

Exodus 7-10

God's Persistence

A few weeks ago Fox News published the results of an Opinion Dynamics poll on religion in America. As was expected, 92% of the population believes in God. That's a figure that's been pretty steady over the years. 85% said they believe in heaven and about the same number said they believe in hell.

Those are pretty impressive figures. That means that the overwhelming majority of Americans say they believe in God's blessing as well as His judgment.

Of course, almost 1/3 of those same people said they believe in ghosts, astrology, and reincarnation.

In the final analysis, we all end up taking things by faith. The atheist has to take a leap of faith and believe that all of the universe just happened to happen. That takes a lot of faith.

The secular evolutionist has to believe that somehow life forms are becoming more specialized and complex, even though there's not a shred of evidence for it in nature.

We all operate on faith, whether we want to admit it or not.

The question is always, which expression of faith is more reasonable?

Is it reasonable to look at the genetic code, which is complex information, and believe that DNA just happened on it's own, or is it more reasonable to believe that genetic information had an intelligent designer?

Is it more reasonable to believe that the Bible with it's detailed, specific prophecies is merely the compilation of a bunch of men, or is it more reasonable to believe the Bible's claims that it's God breathed?

In the end we all live by faith.

Here at FCC we believe the overwhelming evidence points to the world as God's creation and the Bible as God's inspired Word to us.

The Bible has plenty of evidence to back up it's claims, which is why it's our sole authority here. We use the Bible in classes. We use the Bible from the pulpit. We use the Bible in counseling.

The Bible is trustworthy, but in the end we still have to take what it says by faith. When Fox released the results of that poll on June 18 the headline read "More Believe In God Than Heaven."

They could have alternately titled it "More believe in God than Hell." Somewhere along the line even some people who say they believe in God, have trouble believing in God's blessings and God's judgment.

God's deliverance and blessing is something we take by faith. God's judgment and wrath, is also something we take by faith.

So many times in life it looks like the bad guys are getting away with what their doing and the good people are suffering. It doesn't seem like God's aware, or that God cares.

What's the answer? **Turn to Exodus chapter 7 Pg 55**

This morning we're going to do a Super Big Gulp. We're going to look at chapters 7-10.

Obviously we're not going to read every verse of these chapters, but as we look at the plagues that God brought on Egypt I want us to see those two parallel truths: God's salvation and God's judgment. I want us to see how God is just as serious about the one as the other.

Before we look at Exodus 7 let's do a quick review. The people of Israel had some powerful, specific promises from God. He had promised to make them a great nation, to give them a homeland, and to bless the world through them.

By the time we get to the 15th century BC, the Hebrews have become a very large group of people but they're not in the promised land. They're slaves in Egypt.

God raises up Moses to be their deliverer. By Exodus chapter 7 Moses has gone to the Egyptian Pharaoh and commanded him to let God's people go.

Of course, Pharaoh doesn't believe in the God of Israel, or at least he doesn't believe God has any authority over him.

So Pharaoh refuses to let Israel go and in fact makes their work load harsher. That brings us to Exodus chapter 7

In Exodus 7-11 there's a great drama that's played out. On the earthly stage there's Moses and Pharaoh in opposition to each other. From the divine side it's really a battle between God and Satan.

But we don't get to see Satan operating here. We know from the rest of the Bible how active he is. But what we read in these chapters is the way Moses and the other players in this drama saw things.

God had told Moses ahead of time that Pharaoh wouldn't listen. God even tells Moses back in chapter 4 *I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.*

Now understand that all the Hebrew people have known for the past 400 years is slavery and oppression. To them it looked like the unbelievers had won. They were about out of hope. They struggled to believe that God was ever going to bless, or judge.

Remember, God could have just destroyed the Egyptians and set His people free. He could have rained fire down from heaven, opened up the ground and swallowed them all up, or even raised up another nation to destroy them.

Obviously since God didn't do that, there's a reason. Getting the people out of there and into the Promised Land is important. But there's more that God wants to accomplish along with that.

Ex 7:4-5 The greatest, most powerful nation on earth didn't acknowledge God. When this was over Egypt would know Jehovah is the living God.

Ex 10: 1-2 God wanted to make it absolutely crystal clear to the Hebrews that He alone was the one who delivered them. He wanted them to know that He alone is God. Remember, some of them were worshipping the false Gods of the Egyptians.

Ex 9:15-16 This wasn't just about Egypt or Israel. This was about the whole world.

Isaiah 48:2 *I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another...*

When we did our series on *True Worship* we saw that God is the sum of everything. We said everything is about God.

The Bible is about God, heaven is about God, the church is about God, the Cross is about God. It's all about God. In fact, we said that God is about God.

God's highest value is God. God's highest value is Himself.

Col 1 explains it this way: *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*

All things were created by God and for God. God's highest value is Himself because there's nothing and no one more important in the universe than God.

God is doing us a favor when He points us to Himself. God is letting us in on the blessing of knowing and worshiping the most important, significant, consequential, one of all.

So God not only deserves our worship, we are completely fulfilled when we make our lives about the most important thing of all. If God were to call us to make our lives about anything less than Himself He would be robbing us of the greatest blessing in life.

That God's grace in action. The problem is we're so full of ourselves that we have a hard time seeing that. We don't want to worship God. We want to be our own god.

This whole interchange in these chapters in Exodus is part of the plan and purpose of God to make His personal reality known.

So let's just do an overview of the first 9 of these plagues and see Pharaoh's response.

Read 7: 19-21

You'd think that would be pretty convincing, right there, wouldn't you?

But now look what happens... Vs 22

Three times Pharaoh's magicians do what Moses did. In the beginning of this chapter Moses threw down his staff and it became a snake. They threw down their staffs and they became snakes. Now Moses turns water to blood, the magicians seem to do the same thing.

In the next chapter there's a plague of frogs, the magicians bring up frogs.

What's going on? Here's what I think is happening. God said, I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart so he won't listen to you. This is part of my plan.

There are two main Hebrew words used in Exodus that are translated "harden," *kabed* & *chazaq*.

kabed means "heavy" , "insensitive," immovable." It's the word that's used later when they have to help Moses hold his hands up because they became heavy when he was trying to hold them up a long time.

chazaq means "to strengthen" or "to encourage." It's the same word used in Josh 1:7 where God says, *...be strong and very courageous*

I believe God used an obstinate, stubborn man like Pharaoh to accomplish His purpose.

Pharaoh's already shown how stubborn he is by saying back in chapter 5 *"Who is Jehovah that I should obey His voice..."*

Now, God strengthens Pharaoh's resolve. He doesn't force Pharaoh to do anything. What He does is allow Pharaoh's magicians to duplicate some of these initial miracles.

When that happens Pharaoh is all the more convinced that he doesn't have to listen to any Hebrew God. And Pharaoh's heart becomes all the more hardened.

In other words, Pharaoh makes his own moral decision to oppose God, but God is going to give him the resolve to carry out that opposition, even in the face of these plagues.

Look at the second one. **Read 8:1-7**

Now obviously the magicians were no help. Pharaoh wanted them to get rid of the frogs, not make more frogs.

vs 8

This time it looks like Moses is getting somewhere.

Moses prays, the frogs die, they pile them up in heaps **But, vs 15**

Pharaoh makes a deal with God when the pressure is on, but as soon as the pressure's off the deal is over. How many people are so willing to make deals with God, but how few keep them. Have you ever tried to make a deal with God?

Plague number 3... **Read 8:16-19**

The magicians couldn't duplicate this one but Pharaoh was getting so angry it didn't matter any more.

So now comes the flies. **Read 8:20-25**

Notice how God's ratcheted up the pressure. Egypt gets flies everywhere except Goshen, which was where the Hebrews lived. God is making it real clear to everybody what's going on.

Another deal when the pressure is on. But Moses says we need to leave Egypt. **Vs 28**

Pharaoh says "OK, but don't go far." He's full of compromises.

Once again, God removes the plague and look what happens... **vs 32**

Plague 5 hits the cattle. **Read 9:1-7**

Plague 6 gets real personal now. **Read vs 8-12**

In verse 12 we read this phrase for the first time, *And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh.*

This is so important to understand. God didn't take some willing, compliant man and use him as a puppet with no will. God took a hardened, rebellious, proud man and used him. He strengthened Pharaoh's determination.

God's will is going to be done one way or another. The question for us is, is our life about us or about God?

God's bringing blessing and God's bringing judgment. Those are promises. Which one do you want to be a part of? God is persistent in all that He does. So finally after Pharaoh repeatedly hardens his own heart, God seals things.

The seventh plague comes next. **Read 9:23-28 33-35**

Plague 8 is locusts: **Read 10: 3-4**

Verse 11 Pharaoh's still striking up bargains. He says the men can go but leave the women and children here.

Read 10:12-14

Once again Pharaoh seems to cave in to God's pressure. He even gets real religious.

Read vs 16-17

Of course when the locusts are gone he's just as stubborn as ever.

Then finally for this morning God brings plague number 9.

Read 22-24

This guy never stops bargaining with God, does he? He hangs on to control with all he's worth.

Pharaoh was trying to negotiate with God! But God doesn't negotiate. God does not put morality, ethics, right and wrong up for a vote. He sets the standard! We don't negotiate, we listen and obey.

As we'll see next week, Pharaoh ends up losing everything that was dear to him including his own life. He experienced the reality of God's judgment first hand.

Having a hard heart is a dangerous thing. It seems like the more Pharaoh opposed God the harder his heart became.

Think about it. Doesn't the same thing happen on a regular basis today? Aren't there plenty of people who've closed their ears to the things of God? It isn't that they haven't heard. . . it's that they won't hear. And the scary thing, is this kind of hardness doesn't just come out of no where. It grows in us. As we ignore God in the little things of life, it becomes easier to ignore Him in the big things.

* The embezzler doesn't start by siphoning off funds. They begin by taking little things.

* The perjurer doesn't begin lying in court, they learn to lie by distorting the truth in little things

* The adulterer doesn't set out to commit adultery, they begin with flirting, inappropriate conversations, little compromises with evil.

* The murderer doesn't start off with murder. Little by little he begins to deaden his conscience in small acts that teach disregard for human life

Our little compromises with evil builds a hardness on our heart that deadens our conscience so that we no longer feel guilty. And then we conclude that if we don't feel guilty, we aren't guilty. Before long we are engaged in behavior that we would have never believed we were capable.

Other people see it in us but we don't see it in ourselves.

God is a God of salvation and deliverance. He is also a God of judgment.

In the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, we get God's blueprint for the end times. When you read through it you find a startling parallel to the plagues in Egypt.

God will send two witnesses to work miracles before His enemies

God will protect His own people from the judgements

Water will be turned to blood

Unclean spirits like frogs will appear

A plague of locusts will be sent

Ugly and painful sores will break out on the people

Terrible hailstones (and fire mixed with blood) will rain down from heaven There will be awful darkness

The hearts of the people will be so hard that they still won't call on God for mercy.

The Exodus might have happened 3400 years ago but the message in the plagues is real and practical for us today.

When God says He judges those who rebel against Him, believe it. When God says He delivers people of faith from judgment you can believe that too.

Joh 3:36 *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

God's wrath crashing down is a awesome sight. It's surprising to see him bring thunder and hail - pestilence - boils - and harden a man's heart.

But it's even more astonishing to see the wrath of God come down on His only Son on the cross. To see the blood come from his nail pierced hands. To see his feet nailed together. To hear Him gasping for breath and finally crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

God ways are so different than ours. He's the God who judges and the God who saves.

Which one is He to you?

The judgment of God, just like His salvation, is something we have to believe and apply by faith. In Psalm 73 David, looks at his life and says the wicked aren't suffering for their sin. They're prospering, while the righteous seem to be the ones who suffer.

It's no different for us today. So many times it looks like sin is profitable, while righteousness is painful.

The key is to remember that God judges and God blesses in His time and in His own way. And God is persistent.

David wrote: my feet had almost stumbled; *My steps had nearly slipped.*
For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

He said I almost lost my faith in God. Then he did something: *When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me-- Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.*

He David got his eyes off the immediate, and put them on the eternal saw things from God's perspective.

How are you seeing life today? God never gave up until His final destruction came upon Egypt. God never gave up until His people were delivered. God never gave up until His fame and majesty was made known.

Is God pursuing you today? What's it going to be? Judgment or blessing? Hardness or a receptive heart?

Chuck Swindoll. Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication. *"You may be in the danger zoneYou have played fast and loose with your life, ignoring warning after warning. You have shoved aside essential truths for so long that your heart has become hardened. And the longer you harden it, the more difficult it will be to allow God's light to finally break through."*

The New Testament warns in Hebrews 3 *"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts..."*