

The Plagues, part 1

Exodus 7:14-9:12 Pastor Bland Mason

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BIG Idea: God dismantles our idols to display his glory.

INTRODUCTION

- We have been in Exodus for 7 weeks now and it has been a journey exploring theme of Deliverance in the first major section of the book. Temptation is to look at what God is doing as being simply about freeing his people from bondage in Egypt and in doing so he is laying a beat down on Pharaoh and the Egyptians but there is MUCH more going on here as we've seen so far.
- Today passage reveals it as the 10 plagues begin. We'll hear about some of the Egyptian gods who are defeated by the Lord in this passage. We can have a tendency to look at the Egyptians and think, "Well, that's silly. Of course they needed to be set straight if they worshiped the Nile River or thought that there was a frog God." We can look down on them and think that we are above them and more sophisticated than them.
- Paul says that what they "*exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*" –Rom 1:23. The lie is for us to sit here and think, "That's not me. I only live truth." But that's not the truth. Paul goes on in Rom 1:25 – "*They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*"
- We all are tempted every day to worship something that is created and not he Creator. We exchange the glory of God for other things. We give our affection and energy to false things and God knows that not only are these things, a lie, he knows they won't ultimately satisfy us.
 - We long for money and then we get it. How long does that joy last? Does it protect us from relational suffering? Does it stop us from hurting those around us? Yet, we can go after money as if it can give our life meaning.
 - We long for success and then we get it. Is that joy the same a year later? Two years later? Or is there always another thing we have to succeed in?
 - We long for approval from others and we get it but then time passes and we don't get the same approval from them? Has anyone been able to maintain others approval through perfect behavior?
- What if the disappointment we feel when the thing we pursue fail to satisfy our deepest longing is actually a gift to get us to realize that idol is not what we are made to worship? That what we are looking to may not be a bad thing in and of itself, but it just was never meant to be an ultimate thing in our life.
- If God really is who we are made for and he alone provides the satisfaction our souls need and we are constantly distracted by false gods, then the greatest thing he can do is dismantle our idols to display his greater glory. And his glory is exactly what we need.
- The key to understanding how God's glory connects with us and what he is doing in Exodus and specifically in the plagues. It is about answering Pharaoh's question back in 5:2: "*Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.*"
- This is a question that people answer every day in our city. How many people simply dismiss Jesus and say, "who is Jesus that I should obey him?" This is the question that happens to any of us when we are confronted with who God is... will I respond based on who he is or will I ignore who he is and do what I want?

Our big BIG IDEA for today: God dismantles our idols to display his glory.

- We'll see this idea develop as the Lord God dismantles the false gods of Egypt through the first five plagues. We'll hit 6-9 next week and then Pastor Jared of Renewal Church is going to hit the 10th plague, the death of the first born sons, at the Good Friday service.

1. The First Plague: What do we trust in for fullness of life? (7:14-25) READ LOTS of VERSES TODAY

¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. ¹⁶ And you shall say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." But so far, you have not obeyed. ¹⁷ Thus says the Lord, **[KEY IDEA HERE FOR ALL THING PLAGUES]** "By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. ¹⁸ The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile." ' ' ¹⁹ And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.' "

²⁰ Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. ²¹ And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. ²² But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. ²³ Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. ²⁴ And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

²⁵ Seven full days passed after the Lord had struck the Nile.

- Prosperity of Ancient Egypt was tied to the Nile. The Nile as the lifeblood of Egypt. There is no Egypt without the Nile. It was responsible for: transportation, irrigation, water, food, and the setting of the calendar. All their power, all their might, all their wealth were caught up in the Nile, and the primary god of the Nile was a goddess called Hapi. [PICTURE OF HAPI – Limestone Slab]
- Hapi was there to provide fullness of life to the Egyptians. They worshiped and she provided. But now, the Lord God has judged Hapi. The Nile river is not giving fullness of life but taking it.
- This type of catastrophe would be similar to cutting off all oil supplies, the stock market collapsing, drinking water being contaminated, and no food at the grocery store. It would be total and utter chaos.
- v.22: The magicians counter the miracle. But the fact that the people were digging for water shows that while they repeated the sign, they could not cleanse the water from the Nile.
- How does Pharaoh respond? v.23 says "he turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart." God had shaken Egypt on a deep level but Pharaoh didn't even take it to heart. God was inconsequential to him and he didn't even pay attention to God dismantling the false god, Hapi and other Egyptian gods associated with the Nile.
- Instead, Pharaoh was content for his people to have to dig next to the Nile to try to get water and this went on for a week. Stinking fish, putrid water that no one could drink and Pharaoh didn't even take it to heart.
- How many people experience brokenness in their lives and rather than letting it awaken them to who God is and what God offers them through Jesus, they just ignore it?
- If we will look and pay attention we can see that all the things we trust in for fullness of life can be ruined and it is God's goodness to dismantle these idols and to show us his greater glory.

2. The Second Plague: What do we trust in for protection? (8:1-14)

- 8:1-4 *Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ² But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. ³ The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. ⁴ The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.”’”*
- The frogs would go everywhere—without virtually any limitation—including the interior of the palace (mentioned first to be sure Pharaoh knew he would not be immune), bedrooms, beds, and cooking utensils (mentioned as well to complete the picture of a gross manifestation of all places where humans lived).
- Implied is the disgust that would occur when people stepped on the frogs (as far as we know, Egyptians did not wear shoes indoors), when they rolled over on them in bed (again, people slept on mats on the floor, not in elevated beds as Westerners think of “beds”), and when they were surprised by them in various places thought otherwise to be clean (feeding troughs, ovens).
- Heqet the goddess was pictured with a head of a frog [PICTURE – real pretty!]. She was the goddess of fertility and fruitfulness. Because of this, frogs were sacred in Egypt and even the involuntary slaughter of one was often punished with death. Imagine the irony of believing that frogs are divine and now you have them EVERYWHERE.
- Heqet was looked to because the Egyptians were looking for help in childbirth. In the ancient world, childbirth was far more dangerous and frightening than in America today. Surely, no one in here is looking to an amphibian for health or security or fruitfulness, but are you looking to something for ultimate protection in desperate times, in childbirth, in your health condition, or any other situation that you think is out of your control?
- God was dismantling the false idol of health and protection so we could see only HE can provide what we need. Now, think about the person who has the super disciplined health routine. They exercise 5 times a week, they eat only kale and sweet potatoes, they don’t drink soda, coffee, tea, and only drink water from a mountain stream that has been filtered through a dormant volcano? Does this not look like worship? They believe that if they do all the right things than they are OWED good health.
- Now, there are wise things we can and should do with our bodies but deep down we all know we can’t make it so we avoid all sickness and disease. We all know we can’t control that, right? Things fall apart. We get sick or someone we are close to gets sick. And we see that we can’t control our health. Sometimes we try to fix it by going to God.
- Pharaoh was tired of having frogs in the palace and all over him so he appeared to “seek” God by asking Moses to plead with the Lord but then as soon as the frogs were gone he hardened his heart. How many people seek God when things fall apart but as soon as any relief is given, they are no longer interested in God.
- ILL - After Sept 11 church attendance in America went up dramatically. Our country collectively felt assaulted by the events of that day and people were struggling with making sense of evil. What if it happened again? What if the stock market collapsed? What if we can’t be safe again? Within one-year attendance was back at its levels prior to Sept 11.
- Paganism – if I do X for God, he will do X for me. If I worship enough, give enough, pray enough, then God “owes” me what I want. It is using God as a means to our own ends which is worshiping ourselves, our pleasure, our personal idol above God and God is not an idolater. He won’t play that game with us.
- God dismantles our protection idols to show us his greater glory.

3. The Third & Fourth Plague: What do we trust in for comfort? (8:16-19; 20-32)

- ¹⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.' "
- ¹⁷And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.
- Now this is an assault on another Egyptian god, but more than anything, it's an assault on the pride of Egypt and their ability to live lives of comfort and ease. If you think back to kind of imagery around the Egyptians, what do you think of? They're always lounging. They're always lying around. They're surrounded by pets. They had this kind of, "We are the most powerful nation the world has ever known. What we provide is comfort and peace."
 - Scholars have various ideas over what kind of insect this actually was. They could have been lice or mosquitoes. They are touching the people. It is translated "lice" in the KJV. Whatever they were, they were swarming everywhere in Egypt, affecting everyone.
 - Which god was God striking in this plague? It is hard to pin point these in each plague, since they aren't mentioned. Bu this plague could have been intended to humiliate the earth-god, Geb. This is drawn from God's turning the dust into bugs. God is challenging their trust in the soil and the god of the ground but he is ALSO just really pushing on their comfort.
 - The magicians tried to duplicate the gnats but couldn't and told Pharaoh that it must be God. BUT Pharaoh ignores it while he has to constantly swat at the gnats.
 - Then God ramps up the discomfort even more with the 4th plague... FLIES. 8:20ff
- ²⁰Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ²¹Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. ²²But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. ²³Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen." ' "
- ²⁴And the Lord did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.
- ILL - This one is a little personal for me. So, my freshman year in college I lived in the dorm. Whenever the powers that be at the school decided it wasn't hot any more they would just randomly cut off the AC in our dorms so we had to open the windows. The windows had no screens on them and for some reason our room smelled really good to flies so we would end up with them on the walls, on the ceiling and we would spend our time killing them. The pinnacle of that experience and something that I will never forget is early one Saturday morning while I was sleeping I breathed one of those flies in and swallowed it. UGH!!!!
 - I have to believe that this happened to someone in Egypt... Imagine you live an opulent life of comfort living in a Penthouse in Manhattan. You eat where you want. Go where you want, buy what you want. Now, imagine that life with FLIES... millions and millions of flies. Wouldn't be quite as nice, right?
 - What god was being targeted here? We can't know for sure, but it could be "the god of the resurrection" – Kepher – who was depicted as a beetle. Some argue that these flies were flying beetles, known as scarabs. Scarabs are found on monuments and other things in Egypt.

- God was plaguing people with the false god of the resurrection they worshiped to give them eternal life. The irony here is not lost. The only God with the power of eternal life is dismantling the false god of eternal life so that people can experience real eternal life.
- John 3:16, 36 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life....Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”*
- In this case, God’s wrath is allowing Pharaoh to continue to seek eternal life in helpless idols. Who or what are you trusting for eternal life? For those who want true life in Jesus, it is available by faith, but for those who don’t God will let them experience the brokenness of their own idolatry. Pharaoh hardened his heart again this time and so God would continue to dismantle the gods of Egypt until God defeats Pharaoh the man who claimed to be a god.

4. The Fifth Plague: What do you trust in for security and hope? (9:1-7)

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ²For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, ³behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.” ’ ” ⁵And the Lord set a time, saying, “Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land.” ⁶And the next day the Lord did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. ⁷And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

- Domesticated animals were treasured as enormously valuable assets in Bible times (as in any time prior to the industrial revolution, or any place even today where farming predominates). For them to have lost livestock would constitute a serious blow indeed. For them to have lost livestock while the Israelites retained all theirs represented a nationwide humiliation.
- The Egyptians worshiped many animals, and many animal-headed deities. The god Apis [PICTURE] was represented as a bull, and had been worshipped in Egypt since around 3,000 B.C.
- As the Egyptian economy had already been ravaged by turning the Nile into blood, now the Egyptian people’s personal wealth, security, and hope was being destroyed. The very livestock images they worshiped and the real life bull they worshiped as the incarnation of Apis could not save them.
- When people experience economic devastation it opens them up to be able to see things they could not see otherwise. When praying as Jesus said, “Give us this day our daily bread, is not simply a nice prayer we pray before we stuff our faces with our food at home or go eat out somewhere, but is a real cry of our hearts, it opens us up to seeing God as the only source of real security and hope.”
- ILL – When we moved to Boston in the fall of 2008 to start City on a Hill, I did a one year residency with Hope Fellowship Church in Cambridge. I came to Boston at a hard time for fundraising. The economy was on a downturn and while I had raised some up front cash, new partners were very slow. I remember about this time of the year we had drained through our savings and I was looking at picking up a job to make ends meet while we were preparing to plant the church and I was raising support. I remember realizing that Teresa, Jordan, Hannah, and Sarah were all relying on me and while I felt a responsibility I remember leaning into God in a way that I have only a few times in my life. I was trying to find work and was looking at every option I could find, but God didn’t want me to meet our family’s need through my hardwork or creativity. He wanted to supply my need when I looked to him. Long story short while I was praying one morning and felt a peace and email came in explaining that an unexpected check for \$5000 had come into Hope Fellowship to help with my support.

- What are you trusting in for your security and hope? Andy Stanley once asked “Which statement bothers you more: ‘there is no money in bank’ or ‘there is no God’” How you answer that reveals where your real security and hope is.
- God is gracious to dismantle the false idols we are trusting in so we can see his glory more clearly. He may be doing that today in some of your lives. You can choose to resent him for exposing that raw nerve or you can see that idol for what it is and repenting of trusting it.
- One of the real mistakes of reading the plagues is to believe that the people of Israel were somehow better than the Egyptians and that’s why God spared them and then delivered them. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Israelites were a gaggle of morons. Case in point... they had seen God kill the livestock of Egypt and defeating the god Apis. Question... when the Israelites are out in the wilderness and Moses is up on the mountain, they build a golden statue of what??? A calf. It was the symbol of Apis. They were worshiping Apis.
- The mistakes it to believe God saves you because you got it together and deserve it. God delighted in saving the Israelites with all their brokenness and rebellion because that is how amazing his love is.
- He loves you the same way today. The question is, how will you respond today? Will you repent of pursuing idols for fullness of life, for prosperity, for comfort, and for security?

•PRAY WITH ME...

COMMUNION

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