



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



EXODUS 7 - 14

Exodus 7

7:1-3 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."

The Lord had just commanded Moses to return to Pharaoh with the Lord's message. Moses balked at the thought of speaking to Pharaoh again because Pharaoh had disregarded him the first time. Moses asked the Lord why Pharaoh would listen to him. Now the Lord answers the concern of Moses in a way that strengthens the heart of Moses and also takes Pharaoh down a level in the eyes of Moses. The Lord is going to make Moses "God to Pharaoh..." Moses has seen Pharaoh as too large until this point. The Lord is announcing to Moses how He sees Pharaoh and where He has appointed for Moses to stand in relationship to Pharaoh. Remember Pharaoh was considered a god among men by the Egyptians. This role description by the Lord confirms for Moses that not only is Pharaoh not going to be like a god to him anymore, but that because of his role as the messenger of the one true God, Moses will actually be like God to Pharaoh. Additionally Aaron will serve as the prophet of Moses. This is all to demonstrate how far down the pecking order Pharaoh really is. He sees himself as a god, but the true order of spiritual authority will be Yahweh, then Moses, then Aaron, and only then Pharaoh. One of God's great works in the events about to unfold will be the humiliation of the ruler of Egypt who had been so arrogant as to designate himself as a god.

The Lord alerts Moses once again as He has before that the release of Israel that the Lord has promised is not going to be immediate. The Lord will bring Israel out of Egypt, but first He has some unfinished business with Pharaoh and Egypt. In order to accomplish all that He has planned the Lord must insure that Pharaoh does not give in too quickly. The Lord has planned a multiplied series of signs and wonders for Egypt. These signs are commonly known as the Ten Plagues. They are not all literally plagues, as in diseases, and the term Ten Plagues is nowhere used in the Bible, but was coined later as a way of describing these events. As we will see in the study of each of these signs of the Lord, each one was a necessary aspect of the Lord's plan. If Pharaoh were to release Israel too soon, critical elements of the Lord's message to Egypt would be left out. Therefore, the Lord announces again that He is going to spiritually deal with Pharaoh's heart to insure His plan is fulfilled.

The way the Lord is going to deal with Pharaoh is by hardening his heart. Many struggle with this concept because at first glance it seems as though it is not right or fair for the Lord to do this to Pharaoh. First we should be clear that Pharaoh is no innocent victim here as though he was a pure and good ruler that God turned

bad. God hardening his heart is making his heart more firm in the direction it was already inclined. Even so, does God really have the right to do so to a man's heart? Yes, God as the creator of all has the right of ownership. "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." (Proverbs 21:1). "So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." (Romans 9:18). Many are uncomfortable with this principle because the concept of God being in charge to such a deep degree is unsettling or even frightening. It is indeed unsettling for a person who lives under the impression that they are in complete control over their own life. The Bible gives us unsettling truth which leads to a deeper security in our sovereign God rather than the false comfort of the illusion of human control.

7:4-5 - "When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst."

In referring to the eventual release of Israel, the Lord describes that He will "bring out My hosts..." The hosts here are the people of Israel. The word chosen by the Lord to describe them on that day is intentional and awesome in its implications. Hosts is a military term. It describes the orderly arrangement of an army. Israel at this present moment could hardly be compared to an army. They were a nation of slaves. They were not armed nor trained to be warriors. Even their disposition was oriented more to their slavery than to any real hope of freedom. Yet, the Lord chose to describe Israel not just as an army but as His army! This is a prophetic description by the Lord of what He is going to accomplish in and with Israel. It is not about what they are today, but what they will be when God accomplishes His purpose for them. In a similar way, in the New Testament, we are each saved from the spiritual slavery of our old life. When the Lord saves us He joins our lives to His church. In terms of who we were before Christ laid His hand of salvation upon us, we were far from special. His salvation gives us a new identity and a new purpose. He transforms spiritual slaves into spiritual warriors, and calls us His army.

The Lord announces here that He is going to cause Israel's release by a series of what He calls "great judgments." What we call the Ten Plagues, God calls great judgments. In other words, the ten signs and wonders He is about to do are not mere displays of God's power, but they are specifically targeted judgments from God. Biblically, judgments are long deserved responses of God's justice because of the mounting sins of the people judged. In this case, the judgments will fall upon the nation of Egypt implying that they deserve what they are about to receive. What sins of Egypt are the reason why God will send these great judgments? The sins of Egypt were numerous, but the target of the Lord is to deal with the idolatry of Egypt. The nation worshipped a number of gods. Each of the ten great judgments that will strike Egypt in these next chapters is a specific

judgment upon one of the false gods of the Egyptians. Each judgment will show conclusively that their god has no power and that Yahweh is the One true God. This passage from the final judgment confirms that the false gods of Egypt were the Lord's target; "against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments--I am the LORD." (Exodus 12:12).

7:8-13 - "Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Work a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'" So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said."

Before the ten great judgments of the Lord begin, the Lord first has Moses and Aaron do a personal demonstration for Pharaoh of the Lord's power. The demonstration involves Aaron throwing down his wooden staff and it becoming a serpent. This demonstration was not randomly chosen by the Lord. The serpent was one of the primary gods worshipped in Egypt. On the crown Pharaoh wore was a depiction of an angry cobra ready to strike. This demonstration would make clear from the beginning whose crown or authority was greater; Pharaoh's or Yahweh's.

When Aaron's staff becomes a serpent by the miracle of God, Pharaoh responds in an unexpected way. Pharaoh is apparently not impressed, and summons sorcerers. When they arrive they amazingly duplicate the miracle by throwing down their staffs which then turn into serpents. This passage has troubled believers with the question of how this could happen. We will see in the account of the first two great judgments to follow that a similar imitation of God's miracle by these same sorcerers will occur. How should we understand what took place here? There are two possibilities, both of which could be what happened. The first possibility is that the sorcerers are nothing more than ancient versions of our modern Las Vegas magicians in which they used natural trickery to give the false impression that they had real spiritual power. This view explains this as a trick in which the serpents of the sorcerers were made a stiff as a staff by a special nerve manipulation known to snake charmers. The explanation is that the same nerve that made the snakes stiff is pressed in front of Pharaoh and their "staffs" only appear to turn into snakes. While this is a plausible explanation, there is no hint in the text that would lead us to think that this was pure showmanship here.

The other possibility, and the one I accept is that these sorcerers did real works of power. This passage describes how such a thing can happen; "the one whose

coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." (II Thessalonians 2:9-12). This describes the activity of Satan in certain circumstances to do supernatural works of power through deceptive human agents in a similar way that God does in certain circumstances works of power through those He chooses. In this case, it is not the sorcerer that turns the staff into a snake, but Satan. The purpose is the opposite also of God's signs and wonders. When God does a miracle it is to confirm the truth of His message and validate the authority of His messenger. When Satan does a work of power, it is to confirm the deception of his message and to validate the authority of his false messengers. The Lord permits Satan to do limited works of power for the purpose of exposing the hearts of those who are willing to believe a lie.

This is spiritual warfare in a display of competing powers. The Lord does not leave it unclear whose power is the greater one however. The serpent that was Aaron's staff immediately attacks and swallows up the serpents made from the staffs of the sorcerers. Pharaoh could not ask for a clearer demonstration of the superiority of God's power, but his heart ignores the swallowing of the staffs of his sorcerers and his heart is hardened further. Generations later when Jesus does awesome miracles in front of witnesses, we should not be shocked at how easily they turn away from Him. People will believe what they want and need to believe no matter how great the evidence to the contrary until the Lord changes their heart.

7:17 - "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 staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood."

This is the first of the great judgments of the Lord upon Egypt. As with each of the nine judgments to follow a specific false god of the Egyptians is to be judged in the eyes of Egypt. The intention of the Lord is to expose the utter weakness of their gods in comparison with the One true God, Yahweh. The first judgment the Lord unleashes will target the Nile river. The Nile was itself one of the gods of Egypt. The Nile was personified by the Egyptians as the god Hapi. It was called the giver of life. The river was pictured by the Egyptians as providing for the land of Egypt what the bloodstream does for the physical body. By turning the water of the Nile to blood, the Lord is going to at the same time literally give to the Egyptians what they worship, and show them that what they call the life giver of Egypt is really the source of death. Of course, the Lord's issue is not with the Nile river because He had created the river. His issue is with how the darkened hearts of the Egyptians have turned His creation into a false god. "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." (Romans 1:25).

God is going to humiliate the Nile god of Egypt and make it so that they cannot lean on it any longer.

Questions from Exodus 6:

Question: 6:1 and 3:2-4 - In 6:1, it identifies the Lord as the one speaking to Moses. But in 3:2, it reads "and the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush..." and then in verse 4, "God called to Him from the midst of the bush...". Does God use angels to speak for Him at times?

Answer: Yes. One of the primary assignments of angels is to function as the messengers of God. The term "angel" is a translation of a Greek word for messenger. This passage from Hebrews tells us that God revealed the Old Testament through angels. "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty," (Hebrews 2:2). To address the other aspect of your question we have to also make a distinction in how the Lord spoke through angels in the Old Testament. The following topic really deserves a full book to adequately explain it, but I'll briefly describe it here. Throughout the Old Testament God spoke His messages to people by sending angels as messengers. However, in some of the portions that mention an angel we are meant to identify that "angel" as a very special messenger even among angels.

The passages that refer to "the angel of the Lord" can refer not just to a normal created angel serving the Lord as His messenger, but as the Son of God appearing in the form of an angel. These kinds of appearances in the Old Testament are what are known theologically as a theophany or christophany. These refer to an appearance of God or an appearance of Christ. It does not mean that Christ ever became an angel, only that He took the form of an angel to deliver a message from God. In these appearances we will read that an angel spoke and often in the same passage that God spoke. The passage we studied in Genesis 18 is an example. Three "men" appeared to Abraham. We later learn that they were angels, yet one of them is also identified as the Lord. Your question was about Exodus 3:2 in which "the angel of the Lord appeared" to Moses in the burning bush. Yet two verses later in 3:4 we read that "God called to him from the midst of the bush..." The angel that appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and later on Mt. Sinai to give Moses the Law of God was the Lord Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate appearance. In other cases, the Lord sends messages through an actual angel, such as the times the Lord spoke to Mary and Joseph by sending the angel Gabriel with messages.

Exodus 8

8:1-4 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite your whole territory with frogs. The Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come up and go into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. So the frogs will come up on you and your people and all your servants.'"

Following the first great judgment of turning the Nile into blood, the Lord now sends Moses back to Pharaoh with a simple message and a warning. The message of the Lord is nothing new, but repeats the earlier demand of the Lord to let His people go so that they may serve Him. The issue between the Lord and Pharaoh has been clarified into a straightforward contest of will and power. Who is stronger, and who will flinch first? The Lord leaves no question as to whether He is going to lighten His demand as was common in any negotiation between sovereign rulers. When relative equals negotiate it is expected for both to give a little to find some workable middle ground. The Lord restates His earlier requirement, and He will do so again and again with increasingly devastating demonstrations of His power until finally Pharaoh relents. One thing Pharaoh is going to learn the hard way is that the Lord when the Lord makes a demand, the only viable option is to respond as He requires. The Lord also has Moses announce the second of His great judgments upon Egypt. Moses is to deliver the message in the form of, "But if you refuse...behold, I will smite..." The Lord does not expect Pharaoh to give in. The warning is phrased to highlight the stubbornness of Pharaoh's heart and that the responsibility for the suffering to come rests squarely on his shoulders.

The Lord chooses a swarm of frogs for the second judgment. This choice was as purposeful as the choice of the Nile in the first judgment. As with each of these judgments specific Egyptian gods are targeted and "humiliated" in the eyes of Egypt. Egypt revered the goddess Hekhet, who had the head of a frog. She was the wife of Khnum, who was the god in Egyptian mythology that made humans on his potter's wheel. Once he made them, she breathed life into their bodies. Hekhet also had the job of keeping the frog population in the Nile river in check by using crocodiles to eat them. By miraculously multiplying frogs to swarm throughout the land the Lord was exposing Hekhet as powerless to stop them. He is in essence saying to Egypt, "Where is your frog god now?" The Egyptians were well familiar with the frogs spawned in the Nile and in some seasons had to deal with a greater number of frogs along the banks of the river where they bathed and fished. This judgment multiplied that problem a thousand fold. These frogs did not just overrun the banks of the river, but filled the entire territory. They swarmed every house, bedroom, bed, and kitchen. Remember, in that culture people slept on the floor on mats rather than raised beds. For the

duration of this judgment, they slept with frogs, and could not even roll over in bed without rolling over on the frogs. Their food preparation was affected by the frogs in their ovens and bread making bowls. Every class in Egyptian society was affected and none of the wealth or power of Pharaoh could exempt him from it.

8:6-11 - "So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. The magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Entreat the LORD that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD." Moses said to Pharaoh, "The honor is yours to tell me: when shall I entreat for you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses, that they may be left only in the Nile?" Then he said, "Tomorrow." So he said, "May it be according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. The frogs will depart from you and your houses and your servants and your people; they will be left only in the Nile."

Once again, the sorcerers of Egypt were able to imitate the appearance of the frogs. The impression is that in these first two works of power, the magicians of Egypt were able to do a similar work by demonic activity, but on a much smaller scale. The obvious and unspoken issue for the sorcerers is that they are only able with the greatest display of their "powers" to make the problem worse, not better. In the first judgment of turning water to blood, and now in the swarming of frogs, their efforts add to the blood and the frogs. They are completely unable to decrease the number of frogs let alone make them go away for Pharaoh. There is an important principle here regarding spiritual warfare. Satan has a limited power, granted to him by the Lord, to imitate the works of God. We will see in the following judgments that the Lord will not allow demonic powers to duplicate all of the works of God, or even the degree of the works that are being imitated. We should be aware however, that some degree of spiritual imitation remains a dangerous deception for those who interpret any display of spiritual power as an automatic proof of God's involvement. We should also be confident if we ever encounter some deceptive spiritual power, that the power of God is always superior (Acts 13:6-12).

The plague of frogs has an affect upon Pharaoh in a way that the first judgment did not. Certainly this judgment touched him more directly and was a much greater irritation. Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron and for the first time he shows a weakening resolve. He then does an amazing thing. He appeals to them to pray on his behalf. Keep in mind that Pharaoh was a god to the Egyptians. Here is a "god" asking someone else to pray for him. It reveals the truth hidden in Pharaoh's heart. The truth is that he knows he is no god. This request exposes his lack of confidence in his own godhood. If he were truly a god he could command the frogs to go and they would have to obey. Pharaoh is shown to be as weak in the face of this judgment as the lowest servant in Egypt. Additionally,

Pharaoh does not ask Moses to pray to the Nile river for help, or to Hekhet, the frog goddess. He asks Moses to pray to Yahweh for him. In an earlier exchange, Pharaoh had arrogantly questioned who Yahweh was (Exodus 5:2). Now he is beginning to learn to fear Yahweh. He won't yet fully admit it in these exact words, but by asking for prayer to Yahweh, he is acknowledging that Yahweh has power over the frogs and admitting that neither he, nor any of the gods of Egypt do. It is an interesting phenomenon that I have encountered many times with unbelievers. People that do not believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, when they are confronted with a life crisis beyond their control display a sudden interest in Christians praying for them in the name of Jesus.

8:12-15 - "Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD concerning the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh. The LORD did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, the courts, and the fields. So they piled them in heaps, and the land became foul." But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said."

Moses prays, and the Lord answers by causing all the swarming frogs to die. The Lord leaves Pharaoh a pungent reminder of this judgment in the rotting bodies of the frogs. The frogs do not conveniently hop back to the Nile to die, but instead expire where they were covering all the land. The task remains of piling up all the dead frogs. The original text emphasizes how many piles of frogs created by repeating the word heaps. There were heaps and heaps and heaps of dead frogs. If you have ever been near the carcass of even a single dead reptile you have learned first hand that the odor from decaying reptiles is a unique experience. There is nothing even faintly pleasant about the odor. Now imagine multiplied thousands and thousands of decaying frogs heaped up right outside your house. Remembering that Egyptian homes had open windows with no glass or screens, the smell of the heaps of frogs was a strong reminder of the hand and power of Yahweh that they could not escape. Even as further judgments would unfold, this one will remain for a time as an aroma of death.

In spite of all this, once the frogs died, Pharaoh breathed a sign of relief and his heart immediately hardened again. It is becoming apparent quickly after the start of the judgments of the Lord that Pharaoh's heart will only change under the continued intense pressure of present judgment. If the Lord grants him any space to relax, his heart goes right back to its previous stubborn resistance. How similar is this pattern of Pharaoh's reactions to the Lord's dealing with him to the way people react to the Lord even today. I have seen the Lord apply intense pressure to the heart of a person through unwanted circumstances of trouble. When the trouble is at its peak it is not uncommon for people to apparently soften toward the Lord. Then, as soon as the pressure is of the trouble is gone, their hearts snap almost instantly back to their previous unconcerned and rebellious attitude. It is a well known pattern that when some disaster strikes society such as the events of September 11, 2001, the Katrina hurricane, or the recent Virginia Tech

shootings that the people affected show a surge in spiritual interest. Church attendance always increases in connection to these kinds of events; for an amazingly short time. Then, soon after God and church are as neglected as before, if not more so.

In WWII, this pattern was known as "foxhole salvation." People tend to show great interest in the Lord's help when bullets and bombs are flying overhead the foxhole. In the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, George Clooney's character Everett is a worldly wise scoffer at the foolishness of religion. Then, when he is about to be hanged, he suddenly "finds religion" and prays with great zeal. As soon as he is unexpectedly rescued by a flood of water, he disregards the divine connection in his deliverance and he immediately returns to scoffing even as he is floating in the water of the flood. One of the most important things we can do to maintain true spiritual growth is simply to remember what the Lord has done for us in our life circumstances. To recognize His hand in our lives safeguards our heart from the arrogance of Pharaoh.

8:16-23 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.'" They did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt. The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Now the LORD said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For if you do not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians will be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they dwell. But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of flies will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land. I will put a division between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign will occur.'"

This section details the third and fourth great judgments of the Lord. They are similar in that they both involve swarms of flying insects. In the third judgment either gnats or mosquitoes cover all the land of Egypt. The original word used can refer to either type insect. I am inclined to believe these were mosquitoes. Gnats would certainly be irritating, but there is a sense in which each successive judgment is increasing in severity over the preceding one.

As bad as the frog judgment was, mosquitoes would be even worse, especially in dense swarms covering all the land. One of the worst nights of my life was spent

camping next to a lake in Canada on a canoe trip. My camp site was swarmed by mosquitoes and I was bitten hundreds of times in a few minutes of time. I ended up climbing in my sleeping bag even though it was a hot summer night and closing the hood of the sleeping bag with a draw string until only my nose for breathing was exposed. At least I had the relief of morning arriving and the mosquitoes dispersed in the daylight.

For the Egyptians, they had to endure that kind of torment, without relief for the duration of this judgment. With no screens on their homes, they had no place to hide.

It is at this point that the Lord draws the line on what He allows the magicians of Egypt to imitate. They exhaust all their magical arts, but are unable to bring forth these insects as Moses and Aaron had done with the staff of the Lord. They are forced to acknowledge to Pharaoh that this miracle is the "finger of God." We might expect Pharaoh to give heed to his own sorcerers, but instead he once again hardens his heart.

In earlier judgments, Pharaoh hardened his heart because his magicians were able to in measure imitate the miracles with their powers. Now, in spite of the clear evidence that they cannot imitate the plague of insects, he still hardens his heart. This shows us the dangerous progressive nature of a hardening heart. At the beginning it took more for his heart to harden. Now, and from now on, it will take less for him to harden his heart. The warning, for even true believers, is to not lightly dismiss the danger of ever hardening our hearts toward the Lord. Each time we harden our hearts we are making ourselves more inclined to further hardening in the future.

The Lord also introduces a new element in the announcement of the fourth great judgment. He is going to purposefully distinguish between the Israelites and the Egyptians in the coming judgment.

As the Lord brings swarms of flies upon the land and people of Egypt, He is going to preserve the people of Israel and their homes in the land of Goshen from the swarms. This protection of Goshen will confirm that this is no naturally occurring phenomenon. The Lord is going to protect His own people at the same time that He afflicts Pharaoh's people. Everyone will experience for themselves which god is truly God, Pharaoh or Yahweh.

Exodus 9

9:8-12 - "Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt." So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians. And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses."

Following the fifth great judgment of the pestilence upon only the livestock of the Egyptians while sparing all the livestock of Israel in Goshen, the Lord now directs Moses and Aaron to do a particularly unusual act to introduce the sixth judgment. Of course, all of these judgments are out of the ordinary, and the roles of Moses and Aaron in them are not usual activity for any person. What the Lord has them do here though, is at first mysterious. They are to take handfuls of soot from a kiln and throw it into the sky. It is important that they do so in the sight of Pharaoh. They must do it where Pharaoh can see them because there is no prior announcement for this judgment, but the Lord wants Pharaoh to be certain that the boils that follow are not a natural outbreak of disease, but the work Yahweh. Why soot from a kiln, and why throw it into the sky? We cannot be 100% certain since the text does not give us further explanation, but there is a likely connection to an earlier part of the story. When Moses had first arrived back in Egypt and first delivered the Lord's demand to Pharaoh to let His people go, Pharaoh had responded by making the lives of the Israelites more miserable by requiring them to make an unreasonable amount of bricks and to do so without the provision of straw. The people made the bricks by taking mud from the banks of the Nile, mixing some straw into the mud, and then baking the mixture in brick ovens or kilns. This soot that Moses and Aaron were to throw into the air by handfuls was most likely the soot left in the brick ovens.

It was an appropriate expression of God's justice that He chose the soot of Israel's kiln's which represented their great misery under Pharaoh's oppressive hand to impose on him and the Egyptians His hand of judgment in the form of boils. They were also to throw it into the sky. The Egyptians worshipped a number of sky gods, the most prominent of which was Horus, who was pictured with the head of a falcon. The primary task of Horus was to watch over from the sky the reigning Pharaoh and to protect him from all harm. This judgment from the Lord was going to symbolically use the soot of Israel's misery and hold Pharaoh directly accountable for it by imposing upon his body and the bodies of all his subjects boils causing their own great misery. Horus would be exposed as completely powerless to protect Pharaoh from Yahweh's hand of judgment.

This is also the final time that the magicians of Pharaoh are mentioned. The last time we encountered them, they attempted to imitate the third plague, but they could not. They never left Pharaoh's court because throughout this series of judgments they act as Pharaoh's counselors. In this case, they do not even attempt to imitate this judgment, and are instead personally inflicted with the boils of the judgment. There is a noticeable comparison and contrast drawn here. Moses and Aaron stand boldly before the so called god Pharaoh, and pronounce the judgment of God upon him. The greatest sorcerer/magicians in all the land of Egypt with all their secret arts can no longer stand before the messengers of Yahweh.

9:13-17 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go."

This section like a spiritual interlude between plagues six and seven. Before the Lord unleashes the seventh judgment upon Egypt, He first has Moses deliver a message of mercy to Pharaoh. The Lord wants Pharaoh to know that whatever he has so far experienced in these judgments is not as bad as it could have been. The Lord declares that if He had put forth His hand and struck Pharaoh with what the Lord implies he really deserves, then he would have been killed already and all of Egypt with him. The lesson here is about the daily mercies of God that we all enjoy without even being aware of them. The real issue is one of God's justice and mercy. In light of God's holy justice what do all human beings actually deserve from God? The answer is death. We have all sinned and violated God's Law in many ways. Every single one of us has earned and deserves the death penalty for our transgressions against God. Since we have not yet died, then we are living only because of God's mercy. God has not inflicted upon anyone the full penalty that they deserve while they are still living and breathing.

The ten judgments unfold in a specific order as we should expect from the Lord who is a God of order. The first nine judgments occur in three sets of three judgments. In comparing the first three to the second and third set of three there are patterns of similarity that emerge in the kind of judgments and even in the way the Lord either announces them to Pharaoh or chooses not to announce them. The seventh plague is the first one of the third and final set of three. The tenth plague is by itself as the culminating or final judgment.

Just before the Lord has Moses declare the beginning of the final set of judgments, He informs Pharaoh that there is not one more judgment coming, but a set of "all My plagues" that He is about to send on Egypt. The implication of describing what is coming in this way is that the worst is still to come. No matter how devastating blood, frogs, gnats, flies, pestilence, and boils have been, things can and will get worse. Telling Pharaoh in advance that there is more than one judgment coming is merciful because it allows him the opportunity to repent and release Israel before it is too late. This also shows us the pattern of how the Lord deals with people in rebellion to Him.

When the Lord brings judgment upon a person's life it always contains an element of His mercy in that it provides a call to repent and avoid a worse judgment. The Lord does not start with a final destroying judgment, but if a person persists in rebellion, then the Lord will continue to turn up the heat.

The Lord also informs Pharaoh of His ultimate reason for all of the plague judgments. There is more motivating the Lord than simply getting Israel out of Egypt. What the Lord tells Pharaoh about His own concerns in all of this is deep insight into the priorities of the Lord's actions in all judgment. He has and will judge Pharaoh not just to punish him or make him suffer. The Lord's priorities are that Pharaoh may know there is no one like the Lord in all the earth, that He would show Pharaoh His power, and that He would proclaim His name through all the earth. These three priorities are all concerned with the glory of the Lord. His glory is His first concern and priority in all His dealings with Pharaoh.

When a human being is most concerned with their own glory in their dealings with others we rightly judge them to be conceited and arrogant. The difference with the Lord and why it is a holy thing for Him to be concerned foremost with His own glory is that we are imperfect and flawed and He is perfect and gloriously holy. It is therefore wrong for us to glorify ourselves because we are glorifying that which is actually corrupt. When God glorifies Himself in all His interactions with us, He is righteously calling our attention to His perfection and holiness so that we can respond as we should in worship. God chose to make his dealings with Egypt and Pharaoh an example for all the nations and all of history to follow of His incomparability and His power so that His name would be made known in truth (Romans 9:17).

9:18-23 - "Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been seen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Now therefore send, bring your livestock and whatever you have in the field to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought home, when the hail comes down on them, will die." The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses; but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field. Now the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt." Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt."

In the announcement of the seventh plague, there is an additional expression of mercy from God in the form of a specific warning. The seventh judgment will be a severe storm of rain, thunder, lightning and large hail. The hail alone will be so great that any remaining livestock or people that are out under the open sky when the storm strikes will be killed by the hail. The exact size of the hail is not described, but we can conclude by its deadly effect that it is going to be unusually large. The mercy from God is not in the storm, but in the warning God has Moses deliver. The Lord tells Pharaoh for his own benefit and the benefit of everyone in Egypt to stay inside during this plague. It is merciful of the Lord to issue such a specific warning since He owes no warning at all to Pharaoh. The reason that the Lord gives such a merciful final warning at this point is that the severity of the judgments is about to increase in these four coming judgments. Up until now, in the first six judgments there has been serious loss of convenience, comfort, and wealth, but so far, no loss of human life. From this point forward people are going to die in the greater judgments to follow. The Lord does not take lightly the death of even rebellious and wicked people.

The warning is also a test. Pharaoh and the Egyptians have been given plenty of evidence in the first six plagues to start taking Moses and the Lord seriously. Now, the Lord tells them what is going to happen and the danger in it for them, and then He allows each one to decide for themselves whether to be judged by the hail. If the person that hears the message respects the message, he will act with appropriate fear and stay inside. If the person that hears the message chooses to arrogantly disregard it, then they have chosen the hail for themselves. There is a parallel here to how the people respond to the gospel of salvation. The Lord has declared to all the world through His messengers that the only salvation from final judgment is through faith in His Son Jesus. Those that heed the message and flee to Him in faith will find safety on the Day of final judgment. Those who disregard the gospel message are choosing God's announced judgment for themselves.

9:27-30 - "Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." Moses said to him, "As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the LORD'S. But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God."

Following the seventh judgment of the great hail storm, Pharaoh has a change of heart. For the first time in his reaction to the series of plagues, he acknowledges his own shortcomings. "I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones." The natural first reaction is to hope that the judgments from God have finally worn down his stubborn resistance and that he has come to a heart and life changing understanding. He declares three critically important right conclusions when he tells Moses and Aaron that he had sinned, Yahweh was the righteous one and that his people had also sinned. Moses responds to Pharaoh's confession with a discerning reply. "But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." Moses recognizes this apparent repentance of Pharaoh for what it actually was. Pharaoh is shedding what we call crocodile tears from an insincere heart. As soon as Moses prays for the hail storm to stop, Pharaoh's supposed repentance disappears like a mist in the heat of the sun. He told Moses what he believed he and Yahweh wanted to hear, as a way to manipulate them into relieving the pressure of the judgments. We were not there to see any non-verbal clues of hypocrisy on Pharaoh's face, but in his words there is a clue of his insincerity. The two words he uses "...this time" limit his admission of guilt to this plague alone. He implies that up until now he has been without fault.

Moses is given discernment by the Lord to expose to Pharaoh how the Lord sees his heart. Nevertheless, Moses is still going to intercede for Pharaoh and end the judgment of the hail storm. The reason is that each judgment serves a dual purpose in revealing God's power. There are not ten messages from God in the ten judgments, there are twenty messages. God is speaking in each judgment about His power, and He confirms that message each time He cause the judgment to stop. It is a revelation of the power of God to cause the hail storm and it is a revelation of the power of God to end the hail storm at the exact time that Moses prays. When God answers the prayer of Moses and ends this storm, it is so that Pharaoh "may know that the earth is the Lord's." Pharaoh has falsely believed that Egypt is his, but the Lord is showing him that Egypt and all the world are His! "The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it." (Psalm 24:1).

Questions from Exodus 8:

Question: The question is: it seems that Moses committed for God here in verse 9 — did he have the authority to do that because in verse 12 he's crying out to God to do the request? 8:9 - "Moses said to Pharaoh, "The honor is yours to tell me: when shall I entreat for you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses, that they may be left only in the Nile?" 8:12 - "Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD concerning the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh."

Answer: Yes, Moses did establish a guideline for the end of the plague that in effect committed the Lord to that guideline. No, Moses did not exceed the authority that the Lord had given to him when he did this. It's true that no where in the text did the Lord specifically tell Moses to say this to Pharaoh, but it is also true that no where did the Lord forbid him to do so. We can be certain that Moses was acting within the boundaries of his authority because of the response of the Lord when Moses prayed next. "The LORD did according to the word of Moses..." (Exodus 8:13). If Moses had gone too far, and exceeded his authority, the Lord would not have honored his commitment to Pharaoh. We will read an account later in Exodus of a time when Moses does transgress and exceed his authority while representing the Lord. When he does, the Lord immediately rebuked him and disciplined him for misrepresenting Him.

Question: Exodus 8:16, 20 - What is the significance of the third and fourth judgments? Are they targeted toward specific gods/goddesses?

Answer: Yes I believe that all of the ten great judgments of the Lord upon Egypt that we commonly call the Ten Plagues were aimed at exposing the foolishness of the Egyptians' idolatrous worship of many false gods. The third judgment was the turning of the dust of the earth to gnats. The fourth judgment was swarms of flies. In the third judgment the ground of the land of Egypt which was itself worshipped as a god was transformed from fertile, life giving farmland into what I believe was probably mosquitoes. Instead of giving life, the land of Egypt was now draining their life blood. The swarms of flies in the fourth judgment is a translation of a word which literally means all kinds of flying vermin. This category included biting flies, gadflies, and the famous Egyptian beetle we see depicted in various expressions of Egyptian art as the scarab. These were all worshipped in Egyptian idolatry in varying levels of honor.

Exodus 10

10:1-2 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."

In a previous passage we saw that the Lord planned this series of great judgments to glorify His own name on the stage of history in an unforgettable way. Now, the Lord gives Moses additional insight into His long range purpose for these events. Again, these plagues mean much more than the way the Lord got Israel out of Egypt. Had the Lord been looking for the quickest route for Israel's release, He would not have hardened Pharaoh's heart and instead would have influenced Pharaoh to release them without all of this trouble. All ten of these great judgments were necessary so that the Lord could demonstrate in history the range and extent of His power. Earlier the focus of the Lord's revelatory purpose was so that Pharaoh and Egypt would learn that they should compare no so called god to the One true God Yahweh (Exodus 9:14).

In this passage the Lord explains to Moses how these events will accomplish an important spiritual benefit for Israel in the generations to come. God did what He did to Pharaoh and Egypt to give the fathers and grandfathers of Israel awesome stories to tell their children and grandchildren (Psalm 78:42-51). These stories will be more than the common exaggerations of life in the good old days. These are the true stories of the Lord and His mighty acts. The Lord wants each successive generation of Israel to be raised in the remembrance and understanding of how Yahweh "made a mockery of the Egyptians..." The sense of the phrase is how the Lord humiliated the arrogance of the mightiest nation on earth and the false gods they worshipped. He wants all future generations to learn the story of how He performed each of these miraculous judgments. The ultimate goal of passing to the coming generations, like a treasure, the message of these amazing events was that those generations would come to know Yahweh for themselves. Each generation is faced with its own challenges of false gods and must have their own hearts anchored to the reality of the power and holiness of the Lord. Your heart and mine today need to rehearse and remember these judgments of the Lord so that we will know with spiritual perception who the Lord is and what kind of God we serve.

10:7-11 - "Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?" So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones that are going?" Moses said, "We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD." Then he said to them, "Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind. Not so! Go now, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire." So they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence."

Pharaoh's heart has been progressively hardened. One of the consequences of a hardened heart is that it affects the ability of the hardened person to see what is clear to others around them. In spite of the great and mounting losses that Egypt had suffered, at this point Pharaoh remains convinced that it is in his best interests to hold the Israelites in slavery and to not release them as Yahweh had demanded through Moses. The servants of Pharaoh are not portrayed in these events as men of great wisdom, but after all this, they can see what Pharaoh cannot. They dare to approach Pharaoh and appeal directly to him. They urge Pharaoh to give in to the demands of Yahweh. They take a personal risk of offending Pharaoh by including a light rebuke in their appeal. "Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?" Of course, Pharaoh was well aware of the physical and economic cost of these events to Egypt. Their point was that he was not admitting to himself in his stubborn resolve, just how bad the condition of the nation was. The servants make a suggestion to Pharaoh that he yield to Yahweh's demands, but they cleverly suggest a partial offer that would effectively leave Pharaoh in control of Israel. They recommend that he "let the men go..." Their advice appeals to Pharaoh because it would relieve the pressure of more judgments while insuring that the men of Israel would return to their slavery after offering to Yahweh, because of their desire to return to their families.

Pharaoh has Moses and Aaron brought before him, and asks them leading questions about their intentions in leaving. In his response, it is apparent that Moses has grown since he was first given this assignment from the Lord. On the day of the burning bush, Moses was extremely reluctant and protested to the Lord about his lack of eloquence. Even in his first exchange with Pharaoh, remember Moses was quick to appeal to Pharaoh by asking him to please release Israel when Pharaoh rejected the Lord's demand. Listen to Moses now as he responds to Pharaoh's question. Moses does not hesitate, waver, or show any sign of fear at all. He boldly declares, "We shall go..." Moses is not saying please to Pharaoh any longer. He is growing in confidence as he is serving the Lord in his assignment. His confidence is not self confidence, but in the Lord. He has seen the hand and power of God. He is able to say that they are leaving Egypt as a certainty before it even happens because the Lord had said He would make it happen.

Pharaoh reacts to the answer that Moses gives him. The meaning of his answer is that he mockingly acknowledges that if he were to ever release all of Israel including the women and children, it would indeed be the proof that their God was with them. However, he has no intention of that ever happening. He is really sneering at the suggestion that all of Israel will ever leave Egypt. Pharaoh's heart and will is battered by the pounding he has taken from eight plagues so far, but his willful stubborn streak runs deep. He offers to Moses what his servants suggested. Only the men of Israel will be allowed to leave for a short time for their sacrifices. Pharaoh is smug in having made this offer that he considers plenty generous on his part, and he drives Moses and Aaron out of his presence fully expecting that they will settle for what he has allowed them. Pharaoh still does not get it yet.

10:21-23 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings."

This is the account of the ninth plague. The Lord caused the sun to be blotted out for three days with a thick darkness. The Lord also distinguished among the Egyptians and His people Israel by leaving the land of Goshen where they lived unaffected. We should recognize that this was far more than the kind of inconvenience we experience in a power outage. The sense of the term thick darkness is that there was no light in Egypt at all except in Goshen. When I was a child I visited with my parents Carlsbad Caverns. During the underground tour at a certain point the guide announced that they were going to turn off the lights. When they turned the lights off the darkness was so deep that I could not see my hand an inch away from my face. In fact I could see nothing at all and was functionally blind until they turned the lights on again. It was an unsettling experience. This was the experience of an entire nation, not for a minute, but for three days. There was also the sense that there was a spiritual element about this darkness as a darkness that "may be felt." This was an oppressive pressing darkness. No one left their home for its duration because they would only be stumbling around lost.

All of Egypt ground to a halt for those three days. The Lord gave the entire nation a forced retreat to contemplate what was happening and what it all meant. One thing every Egyptian would think about was the implication for the chief of their gods, Amun-ra. He was considered to be the king of all the Egyptian gods. The second part of his name, Ra, was the Egyptian word for the sun. Where was Amun-ra in these three days? Yahweh had blotted him out. To the Egyptians all of life began with the sun. This great darkness imposed on Amun-ra was the Lord's ultimate demonstration to Egypt that they might know that Yahweh, not even the king of their gods was supreme.

10:24-29 - "Then Pharaoh called to Moses, and said, "Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you." But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice them to the LORD our God. Therefore, our livestock too shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve the LORD." But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!" Moses said, "You are right; I shall never see your face again!"

In this exchange between Pharaoh and Moses, we can see Pharaoh continuing to weaken as he is fresh from the fear of the thick darkness. Pharaoh gives Moses his most gracious offer yet. Before the darkness he was only willing to release the men. Now, he offers for all of Israel to go worship Yahweh, but he still attaches one stipulation to his offer. Israel must leave their livestock behind in Egypt when they go. This is Pharaoh still desperately trying to maintain a shred of control over Israel in the hope that they would have to return to their herds and flocks eventually. As Pharaoh is weakening, Moses is continuing to grow in the strength of the Lord. Moses responds again without hesitation and with great boldness. Three phrases Moses uses emphasize the new strength of his heart. Moses is not negotiating, he is telling Pharaoh how things are going to go. "You must also let us... our livestock too shall go with us... not a hoof shall be left behind..."

As we might have anticipated, Pharaoh does not respond well to being told by anyone how things are going to be. He is still a god in his own perspective and people do what he says, they do not dare to tell him what they are going to do. Pharaoh immediately reacts in anger and orders Moses to leave. This is the end of their exchanges. Pharaoh issues a death threat warning to Moses. He warns him to never see his face again or he will die. Moses responds with what we should understand as a personal prophecy from the Lord. They will never meet face to face again according to the plan of God, and Pharaoh said it without realizing he was in essence signing his own death warrant. The three cycles of three judgments each has now ended and there remains only the final judgment of the Lord upon Pharaoh and Egypt in the tenth plague to come.

Questions from Exodus 9:

Question: 9:19 - Had a significant amount of time passed since the plague where all the livestock had been destroyed? The Egyptians now have livestock ("and whatever you have in the field") and so do the Israelites (their livestock was not harmed in the plague), even though they were slaves. Did they maybe force the Israelites to give up some of theirs?

Answer: The amount of time that passed in the duration of the ten plagues was likely to be a few months total. The last plague occurred on a single night, but the earlier plagues lasted for a period of days each (Exodus 7:25). I am assuming you are curious about how the Egyptians had livestock in the fields in verse 9:19 for plague number seven, when earlier in 9:6 for plague number five the text tells us that "all the livestock of Egypt died." While some time did elapse between plague five and seven, I do not think there was enough time for the Egyptians to go acquire more livestock from other countries. There is also no hint that they confiscated the livestock from the Israelites. I think the better explanation is found in the use of the word "all" in verse 6. We tend to read it as though every single animal in Egypt died in that plague. The word actually refers to all kinds or sorts of what is being described. I think what happened in plague five was that all categories of Egyptian livestock were afflicted with the pestilence and the vast majority of them died.

Question: 9:27 Moses intercedes for Pharaoh to end the storm and the other judgments and God answers His prayers. How might that apply to us today in the area of intercession? It doesn't appear that Moses is putting up all sorts of various prayers during this time as he is watching all the hurting people and animals. Perhaps he is only praying those specific prayers the Lord has put on his heart to pray with a kingdom perspective vs. comfort or compassion. Could you elaborate some on that?

Answer: You've asked an interesting question, and I'm not sure I can answer with a definitive response. Moses' situation was clear cut because he was a prophet sent by God with a crystal clear message and assignment. I'm sure he realized that devastation experienced by the Egyptians from the judgments he was announcing, but even if his heart was ever sympathetic toward the suffering of the Egyptians, he knew that the Lord had caused it by His hand. To pray and ask God to go easy on them, or to soften the blow would have set Moses in a position of resisting the purpose of God to judge the nation. That much is clear to me. The difficulty in answering your question is considering how this applies in the circumstances around us. I do believe unlike many modern Bible teachers and pastors, that God continues to judge people, cities and nations today. However, none of us have the benefit of an audible message from God identifying what events are His judgment and which are not.

I could choose one example and describe my own response. I believe the Katrina hurricane that flooded New Orleans was a judgment from God. My own response was to pray first for the true believers in the area that they would find grace to endure and be a light to everyone around them. I also prayed for the hearts of the unbelievers that they would recognize God's hand in the storm and turn to Him in repentance. I did not ask the Lord to lighten the effect of the storm because I believe that God caused it to get people's attention. In each new situation we are dependant upon our understanding from God's Word of how He works in the midst of His world, and the discernment we have of what He is doing today. It is always good to pray for wisdom and discernment in the process of deciding how to interpret what each event means.

Exodus 11

11:1 - "Now the LORD said to Moses, "One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely..."

The Lord now gives to Moses the details on how His planned sequence of great judgments upon Egypt will conclude. The certainty of the Lord's description is significant. There is no hint of the following kind of statement from the Lord. "Moses, I would really like to finish these judgments against Egypt and free Israel. I have one more big judgment planned and I hope that it will be enough to change Pharaoh's mind about releasing Israel. However, you know how stubborn he is, and if he refuses even after this, I'll just have to come up with an eleventh plague." I uses this kind of fantasy response from the Lord to contrast with the way He actually spoke to Moses. There is zero uncertainty on His part regarding whether this would be the final plague, or whether another would be necessary. The Lord is not at all unsure of how Pharaoh will respond before the final judgment even occurs. He has ordained this as the final plague, and it will have the intended impact upon pharaoh's heart, and he will change his mind about releasing Israel.

The reason the certainty of the Lord regarding the future and specifically the future hidden decisions of the man Pharaoh is important is because of a heretical teaching in the church that has grown in influence in the recent years. A heretical teaching is one that undermines one of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. The teaching that has grown in recent years describes God as an "open" God. Those who teach this error assert that God neither fully knows or controls the future. They say He is open in the sense that He discovers the future in the same way that we do, as it unfolds. This is a clear contradiction of many Bible passages that teach us that God knows the end from the beginning and that He is sovereign over all of history including future history. God can only know a future event with absolute certainty if He controls history to such an extent that

He can cause the future to unfold in that exact way. This passage is not God hoping, or guessing or speaking about future probabilities, but declaring what will happen with this tenth judgment.

What is more, Pharaoh will not change his mind in the same way he had done previously, only to change back before actually releasing them. On three previous occasions Pharaoh had agreed to release Israel, but with restrictions. Once he permitted them to leave as long as they only went a short distance. Another time he allowed them to leave as long as it was only the men that left. One other time, he agreed for them to go, but forbid them to take their livestock with them. In each case, Pharaoh gave permission under the duress of the recent judgment, but remained in control over Israel in his own mind. This final judgment was going to strike the deathblow, not only to the firstborn of Egypt, but to the hardened illusion of Pharaoh's that he was in ultimate control over Egypt and Israel. This time "he will surely drive you out from here completely." The word completely highlights that Israel's release from their Egyptian bondage will be on the Lord's terms, and not Pharaoh's. They will be released permanently and without restrictions.

11:2-3 - "Speak now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold." The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Furthermore, the man Moses himself was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, both in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people."

The Lord now rehearses for Moses what He had told him all the way back at their first meeting at the burning bush back in the wilderness of Midian. "I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians." (Exodus 3:21-22). The time for the Lord to bring to pass what He had promised has now arrived. This is also the fulfillment of the same promise God had made to Abraham over 400 years before. "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions." (Genesis 15:14). God had first made this promise to Abraham that long ago, but once He makes a promise, He never forgets and never fails to fulfill it. I am so glad that God's faithfulness is immeasurably greater than mine. I have difficulty remembering commitments I made last week, let alone faithfully following through with every single one. The Lord never drops the ball in finishing what He said he would do, exactly as He had declared it.

The Lord will cause the Egyptians to willingly give to Israel many precious possessions because the Lord will cause them to look favorably on Israel. This giving favor to Israel in the perspective of the Egyptians is a powerful work of

God in itself when compared to the previous attitude of the Egyptians toward Israel as their slaves. The gold and silver and other precious items will be given by the Egyptians, not taken by force by the Israelites to show that it was the sovereign power of God at work in their hearts, not Israel's own strength that made this happen. Nevertheless, Israel was to view these valuable items as plunder. The term plunder points to what we call the spoils of war. Plunder is the valuable items carried off by a conquering army from the helpless people they have just conquered. Even though Israel has not lifted a hand in battle, there is a huge spiritual warfare that has been fought. The battle was between the Lord and the false gods of Egypt. The Lord won a complete and decisive victory, and now Israel will carry off the plunder as a sign of the Lord's victory.

In addition, the Lord is going to redeem the wealth of the Egyptians in the hands of Israel. This silver, gold, and fabric that they are taking with them is later going to be gathered by the Lord from Israel and used as the raw materials for the building of God's tabernacle when He commands Moses to take an offering from Israel for His sanctuary (Exodus 25:2-8).

11:4-8 - "Moses said, "Thus says the LORD, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well. 'Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again. But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not even bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me, saying, 'Go out, you and all the people who follow you,' and after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger."

In the previous great judgments the Lord had Aaron and Moses represent Him to Egypt in the actual circumstance of the plagues by their actions of using the staff that represented the authority of Yahweh. In this final judgment upon Egypt, the Lord has Moses declare it in advance to Pharaoh, but He will not work through Moses in this plague. Instead, the Lord announces that He will go out into the midst of Egypt Himself and cause the death of all the firstborn of Egypt. This is an awesome depiction of what every human being will one day face in the final Day of Judgment. Throughout history, the Lord has dealt and continues to deal with each generation through events that signify a degree of His judgment. But, on the final day when everyone stands before the throne of God to face His final judgment, the Lord will not be working indirectly through some event or circumstance. Then each person will face the hand of God directly to receive from Him the judgment that they deserve.

The Lord again emphasizes the sovereign distinction He maintains between the Egyptians and the Israelites. This final plague is not going to be any more random than the previous ones. This is not going to be an indiscriminate disaster that will strike Egypt in the middle of the night. Yahweh will cause His judgment to strike only the homes of the Egyptians while at the same time protecting every home of Israel. The result will be a loud wailing erupting from every Egyptian home, while the neighborhoods of Israel will not even be disturbed by a barking dog.

When Moses finished delivering the Lord's message to Pharaoh, he left Pharaoh in the boldness and the holiness of God. In both of these elements we see Moses acting as a true prophet of God who is more than a mere messenger, but one who also represents the Lord in his actions. The boldness of Moses is seen in how this meeting with Pharaoh ends. To honor proper court etiquette, Moses, as the messenger should wait until the king dismissed him to leave the king's presence. Leaving without being dismissed by the king was actually a great insult to the king and reflects the Lord's disdain for this self-centered and stubborn ruler. It also powerfully expresses the superiority of the Lord over Pharaoh. It shows that the Lord is so much more powerful than Pharaoh that He can afford for His messenger to insult Pharaoh in his own court and yet be assured of the Lord's protection. It also reveals the holiness of God in this final announcement of judgment upon Pharaoh. The anger of Moses as the Lord's representative is born from the anger of God toward Pharaoh. This is a deserved judgment based upon Pharaoh's many previous insults to the Lord's name.

Questions from Exodus 10:

Question: 10:29 - Pharaoh said he wouldn't see Moses face again but does he summon Moses after the final judgment of the Lord (12:31)? Does this prophecy refer to the time when, after the Lord has completely dealt with Pharaoh and the Israelites leave Egypt, he will then never see Moses face again?

Answer: Great question, and it is good to see you paying attention to the details. First of all, it was not Pharaoh that said Moses would never see his face again. In Exodus 10:28, Pharaoh threatened Moses with death if he saw his face again. It was Moses that declared that he would not see his face again in 10:29. This is important, because Pharaoh could simply be wrong, but Moses was speaking as the prophet of God and his declaration is true. This is a classic apparent contradiction in the two texts. Since Moses wrote both Exodus 10:29 and Exodus 12:31 we can expect that he would be aware of such a contradiction in the events if there was one. Having compared these two verses and studied them, I don't think there is any actual contradiction. There are three viable explanations that reconcile the apparent contradiction, and I'll list them in order of what seems to me the best way to explain these verses.

1) This is an issue of confusing wording in our translation, but not in the original Hebrew text. We can translate Moses' declaration like this and remain faithful to the Hebrew original, "I shall not be seeing your face again." We have a similar saying in our way of speaking when say to someone, "I won't be seeing you anymore." It does not mean that another encounter can't happen, but that a permanent change is coming in which the two people will be separated. I believe this is the best way to understand this passage.

2) It is possible that after the 10:29 declaration that Moses and Aaron returned to Goshen and prepared for the exodus of Israel. The passage in 12:31 does not specifically require a face to face meeting and could be describing an official message sent by Pharaoh to Moses in Goshen.

3) Pharaoh and Moses could have been referring specifically to official court appearances by Moses as had been happening throughout the plagues so far. This option seems a bit weak to me.

Exodus 12

12:1-2 - "Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you."

The Lord announces to Moses and Aaron that their calendar is changing and that this month will be the new first month of the year. This is not a temporary change due to the present special circumstances but is going to be a permanent change for all of Israel. It is also not a simple administrative adjustment to change their calendar. This is a significant symbolic change. Living under Egyptian rule for the past 430 years they have been accustomed to the Egyptian calendar. Egypt began each new year at the time of the yearly flooding of the Nile River. It was Egypt's way of honoring the god of the Nile and acknowledging that their entire society depended upon the yearly renewing of the fertile soil on the banks of the Nile from the flood waters. By changing the calendar of Israel the Lord was stating that Israel would no longer mark time by reference to the honor of this false god of Egypt.

This change was more than a negative comment about the worship of the Nile by the Egyptians. It also powerfully identified the new spiritual reference point that the life of Israel would be based upon for this generation and all the generations to follow. The calendar would begin with the celebration of the Passover. That points to Passover representing a new beginning for Israel. It signifies the end of their old lives as slaves to Pharaoh and the beginning of their new life as servants of Yahweh alone. In this way, Passover is a symbol of our salvation as well as theirs. The Passover is linked to the death of Jesus upon the cross and

all that His death means for us. Our lives are transformed when we encounter the cross in the moment of our salvation. Because of the cross, we are permanently delivered from our former life of slavery to sin (Romans 6:16-18). Because of the cross we are delivered into the freedom of a new covenant life with God. While our society does not base its calendar upon the event of the Passover, the cross to which the Passover points is the starting point of our personal spiritual calendar. Before the cross, there was only our old life and slavery to sin. Since the cross we are free. God changed their calendar so that Israel would never forget the Passover. Christians must never forget the cross!

12:5 - "Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats."

The core of the Passover was a special meal that was to be eaten by all the Israelites the night that the Lord brought the tenth and final great judgment upon Egypt. Each household was to take a lamb or a kid from their flocks. It was required to be a male, a year old, and unblemished without any physical defects. These three requirements were commanded by the Lord and were not options or suggestions to enhance their dining experience. All three requirements were spiritually symbolic as we should expect and must be maintained without modification so that the spiritual picture the Lord intended to paint with these events can be clear to all who will ever participate.

We know with certainty from New Testament passages which refer to this event and apply it to Christ that the lamb was a type of Christ. Remember, a type is an Old Testament event designed by the Lord to portray in advance some critical element of the person or work of Christ. John the Baptist proclaimed that Jesus was the embodiment of this lamb. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Peter referred specifically to one of the details of this passage and applied it to Christ. "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." (I Peter 1:18-19).

The three key elements for the Passover lamb all point to Christ. Jesus was of course a male. Males were in this culture the leaders of their households. This is significant because of the role He fulfills following His death upon the cross. His death will provide the foundation for a new family of God with Christ as the Head. The lamb must be one year old, the age at which lambs were considered to have reached full growth. A one year old lamb had arrived at the prime of life. Jesus died on the cross as a young, but fully mature man. He was sacrificed in the prime of his physical life.

The most important element was that the lamb must be unblemished. We will see later in the requirements of the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temple that only unblemished lambs were allowed for sacrifice. To be unblemished is to be

physically pure. This symbolically pointed to a deeper and greater purity in Christ that was absolutely essential to His sacrifice on the cross. The greater purity of Christ is the fact that He had never sinned (II Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15). Not once in His thirty-three years of life in this world did Jesus ever sin. This is far more than a preference for our salvation. If Jesus had ever once sinned, then you and I would not and could not be saved. The reason is found in the requirements of God's justice. In order for the blood of Jesus to pay the price for all of our sins, it had to be of infinite spiritual value. Had He sinned once, then His blood would have been no more valuable in satisfying God's justice than our own blood. The unblemished lamb represents the absolutely pure and innocent Savior as He hung on the cross providing complete payment for our many sins by virtue of His perfect blood.

12:21-23 - "Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the Passover lamb. You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you."

We derive the name of this event from this passage. It is called the Passover because the Lord passed through the land of Egypt that night and passed over the homes of Israel, while entering the homes of every Egyptian to strike the firstborn children and livestock. This may seem a bit hard to believe for some because of the number of homes involved and all of it occurring in a single night. This is only difficult to believe for those that have a low perspective of the power and nature of the Lord. This is not a Santa Claus story where we are left wondering how a single man can possibly accomplish all that in a single night. Keep in mind that He is the One who created lightning, and He is not slower than His own creation.

It was the Lord's choice of which homes to enter and which homes to pass over, but He had warned Israel through Moses that their faith and obedience would be a critical factor in His response. Each head of household in Israel was to take the blood from the slain lamb and dipping a branch of hyssop in the basin of collected blood they were to apply some of the blood to the outside of the house. A haphazard application would be of no benefit. The Lord commanded that the blood be applied in a very specific way to the doorway into each Israelite home. The blood was to be applied to the two sides of the front door (the two doorposts) and then some was to be applied to the top of the frame of the door (the lintel). While the Lord does not explain the significance of these three specific locations for the blood, we can draw a conclusion from comparing the New Testament fulfillment of this event. This is intended to be a direct connection to the death of

Jesus upon the cross. The symbolic result of applying some blood to the two sides and the top of the doorway leaves us with a clear impression of a cross with the blood on the top indicating the top of the cross and the blood on the two sides indicating the cross beam and the two sides of the cross.

Israel would be saved from the great judgment of that night only if they were inside a home covered by the blood of the lamb. Best intentions and good deeds would not stop the destroyer from entering the house. Neglect the blood and death is the unavoidable consequence. Believe and obey this and salvation from judgment is the glorious result. This principle remains 100% in force in God's dealings with all of humanity today. Those who count on their own goodness or even the good will of God, but who ignore the shed blood of Christ will encounter the full impact of God's great judgment on the final day of history. Only those who have believed in the death of Jesus upon the cross and have His blood applied to the entrance of their hearts will be spared forever the judgment of God.

12:43-48 - "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it; but every man's slave purchased with money, after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it. A sojourner or a hired servant shall not eat of it. It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this. But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it."

The Lord rehearses once again the importance of the Passover for Moses and Aaron. When the Lord repeats Himself it is a signal for us to pay attention even more closely. We are historically and culturally far removed from the events of this night, but we are spiritually living in direct connection to what this night still means. Paul connected the events of Exodus 12 to Christ in a way that demonstrates that Christ is not just one of the things Passover means; He is the meaning of Passover. "For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7). The details of this night were designed by God in anticipation of the time that Jesus would come to fulfill what the symbols can only foreshadow. The lambs sacrificed that night did not actually save anyone from the destroyer. Their purity was limited to physical purity alone. The blood of even the best animal in the world cannot adequately answer the problem of even a single person's sins.

These lambs were symbols of the true Lamb of God. Even the details of how the meal must be prepared speak to this connection. No bones were to be broken that night, and God made sure that none of the bones of Christ were broken on the cross. "For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN."(John 19:36). It was His death on the cross that

saved Israel that night. Yes, His death would not technically happen for hundreds of years to come, but because Israel believed God and applied the blood of these lambs to their homes, God counted their faith that day as though they were believing in Christ's death on the cross. The benefit of His death is not chronologically limited as though only the people alive since the cross can ever be saved. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The cross is no afterthought in the plan of God. All of history led up to the cross. The Passover was simply the most detailed preview of the cross that had yet been given to the world.

The Lord also establishes a firm boundary identifying who may and who may not partake of this meal. Only members of the covenant people of Israel may eat of it, or those that have been joined to Israel by circumcision. The Lord is very specific and particular about who can receive the benefit of salvation from the destroyer. There are to be no exceptions to this rule. What this points forward to is the dividing line in the New Covenant between those who have been born again and those who have not. In the New Covenant there is a circumcision all believers experience, but it is a spiritual circumcision performed by Christ Himself upon our hearts (Colossians 2:11). The New Testament fulfillment of this principle is found in the insistence of Jesus that "You must be born again." (John 3:7). The person that is born again is delivered from the great judgment of God, but the person that has not been born again remains under judgment.

Questions from Exodus 11:

Question: 11:5 - "from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl..." Is this specifying the actual age range of firstborns who died - i.e., could this include older children or even adults?

Answer: No, the age range is not emphasized in 11:5 so much as the social range is. The point is that every level of Egyptian society would be touched by this judgment from the highest and most powerful, the Pharaoh, to the lowest represented by the slave girl. I don't think adult firstborns were affected in this judgment. It is probable that Pharaoh was himself the firstborn son of his father, but he did not die in this plague. We do know, however, that from 12:30 every home in Egypt was affected so the extent of the judgment was tremendous.

Question: 11:5 - Is it possible that the Lord chose this particular plague as a judgment to Pharaoh because of his choice to kill the male children back when he began to fear the Israelites teaming-up against the Egyptians? Ex. 1:10-22

Answer: The Lord never specified His reasons for choosing this last judgment. It is entirely possible that one of His reasons was as an "eye for an eye" expression of His justice for the earlier command from Pharaoh to slay the male Hebrew babies. Another reason I believe that the firstborn of Egypt were chosen is that they represented the strength of Egypt's future. Pharaoh's firstborn in particular

was designated to be the next god as the future Pharaoh that the Egyptians would worship and serve. The other firstborn children represented the people who would choose to worship Pharaoh rather than Yahweh. In the aftermath of this devastating judgment the message was that idolatry only leads to death.

Exodus 13

13:6-9 - "For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. You shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'"

The Feast of Unleavened Bread which was introduced to Israel for the first time in the previous chapter is confirmed and emphasized here. This seven day feast was to become a permanent part of Israel's calendar throughout the generations to come. It was intentionally linked by the Lord to the remembrance of the Passover and that link was to be preserved in their future practice. This requirement of eating a particular kind of bread had nothing to do with health concerns, but served as a spiritual symbol that was to shape the understanding of all generations of Israel. There were three spiritual aspects of the feast.

The first aspect was the symbolism of leaven as a substance to not eat with their bread. A common misunderstanding among Christians is that leaven is always a symbol for sin in the Bible. Leaven does represent sin in some passages, but it is really a broader symbol than that. We learn from the later teaching of the Lord Jesus that leaven is a symbol of hidden influence. It can be used to represent a good thing like the hidden influence of God's kingdom (Matthew 13:33), or a bad thing such as the hidden influence of the sinful world around us. In this case, the leaven that Israel was not to mix with their bread symbolized the influence of Egypt upon their hearts. They had lived in the world of Egypt for over 400 years and had been subtly influenced by Egyptian culture, and worse, Egyptian religion. This feast was a message from the Lord to Israel to cleanse themselves of all Egyptian influence (II Corinthians 7:1). The second aspect of the symbolism of the leaven was that cleansing their lives of the influence of Egypt was a necessary preparation for where the Lord was taking them. The exodus was about a permanent departure from Egypt, but it was even more about the goal of the Promised Land ahead. The spiritual standards of the Promised Land were higher than the standards of Egypt.

The removal of all leaven, points to the sanctification that the Lord requires of all of His people. A true relationship with the Lord consists of much more than simply receiving forgiveness for our past failures, but remaining unchanged for

the future. God forgives us, but He also changes us. He does not want us to remain the same people that so casually violated His standards the way the rest of the world does. He is a holy God, and He wants His people to be holy. He calls us to be holy as He is holy (I Peter 1:14-16).

The third aspect of the leaven is more of a practical spiritual one. This feast to be celebrated for one week each year by all future generations of Israel will provide each father of Israel the opportunity to rehearse for his children the reason for the feast, and to teach them the meaning behind it. The Lord is always very concerned with the faithful transmission of the truth to the next generation. God is long term oriented in ways that we are not. It is not sufficient for us to have our own relationship with the Lord and understanding of His ways without passing them on to our children after us. This also highlights another critical principle of God's kingdom. The future generations of Israel would not themselves experience exactly what this first generation did. They would not witness the ten great judgments of the Lord on Egypt. They would never travel for themselves across the Red Sea and through the wilderness into the Promised Land. Would their lack of personal experience mean that they had any less of a covenant relationship with the Lord? The clear answer found in this God ordained feast pattern is no! The future generations would be established in their own relationship of the Lord through the message proclaimed from father to child. This remains critical for us. None of us were there on the day Jesus was crucified or the day He rose from the dead. Yet, because of the message of the gospel, we have as close and meaningful relationship with the Lord as the people that were there to see those events.

13:11-16 - "Now when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD. But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck; and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' then you shall say to him, 'With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.' So it shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

The Lord introduces the redemption of the firstborn to Israel here. This requirement of the Lord applied to all firstborn sons born to Israel, as well as the firstborn males of their livestock. For the people, the requirement was that when

the firstborn son was born the parents were to pay to the Lord a redemption price which will be specified in the Law of God to be given at Sinai. For the animals, each Israelite family was to sacrifice the firstborn unto the Lord with an allowed exception. The firstborn donkeys were to have a lamb substituted as sacrifice. This was because the donkey was an unclean animal under the Law, and could not be directly offered to the Lord. There is a requirement of this law that seems strange to us at first glance. If the family with the firstborn donkey could not provide a lamb in place of the donkey, they were to break the neck of the donkey, thus killing it. This may seem harsh and wasteful, but God is more concerned for His people to understand the principle at stake than He is about the economic loss of the donkey.

The principle is tied to what the Lord describes next about the law of the firstborn. The Lord anticipates the future sons of Israel to ask about this redemption of the firstborn practice. When they do, the fathers are to press home to their hearts the continuing significance of the events of the Passover night. On that night God killed all the firstborn of Egypt while passing over and sparing all the firstborn of Israel. The reason that God spared the firstborn of Israel was not because they deserved to be spared. The Egyptians were not greater sinners than the Israelites. If we consider who deserved to die that night based upon sin, then all deserved to die, Egyptian, Israelite, firstborn, secondborn and everyone else. God spared Israel only because of the blood of the lamb upon their doorway. Because God spared their lives even though they did not deserve it, they all owed their lives to Him from that moment forward. They belonged to Him, not to Pharaoh, and not even to themselves any longer. In the same way, this principle carries forward into the New Covenant church. We are identified by the Lord as the "church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23). The meaning is the same. Jesus as the Lamb of God saved us from the judgment of God by His blood shed for us, and because of that, we forever belong to Him and owe our lives to Him.

13:17-18 - "Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, "The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt."

Israel was about to permanently leave Egypt. The destination was the Promised Land to the northeast. There was more than one route from Egypt to Canaan. In fact, the route that Israel took was not the preferred route of the day. Along the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea was a commonly used and well traveled route. It was used by trading caravans and was the most direct and pleasant way to travel to Canaan. The distance by foot by the coast route would take maybe a month or so to travel given that there were older people and small children among them. It was more pleasant by far than the inland route because the coast

route had the benefit of the cooling sea breezes. Left to themselves, Israel would have taken the coast route. However, they did not choose their own path, because they were to follow the presence of the Lord as their guide in their journey from Egypt to Canaan.

Certainly, because God knows and is sympathetic to the needs of His people and the difficulty of the journey, He would guide them the faster, far more pleasant way. Again, in this passage, we see that our priorities do not always match God's priorities. The Lord chose to avoid the "better" route and take Israel instead through the wilderness of Sinai. His choice really did not make much sense. A route through Sinai was much longer, and the environment passing through that desert wilderness was not friendly to a caravan of over a million people. Where would they find food and water in that wilderness sufficient to sustain all the people? Yet, in spite of all these natural reasons, the Lord chose the wilderness route. The reason He shared with Moses was that He anticipated them changing their minds about continuing on to the Promised Land. The coast route would take them directly through the heart of Philistine territory. To pass through they would have to fight. The Lord's long range purpose was to form Israel into a fighting force capable of conquering the Promised Land, but that would take time, training and experience. They would not be ready for battle within the month.

The choice of the longer, much less pleasant route for them was really then an expression of the mercy and wisdom of God toward them. The bottom-line of this scenario is that God knows best which direction we should go in life and we don't! Left to ourselves we all would choose the faster, more pleasant option of life pathways. When God leads us the long way with more difficulties we should trust and believe that His wisdom is greater than our own, and that His way is going to turn out best for us in the end. If every Christian could just get this one lesson learned well, how much heartache would be avoided. Had they gone they way they would have chosen, they would have ended up slaves in Egypt once again. God's way was harder, but in the end they were a free and strong people.

13:21-22 - "The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people."

This is the first appearance of the famous pillar of the Lord. It is a single pillar, not two as some have mistakenly concluded. That same pillar appeared as a column of smoke in the daylight, and a column of fire at night. The double practical benefit for Israel was that during the day, the smoke would often shade them from the desert sun, while at night the fire of the Lord provided the security of light in the wilderness. Those benefits would only be consistently experienced as Israel maintained their one responsibility toward the pillar; stay close to it. If they remained close, then they were blessed in the Lord's presence. If they were to

ever lose sight of the pillar, then there would be no shade, no light, and no guidance to enjoy.

The simplicity of this principle remains in our own relationship with the Lord. All we have to do is stay close to Him. Of course, since we do not see him in a visible pillar like they did, we must discern where the pillar of the Lord's presence is day to day. The way we discern the Lord's presence today is by the clear testimonies of His revealed Word. God is found where He says He will be found. If we stay on the path of holiness and righteousness we can be assured that we are staying close to Him. If we veer off into sin we should expect to begin to lose sight of Him. If we stay on the path of love, we can be certain that we are staying close to Him, because "God is love". If we veer off into anger, dissension, bitterness and hatred we should not be shocked to discover a growing distance between ourselves and His presence. This spiritual discipline of staying close to the Lord is a daily issue for us. It is not enough to check once a month or week to discern whether we are currently close to Him. Each day I need to check to make sure I am following the pillar of cloud and each night the pillar of fire.

Exodus 14

14:9-12 - "Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. Then they said to Moses, 'Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.'"

Up until this moment, Israel must have been riding a wave of exhilaration. They had received a prophet sent from God to deliver them in Moses. They had watched as the Lord successively struck Egypt with ten awesome demonstrations of His judgment while preserving them in the midst of it all. They had finally been set free from their slavery and the misery of their impossible work load. They had been blessed with favor with the Egyptians and plundered their wealth as they left. Finally, they were given the supreme assurance of the Lord's provision and protection in the visible presence of the pillar of fire and cloud that was already leading them in their journey. They had every reason to be confident in their circumstances until this moment. With the arrival of the chariots of Egypt, suddenly all of the evidence of the Lord's involvement in this

circumstance was forgotten and they were immediately dominated by fear for their safety.

The first response of Israel in this situation was a step in the right direction. They cried out to Yahweh! When overwhelmed by fear and a circumstance beyond human control, the wisest thing the people of God can ever do is to cry out to the Lord. However, what and how they cry out is the concern, not just that they cry out. They cried out to the Lord and then spoke to Moses as the Lord's prophet. What they said to Moses reflected the current attitude of their heart toward the Lord. They cried out, not in faith and trust, but in complaint and bitter sarcasm. Had their hearts learned the lessons of the Lord's deliverance, here is how they would have spoken to the Lord and Moses. "Lord, we saw your mighty hand in the plagues you sent upon Egypt. We saw you humble Pharaoh and prove that You alone are God over all the earth. We have been blessed by your special concern for us as Your covenant people. Now, we trust that You protect us from this threat of Pharaoh's chariots. We place all of our hope in You!" Of course, the people did not cry out to the Lord and Moses in that way, but instead exposed their unbelieving and rebellious hearts in their cries.

They speak to Moses with dripping sarcasm when they ask if there were no graves in Egypt. They are implying that God has brought them all the way out here only to have them killed by Pharaoh. They had been given assurance by Moses that God was going to free them from slavery and bring them to the Promised Land in Canaan. Their complaint about God letting them die here was actually a back handed accusation against the integrity and faithfulness of God to His own promises. They then compound their complaint against the Lord by declaring that their lives would have been better off if God had not intervened to free them at all. They were saying it would be better to be a living slave to Pharaoh than a dead free man who had followed the Lord. What they failed to grasp is that even if they were to die here, their shorter lives would be more meaningful because they had followed the Lord where He led them. But, even so, the Lord had not led them here only to abandon them to Pharaoh.

The Lord has not abandoned them, but they are abandoning the Lord. This response of the people to the very first thing in their journey that goes "wrong" in their perspective introduces a theme in their relationship with the Lord that will be repeated over and over in the years to come. Their inability to anchor their hearts to what the Lord had just revealed to them and done for them is their downfall. They so quickly forget the multiplied proofs of God's commitment to them, and focus instead on the present difficulty as "proof" of how little Yahweh cares for them.

14:13-16 - "But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. "As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land."

The people have already slipped from faith into complaint and unbelief, but the spiritual growth of Moses in this process now becomes evident by his answer to their complaint on behalf of the Lord. Moses does not shrink under their accusations, or indulge in self-doubt or despair. He boldly replies to them with a three-fold rebuke and double word of encouragement. The wording in the original Hebrew emphasizes the strength of his word to correct their heart perspective. "Do not fear!" A study through the Bible of the times the Lord speaks to His people will turn up dozens of times that the Lord gives this same simple but powerful exhortation. The implication is the fear is the natural and expected tendency of the human heart when faced with uncertain circumstances. The Lord knows our tendency to fear, but also wants us to understand that our hearts cannot effectively hold both fear of the circumstance and faith in the Lord at the same time. Our heart will be dominated by either fear or faith, and we have a responsibility to not yield our hearts to fear, but rather trust ourselves fully to Him.

The following two words by Moses were for Israel to take a stand and watch what the Lord would do for them. To take a stand is the opposite of turning to run away. As soon as fear grips our hearts the natural flight to perceived safety mechanism kicks in. The parallel New Testament exhortation is, "... having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore ..." (Ephesians 6:13-14). The emphasis on standing to see the salvation of the Lord is that in this situation, they would not have to raise a hand to fight Pharaoh for themselves. Moses declares that the Lord, Himself, is going to fight for them. This tells them and us that the Lord is a warrior and that this battle will be all His. This points forward to the New Testament fulfillment in the work of Christ. When Jesus went to the cross, He did so, not for Himself, but for us. His sacrifice was the greatest battle of spiritual warfare. Just like Israel's future depended entirely on whether the Lord would defeat Pharaoh for them, our eternal future depended entirely on whether Jesus won the great battle at the cross. Israel could contribute nothing to Yahweh's fight with Egypt, and we contributed nothing to the war Jesus waged for us on the cross. Because Jesus won a complete and final victory for us, our old slave masters of sin and death have forever been vanquished.

The Lord's response to Moses was not a personal rebuke of Moses, but directed to the complaining people whom Moses represented. The essence of His response was for them to stop their crying complaint and to go forward where their natural perspective saw no way out. God then announces that He is about

to do the greatest miracle that they have yet seen, even overshadowing His works in the ten plagues. By the hand of Moses, the Lord will divide the Red Sea and provide a highway for them to reach their new life.

14:17-18 - "As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen."

The Lord now briefly explains to Moses the why behind the what. What has happened is that the Lord chose to spare Pharaoh's life in the ten judgments upon Egypt. He then hardened Pharaoh's heart once again and stirred him to pursue and recapture Israel. The obvious question is why the Lord arranged things in this way. Bringing Pharaoh and his army of chariots after Israel has really complicated their escape from Egypt. Why didn't the Lord simply kill Pharaoh before they left? Or, since the Lord can influence Pharaoh's decisions, He could have persuaded Pharaoh to not pursue Israel and to remain at home. So what reason could be big enough to put everyone to the trouble of Pharaoh's pursuit? For the Lord, there was only one reason what He caused this circumstance.

The Lord did this for His own honor! He did it to be honored through Pharaoh and his armies. By stirring Pharaoh to marshal his strongest military force and pursue Israel, the Lord was going to make one final demonstration of His power compared to Pharaoh and his army of chariots. The demonstration to follow would never be forgotten for all of history to follow. Not everyone in the generations to come will believe this event as it is recorded here, but, those who do, will have the single greatest evidence of the comparative power of God over all false gods. We have a humorous way of emphasizing personal glory in our culture. When a man asks his friends, "Who's the man?", the anticipated response by them in acknowledgment of his greatness is, "You're the man!" In this circumstance God designed, He was essentially asking Israel (and all nations that would later hear of this), "Who's the Lord?". The only right response is, "You are the Lord!"

The priority to the Lord of His own honor is established in this event in a costly way. As bad as the armies of Pharaoh were that drove their chariots into the Red Sea in pursuit of Israel, they were still human beings. Each one of them had value and significance as a person made in the image of God. Yet, God was willing to wipe out an entire army of human beings in order to make a huge point about His own glory and honor. We might be tempted to ask whether the Lord could have found another way to establish His honor that would not result in the death of so many. Even though this is difficult for many to grasp because we too are human beings, the truth is that as important as human beings are in His plan, His own honor is more valuable to the Lord than the life of a human being. This

tells me that I am not more important than the honor of the Lord. His honor comes first and I come second. How important is it then that my life would honor the Lord?

14:21-22 - "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left."

The physical circumstance described in these verses is an awesome display of the power of God to control an entire sea superceding the "laws of nature". This is a physical miracle, but this parting of the Red Sea also bears great significance as a symbolic type of God's work in our lives. The crossing of Israel through the Red Sea is a picture of the transition from our old life in sin to our new life in Christ. Paul refers to this event and identifies it interestingly as a baptism. "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;" (I Corinthians 10:1-2). The water never physically touched the Israelites as they walked across the sea, but as a symbol, they were all being baptized together in the sea. Their baptism was "into Moses", which signified that they were no longer slaves to Pharaoh, but now belonged to the Lord through His chosen deliverer, Moses. In the same way, when the Lord saved us on the cross, He calls us to follow Him into a new life. Our first step of obedience to Him is in submitting our entire body to be baptized into Christ. That act of obedience declares to everyone that we no longer belong to our old slave master, Satan, but we belong completely to God's chosen One, Jesus.