

Now that we are at the seventh plague let's step back and look at the big picture. We're more than halfway through the plagues; it's good to review to see God's purpose. The plagues come upon Egypt relentlessly, and it's easy to forget why they are happening.

Even though it's not mentioned, the people of Israel continue to be oppressed. They are still making bricks without straw, still being beaten, still a threat to Egypt while all this is going on. Their suffering has not come to a standstill. Misery continued to define their lives.

God's intention from the very beginning was to free God's people. God heard their cries of suffering and observed their misery, and God had had enough.

But Pharaoh was in complete control. According to him, there was no public existence of the real God; that God was not present; only the gods of whom he was in control. Society is built by human industry, not God; there is no need of God. He believed God was dead and unnecessary. Remember what Pharaoh said, "Who is this Lord that I should heed him? I don't know the Lord" (Ex 5:2). God being in the midst of people is a problem for him because God meddles. God rules human destiny and requires that humans live a certain way. Pharaoh wanted to live according to his own standard.

In contrast stood Moses, the shepherd, the most lowly and despicable occupation to the Egyptians. That's the kind of man God chose and sent to set the Israelites free. If you read your One Year Bible reading this week, one passage said, "Moses was the most humble man on the earth" (Numbers 12:3). So you have God's man, the most humble of men, and Pharaoh, the self-directed man. Moses confronted Pharaoh, "There is a God and that God by His very nature holds you accountable. You may not enslave people. You are called to set them free."

This tells us a lot about God. God is involved; God guides; God is in charge.

But Pharaoh was like a god – his word was law. His government controlled everything; he built society autonomously as if he is god, and if that means a segment of the population is oppressed, so be it. Pharaoh builds Egypt on the backs of the Israelites.

That's the enemy God is fighting against. He was a dictator in control of his own destiny. He doesn't want to know God because God has an opinion about the way the world should be run. Certainly today there are like-minded dictators in the world who do not allow the call of God on their lives; who live out their own choice; who honor no God but themselves; who gain an iron grip over people to use them. And they are a problem in the world. Heads of state struggle with how to deal with them.

Pharaoh was like that. So how relevant is this story to our world today. God takes on that kind of ruler.

Now this seventh plague clearly shows God's perspective on things. Let's read it. READ Exodus 9:13-35.

Did you hear the grace of God in the passage?

Did you notice that God gave all the Egyptians a chance to believe? And, God's timing was perfect. He was not trying to eliminate these people but trying to wake them up. Did you see that the opportunity was given for a way out; for a way to respond to God's grace? God cares for all people.

God gives grace to you. Are you responding? Or do you steel your mind against God's grace? God extends the same opportunity to all your loved ones. Look for grace in your daily lives and respond. It's given to help you believe.

God embodies grace and mercy, so when you pray for others, pray in this way: that your friends and loved ones would hear and listen. Ever think of the OT God as that judge who seeks to punish? That is not the case. That's completely wrong. This God is full of grace first, before punishing the guilty. Everyone has an opportunity to turn around and follow God.

But Pharaoh does not follow God. He says he will, but in actuality, he reneges every time. Why does he do that? Why doesn't he learn?

My husband is like that. He's the perfect example. The other day we were out at lunchtime, looking for a place to eat. I spotted Steak and Shake. Now generally I don't want to go there with Dean because he always orders a milkshake, and I don't think he should drink a chocolate malt every time we go there. So generally I remind him of that, and every time he promises, "I won't order one." And that day was no exception. He said as we went in, "I'm not going to order a shake today." And I believed him. We sat down, looked over the menu, the waitress came, and he ordered a chocolate malt! He reneged. Just like Pharaoh.

Paul interprets this very passage about Pharaoh's hard heart in Romans. He says *God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen*. That sounds really harsh and strange, and Paul anticipated people who read the Bible would think that too.

Why would he say that? The biggest problem seems to be with understanding who is in charge.

When my children were little, books about discipline abounded. We tried to discipline without spanking, by using a system of natural consequences. We offered choice. We no longer disciplined with punishment, but we allowed our children to choose to obey. For example, one book was called "Raising Your Child with Love and Logic." I suppose it meant, love and logic as opposed to power and punishment! Well, I was reading all these books and trying these theories out. And one night when all three boys were sort of out of control, I remember my husband looking at me in exasperation and saying, "Somebody's got to be in charge here!"

You and I need to see who is in charge. This passage teaches that God is in charge here. There's not one person on earth who crosses over into God's realm.

Once, Cliff Huxtable, dad on "The Bill Cosby Show," told one of his unruly children, *you were easy to make; I brought you into the world and I can take you out, and have another kid!* That's

kind of the idea here. The clay does not judge the potter. The clay is completely subject to the potter. There's a huge delineation between the Creator and the created.

At the same time, Paul also tells us as was read from Romans 2, "Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? . . . Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself" (Ro 2:4f).

God does not desire that anyone perish, but we are all accountable. God judged Pharaoh, and this passage shows us that God will punish sin if we refuse to submit ourselves to Him.

Awhile back Harry Eyres wrote an article for the *Financial Times* newspaper about this very subject. He entitled it "The Tyranny of Choice." Talking about what path a person chooses for their life, he said, "How could I know what to do when I didn't know who, why, which or what I was?" He referred to Moses' calling. Then he said, "I believe that to everyone, *from outside themselves*, comes some kind of calling." And, he continues, to have nothing but your own choice to govern your life sounds like a self-enclosed system, subject only to your desire.¹ And that is a very small and limited place.

That outside person, of course, I would posit is God. God rightly sets the call on our lives. Do you allow God to set the call on your life?

How good that our God is in control. Nothing would be worse than us having the responsibility for our own destiny. May you rest today in the destiny of being safe and secure, protected from destruction and held close to the heart of your faithful God.

AMEN

¹Unfortunately, I cut out the article and did not get the date. It would have been in the Life & Arts section, *Financial Times*, sometime in 2009.