

**Review and Introduction:** We ended last week with Pharaoh beginning to harden his heart. He ignores God's power in Aaron's rod as it swallows up his magicians' scepters of authority in Ex. 7:12-13. Nevertheless, despite Pharaoh's systematic efforts to silence the truth of God, we rejoice this week in knowing that God Himself would ensure that there would be mighty deeds of salvation to be talked about in Israelite families – for centuries to come (see Exodus 10:2)! Pharaoh's hardness would not, and could not, derail God's purposes or squelch His wondrous works of salvation. Because of God's plan, as outlined in the focus verses of our notes this week in Exodus 9:13-17, there are always ample opportunities for God's people through the ages to pass on the Good News of the Exodus. As hymn # 364 in our Trinity hymnal puts it:

*Let children hear the mighty deeds  
Which God performed of old;  
Which in our younger years we saw,  
And which our fathers told.*

**Monday/Tuesday: read Exodus 9:13-17 and Exodus 7:14-8:8.** Why begin with Exodus 9:13-17 instead of going through the plagues one at a time? Because Exodus 9 offers us the key to understanding the purpose of the plagues and the meaning behind each one of them. For example, in the first two plagues, God strikes the Nile River – first with blood, and then with frogs that overflow the river and come into the very homes of the Egyptians, in order to “show that there is no one like Him in all the earth.”

In other words, God takes the most revered source of agricultural nourishment and life, the Nile River, which Pharaoh worshipped, and curses it, precisely so that all of Egypt, indeed, all of the world, might see that there is no earthly power to be relied upon instead of the LORD. It is Egypt's idolatry which leads to the plagues. From Pharaoh on down, Egypt had engaged in the sin of Romans 1:25 *They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.*

Meditate and Pray: *LORD, thank you that you have the power and the right to blight and wither all sources of life which we are tempted to substitute in place of you. Forgive us for our sinful desires. Forgive us that, though we knew you, we have not glorified you as God or given thanks to you, and so our thinking has become futile and our foolish hearts darkened. Send forth your light and truth afresh, LORD. Let them guide us. We also thank you for Jesus Christ, your Son, who, as Victor over sin, Satan and death, has the right now to “ask for the nations” to be given Him (Psalm 2:8). LORD Jesus, please save many benighted peoples from the fate of Egypt. May we hear, even in these days of hurricanes, plagues, and famines, that you have revealed yourself in saving ways in our world. May the nations indeed know the truth of Exodus 9:14, “That there is no one like you in all the earth.” In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

**Weds/Thurs: read Exodus 9:13-17, Exodus 8:9-32 and Matthew 5:44-45.** Clearly, as Exodus 9:15 makes clear, any one of the plagues sent on Egypt could have wiped the Egyptians from the face of the earth. It was only because God restrained His hand that Egypt was spared. In fact, God restrains the plagues in such a way that they only gradually increase in intensity. For example, plagues one and two, blood and frogs, no doubt greatly obstructed the flow of pure water in Egypt. Yet, the Egyptians were still able in Ex. 7:24 to dig down and find places of potable water. In the same way, the gnats in the third plague in Ex. 8:16-19 are a terrible nuisance, but nothing compared to the fourth plague of biting flies (called “dog flies” in Egypt) in Ex. 8:20-24. No wonder Pharaoh begs in Ex. 8:28, asking Moses to pray for Divine relief from the flies. God's hand is falling more and more heavily upon Egypt, and Pharaoh feels it keenly.

But now – here is an interesting question which arises from our focus on Ex. 9:14-15 as the key to interpreting these plagues: If each of these plagues is increasingly terrible, so that in experiencing the first four of them Pharaoh is twice brought to his knees to beg Moses for relief (Ex. 8:8 & 8:28), what does God mean when He

says to Pharaoh: “This time I will now send the full force of my plagues against you?” (Ex. 9:14) Ah well, keep in mind the original language here, as reflected in the King James Version: “For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart.” In other words, the judicial weight of the plagues begins to penetrate Pharaoh’s heart. In the last five plagues, which we will begin to study next week, Pharaoh will more keenly experience the guilt of his sin and the weight upon his heart of the wrath of God. That is what God is telling Pharaoh will happen in Exodus 9:14.

Now surely we see how just and right this increasing torment of Pharaoh is. After all, we cannot expect God to sit idly by while Pharaoh abuses Divine patience and “sets himself against God’s people” (Ex. 9:17). No, Pharaoh’s suffering must increase – so that no one can take Pharaoh’s side any longer. All men must in the end confess that, “The LORD is in the right, and Pharaoh and his people are in the wrong” (Ex. 9:27).

*Meditate and Pray: LORD, thank you for your impeccable and patient justice in your treatment of even the most base and rebellious of your creatures. Thank you that you are not a God of passion, or hasty retaliation. Thank you that all men one day will confess that you often restrained the punishment they deserved; often sent your sunshine and rain upon their wicked lives to bless their crops and increase their wealth (See Matthew 5:44-45), and often showed them abundant kindness – all of which should have brought them to repentance.*

*Please help your many kindnesses in our lives to have the opposite effect which they had upon Pharaoh. Thank you for your effectual Grace shown to us in Jesus Christ: that your kindness has indeed brought us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Please cause us to benefit from the example of Pharaoh’s hardness of heart, that we might early and often seek your forgiveness when we grieve you, so that, instead of your wrath weighing increasingly on our hearts, your loving Grace might give an increasing weight of joy and glory to all we do and say. We pray these things through our meek and mild Savior’s Name, Amen.*

**Fri/Sat/Sun: read Exodus 9:1-7; 9:13-17 and Romans 8:20-22.** Pharaoh’s hardness of heart effects not only the inanimate creation, such as rivers, soil and crops. It also grievously effects the beasts of Egypt, who innocently suffer the plague of Exodus 9:1-7. What groaning there must have been on the part of these livestock as they faced this universally terrible plague. For, indeed, all of creation, including these cattle, groan as they wait the final Return of Christ and the Redemption of the fallen creation. Yet, does such innocent suffering move Pharaoh? Not at all – even though he actually engineered a covert spy operation, which confirmed to him in Ex. 9:7 that the cattle of the Israelites were *not* suffering as those in his kingdom were! Instead of fleeing with his livestock, and his people, to take refuge from this fifth plague under the protective wings of the LORD, his heart was as unyielding as stone (Ex. 9:7). Later, his own wise men would plead with him to spare the land, livestock and people of Egypt in Ex. 10:7, yet, to no avail!

This is how high-handed and willful Pharaoh is, as he says to himself, unyielded to God: *Even if all my people, land and livestock are sacrificed on the altar of my pride and rebellion, I will not bow to the God of Moses to let God’s people go!*

*Meditate and Pray:* What would we do in the face of such stubbornness? I would be one of the first to throw up my hands in despairing of anything good for God’s people from this man Pharaoh! But wonder - not despair – is to be the note on which we end this week’s Bible notes: Wonder that God could, and indeed does, use such a hard-hearted man for the revelation of His glory and for the publishing abroad of His Name in Ex. 9:16! And also, there is a most wonderful, comforting truth about God’s power to preserve His people from the destructive hatred of Pharaoh: Not even the full power of Pharaoh to destroy Israel could touch one hair of Israel’s children, wives, husbands and families. As Moses declares so triumphantly in Ex. 10:9, which could be literally translated in a way that sums up our devotion to the LORD as well:

*We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we will go, for there is **to us** (all of us and all that we have), a feast to the LORD.*

Ponder: It took faith for Moses to say that, didn't it? Such a declaration assumes that *there would be for Moses and Israel a future, with all their possessions, families, children, old and young which could then be offered, spiritually and joyfully to the LORD!* What an assurance: God will indeed fill our hands with all that we need for sacrificial worship... and protect all that we have from this world that it might be offered back to Him! How does hymn # 689, which we just sang last week, put it?

*Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.  
Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
In every change, He faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

*Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart,  
And all is darkened in the vale of tears,  
Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,  
Who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.  
**Be still, my soul: thy Jesus can repay  
From His own fullness all He takes away.***