Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church
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DHW

The Book of EXODUS

Chapter 7

LESSON 7

INTRODUCTION

God had told Moses that Pharaoh would not readily let the children of Israel go. He would then smite Egypt with all His wonders which He would do and after that Pharaoh would let the children of Israel go (3:18, 19). Moses and Aaron had met with initial failure when they first approached Pharaoh to let their people go. And Moses turned to God and asked Him why but God reiterated His promise (Exodus 5:22; 6:10, 11). God revealed to Moses who He was and charged him to go to Pharaoh with Aaron. God would perform all the *signs and wonders* through them and in the end Pharaoh would let them go.

God did altogether nine plagues (chapters 7-10) and one final one (chapter 12) after which Pharaoh would let the people go. The nine plagues can be divided into three groups. Each group of plagues was more severe than the previous ones. The first three plagues touched the land of Egypt, the second the livestock, and the third the people. In each series, Pharaoh was warned of the first two plagues but the third one would be inflicted without warning.

These plagues were not freaks of nature. Neither could they be explained as coincidences. A careful study of the plagues provides sufficient evidence that these plagues were supernaturally wrought by the True and Living Almighty God. There are at least five unique features of the plagues that show them as miraculous events: the intensification of the plagues, the prediction before the events, the distinction made between the Egyptians and the Hebrews, the orderliness of the progression of the plagues and the moral purpose.[1] Any attempt to rationalize the phenomenon in order to satisfy the unbelieving heart destroys the plain honesty and integrity of the text and the purposes for which they were intended.

One thing that puzzles us is why God did not deal with Pharaoh with one big devastating blow. God could destroy him completely with one strike. But we see that he did not. He took His time. In this we learn that He had

[1] John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), p.85.

bigger and better plan for Moses. In this regard, He was teaching and training Moses how to serve Him. He wanted Moses and the children of Israel to have faith and trust in Him.

Hence, there are many precious and permanent lessons that we can learn from these spectacular and stupendous acts of God. The following is an outline of this present chapter:

1) The LORD reassured Moses to speak authoritatively to Pharaoh (7:1-7);

2) The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart for a purpose (7:8-13);

3) Pharaoh was warned that the waters of Egypt would be turned to blood (7:14-18);

4) Although the waters of Egypt turned to blood, Pharaoh still hardened his heart (7:19-25).

STUDY THE WORD

God Reassures Moses Yet Again

The LORD reiterated His command a second time to Moses to speak to Pharaoh of all the things that He had told him (6:29). Moses again raised the issue of his speech impediment and that Pharaoh would not listen to him (6:30). This time the LORD answered Moses.

Moses' earlier encounter with Pharaoh had met with failure. Pharaoh was defiant, stubborn, arrogant, self-centred and conceited for he believed that he was a god himself. That being so, God responded by making it clearer to Moses what He intended to do. No more surprises for Moses. First, the LORD made Moses to be *a god to Pharaoh* and Aaron his brother his prophet or spokesman (7:1). When God said that He had made Moses *a god to Pharaoh*, it did not mean that Moses was endowed with inherent divine powers. He did not become God. But it means that Moses is *like* God to Pharaoh. God would give His prophet Moses divine authority. In other words, when Moses spoke to Pharaoh it was as if God Himself was speaking and acting through Moses. Moses' words would be God's word. God Himself was present and active whenever Moses spoke to Pharaoh.[2]

This time no more surprises to Moses. In simple and clear terms God told Moses that he should speak to Pharaoh all that He had commanded him to say, and Aaron, his brother should speak plainly to Pharaoh that the latter send the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. Moses and Aaron were to be faithful in speaking God's

[2] Terence E. Fretheim, 90.

message to Pharaoh. God used them to speak and do His work and carry out His will. God further reiterated that He would harden Pharaoh's heart (7:3). And the purpose for hardening Pharaoh's heart was that the LORD intended *to multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.* But Pharaoh would still not listen. And God said that He would *bring forth Mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments* (7:4). God used military terms to describe the deliverance of His people. The children of Israel would leave orderly like an army, companies by companies (sections by sections). They would not be scattering all over the land without any defined direction.

God already predicted that Pharaoh finally would have to let the children of Israel go. It was God's purpose to establish the truth that the LORD is God and none else. God delayed Pharaoh's release of His people. In this way, it serves a dual purpose. God would vindicate His faithfulness to His covenant promises to His people as embodied in the name *Ani Yahweh* [I am Jehovah]. At the same time Pharaoh and the Egyptians would experientially know that the God of the Hebrews was more superior and powerful than the gods of Egypt. The hardening of the heart of Pharaoh does not mean that Pharaoh repented in the process. Later we learn that Pharaoh reluctantly had to let Israel go because of the plagues which God inflicted upon the Egyptians. But no sooner were the Israelites gone, he mustered all his special force of chariots and personally led the pursuit of the Israelites (14:5-8).

The LORD Hardens Pharaoh's Heart

Moses and Aaron *did as the LORD commanded them* (7:6). The duty of a prophet of God is to do whatever God commands him to do. At this juncture, the ages of the two brothers are given – Moses eighty, and Aaron eighty-three. It is never too old for anyone to serve God.

Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh again. Pharaoh asked for a sign from them. God had already instructed Moses what to do. He was to tell Aaron to cast his rod and cast it on the ground before Pharaoh and his servants. Aaron's rod became a serpent (7:10). Pharaoh called his magicians and they duplicated *in like manner*.[3] The magicians cast down their rods. But Aaron's snake swallowed up the magicians' snakes. The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, who then

[3] 2 Timothy 3:8 *Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.*

refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, as the LORD had spoken.

The ability of the magicians to perform the act was not by any sleight of hand or trickery for the inspired Word describes that they did it in the same way *with their enchantments* [sorceries, black magic] (7:11). God has revealed in His Word that Satan and the fallen angels, who followed him, can also perform miracles.[4] In the light of Scripture these magicians were Satan's agents and they performed the miracles through the power of the devil. In other words, in God's plan and purpose, He had given the angels whom He created the power to do great and mighty works.

The Egyptians had deified the snake. It was a symbol of protection and power. The Egyptian kings had the image of a snake-god on their head-gear. The most significant part in this encounter was that Aaron's snake swallowed up all the other snakes. God displayed that He was more superior to the gods of Egypt. The stage was set for the battle between the LORD God of Moses and the children of Israel and the gods of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

The First Plague – Turning the Waters of Egypt into Blood

The first plague was directed against the river Nile. It was appropriate because the Nile was considered sacred by the Egyptians. It was the lifeline of Egypt for without it the lands adjacent to it would be like the deserts and the wastelands beyond them. The LORD told Moses to meet Pharaoh when he went to the river. He should take the rod which turned into a snake with him (7:15). Then he should repeat his previous petition to Pharaoh saying: *The LORD God of the Hebrews* sent him to Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go that *they may serve me in the wilderness* (7:15, 16). And if Pharaoh still would not hear, the LORD warned Pharaoh through Moses that He would use the rod which was in Moses' hand to strike *upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood*. The fishes in the river would die, and the river would stink, and the Egyptians would loathe to drink the water from the river (7:17, 18).

The turning of the waters of the Nile into blood was to demonstrate to Pharaoh that the God of the Hebrews

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[4] Matthew 24:24 *For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

2 Thessalonians 2:9 *Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

Revelation 16:14 *For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.*

was the LORD—the ever present, active and powerful God.[5] When the Nile was turned to blood it could no longer give the life-supporting elements that it used to be. This is to impress upon Pharaoh that the origin and sustainer of life is the LORD God of the Hebrews and not the Nile.

Pharaoh Hardens His Heart

The LORD called Moses to say to Aaron to take his rod and stretched over the waters of Egypt. The streams, the rivers, and the ponds of water became blood, even the water in receptacles of wood or stone (7:19). Now the text mentions that *the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments* (v.22). The chapter ends with the Egyptians digging around the river banks for water to drink. For this act they turned the water which they dug around the river bank into blood. It would have been better if the Egyptian magicians could reverse the bloody water in the river Nile into plain water. That would be more practical and useful. But they were powerless to reverse it. What the LORD had done they could not reverse it. The Egyptian magicians could only replicate it as what the LORD had intended. They made the situation worse. Pharaoh's heart was hardened seeing that his magicians could also turn the water into blood. How foolish was he, who should have expected his magicians to reverse what the LORD had done so that his people could have water to drink. The plague lasted for seven days. Nothing seems extraordinary insofar as Pharaoh and the Egyptians were concerned. The interval of seven days after the LORD had smitten the river gave Pharaoh ample opportunity to repent before God would act again in judgment. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

Practical Value

It is clear from this chapter that idolatrous worship of things and animals is futile and useless. Paul had pointed out that people would rather worship the creature than the Creator. But this chapter teaches us that the LORD God of the Hebrews is the true God. It is God's intention to show that He is in control and has the power to miraculously change the nature of things. Although men may seem to be able to replicate His signs and wonders, they could not reverse what God had already done or decreed. In his attempt to imitate God, Man can only make situations worse. We should therefore

[5] Davis (pp.93-94) comments that it is not necessary to argue whether the Nile River was turned into human or animal blood. The water had all the characteristics of blood as viewed by Moses and the others.

acknowledge who the LORD is and trust Him wholeheartedly.

The statement: *And Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded them, so did they,* is instructive (7:6). It is repeated two more times in verses 10 and 20. What does it mean? Moses was a prophet of God. As a spokesman of God, the prophet is required to be faithful in conveying the message given to him by God. He will not be responsible for the outcome of the message which is conveyed. The outcome of the message belongs to God. Moses announced to Pharaoh, and it was the LORD who turned the waters of Egypt into blood (7:16, 17). This truth gives light to present day preachers and teachers of the Word of God. Preachers and teachers of God are required to faithfully proclaim God's message according to His Word. Whether the hearers are converted or changed is not the responsibility of the preacher and teacher for they have no power to change or transform a person's heart condition or character. That is God's domain and power. God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy (Romans 9: 15-18). Hence, in our evangelistic efforts we must not be discouraged that people are not converted after we have shared with the gospel of salvation. We must evangelise because it is God's commandment and we must be faithful in preaching and teaching the pure gospel of Christ. We have no right to re-package it in order to soften the impact so that people will find it more palatable or acceptable. Some of God's prophets had preached for many years without even a convert – Noah for 120 years, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, for examples.

While Satan through his agents is able to replicate similar signs and wonders that astound and attract the masses, who have been blinded by him, his feats and acts only make things worse eventually. When God works, everything that happens to a person even the bad things is for good (Romans 8:28). But when Satan works, everything will turn out to be for worse. His paramount purpose in life is *to steal, and to kill, and to destroy* (John 10:10a). Beware and be not deceived. AMEN.