

September 8, 2024 (Lesson 2)

ANOTHER PHARAOH OPPOSES ISRAEL

1. **Pharaoh's Magicians Recognize God's Hand** (Exodus 5:1-2; 7:8-13, 19-23; 8:1-7, 16-19)
2. **Pharaoh's Officials Fear Moses' God** (Exodus 9:8-20; 10:3-7)
3. **Israel Plunders the Egyptians** (Exodus 11:1-3; 12:29-36)

Central Truth: Discerning and yielding to God's plan helps us to choose wisely.

Focus: Acknowledge and give thanks to God for carrying out His plans for His people in spite of opposition.

Evangelism Emphasis: Recognizing God's majesty can lead sinners to repentance.

Golden Text: "Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?" (Exodus 10:7).

This lesson presents us with the defining event in the history of Israel—the Exodus. Indeed, from this time forward, their calendar would be based on the Exodus (Ex. 12:2). Even today, almost 3,500 years later, the Jewish people look back to this event as their beginning as a nation. Here they became the covenant people of God; God asserted that would happen (ch. 6). He emphatically declared He would deliver Israel from bondage (vv. 5-6), He would take them to Himself as a covenant nation (v. 7), and He would bring them into the land promised to their fathers (v. 8).

To accomplish these things, God openly confronted Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt. He did this through a series of supernatural demonstrations establishing His power and sovereignty over both nature and humankind. We traditionally call these the "ten plagues" of Egypt. However, the Scripture does not use the term *plague*. Instead, it refers to these ten divine acts as "signs and wonders" from God (7:3). Indeed, as the Bible writers would look back on the Exodus, they would consistently speak of what happened as the miraculous signs of the Lord's power (cf. Deut. 4:34; 6:22; Pss. 105:27; 135:9; Acts 7:36). These acts of God culminated in the Passover and Israel's deliverance from Egypt. They also remind us of the necessity of obedience to God. They demonstrate that God will accomplish His purpose and plan. Whether we experience His blessing in this or His judgment depends on how we respond to His commands.

1. PHARAOH'S MAGICIANS RECOGNIZE GOD'S HAND

A. A Serpent and Bloody Water (Exodus 5:1-2; 7:8-13, 19-23)

^{5:1} And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. ² And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.

^{7:10} And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the Lord had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. ¹² For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. ¹³ And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.

²⁰ And Moses and Aaron did so, as the Lord commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. ²¹ And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. ²² And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the Lord had said.

Moses had fled Egypt and lived in exile for forty years (Acts 7:30). Following this period, God sent Moses and his brother, Aaron, back to Egypt to face Pharaoh. This was a different king than the one who attempted to kill Moses (Ex. 2:15, 23). They told Pharaoh that God wanted His people to go into the desert to worship Him. Pharaoh's response is striking: "Who is the Lord?" (5:2). Here Pharaoh used the Lord's personal name: *Yahweh*. In effect, he said, "Who is this Yahweh? He has no authority over me. He cannot tell me what to do! I do not know who Yahweh is, and I will not let this people go." Remember, Pharaoh considered himself a god. He rejected the authority of the true God to assert his own authority. Further, he believed the Hebrews were his slaves; thus, his property. To demonstrate his sovereignty, Pharaoh ordered the Israelites to harsher labor. They now must make their quota of bricks without being provided any straw to work with (vv. 6-8).

Everything that follows is essentially Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt confronting the Lord God (see 7:5; 12:12; Num. 33:4).

In Exodus 7, God began His demonstration of power. The first sign occurred before Pharaoh and his court. Aaron cast down his staff, and it became a serpent. Serpents, especially cobras, were considered sacred in Egypt, a symbol of immortality. Pharaoh showed disdain for this miracle. He called on the magicians of Egypt to duplicate what happened, which they did. But Aaron's rod/serpent swallowed up their serpents (vv. 11-12).

There is an important point here. Egypt was famous for its magicians. The Jewish Talmud, a collection of rabbinical teachings, says ten portions of witchcraft were given to the world. Egypt received nine, and the rest of the world one. The ability of these magicians was real. This was seen not only in their power to turn rods into serpents but also in turning water into blood (v. 22) and calling forth frogs (8:7). Remember, Satan has real power. But there is a limit to what he can do. After the frogs, the magicians could no longer imitate the work of God (v. 18).

Now began the famous ten plagues. We may draw parallels between each of the ten signs and specific Egyptian deities. The Lord wanted to contrast His power with that of these false gods (cf. 18:11; Num. 33:4). God told Moses to confront Pharaoh as he went to bathe in the Nile River in the early morning (probably an act of worship). The Nile was seen as divine. Hapi was the god of the Nile, and Isis was the Nile's goddess. With Egypt being a desert land with little arable soil, the people looked to the Nile as the source of life itself. So, when Aaron used his staff to smite the river, which immediately turned to blood, the Lord demonstrated He is the true God (Ex. 7:17) and Lord over the Nile River. But Pharaoh only became stubborn and hard in his heart (v. 23).

—What copycat acts did Egypt's magicians perform (vv. 11-12, 21-22)? How do false religions today try to mimic acts of God?

B. Frogs and Lice (Exodus 8:1-7, 16-19)

⁶ And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt. ⁷ And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.

¹⁷ And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸ And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast. ¹⁹ Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.

We typically think of the confrontations with Pharaoh as being times of judgment, but they were actually expressions of God's mercy. Time and again, the Lord offered Pharaoh a chance to change, but he repeatedly refused. Now God sent Moses to Pharaoh again, giving him another chance to repent of his rebellion. Once again, he refused. A second time Aaron looked to the Nile, and God sent frogs on the land from it. Can you imagine how disgusting this must have been? Even their beds and kitchens were full of frogs (8:3). The women couldn't knead bread without having to push frogs aside. Again, God confronted a specific Egyptian deity. Heqet was a frog-headed deity—the goddess of fertility, childbirth, and resurrection. What the Egyptians worshiped as life-giving was now odious to them.

In response to Pharaoh's continued disobedience, God sent a third sign, but this time without any warning. Aaron struck the earth, and from the dusty sands of the desert, lice (or perhaps gnats) filled the air. The frogs had filled the houses of the Egyptians, but the bugs attacked the people's bodies. Another Egyptian false god was opposed here. Geb was one of the primordial gods of the Egyptians, the god of the earth. Yet he was powerless to bring relief to the people in their misery. Seeing this mighty god impotent before the Lord of the Hebrews caused the magicians to declare,

“This is the finger of God” (v. 19). In the Bible, the phrase “the finger of God” indicates the presence of God at work (31:18; Ps. 8:3; Luke 11:20).

The Author

God is not an actor within the larger scheme of things. He is not a muscle-bound Jupiter, bullying the little ones. He is the author of the whole thing.—Douglas Wilson

2. PHARAOH’S OFFICIALS FEAR MOSES’ GOD

A. Boils and Hail (Exodus 9:8-20)

⁸ And the Lord said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. ⁹ And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt.

¹¹ And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians.

¹⁶ And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. ¹⁷ As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go? ¹⁸ Behold, to morrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now. ¹⁹ Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die. ²⁰ He that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses.

Over and over, God offered Pharaoh a chance to yield and obey. Over and over, Pharaoh resisted. Repeatedly, once a plague came, Pharaoh pretended to relent (Ex. 8:8, 28; 9:27-28, etc.), and God removed it. How merciful and kind is our God! Yet, through it all, Pharaoh stubbornly hardened his heart.

The reality of God’s power was so great that even pagan magicians recognized the hand of God. But Pharaoh, thinking himself a god greater than Yahweh, would not repent. Once again, the king

went to the Nile to worship, where Moses and Aaron confronted him again (8:20). Through them, God warned of another sign—swarms of flies (v. 21).

The Lord God declared He would distinguish between the Egyptians and the Hebrews, and Israel would not be affected by the flies (v. 22). Only the God of all creation could control where flies would go! Once again, an Egyptian deity was exposed as powerless—Uatchit, or Wadjet. She was associated with swamps, where many insects lived. Once again, Yahweh showed He is “Lord in the midst of the earth” (v. 22).

Another plague immediately followed this one. Until now, people had suffered torment, but there had been no deaths. Now, the Lord brought a deadly disease on the livestock of the Egyptians—cattle, donkeys, and sheep (9:1-7). Next, as happened with the lice, there followed another sign without any warning given to Pharaoh. Moses and Aaron went to a furnace, took up handfuls of soot, and threw them into the air (v. 10). This may have been one of the kilns used for firing bricks. As the wind blew the soot, it became boils on people and any animals still alive. Boils are very painful, unpleasant, and foul-looking sores. For a people obsessed with ritual and physical cleanliness, this would have been especially odious to the Egyptians. Priests could not enter the temples to worship. People would have been ashamed to be seen in public. Even the magicians could not stand before Moses (v. 11), for this condition especially affected the legs and feet. God’s work made Egyptian ritual and worship impossible. This also exposed the powerlessness of the goddess Isis, who was especially known for her ability to protect and heal.

Once again, the Lord directed Moses to confront Pharaoh early in the day. The Lord instructed Pharaoh to “let my people go, so that they may worship me” (v. 13 NIV). Moses then warned that if Pharaoh did not relent, God would send “the full force of [His] plagues against [the king, his officials, and his people, so he might] know that there is no one like [Yahweh] in all the earth” (v. 14

NIV). God was now prepared to ramp up His actions. He would call on all the forces of nature to come against Pharaoh.

The Lord warned Pharaoh that He would send “very heavy hail” (v. 18 NKJV) on the Egyptians. Yet, in divine mercy, God gave the Egyptians a way out. They could protect themselves by getting under shelter. Anything or anyone in the open would die. Some obeyed; others did not (vv. 20-21). The fury of the heavens was unleashed, and an unprecedented thunderstorm with fierce lightning and pounding hail struck the land (v. 24). The crops in the field were broken and stripped by the hail (v. 25). This would have been in January or February, when the flax and barley were growing. The fierce storms coming in from the desert were supposedly under the dominion of Set, the god of chaos and storms, but he was powerless to stop Yahweh.

When God Judges

When God balances the scales morally, it is not some standard outside Himself He looks at and then decides what is right or wrong. Rather, it is His very nature . . . that is the standard by which He judges.—Josh McDowell

B. Plague of Locusts (Exodus 10:3-7)

⁴ Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast: ⁵ And they shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth: and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field: ⁶ And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day. And he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh. ⁷ And Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?

Pharaoh consistently rebelled against God and hardened his heart. In response, the Lord says He then hardened Pharaoh's heart (e.g., v. 1). Essentially, God acted in response to Pharaoh's own decisions. God did this to display His power so future generations would tell of His work (v. 2).

In His mercy, God had spared some of the crops. The hail had beaten down the flax and the barley but spared the wheat (9:31-32). If Pharaoh had repented, there was grain to harvest. But now, God would send a much-feared tribulation—locusts. Swarms of locusts can quickly devastate huge areas, stripping the land of all plant life. This caused despair among the Egyptian officials. They saw Egypt was already ruined; why add to the destruction? They advised Pharaoh to relent (10:7).

Fearful of an invasion of locusts, Pharaoh tried to negotiate. He would allow the Israelite adults to go, but the children must stay (v. 11). He knew the people would return for their children and remain his slaves. Of course, Moses refused. So God sent locusts into the land, and nothing green remained (v. 15)—total devastation. This time the god Osiris was challenged and defeated. He was thought to be responsible for agriculture and crops and was often portrayed with green skin, indicating his agricultural fruitfulness. Yet, he was powerless before the true God.

—In our day, do you suppose God still sends plagues in various forms? If so, are they evidence of divine judgment or grace?

3. ISRAEL PLUNDERS THE EGYPTIANS

A. One More Plague (Exodus 11:1-3)

¹ And the Lord said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. ² Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver and jewels of gold. ³ And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.

Without warning Pharaoh, God sent a darkness so complete that it could “even be felt” (10:21 NKJV). The people could not see to do anything. All commerce, labor, and travel ceased. As with previous plagues, the Israelites were spared. No cloud, sandstorm, or other natural phenomena could account for all of Egypt being in darkness except for Goshen; only Yahweh could do this. Sun worship was a daily part of life, especially for Pharaoh. Yet Ra, the sun god, had no power against Yahweh. This plague would be distressing to anyone, but for the Egyptians, it seemed the world was ending.

God then said, “I will bring one more plague” (11:1 NKJV). This was not only a warning but also a plea. God was giving Pharaoh one more chance to repent and obey Him, but Pharaoh would not relent. Warren Wiersbe comments on what follows: “King Jehovah (Ps. 95:3) was about to confront King Pharaoh with another king—death, the ‘king of terrors’” (Job 18:14). The last enemy, death (1 Cor. 15:26), would visit Egypt with one last plague and deliver one last blow to the proud ruler of the land” (*Be Delivered*).

This last plague would be the worst of all. God would cause the firstborn son in every household to be killed in one night. Why this particular judgment? Here are four possibilities. (1) God may have exacted justice against Pharaoh for his attempt to kill the male children of Israel (Ex. 1:15-16). God had told the king that He reckoned Israel as His firstborn (4:22). (2) This was a direct confrontation with Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh claimed to be divine, a son of the gods. His son would be the same. Again, God was saying, “I am God, and there is no other god.” (3) The main inheritance of a family went to the firstborn son, who received a double portion (see Deut. 21:17). The firstborn son represented the strength and vitality of the family (Gen. 49:3; Ps. 78:51). This plague would be a devastating blow to the entire nation, upsetting families for generations. (4) The entire event foreshadowed the sacrifice of God’s firstborn Son (John 3:16). The firstborn sons of Egypt would

die because of the rebellious sin of the king. The firstborn Son of God would die because of the rebellious sin of Adam.

God knew with this final plague, the king would relent, and Israel would leave Egypt. In preparation for this event, the Lord told the Israelites to “borrow” silver and gold from their Egyptian neighbors. The word *borrow* means “to ask.” They requested valuables from the Egyptians, with the Egyptians not expecting to receive them back. By now, the Egyptians just wanted to be rid of the Hebrews. At the same time, God caused the Israelites to be viewed with favor by the Egyptians. Thus, they willingly gave them silver, gold, and clothing. They did this to “plunder” the Egyptians, basically repaying the Israelites for many years of enforced slave labor with no compensation (see Ex. 3:21-22; Gen. 15:14).

—*According to Hebrews 11:28, what did Moses do “by faith”?*

B. Immediate Departure (Exodus 12:29-36)

²⁹ And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. ³⁰ And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead. ³¹ And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said.

³⁴ And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneadingtroughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. ³⁵ And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: ³⁶ And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.

God instructed the Israelites to prepare for a quick departure. Their priority in getting ready to leave Egypt was to prepare the Passover lamb for slaughter (12:3-11). They were to take the blood of this lamb and place it on the doorposts and lintels of their houses (v. 7). This was their sign of faith in God and their protection from the death of the firstborn (v. 13). This is of utmost

significance. God did not say He would kill the firstborn of Egypt but not of Israel. Instead, He promised to spare the households with the lamb's blood on their doorposts. It is the blood that brought salvation. If any Israelite refused to follow this procedure, their firstborn would have also been killed. Obedience meant life, for judgment and death would pass over that household (v. 13).

This first Passover demonstrated the importance and power of the sacrificial blood of the unblemished lamb (v. 5; Lev. 22:20-21). The lamb's blood saved and provided life. It also foreshadowed the coming Passover when the Lamb of God (John 1:29) would shed His blood so God's death and judgment would pass over us. This is why Paul said Christ is now "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7 NKJV). Like the Passover Lamb, Christ was innocent and without blemish (Heb. 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19). Jesus himself provides redemption and freedom for all who put their faith in Him (Heb. 9:12; Eph. 1:7).

On the Passover night, a great cry went up from across the land. Home after home mourned the loss of their firstborn sons. Pharaoh himself arose in the night (Ex. 12:30) in anguish at the death of his heir. He called for Moses and demanded that the Israelites leave (v. 31).

The people were ready. They had prepared for this night. Their Passover meal included the roasted lamb and bread baked without leaven, because there had been no time for the bread to rise (vv. 8-10). They ate the ceremonial meal fully dressed, with their shoes on and their staffs in hand, ready for the journey ahead (v. 11). They gathered their belongings—the plunder of the Egyptians, their families, and their livestock—and left behind their slave quarters. In haste, they moved toward the border of Egypt and freedom.

Obedience Brings Freedom

Have you ever seen the amazing rapport between a sheepdog and a shepherd? The master only has to whistle, move a finger, or utter a single word, and the well-trained dog obeys immediately.

Because of this, the dog does not have to be on a leash or in a pen. Its expected obedience guarantees its freedom. So it is with us. Obedience to God leads to true freedom.

LEARN FROM A BAD EXAMPLE

In this lesson, we have seen the mighty hand of God deliver Israel from Egypt. Thus began Israel as a nation. Yet, there is more than history here. There is a valuable life lesson for us. God expects and deserves our obedience. Interestingly, in Hebrew, there is no word for “obey.” Rather, the word usually translated as *obey* means “to hear.” The proper response to hearing the Word of God is to take heed and do what He says.

Hearing God demands obedience. This is a lesson Pharaoh never learned. Over and over, the Lord spoke, and Pharaoh rebelliously would not take heed. Repeatedly in mercy and patience, God commanded, warned, and offered Pharaoh a chance to obey. But Pharaoh consistently refused, to his own misery and the destruction of his land. Let us learn from his example. Disobedience not only displeases God; it results in tragedy and hardship. Obedience is the path to freedom and blessing.

Daily Devotions

- M. The Fear of God Established (Joshua 2:8-11)
- T. God’s Thunderstorm Confounds the Enemy (1 Samuel 7:9-13)
- W. Asking God for Vindication (Psalm 7:6-10)
- T. Death of Jesus Produces Awe (Luke 23:44-48)
- F. All Will Face Christ’s Coming (Revelation 1:4-8)
- S. The Final Rebellion Crushed (Revelation 20:7-10)