

THE STORY OF MOSES & PHARAOH

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God Sends Moses to Pharaoh

God sent Moses as a Messenger to Pharaoh and his people. The Children of Israel had been subjugated and enslaved in Egypt for generations. God commanded Moses to call Pharaoh to worship God alone, as well as to release the Children of Israel from their bondage. Pharaoh was a tyrant and a despot. He was known for his oppression and transgression.

The Prayer of Moses

In the Quran, God relays to us the prayer of His Messenger Moses when he was tasked with addressing Pharaoh, "Moses said: 'Lord, expand my breast for me so that I can bear the difficulty. Make my task easy. Give me the ability to speak eloquently, so that they understand my speech when I convey Your message to them. Give me a helper from my family who will assist me in my affairs – Aaron my brother. Strengthen my determination through him. And make him my partner in the mission.'" [20:25–32]

God answered the prayer of Moses and anointed Aaron as a Messenger alongside him.



Instruction to Speak Gently While Calling People to God

Moses understood the gravity of the task before him and the challenges that would inevitably face him. God reassured Moses that He would give him His divine care and protection. God says, “I have selected you as My Messenger to convey to people the instruction I sent to you. Go, O Moses and your brother Aaron, with My signs indicating My Power and Oneness, and do not slacken in calling towards Me and in remembering Me. Go to Pharaoh, for he has overstepped the bounds in disbelief and rebellion against Allah. Speak to him gently without harshness, in the hope that he may take heed, fear Allah, and repent.” [20:41-44]

These verses show how God protects the believers as long as they trust in Him and continue to remember Him. Despite Pharaoh’s tyranny, God instructs His Messenger Moses to speak to him gently, as harshness would only have increased Pharaoh’s evil and aggression.



Pharaoh Demands a Sign

God's Messenger Moses came to Pharaoh and called him to God. When Pharaoh questioned how there could be another God besides himself, Moses explained that God is the One who created all things in the universe, "My Lord is the One who made the earth spread out for you to live on and made pathways on it for you to travel on. He sent down rain water from the sky and with that water He brings forth every kind of plant." [20:53]

Pharaoh demanded a sign from Moses, so Moses threw down his staff, which turned into a serpent.

The Challenge

Pharaoh took this to be a magician's trick and stated that he would gather the greatest magicians of his lands in order to duel with Moses and show which of them was stronger. They agreed that they would meet on the day of celebration when all the people would gather to watch on, as God says, "Pharaoh went back and gathered his plots and tricks. Then he came at the specified time and place for the contest." [20:60]



Moses alone was facing an army of magicians, yet Moses had with him God's help. Pharaoh promised his magicians a great reward if they overcame Moses, and that he would honor them. Moses asked the magicians to show their magic first. They threw down their sticks and ropes, and through their tricks and illusions, it appeared as if there was a nest of snakes. God commanded Moses to throw down his staff. His staff became a giant serpent that swallowed all of their magic.

The Magicians Accept Islam

The magicians understood that this was no illusion and beyond their combined abilities, "The sorcerers threw themselves down in submission. The magicians then all fell down bowing in submission to God once they came to know that what Moses had was not magic, but it was from God. They said: 'We believe in the Lord of Moses and Aaron, the Lord of all created things and commit to His worship.'" [20:70] At this, Pharaoh became incensed. Instead of taking heed of God's signs, his arrogance and evil led him to think that this was a plot to take his kingdom, despite the fact that he had chosen the assembled sorcerers and that Moses had no possible way to collude with them.



Pharaoh threatened the magicians with the worst punishment he could dispense. “I shall certainly cut off from each one of you one hand and foot from opposite sides, then I will crucify your bodies on the trunks of palm trees until you die.” [20:71] Yet the sorcerers had seen the truth. They had recognized God’s signs and the truthfulness of Moses. They replied, “We believe in our Lord, with the hope that He will erase from us our past sins of disbelief and other vices, and that He will erase from us the sin of magic that you forced us to learn, practice and challenge Moses with. Allah has a better reward than what you promise us and His punishment is more lasting than the punishment you threaten us with.” [20:73]

Pharaoh Remains Obstinate

Pharaoh was therefore humiliated in public before his people. Pharaoh remained obstinate and refused to believe in the Messenger Moses or release the Children of Israel. Instead, he doubled down on the punishment that he dispensed towards the Children of Israel. Moses told him that God would continue to punish him until their release.



God says, “And indeed I gave the people of Pharaoh a number of years of drought and famine, testing them with a shortage of fruits and crops, so that they might reflect and realise that this was a punishment from Allah because of their disbelief, and so they might repent to Him.” [7:130]

Yet they refused to believe, “The people of Pharaoh said to Moses, out of their stubbornness against the truth: 'Whatever sign or evidence you bring to us and whatever proof of the falsehood of own beliefs you show us, we will not believe you.'” [7:132] God responded, “As a punishment for their rejection and stubbornness, I sent floods of water that destroyed their crops and fruits; locusts and weevils that ate their crops and harvests; frogs that filled their dishes and containers, ruining their food, and disturbing their sleep; and turning the water in their wells and rivers into blood. All these were sent as clear and distinct signs, one after another. Despite all of these plagues, they were too proud to have faith in God or to believe in what Moses brought. They were a people who committed wrongs, who would not give up falsehood, and would not be guided to the truth.” [7:133] Pharaoh eventually relented, asking Moses to pray to God to remove these plagues and afflictions, and in return, he would free the Children of Israel.



Pharaoh Pursues the Children of Israel

After being set free, Moses hastened with the Children of Israel to leave Egypt, knowing that the tyranny of Pharaoh would not allow them to leave peacefully. Pharaoh became more obstinate, having realised that he was overpowered by a single man, when he possessed armies, wealth and a massive kingdom. Pharaoh gathered his armies and leaders and together they set off in pursuit of Moses and the Children of Israel.

Moses and his people reached the sea. Ahead of them was water and behind them the approaching army of Pharaoh. God recounts this in the Quran, "So when the two groups came into view of each other, Moses's people said, "We are definitely going to be captured!" When Pharaoh and his people drew closer to Moses and his people, such that each person was in view of the other on the opposite side, Moses's people said, " Surely Pharaoh and his people will catch up with us and we are powerless against them." Moses said to his people: "It is not as you have imagined it to be, for My Lord is with me supporting and helping me. He shall guide and show me the path to salvation.'" [26:61-62]



Parting of the Sea

God instructed Moses to strike the sea with his staff, and by God's command, the sea parted for Moses and the Children of Israel. Moses and the Children of Israel crossed the sea and reached safety. Pharaoh, in his arrogance, assumed that the sea had parted for him and his armies. They too entered the sea, but as the Children of Israel reached safety and Pharaoh and his armies were in the middle of the sea, God commanded the water of the sea to come together again. God says, "I saved Moses and whoever was with him, none from among them perished. I then destroyed Pharaoh and his people by drowning them in the sea." [26:65-66]

Thus, God showed His power over all things and His divine care and protection for His faithful servants.