

JANUARY 29

Exodus 7:25-9:35

On p. 110 of the BKC it mentions that the time frame of the plagues was probably from July to April.

Exodus 7:25 Just for reference we are told the plague of blood in the Nile lasted for seven days. You can imagine that after each plague, there would have been lots of clean up from the devastation.

Exodus 8

Vs. 1-15 This second plague brought frogs over all of Egypt. How harmful could this be? Along with this the Egyptians had a god with a frog's head and it was against the law to kill frogs.

V. 7 Notice that the magicians did the same thing, but they didn't make them go away, so Pharaoh had to ask for Moses' help.

V. 15 Notice that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. He must have thought this was a cute trick, to lie and get a reprieve. What we don't see in this is that God was slowly destroying the economy of Egypt and weakening the nation.

Vs. 16-19 The third plague was the production of swarms of gnats. These were probably the biting kind.

Some say that the reason the magicians couldn't imitate this miracle was that Satan's power does not extend to the creation of life. I'm not sure that the frog "event" just involved rounding up all the already existent frogs, but I can see that. To take dust, and turn it into living things is definitely a "class A" miracle, and I guess it shows us something about the spiritual world.

Note the repeated phrase regarding Pharaoh's hardness, *as the Lord had said*. God was encouraging Moses and Aaron in this conflict by already telling them what would happen, and thereby, to expect this and to be strong and go forward. For us as disciples, this is why it is important to live in the Word. God tells us stuff like this all the time. A case in point is what Jesus tells His disciples in John 13-17. We are to expect opposition; God says so. But in opposition, we also can expect God's presence and working to bear fruit.

Vs. 20-32 This is the fourth plague, biting flies.

Notice that with the fourth plague, God makes a division between the people of Israel and the people of Egypt. This means that Israel had also experienced the other stuff. God is a good teacher. Why do you think God let them experience the first three and now will keep them separate? In a way He does the same with us. He allows us to experience tough times, so we'll appreciate His blessing and the privilege of being able to follow Him as disciples in the harvest. I know I can take a lot for granted, unless He teaches me to value it.

Isn't it interesting that God could "ruin the land" by something as simple as frogs, gnats and flies? We have all this technology and think we're so strong, and God can humble us with things we don't even think about. I'll bet the Egyptian FEMA was completely unprepared.

V. 32 Notice who hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Exodus 9

Vs. 1-7 This fifth plague brought death to all the livestock in Egypt, except in Goshen where Israel lived.

So, pausing at the fifth plague, overlooking the fields of dead animals, what do you think "Joe" Egyptian was thinking? Does it seem to you that things are escalating? It seems interesting that

we don't hear anything of the Egyptians themselves crying out to God. FYI, in Revelation, when similar things are happening, people don't cry out to God either; they just keep getting madder at Him and kill His people.

After the shock of losing all their animals, they noticed that the animals in Goshen were living. I'm sure Pharaoh thought he was clever going up there and taking the livestock.

Vs. 8-12 This is the sixth plague: boils. Goshen was spared, but even the magicians couldn't be clever now.

Finally God hardens Pharaoh's heart. I'll throw out something here we'll see later with others, especially King Ahab, that when people have their hearts set to be stubborn or disobedient or stupid, God intensifies their bent. That means, they would naturally have done it anyway, and so God intensifies their stubbornness to the point that their sin is visible to everyone. I don't think Pharaoh would have changed his mind here and that God forced him to resist. I think God intensified his hardness to the degree that it had no semblance of rationality. The effect will be that Pharaoh's own people will start yelling at him.

Vs. 13-35 This is the seventh plague, killer hail. Note that God gave fair warning. There were Egyptians who feared the Lord; and, as we will read later, many Egyptians went with the people of Israel when they left Egypt.

Vs. 14-17 This is a very powerful passage that Paul quotes in Romans 9:17. It gives us an explanation of why God doesn't remove the wicked who He knows will not repent. He uses them for His glory.

V. 27 So how do you view this admission? The land was ruined by now and I'm sure many officials were doubting Pharaoh's divinity and his sanity. I don't think there is sincere repentance here. I think this is like a drunk driver who wrecks his car and goes back to drinking. The sorrow is for a moment.

V. 35 Pharaoh hardens his own heart.

Notice that we are reminded that it was all going as God said it would. As disciples we need to remember, too, that Jesus has promised both joy and opposition as we work to bear fruit in the harvest. In our work, as we're seeing here with Moses, God will win.

Matthew 19:13-30

Vs. 13-15 The disciples were repeat offenders regarding stiff-arming children. Children have a God-given ability to believe and trust. Anyone who has worked with children knows, that properly taught, kids can make a valid, strong, saving commitment to Christ at a very young age. To ignore this openness allows sin to grow in their lives, and allows their hearts to become distrustful and complicated like this next guy.

Vs. 16-22 This guy was a nice guy and Mark says that Jesus loved him. Loving him meant extending the offer to follow, but, in love, Jesus had to put His finger on the idol in this person's life. If you look at this challenge Jesus gave him, you can see a couple different areas where there would have been conflict; but the real answer was in really believing in Jesus and wanting to follow Him. Jesus told the Twelve they couldn't serve two masters. Here was proof.

So many of the verses dealing with following Christ end with the idea that He must be our passion, our Lord, and the most important thing/person in our life. If this is so, following is natural. If this isn't the case, following becomes doing religious things, like going to church and giving money, to convince ourselves and others that we are followers.

Vs. 23-30 Lots of good stuff here, so just a few notes.

Almost all who live in the western world are rich according to biblical standards. How hard is it to depend on Christ and follow Him when we can buy comfort and convenience? I think we fool ourselves thinking it is easy to follow Christ in the land of milk and honey. We end up living lives that are only shadows of what it means to follow Christ in this dying world. I'm challenging myself on this one all the time.

Lots of people "wax elephants" regarding the "eye of the needle." Just to simplify, Luke, the doctor, uses the word for "surgical" or "sewing" needle. No kneeling camel would have gotten through there.

V. 25 The disciples understood what Jesus was saying and were *greatly astonished*. We go, "null problemo." And therefore, our lives as disciples have lots of problemoes. We need to take this seriously. I don't think Jesus was saying that if they had mansions and Mercedes and billions, they would have a hard time giving that up to get into heaven. The apostles would have understood that. I think what blew them away was that Jesus meant that if they had more than what was currently in their possession, it would keep them from being fully dependent on Him. Any desire for possessions was enough to keep a lost person lost. The desire for stuff hurts us. *And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.* (Luke 8:14, RSV)

Vs. 27-30 Once again Jesus confirms that there are rewards in following Him. The Twelve would receive something that no other believers would receive because of their sacrificial following. The rewards are meant to encourage us and we are encouraged and commanded to seek them.

The crux of the matter in following Christ in the harvest, bearing fruit, making disciples, who make disciples, is what we are willing to give up and sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed and we are to follow Him in this. But we are scared silly thinking of what we'll have to give up. I'm amazed, given the deadly gravity of the situation on earth and the dying people around us, that God decides to give us anything. God could just command it without any mention of reward. I watched "Band of Brothers" and "The Pacific." When you see what these guys had to endure in battle, not only the conditions of heat or cold but the maggots, you think that God could expect the same from us. But instead He *richly bestows on us everything to enjoy*. The real paradox here, and what separates the men from the boys, is that true closeness to Jesus and the

true riches of His blessings and joy are found in the middle of the harvest field. Those who dwell on the outskirts only know the blessings of the outskirts.

Psalm 24

Once again a beautiful psalm. When we read psalms like this we need to appreciate that God wrote this in David's heart through hardship and longing. But look what came out. The Lord does this with us too.

Vs. 1-2 Notice that the testimony of the Lord is available for all men everywhere to see, because it is in all the world.

Vs. 3-6 David understood that salvation would be extended to all men and all nations. The question of "who" is answered in seeking the Lord. Even if man would not seek God on his own, God puts so much testimony before us that the heart is encouraged to seek.

Note that vs. 7-10 were used by Handel in the "Messiah." In fact, one of my favorite German Christmas songs comes from these verses.

Proverbs 6:1-5

The thing to look at here, which will come up again, is the warning about being deeply connected to others who have different values. Many preachers will use these verses to say that God is against co-signing for a loan for your kids or a relative. There might be some wisdom even there, but still, I think the force here is against making yourself responsible or liable for someone with very different values. This would be along the lines of what God says via Paul about being unequally yoked to unbelievers. Actually, I've met some believers I wouldn't go into business with. The principle and warning is here. We need to bring this before the Lord before we make a tight connection with anyone.

As disciples, we need to be understanding, and ask God about everything. In our desire to help the lost and needy, we don't need to be God for them. God will take care of people without us having to take out a second mortgage on the house. In the same way, when we hook up with other Christians in the harvest, who are different enough to keep us from doing God's work, it can also lead to malfunctions. There is a good reason for different churches and different confessions. Sadly, if we all had to work together, we'd probably never get anything done.