

God's Judgment

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Mel. Please keep the passage which Ron read open. That would really help you. We're going to be jumping around a little bit through the story, but it was a long one.

And as I said before, where we're going today is just on the inside cover of your bulletin. Just quickly, with the person next to you, which one of the plagues of Egypt would you like to live through the least?

Just with the people around you, which plague would you like the least? I wonder what you said. When I was growing up, I watched the Ten Commandments movie, the Cecil B. DeMille version, the great version, which I encourage you to watch, and the hail was always depicted as like fire coming down of heaven, and that used to terrify me.

But now reading it again, it's the gnats that really get me, I think. Just gnat, like you can swat a fly away, but a gnat, what are you going to do with a gnat? Ugh, horrible stuff. But I don't know if you like watching the movies the way I do, movies like this, but in almost every movie I watch, the good guy wins in the end.

Actually, in almost every movie, and every TV show, it's the bad guy that loses. And that is Pharaoh in our story today. God gives Pharaoh ten words or plagues, ten warnings to repent and let his people go.

[1 : 29] But as Ron was reading it, did you notice how it went on and on and on? You think it's going to end and it doesn't. It just keeps going on and on and on. There was a relentlessness to it.

And so the question is, why did the author write down ten plagues? Why ten? And you might say, well, look, that's just what happened.

The author is recording history. Ten was what it was. He's just documenting that for us. Okay, fair enough. But then if this is like a superhero movie, like the ones I like to watch, God is clearly more powerful.

Why did he need ten plagues and not just one? Is there something wrong with God's power? We're going to attack this passage today.

It's a long one. But the way we're going to do it, we're going to try and figure out why there were ten plagues and not one. That will get us to the author's purpose. And so keep your Bible, or that sheet there and your handout, that will really help you.

[2 : 30] I'm going to throw up a few theories as to why ten plagues and not one. The first theory is called the Plan J approach. Plan J. Can you look at 7 verse 16?

7, 16. The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you, let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened.

This is what the Lord says. By this you will know that I am the Lord. With the staff that is in my hand, I will strike the water of the Nile. It will be changed to blood. And even that extraordinary miracle doesn't work, does it?

Plan A fails. But then so does Plan B with the frogs. Plan C with the gnats. Plan D with the flies. So on and so forth.

Right up until Plan J. The killing of the firstborn sons, which is next week. Then Pharaoh lets them go. So not so much a Plan A, but a Plan J.

[3 : 32] The problem with that is, if God knew that only the last plague would work, why doesn't he just start with that one and spare everyone nine other plagues of misery?

It's strange, isn't it? If the author decides to show us God failing nine times in a row, that would be strange. That's the Plan J approach. Another suggestion for 10 plagues comes from the commentaries.

They suggest the 10 plagues correspond to 10 Egyptian deities. You know, there's lots of little statues and deities in Egypt. So when Yahweh turns the Nile to blood, he's attacking Harpi, the Egyptian god of the Nile, sending him to blood.

It's like leaving him bleeding. When he makes frogs appear all over the land, that's Heket, the Egyptian frog god. He is sent hopping mad. Don't laugh.

Don't. It only encourages me. The sun god Ra, he has his lights punched out with the ninth plague of darkness. Do you see how that works? And this theory sort of works here and there, but there's a couple of problems.

[4 : 39] The fact is, there were 10 plagues and about 18 Egyptian gods. Also, the lynx get a bit tenuous, so the plagues of flies and gnats and locusts.

The closest Egyptian god to that is a beetle, a bit thin, I think. So that's the Egyptian deity theory. The strongest theory for 10 plagues and not one is the wear down Pharaoh approach.

That is, Pharaoh is so stubborn that Yahweh needed to wear him down with 10 plagues and not one. The big problem with that is this. If God needed to wear Pharaoh down, why does he deliberately harden Pharaoh's heart?

I've highlighted that phrase, you can see in bold, throughout the passage, so you can see the repetition. Look at 9 verse 11. 9 verse 11, I think it's at the bottom of the first page.

After the sixth plague, Israel are almost out the door when, 9 verse 11, the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and all the Egyptians.

[5 : 48] They're almost out the door, but the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron just as the Lord said. Why, if God is trying to free his people, when they're almost out the door, does he slow the process down?

But actually, the slowness of the plagues is not all God's doing because many times in the story, it says Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

He is morally culpable too. You see, this passage is clear that God is in control of our actions, but we are morally responsible for them as well.

And that dual dynamic is very common in the Bible. So remember Joseph, Joseph's wicked brothers sold him into slavery, but God intended that for good.

When the king of Assyria boasted over his victory against Israel, God used him as an instrument to judge his people. Judas, when he betrayed Jesus for pieces of silver, God used his actions for salvation purposes.

[6 : 59] God is sovereign over our actions, but we are morally responsible as well. If God needed 10 plagues to wear Pharaoh down, it doesn't explain why he hardens Pharaoh's heart and slows the whole process.

You see, they are the major theories as to why there are 10 plagues and not just one. But I think God himself tells us the answer. Can you turn the page?

Have a look at 9 verse 15. 9 verse 15. This is our key verse today. For by now, I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth.

But I've raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. Here is God's reason for all the plagues.

He wanted to give Pharaoh a front seat to his power. A river to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, pestilence, boils, hails, locusts, darkness.

[8 : 06] Next week, another one. 10 chances to see his power. 10 chances to see him ruling over his creation. In this story, every time God says a plague is on its way, it happens.

God says, it was so. It is the creator at work, just as he was in Genesis. Some people try to explain away these plagues as naturally occurring phenomenon.

So, oh, look, there are locust swarms all the time in Africa, so that's all that plague number eight was. Livestock die by massive disease all the time. Remember mad cow? Well, that's all plague number five was.

When we explain away Bible miracles like that, we don't allow God to be creator over his creation. You know, perhaps a natural coincidence might explain a plague or two, a miracle or two, here and there, but the Nile turning to blood, darkness over the whole land for three days, it doesn't allow Yahweh to be creator over his creation.

It suggests that the author was using a natural coincidence and sneakily calling it God's power instead. And that is true for Noah's Ark, for the crossing of the Red Sea, Jonah's fish, all of Jesus' miracles.

[9 : 31] Can you think of a better way to get our attention than if the creator interrupts the regularly observed laws of physics to get our attention?

Did you notice that Pharaoh's magicians were also able to do a miracle or two? That always stumps people, doesn't it? They were able to copy when God turned the Nile to blood, but wouldn't Pharaoh have been happier if they turned the blood back into the Nile?

They were able to summon a few frogs here and there, but didn't that just add to the problem? Their miracles weren't helping, but only adding to the problem. See, I think the author is poking fun at them.

Look at the third plague, which is 8 verse 18. 8 verse 18. When the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not.

Since the gnats were on the people and animals everywhere, the magician said to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God. You see, if God's mighty hand and outstretched arm was against Egypt, the magicians couldn't even keep up with his finger.

[10 : 42] It's not even a contest. Actually, the real power in the plagues seems to be in reversing them, not just making them from the beginning.

In fact, isn't that what God did in creation when he brought order where there was chaos?

Remember the New Testament reading which Joyce gave us, Jesus calming the storm?

There was a furious squall, but then completely calm. Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him. You see, this story is so famous, it's almost entertaining.

It's like a superhero movie, but actually, it's more like a horror show. Let me show you how horrible some of this stuff is. So, 7 verse 18.

The fish in the Nile will die, the river will stink, the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water. I don't know how squeamish you are at blood. I used to be really tough about it, but now I fainted when I was having my teeth checked.

[11 : 46] Good thing I was lying down. Imagine a whole river of it running through your city.

Handfuls of soot, it says in chapter 9, it will become fine dust, festering boils will break out on the people and animals throughout the land.

Talk about an airborne virus. He says in 9 verse 18, at this time tomorrow, I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt from the day it was founded till now.

After the hail in chapter 10, if you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen.

It's extraordinary. It says, they will devour what little you have left after the hail so that every tree that is growing in your fields will be eaten. Imagine if after the hail there's a famine as well, just to add insult to serious injury.

Darkness. It says, with a darkness, it says, a darkness that can be felt. I have no idea what that means, but it can't be good. A darkness that can be felt.

[12 : 56] It says, no one could see anyone else or move about for three days. That is isolation. That is a lockdown. In chapter 10, verse 7, Pharaoh's officials, they have had enough.

10, verse 7, how long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go so that they may worship the Lord their God. Don't you realize that Egypt is ruined?

It's not entertaining, is it? It's not a happy show. It's a horror story. Nine plagues, the worst one to come next week. Ten chances to repent and let God's people go.

And the reason in chapter 9, verse 16, is the key. I have raised you up for this purpose that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

You see, when Pharaoh first met Moses, he said, who is the Lord that I should obey him? But after today, he's not so ignorant, is he? He knows who God is.

[14 : 00] It's ten plagues, not one. So he knows that Yahweh is not to be messed with. So he knows how Yahweh treats his opposition. And not just Pharaoh, actually, but the whole world will know that my power might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Not just all the world. It says down through the ages too, chapter 10, verse 2, that you may tell your children and your grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them that you may know that I am the Lord.

See, that is Yahweh's agenda for the whole book of Exodus. A world that knows him. I am the Lord, the holy, incomparable God. I am what I do. Look at what I do to Pharaoh, how I treat opposition. And as we keep reading this story, we'll be screaming at Pharaoh to listen and change his mind to realize who he's up against. But he won't listen, will he?

Remember, not that there's anything wrong with his ears, but because there's a deeper issue going on in his heart. You see, Pharaoh is a cautionary tale.

[15:15] The plagues are the Bible's shock tactic of how not to respond to God in your life. And maybe you have seen people like Pharaoh, people who oppose God, want nothing to do with his son.

Maybe it's governments, maybe it's a politician, maybe it's someone in your circle. They need to know that God is not to be messed with, that he won't tolerate opposition forever.

The situation in Myanmar, the military coup over the people, they need to know that Yahweh won't tolerate that forever. When the clever atheists suggest that God is just a delusion, Yahweh won't stand for that.

When our culture suggests that Yahweh is just one God of many, he won't stand for that. When your friend, my friend, who is kind and polite and does work for charity, but thinks that Jesus is just not for them, Yahweh won't stand for that.

Maybe you can warn them, this passage is a good place to go. Maybe invite them to church through this Exodus series and the passage, the Bible passage will warn them on your behalf.

[16:30] That would be a loving thing to do. But don't be surprised if they don't see what you see or listen when you speak. not that there's anything wrong with their eyes and ears.

They may have Pharaoh's condition of the heart and this is so important because people always say if your God would just show up at my kitchen then I will believe.

I don't believe in your Bible but if God would just speak to me personally then that would do the trick and we will try all sorts of debates and apologetics, YouTube clips, fancy polished speakers, famous Christians, arguments from science, reliability of the Bible, we will try it all so they will believe and some of it might work but don't be surprised if it doesn't.

Again, not because there's anything wrong with their eyes. Pharaoh saw the plagues. Not that there's anything wrong with their ears. Pharaoh heard the warnings.

It's not an evidence issue but probably a deeper condition, a hardening of their hearts and I hope that that makes sense of your interactions with your non-believing friends and family.

[17:49] Please father, soften the hearts of people we know so they stop opposing you in their lives. That's the right application isn't it for non-Christians and maybe you're a non-Christian here today.

From this passage, you need to know that opposing God in your life is as foolish as thinking that bad guy Pharaoh can defeat superhero God in the story.

His word to you today, chapter 10 verse 3, how long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Perhaps you just need more evidence, that's fine.

We've all got different standards of proof, that's fine. But please be honest if it's an I and E issue for you, or actually if it's a heart condition because deep in your heart you don't want to set apart Christ as Lord.

Honesty about your opposition to God is a great place to begin a relationship with him. For the rest of us, for the believers in the room, he does show favouritism to us, doesn't he?

[19:01] The people in Israel, they were spared from lots of the plagues safely in the land of Goshen. If we were the Israelites back then, this story is good news. We're cheering when the mad king gets it.

This passage shows God's power against people who would harm us, that he won't tolerate what's been done to you and his church forever, that he will act.

knowing God is like having a superhero big brother in the schoolyard. Any bully who chooses to pick on you is foolish for thinking that they will get away with it.

The point of the story, don't mess with God. He takes opposition seriously. And that means even for Christians, it's worth us thinking about parts of our lives that we still oppose God in.

Yes, our lives are not in open rebellion as they once were. We follow Jesus as king, but there might be parts of our lives, bad habits even, that like Pharaoh, we refuse to humbly submit ourselves before the Lord.

[20 : 15] And so honesty is a good place for us too, a good place for us to continue our relationship with the Lord. Our sins might be big things like anger management, love of money, sexual immorality, but they might just be bad habits, acceptable sins that our culture thinks is just folksy and okay, things we refuse to get under control.

It would be worth some honesty about whether there's a bit of Pharaoh in parts of our lives, perhaps a spiritual stock take is needed today, which parts of my life, which bad habits of mine, if left unchecked, will most likely lead me to harden my heart and stop listening to God.

If we shrug away that application, the purpose of the story, be warned. Don't mess with Yahweh. He takes opposition seriously. So let me pray that we would take our opposition seriously the way God does.

Do join me. Father God, help us to be warned. Help us to humbly submit all of our lives to you, especially the secret parts, the folksy bad habits which we really know our sin.

Please, Father, help us to not oppose you in any part. we pray for our loved ones again. Please soften their hearts so that they would set apart Jesus as Lord.

[21 : 57] And Father, thank you that you take opposition seriously. Please would our world, our loved ones, even ourselves, please would we be warned with this serious passage.

In Jesus' name. Amen.