

## Exodus 6 - 8 – The Plagues – David Loke – 26<sup>th</sup> May 2019

The lopsided “battle” lines have been drawn up. You have the downtrodden Israelites, along with Moses and Aaron on one side, and Pharaoh and his cohorts on the other. Whatever surge of hope the Israelites felt must have evaporated after they got their workload ratcheted up after Moses and Aaron talked to Pharaoh. Moses is 80 and Aaron 83 years old. Not your usual freedom fighters. These are two older men going up against a God like character Pharaoh who is both Hitler and demi-God at the same time. The Israelites do not have a ‘hope’ and they know it. But God has other plans. He’s got Pharaoh where he wants him. There’s when the 10 Plagues come into play.

Let’s pray. Dear Lord, please open our eyes to your power and your glory. That you are no ordinary God, that you are indeed the only true God of heaven and earth, creator and sustainer of all things. Amen.

My sister in law recently gave birth to a dear baby boy. About 5 weeks now and already he is the boss. You know newborns have a certain kind of cry. A startling cry that grabs you; demands your attention STAT. Baby comes first and what baby wants, baby gets! It’s times like this that one might begin to realize, there is something more than just my own comfort and personal wellbeing. There is more than ME. Similarly, although not a baby crying, I hope these plague encounters alert us to the fact there is more than just me doing my life.. going to the doctors, getting my new mobile phone, surfing the internet. There is a being, the great I AM, the living God who is revealed himself to Israel, Pharaoh and even to us today through these encounters.

1/ Pharaoh throws down the gauntlet. He commands them to “perform a miracle.” He’s testing them out. Are these guys just some troublemakers? Does the God of Hebrews have any power?

God more than answers these questions. On king Tut’s coffin, there is a cobra on the headdress, presumably a symbol of his power and authority. God seems to be the one throwing down the challenge to Pharaoh. He tells Aaron to throw the staff before Pharaoh. That means in front of him. Imagine someone throwing a snake in front of you. Sure, Pharaoh’s magicians are able to turn their staffs into snakes too. However, Aaron’s snake gobbled up their snakes. There is no contest. The God of the Hebrews is more powerful than the ‘gods’ of Egypt. God is greater than all else.

We need to remember and be reminded today that the “one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4 niv

There is a unseen, invisible struggle going on between God and the devil, even today. The war has already been won. Jesus conquered death and Satan. But the devil, the evil that produced this counterfeit miracle is still abroad in this world, trying as much as he can to distract us, bring us down and render us ineffective.

We used to attend a church where the pastor's daughter noticed when she was gearing up to do God's work, she would begin to experience difficulties or problems in her life. Things would just pop up, stressing her or distracting her. I also have found this to be true too. Sometimes, when I am doing something of spiritual significance, I have found that there can be more intense pressures and problems that just come out of the woodwork. We need to be mindful that we do not struggle against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers in the spiritual realm. But one clear message from this "snake" prelude to the plagues is a demonstration of God's power over Satan and remember always, "Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world." Give God the glory!

2/ Have you noticed there is recurring theme in these chapters we just read about Pharaoh hardening his heart?

After Aaron's snake swallowed up Pharaoh's snake, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not listen.

After Aaron's staff turned the river Nile into blood, Pharaoh's heart became hard and wouldn't listen.

After The Lord brought the frogs out of the river Nile and then the country reeked of dead frogs, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not listen.

After the Lord sent a plague of gnats so that it was on people and animals everywhere, Pharaoh's heart was hard and wouldn't listen.

And after the Lord sent a plague of flies into Egypt and ruined the land, Pharaoh also hardened his heart and would not let God's people go.

In these 5 narratives, each and every time, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not listen. If God is so powerful, why doesn't Pharaoh listen the first time around?? Couldn't he just get rid of Pharaoh or soften his heart so that he would let the people go?

Friends, pharaoh's hardening of the heart is as much his fault as God in his sovereignty hardening Pharaoh's heart. The root cause is God. Why does God harden Pharaoh's heart?

Exodus 7:3,5 niv tells us why. <sup>3</sup>"But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, <sup>4</sup>he will not listen to you. ... <sup>5</sup>And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."

The Lord God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he can show his power and glory not only to Egypt, not only to Israel but to all the world. Right now, we are hearing of the wonder and glory of the Almighty God, how he bent the laws of nature and of creation to show his power and glory. God is revealing his power and glory to Egypt and to the ends of the world. There is no God but the living God who is here today in this place. We give glory to God!

3/ This then leads me to my third point that God is a God of justice. God brings low the proud but gives grace to the weak.

Are you familiar with the story of Cain and Abel? Cain was jealous of his brother Abel. His offering to God was not as good as that of his brothers. That infuriated Cain. Just because his ego was slighted, he killed his brother in the field.

Blood was spilled in that field.

Genesis 4:10 niv says,

The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."

Only one man is dead and yet the blood spilled out on the ground is a witness. It cries out to God for justice.

So if God hears the cry of one person's spilled blood. Imagine the cries of hundreds if not thousands of babies ringing out in chorus to God. Exodus 1 tells us that when Joseph and his brothers moved to Egypt, the Israelites filled the land and Pharaoh was upset. He didn't want this people group to displace theirs, to have to compete with them. So like any good despotic leader, he found an easy solution. Just chuck them into the river Nile. If it's a girl, cool let her live. If a boy, just chuck him into the river. Easy right, no cries, no messy blood. Just chuck em in the river. But God sees all this. He will bring justice.

Exodus 7:19.niv **19** The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood.' Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in vessels[a] of wood and stone."

The Nile is Egypt's symbol of strength and power. It gives them water, fish ,irrigates their fields. It's the cornerstone of their country. Egypt's civilization is founded on the life giving water of the Nile.

But God turned the river red. Turned it into river of blood. The fish died and it stank. Blood flowed in the Nile.

The first plague serves as a reminder that God has not forgotten the babies drowned in the Nile. God is a God of justice and I think he turned it into to blood as an act of judgment. Furthermore, if you look ahead, the tenth plague is the first born child of the Egyptians were killed by the angel of the Lord. So you can see like book ends: the first plague is reminder of the Jewish babies killed in the Nile and then the 10<sup>th</sup> plague is the Egyptians turn to have their first born killed. Now you could begin to see the 10 plagues are contained within these 2 framing acts of judgment that tell us that God has not forgotten the murder of his people and that God acts in judgment.

Friends, we can see from this that God humbles the proud. Those who think they can get away with anything. He will bring them to judgment. Yet, God is merciful too. To those who follow him, who turn from their ways, he will set them free. Just like the enslaved Jews. Give glory to God who is both just and merciful!

I'd like to share a story of my dad. My dad used to work for Esso, now called Exxon. He had a stressful job. He used to work as stations manager looking after whole hosts of petrol stations in Malaysia. You can begin to imagine the problems he had to solve. Well, his job and looking after his family was a major part of his life. He wasn't a particularly religious man. We went to church when we were children but not as a family when we were in high school.

You see you live, you work , you eat , you sleep and before you know it, you're retired. That's where my dad found himself and one day he got really sick. We found out all the heart arteries were blocked except for one small reedy one. Dad was on borrowed time. During his last one to two years, dad came into a living relationship with our God. The God of the Hebrews became real to my father. During times of suffering and brushes with death, God brought my father to the brink and showed him that he is God. God was patient with my father, using hardship and illness to drive the message home that God is real.

God was patient with my dad. He brought on the circumstances that helped my father find his way to the Lord. I had no uncertainty when he passed away that he had gone to be with the Lord. The story of exodus and the plagues reveal how patient God is in working out his plans. He didn't rush getting the Israelites out of Egypt. They were there for 400 years! It took 10 acts of judgment. 10 incredible works of wonder for Pharaoh to let God's people go. God's ways are not our ways. His ways are higher than our ways.

If you were an Israelite, you might have wanted it over and done in one instant but God is patient, working out his plans to fruition. Just as God is patient working out his plan. So should we be. We ought to be patient when we wait for God to work out the suffering our lives. We wait patiently prayerfully but ready to act to share gospel to our loved ones. We wait patiently for God to use us.

Who God is determines what we are. God is in control, sovereign , patient. Because we know he is in control of all things, we too can be patient, trusting in God to work out his purposes.

5/ Have you ever been to Malaysia and walked down one of their street markets? You can pick up a nice "bargain" there. You might be able to pick up a Rolex for 20 bucks. But you still gotta be smart. If you look Asian like my wife Tamara but have an Aussie accent, you should not open your mouth. Zip it! I have a suspicion that there are two prices. One for local Asians who speak with strong accents and one for foreign Asians with the Aussie/foreign accents. You guys should practice your "lahs" before going shopping. Do you like this Rolex? NoLah! Do you like this louis vutton bag? Yeslah!

The only problem of course is what to do if your watch stops ticking or bag handle falls off. If you went to the official Rolex repair shop in Australia, you'll be kicked out of the shop. Coz these are counterfeits. Fake stuff. When it comes to buying a real Rolex, we don't buy one from a street market. What more when it comes to worshipping and trusting God. You want to follow the one true God and not a counterfeit.

My last point is there is only one true God. There is no one like him. But beware of counterfeit forces abroad. Satan and his demons are working to trick some of us that there are other gods or explanations for the universe.

The magicians were able to mimic the miracles of staff turning to a snake, and Nile turning into blood and the frogs coming out of the Nile.

In the plague of the gnats, Aaron's staff struck the dust of the ground and the Lord turned ALL the dust throughout the land of Egypt into insects. Now this the magicians could not do. It's one thing turning water into blood, or turning a couple of staffs into snakes, but this is turning an immeasurable amount of dust into a living being. That is an act of creation that is not the province of humans, or demons or Satan, but only the province of our one true God. Even the magicians admitted "this is the finger of God."<sup>1</sup>

Friends, even though the devil can produce counterfeit miracles, there is only one God and master over the entire universe. Everything is subject to him. These narratives make it abundantly clear. We learn already the magicians power is no match for God's power.

Further, God has the power over creation. He creates and un-creates. He gives life and can take life. He made the frogs cover all the land but took their lives so that they died all over the land.

He made an inanimate object dust into a living organism, a gnat. Not only one but countless numbers. There may be counterfeit forces in this world trying to tell us there are different pathways to God or that all roads lead to the same place. But beware the counterfeit. Truth is there is one true God who is Lord overall. Worship him alone. Beware the counterfeits.

As we draw to a close, we surmise that these narratives teach us much about God. Who God is helps us in our everyday life. Understanding who he is in all his glory and power helps us approach this life, knowing that the Lord of all has got our backs and is guiding and looking over all shoulders. Because God is greater than all, is both just and merciful and patient, and the only one true God, there can be only one response. We bow at his feet and worship him alone. There is no one like him, no one who deserves our adoration, worship and obedience but him. He is our all in all. We give glory to our living God. We stand in awe of him and worship him alone because of who he is.