

SUMMER 2 - Way Out!

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[0 : 00] with us as you promised to be with your people and have promised throughout all the ages. Open our minds, our hearts and our eyes to see wonderful things in your word tonight and we pray that your word will bear much fruit in our hearts for your glory. Amen.

Well, over the ambitious one, we're going to start at chapter 4, which is where we got to last week and hopefully we'll get to the end of chapter 10.

I've been toying over the last few weeks about whether to try and just do the first half of the book of Exodus or to give a sort of big sweep and I've decided on the latter. It'll mean that we leave out things, but I think big pictures are often good things to appreciate as well.

So, here goes, Exodus chapter 4. We're still at the burning bush and if you remember last week, Moses had objected to God's call to him to go to Pharaoh to instigate the proceedings that would lead to the Israelites being set free from Egypt and come to the Promised Land.

Already Moses has objected to God by saying, who am I that I can do all of this? Back in chapter 3, verse 11. And God responds as we saw.

[1 : 23] And then Moses says, well, okay, you've talked about who am I. Well, what about who are you, God? What am I going to say when I get there? Who are you? And God again responds as we saw in the last verses we looked at last week that he is Yahweh, I am who I am and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Now comes his third objection at the beginning of chapter 4. He says in response to what God has been saying, but suppose they, the Israelites, do not believe me or listen to me, but say, the Lord did not appear to you.

Well, that's his third objection. Notice that Moses is lacking severely confidence in God's word because God had told him back in chapter 3, verse 18, that the Israelites would believe him and listen to him.

So, Moses now is quite explicitly doubting and not believing the word of God that he's just spoken to Moses. So, Moses here is not doing a good thing.

And ironically, I guess, Moses is accusing the people of exactly what he's doing now. You know, God, what if I go there and they don't believe me is exactly what Moses is doing now, not believing God's word.

[2 : 31] Well, God, in response to this, offers him three signs, two of which are performed and one of which is anticipated. The first sign comes in verses 2 to 5.

God says to him, or Yahweh strictly, says to Moses, what's that in your hand? He says, a staff, a walking stick, so to speak, a stick of wood. And he says, throw it on the ground.

So, he threw the staff on the ground and it became a snake. It's not an everyday occurrence. This is something quite unusual, a miracle. A staff is a sign of authority in the ancient world.

And this staff of Moses is going to be quite significant in the chapters that follow. It's the same staff that's used in the beginning of the plagues. And it's the same staff that's lifted up where the waters of the Red Sea are parted.

And later on, much later, I think, it seems to be the same staff that is then called Aaron's rod and is placed in the tabernacle much later on in Israel's history. Moses drew back from the snake, the end of verse 3, and God says to him, reach out your hand, seize it by the tail.

[3 : 39] And he did. He grasped it and it became again a staff. A miracle. But it's also a sign of what's going to happen. And God explains it in verse 5 by saying, so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to you.

So, what God is saying to Moses is, this will be a sign. Later on, you'll throw down the staff. It'll become a snake. You'll pick it up. It'll become a staff again. And that sign will be for the benefit of

the Israelites that God has appeared to Moses.

Because that's his objection. What if they say the Lord didn't appear to me? So, this will be a sign for the Israelites' benefit that God has. The second sign is in verses 6 to 8.

This time, God, the Lord, says to Moses, put your hand inside your cloak. He did so. He takes out the hand and it's leprous. Exactly what it looked like, we're not sure, but it's as white as snow. Clearly and suddenly, his hand has become thoroughly diseased. Leprosy is a fairly general term for skin disease in the Old Testament, not a specific technical medical term.

[4 : 52] And his hand is suddenly leprous. Just as miraculous, if not more so, put your hand back into your cloak. So, Moses did as he was told. And when he took it out this time, it was restored like the rest of his body.

Now, it's one thing for a miracle to put your hand in and all of a sudden be leprous. But leprosy is often incurable in the ancient world. So, all of a sudden, a leprous hand has become thoroughly cured.

And then in verse 8, the purpose of this, if they, the Israelites, will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. So, even though God has said, yes, the people will believe and hear, he's conceding the fact that it may take a little bit of getting through to them.

So, there's a second sign for them to back up the first. And then the third one in verse 9 is not something probably that happened right here because Moses is not at the Nile River.

But it's probably an anticipated sign for later on when he's back with the Israelites in Egypt. If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.

[6 : 05] That's an anticipated sign and it also is a precursor of the first plague against Egypt.

There's a sense in which what's going on here is God revealing himself as we saw last week but needing in some ways to convince firstly Moses, then the Israelites and then in a different way to convince or reveal himself for the Egyptians.

But there's a sense in which God is revealing himself here to each of those groups of people, in turn in effect. It'll have different results but the purpose we could say is the same so that Moses, the Israelites, the Egyptians, Pharaoh will know that God is God.

That's in effect what's going on here. Well, Moses is not quite convinced. He's quite a doubter really, is Moses. He's already objected three times.

His fourth objection comes in verse 10. Moses says to the Lord, O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant.

I'm slow of speech and slow of tongue, literally heavy of speech and heavy of tongue. It may mean a speech impediment or it may just mean Moses putting himself down and saying, look, I'm not a great orator.

[7 : 24] I'm not full of rhetorical flourishes and so on. And God's response is not to disagree. We might expect God to say to Moses, oh, come on, Moses, you've got the gifts, you've got what it takes to do it.

But no, God doesn't say anything like that. God says to him in verse 11, Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?

Now go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak. You see, he's not saying that Moses is not ineloquent and he's not saying that he will cure in eloquency, but he's saying I'll be with you and that's enough.

I'll tell you what to say and that's enough. You may still be slow of speech, but my words will be the words you speak and that will be sufficient. Later on, Moses goes on to object even further.

It's not so much a question this time in verse 13, but basically he now gets to the end of his possible objections. He runs out of questions and he says in verse 13, Oh my Lord, please send someone else.

[8 : 40] Well, it's a fairly desperate refusal to do what God has said, especially when God has promised him so much, given him signs so much, etc. And God, I guess, in his mercy, although nonetheless with anger as well, deals graciously here.

The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, literally Yahweh's nostrils heated up, you know, almost sense a fiery dragon breathing here. He's getting quite angry with Moses' sort of refusal to do what he's been called to do.

And he said to him, What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently, even now he's coming out to meet you. So here is God who's sovereign. He knows the objections of Moses.

Perhaps in his sovereignty he's bringing Aaron out from wherever he is over somewhere or other, back in Egypt presumably, to come and meet Moses. Here is God orchestrating the events to bring about his purposes, sovereign over Aaron as well as over Moses, anticipating what's going to be said and so on.

So he says in verse 15, You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth and I'll be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people.

[9 : 53] He shall serve as a mouth for you and you shall serve as God for him. That's quite a startling statement. You shall serve as God for him. But the idea is that God's words will be faithfully transmitted to Moses who without any alteration will transmit them in effect as God to the prophet Aaron in effect.

So Moses is the agent, if you like, the mediator of God's words to Aaron for the sense in which Moses' words spoken to Aaron are in effect as God's words spoken to Aaron.

Quite a startling statement to make about Moses here. And then at the end of verse 17, Take in your hand this staff with which you shall perform the signs.

Now I guess what we see here is not unusual in scripture. Time and again we find that the people whom God uses are unlikely people.

Now whether or not Moses was ineloquent and God doesn't disagree, so presumably he was, he probably doesn't strike us as the sort of person who's going to go and confront Pharaoh, win battles with Pharaoh and lead the people out from Egypt.

[11 : 06] He's probably an unlikely sort of person and of course remember back to what we saw last week, he's also a murderer. But God is consistently picking out unlikely people in scripture. Now it is rather odd.

They say how odd of God to choose the Jews generally and it seems odd of God sometimes to choose individuals to lead his people. And you see the same sort of thing along with some of the prophets or Jonah perhaps.

And you see it of course in the New Testament most fully in some respects with St Paul who it seems was lacking in some sort of Greek rhetoric and eloquence. In some of his letters to Corinthians for example, he makes that very clear, one Corinthians the same, that he's not what people expect.

He's not the sort of rhetorical orator that the Greek world would have run after to go and listen to. Quite ineloquent perhaps and in various other ways an unlikely apostle.

But God I think is deliberate in choosing unlikely people as individuals to lead as well as individuals to be Christians for that matter. And one of the reasons why I think he does that is that he's on about ordinary people, you and I, but also because in choosing ordinary type of people, even we might say weak people, God's own power is displayed more fully.

[12 : 28] And I think there's great danger sometimes when thoroughly gifted people are leading God's people and somehow it sometimes can look as though it's their own gifts and abilities and charisma and so on that is actually doing the work of God.

But it's when God uses the ordinary people, the almost we might say unskilled, ungifted, unlikely people, us generally, that's when his work is seen to be his work.

And so when we read this story of Moses we've got to realise at the end of it all the reason why the people of God end up in the land is not because God was very clever in choosing Moses, full of eloquence and ability and skill, but it's rather God's power at work very clearly.

And that also ought to be an encouragement to all of us I think, that God can use each one of us quite mightily. We ought not to think too lowly of our own deficiencies or inabilities.

If God calls us to some ministry he'll be with us, he'll provide and that is sufficient. It doesn't mean that he'll cure the inabilities but work through them. So presumably through the rest of the book of Exodus and into the end of the book of Deuteronomy when Moses dies, having preached one of the great sermons ever preached in Deuteronomy, we've got a man who's in eloquence still but they're God's words and that's why they're powerful.

[13 : 51] Well Moses in the second half of chapter 4 goes back to Egypt. Nothing too much in this section to comment on apart from one very puzzling statement but just a couple of little things.

He gets permission from his father-in-law to go back. I guess that's good protocol. And then the Lord said to him in verse 21, when you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I've put in your power.

So not only is he to perform signs to convince the Israelites but then he's to perform signs to convince Pharaoh and the Egyptians. But God says to him, I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

And we might well think, well what's the point? What's the point of doing all these plagues and miracles before Pharaoh which we're about to see if God hardens his heart? Why bother? But of course in the end it's displaying God's power even more greatly.

And that's one of the things we see here right through the Bible but here in Exodus God is on about displaying his glory for the world to see. And so the hardness of Pharaoh's heart actually will highlight the glorious power of God in contrast.

[15:05] Then in verse 22 Moses is to say to Pharaoh thus says the Lord Israel is my firstborn son. I thought I'd just pause at this verse because it's quite significant.

It's the first time in scripture that the people of God or a person of God is called a child of God. As the beginning of a theme that culminates I guess in all Christian people marvelling at the glory of God and the love of God that we can be called children of God to paraphrase say 1 John 3 verse 1. God's people are here called his children his firstborn which is quite significant given what Egypt has been trying to do to Israel's firstborn back in chapters 1 and 2 killing them and what God will do in the last of the plagues which we'll see next week killing the firstborn of Egypt.

Israel is God's firstborn and he's protecting them but it's a statement of great grace and privilege. There's nothing in Israel that warrants them being called the child of God just as there's nothing in us that warrants us being called children of God.

And also we should pause and remember that children of God is not a statement made about human beings it's a statement made about God's people as distinct from the rest of the world.

[16:22] So sometimes you hear it said in general ways that every human being is a child of God. They're not. Creation of God made in the image of God but child of God is reserved for the people of God.

Today we would say reserved for Christian people. I guess that's one reason this is a digression here why I don't like the hymn Dear Lord and Father of Mankind.

The tune's great most of the words are pretty soppy but that first line greats because God is not the father of mankind and I think the New Testament makes such an issue of the fact that God is the father of Christians that I find it difficult to sing the first line of that hymn.

Anyway, so be it. Better move on. In verse 24 to 26 comes one of those little puzzling paragraphs that really to be honest I sort of wish wasn't there.

What do we make of this? On the way at a place where they spent the night the Lord met him whoever him is and tried to kill him but Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched now it's got Moses' feet there but literally it's his feet with it and said truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me so he let him alone it was then she said a bridegroom of blood by circumcision now this is rather bizarre because it looks as though God is trying to kill somebody and a lot of people think he's trying to kill Moses but throughout that paragraph Moses is not mentioned it's actually him and the him that it seems actually to refer to is Moses' son Zipporah is his wife and what I think the issue here is is that Zipporah the wife of Moses circumcises her son which is a covenant sign going back to Genesis 17 and smears him with the blood as a mark of protection that he's now part of the covenant family the word for bridegroom is actually more loose than that it sort of talks about somebody who's into your family by marriage so a father-in-law could be used it could be described with this word or a mother-in-law or a son or daughter-in-law so what I think is going on here is that God has somehow and for some reason threatened to kill Moses' son en route but Moses' wife has circumcised him smeared him with blood thus protecting him from God's anger and he's brought into the covenant family which is what I think the thrust of the end of that paragraph is about now why I think this is there is that it anticipates what's going to come later and in the book of Exodus there's lots of little cameos if you like of things that are anticipating things that are going to come later a bit later on we'll see Moses' staff become a snake and swallow up the others it's the same word that's used about swallowing up the Egyptian army in the Red Sea so here I think it's an anticipation of the Passover when smeared blood will protect God's people and the issue here is the covenant people and God's son is being circumcised as the Abrahamic law of Genesis 17 said

and now then as part of the covenant family he's safe anticipating what God will do to those who are not part of the covenant when a bit later on in Exodus 11 onwards the first Passover occurs still it's slightly bizarre sort of event but it also fits with what God is on about generally in scripture sparing people by blood is a theme in the Bible it's there in the Passover it's there here and of course it's there in the cross where Christian people who place their faith in Jesus' death are spared by his blood shed on the cross the writer to the Hebrews says it's by the blood of Christ that we can enter

[20 : 15] God's presence so here I think is just a little foreshadowing of that biblical theme of people being spared from God's wrath by blood well Aaron comes and meets with Moses at the end of that chapter verses 27 onwards the Israelites believe as God anticipated when they perform the signs and now in chapter 5 Moses goes to Pharaoh for the first time it's not an auspicious start to his career as the leader of God's people he starts well thus says the Lord it's a bold claim it's a claim of being spoken obviously from a deity it's a claim of a deity and it reminds us that the confrontation is not between Moses and Pharaoh but between Yahweh God and Pharaoh who represents God for Egypt verse 2 oh the demand is let my people go so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness but Pharaoh said who is Yahweh that I should heed him and let Israel go

I do not know Yahweh and I will not let Israel go and he's thrown down the gauntlet there in the sense of a challenge I don't know Yahweh so the plagues that follow periodically we sense this is so that Pharaoh will know Yahweh you said you don't know Yahweh Pharaoh well here are a few signs to let you know who Yahweh is they're coming but it's a fairly proud and arrogant response to Moses words well then Moses please pleads with Pharaoh the God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us let us go a three days journey into the wilderness to sacrifice the Lord our God or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword there's a sense in which Moses has gone from saying thus says God let us go to oh please can you let us go well Pharaoh is fairly dismissive of all of this in the verses that follow and despite Moses please the outcome is that Israel is to make as many bricks as they've been making as part of their labour but verse 7 you shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks let them go and gather straw for themselves but you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously don't diminish it for they're lazy so that's Pharaoh's response to Moses plea to go to the worship Yahweh in the wilderness no way you're not going and in addition to the work that you're already doing you've got to build the same quota of bricks but in addition you've got to find the straw to make the bricks so it's become harder work that's not a good start for Moses and it's not really a good start for him in his relations with the rest of the Israelites either as we'll see verse 9 we read let heavier work be laid on them then they'll labour at it and pay no attention to deceptive words that is keep them distracted it's the same ploys back in chapters 1 and 2 to stop them giving birth give them heavier labour they won't give birth they won't listen to Moses they won't want to go away and ironically the word let heavier work be done is the same word that's often used to describe

Pharaoh's heart he says make their work heavy and it's God who makes Pharaoh's heart heavy usually translated in our English as hard weighty in a sense what it's saying is Pharaoh oppresses the people so God will oppress Pharaoh's heart in response then in verse 10 we get the sense of the contest going on here so the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people that's to the Israelites thus says Pharaoh chapter began with Moses saying to Pharaoh thus says Yahweh now we get thus says Pharaoh do you see the contest it's God versus Pharaoh who represents the gods of Egypt and they're pitted themselves against each other here and we as an ignorant reader of course are wondering who's going to win this battle when they don't produce the quota they'll be beaten is what verse 14 tells us verse 15 the Israelite supervisors come back to Pharaoh why do you treat your servants like this no straw was given to your servants yet they say to us make bricks look how your servants are beaten you are unjust to your own people and

Pharaoh said you are lazy lazy that is why you say let us go and sacrifice to the Lord go now and work for no straw shall be given you but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks and the Israelite supervisors saw that they're in trouble when they were told you shall not listen your daily number of bricks as they left Pharaoh they came upon literally confronted Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them and they said to them the Lord look upon you and judge you have brought us into bad odour you've made us stink or smell in Pharaoh's nostrils ironically that's one of

the plagues later on where they're stinking and smelling in Pharaoh's nostrils as well you've brought us into a bad odour with Pharaoh and his officials and put a sword in their hand to kill us but it's not looking very good for God's promises to Moses Pharaoh hasn't listened but now his own people have turned against him because they've ended up with harsher work conditions so what happens now Moses complains to God in verse 22 through the beginning of chapter 6 and he complains in verse 22 and 3

O Lord why have you mistreated this people why did you ever send me since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name he has mistreated this people and you've done nothing at all to deliver your people God you've been lazy in effect is what he's saying Pharaoh's accusing Israel of being lazy Moses accusing Yahweh of being lazy God's not done what he said he did God's not faithful to his word that's what he's accusing God of and then comes God's response but there's no rebuke here there's no heat in his nostrils like there was in chapter 4 God rather patiently explains what he's on about God's now these are great words that we can only skim through all too quickly I'm afraid but God says in verse 1 or no verse 1 indeed by a mighty hand he Pharaoh will let them go by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land that's ascribing to Pharaoh a mighty hand but in the verses that follow we realise that actually it's

[26 : 43] God who's sovereign not Pharaoh's hand so God spoke to Moses and said to him I'm the Lord I appeared to Abraham Isaac and Jacob as God almighty but by my name the Lord Yahweh that is I did not make myself known to them we saw some of that last week in chapter 3 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan referring back to Genesis 12 and the promise to Abraham the land in which they resided as aliens but not now they've been in Egypt for 400 years I've also heard the groaning of the Israelites that's referring back to the end of chapter 2 we saw last week whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves and I remembered my covenant which again we were told at the end of chapter 2 so say therefore to the Israelites I am Yahweh and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from slavery to them I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment I will take you as my people I will be your God you shall know that

I am Yahweh your God who has freed you from the burden of the Egyptians I will bring you into the land that I swore to give I am Yahweh now throughout that statement it is clear that God is saying I am sovereign here I'm the boss I'll do this I'll do this I'll do this I'll do this I am Yahweh it's a very grand statement of his sovereignty over Pharaoh over Israel over the world in effect the great statement of who God is and his pledge to be faithful to what he's promised Abraham Isaac and Jacob reminds us again that the whole point of bringing Israel out of Egypt is not because Israel deserves it but because God is keeping a promise he made some 600 500 years before to Abraham so he reiterates at the end of that section verses 9 to 13 the command for Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh though they're a bit worried about this if Israel's not going to listen surely Pharaoh won't the rest of chapter 6 more or less is a genealogy of Moses and Aaron in one sense it's creating suspense it's like an advert break and sometimes in narrative stories that happens that is you read a story and you find various devices in the story that build the suspense sometimes it's repetition like you know when you tell a joke there was an Englishman and Irishman and Scotsman I won't tell you a joke because I can't remember them but you know that the repetition of the Englishman and the Scotsman and the Irishman is usually the loony one at the end the repetition in the joke is building suspense well here it's a sort of advert break it's not as though it's trivial though it's staking the claim for who Moses is and the ancient world were more interested in genealogies than even we are though that's more of an interest in the last 40 years I suppose in modern times but it's demonstrating that Moses is a legitimate Levite descended from Jacob the same for Aaron his brother of course the end of verse chapter 6 verse 28 through to the beginning of through to 7 verse 7 continues on the discussion we've just been part of between Moses and God God commissioning Moses and Aaron answering the question of verse 12 will Pharaoh listen to me and God saying yes he will in effect in verse 2 of chapter 7 you shall speak all that I command you your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of this land but I will harden Pharaoh's heart and I'll multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt and when Pharaoh does not listen to you I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people out of the land by great acts of judgment so in effect he's saying well to one extent Pharaoh won't listen to you but the outcome will be that you get out of the place that's the promise so we come to the passage that Horry read verse 8 through to verse 13 this is the prelude to the plagues in a sense it epitomizes

what's going to happen in the next three chapters when Pharaoh says to you perform a wonder it almost sounds as though it's sort of great aunt

Nellie saying to her grandniece can you perform a song on the piano dear but perform a wonder then you shall say to Aaron take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh and it'll become a snake that's what we've already seen back in chapter 4 so they went to Pharaoh they did as God commanded Aaron threw down his staff it became a snake but then what we don't expect perhaps Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers the magicians and they did the same thing they threw down a staff and it became a snake now sometimes that sort of puzzles Christians they think well how can that be isn't the God of the God alone can't hear you do miracles but there are several occasions in scripture where it is clear that sometimes miracles however whatever their source of power are actually there for evil purposes that is because something miraculous happens it does not legitimate or validate the person who performed the miracle the clearest example of this comes perhaps in say Deuteronomy 13 and 18 where there might be false prophets who perform miracles the test is not whether the miracle is done though if it's not done then that invalidates them anyway but if the miracle is performed then the question is which God are they leading you to worship now I think that the

[32 : 22] Christian church by and large in the last say 30 years would have done well to heed these words a bit more carefully because you often hear Christian churches sort of advertising all these miracles that are going on the healings and so on that they might perform on television or in other places occasionally they're proven to be bogus but but the point is not that here is a powerful act of God necessarily the point is what God are they calling people to worship now the difficulty is that sometimes they're done under Christian names but we must be more discerning than that we mustn't be blind to a miracle we must see behind it to see what truth claims are being made about the God who's supposed to perform them so don't get true trouble that Pharaoh's magicians perform miracles here whether we say that's Satan's work or God's work I'm not sure that we need to worry about that the point is it doesn't make them legitimate in the sense of truth claims over and above Moses indeed at the end result is that Aaron's staff snake swallows up all of theirs just as the Red Sea will swallow up Pharaoh's army in a few chapters time there's a statement of sovereignty and remember that a staff was a symbol of authority to for Aaron to come in before

Pharaoh and hurl down his staff is really a claim at the authority of Pharaoh to be God and King and then for his staff turned into snake to swallow up the other ones is a clear statement that God is sovereign and powerful there are nine plagues we're going to touch on tonight gosh I am ambitious they come in three cycles of three they're not in tight patterns but in the three cycles of three the first two of each cycle that is plagues one and two four and five seven and eight all have some sort of announcement before the plague happens that is Pharaoh is told by Moses and or Aaron this is what God's going to do and then it happens but plagues three six and nine have no warning no announcement Moses and Aaron don't go to Pharaoh to tell him what's about to happen each of the first of the sequence one four and seven occur at the Nile River as well so it seems that loosely there's a sort of three three cycles of three plagues the first one is the

Nile turned to blood in chapter 7 verse 14 onwards now this is not just God sort of doing you know wonderful things you know God having fun thinking oh what what sort of great creative pyrotechnic display can I bring about today some of these are quite deliberate probably the others are too but we're not always certain why they're deliberate the first one though is the Nile and that's the source of life as I made a comment about last week to turn the Nile into blood strikes at the heart of Egypt's existence the Nile was almost deified as a God God happy and here is Yahweh in a sense showing that he is sovereign over the Nile God of Egypt not the chief God of Egypt at this point but the death of fish that is a result of the Nile turned to blood is clearly God saying I'm God not happy not the Nile River important though it is the result of this is that Pharaoh's heart in verse 14 is hardened well that's actually before the plague begins

Pharaoh's heart is hardened he refuses to let the people go and at the end of it all Pharaoh is very dismissive about what happens in this everything that Moses says will happen happens exactly so God you see is announcing what will happen and then performing it and the way the story is told because that happens each time virtually it is making it clear that God is thoroughly in command you see we don't just get a series of plagues that don't have a have some sort of announcement for the reader that is each time it's clear that God is sovereign these are not just sort of haphazard natural phenomena at work it is God who is in control of what's going on here the trouble with the

first one is like the snake in the preceding paragraph the Egyptian magicians do the same thing which I think must be quite a bit of a laugh because here are Egyptian magicians somehow adding to the bloodiness of the Nile River which wouldn't have gone down too well with their people when they're full of dead fish and so on so ironically the magicians of Egypt are somehow even adding to the problems and plagues of Egypt well the second one the second plague is frogs chapter 8 verses 1 to 15 it opens with the Lord saying to Moses go to Pharaoh and say to him thus says the Lord there's the claim right from the beginning let my people go so that they may worship me now the word for worship is literally just serve it doesn't necessarily have a liturgical sort of function it could just be about serving in your court and doing labor for the king so here is a very clear claim and this is part of the contest who will Israel serve will they serve Pharaoh who's giving them hard labor or will they serve Yahweh Yahweh saying let my people go to serve me so you see that there's a sort of ownership puzzle going on between Pharaoh and Yahweh the frog was in part also a symbol of divine power there was a goddess called Hehet and she in pictures had a frog's head poor thing and so it seems here too there's some striking at the the gods of Egypt you see what's going on you see they're not just God thinking what animal can I persecute them with oh let's find a few kangaroos or something he's he's targeting the gods and goddesses of Egypt to show that God is sovereign over those other gods and goddesses the language is strong the land will team it'll be covered with them I mean it's not just a you know a few frogs like you get up in northern Queensland when you go in a caravan park I remember a few years ago getting up in the middle of the night going to the toilet and lifting the toilet seat and a frog jumps out and I screeched out loud woke up the whole campsite I think we're talking here about hundreds and hundreds of frogs you wouldn't be surprised to find a frog because there'd be so many you could your eyes couldn't fail to see them all everywhere they'd be this is really an inundation of frogs but again ironically again the magicians repeat the plague anything you can do we can do well the same if not better then in verse 8 of chapter 8 Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron said pray to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and my people and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the

[39 : 22] Lord for the first time it seems more or less he's acknowledging Yahweh's existence is not just God but Yahweh and now he's for the first time saying I'll let them go though it's clearly a lie but it does show that Pharaoh is beginning to get concerned and beginning perhaps to weaken even if his concessions are palpably lies he's nonetheless beginning to weaken and get thrown by this well the frogs go the next day exactly as Pharaoh asked for exactly as Moses said he would and prays for but then of course there's a massive cleanup and we have to laugh at the smell of all these rotting frogs around the country but again at the end there's no release the third in this first sequence of the magicians of Pharaoh told much more briefly in a sense that makes it a little bit more brutal there's no warning this time Moses and Aaron don't go to Pharaoh and say come on let my people go or we're going to send you gnats they just come there there's no warning for Pharaoh the word for gnats could mean vermin maggots lice that sort of thing it's it's a word that we're not quite sure about its meaning but it's something like that but this time the magicians of Pharaoh are unable to repeat the miracle now we've got no idea why I mean there doesn't seem to be a qualitative difference between the

Nile into blood frogs and gnats you think that if you could do two of them you could do all three but here for some reason and I suspect there's some indication of the hand of God's sovereignty precluding them from doing this they can't do it and from now on the magicians really are out of the picture apart from the fact that they're infested with mosquitoes later on in verse 19 though we get a sense of sort of Pharaoh's strength beginning to crumble a little bit further the magician said to Pharaoh in verse 19 this is the finger of God now it's not the mighty hand of Pharaoh it's a finger of God it's not too much of a concession perhaps but it's all and they're not saying it's the finger of Yahweh it's the finger of God a generic term that's being used but nonetheless it's showing that even in Pharaoh's own court there are those who are beginning to back off but not Pharaoh he's stubborn his heart was hardened further and he wouldn't listen to them just as the Lord had said well then come flies in the days before

Eregar the stinging sorts of flies so these could be these could be mosquitoes or maybe some suspect even flying beetles because one of the Egyptian gods of resurrection was a was called Kepra or Kepra a flying beetle but that's a little bit speculative but it's some sort of flying insect that may be a stinging insect through this sort of plague but here we get a distinction made between

Egypt and the Israelites so in verse 22 of chapter 8 we're told that on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen where my people live we're not quite sure where Goshen is it's mentioned back in Genesis where Joseph and his family are settled or the family of Joseph are settled not quite sure where it is nobody's been quite certain about that where my people live so that no swarms of flies should be there that you may know that I the Lord am in this land now periodically you read of people who try and dismiss all these plagues and saying well there must be some natural phenomena that explains it but here is a suggestion that really it's more than that because these this is not just indiscriminate over the land the land where the Israelites live is kept free from the plague of flying flies or stinging flies or whatever they are the purpose is to show Egypt that I am Yahweh that's what God's on about you see his purpose fundamentally is not quite to let my people go his purpose is that they may know that I am God that's a bigger purpose letting people go will be part of that purpose but the ultimate purpose is God saying I am God that's what I'm on about in all of this so it all happens exactly as it's announced as each time it does Pharaoh doesn't even call for his magicians this time they've given up they've gone they've said this is the finger of God we're not having anything to do with it anymore they've gone he's left by himself perhaps and now he makes a concession in verse 25 he allows Israel to sacrifice but in the land that is no you can't go out of the land you can't go to the wilderness but in the land I'll let you sacrifice now there's difficulties with that Moses says it's not right in verse 26 and 27 because it would be an abomination and it would be compromised by being in Egypt and so on Pharaoh makes a slight concession in verse 28 he says well don't go too far but what we sense here is Pharaoh losing but trying desperately to sound as though he's in control to sound as though he's calling the shots but we know he's not although he thinks probably he is and again in verse 28 he asks for a prayer so here is Pharaoh conceding more and more each plague but at the end of it all verse 32 Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also and would not let the people go the fifth one is livestock disease verse 1 of chapter 9 repeats the demand thus says the

Lord the God of the Hebrews let my people go then comes the warning if you refuse and if you still hold them the hand of the Lord not the finger notice of God but the hand of the Lord that is it's stronger than you think the hand of the Lord will strike with a deadly pestilence your livestock in the field the horses donkeys camels herds and flocks some people dismiss this and say there were never camels in 1400 BC but there probably were the archaeologists tell us more reliably the bull was a cultic animal there was a God Apis the chief bull God so here again perhaps this attack on the animals is perhaps also an attack on the gods of Egypt and God is showing that he is the real God and again there's a distinction made between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt in verse 4 again God is being discriminant it's not just a natural phenomenon like the fourth plague God also sets the time when it will happen tomorrow to show that he's sovereign it's not just going to happen whenever God's thoroughly in control of all these events maybe not every animal was killed maybe some of every type because animals reappear in the seventh plague whatever at the end of it all verse 7 Pharaoh's heart is hardened yet again sixth one boils this time maybe anthrax or smallpox or some disease like that some suggest this is slightly strange one Moses is told again there's no warning this is the third of the second sequence so there's no warning to Pharaoh God just says to Moses what to do take handfuls of soot from the kiln let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh it shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt and cause festering boils that's a bit strange you know why not just create festering boils but the fine soot from the kiln is probably a reference to the brick making facilities that the Israelites are working at so it's probably being dismissive of the hard labor that Pharaoh has subjected the Israelites to it's sort of mocking the hard work that he's called them to again Moses and Aaron do exactly what God commands and again it happens exactly as God said it would magicians can't even protect themselves this is the last time they appear they're not trying to do any trick it's just they can't even protect themselves let alone create any boils and notice that too in verse 10

[47 : 11] Moses and Aaron took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh but in verse 11 the magicians could not stand before Moses now I think there's a deliberate contrast here Moses and Aaron have got the upper hand they can stand before Pharaoh which was a statement of authority to go to Pharaoh but the magicians could not stand before Moses because of all the boils so here you sense that really Moses and Aaron are really well God is calling the shots and Pharaoh's getting weaker and weaker by the plague but again his heart is hard hard heart is hardened but this time the Lord hardens his heart now that's been said already back in chapters 4 and 7 and there's sort of parallel thing going on here God is hardening Pharaoh's heart but Pharaoh's heart is being

hardened by himself as he goes along as well it's not as though God is being capricious with Pharaoh and saying oh look I'm just going to harden his heart because I don't like the look of him Pharaoh's set the course of action to refuse God's word and the Lord will confirm him in that hardness as he keeps on going I'll make another comment about that at the end the eighth the seventh one is hail verses 13 to 35 of chapter 9 now we get a warning to Pharaoh in fact quite a long warning in these verses to Pharaoh the length of warning I think is showing that we're now beginning to intensify the contest the stakes are higher there's a growing build up to the climax that'll come which we'll see actually next week the first and fourth and now this plague the seventh the beginning of each of the three cycles is in the morning each time each one is and it goes on about the fact that that Yahweh say in verse 15 says that the reason you're still alive there is that I've been patient I've been playing with you sort of like a toy in my hands don't don't think that I'm nothing I'm everything is in effect the substance of what's being said here in verses 19 and 20 we recognize that some of the Egyptians apart from magicians they also have heeded God's word now they've heeded the warning and gone to protect themselves from the hail that's going to come so we can see sense that Pharaoh is being more and more isolated in his position here as the king of Egypt and exactly what is warned happens from verse 22 onwards and then in verse 27 Pharaoh weaker yet again says this time I have sinned now it's a fairly weak statement of confession and repentance this time I've sinned but not in the past is the implication of it but we get a sense that Pharaoh is really beginning to give way bit by bit he's pretty stubborn pretty hard-hearted but there are little chinks here and there the Lord Yahweh that is in the right and I and my people are in the wrong he says a false repentance I think he's still trying to stay in control he still issues commands to Moses in the verses that follow to pray for him and Moses does pray and the prayer is described and God is heeds the prayer and God is in control and again at the end of this plague

Pharaoh's heart along with his servants hearts this time are hardened also faithfully come the locusts this plague is in verse 3 let's read of chapter 10 Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him thus says the Lord the God of the Hebrews how long will you refuse to humble yourself before me a bit of irony or poetic justice at least in this because Pharaoh in chapter 1 had tried to humble Israel through the hard labour now Yahweh is humbling Pharaoh though he's refusing to be humbled there were there was an Egyptian God called Senahem who was the God to protect the Israelite the Egyptians from locusts so the fact that there is a great locust plague here shows again that God is attacking the heart of the Egyptian pantheon of gods another one is being sort of felled by God's power and might Moses words to Pharaoh end fairly abruptly in verse 6 there's no extended discussion or conversation it's as though I give up I'm not talking with you any longer Moses walks out and in effect the plague comes Pharaoh summons Moses back and concedes to him in verse 8 he says go worship the Lord your God but which ones are to go and Moses says we'll go with our young and old with sons and daughters flocks and herds because we have the Lord's festival to celebrate now they're words of anticipation there's no Lord's festival yet in the Old Testament but of course the Passover is just around the corner and Pharaoh said the Lord indeed will be with you if ever I let your little ones go with you plainly you have some evil purpose in mind no never your men may go and worship the Lord for that is what you are asking so Pharaoh is saying there your little ones will not go the women won't go only the men so in effect the women and the children are hostages to make sure that you come back notice though that Pharaoh has conceded that they can go so he is beginning to crumble each time a bit further well Moses refuses to or no let me say firstly that Pharaoh's words are quite sarcastic God is with you if you do go and do this but I won't let you now ironically his words come true they do go and worship and God is with them and Pharaoh is not in control it's an east wind that brings locusts that's unusual it's normally south wind in Egypt so here I guess is a little indication that this is not just a natural phenomenon but God's hand deliberately at work and then in verse 16 we read after this plague [53 : 04] Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses first time Pharaoh's hurriedly done that I think again we're getting a sense of his desperation at the events that are happening and unfolding here and he's quite desperate he says I've sinned against the Lord your God and against you do forgive my sin just this once that seems to limit his confession and pray to the Lord your God that at least he removed this deadly thing from me so each time it seems Pharaoh's becoming more desperate conceding a little bit more but at the end of it all his heart his heart as it says in verse 20 last plague darkness like the third and sixth the ninth has no warning the Egyptian chief God was Ra or Ammon

Ra the sun God so to bring about darkness unexpectedly is to get right to the top dog of the Egyptian gods to knock him flat so to speak so it's Yahweh attacking the all of God well he's been attacking different gods and now the chief God of the Egyptians it's a severe darkness that could even be felt that is this is not just night come early this is something quite tangible some say a dust storm or something but but it it's darkness that stress not not dust storm and even a great dust storm is it doesn't

I think on the whole make it pitch black although maybe you can feel the dust but again there's a distinction the Egyptians will be in darkness but Goshen with the Israelites will be in light see this is not just a natural eclipse or something like that this is God at work sovereignly and now a further concession is made by Pharaoh in verse 23 that all the people can go but not their flocks and herds Moses objects and says well we need some animals you give us the animals to sacrifice and once Pharaoh acknowledges that then we'll take all our own animals as well thank you very much but again at verse 27 towards the end of this chapter God Pharaoh's heart is hardened again by God who's directly responsible at this point you see Pharaoh keeps thinking he's in control but we know that at every point God is well let me make a some concluding comments this has been a bit long but three or four concluding brief comments God is sovereign and the way the events are contrived and told draws that out very clearly God announces what he'll do and he does it exactly God even specifies the time at one point that it'll be the same time tomorrow I think it's about the seventh or eighth of the plagues so God is thoroughly in control and so much so that he distinguishes between the Israelites and the Egyptians on several occasions it's clearly not natural phenomena as some people try and make out there's no other answer to how does this happen other than the hand of God at work secondly we've got to remember that it's that the Yahweh who is in control here is the same God who created everything at the beginning of Genesis not all that far much earlier in the Bible so it's God the creator unleashing the forces of his own creation over pseudo gods who claim to be in control of bits of creation so it's the creator God seeking to demonstrate his glory over the Egyptians and over the Israelites as well for that matter this contest with Pharaoh is in part an act of judgment it is punishment against Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their hard-heartedness and their refusal to heed God and to care for God's people we could go back to Genesis 12 to get an inkling of that idea God says to Abraham those who bless you I will bless and those who curse you I will curse and here is God keeping that part of his promise as the Egyptians curse Israel by their hard labour and oppression and so on God curses them and

God has the final laugh in the matter God hardening the heart of Pharaoh is not a sort of caprice a sort of vindictiveness of God it is God giving Pharaoh over to the course of action or direction which he's already chosen to head down it's exactly the same as occurs in other parts of scripture Isaiah for example is told go and preach but they will hear but not hear my word that is they'll be confirmed in their sin and their deafness to my word words that Jesus also used in Mark 4 and other places as well in the New Testament so that as the gospel is preached there will be people who as a result of the hearing of God's word actually become even deafer to God's word and so the preaching of the gospel becomes in effect an act of judgment against such people it's a similar also situation to what you find in Romans 1 where God hands them over to their sins so that leaving people in the direction they choose they become more and more confirmed and hardened in it and end up reaping the fruit of their own sin which is God's judgment and punishment the plagues that we've seen here some of them at least six of the nine are used in the book of Revelation as plagues that show the end time judgment against the enemies of God all of them occur with one exception in Revelation 16 the water into blood the frogs the boils the hail and the darkness and in Revelation 9 the locusts so it seems that the model of what what happens here in these chapters is used in the book of Revelation to tell us about what God's judgment will be like against the whole world that stands as his enemies at the end of time but also we see in the midst of this that in the midst of judgment is redemption they're not separate things that occur independently as God redeems his people so the flip side of that is that he he judges and punishes his people's enemies and his own enemies but never do we get a sense that God is saving Israel protecting Israel because they want it or deserve it the only reason ever given in this book is that God is keeping promises to Abraham and there was nothing about Abraham that deserved those promises that was made clear in Genesis 15 so by extension we've got to say what Israel is benefiting from here is God's faithfulness to his promises that are freely made that Israel does not deserve and indeed Moses own slowness to agree to fair to eat to God's request and call and Israel's own

unbelief and murmuring against Moses at times as we saw makes it very clear that they don't deserve what they're getting either but God in his mercy is saving them from Egypt because he's faithful the big picture though in the end is not God's not doing this just for the benefit of Moses and his people God's doing it for the sake of his own glory he's doing it so that his glory will be manifest in the entire world so that people who are for him or against him will at least acknowledge him that after all is what God was doing in Jesus lifting him up on the cross so that at the end of the time as Paul says in Philippians 2 every knee will bow and tongue confess that

[60 : 20] Jesus is Lord maybe not all with faith and salvation but God's glory will be so evident that the whole world will acknowledge it here we see the same thing though in the cross of Christ we see it par excellence well I thought I was being a bit ambitious I hope you've stayed with us we probably should stretch our legs so we're going to we'll sing a song that's our excuse for stretching legs and we'll sing a hymn that picks up the notion of God being the king hymn number 22 king of the nation yeah probably it is a new pharaoh probably it's about 40 years later so Moses grew up to be about 40 then after murdering someone he went into the wilderness and we're told that he's he died at 120 the last 40 years were in the wilderness leading the Israelites out so he's it he's about 80 or just before 80 when he comes back

Ian well we're not quite sure really at one point it says there's a week between two of the plagues I suspect we're talking about a number of months must have been a horrendous month year you imagine the sort of you know end of year news you know the year in review type TV programs that have had a field day the question is that in Acts chapter 7 verse 22 it talks about Moses being powerful in words in his words and deeds I think we're meant to see that he was ineloquent I don't think he was just being modest about himself I think though him being powerful in words and deeds is because it's God's speech not because he's eloquent so it's ultimately it's attributing it to God's using of Moses that's how I would understand that there's no indication of that once Moses begins the sort of second time round with

Pharaoh chapter 7 there's there doesn't seem to be any stopping him and there doesn't seem to be any indication that he's still with doubts or anything like that so I'm not sure that I'd say that we could we could say that with any confidence that God's actually testing Moses at that point I think that's come earlier with the signs and so on I think God's been very patient with Pharaoh and I think he's also using every opportunity to demonstrate his power which is why it doesn't all happen in one big blitz at the beginning any other questions okay well let's uh let's pray and uh I realize we've got fans going so it's a little bit hard to hear but if two or three people would like to pray where you are out loud giving thanks to God or praying about something that's come out of tonight's study please do can I encourage you to stand and pray loud not necessarily long don't have to be eloquent in inoquent but faithful prayers are effective in God's sight so let me encourage two or three of you if you'd like to pray and then we'll sing a hymn to finish coming hard heart heart hearted against your word we pray that your spirit will keep on reforming us keep on changing us from the inside out that we may be forever attentive to what you say and what you do we thank you for your marvelous glory manifest so obviously in the events described in this book and in the words of this book we pray that we may be people who live lives bringing you further glory for Jesus sake amen bills you you you you you you