

“THE SERVANT OF THE LORD” – A Study of the Life of Moses**“Preaching Plagues – Part Four” (Exodus 10:1-29)**

It seemed that there was no hope for Moses when he first stood before Pharaoh. One eighty-year old Hebrew shepherd against the collective might of the Egyptian empire appeared impossible odds. However, by the end Pharaoh and his people would know who Jehovah truly was but also that there was no one like the Lord! One with God is always a majority. It always has and it always will, “*If God be for us, who can be against us?*” (Romans 8:31)

The plagues continued to strike at the heart of the Egyptians people and their land. The more Pharaoh resisted the will of God, the more the Lord intensified His judgments upon him. Swindoll points out.

...this was one of those rare moments in history when God stepped to earth in a specific way to judge His enemies. It had never happened to a nation in that manner since the flood and will not happen again until God says, “Enough, ” and sends forth His Son with a rod of iron to once again judge the nations. To make matters worse for the Egyptians, they had only to look across the border into the nearby land of Goshen to see that life went on normally. Cattle grazed in the pastures. Trees blossomed and produced their fruit. Healthy children played in the streets and vacant lots. Fields of grain rippled in the breeze. Not a single locust afflicted the Hebrew community.

The demonstration of God’s sovereign power echoed down the centuries. More than 400 years later, the Philistines remembered the sovereign power of Jehovah who had plagued the Egyptians, “*Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness*” (1 Sam. 4:8).

PLAGUE EIGHT – LOCUSTS

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him: And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD. And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me. Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast: And they shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth: and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field: And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day. And he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh. (v1-6)

The next plague was another destructive one. God revealed to Moses that Pharaoh would not heed it because the Lord had sovereignly intervened, “*for I have hardened his heart.*” So this was no easy task for Moses to undertake to warn Pharaoh to humble himself yet Moses was faithful. The sovereignty of God did not undercut Moses’ responsibility to declare the message. Moses’ duty was to be obedient to the command and leave the consequences to the Lord.

This eighth plague would be a sign not just for Pharaoh but for Moses and future generations of Israelites to be instructed by, “*And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD.*” This reminds us that God’s deliverances in our own lives should be testified to our children and grandchildren. The world spends their time boasting to their children of their academic and business successes. Believers are called to glory in the goodness and greatness of God,

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

In grace the Lord warned Pharaoh of the utter devastation to come from this plague. The previous plague of the thunderstorm had destroyed the flax and barley crops, but the wheat and rye crops were not destroyed, because they had not matured at that point in the cycle (Exod. 9:31-32). Again this was grace from the Lord to spare Egypt from total devastation if Pharaoh would only repent.

The Lord got to the heart of Pharaoh’s problem in this interaction, “*Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?*” The reason for the plagues and the consequent sufferings was because of Pharaoh’s refusal to bow the knee to the will of God. The proud monarch would not humble himself before his Creator. Pride prevented him from doing so. As he would not do it voluntarily, the Lord would have to force him to do it.

And Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed? And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh: and he said unto them, Go, serve the LORD your God: but who are they that shall go? And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD. And he said unto them, Let the LORD be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; for evil is before you. Not so: go now ye that are men, and serve the LORD; for that ye did desire. And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence. (v7-11)

There were clear divisions in the minds of the Egyptians after the seventh plague. Now for the first time we read of an intervention by the servants of Pharaoh that disagreed with Pharaoh’s policy, “*How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?*” They informed the proud king that resisting Jehovah would bring destruction. That is always the consequence of taking on the Lord by sinners. Ultimately He will win and will be seen to win.

Pharaoh decided to partially relent and offered to let the men go, but not the women and children. This would be Pharaoh’s surety that Israel would come back. It also would allow him to control the religious influences on the next generation. The devil often focuses much of his energy and time on trying to destroy our children, as he knows that this is an effective way to limit the spread of Christianity. The Bible places great emphasis on Christian parents teaching God’s word to the next generation,

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. (Deut. 6:6-7)

Pharaoh did not allow Moses to respond to his offer of the men only going to worship but simply drove him out of his presence. The proud monarch still wanted to assert his control with a power play. Pharaoh's advisors were willing to concede defeat but not Pharaoh!

And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath left. And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt. (v12-15)

Just as the Lord had warned the locusts came the next day. As was promised, they brought utter devastation to the crops and vegetation of Egypt, “*there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.*” The Egyptians had various deities that they worshipped that they believed controlled the fertility of their crops. This destruction was another demonstration of Jehovah's sovereignty over their gods. The Lord will expose and utterly defeat every false god that we trust in. Few could have imagined things could have gotten worse than this. But there were two more plagues to come.

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only. And he went out from Pharaoh, and intreated the LORD. And the LORD turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go. (v16-20)

Panic set into the heart of Pharaoh and he called for Moses and Aaron in haste. Again he appeared to be sincere in his repentance by admitting he had sinned and that he needed forgiveness. However, what Pharaoh wanted was deliverance from the judgment, “*intreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only.*” Pharaoh did not want deliverance from his sin of rebellion against the Lord: he just wanted the plagues to be removed. The king had learned that a few words of public contrition seemingly bring relief from the sufferings so he would do what was required to bring about relief and nothing more.

It should also be noted that Pharaoh's concern was for himself, “*that He may take away from me this death only.*” There was no concern in the hard heart of Pharaoh for the sufferings of his own people by his stubbornness to God's will. Proud people are self-centred in their attitudes to the needs and sufferings of others.

PLAGUE NINE – DARKNESS

And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings. (v21-23)

The Lord did not give any warning of the next plague. It will be a foretaste of the outer darkness of hell, “*even darkness which may be felt.*” This was no normal darkness, but seemed to have this supernatural element in its pervasiveness as it could be “*felt.*” We can only but imagine the panic and fear in the hearts of the Egyptians as they experienced this plague, “*They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days.*” This would have been heightened by the fact it came without warning so they had no opportunity to prepare for it physically or psychologically. Remember also the Lord never revealed to them that it would only last for 3 days. It must have seemed like blindness or even death.

This plague had theological significance in the battle between Jehovah and the gods of Egypt. One of the prominent gods of Egypt was the sun god, Ra of whom Pharaoh was claimed to be an incarnation. By covering the land in such a powerful darkness, Jehovah was demonstrating once again His absolute power and sovereignty over Pharaoh and his gods. It was utter humiliation for them.

There was a sharp contrast with the children of Israel, “*but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.*” This reminds us of the contrast between the ultimate destination of the saints of God and unbelievers. One group will bask in the light of heaven’s glory whereas the other will be damned to outer darkness for all eternity. This plague should have been a providential warning to the Egyptians of the darkness of hell that they would soon encounter if they did not repent of their sins.

And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you. And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God; and we know not with what we must serve the Lord, until we come thither. (v24-26)

Despite the tremendous psychological power of this plague, Pharaoh still refused to submit to the command of God to let all of Israel go to worship Him. This time the compromise offer was that the people could go but the animals must be left behind in Egypt, “*only let your flocks and your herds be stayed.*” Although his world was publicly falling apart, Pharaoh must hold onto something to indicate his rebellion. The flesh is willing to give a little just as long as it does not have to fully submit to the Lord. Such is the hardness of the depraved heart of a sinner. God was not responsible for Pharaoh’s sin, Pharaoh was. Bruce Goettsche points out what Pharaoh is doing,

Pharaoh was trying to negotiate with God! But God would not negotiate. His standards were firm and sure. God does not put morality, ethics, right and wrong up for a vote. He sets the standard! We don’t negotiate, we listen and obey.

Moses was in no mood for compromise. He boldly refused to concede one inch of God's word, "*there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God.*" Moses recognised that this was an attempt not just to sabotage the sacrificial worship (as animals would be needed for that) but also an attempt to get him to dilute the commandment of the Lord. All too often we are tempted to compromise our faith. Sometimes it is in the matter of our families and other times it is in the matter of how we worship the Lord. Like Moses, we should cut no deals with the world, the flesh or the devil. Compromise with God's word is not an option for the saints of God.

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die. And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more. (v27-29)

Pharaoh's unrepentant heart was seen in his reaction to Moses. When Moses refused to negotiate Pharaoh lost control. Not only did he refuse to let Israel go, but Pharaoh also told Moses never to appear before him again. Effectively Pharaoh was making clear that no matter what plagues the Lord sent upon him and his people, he would not submit. So adamant in his refusal was he that he warned Moses as God's spokesman, "*for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die.*"

Forty years before when another Pharaoh threatened the life of Moses he fled in fear. But it was a different Moses now. He was steadfast as a rock when Pharaoh threatens his life, "*Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.*" Ironically, it would not be Moses that was eventually slain but Pharaoh. The more Moses walked in obedience to God's will, the more God gave him courage, "*The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion*" (Prov. 28:1). Our faith grows and is strengthened as it is tested. It is the testing that we find difficult but it is necessary to build character. All too often we fail to realise the rainbow comes after the storm.

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is true repentance?

2. How far can we go to resist God's will?

3. What changes can be seen in Moses in this chapter?

4. What have you learned from this chapter?
