

OUR SOVEREIGN GOD

6²⁸Now on the day when Jehovah spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹he said to him, "I am Jehovah. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you." ³⁰But Moses said in the presence of Jehovah, "I am a man with 'uncircumcised lips.' How will it be that Pharaoh will listen to me?" ⁷Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Listen; I have made you like God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. ²You are to speak everything I command you, and Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh, instructing him to allow the children of Israel to depart from his land. ³And I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴And Pharaoh will not listen to you, so I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring forth my hosts—my people, the children of Israel—out of the land of Egypt with mighty acts of judgment. ⁵Then the Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah, when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them." ⁶Moses and Aaron did so—they did just as Jehovah commanded. ⁷Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh. (Ex. 6:28-7:7)

Introduction

A missionary, serving in the South Pacific, relates a personal experience he had while ministering in the countryside of Tahiti.

The missionary and a local Tahitian pastor were walking through waist high grass on their way to visit a small thatched hut. As they walked towards the hut they heard a low, throaty growl from the hidden depths of the grass. Stopping to discern what was making this ominous sound, they both felt a chill of fear.

Suddenly a Doberman pinscher leaped up from out of the tall grass and came bounding towards them, his sharp teeth bared in an awful snarl. The missionary could see every detail of the attacking dog as though the whole thing were occurring in slow motion; he stood directly in the dog's path, paralyzed with fear.

As the Doberman made his final leap, so close that the missionary could smell his foul breath, the dog's head was violently twisted to the side. Savagely slammed down to the ground, as if by some invisible hand, he lay stunned, his feet waving in the air like an overturned beetle. Then the missionary saw what he had failed to notice before because of his fear: the Doberman was on a chain.

Later, when the two men walked back from the house, across the field of tall grass, they ignored the leaping, barking dog. They were no longer afraid of him because, no matter how ferocious and sinister he looked or sounded, he could only go as far as his chain allowed.

We must realize that the devil, too, is on a "chain," and at the other end of that chain is the strong hand of the LORD, holding it fast with an unyielding grip (*POWER*,

4/7/91. As Christians, we should be encouraged to know that the LORD is the sovereign God who will surely accomplish His purpose of redeeming His church.

I. Because the LORD is the Sovereign God, Be Assured that Even Those Who Oppose Him are Subject to His Control

Consider the final instructions the LORD gives to Moses as He sends him to the king of Egypt. Moses is to speak to Pharaoh, instructing him to let the children of Israel depart from his land (6:29; 7:2.) But the LORD warns Moses that Pharaoh will not listen (7:4.) Then the LORD informs Moses that He will lay His hand upon Egypt and bring His people out by means of great judgments (7:4b.)

Look still more closely at those words of instruction to Moses: *“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart ... Pharaoh will not listen to you”* (7:3-4.) Exodus 7:3-4 is actually a summary statement foretelling the LORD’s act of hardening Pharaoh’s heart as an act of judgment upon Pharaoh for hardening his own heart against the LORD. Six times Pharaoh stubbornly resisted the commandment of God, each time hardening his heart against the LORD: first, at the initial interview with Moses when Moses turned the rod into a serpent (7:13); second, in response to the first plague, (the water of the Nile turned into blood) (7:22); third, following the second plague (the plague of frogs) (8:15); fourth, in response to the third plague (the plague of lice) (8:19); fifth, following the fourth plague (the plague of flies) (8:32); and, sixth, in response to the fifth plague (the disease on the livestock) (9:7.)

Then, starting with the sixth plague (the plague of boils), we read, *“the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart”* (9:12.) Following that sixth plague—and the preliminary hardening of Pharaoh’s heart as an act of warning in response to Pharaoh’s own persistent hardening of his heart against the LORD—the LORD informs Pharaoh that if he continues to persist in his rebellion, *“I will send the full force of my plagues against you;”* literally, *“I will ... send all my plagues upon your heart”* (9:14.)

The point of no return came at the conclusion of the seventh plague, (the plague of the hail storm.) When Pharaoh saw that the hail stopped, *“he sinned again,”* (literally, *“he sinned still more”*.) Here was a continuing and deepening sin act of sin, *“he and his officials hardened their hearts”* (9:34.) In consequence, and as an act of judgment, Pharaoh’s heart *“was hardened”* (by the LORD) (9:35) Although the NIV version reads, *“So Pharaoh’s heart was hard,”* the ASV more accurately translates the statement, *“Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.”* The Hebrew verb, קָשַׁח, occurring in the Kal form has the passive meaning, “to be hardened” (*The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, Benjamin Davidson, Samuel Bagster & Sons, Publishers, reprinted in 1967.)

Thus Exodus 7:3-4 is a summary statement, foretelling the LORD's act of judgment in hardening Pharaoh's heart as the consequence of Pharaoh's own act of repeatedly hardening his heart against the LORD. Take note of Job's rhetorical question, *"Who has hardened himself against [the LORD] and succeeded?"* (Job 9:4b.)

Look again at the LORD's words of instruction to Moses and note carefully the way He identifies Himself: *"Now on the day when Jehovah spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹he said to him, 'I am Jehovah'"* (6:28-29.) The name "Jehovah" is derived from the Hebrew verb "to be," or, "I am." In Exodus 3:14 God elaborates upon His name and His identity, *"God said to Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM.'" The Hebrew has the meaning, "I AM BECAUSE I AM;"* He is self-existent, depending upon no one and nothing. The LORD is the Source, or, Creator of all things: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Gen. 1:1.) The LORD is the Sustainer of all things: *"He is before all things, and by him all things hold together"* (Col. 1:17.) The LORD is the Supreme Purpose for all existence: *"from him, and through him, and for him, are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen"* (Rom. 11:36) Note, too, Ecclesiastes 12:13, *"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."*

The Hebrew phrase also has the meaning, *"I AM WHO I AM."* The LORD is self-defining, no one tells Him who He is or what He can do. As King Nebuchadnezzar was led to testify, *"He does as he pleases with the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can push away his hand, or demand of him, 'What are you doing?'"* (Dan. 4:35b.) In Ephesians 1:11 the LORD is described as the One who *"causes all things to work for the sake of his own plan"*—i.e.; the LORD causes all things to happen in such a way that they will contribute to the fulfillment of His own sovereign will and purpose.

Because the LORD is the Sovereign God, let us be assured that even those who oppose Him are subject to His will. *"The Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth'"* (Rom. 9:17.) As Job testifies, *"His wisdom is profound; his power is vast. Who has hardened himself against [the Lord] and succeeded?"* (Job 9:4.)

II. Because the LORD is the Sovereign God, Be Assured that He shall Conquer All His and Our Enemies

Right from the outset, this was not merely a political war, nor merely a cultural war, but a spiritual battle. The initial sign performed before Pharaoh, (turning a staff into a serpent,) related directly to the art of snake charming practiced among the Egyptians; i.e., the LORD was challenging the gods of Egypt. When Pharaoh summons the magicians (Ex. 7:11-12), he is summoning the gods of Egypt by means of their appointed spokesmen (the magicians) to meet the LORD's challenge and contest against Him. The fact that Aaron's staff swallowed

up the magicians' rods (7:12) is a portent of what is to come; namely, the divine victory of the LORD over Egypt and all of its gods.

The spiritual battle waged by the LORD against the gods of the empire is dramatically presented in the first plague: the turning of the Nile River into blood (7:14-25.) The Nile was viewed by Egypt as the source of its prosperity and life, it was honored as Egypt's supreme deity (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, Vol.1, p.478.) When Pharaoh went out to the Nile early in the morning, he went out to offer sacrifice and worship. It is here that Moses is sent to confront him with the demand of the LORD.

It should be noted that every year the Nile "turned into blood." At the season of low water, the Nile was green and undrinkable; but at the season of high water the Nile became red and wholesome, it was said to have "turned into blood" (Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 478-479.) But on this occasion it was different: this time the Nile was actually turned into blood. But it was not blood that was the symbol and means of life; on the contrary, this time it was blood poured out in death:

This is what Jehovah says, "By this you will know that I am Jehovah: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. ¹⁸The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water." (Ex. 7:17-18)

The very first plague became a prophecy of what the LORD would do to this pagan nation—and what He will finally do to every pagan nation—as well as to the powers of darkness that possess such nations: *"I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt. I am Jehovah"* (Ex. 12:12b.)

In His conflict with His enemies, notice the LORD's patience—but it is a longsuffering and patience that must eventually give way to judgment when it is persistently met with defiance and neglect. Early on, when Pharaoh shows some inclination towards the LORD, the LORD immediately offers to employ His divine power for Pharaoh, rather than against him:

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Pray to Jehovah to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to Jehovah." ⁹Moses said to Pharaoh, "I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile." ¹⁰"Tomorrow," Pharaoh said. Moses replied, "It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like Jehovah our God." (Ex.8:8-10)

The first nine plagues are administered in a re-occurring cycle, with the first three plagues forming the first cycle, plagues four through six the second cycle,

and plagues seven through nine the third cycle. In each cycle Moses is first sent out to meet Pharaoh at the banks of the Nile River, to announce an impending plague (1st, 4th, 7th plagues); next Moses is sent in to Pharaoh's court, to warn of another impending plague (2nd, 5th, 8th plagues); then, the final plague in the series occurs unannounced (3rd, 6th, 9th plagues.) By means of these three cycles, there is a divine seeking out of Pharaoh (with the desire for his repentance), this is followed by a coming in to Pharaoh (with the purpose of urging upon him the importance of repentance.) When both of these efforts fail, there comes judgment without further warning, the type of judgment described in Proverbs 29:1, *"A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy."*

Each time the cycle is repeated, the chastisement becomes more severe and more ominous as it continues to be met by sinful rebellion on the part of Pharaoh:

- **1st cycle of plagues (1-3):** the Nile is turned into blood, and restored after seven days (7:24-25); ...frogs fill the land and the land is filled with their stench (8:14); ...gnats come upon the land and inflict their painful sting (8:16-18)
- **2nd cycle of plagues (4-6):** there now come dense, or, grievous, swarms of flies (8:24); ...a disease upon cattle, which produces death to animal life (9:3,6); ...boils, which are so severe that the magicians could not stand before Moses (9:11)
- **3rd cycle of plagues:** a severe hailstorm that destroys the lives of all who are exposed to it, both animals and mankind (9:19); ...locusts that devour all the fruit trees and the crops not previously destroyed by the hailstorm (10:5,15); ...dense darkness (10:21-23), indicating the withdrawal of God's grace and being given over to God's judgment, note 2 Peter 2:4, *"God did not spare angels when they sinned, but consigned them to hell, putting them in dark pits where they are being kept for the day of judgment."*

At last, the longsuffering patience of God and the warnings of God must give way to the final judgment, judgment that comes in the form of the 10th plague:

So Moses said, "This is what Jehovah says, 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. ⁵Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. (Ex. 11:4-5)

This time the LORD will personally go forth to execute His divine judgment. The death of the first born represented the whole nation, note the comment of the Egyptian leaders, *"We will all die;"* literally, *"We are **all** dead men"* (Ex.12:33.)

Because the LORD is the sovereign God, let us be assured that he shall conquer all His and our enemies:

Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; surely, I will help you; surely, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. ¹¹Listen! All those who rage against you will be brought to shame and disgrace; those who oppose you will be as nothing and will perish. ¹²You will seek them—them who fight against you—but you will not find them; those who wage war against you will be like nothing, like nothing at all. ¹³[Such will be the case] because I, Jehovah your God, will hold your right hand and say to you, Do not be afraid; I will help you. ¹⁴Do not be afraid, O Jacob you worm, and you men of Israel; I will help you, declares Jehovah. Indeed, your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. (Isa. 41:10-14)

No weapon forged against you will prevail. Furthermore, you will condemn every tongue that speaks against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of Jehovah—and their righteousness is from me, declares Jehovah. (Isa. 54:17)

III. Because the LORD is the Sovereign God, Be Assured that the World Shall Finally Acknowledge Him as God

The divine purpose for these judgments upon this world empire are stated as follows in Exodus 7:17-18, *“This is what Jehovah says: ‘By this you will know that I am Jehovah: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. ¹⁸The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.’”* His purpose is that all may know that Jehovah is **the Lord over nature**, the God who stands distinct from nature and above nature and all created powers (things that Egypt honored as divine.)

In Exodus 8:22, His divine purpose is further stated in these terms: *“that they might know that I, Jehovah, am in this land;”* or, *“I am Jehovah in the midst of the land (of Egypt).”* His purpose is that all may know that Jehovah is **the Ruler over the nations** of the earth.

Then, again, His divine purpose is still further expressed in Exodus 9:29, *“that they might know that the earth belongs to Jehovah.”* His purpose is that all may know that Jehovah is **the Sovereign Ruler** over nature and all things are under His control. To demonstrate this, the LORD caused the violent hailstorm to cease at the command of His servant, Moses.

Yet one more purpose is expressed in Exodus 8:22-23,

... that they might know that the LORD makes a distinction between Israel (His people) and Egypt (representative of the world of mankind in league with the devil and in rebellion against the LORD): I will deal differently with the

land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, Jehovah, am in this land. ²³I will make a distinction between my people and your people. (8:22-23)

His purpose is that all may know that Jehovah is **both the Redeemer of His people and the Judge of the world**. To demonstrate this fact He delivered the land of Goshen, where His people Israel lived, from being subjected to the last two cycles of plagues.

What were the results of these divine judgments that fell upon the world of Egypt?

The magicians, the representatives and servants of darkness, could not stand before Moses, the servant of the LORD (Ex. 9:11.) Pharaoh grudgingly confesses, *"Jehovah is righteous, I and my people are wicked"* (Ex. 9:27.) As mankind is exposed to the holy majesty of God, evidenced here by the violent hailstorm with thunder and lightning bolts from heaven, there is the acknowledgment both of the righteousness of the LORD as well as the sinfulness of man. The royal counselors seek to call Pharaoh's attention to the fact that Egypt (a representative and example of the empire of man) is ruined (Ex. 10:7.) When the people of Israel departed from the ruins of this formerly oppressive power, they plundered the Egyptians: *"The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. ³⁶Jehovah had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians"* (Ex. 12:35-36.) Here is one instance of the enactment of the truth expressed in Ecclesiastes 2:26, a passage that speaks about the final and divine "re-distribution of wealth," *"[God] gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to the man who pleases him; but to the sinner [God] gives the arduous task of gathering and storing up wealth so that He may give it to the one that pleases Him."*

Because the LORD is the sovereign God, let us be assured that the world shall finally acknowledge Him as God:

Jehovah of hosts has a day in store for all that is proud and arrogant, for all that is exalted—and they will be humbled ...¹⁷The arrogance of man shall be brought low, and the pride of man shall be humbled; and Jehovah alone shall be exalted on that day—¹⁸and the idols will totally disappear ...²⁰On that day men will throw away to the rodents and to the bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold that they made to worship, ²¹in order to flee to the caverns in the rocks and to the overhanging crags from the terror of Jehovah and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to mightily shake the earth. (Isa. 2:12,17-18,20-21)

Conclusion

As a Christian, you should be encouraged to know that the LORD is the sovereign God who will accomplish His good purpose for His church and will glorify His holy name. In the words of the hymn writer:

This is my Father's world.
O let me never forget
That though the wrong often seems so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world,
The battle is not done;
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and heaven be one.
(Maltbie D. Babcock)