

JANUARY 24

Exodus 8-11

Today you read Exodus chapters 8 – 11, and in these chapters encountered the ongoing contest between Jehovah, the God of Israel, and all the gods of Egypt. I want to trace this ongoing conflict with you on a few different levels.

First, I want us to see the struggle of one man – Pharaoh, against his creator – Pharaoh, the lord of the earth, against Jehovah, the Lord of all creation. The most basic lesson to be learned from this contest is very simple: It is absolutely futile and ridiculous to attempt to fight against God. You cannot ever win that fight - not even if your name is Pharaoh.

There is a fascinating progression here in this "one-on-one" contest: Moses' initial audience with Pharaoh is brief and very decisive. Moses, in true prophetic fashion says, "Thus saith the Lord -- Let my people go." Pharaoh's response is, "Who is He? Who is the Lord? I don't know Him." Moses turns the Nile River to blood and Pharaoh is unimpressed - there is no response. He just walks away - maybe he thought it was the sorcerer's trick. Seven days pass and Moses and Aaron show up again this time bringing frogs.

By now God has succeeded in gaining the attention of Pharaoh. He calls Moses and Aaron in and asks them to pray to the Lord to take away the frogs. 'If you do, I'll let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.' That is significant theological progress on the part of Pharaoh. He has decided that the God of Israel has real power and he has concluded that the prayers of righteous men are effective. "Moses" - please pray for us - but do it tomorrow. (Maybe they'll go away on their own tonight and I won't have to humble myself in this way!) The frogs didn't go away by themselves, but when Moses prayed the frogs left, and so did Pharaoh's sense of repentance.

Next came the gnats - Pharaoh scratches, but he doesn't repent.

The flies work though, but only temporarily. Pharaoh now knows he can't ignore this Israelite God, so he tries to strike a bargain. "You can go worship God, but don't leave Egypt!!!" Another lesson to be learned: God doesn't negotiate - it's always His terms, or no terms! - With a warning, Moses prays again and Pharaoh forgets his repentance.

Then the livestock die - Pharaoh sends men to check out the death toll among the Israelite cattle. There isn't any. But Pharaoh digs his heels in deeper - he still won't let go.

Boils are the same - no response.

Hail comes, a killer storm, the likes of which Egypt has never before seen in its history - and Pharaoh is broken a bit. He says to Moses, "*I have sinned*." That is a

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new word for Pharaoh. The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are wrong. You can go." But when the thunder and hail stopped, Pharaoh sins again and changes his mind.

Locusts bring about another round of repentance and bargaining, and now it is, "you can go - but not all of you." Then, "oh, all right - I've sinned again God and against you. Please forgive me."

Then comes the darkness, and Pharaoh's nerve begins to break. "Go - all of you. Go - just take away the darkness." Finally Pharaoh's heart has been hardened so often that it has set in concrete. He no longer can change.

Did you notice that Pharaoh wants the rescue of God, but not to submit to God. Do you know how much this is like all of us? We often want God to get us out of a jam, or give us the blessing, but we are resistant to just do what he says. If this is the case for you, then who is really God?

There is one other level upon which I would like to trace this conflict with you, and that is the level of the nations. Egypt was probably the single most powerful nation in the known world at the time of the exodus. Whether you accept an early or late date for Moses' historical milieu, makes no difference. Egypt was a world-class power throughout the whole of both periods. In chapter 9, verse 16, God tells Pharaoh that He has raised him up for the very purpose of showing his power, and so that the name of Jehovah will be proclaimed throughout the earth. This whole contest has missionary implications! Every nation turns its eye toward the strongest nation on earth. What happens there has worldwide implications. By dealing with Egypt progressively, one plague at a time - judgment upon judgment upon judgment - God is demonstrating both his omnipotence and Egypt's impotence. As word trickles out of Egypt by courier, and by traveling caravan, and departing ship, the whole known world is progressively drawn into the role of spectator to this great contest. The fame of Jehovah spreads - the name of Moses is repeated in far flung places, and back in Canaan the people begin to tremble in anticipation of a conflict that they may already sense is coming to them. Out of this whole line of thought emerges a truth that clamors for our attention. God's judgments of men and nations oft times have an evangelistic motive. In judging one, publicly and decisively, God announces His reality to the others, and the opportunity for repentance is opened.

When God has a plan it is a SERIOUS plan. Check this out tomorrow to see the climax of this plan and another glimpse at Jesus....