

What's the Message – Lesson 23

Today's study is entitled: Let My People Go.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that God will use this study to open our minds to a deeper understanding, not only of His power and might, but also His grace and mercy to those who love Him. Amen.

In the last lesson we saw Moses offering excuses, trying to get out of being involved in the plan of freeing His people Israel from their slavery in Egypt. This time, in chapter five of Exodus, we see Moses and Aaron standing boldly before Pharaoh, demanding that he let Israel go to worship the Lord. As we might have expected, in verse two, Pharaoh replies sarcastically: “Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go.”

Then we read in the rest of chapter 5 that Pharaoh decides the Israelites are idle and do not have enough work to do to keep them busy, so he orders the taskmasters not to provide them with the straw needed to produce the daily quota of bricks. They would have to get the straw themselves. But the quota was also not to be lowered. This, of course, led to the workers complaining to Moses that he was the cause of this increase in drudgery and had made their conditions only worse.

In chapters 6 and 7 we see two key statements that follow this complaint. The first statement reads: But the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”

And the second statement adds: And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.

So in chapter 7 verse 16, Moses says to Pharaoh: The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; and behold, you have not yet obeyed.” Thus says the Lord, “By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand, and it shall be turned to blood, and the fish in the Nile shall die . . .

And so the ten plagues begin. With the pain of each plague in turn Pharaoh initially gives in to the request of Moses, but later recants and refuses when the pain is ended. Each plague touches a new phase of Egyptian life, proceeding in order from chapter seven through chapter twelve: the second plague, of frogs; . . . the third, of gnats; . . . the fourth, of flies; . . . the fifth, of cattle dying; . . . the sixth, of boils; . . . the seventh, of hail; . . . the eighth, of locusts; . . . the ninth, of darkness; . . . and finally, the tenth, the death of the firstborn in each family, beginning with Pharaoh himself.

And there, Teacher, we have a brief summary of these early chapters of Exodus, which was one of the most famous episodes in the history of the people of Israel. But now, what do those facts mean to us in our lives today? Teacher, what is the message?

The important thing for us to see is that this experience is a two-edged sword, with lessons of justice and mercy for both the Egyptians as well as Moses and the people of Israel.

This is a new generation of the chosen ones, a new generation that needed to learn the same lesson that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had learned – the lesson of trusting The Lord completely. But it was a lesson that they would not learn immediately.

The Egyptians needed to learn that The Lord was the only true God, and that the gods of Egypt were false gods and powerless before Him. So the plagues attacked the basic structure of Egyptian worship and cultural standards, showing the impotence of their gods before the might of Yahweh. The first plague, for example, attacked one of the most visible and important symbols of Egypt – the god of the Nile River, Hopi – and turned this symbol of renewed life into a cause of death.

The second plague was with frogs. Strange as it may seem to us today, frogs were associated by the ancient Egyptians with their fertility gods. But now, instead of life, they piled up in their homes, died, and stank. In the third plague, Aaron struck the earth with his rod and gnats came forth. All of a sudden the Egyptian soil did not produce wholesome food, but biting gnats that were everywhere. And so it continued throughout all the rest. Mighty bulls were widely worshipped and adored, but they were not strong enough to withstand Yahweh, and many cattle died.

The important sun-god, Re, was overcome by the word of Yahweh, and deep darkness covered all of Egypt, except that area where the Israelites lived. What a clear and unmistakable contrast! Yet, Pharaoh would not obey. And he was not just some run-of-the-mill minor league king. Many scholars today think that he was the mighty Ramses the Great, himself. Finally, beginning with the great king and proceeding throughout the country, the first-born in every family would die.

As we read in chapter 12, verse 12: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord.” It is an ancient lesson that still needs to be learned today. The message is simply this: The Lord God is all-powerful, and is to be trusted and obeyed.

Our next lesson will deal with the significance of the Passover.

This series has been developed and written by our director of teacher training, Mr. D. A. Senter, and is copyrighted by Lamb of God Lutheran Church in Flower Mound, Texas. Your narrator is Dale Gaus.

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