

EXODUS

Lesson 7 - Chapter 7

Last week Exodus chapters 5 and 6 began the preparation for the Lord to force Pharaoh to give up the Israelites and allow them to leave. Moses and Aaron were in Egypt, they had confronted Pharaoh with the mildest demand that would be put on him: let My people go out to the desert for 3 days to worship Yehoveh. But, we were also told that God had pre-determined that Pharaoh's heart would be hard, that Yehoveh would (Himself) harden Pharaoh's heart further, and then Pharaoh would harden his own heart even more, and then the Lord would harden the King of Egypt's heart to an even greater level and so on until the plagues that were poured out on Egypt were so devastating that the Pharaoh would not only let Israel go, but DEMAND that they go!

The Pharaoh reacted to Moses' demand by stopping the shipment of straw....a standard ingredient for mud bricks.....that the Israelites counted on to manufacture the countless millions of mud bricks for the cities and fortresses they were building for Egypt. Rather, they were told that they would have to go and obtain straw on their own, but that their quota of bricks could not decrease.

Such a demand was utterly impossible to meet; and Pharaoh, whose irrational and paranoid hatred of the Hebrews was behind this nonsensical demand, orders that the foremen of the Israelites be beaten for not producing as much as before. The foremen in turn go to Pharaoh personally, asking exactly how it is that he thinks they can possibly accomplish what it is he is insisting on. His answer is: "it's not my problem".

So, the foremen go to Moses and Aaron, blame them for what has happened, causing Moses to question whether a) he is adequate to even do what the Lord has told him to do, or b) whether or not he's going about doing what it is that Yehoveh instructed him to do in the right way.

The Lord's response to Moses is what begins Exodus chapter 7.

READ CHAPTER 7 all

One of the great challenges we Believers have is trying to understand just who Yeshua is, and where He fits into the Godhead, and how it is that He is a man, and yet He is God. Even more, while the Lord pronounces at every turn that He is echad, one, completely unified, that we have these multiple essences or entities of Him, the 3 chief ones being named Yehoveh, another named Yeshua, and the third one that we simply call the Holy Spirit. I promise you if you understand how all this works, and then you need to write a book because you'll be the

first.

That said, nothing helps to understand this amazing mystery more than understanding Moses and Aaron's relationship with each other, and with God. There are precisely TWO Mediators in all Scripture, and in all history: Moses, and later Jesus the Christ. And, generally speaking, the relationship between Jesus and the Lord is patterned AFTER the relationship between Moses and the Lord. The obvious difference, of course, is that Moses was NOT God, but Yeshua was.

Therefore, let the impact of the words of Exodus 7 verses 1 and 2 sink in a bit. Allow me to point out that in the original Hebrew the words of verses 1 and 2 are this: “ **Yehoveh** said to Moses, see I place you in the role of **Elohim** to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your **navi**.” That is the Father places Moses, the Mediator, in the role of a divine being (a god), with Aaron being the earthly spokesman for the divine. Navi is the typical Hebrew word that we translate as prophet.

Do we not see that same pattern with Christ? The Father puts Yeshua in the role of the divine god, and there will also be a prophet as a spokesman to pave the way for Yeshua, John the Baptist. God, Mediator, prophet; this was Moses' situation, and this was Our Savior's situation.

This was perfectly understandable to Pharaoh. After all, Pharaoh was considered divine, and now Moses would be the divine negotiator for Yehoveh. Of course, in reality Pharaoh was no more a god than was Moses; the difference is that Pharaoh was delusional while Moses was indeed imbued with the power of God. Can you say, mismatch?

So, as we move along, pay close attention to how Moses behaves, and what he does, and what the Lord expects of Him: because it is a shadow of Yeshua's ministry.

Chapter 7 begins the series of plagues that God will use to strike Egypt and eventually result in the king of Egypt letting the Israelites leave. It's important to understand the great cost it would have been to Pharaoh and Egypt to allow these Hebrews to immigrate, en masse, out of Egypt. And, Pharaoh was indeed paranoid about that happening; remember, up to this point, the only demand made on Pharaoh was to let the Hebrews go 3 days journey into the desert to worship God. The implication was that they would return. But, Pharaoh didn't trust this; he figured that if he gave his permission, they would just keep on going and never return. In fact, in later verses we'll see Pharaoh cave in a couple of times, and then demand that Israel leave their flocks behind to ensure their return. Egypt had a population of around 10-12 million people at this time. Israel made up something between 2 ½ and 3 million of that number. Which means that Egypt stood to lose 25% of its population, and almost its entire work force, if Israel was to go.

Imagine if the US, which now stands at 300 million population, were, in a matter of a few days, to suddenly lose 75 million people.....and that these people were our construction workers, factory workers, automobile assemblers, field workers, food preparers, steel makers, electricians, plumbers, heavy equipment operators, cargo handlers, truck drivers.....the effects would be devastating. Our entire economy would collapse. Food distribution, construction,

automobile repair, utilities.....all the most basic services we take for granted would be interrupted. And, unlike that 24-hour power failure not too long ago in the Northeast, this event would last for years, perhaps decades. The US would, overnight, become a 2nd rate power and a bankrupt nation unlikely to ever again attain its former greatness.

This is what faced Pharaoh if he released the Hebrews, permanently. Is it any wonder that he refused? Yet, what we will see is that the end result was that God crushed Egypt for refusing His instruction and THEN was devastated even more by losing Israel anyway. It was a double whammy. Whatever difficulties we may face in obediently submitting to the will of God, no matter how hard it may seem at the time, the consequences will be less than when, in our refusal, God moves to enforce His will.

Now, before we get to all the plagues, I would like to set the stage. First, the Hebrew word typically translated as “plague”, is ***nega***. ***Nega*** is a generic word indicating being stricken, as in some type of blow upon something or someone, usually with the idea that it is a punishment for an offense. So this strike, this blow, can take many forms: it could be a sickness, it could be a pestilence, it could be an earthquake, it could be the loss of a loved-one to death, or the loss of wealth and prosperity. It could, of course, also be a plague. So, calling all ten “strokes” against Egypt plagues (in our more modern sense) is a little off course, although a couple of those strokes were most certainly “plague-like”.

Next, properly speaking, there were only 9 “strokes” or “plagues”, with the tenth actually being “Judgment”. The first nine were to convince Pharaoh to avoid the judgment Yehoveh had said would occur if the great king would not release Israel: God, by His own hand, would kill the firstborn of Egypt.

These “strokes” inflicted upon Egypt were, therefore, actually not 10, but 3 sets of 3, all progressive in nature. The first set of three involved the whole land of Egypt and everybody in it: Egyptians, Hebrews, visitors, all were affected. And, they were generally mild in nature, causing little more than discomfort. The next 2 sets of 3, that is, the next 6 “strokes” were visited only upon the Egyptians; God in this way divided and separated His people from the others in the land of Egypt; He made a distinction between Israel and all others. While Pharaoh had been personally informed in his palace by Moses and Aaron that Israel had been set apart for God, the people of Egypt would only find this out by experiencing that God made a distinction between Israel, and everybody else. One can only imagine how quickly the news spread, even beyond Egypt, that these terrible blows suffered by the Egyptian people, including the god-man Pharaoh himself: but it left the Hebrews unaffected.

Now, indeed, these “plagues” were of supernatural origin. They were miracles from the power of God. However, in reality, what occurred in each of them also occurred in nature from time to time.....though not to the extent now happening. It is completely normal, according to the Scriptures, that God would use ordinary events and circumstances and nature’s various elements in an extraordinary way to achieve His purposes. What separated these 9 devastations from the same types of occurrences which appeared naturally, occasionally, was that they occurred at Moses’ commands, they came at an abnormal time of year, they were greatly more severe than had ever occurred before, and they happened one right after the

other. It left no doubt to the Hebrews or the Egyptians that the God of Israel controlled every natural process known to them.

We know, from the scripture we read in chapter 7, that the first stroke lasted 7 days. We also know that the judgment upon Egypt (usually called the 10th plague), when God killed all of Egypt's firstborn and which marks the first Passover, happened on the night of the 14th of Nisan, late winter, early spring. The 7th plague struck Egypt's agriculture, and the Bible tells us the state of development of certain of the field crops, which gives us a good idea of the season it occurred (around the end of January or beginning of February). Various Bible scholars have used this, and other data, to speculate that from the 1st plague to the final judgment (killing of the firstborns) was approximately 10 months; that is, the event began in May-June and ended the following March-April. Some see it as slightly less, perhaps 8 months. Either way, we see that this series of blows against Egypt played out over an extended period of time, and that Pharaoh and his advisors had ample time to consider what was happening, and what their response should have been: repentance and compliance. And, in between each plague the government and the people likely gained some amount of false hope when the effects seemed to subside and life at least moved a bit back towards normal.

Yet, what actually happened was that as each day passed after a calamity, Pharaoh grew hardened and less concerned that there might be another. He just returned to his normal day-to-day activities, addressing his ongoing agenda and affairs of state. What could be a better picture of our human nature? A few days after 9-11, a great part of our nation filled their pantries with extra food and water, plastic and duct tape, and kept their gas tanks filled and their senses heightened for any sign of something abnormal occurring. Our churches overflowed and volunteerism skyrocketed. Now, barely 5 years later, our churches are as empty as before and our blood banks run dry. For a time this nation's Believer's wondered out loud how we might have displeased the Lord, and why His hand of protection had been lifted from us; and now we're back to hearing Pastors say once again: God doesn't punish His people, it was simply evil doing what evil does. We are more concerned with the inconvenience the extra security at our airports and office buildings cause us, than with what might happen if it wasn't there. People haven't changed much in 3500 years, have they?

One final peculiarity about these 9 strokes against Egypt, and we'll move on: the 3rd stroke of each group of 3 always came unannounced to Pharaoh. That is, 2 calamities would occur, but each time Moses would FIRST warn Pharaoh and explain the nature of these punishments. Then, a 3rd (more terrible one) would happen, but Pharaoh would NOT be forewarned. So, plagues 1&2, then 4&5, then 7&8 occurred with advance notice to the king of Egypt. Plagues 3, 6, and 9 happened with NO prior notice to Pharaoh. To Pharaoh and his brain trust it appeared that Aaron and Moses were responsible for this series of calamities.....just as the Kings magicians were given credit for their own sorcery. Yet, it was hard to pin plagues 3, 6, and 9 on Moses and Aaron, since they were not present before Pharaoh to tell him what was about to happen. God used the 3rd of each series of 3 plagues to show Pharaoh and his cronies that Yehoveh was the author of these things, not His Mediator or His prophet. And, that Yahweh, God of Israel, was supreme over all things, everywhere, including Egypt.

Understanding this helps us as we look at the very first verse of chapter 7, where God sends

Aaron and Moses BACK to Pharaoh with another demand, and Yahweh says to Moses “I will make you as a god to Pharaoh.....” Indeed, this first stroke Moses was about to announce, through Aaron, would appear to Pharaoh as though it was Moses’ doing. So, by Pharaoh’s thinking, indeed Moses’ was “as a god” to make such supernatural things occur at his command. And, by the way, Pharaoh knew full well that he could not do such things.

Now, in verse 3, God tells Moses that HE will harden Pharaoh’s already rebellious and defiant heart for the purposes of showing Egypt “my signs and wonders”, that Egypt will know that “I am Yahweh”. So, what we see here is that it is not just a matter of convincing Pharaoh.....God wanted Egypt, the millions of common people, to be made acutely aware of His power and glory. Certainly, it would take Pharaoh’s permission for Israel to go; but God wanted all the people of Egypt to learn whom He is. Why? Undoubtedly so they would give up their false gods and worship Yehoveh. Pharaoh was never going to worship Yehoveh; he was only going to be defeated and then comply grudgingly. Pharaoh’s heart had long ago passed the point of no return.

This brings us to a question that is less difficult when applying it to Pharaoh, but much MORE difficult when we apply it to our own lives, and it is this: what do we gain from 1) believing that God, Yehoveh, exists and is powerful; and 2) by complying with God’s instruction? Pharaoh most certainly believed, even before the final plague, that Yehoveh was a real god, and very powerful. He also, in the end, complied by letting Israel go, knowing it would mean the end of Egypt as a power. Does that mean that Pharaoh was now righteous before God Almighty? We could pretty easily answer, no. But, how about us....you and I....what if we believe that God exists, and we comply with most of the instructions He has given us, are we righteous before God? Depending on which Christian denomination you adhere to, the answer could differ. We have here, in the Exodus story of Pharaoh the frightening and perfectly clear answer to my question: simply performing whatever act that God has commanded of you, legalistically or from fear of punishment, does not bring righteousness. Believing that God exists and is real also does not bring righteousness. One of the worst words ever chosen to explain a righteous relationship with God is the word “belief” or “believe”. How often I have heard an evangelist call unbelievers to belief in God that they might be saved. Well, Pharaoh believed, didn’t he?

No, righteousness is not acquired by adherence to God’s commands, nor to the doubtless belief that He is. Righteousness is acquired by trusting God, and then Yehoveh in turn declaring one to be righteous. Pharaoh believed, but he didn’t trust God. What is trust? Theologians have argued over the precise definition of that one for centuries. What all do agree on, though, is that the basis of trust is faith and commitment that God is who is says He is, is able to do what He says He will, and that our responses to Him come from a type of love that can’t even exist within us unless He puts it there Himself. The principles we find in the OT are surprising aren’t they? Genesis 15 said that Abraham was seen as righteous ONLY because he trusted God, so God credited that trust as righteousness. And, now we see here in Exodus that acknowledging that God exists, and legalistically or fearfully following His commands, does not bring righteousness. Principles that we typically always thought only came into existence during NT times.

So, these two elderly men, Moses 80 and Aaron 83, trudge back into Pharaoh and do all that

God commanded of them. And, in verse 10, we see the last warning shot fired over Pharaoh's bow, before God plays rough: Moses handed Aaron his staff, and gave Pharaoh the sign that the Angel of Yehoveh had given Moses at the Burning Bush: Moses' staff became a serpent. Why a serpent? Because Pharaoh literally WORE a serpent on his regal headdress; the serpent being the Egyptian symbol of kingly authority and healing. This was a direct insult and questioning of Pharaoh's authority. And, through Satan's power to counterfeit, Pharaoh's sorcerer's imitated the miracle and turned their staffs into snakes. But, God's power overwhelmed that of the magicians' and Moses' staff swallowed up their snakes. As predicted, Pharaoh scoffed at the demonstration of divine power.

The last warning ignored, the battle begins in earnest. In Vs 15 God instructs Moses to go out to the Nile the following morning and meet Pharaoh there. Now, how Moses knew WHERE to meet Pharaoh is the subject of much conjecture. Some believe that there was a regular religious rite that occurred at the same spot each day in which Pharaoh was involved. Others believe it could have been part of Pharaoh's normal morning routine to go out to the Nile and bathe. In any case, there is no chance he would have been alone; his royal court would have been with him.

Moses pronounces to Pharaoh the coming of the first stroke.....the first nega (more correctly, *negeph*). Moses smites the water of the Nile with his Shepherd's staff, and the Nile turns blood red. Not just the great river itself, but all of the canals and ponds and reservoirs that the Egyptians had built, as well as all the many branches of the Nile. And, this miracle happened over the full length and breadth of Egypt, affecting every one.....no one was spared from its effects including the Hebrews: for they counted on the Nile for water just like everyone else. Even water that was not currently in contact with the Nile, but that had come from it, turned to blood....in the cooking pots, in the storage containers, everything that held water taken from the Nile.

Interestingly, Egypt's sorcerers were able to imitate this just as they were able to counterfeit the turning of staffs into snakes. Of course, what would have been better is if Pharaoh's magicians could have overcome, and restored, the Nile to its freshness. But, they didn't, undoubtedly because they couldn't. One would have thought this awesome spectacle of the Nile turning blood red, and then the royals receiving reports that it had occurred everywhere in Egypt, might have swayed Pharaoh. But, it didn't. Why? Well, in addition to the hardened condition of Pharaoh's heart, many Bible scholars believe that what occurred here was something that the Egyptians had seen before, but in smaller measure. Every year at the time of the rise of the Nile, silt would color the water a characteristic red, and the rich nutrients contained in the silt spurred the growth of micro-organisms to create an effect that most of us who live near the ocean are familiar with: a Red Tide. This eats up necessary oxygen, thereby killing millions of fish, and causing a terrible stench.

This fits very well not only with the scriptural description of what occurred, but also with the God-pattern of using nature in extraordinary ways. Of course, the miracle was that Moses caused it to happen upon his command, it happened when the Nile was NOT in the rising season, and it even contaminated already drawn water in the vessels in which the water was being stored. Now, could this have actually been blood, real blood, as most versions say?

Maybe. The Hebrew word used here is “dam”, which means blood. But, “dam” also means, bloody, bloodlike, and it is even used when referring to wine as the ‘blood of the grape’.....the “dam” of the grape. So, the use of the word “dam” can, and often does in the Bible, refer to a color....so it doesn’t necessitate our assuming that the Nile became literal blood. I’m not dogmatic about this at all; yet, when you take this plague in context with all the others, literal blood seems out of place as all the other plagues used obvious elements of nature.....except of course the 10th, when blood is used in the way we would expect.

Add to that, we’re told in Vs24 that everyone had to “ dig around the Nile” for water to drink. In other words, just like at the beach, if you get near the water line and dig a little hole in the sand, the hole quickly fills with water as it seeps in through the sand. Just as used in reverse here in Florida and other places where storm water runoff is channeled into ponds, so the solids and pollutants can be filtered out as the water returns to the aquifer, the people of Egypt were able to have the sand filter the red silt and micro-organisms out of the tainted water sufficiently that they could drink it. No amount of filtering would have solved the problem if the water was no longer water, but actual blood. Besides, 7 days with no drinkable water in Egypt would have been a death sentence to hundreds of thousands. And, that most certainly was not the aim in this, especially since the Hebrews were subject to it as well.

Yahweh now sends Moses back to the so-far unimpressed and unmoved King of Egypt. In Vs 26, Yahweh says to Moses to tell Pharaoh to “set my people free”. And, if he will not do it, then God will send a hoard of frogs. First off, if you do not have a Bible that reflects the original Hebrew structure, you don’t HAVE a Vs 26; instead, this shows up as Chapter 8, Vs 1. No big deal. It changes nothing. But, for the sake of everyone who doesn’t have the older Hebrew structure, let’s stop now and read Chapter 8.

READ EXODUS 8 all

Why frogs? Well, a frog was the animal symbol of fertility in Egypt; and Hecket was the frog/fertility goddess. So, here we have a further assault on the Egyptian false religion. But, this inundation of frogs is also a naturally occurring phenomenon along the Nile, only in much smaller numbers than we have here. This typically occurs along the Nile in the October/November time frame, so we have a sort of mile marker to watch the progression of the strokes upon Egypt that had begun in summer, and now the latest one, the frogs, was occurring in the Fall.

The supernatural nature of this happening was, again, that Moses directed it, that the number of frogs was enormously beyond imagination, and rather than simply hanging around the banks of the Nile for a short time, near the puddles of water, as usually happened, these frogs wound up in people’s homes, their bedrooms, even in the bread ovens.

Typically when these frogs emerged from the mud they became a feast for the Ibis that inhabit the shores of the Great River. It’s not unlike in Africa when, after the rainy season, summer comes, water holes dry up, and millions of birds feast on fish that have been trapped in tiny ponds, overcrowded and with no means of escape. These Nile frogs are a unique variety that

is quite small, and they can barely leap or hop at all. They are also known for generating the most obnoxious, never ending croaking. Thankfully they have a very short life cycle; living just long enough to lay eggs for the next generation, and staying around for 3 weeks perhaps, in the moist sands all the length of the Nile. So, one of the miraculous elements of the frog infestation was that they found their way into the driest of places, the bread ovens; a place where, likely, they had never ever been found before. Actually, the fact that they flooded the dry landscape that began just yards beyond the Nile's banks was also unheard of.

Now, once again, Pharaoh summons his sorcerers, and they imitate what Moses and Aaron had done. I guess it was important to the Pharaoh to play down any power that Moses and his god seemed to have, because it was certainly irrational to the max to simply ADD to the already out-of-control frog plague. As in the first plague, with the Nile waters becoming blood red and undrinkable, Pharaoh's magicians could imitate to a degree what Moses had commanded, but they couldn't overturn what God had done.

Let us learn from this an important attribute of Satan, who is the source of all power that is not from God. What we are commonly aware of is that Satan can, to a degree, imitate, counterfeit, supernatural occurrences brought about by God....this is attested to all throughout the Scriptures and is demonstrated for us here in Exodus. But, what Satan cannot do, is Undo what God has decided will be. Satan cannot defeat acts of God. Some elements of the plagues, the strokes, could be mimicked to a degree.....but they could NEVER be stopped or reversed. This is a truth that we can be very thankful for, and comforted by, and we should remember as we find ourselves dealing with matters, from time to time, that seem to have demonic sources. And, as you read end-times prophecies about the coming Anti-Christ, the beast filled with Satan's power, notice how he can never stop, reverse, or undo what God has done.....God has only allowed Satan enough power to mimic, and that only to a point that really but serves to bring about Yehoveh's plan.

Well, the frogs apparently got to Pharaoh. Because, here, in only the 2nd of what would prove to be 9 strokes, Pharaoh tells Moses to plead with Yahweh to call off the attack of the frogs, and in return he will let Israel go into the wilderness to offer sacrifices. And, as if to underscore God's power, Moses asks Pharaoh exactly WHEN he'd like the frogs to disappear. Talk about rubbing it in. But, there was a very important point to all this: the act of Moses letting PHARAOH determine the time and place for the frog removal activities.....something that neither the Pharaoh nor his magicians could do.....served to emphasize the God of the Hebrews' enormous sway and power.

Moses says, OK, it will be as you say; and proceeds to go to God with Pharaoh's request. Just a little note here: while Moses was most certainly right to immediately proceed to God, Moses already HAD the authority to call off the frogs. Remember, Yahweh told Moses "you will be as God". If Moses spoke it, it would be as if God spoke it. And, Moses had agreed to Pharaoh's request that it be "tomorrow" that the frogs were removed. So, it was a done-deal right at that moment.....nothing further was required.

Well, the next day, as Moses promised Pharaoh, the frogs suddenly died. The people had little choice but to gather up the millions upon millions of little frog carcasses, and put them in piles

in order to get them out of their houses, their pathways, even their cooking utensils. And, what a stench went up all over Egypt as these tiny croakers decayed. The Pharaoh, as he would do a number of times, changed his mind and wouldn't release Israel to go worship God. Or, as our Bibles correctly say, hardened his heart. Notice, that opposed to it being God who hardened Pharaoh this time, it was Pharaoh who hardened his own heart this time.

A little footnote: associated with Pharaoh changing his mind, there is some humor that our English Bible translations tend to mask, so we don't get to enjoy it. In Vs 11, if your Bible had the extended chapter 7, or in the more traditional Bibles Vs 15, it says that "when Pharaoh saw there was relief" from the frogs, he hardened his heart. Well, the Hebrew word that is translated "relief" or "respite" is **revacha**. And, it literally means breathing room. So, here we are told the whole land stunk from the piles of dead frogs but, when the Pharaoh finally got some breathing-room, when the stench died down, he changed his mind. In the Hebrew original it was intended that the words stench vs. breathing-room were to play off of one another. Cute, huh?

This is a good place to end our lesson this week.