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Teaching Notes

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The Plagues Begin

Exodus 7

I. Overview

A. Exodus 1-6: A Careful Look at the Deliverer (Moses)

1. a look at the deadly persecution of Israel in Egypt
2. account of Moses' birth, his mother's action & miraculous preservation by God
3. Moses' training in Egypt
4. the murder Moses committed, trying to accomplish Israel's deliverance himself
5. his life in Midian
6. his calling by God at the burning bush, complete with his attempts to avoid the service
7. his complete provision by God who commissioned him and equipped him to serve
8. the message he delivered to Pharaoh; Pharaoh's hardness; the worsening condition for Israel
9. the unbelief of Israel
10. the unbelief of Moses himself

A.W. Pink: Moses himself was deeply dejected, and Chapter 6 closes with the Lord's servant bemoaning the seeming hopelessness of his task. Thus the *weakness* of the instrument was fully manifested that it might better be seen that the power was of Jehovah alone, and that Jehovah acted not in response to faith but in covenant faithfulness and in sovereign grace."

B. Exodus 7-12 The Work of Redemption: God's Mighty Hand in Delivering Israel

1. Moses undergoes a remarkable transformation: no longer weak, cowardly, unbelieving
2. More a matter of actions than words... the time for talk is done... it is now a time for mighty deeds

3. This is a thrilling drama unfolding before our eyes, a story of the mighty power of God to strike down the oppressors of His people
4. A powerful struggle between GOOD and EVIL... played out on a grand stage, for all the world to see!!
5. Really a struggle between God and His agent, Moses vs. Satan and his agent, Pharaoh
6. The delay of the struggle gave opportunity for a full display of key issues:
 - a. human responsibility... as each plague preceded by a warning and an opportunity for Pharaoh to repent
 - b. divine sovereignty: even over the heart of a Pharaoh
 - c. the minute nature of God's sovereign power... power over every detail of His world
 - d. the testing of the saints... the trying of their patience
 - e. the full display of God's attributes in glory
7. The conclusion of the struggle (indeed all along the way!!) shows a complete vindication of God's goodness and power over the devil's wickedness and power
8. Redemption was accomplished with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm

II. Plagues against the deities

A. A Direct Attack on Egypt's Gods and Goddesses

1. Ten plagues in all... everyone a display of God over the pagan deities of Egypt

Numbers 33:3-4 They marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians, who were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them; for the LORD had brought judgment on their gods.

God intended to strike Egypt and their gods with his mighty power:

"For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord" (Exodus 12:12).

2. Egyptians saturated with religion... it permeated every area of their lives

3. Polytheists: gods and goddesses with specific realms... they scrupulously tried to please them

"They had 39 principal gods, many of them depicted in Egyptian art with animal bodies or heads. In Egyptian temples, priests cared for many types of sacred animals that represented deities."

God directed each of the 10 plagues against Egyptian gods that ostensibly held sway over an aspect of nature. The plagues represented, collectively, a dramatic demonstration to Israelite and Egyptian alike that the gods were false; they were powerless to come to the aid of anyone who implored them.

B. The Plagues: An Overview

1. The first plague: the plague of blood
 - a. an attack on Egypt's most vital life source: the Nile river
 - b. ALSO an attack on the gods associated with the Nile
 - c. Egypt's existence: water and food supply... depended on flooding of Nile, annual soil deposits from upper Egypt
 - d. failure to overflow banks resulted in famine
 - e. too great an overflow resulted in flooding

The first plague was aimed at the most venerable and valuable resource of Egyptian civilization, the powerful Nile River, along with the gods the Egyptians associated with it. Egypt's food supply depended on the flooding of the Nile, as well as its annual deposits of silt to replenish the fertility of the soil. Sometimes, as in Joseph's day, failure of the Nile to overflow its banks would result in a famine. So the Egyptians prayed regularly to their gods for abundant water. The first plague made the water undrinkable and rancid. The fish, a valuable source of food, perished.

The Egyptians counted on the Nile goddess Hapi and the powerful Osiris to protect the Nile. Nothing resulted from the clamor and prayers of the Egyptians that their gods would purify the Nile. Only when Moses and Aaron prayed to the true God were the waters refreshed. Yet Pharaoh remained proud. He believed a host of powerful gods were waiting to do his bidding; indeed Pharaoh himself was considered a god by most Egyptians.

2. The second plague: frogs

The second plague targeted one of the creatures the Egyptians associated with the Nile. Egyptians worshiped the frog in the form of Heqt, whose statue bore the head of a frog. This god was symbolic of good crops and blessings in the afterlife. Egyptians noticed that, when the Nile reached a certain level and overflowed, frogs abounded. Their presence was an omen of bountiful crops and control of the insect population. A low Nile with few frogs meant a lack of silt, poor crops and many insects.

Heqt, god of the frogs, supposedly controlled the frog population. When the second plague produced too many frogs, it appeared to the Egyptians that the god who governed them had lost control. No amount of prayers and incense altered the situation. Only when the true God intervened did the frogs die and the crisis end.

3. The third and fourth plagues: lice and flies

The third and fourth plagues featured another favorite god of the Egyptians, Kheper, the scarab deity represented by beetles and other insects. The image of the scarab god appeared frequently on amulets. "The cult to flies, and especially of the beetles, was an important part of the ancient Egyptian religion" (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Exegetical Commentary of the Bible, Vol. 1, p. 67). "Various types of beetles were venerated in Egypt; among them the dung beetle [which] became the emblem of resurrection and continual existence . . ." (The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 4, p. 258).

When a swarm of lice or gnats (or possibly mosquitoes) and horseflies stung the populace, the court magicians asked the insect god to control them, but to no avail. Only when Pharaoh pleaded with Moses to ask the God of Israel to remove the pests did the plague abate.

4. The fifth plague: livestock diseased

- a. sacred cow for Egyptians: Apis, the bull god... Hathor, cow-like mother goddess
- b.

The next plague affected cattle, which the Egyptians considered to be under the control of Apis, the bull god, and Hathor, the cowlike mother goddess. The bull was considered sacred. When the bull in a temple died, it was mummified and buried with great pomp. The fifth plague struck at this mode of worship. "So the Lord did this thing on the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the children of Israel, not one of them died" (Exodus 9:6). No amount of pagan prayer could alter the outcome.

5. The sixth plague: boils

Next came a plague of boils, which the Egyptians thought they could cure by resorting to their god of medicine, Imhotep, a legendary Egyptian physician who came to be worshiped. They also revered Thoth, the god of magic and healing. But again in this case the boils did not go away. Even worse, the court magicians who besought these entities were themselves covered with the pestilence: "And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians" (verse 11).

Again, Pharaoh and other Egyptians pleaded with Moses that God would take away the problem. God's power to remove this plague served as a witness not only to the Egyptians and the Israelites, but to the rest of the world. God told Pharaoh: "But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth" (verse 16). This witness remains with us today through the Bible account.

6. The seventh plague: hail... the eighth plague: locusts

The seventh and eighth plagues struck Egypt's crops. First, a horrible hailstorm hit the harvest, then a swarm of locusts completed the destruction. The crops were supposed to be guarded by Seth, the harvest god, and it was up to Nut, the sky goddess, to prevent weather disasters. Yet the pleas of the Egyptians fell on deaf ears. Pharaoh was running out of gods to protect his people.

God strikes the mightiest

7. The ninth and tenth plagues: striking Egypt's most powerful gods of all

The final two plagues were directed at the two mightiest gods of the Egyptians, Ra the chief god, represented by the sun, and Pharaoh himself.

Egyptians believed Ra to be the source of life, bringing light and heat to the earth. The ninth plague brought three days of no sunlight. The darkness was so "thick," says Scripture, that even lamps could not dispel the blackness. "So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10:22-23).

In spite of the prayers and supplications the Egyptians must have offered up to Ra, the sun god did nothing.

The final god in dire need of humbling was Pharaoh himself, who supposedly descended from the god Ra. Pharaoh's patron gods were Osiris, the judge of the dead, and Horus, the god of light. Egyptian worship of the Pharaohs found expression in the construction for their leaders of great pyramids as tombs. The 10th plague struck even the offspring of the Egyptians' man-god.

Pharaoh himself was powerless to stop the death of his firstborn son, who was next in line to sit worthy of Egyptians' worship. "And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock" (Exodus 12:29). With his gods impotent and humiliated, mighty Pharaoh finally relented, and the Exodus of the children of Israel began.

III. A.W. Pink on Exodus 7

Exodus 7:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. 2 You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.

- Amazing turn of events here!! Moses had just gotten done wailing about the weakness of his verbal skills

Exodus 6:30 But Moses said to the LORD, "Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?"

- God re-establishes Moses' focus where it needed to be... off himself and onto the mighty God who is controlling this entire deliverance
- Strong language! The prophet stands in the place of God to the people.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. 16 For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." 17 The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. 19 If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.

- Acting in God's place, Moses was to rule over proud Pharaoh, Egypt's king. Moses would punish Pharaoh when he acted wrongly, reward him for proper responses. Proud Pharaoh would have to apply to Moses for relief
- Aaron would stand as Moses' spokesman, just as Moses stood as God's
- BUT neither Moses nor Aaron was free to write their own lines. They had to speak and act exactly as God told them to do

vs. 2 You are to say everything I command you

- Moses' failure to obey this principle would cost him entry into the Promised Land
- This is still true today of ministers of the Gospel

2 Timothy 4:1-2 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction.

1 Timothy 6:3 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing.

- It is not my right to improvise or entertain you with stories I have made up
- Nor am I allowed to drop out any of God's words that modern man thinks unpopular

vs. 2 *You are to say everything I command you*

Acts 20:26-27 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

- Next, God promises to harden Pharaoh's heart so that God will have the full opportunity to pour out ALL His miracles and judgments on Pharaoh and on Egypt

3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, 4 he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. 5 And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."

- The purpose of this hardening is a FULL DISPLAY of God's attributes and power, so that all nations would know that He is the Lord
- This doctrine of the hardening of a human heart is one of the most serious and solemn doctrines in all the Scriptures
- Modern people have a very hard time accepting that God would ever do this to a human heart... they assume God would only allow us full free choices at every moment
- Some say it only means that God permitted Pharaoh to harden his own heart
- Now the Scriptures also teach that Pharaoh hardened his own heart... both doctrines are true... we will discuss this doctrine more in depth later on
- YET God does harden people's hearts:

Deuteronomy 2:30 But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through. For the LORD your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands, as he has now done.

- Next we have an account of Moses and Aaron's obedience to the commands of God... they followed His instructions perfectly

vs. 6-10 *Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded them. 7 Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh. 8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 9 "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake." 10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake.*

vs. 11-13 *Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: 12 Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. 13 Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.*

- Pharaoh's hardened heart had external causes, as well as internal ones. God permitted the magicians of Egypt to mimic Moses' miracles to a point
- This power to deceive becomes one of the major themes of the first few plagues
- It will occur again at the end of the world

Matthew 24:24 *For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible.*

2 Thessalonians 2:9 *The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,*

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake.

16 Then say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert. But until now you have not listened.

17 This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood.

18 The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water."

19 The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt-- over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs'-- and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars."

20 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood.

21 The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt.

- This is a great judgment on Egypt, and a cause for great suffering. Water is absolutely essential for life.
- Notice the detail concerning the judgment: water that a moment before had been fresh, standing in a separate container, perhaps a wooden bucket on a table, suddenly turned to blood. There is no human explanation for this
- Very much like the container of wine vinegar at the foot of the cross... it's the tiny details that show the immense power of God
- This judgment will be repeated at the end of the world, on a much grander scale

Revelation 8:8-9 The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, 9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

22 But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

23 Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart.

- Notice however that they did not do what one would expect: to reverse the judgment of God. This they had no power to do

24 And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.

25 Seven days passed after the LORD struck the Nile.