

Lesson 2 | September 8, 2024

Another Pharaoh Opposes Israel

Study Text: Exodus 5:1 through 12:51

Central Truth: Discerning and yielding to God's plan helps us make wise choices.

Key Verse: Exodus 10:7

Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man [Moses] 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? (KJV)

Pharaoh's officials now came to Pharaoh and appealed to him. "How long will you let this man [Moses] hold us hostage? Let the men go to worship the Lord their God! Don't you realize that Egypt lies in ruins?" (NLT)

Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize that the Lord fights for His people.
- Students will identify how the Lord speaks to them and choose to obey His Word.
- Students will recognize God's blessings in their lives and commit to using them for His glory.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Have you ever had a day when everything seemed to go wrong? Your coffee spilled in your lap. Your car wouldn't start. You got stuck in traffic and showed up late for work. You completely forgot about the important meeting that started five minutes ago. On those days, it's not a good idea to ask, "What else could go wrong?" You just might find out!

Discussion Starter—Having a Bad Day

Say: What makes you feel better when you're having a bad day? (*Examples: going for a run, reading a good book, listening to worship music, taking some time to calm down and pray*)

Say: In today's lesson, we'll see Pharaoh was having more than one bad day. Some scholars deduce that the ten plagues happened over a period of forty to fifty days. Because of Pharaoh's pride and stubbornness, he was locked in a weeks-long battle with God himself over the future of God's people. And the Egyptians were paying the price.

By refusing to release the Israelites from slavery, Pharaoh was setting the stage for God to display His strength. God made this clear just before unleashing the plague of hail (the seventh of ten plagues). Through Moses, God told Pharaoh, "By now I could have lifted my hand and struck you and your people with a plague to wipe you off the face of

the earth. But I have spared you for a purpose—to show you my power and to spread my fame throughout the earth” (Exodus 9:15–16). With every plague, Pharaoh and the Egyptians witnessed God’s existence, His power, and His commitment to His children.

Part 1—Pharaoh’s Magicians Recognize God’s Hand

Copycat Miracles

Exodus 5:1–2; 7:8–13, 19–23; 8:1–7

Say: If you’ve ever witnessed playground bullying, you know how heartbreaking it can be. Usually, a teacher or parent steps in to protect the child being targeted and to punish the bully. The Book of Exodus shows us God’s reaction to Pharaoh’s harsh mistreatment of the Israelites. Again and again, God intervened to protect His children.

God had told Moses to confront Pharaoh (Exodus 3:18). After following other instructions regarding the elders, Moses and Aaron finally reached Pharaoh’s court (5:1). On God’s behalf, they asked Pharaoh to “let my people go so they may hold a festival in my honor in the wilderness.” Furious, Pharaoh demanded, “Who is the Lord? Why should I listen to him and let Israel go?” (verse 2). Contrast Pharaoh’s reaction—“Who is the Lord?”—with Moses’ more humble response to encountering God—“Who am I?” (3:11).

In Exodus 7, Moses and Aaron returned to Pharaoh’s court. God had told them that Pharaoh would demand a miracle and prepared them accordingly. Following God’s instructions, Moses told Aaron to throw his staff on the ground in front of Pharaoh and it turned into a serpent. Pharaoh immediately called for his own experts who were able to replicate the miracle with their “enchantments” (verse 11, KJV). However the magicians were able to do this, whether by illusion or some evil power, the limits of their sorcery were soon obvious: “Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs” (verse 12). This first display of God’s superior power had no effect on Pharaoh and he refused to listen to Moses and Aaron. As a result, God’s judgment upon Egypt escalated and the ten plagues began.

Pharaoh’s sorcerers were able to mimic the first two plagues (7:14–25; 8:1–15), although apparently on a smaller scale than Moses and Aaron. When his magicians turned water into blood, “Pharaoh’s heart remained hard. He refused to listen to Moses and Aaron” (7:22), apparently because their miracle had been duplicated. He went back to his palace and “put the whole thing out of his mind” (verse 23). However, when the magicians mimicked the second plague, causing frogs to come out of the Nile, this wasn’t enough to put Pharaoh’s mind at ease. Instead, he told Moses and Aaron that he would let the Israelites go if they would “plead with the Lord to take the frogs away” (8:8). His use of the name Yahweh may indicate that Pharaoh was beginning to understand more about this God of the Israelites. (This Hebrew name for God—Yahweh or YHWH—is designated by “Lord” in English translations.) But once the frogs were gone and “Pharaoh saw that relief had come” (verse 15), he changed his mind.

When we face heartbreaking situations—like persecution, injustice, disease, depression, grief, or abuse—we can be certain that God sees and God cares. The world may offer copycat solutions to these problems, but we can trust God to intervene at the right time and display His matchless, wonder-working power.

Resource Packet Item 1: In Need of a Miracle

God worked miracles on behalf of His people leading up to and after the Exodus. In this case study, students will be reminded of their own need to trust God.

Discuss

- How do you think Pharaoh’s sorcerers were able to mimic Moses and Aaron’s first three signs?
- What might have been the reason God chose to send ten plagues rather than skipping to the final plague—the death of the firstborn?

God’s Matchless Power

Exodus 8:16–19

Say: With the stench of dead frogs still hanging in the air, Pharaoh broke his promise to let God’s people go. Stubborn and prideful, he clung tightly to his limited power as king. But the limitless power of God was about to be unleashed against him.

The plague of gnats (8:16, NLT; “lice,” KJV; likely some sort of annoying insect) was the first to come without any warning and represented an escalation in the intensity of God’s judgment. Following God’s instructions, Aaron struck the ground with his staff and countless biting insects covered all the people and animals in Egypt. Pharaoh’s magicians could not mimic this miracle. Their phony power was utterly eclipsed by the matchless power of God.

When the magicians told Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” (verse 19), they used a generic word for *god* rather than the proper name *Yahweh* (which Pharaoh himself had used in verse 8). They didn’t realize exactly who they were up against, but they knew they were defeated (see 9:11). From that point on, they no longer competed against Moses and Aaron. Their resignation stands in contrast to Pharaoh’s persistent stubbornness: “Pharaoh’s heart remained hard. He wouldn’t listen to them, just as the Lord had predicted” (8:19).

God’s power is unrivaled, and His plans will not be thwarted. Just as He was working on behalf of the Israelites, He acts on our behalf as well. When we spend time in His presence, seeking His face, we begin to discern His will—and it’s up to us whether we will yield to it. “The Lord says, ‘I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control’” (Psalm 32:8–9). In other words, do not be like Pharaoh—so caught up in his own agenda that he hardened his heart and willingly turned a blind eye to what God was doing.

Resource Packet Item 2: The Ten Plagues

Some have noted that the ten plagues in Exodus 7–11 could be seen as targeting specific Egyptian gods. While this correlation is not expressly stated in Scripture, it is an interesting piece of historical context. Students will learn how ten Egyptian gods were proven to be powerless by the signs and wonders of the one true God.

Discuss

- Why do you think Pharaoh became more stubborn with each plague while his magicians eventually acknowledged God’s supremacy?
- In what ways might you be resisting God’s plans for your life?

Part 2—Pharaoh’s Officials Fear Moses’ God Obey the Lord’s Instructions

Exodus 9:8–20

Say: By the time the plagues were halfway over, the Egyptians must have realized their king was locked in a supernatural battle with a God they did not know. They must have wondered what the God of the Israelites would do next.

When the sixth and seventh plagues took place, Pharaoh’s officials were directly affected (Exodus 9:11, 20–21). The magicians suffered from boils just like everyone else. Then some of Pharaoh’s officials believed Moses’ warnings about the impending hailstorm and protected their livestock and servants accordingly. But Pharaoh was not so teachable. In fact, starting with the sixth plague, it was not Pharaoh who hardened his heart, but the Lord (verse 12). The implication is that, after repeatedly refusing to free God’s people, Pharaoh’s mind would not change.

God showed mercy to the Egyptians by warning them to take cover before the hail began to fall (verse 19). It was never His purpose to destroy the Egyptians, but to free His own people from bondage (verses 15–17). After commanding Pharaoh to release His people so they could worship Him (verse 13), God reiterated that He was sending the plagues “to show you my power and to spread my fame throughout the earth” (verse 16; see Romans 9:22–23).

Through His Word (Psalm 119:105) and the leading of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), God will speak to us if we choose to listen. We would be wise to pay attention to what God is doing and follow His instructions—for the sake of our own souls and the people under our care.

Discuss

- Why do you think God used extreme, yet familiar, natural phenomena when pouring out judgment against Egypt?

Resource Packet Item 3: Hearing from God

One of the major contrasts between Moses and Pharaoh is that one listened closely to God's words and the other completely ignored them. This handout encourages students to reflect on their own experiences of hearing from God.

Egypt Lies in Ruins

Exodus 10:3–7

Say: Before sending the eighth plague, God told Moses that He had hardened Pharaoh's heart "so you can tell your children and grandchildren about how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and about the signs I displayed among them—and so you will know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 10:2). God intended to teach His people thankfulness, wisdom, and trust by reminding them of the miraculous wonders He had worked to win their freedom.

Moses and Aaron again approached Pharaoh, this time foretelling a plague of locusts that would soon descend on Egypt. What little vegetation was left after the hailstorm would be completely wiped out. Maybe Moses was more confident by this time, or maybe he was less patient, but he did not wait for Pharaoh's response to God's message. Instead, almost certainly defying royal protocol, he "turned and left" with no further discussion (Exodus 10:6).

Faced with the horror of locusts—a dreaded plague which would be worse than any Egypt had experienced to that point (verse 6)—Pharaoh's officials finally confronted him. Echoing Moses' phrase from verse 3, they demanded, "How long will you let this man hold us hostage? Let the men go to worship the Lord their God! Don't you realize that Egypt lies in ruins?" (verse 7).

Considering the plagues in sequence, it's clear that God was trying to get Pharaoh's attention by progressively decimating Egypt and all its natural resources: water, land, food, livestock, and even people. This destruction directly resulted from Pharaoh's pride. Because of it, he lost power, security, wealth, and even the future he might have had through his firstborn son. By the time the Israelites left for good, Egypt was not all that lay in ruins—so did Pharaoh's life.

Sin has a cumulative effect. Sometimes a person's choices spiral out of control until their life is lying in ruins. But because of what Jesus has done, we can have hope. Through repentance—a change of mind that results in us both asking for forgiveness and turning from our old way of living—we can be set free and find new life in Him.

Discuss

- Have you noticed any changes in Moses' behavior and level of confidence in the Book of Exodus so far? If so, discuss the possible reasons.
- In what ways have you seen Jesus restore the barren, ruined places in your life? What areas still need His life-giving touch?

Part 3—Israelites Plunder the Egyptians Favor with the Egyptians

Exodus 11:1–3

Say: After generations of slavery, abuse, oppression, and even mass murder, the Israelites were about to depart from Egypt. And what were they carrying as they left in the middle of the night? Hastily made bread dough, kneading boards, traveling cloaks, walking shoes . . . and the Egyptians' wealth! Only God could have made sure the enslavement of His people ended with centuries' worth of back pay.

God clearly told Moses that the tenth plague would be the last. Before explaining exactly how the people should prepare for Passover—arguably one of the most sacred rituals in Judaism—God's first instruction was for all the Israelites "to ask their Egyptian neighbors for articles of silver and gold" (Exodus 11:2). This was clearly not robbery; the Israelites asked, and the Egyptians freely gave. Whether through Middle Eastern cultural values or miraculous intervention, God "caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the people of Israel," particularly their powerful leader, Moses (verse 3).

Looking back at Exodus 3:21–22, we see this was God's plan all along. At the burning bush in the Midian wilderness—before Moses had appeared before Pharaoh the first time—God had told Moses that He would cause the Egyptians to show favor to the Israelites. "They will give you gifts when you go so you will not leave empty-handed" (verse 21). In fact, God's people would drape the Egyptian spoils on their children. Carrying few of their own possessions, they would be able to carry more of their captors' wealth.

The treasures handed over by the Egyptians were really gifts from God. In His justice, He ensured that His people were leaving centuries of slave labor far better off than slaves. As some scholars note, this may foreshadow the victory God's people will eventually win over the evil powers of this world (see Zechariah 14:14).

Discuss

- What is the significance of God's plan to make sure His people didn't leave Egypt empty-handed?
- Have you ever experienced God's supernatural favor being shown through a third party? If so, share the story with the class.

The Spoils of Egypt

Exodus 12:31–36

Say: In the tenth and final plague, we see an incredible parallel. Decades earlier, a different Pharaoh had commanded that every male Israelite baby be drowned in the Nile River. And on Passover, "the Lord struck down all the firstborn sons in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 12:29). Unlike the previous plagues, which used some of the features of the natural world, this judgment was executed more directly by God.

Having just witnessed the death of his firstborn son, Pharaoh reversed his banishment of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 10:28) and summoned them to his palace in the middle of the night. He ordered them to take the Israelites and leave Egypt. (Note the fulfillment of Moses' words in 11:8.) Hoping to reverse the pattern of judgment he certainly would have perceived as a curse, Pharaoh begged them, "Bless me as you leave" (12:32). He almost certainly feared his own death, just as the rest of the Egyptians did (verse 33).

Only God's intervention could have caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites after the death of the firstborn (verse 36). After all, "loud wailing was heard throughout the land of Egypt. There was not a single house where someone had not died" (verse 30). The Egyptians vehemently "urged the people of Israel to get out of the land as quickly as possible" (verse 33), yet they took time to give the Israelites all the riches they asked for (verse 36).

By blessing His people with the wealth of Egypt on their way out of slavery, God was restoring their dignity and identity. No longer ragtag slaves, His chosen people began traveling toward the land He had promised their forebears long ago.

Discuss

- In Deuteronomy 23:7, God commanded the Israelites not to detest the Egyptians because they had "lived as foreigners" among them. Why do you think God included this regulation in the Law?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Just as Pharaoh's stubbornness set the stage for God to work miracles, God can also use hardship in our lives to display His glory. Instead of hardening our hearts like Pharaoh, we would be wise to listen closely to God's instructions and learn from His discipline. "Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven!" (Hebrews 12:25). Like Moses led the Children of Israel to freedom, Jesus has delivered us. We have been set free from the slavery of sin, and we are following Jesus through the wilderness of this world until we reach the Promised Land—eternity with Him.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Make a list of the blessings God has given you simply because of His favor on your life. What are some practical ways you use these blessings for His glory?
- Instead of continuing to hesitate, immediately obey any command God has given you through Scripture or the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Continually pray that the Lord will fight for you, giving you victory over any sins that would enslave you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The Fear of God Established.

Joshua 2:8–11

Tuesday:

God Confounds the Enemy.

1 Samuel 7:9–13

Wednesday:

Asking God for Vindication.

Psalms 7:6–10

Thursday:

Awe at Jesus' Death.

Luke 23:44–48

Friday:

All Will Face Christ's Coming.

Revelation 1:4–8

Saturday:

The Final Rebellion Crushed.

Revelation 20:7–10