things above and not on the things on the earth. We are not to be concerned with the matters the unrighteous or ungodly are concerned with. Our lives are to be characterized by Holiness, Righteousness, and Truth. It is in this lifestyle that we are continually motivated to find security, peace, and truth by looking to God, His Word, and His Son Yeshua the Messiah rather than the things of this world.