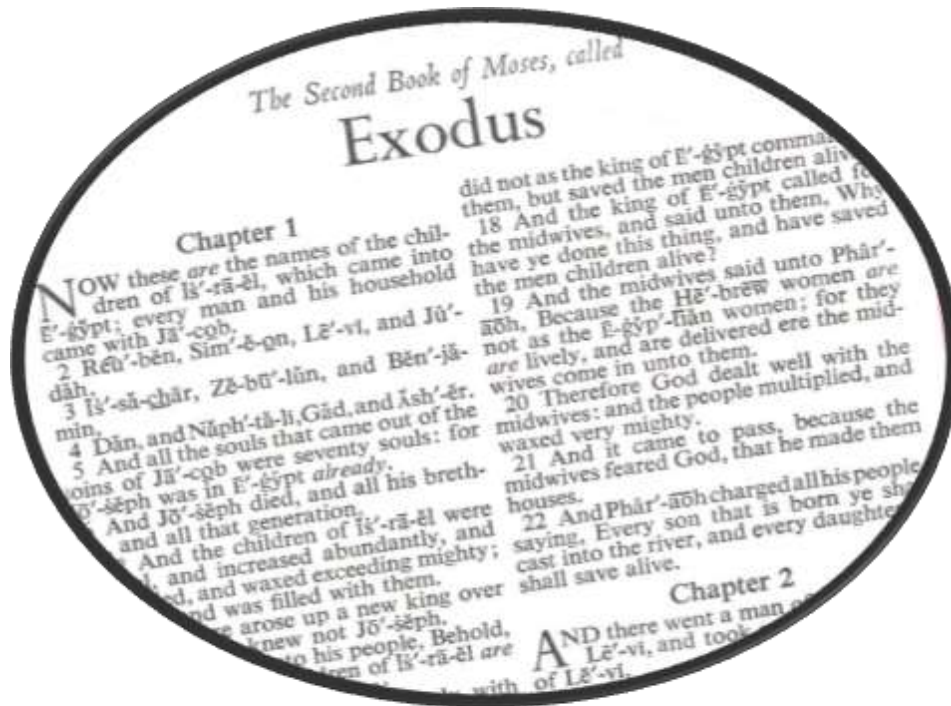


EXODUS – WEEK 6

THE STAGE IS SET



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 9:13–11:8 – The Stage is Set

The plagues are becoming catastrophic. Pharaoh repeatedly acts like he's repentant, only to quickly revert to his old self. His vacillation is pathetic, if not downright unhinged.

At last the time is ripe for the ultimate plague – Passover. Moses announces to Pharaoh what's about to happen and walks out.

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Thank you.

Exodus 9:13–11:8 – The Stage is Set
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1 Exodus 9:13-26 (NKJV)

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: “Let My people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth. Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go. Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now. Therefore send now and gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die.” ’ ’ ”

He who feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses. But he who did not regard the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt—on man, on beast, and on every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.” And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail.

As always, the Egyptian Gods are useless. Today’s useless god of the day is Nut – the goddess of the sky.

<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/nut.htm>

But there’s something new in this passage that’s more important. God tells Pharaoh exactly what’s going on with all these plagues. He shocks Pharaoh by telling him, “*But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.*”

Imagine you are engaged in a war, and the leader of the opposing side informs you that he got you appointed as the leader of your side. Furthermore, he did this to make himself look good.

Can you think of a greater put down?

That same put down is part of the beauty of the gospel. The purpose of salvation by grace alone is God’s glory. Just as He raised up Pharaoh to make Himself look good (and Pharaoh look bad), He raises us up for His own glory while hammering home the point that we deserve none of that glory.

2 Exodus 9:27-35 (NKJV)

And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. Entreat the LORD, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.”

So Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s. But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God.”

Now the flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was in the head and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the spelt were not struck, for they are late crops.

So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and spread out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain was not poured on the earth. And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the LORD had spoken by Moses.

By now the Egyptian people are deeply divided. Any Egyptian who *feared the word of the LORD ... made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses*. Anyone who didn’t, *left his servants and his livestock in the field*. This surely led to a great deal of anguish and argument. Since the loss of life and livestock was severe, those who avoided this catastrophe undoubtedly had a few words for to those who didn’t.

This is turning into a clinic on bad leadership. It’s hard to tell whether Pharaoh’s vacillation is a psychological disorder or just someone out of his depth flailing around. We can’t blame this on his advisors (the “magicians”); they got a clue back in plague number three.

As mean as he is, it’s still hard not to feel some sympathy for Pharaoh. He’s just pitiful. Each time he pleads with Moses to end a plague, it’s more obsequious than the time before. This time he even says, *“I have sinned.”*

But he’s just saying that. He doesn’t really mean it.

Words without meaning are way too common in America, and not just with politicians. We elect people who talk like that because it doesn’t offend us that much. This is a catastrophe. We’re so marinated in this culture that we don’t even notice it. That makes this hard to explain.

Our conversations are usually not even conversations. We ask, “How ya’ doin’?” but don’t expect a real answer. We’d be stunned speechless if someone replied with something like, “I’m really hurting.” We talk to people like we don’t want to talk to them, and we say things we do not mean. To wit:

Beware of the line, “I’ll pray for you.” If you commit to praying for someone, write it down (e.g., on your phone). If possible, don’t just promise, stop and pray right then – and write it down.

3 Exodus 10:1-11 (NKJV)

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”

So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. And they shall cover the face of the earth, so that no one will be able to see the earth; and they shall eat the residue of what is left, which remains to you from the hail, and they shall eat every tree which grows up for you out of the field. They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians—which neither your fathers nor your fathers’ fathers have seen, since the day that they were on the earth to this day.’ ” And he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?”

So Moses and Aaron were brought again to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, serve the LORD your God. Who are the ones that are going?”

And Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.”

Then he said to them, “The LORD had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go! Beware, for evil is ahead of you. Not so! Go now, you who are men, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desired.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

This time Pharaoh’s servants convince him to bring Moses and Aaron back with the words, “*Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?*” But Pharaoh keeps playing games and won’t let the people of Israel worship the LORD the way He requires. Finally, he blurts out, “*The LORD had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go!*” Then they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

Pharaoh has, in modern terms, a god complex. This is perfectly understandable, given that the Egyptian religion deifies Pharaohs. When the LORD asks, “*How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?*” Pharaoh’s answer is, “Forever!” Humility is out of the question.

This is a perfect portrait of a hard heart.

We are sometimes like Pharaoh in that the more obvious it becomes that we’re wrong, the more we dig in our heels and refuse to admit it. Even though we confess Jesus as Lord, we have a God complex too.

It’s pride. Despite all we’ve been taught, our sinful nature clings to the notion that we deserve blessings.

4 Exodus 10:12-20 (NKJV)

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land—all that the hail has left.” So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind on the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt. They were very severe; previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left. So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only.” So he went out from Pharaoh and entreated the LORD. And the LORD turned a very strong west wind, which took the locusts away and blew them into the Red Sea. There remained not one locust in all the territory of Egypt. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.

Locust plagues still happen. There was one not that long ago in Madagascar.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/jul/12/madagascar-locust-plague>

Even with modern technology, it’s a tragedy of biblical proportions. We like to gripe that the deer eat everything. Imagine living in a primitive agricultural society and seeing everything covered in locusts.

If there are any Egyptians left that still worship their “gods” they might be wondering, “Where’s Osiris?”

<http://www.egyptianmyths.net/osiris.htm>

Pharaoh seems to have abandoned this perspective and *called Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only.”*

The fact that Pharaoh did this *in haste* speaks volumes. He sees how dire the situation is. Then he forgets.

One of the weirdest aspects of our sinful nature is how it makes us unseriously serious. Pharaoh was totally serious while pleading with Moses, but that was quickly forgotten. We do this more than we realize. How many promises are broken because they somehow “couldn’t be kept”?

Give me break. If that happens a lot, what does the word promise mean, anyway? You think this is rare? Every debt not paid is exactly that – including every bankruptcy. We’ve even made bankruptcy normal.

Making a promise you might not be able to keep is being unseriously serious.

5 Exodus 10:21-29 (ESV)

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived. Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, “Go, serve the LORD; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.” But Moses said, “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the LORD our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there.” But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.” Moses said, “As you say! I will not see your face again.”

At last we get to the best known Egyptian god – the sun god Ra.

<http://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/ra.html>

Will Durant's *The Story of Civilization* notes, “Always Ra, or the sun, was the Creator: at his first rising, seeing the earth desert and bare, he had flooded it with his energizing rays, and all living things—vegetable, animal and human—had sprung pell-mell from his eyes, and been scattered over the world.”

This plague doesn't do much damage, but to the Egyptians it must feel like Ra has been kidnapped. The point of this plague is its blatantly supernatural nature and its power over Ra.

The take-down of the Egyptian gods is now complete. The plagues have done to the Egyptian religion what Augustine's *City of God* did to the Roman religion – turned it into a joke. Meanwhile, Pharaoh has burned all his bridges with Moses. There's no going back after a good-bye like that. The stage is set for the final plague – the Passover.

But Moses doesn't know that. At this moment everything looks like a failure. Not only has he gotten nowhere with Pharaoh, their relationship is now trashed. This is a major trial for Moses.

Moses will have many more trials, but the lessons he learns in the early ones will help get him through the later ones. That's one of the central themes of Exodus – showing how God fits the pieces together.

This should encourage us. In Exodus, we get to see the reason behind all the disasters. That rarely happens in our own lives. Even when it does, we normally don't see the reason until much later.

So we're left with examples such as the events in Exodus to give us hope that things are actually under control, even when they look anything but. That's why studying Exodus is so important.

But there's something else just as important – to know the ways God has worked in our own lives. Any time you see God fit the pieces together, don't keep it to yourself. People need to hear what He did.

6 Exodus 11:1-8 (NKJV)

And the LORD said to Moses, “I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether. Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold.” And the LORD gave the people favor 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.

Then Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the animals. Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was not like it before, nor shall be like it again. But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that the LORD does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.’ And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get out, and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will go out.” Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger.

Notice how God sets up this plague to get the job done. First off, *the LORD gave the people [of Israel] favor in the sight of the Egyptians*. Also, Moses is now *very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people*.

So, when Moses speaks, they listen. To this attentive audience, he precisely predicts an epic supernatural disaster. If this comes true, Moses’s credibility will be a lot more than just *very great in the land of Egypt*.

Also, this plague will be much more painful than the others. With their crops virtually destroyed, the Egyptian people may be worried about famine, but they aren’t starving yet. Worrying isn’t the same as grieving.

Moses is saying, “This one will make you cry.”

These plagues display God’s wrath in an especially brutal fashion. That’s troubling. It makes people wonder, “What about God’s love?” That’s a good question. The answer is uniquely blunt.

If God’s love was all about pain avoidance, Jesus would never have gone to the cross. Something bigger and more glorious must be involved. We may not understand it – I sure don’t – but it’s obviously a lot more interesting than just making folks comfortable. Every book of the Bible testifies to this attitude. The action is fast, the drama intense, and the pain great.

Every character is put through the wringer, including us. God has big plans for His servants. Frankly, most of us don’t want that. We want comfort, not action. “Let someone else make a difference; I’m busy.”

Sometimes God gets us off the couch by setting the cushions on fire.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What's the greatest insult or comeback line ever?
2. What expressions are often meaningless or insincere?
3. When do you most struggle to admit you're wrong?
4. How have broken promises hurt you?
5. When have you seen puzzling or unfortunate situations turn out so that you could see how God fit the pieces together?
6. What's the biggest catastrophe you've witnessed first-hand?

Items for prayer: