



1-2-1 with God – The finger of God Sunday 4th February 2018.

T.Yacomeni

Today is the fifth week in our series called 1-2-1 with God, following the story of Moses as he followed the call of the Lord to challenge Pharaoh to free the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt.

In previous weeks we've learned how God had to assure Moses of his presence with him and provide the companionship of Aaron to help him overcome his insecurities and share the burden of responsibility. Then last week we saw in Chapter 7v6 that finally 'Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded them.' So now the battle proper begins. Pharaoh dismissed their request saying 'who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go.'

So with Aaron's staff they start to unleash the first of 10 plagues across the land of Egypt saying 'This is what the LORD says: 'By this you will know that I am the LORD', and the River Nile is turned to blood. Whether this was actual blood or something similar to the modern phenomena that happened in the Bah Bolon river in Indonesia during August last year or like the Daldykan River in Siberia in 2016, we don't know.



What we do know is that in both cases all the fish stocks were decimated, and experts are still baffled by the actual cause. Some experts state that the Nile sometimes looks blood red when it carries a lot of sediment. But the Nile, which was sacred and life-giving to the Egyptians was suddenly devastated, and this once great nation whose King had heeded a warning from the LORD to avoid 7 years of famine, is now threatened by the new King's stubborn arrogance.

Seven days later the Lord told Moses and Aaron to repeat the warning to Pharaoh, to let the people go or face another disaster. Pharaoh again refused, so Aaron stretched out his staff again and this time a plague of frogs came and covered the land. Now according to an article in the Telegraph newspaper entitled '*Biblical plagues really happened, say scientists!*', toxic chemicals in the water which produced the red discolouration could have forced frogs to leave the safety of the Nile and collect in large numbers in local cities.



Archaeologists have found evidence climactic changes and devastation occurring in the city of Pi-Rameses at around 1215BC. However it wouldn't be honouring to the Word of God to simply explain the plagues away as purely natural phenomena, as some have tried to do. It was God's intent for Moses to warn Pharaoh, and when he didn't repent and change his mind, the next plague was unleashed.

Like some commentators and scientists of our day, Exodus chapter 8 tells us that the wise magi in Pharaoh's court were able to explain away the frogs, and even reproduce the phenomena. They cast doubt on the miraculous power of God. But they couldn't get rid of the frogs and cracks started to appear in Pharaoh's unbelief: He says to Moses 'pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go...' Perhaps this is a momentary glimmer of humility on the part of Pharaoh? So Moses prays, and the frog plague ceases. But verse 15 says that Pharaoh hardened his heart, and would not release the Israelites from their captivity.

The Hebrew word for hardening of the heart is *kä-vad'* [*Kar-vaed*] the same word that is used for honouring, or otherwise ascribing weight or heaviness to something. Pharaoh chose to honour himself and the weight of his own reasoning instead of yielding to the Lord.

In some places we read that God said that he hardened Pharaoh's heart. In other places we read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. In the grand scheme of God's sovereignty, none of us are left without individual choice. Romans 11:32 says 'For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.' We must each decide how we respond to God's invitation; whether we remain hard or soft hearted.

So the first challenge to us today is this: Do you have a hard heart this morning? What is your attitude towards the miraculous power of God? It's a question I have to ask myself sometimes. As well as my level of faith, what is my level of scepticism? Oscar Wilde said 'scepticism is the beginning of faith', but ironically, I doubt that! Moses discovered humility and obedience is the beginning of faith. Moses and Aaron obediently did as the Lord asked, even though for the first few plagues the Israelites suffered along with the Egyptians. Obedience is costly. It can cause pain to us and to those we love, and when it comes to the 3rd plague, even the animals in the land started to suffer.

So we're going to read from Exodus 8 verses 16-19: The plague of gnats.

The Plague of Gnats –

¹⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground,' and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats." ¹⁷ They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. ¹⁸ But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals.
¹⁹ The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said.

This striking image was taken in Scotland back in May when over 68 Billion midges came out of the ground in time the summer mating season. If you've ever been pestered by midges or a mosquito infestation you'll know how irritating they can be. You only have to mention fleas or nits around my wife and she goes into a scratchy panic. I bet some of you are starting to itch right now!

Well the plague of gnats that Moses invoked on the land of Egypt at God's command was awful. Even the animals and livestock were affected. But it does raise the question – why these particular plagues? Couldn't God just get straight to the point and force Pharaoh's capitulation?



Well the bible doesn't explicitly say why God chose these particular 10 plagues, but commentators have suggested that each one was targeting a particular Egyptian deity.

For example the Nile was worshipped as the life source of Egypt, with Hapi revered as the god of the Nile. One of the Egyptian fertility gods Heket was depicted as having the head of a frog. The Egyptians observed the life-cycle of tadpoles to frogs and so Heket's depiction as a frog was symbolic of mortal life, rebirth and resurrection.



Then the god Khepri who was the God of beetles and flies, was known for creation coming from dust, rather like Scarab dung beetles emerge from a ball of dung.

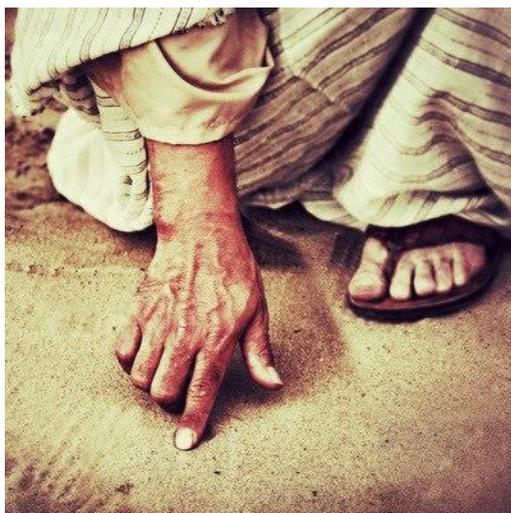
Of course when it came to the worst and final plagues of darkness and the Passover, these targeted the supreme Egyptian god Ra, the sun god and Pharaoh himself, the god-king. While Pharaoh's pride and arrogance overruled Egypt, the very things that the Egyptians worshipped, revered and relied upon were overruled by the one true God of Israel. Pharaoh's priests tried to reproduce their own plague of gnats but they could not duplicate this. They told Pharaoh that this was "the finger of God." They finally began to realise that God's hand was at work, with supernatural power. The expression is still used to indicate the raw power of God. In the 1996 movie, *Twister*, a group of storm chasers is discussing the relative strengths of tornados, and they mention an F5 tornado. Someone asks what an F5 is, to which one of the storm chasers replies, "The finger of God."

The expression 'the finger of God' is found in several places throughout the scriptures, and it speaks of both judgment and deliverance.



As well as the finger of God being behind the plagues of Egypt, in Exodus 31:18 we read of the stone tablets of testimony being inscribed by the "finger of God". The tablets detailed the laws and the 10 commandments that the Israelites are to follow. This law of Moses was the basis of the judgement of God for generations. But then Jesus came saying he had come to fulfil the law- in other words to *fill it with fullness* – to restore the relationship with the presence of God that Moses had personally experienced when the law was written, but had been lost as that the Pharisees and teachers of the law had throttled out of it.

In John 8, a woman caught in adultery is dragged before Jesus by a mob wanting him to order her execution according to the law of Moses. But we read in verse 6 that Jesus bends down and writes in the dust with his finger. She had been caught in the act and the law was clear on her fate. But Jesus then told the crowd 'if any of you is without sin, let him be the one to cast the first stone.' And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. One by one they walked away until only Jesus and the woman remained. When they were all gone Jesus turned to the woman and said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."



So notice the three elements: 1) Jesus writing with His finger, 2) Jesus doing so twice, and 3) Jesus doing so in a dispute about the Law of Moses.

Now by writing on the ground in the dust, Jesus was showing that he knew the law inside out. The episode took place during the feast of Tabernacles when it was forbidden to work or write – except in the dust of the ground which could be erased and blown away by the wind. But also Jesus wrote with his finger to remind them of the finger of God writing the law in the first place. Jesus, God in the flesh, is the original lawgiver. Revelation and authority and power come from Him. To oppose Him is to oppose the author and authority of Law of Moses whether they realized it or not.

Then in another argument with the Pharisees after they accuse Jesus of being demon possessed, Jesus said in Luke 11:19 “if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:19).

So the finger of God is not only about righteous judgment but also deliverance too.

The finger of God in the New Testament is about the healing, deliverance and freedom that the Holy Spirit brings. ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ says Paul in 2 Cor 3:17. The plagues are not just about judgment, but freedom and deliverance too. The Israelites were freed from slavery. In the end Egypt itself becomes freed from the tyranny of a dynasty of Pharaohs who ruled with an iron fist. That freedom has brought blessings down the generations. Egypt has become a place of sanctuary and safety and a thriving nation. Even Joseph and Mary found sanctuary for their young family when Herod is trying to kill Jesus as a baby. In the end God is working his purposes out and because of Jesus we can have full assurance that God’s judgement can also be the means of his deliverance.

I finish with a quote by C S Lewis:

