

### 3) EXODUS 5-10 WITH A FOCUS ON 7 - THE PLAGUES

Chapter 7 has 3 sections: 1-7 renewal of Moses' commission, 8-13 prelude to the plagues, 14-24 the water turned to blood. Chapter 7 introduces chapters 7-12 - the story of the ten plagues and the first Passover.

#### 1) Prelude to Chapter 7.

4:18-31 - Moses returns to Egypt. He brings his whole family with him as well as his brother Aaron who will be his right hand man. God warns him in advance that Pharaoh's heart will be hardened and he will not let the people go easily. Once he arrives, Moses must convince the Israelites that he is to be their ordained leader and that his mission is from God. Once he performs the signs that God has supplied him with (4:1-9), they believe him.

5 - Moses makes his demands to Pharaoh for the first time: "The god of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God..." Pharaoh's response is not positive. He accuses Moses and Aaron of taking the people from their work, and in order to punish them, imposes a heavier workload on the people so that they have less time, energy and willpower to gather together. Pharaoh wants to break their spirits. The people then get angry with Moses and Aaron seeing that their situation has gotten worse not better. Moses then cries up to God, questioning what God could be up to.

6:1-13,28-30 - God assures Moses that God (the Lord), is the same God that made promises to his ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and that God will fulfill what God has promised. Moses tells the people, but their spirits are broken and they cannot believe him. Moses then doubts himself and his speaking abilities as he prays to God.

6:14-27 - the genealogy of the Levite clan within which Moses and Aaron and their children are included. This is important for it links Moses to his past as well as to his descendants who will be reading and reciting the Exodus story.

#### 2) 7: 1-7 - The Renewal of Moses' Commission from God

Moses is bestowed great status and responsibility. He is to be the spokesperson of God, and Aaron is to be God's prophet (like the great prophets). This only makes Moses more nervous and afraid. Moses will persevere and stick it out, but he also wavers and doubts himself at the same time.

#### 3) The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

Between Moses' and Aaron's request that Pharaoh let the Israelites go (v.2) and Israel's final freedom (v.4-5) will lie a great struggle with repeated disappointments for the Israelites, and widespread ruin and death for the Egyptians. Why? The reason given is that the Lord will harden Pharaoh's heart (v.3).

Why would God motivate someone to sin and then punish the person for it? In 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 24 - an angry God orders David to take a census of the people and then David gets punished presumably because the census leads to some authoritarian policies adopted by his son Solomon. The same story is retold in 1 Chronicles 21, but only this time, the role of God in the story is replaced with that of Satan. Satan is now the culprit who causes someone to commit evil. But there is no such rewriting of the story of the plagues. God seems to punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians for something for which God is ultimately responsible.

Various explanations for this include 1) Perhaps Pharaoh proved himself obstinate in the face of Moses' demands because of his own paranoia and twisted reasoning. 2) This is an example of divine predestination which means Pharaoh is a mere puppet. God holds the strings and is in control. (But does this ever explain someone's actions adequately?) 3) Perhaps later writers are explaining earlier events where signs (plagues) failed to achieve their intended purpose (to force Pharaoh into compliance).

Whatever the cause, however, Pharaoh's self-destructive, stubborn resistance leads to increased plagues, leading to a more impressive overall victory. However we are to explain Pharaoh's attitude, moreover, the real issue is the battle between the Lord and Pharaoh plus his gods. Who has the power and who will win? When the matter is finally settled the Egyptians will know that the Lord is God alone! Love and empowerment of the enslaved is the true victory. No wonder the exodus story has been the favourite story of people enslaved and knocked down for centuries! If God empowered the Israelites of old, God could empower any group downtrodden. Black lives matter! Indigenous lives matter! God's love includes everyone! Don't give up Ukrainians, Palestinians, women in Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia... Anyone abused... (who would you include in this category?)

#### 4) v.8-13 - A prelude to the Plagues

Moses and Aaron need a magic wonder to prove themselves. Here we witness a mini-battle between the Lord and the Egyptian gods. In v.12, Aaron's snake "swallows" those of the Egyptian sorcerers, foreshadowing the victory of the Israelites. The word "swallow" is the same one that appears in 15:12 to describe how the waters of the Red Sea "swallow" the Egyptian armies.

#### 5) v.14-24 - The Water turned to Blood

a) All 10 plagues have a common form.

- An initial statement about hardening of Pharaoh's heart - 14
- This followed by Moses' declaration that Pharaoh must let Israelites go - 16
- The plague occurs as a miraculous event ordered by God and performed by Moses or Aaron - 19-21
- In many cases, the plague is matched by Egyptian sorcerers - 22
- Concludes with Pharaoh's response in a renewed hardening of his heart setting the

stage for the next plague - 23.

b) The unique elements in the 1<sup>st</sup> plague

- The place where Moses confronts Pharaoh is the bank of the Nile. The place of Moses rescue (2:5) and that of the Israelites begins at the same place.
- v.15 mentions Moses staff. A staff was a symbol of authority and leadership for any of the great ancient leaders. Moses is one such.

6) Free to Worship

a) v.16 offers rationale for Pharaoh letting the people go - in order to worship God in the wilderness. This theme develops in the next few chapters. In 8: 25 Pharaoh tells Moses that people are free to worship their God in Egypt. Moses protests that the Egyptians scorn Israelite worship and they do not feel safe. Moses also states that their journey is 3 days indicating that the location is probably Mount Sinai/Horeb. Pharaoh consents and even asks for prayers to be said on his behalf.

b) But Pharaoh changes his mind and Moses continues to insist on freedom to worship - 9:13, 10:3. Finally upon the urging of his officials Pharaoh relents, but not entirely. He is suspicious of the Israelites and only permits the men to go (knowing that they would return for their wives and children). Moses doesn't accept these terms.

c) Finally Pharaoh consents to permit all the people to go but demands to hold on to their livestock and possessions (knowing again that this would not allow the people to go too far without returning). Moses again refuses on the grounds that the livestock is needed for worship.

d) While the people do intend to worship God in the wilderness, they have no intention of stopping or returning to Egypt. Pharaoh is right to be suspicious. Moses is not forthcoming with Pharaoh.

7) Conversations with Pharaoh

a) 1<sup>st</sup> plague - Pharaoh never speaks and his rejection of Moses demands is implied.

2<sup>nd</sup> plague - Pharaoh finally gives the matter his serious attention (8:8)

4<sup>th</sup> plague - Pharaoh starts to negotiate with Moses and Aaron. What do they want and what is he willing to offer?

7<sup>th</sup> plague - Pharaoh seems repentant, but such repentance is short lived and deceptive.

8<sup>th</sup> plague – Pharaoh's top officials are pressuring him to give in to Israelite demands. Pharaoh again negotiates but changes his mind.

b) Pharaoh is aloof and disconnected from the plight of his people. This is a typical flaw of the world's tyrants. His pride doesn't give way. He is untouched even when his officials plead with him.