



ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Bible Study

SEP 2013

THE BOOK OF EXODUS (PART 3)

Part 3 of our study on the Book of Exodus focuses on the plagues that Moses and Aaron executed upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians under God's instructions.

These plagues were intended firstly to open Pharaoh's eyes to the God of the Hebrews who he claimed he did not know. Secondly, they were aimed at 'beating' Pharaoh into submission – to 'let my people go' (5:1). Thirdly, they were in nature acts of God's judgement upon Pharaoh's disobedience. Notice the growing intensity and magnitude of destruction with every subsequent plague. Notice also the back and forth dynamic of Pharaoh hardening his own heart and God hardening Pharaoh's heart. Will Pharaoh submit to God? Will God's promise to deliver the Israelites from Egypt be fulfilled? It was suspense even until the ninth plague.

Will the Israelites have to put up a good fight? Will Pharaoh simply give up his fight? Who eventually won – Israel, Pharaoh, or God?

SERMON DATE **1 SEP 2013**

RIVER OF BLOOD, LANDFUL OF FROGS
EXODUS 7:14 - 8:15

SERMON DATE **8 SEP 2013**

PHARAOH'S HARD HEART
EXODUS 8:16-32

SERMON DATE **15 SEP 2013**

THIS TIME I HAVE SINNED
EXODUS 9:13-35

SERMON DATE **22 SEP 2013**

LET THE PEOPLE GO!
EXODUS 10

RIVER OF BLOOD, LANDFUL OF FROGS

EXODUS 7:14 - 8:15

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

INTRODUCTION

The first two plagues were terrible and scary even for the brave-hearted. They invoked fear in the Egyptians and threatened their survival as a people. But the plagues were not unique because Pharaoh's magicians were also able to perform them with their secret arts. So will Pharaoh let Israel go? Obviously not! But were these plagues wasted attempts on chastising Pharaoh?

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. The First Plague: Water into Blood (7:14-25)
 - a. What might be the significance for the first plague to involve the River Nile? (v15; Genesis 41:17; Exodus 1:22; 2:3-5; Ezekiel 29:2-3). Optional: Google the words 'Hapi' and 'Khnum'.

 - b. What might be the significance of the water being turned into blood (vv17-21; Revelation 8:8; 16:4-7)? What is it supposed to tell Pharaoh about God?

 - c. Pharaoh seemed to harden his resolve not to let the people go (v22b-23) after he saw how the Egyptian magicians could also turn water into blood (v22a). What is the difference between Moses turning the water into blood and the Egyptian magicians doing the same? What was Pharaoh's mistake (in thinking and in action) here? How can we guard against committing a similar mistake?

2. The Second Plague: Frogs (8:1-15)
 - a. In Revelation 16:13, what does frogs symbolise? What might the frogs signify in the plague (cf. Ps 78:45b)? Optional: Google the word 'Heqet' –' what do you discover?

 - b. Visualise the scene set out in verses 2 to 7. Frogs are everywhere. Even the Egyptian magicians are able to make the frogs appear (but they cannot make them go away). Pharaoh has to order Moses and Aaron to pray to God to remove the frogs (v8). What does this prove to Pharaoh about God (v10)?

- c. When God answers Moses' prayer to remove the frogs, Pharaoh goes back on his promise to let the people go (v15). It is easy to criticise Pharaoh's behaviour, but how might we also behave that way? How can we guard against doing so?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

By these plagues, God demonstrates his matchless power in delivering Israel from Egypt. He is the same God who delivers man from the slavery of sin throughout history.

- Recognise that God is almighty and supreme. There is none like him. This points us squarely to the first commandment
- You shall have no other gods before me.
- Recognise also that God is a covenant-keeping God. He will fulfil what he has promised to do for his people. The plagues pave the way for God to do that.

FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

Take time to talk about the first two plagues. Are there 'gods' in our lives which need to be removed so that we worship and live for only God?

PHARAOH'S HARD HEART

EXODUS 8:16-32

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

INTRODUCTION

Exodus 8:16-32 continues with the 3rd and 4th plagues that God unleashed on Pharaoh. What did these signs reveal about God and his purposes? Did Pharaoh's reaction serve or thwart those divine purposes? Let us investigate and see how these events became lessons for subsequent generations of Israelites and for Christians today.

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Gnats and flies over the land
 - a. Compared with the first two plagues, what is distinctive about the 3rd (vv18&19) and 4th (vv22&23) plagues? How severe were they? (vv17, 24)

 - b. Given Egypt's worship of many gods (cf. 12:12) and of Pharaoh (who was regarded as divine), what was God showing Pharaoh through all these plagues? (8:22)

2. The king's heart holds sway over his slaves

As events develop, Pharaoh negotiated on the terms and conditions for Israel's release in exchange for Moses' intercession (vv24-29).

 - a. What is Pharaoh's ulterior motive? What does it suggest about his 'repentance'?

 - b. Note the aggravating circumstances below where Pharaoh's heart is said to be hardened. (In Hebrew, the 'heart' represents a person's core being, including his intellect and will. It is also translated as 'mind' or 'will'. It is where plans and decisions are made).

Response to the earlier sign and two plagues

- His heart was hard when the sign and plagues could be duplicated (7:12, 22; 8:7).
- Would not listen to Moses & Aaron (7:13, 22, 15)
- His heart was hard after plague was relieved (8:15)
- Relented and agreed to release Israelites, but went back on his word (8:8)

Response to the 3rd plague

- His heart was hard when _____.
- Would not listen to _____.
- His heart was hard _____.

Response to the 4th plague

- More relenting and agreeable to release Israelites, but went back on his word despite Moses' warning (8:28-29)

- c. What does 'hardening the heart' mean? Who is morally responsible for Egypt's plagues? (9:27; 10:16)

d. What lessons/warnings can we learn? (Pro 28:14; 2 Ch 36:13; Ps 95:8-11; cf. Ex 17:1-7)

3. Lord over plagues and hearts

Thus far, every confrontation with Pharaoh has met with hardened resistance. This happens 'just as the Lord had said' (7:13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32 [implicit]).

a. What exactly did God say previously? Who acts to harden Pharaoh? (4:21; 7:3; c.f. 9:12)

b. Each time Pharaoh's heart was hardened, whose purpose was served? What were these over-arching and inter-related purposes? (Ex 7:4-5; 9:14, 16; 10:1-2; 14:4, 17-18)

c. What bold picture of God do we gain from these 'hardening' passages and from a broader biblical view? (c.f. Pro 21:1; Ps 105:24-25; Ezr 1:1-2; Rev 17:16-17) Why do you think Scripture describes God this way?

Summary: The plagues' increasing severity were but equally matched by Pharaoh's increasingly stubborn response, thus setting up for greater plagues to humble him and this vicious cycle spirals towards the climax. And all this happened by God's word to Moses, by His power (greater than the most powerful of men – the king, and the most free of human faculties – the heart), to effect His judgment on idolatrous Egypt, for the redemption of His people, and for the publication of His saving name among Israel and the nations.

DISCIPLESHIP POINTER

Pharaoh hardened his own heart. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. statements stand equally true side-by-side in a complementary, not a conflicting way:

Pharaoh hardened his own heart and is rightly held morally accountable and judged by God. A fallen heart is also one that easily and deceptively hardens in pride, bitterness, indifference or unbelief, whether in good or bad times.

- Pharaoh was humbled (by outward pressures) but not humble (in heart). He became hardened, stiff-necked and raised his fist. Israel repeated the same mistake in the desert. How do I respond when outward circumstances are bad or even too good?
- Pharaoh 'repented' but even his repentance need repenting of. Have my confession, repentance and thanksgiving become superficial and mechanical? Is it only to get God to give me what I want or is it a genuine seeking and humbling before Him?

God hardened Pharaoh's heart and many others (Deut 2:30; Jos 11:20). Understandably, Christians can find this rather counter-intuitive and unsettling. Indeed God's goodness and righteousness insist that He does not tempt or compel men to sin (James 1:13). Nonetheless, such bold depiction of God functions in Scripture to assert:

- His total sovereignty over all matters, even wicked plans and choices (the heart);
- the absolute certainty that it is His purposes, not men's, that will be achieved;
- His resolved judgment to leave individuals and nations to their wilful sin; and
- His grace to His people, such that in witnessing His mighty rescue, they may worship and trust only in the one true and incomparable God.

Can I believe that God is in control of a world which often seems to be in the hands of inscrutable natural forces or power-yielding individuals and institutions?

Can I trust that God is in the driving seat through my life's ups-and-downs, gains-and-losses, health-and-sickness? Will I humble myself before Him who knows my heart?

Ultimately, God's sovereign oversight over responsible human actions is what assures us that the Passover and the Cross are no accidents of history, but the triumph of His predestined salvation plan for His people. Pharaoh's crime to oppress Israel and Pilate's crime to crucify Jesus only serve God's set purpose to inflict death on the Lamb that He might bring life to His redeemed (Acts 4:27-28; Isa 53:10).

FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

Pondering over men's ways and God's ways

Pharaoh's hard-line resistance despite devastating and humbling judgments gives God's people occasion to reflect on their own ways with God and His higher ways with men.

- a. What would a hardened heart look like in my life (e.g. Prv 28:13; Det 15:7-9; 2Ti 4:3-4)?

- b. Is there an area, issue, or behaviour where I currently manifest an attitude that resists what God or fellow Christians have to say about it?

- c. What life situations might or did lead me to harden myself against people or God?

- d. In practice, who do I fault when I suffer sin's consequences? Who do I credit when my talents and treasures have led people to the Lord and built up my church?

- e. How would I pray or live my Christian life differently, if I believe God is: (i) Good but not sovereign; (ii) Sovereign but not good; (iii) Both good and sovereign?

Which God will inspire worship, comfort and trust in His people but fear of judgment in those who resist Him?

THIS TIME I HAVE SINNED

EXODUS 9:13-35

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

INTRODUCTION

This study delves into God's seventh plague. In the first three plagues God distinguishes between Moses, his servant, and the Egyptian magicians. The fourth to sixth plagues, God distinguishes between the Israelites as his chosen race and the Egyptians as the people of the world. In the seventh to ninth plagues, God asserts himself as the only God, for 'there is no one like me in all the earth' (9:14).

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. God – His Supremacy
 - a. 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me' (v13). Pharaoh stands against the Israelites leaving to worship God. He has kept God's people in slavery so that they could not go and honour their God. What stops people from worshipping God today? (Ephesians 2:1-3) What frees them to worship? (John 8:34-36)

2. God – His Attributes
 - a. What do the following passages tell about God's attributes and his demands?
 - i. Ex 9:13
 - ii. Ex 9:14
 - iii. Ex 9:18-19
 - iv. Ex 9:30
 - v. Ex 9:31-32
 - b. Compare Exodus 9:15 with The Flood (Gen 5:32; 6:5-8,13), and The Parable of the Weeds (Matt 13:36-43). What do these references tell us about God's warning, people's action and consequences and God's judgement?
 - c. Ex 9:16 is a controversial verse concerning Egypt to many readers. Compare it with Romans 9:12-19; Isaiah 45:9-12; 53:10. How does this remind us about the sovereignty of God over all people and our lives under him (Job 40:1-14; 42:1-2, 5-6)?
 - d. In view of 2(c), how should we worship God with our lives?

3. Pharaoh – The Egyptian king and god
 - a. What do the following passages tell about Pharaoh's attitude and attributes?
 - i. Ex 9:17
 - ii. Ex 9:27
 - iii. Ex 9:30
 - iv. Ex 9:34-35In what ways are we like Pharaoh? How should we change?

- b. According to the following passages, what are the behaviours of a hardened heart?
 - i. Exodus 7:22
 - ii. Deuteronomy 15:7
 - iii. Mark 8:17
 - iv. Hebrews 3:13, 15-16

Do you have a hardened heart? What must be done about it? (2 Cor 3:14; Pro 28:14)

4. The People

- a. How do the people respond to God's warning (vv20, 21)? Why?

- b. How do you normally respond to God's warning in the Bible? Why?

- c. How can you learn from Moses' faith (Heb. 11:24-28)? How are you working out your faith in Christ Jesus?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

(Extract from 'The Daily Devotional Commentary', by Lawrence O. Richards. Scripture Press Publication. 1990. P47-48)

'This time I have sinned' (Ex 9:27). When I last talked with Charlie he was lying in a hospital bed with two broken legs. He'd been lying drunk in a Brooklyn gutter and been run over by a truck. Charlie was like Pharaoh. When things went against him, he vocally turned to God. But as soon as the trouble disappeared, there he was, back in the gutter again.

Pharaoh was a deathbed convert. When he was in trouble, he asked for prayer. But when each plague was lifted, he went back to his old ways.

It's worthwhile to underline what Pharaoh said in each confrontation with Moses, and note that each expression of repentance was worthless. How do we know? We understand what was in his heart by observing what he did when each plague was removed.

Talk is still cheap. Words of repentance, without a change in life, are as empty as Pharaoh's promises.

FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

Ponder: Are your words of repentance cheap and empty as Pharaoh – 'All talks and no walk' in the Lord?

LET THE PEOPLE GO!

EXODUS 10

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

INTRODUCTION

We continue with the eighth and ninth plagues in this study. The more Pharaoh pulls his punches on Moses, the harder he is punched by God. It is a losing battle that is destined to bring a harden heart down to its knees. Will God sit down with Pharaoh at the negotiation table? Will God settle for a compromise? Eventually, who really is the one who sets the ultimatum in this long-drawn out battle between the King of the Universe and the King of the world's most powerful people?

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Go to Pharaoh (vv1-6)
 - a. All earlier plagues were aimed at bringing Pharaoh to know the 'God of the Hebrews'. What is purposefully different about the plague of locusts? (v2)

 - b. The phrase 'dealt harshly with' (NIV) (also in 1 Sam 6:6) in verse 2 can also be rendered 'made fools of' (NRSV) (also in Gen 39:14; Num 22:29). What divine reactions might a person who hardens his heart against God [or his word, 9:20-21] expect?

 - c. 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?' (v3) Thus far God was patient with Pharaoh despite his stubborn refusal to let the Israelites go to worship God. The word 'humble' which occurs 76 times in the Hebrew Bible mostly meaning 'afflicted/ defeated'; in some 20 occurrences, it means 'submit to [divine] authority'. What did God demand from Pharaoh and his people Israel? What does he demand of his church today? Why is this important to worship?

2. Go to your God, but... (vv7-11)
 - a. Pharaoh will not listen to Moses, representing the God of the Hebrews. Instead he listens to his own officials. When we rather listen to human voices than to God, what does that show about our hearts?

 - b. 'Do you not yet realize...' (v7) What has Pharaoh's stubbornness and pride done to him as the king of Egypt and protector of his people? What can stubborn pride do to us as well?

- c. Pharaoh decides to 'play politics' with Moses (vv8-11). It is in the nature of man to do this, but not in the nature of God. What does 'playing politics' with God look like in everyday discipleship? Which character of God should warn us to behave with integrity?
3. Go Away Locusts (vv12-20)
- a. The end of arrogant pride and playing politics with God is disastrous. What does the description of the plague tell about the nature of God's judgment and the character of God?
- b. Examine verses 16 & 17 (cf. 9:27). It is possible to repent out of fear of hell's fire, not out of love of God. Discuss.
4. Go Away Moses (vv21-29)
- a. Pharaoh's temporal 'repentance' sends Egypt into 'pitch-black darkness' (translated literally) for three days. It is a darkness which the Egyptians can feel (v21). But light remains with the Israelites (v23). What is the significance of this contrast? Consider Genesis 1:2-4; Joel 2:1-2; Zephaniah 1:15; Isaiah 29:18.
- b. The final face-off between Pharaoh and Moses is charged with the rhetoric of ultimatum – 'Make sure you do not appear before me again!' (v28) 'I will never appear before you again.' (v29) Pharaoh's death threat on Moses turns out to be a death threat upon his own people. It is utter folly to resist God to the end. Is there a warning for us individually here?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

God's sovereign will is not negotiable and cannot be compromised; it is to anyone's peril to oppose him.

- Do not harden our hearts against God; he will deal harshly and make a fool out of those who stubbornly defy him in order to humble them into submission.
- Stubborn pride is blinding because we simply refuse to face up with reality that exposes our selfish motive, poor judgement, and foolish action.
- Do not 'play politics' with God; he desires integrity of heart.
- God's punishment on those who stubbornly defy him will be swift and severe.
- It is utter folly to resist the sovereign God to the end.

FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

Am I stubbornly resisting God by...

- Harboured secret sins;
- Persisting with worldly desires;
- Justifying ungodly lifestyles and habits;
- Quenching the Holy Spirit's reproof within my conscience.

'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' (Heb 4:7; cf. Psalm 95:7, 8) Pray that we will have humble and pliable hearts that submit to God's will.