

## **God Remembers: Judgment Day**

**Exodus 7:14-25**

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Turn in your Bibles please to Exodus chapter 7, or take one of the church Bibles and turn to page 49; Exodus chapter 7. We'll be reading verses 14 to the end of the chapter. Before we do that, it is our pattern ordinarily to pause and ask for God to help us as we pray. Would you pray with me?

Father, before us is Your holy, inerrant, and authoritative Word. Our hearts are prone to wander, Lord, we feel it; prone to leave the God we love. We are idolaters by nature. Our hearts are idol factories. And so as we bow now before You, we cry out to You that You would take hold of us by Your Word and by Your Spirit, tearing from the throne of our hearts every invented idol there to set apart Christ alone as Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

Exodus 7 at verse 14. This is the Word of Almighty God:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. And you shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness. But so far, you have not obeyed.' Thus says the LORD, 'By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.'" And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"

Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. And the fish in the

Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink the water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile. Seven full days passed after the LORD has struck the Nile.

Amen, and we give thanks to God that He has spoken in His holy and inerrant Word.

### **The Bigger Picture**

In the middle of the city of Edinburgh, just down the royal mile from the castle atop an old tenement building is a small wooden structure that houses Edinburgh's Camera Obscura. You're then shown into a darkened room where you sit in a circle around a concave white viewing platform, and it's concave because the periscope that is affixed to the top, that you can see all of Edinburgh from, is bounced off a mirror and passes through a concave, a convex lens, and so it would distort the image and so it's beamed onto this concave bowl in the middle of the room and it makes it appear flat. And you can put your hand into the beam and it looks as though someone walking along Princes Street is walking along your hand, and you can pick them up and sort of splat them with a piece of paper. It's a fantastic thing! You get a great view of Edinburgh from there. Visitors to Edinburgh, however, are often lost in its streets.

And sometimes, I think, as we study the Scriptures we're rather like visitors to Edinburgh. We're viewing the city of the Word of God from street level and we don't really see how it all fits together. We need a different vantage point from time to time to see the big picture and not just the details. And so knowing it was communion today and time is a little short, I decided we would preach on four chapters of the book of Exodus to give us a big picture. And true to my word, I ran significantly over in the early service, so I shall have to try and do better this time! But we're going to look at the first nine plagues because those nine plagues really repeat the same themes over and over, driving the same message home. And so we're going to look at those nine plagues, organizing our thinking around four headings. First, the priority of the knowledge of God. Then, the pattern of the judgment of God. Then, the protection of the people of God. And then finally, the place of the servant of God.

### **The Priority of the Knowledge of God**

And we begin with the priority of the knowledge of God because that is, if you like, the big idea of the plague cycle. The point that God seeks to drive home, both for Pharaoh and the Egyptians, for Moses and Aaron and the Israelites, and for all of us, God wants to make the point that His agenda in all the things that He does is to make His great name known. That comes out in various places in the text. Chapter 7 verse 5, "The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt." 7:17, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD." 8:10, "Moses said to Pharaoh, 'Tomorrow be it as you say so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God.'" 9:14, "For this time I will send my plagues on you yourself and upon your people, so that you may know there is none like me in all the earth."

Why does God judge the Egyptians in this manner and deliver Israel in this manner? Why, for that matter, does God do anything that He does? He does it that His name may be known, that there is none like Him in all the earth. That is what God is doing; that is His purpose and design in all the works of His hands from creation through providence to redemption. It is why He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, that His name might be known. John 1:18, "No one has ever seen God, but the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." Jesus came to make God known. It is God's agenda in your life. "This is eternal life," Jesus says, John 17 and verse 3, "that you may know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent." God's agenda all the time is that His name may be known in all the earth and His glory displayed to the infinite joy of all who trust in His Son and to the distress and the rebuke of all who rebel against His rule. And so the big idea, the macro-theme in the first nine plagues is that God wants to be known. He is displaying to us His character as a just Judge and as a gracious Savior. And I want us to see how He does that in the next four headings, three headings.

### **The Pattern of the Judgment of God**

So first, the priority of the knowledge of God; then secondly, notice the pattern of the judgment of God. The pattern of the judgment of God. Exodus is teaching us here when God acts in judgment He accomplishes a number of things in addition to and as part of the exaltation of His name. He exposes counterfeits, He warns rebels, and He hardens hearts. We saw some of that already last Lord's Day when we looked at the first part of chapter 7 where the magicians were able to reduplicate the miraculous transformation of Moses' rod into a serpent. They could repeat the miracle but they could not overcome it or remove it for that matter and Moses' serpent ate theirs. And the same is true for the first three plagues. They could reduplicate the miracle but they could not end it. They could make things worse but they couldn't make it better until the plague of gnats when even the magicians are forced to confess, "This is nothing less than the finger of God." And so the magicians are exposed as counterfeits and frauds.

## **False gods Exposed**

But so too are the gods of Egypt themselves. The plagues of Egypt are judgments not only upon the people but upon Egypt's false idols and pagan deities. And so Hapi, for example, is the name of the deified Nile River in Egyptian religion. It is worshiped as the giver of life. And here is Hapi, the giver of life, bleeding out. The Nile turned to blood. Hecate, the fertility goddess, her symbol was a frog. The giver of life, the fertility goddess, and here are the frogs piled up dead and rotting in the streets of Egypt. Some fertility goddess Hecate was. The plague of livestock - that's designed to mock the sacred bulls of Egypt. Isis had bull's horns, Hathor has a bovine head; the God Ra was embodied as a bull. They dropped dead at the say-so of the Lord. Amun Ra, the sun god in the ninth plague, is the target of the wrath and judgment of God. His rising was considered to be a sign of the coming of life and his setting of death. But when God speaks, Amun Ra's light does not shine. Even the sun god is judged and darkness reigns over Egypt. Here are the magicians of Egypt, exposed as impotent devotees of pagan deception, and here are the gods of Egypt unmasked as frauds and empty, weak, powerless idols. The plagues of Egypt are designed to tell us idols are empty things and devotion to anyone or anything but to the Lord, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will one day mean being reduced to a laughing stock. God is mocking the mighty claims of Egypt's magicians and their might deities, reducing them to absurdities. I think it was G.K. Chesterton who said that "When we do not believe in God, the alternative is not believing in nothing; it is believing in anything." Be careful where you place your faith, where you rest your trust, your hope, your confidence. If it is not in Christ, then it is an idol, and one day God will expose your idolatry as utter folly.

## **God's Gracious Warnings**

And so the first part of the pattern of judgment is exposing counterfeits. The second has to do with warning rebels. God is not simply acting in wrath; He's also acting in mercy. Every time Moses speaks he offers to Pharaoh a way out, a way of escape from the judgment to come if only he will bow before the Lord God and align his will with the will of the sovereign King. And so God warns rebels. That comes out especially in chapter 9 verse 18. Would you look there with me? Chapter 9 verse 18 - "Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause a very heavy hail to fall. Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die.' Then whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field." What's going on? Judgment is coming! Flee the wrath to God! That's what God sends Moses to tell Egypt. Judgment is coming. Flee the wrath to come. And those who feared the word of the Lord heard the warning and were spared.

It is not an obscure or difficult point to apply, is it? The plagues and judgments of Egypt are but adumbrations. They are hints and shadows, glimpses of the holy wrath of a just God who one day will hold all the world to account in ultimate judgment. And so He is warning us - Flee the wrath to come! Fear the warning and the word of the Lord! And find safety in His mercy! There is yet time. God is not, does not wish that any should perish, but is willing that all should come to repentance, 2 Peter 3 and verse 9, and so He is warning us. He's warning us that He will not wink at sin, that He is a just Judge, and while there is yet time we should flee the wrath to come.

### **The Hardening of Hearts**

And then the third part of the pattern of God's judgment, the hardening of rebel hearts, that is particularly the case with Pharaoh. We've begun to notice this already. Pharaoh seems utterly unwilling to submit to Moses' warnings and to God's rebukes. Actually the chapters before us talk about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in two contrasting ways. Sometimes it is said that Pharaoh hardens his own heart while other times it is said God hardens Pharaoh's heart. That is especially clear if you look at 9:34 through 10:1; 9:34 through 10:1. Turn there please. "When Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants, so the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go into Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart.'" Who hardened Pharaoh's heart? Well Pharaoh hardened Pharaoh's heart, yet it was the will of the Lord that Pharaoh's heart should be hard. Who is responsible for Pharaoh's rebellion? It is Pharaoh, and yet the Lord, in His marvelous sovereign providence, governed even Pharaoh's rebellion that his heart might be hardened, that he might execute his judgment, and the world might know there is none like the Lord our God.

God judges, sometimes by hardening men's hearts and handing them over to their sin and rebellion. And we, as we resist and refuse the warnings of God, harden our own hearts. That is true as much now as it was then. That's why, for example, the writer to the Hebrews is so urgent and insistent as he issues his warnings to us. "Today," he says, "if you hear his word, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Take care, brothers," he says, "lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another, while it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" - Hebrews 3:7-14. You know Pharaoh came awfully close to repentance, awfully close. Chapter 8 verse 25 and 29, he seems to concede and be willing to let Israel go, and then as Moses and Aaron depart he changes his mind. He does the same again in 9:27-28 and 10:16-17, even confessing, "I have sinned. The Lord is right," asking Moses to pray for him and seek his forgiveness. It looks like repentance. It looks like the real deal. But mere words are not good enough. How close Pharaoh came and every time he returned to his rebellion. Be warned, let's be warned, dear friends, that mouthing the words isn't good

enough. A close approximation of repentance isn't close enough. Do not harden your heart; repent, for real, and flee the wrath to come.

### **The Protection of the People of God**

The priority of the knowledge of God, the pattern of the judgment of God, then thirdly the protection of the people of God. The protection of the people of God. I wonder if you notice that while God rains down His wrath on Egypt, He preserves His people; they're safe. Look, for example, at chapter 8:20-23, the plague of flies. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Rise up early in the morning, present yourself to Pharaoh as he goes out to the water. Say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, Let my people go that they may serve me or else, if you will not let my people go, behold I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and on your people.'" Verse 22, "But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen where my people dwell so that no swarm of flies shall be there that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. Thus I will put a division between my people and your people." And you will see the same thing if you look at 9:4 and 9:7 and 9:26 and 10:23. Again and again and again, as the plagues fall on the enemies of God and of His cause, the people of God are safe. There is a safe place in the land of Egypt; it is where the people of God dwell.

### **The True Believer's Safety**

There is safety and refuge from the judgment and wrath of God; it is where the people of God are gathered. There is only one place where you may be free from judgment and condemnation. It is by taking your place through faith in Jesus in the great assembly of the born again. It is belonging to the true people of God. There and only there is security from just judgment. If you are a believer in Jesus today, 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 5 tells you, you are being kept by the power of God for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time. You are safe. Through every trial, in the midst of every storm, He will hold you secure. He will hold you secure and no wrath will ever fall on you. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." If you have fled to Christ, if you are hiding away in the land of Goshen, as it were, where the people of God dwell, you are safe for time and for eternity. What a privilege it is to belong to the people of God, but how vulnerable we all ought to feel if we remain exposed, living in Egypt, rebelling against the Lord and His rule.

### **The Place of the Servant of God**

The priority of the knowledge of God, the pattern of the judgment of God, the protection of the people of God, and then finally, the place of the servant of God. You've noticed, haven't you, how Moses stands as the fulcrum, the pivot point in every single one of these acts of judgment. He warns, Pharaoh resists, Moses

acts, judgment falls, and then Pharaoh asks Moses to pray. And when Moses intercedes, judgment is lifted. It's a picture to us of God's perfect Servant, the Mediator of a better covenant, the greater than Moses by whose obedience and blood, by whose perfect intercession the wrath of God that ought to fall on every rebel heart is lifted. And not merely because He asks, but because He Himself has paid. The wrath of God has fallen, but it fell on Him that it might not fall on us. Safe place, the land of refuge, is entered by faith in Jesus. When He obeys for you and bleeds for you and intercedes for you, the wrath of God that your sin and mine has incurred is born away, having spent itself on Christ crucified.

So the priority of the knowledge of God - God wants to be displayed in all His mighty works. The pattern of the judgment of God - He is warning you to flee to safety. The protection of the people of God - He will always preserve, secure, those who trust in Christ. And the place of the servant of God - rest on Him and you will be safe forever. Let us pray together.

*Father, thank You for the good news about Jesus. Help us to tear from our hearts our idols, to bow before Jesus, even now to repent not with words, not with mere lips, but from our heart, to run for refuge to Christ, and there to find pardon and cleansing and forgiveness. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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