

The Power of God Ex 5, 7-10

Brothers and sisters, in order to make this morning's drama possible, we've given you the abridged version of Exodus chapters 5 through 10, summarizing and presenting the main points and the events which occurred when Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt to rally the Israelites and confront Pharaoh with God's message to let the people go.

And it was unusual for me to create a breakfast theatre script in this way, because my goal in breakfast theatre is to script the scripture, so that what you hear in the drama is what you would read in the scripture.

And that is very easy to do with the shorter stories we've presented in the past, like Ruth, Esther, Jonah, Samson, Daniel, even Joseph... But with this portion in the story of Moses I kind of felt like movie producer Peter Jackson, or Zack Snyder, known for their massive epic productions that can run hours on end, and how they must make difficult decisions to cut out certain scenes while still preserving the storyline, to

trim down the runtime of their movie for the theatrical release.

And of course, their theatrical release movies are always a big hit - regardless of what had to be cut out. And it only seems to make the hardcore movie fans all the more eager to get their hands on a copy of the directors cut to enjoy the further insight, depth and nuance which the extra footage gives.

So brothers and sisters, my hope this morning is that our abridged theatrical release will make you all the more eager to take your copy of the directors cut and read it, and get all the extra dialogue, deleted scenes, and family genealogy that typically gets cut out when presenting this confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. And indeed, you will receive further insight, depth, nuance for having done so.

But what can we say about the abridged version this morning? I think it really highlights the protracted confrontation, the battle of the wills and the power struggle between Pharaoh and Yahweh. It clarifies the liberation of the Israelites is so

that they can worship Yahweh, and of course it showcases the mighty acts of Yahweh.

And it should brothers and sisters, this is not just an excuse for creative theatrical effects, God himself has been hinting that He is going to do something amazing and show His power and might.

Way back in Gen 15:14 when God explained to Abraham that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign country before they returned to the Promised Land, God declared He would punish that nation Israel had served as slaves.

Last week Ex 3:19-20 we heard God say *“But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So, I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them.”*

And in Ex 10:1 God reveals His purpose in these mighty acts, that Moses and the Israelites *“may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how*

I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the LORD.”

So yes, it's ok to amp up the wow factor and be impressed by these mighty acts of God, these demonstrations of His divine power and control, doing things that reveal to us just how mighty He truly is, and who He really is.

And that is needed brothers and sisters because Israel didn't really know very much about God. They would have known He was the God of their ancestors who had made a promise to them, but given the reality of their day-to-day experience being oppressed by the power of Egypt – as the dominant civilization, culture and religion of that time, the God of their ancestors appeared to be an old god that did not have much, if any power, within the jurisdiction of the gods worshipped in Egypt. But all that was about to change...

There are nine mighty acts in the story this morning, turning the Nile to blood, plague of frogs, gnats or lice, the plague of

flies, animal sickness, the plague of boils, then the hailstorm, the plague of locust and the darkness.

They are divided into three groups of three through the third, the sixth and the ninth mighty act happening without any warning or ultimatum given to Pharaoh. All the other acts of God are precluded by Moses and Aaron telling Pharaoh to let the people go or else... and when Pharaoh does not obey, God acts.

But with the plague of gnats or lice, the boils, and the darkness God simply tells Moses to perform a specific action, Moses obeys and God responds accordingly striking the Egyptians with His power.

I think this is meant to reveal that God is Yahweh – I AM who I AM. He is not controlled by anyone else, He does thing on His own schedule, and the warnings and ultimatums He gives to Pharaoh are a courtesy, He is fully within His capacity as God to act without warning in bringing punishment upon Egypt for

the oppression they have inflicted upon Israel in a capricious manner.

Now, you might say – well, three groups of three plagues divided up this way each, that seems a bit predictable and organized, does that really reveal God as someone you can't predict or tame or put in a box like the Egyptian gods?

Yes, that's what it's supposed to do brothers and sisters, in an organized way – because the organization and the other distinctions between the groups of plagues show these mighty actions to be intentional and well thought out by Yahweh.

These mighty acts are not, as some skeptics suggest, natural phenomena that just coincidentally occurred in this order while Moses was confronting Pharaoh.

No, these were specific and deliberate actions performed by God, for the purpose, as Ex 15:16 says that God *"might show [Pharaoh] His power and that His name might be proclaimed in all the earth..."* and here we are this morning, still talking about it to this very day!

And the supremacy of Yahweh's power is established by the end of the first group of three mighty acts. Pharaoh's magicians are also able to turn water into blood and summon frogs but they are incapable of doing so for the unannounced third plague of gnats. Indeed, they admit their defeat to Pharaoh recognizing they are up against *"the finger of God."*

And the focus of Yahweh's power is established in the second group of three. We see that God's mighty acts are solely focused on the Egyptians; the Hebrews are spared from them. Yahweh is indeed a powerful God, but what good is that power if it is indiscriminate and ends up destroying the people it is intended to liberate? But in the second group of mighty acts we see that Yahweh's mighty act only affects those He intends to affect with no collateral damage.

And in the third group of mighty acts we see fullness of Yahweh's power as He shifts from mighty acts that give Egypt warning using amplified natural causes, e.g. lots of flies and frogs, animal diseases and sickness to abnormal occurrences that demonstrate the fullness of God's supernatural power.

When the hail storm happens and the locusts come it is noted this was the worst occurrence of this to ever happen and nothing like it will ever happen again.

And these mighty acts also indicate that Pharaoh has crossed a line with Yahweh and now the countdown begins with these last three mighty acts to Yahweh's final judgement on Egypt. As Yahweh says in Ex 9:14 *"this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you."* And this final group of mighty acts culminates with God sending thick darkness upon the Egyptians blocking out the light of sun for three days.

So, we see how Yahweh performed His mighty acts in a specific sequence - so the arrangement reveals the supremacy of His power, the focus of His power and the fullness of His power, it's an overarching message of Yahweh's greatness.

And each of these mighty acts demonstrates to both the Egyptians and the Israelites how the greatness of Yahweh has come to defeat and break the power of all that is revered and sacred in Egyptian life and religion.

So, as they say, “de-nile” is not just a river in Egypt – it was THE river in Egypt. It was the life source for the Egyptians, it sustained their entire agricultural and commercial enterprise and they revered the Nile river as a divine power.

So, God’s first mighty act takes direct aim at the Nile, turning it to blood as the river had blood on its hands for all the Hebrew babies that had been killed in it. Thus, it should be no surprise to us that the Egyptian magicians can turn water into blood, for the power behind the throne of Egypt was Satanic and as we know the devil comes only to steal kill and destroy, and that’s what Pharaoh had done. The Nile was supposed to give and sustain life, but it had been used to take the lives of helpless baby boys and thus Yahweh would render it useless for that which sustained life - drinking, irrigation of crops, and fishing.

In the second mighty act Yahweh brings forth an over-abundance of frogs, they are everywhere, getting into everything. Which is ironic because the Egyptians believed

frogs symbolized the ability to produce and reproduce life, in fact the Egyptian goddess of fertility, Heqet, had a frog’s head.

So, Yahweh is showing that He is in fact, the God of fertility. Not some frog headed freak of a false god. And as the true God of fertility, He has allowed the Hebrews to multiply and reproduce in Egypt in spite of Pharaoh’s attempts to reduce their population. And remember how the mid-wives refused to kill the baby boys?? Well, I think the Egyptian magicians being able to call forth frogs as well, symbolizes how Egyptians assisted the Hebrews in multiplying, by deliberate actions like that of the mid-wives or unintentionally through oppression.

But when it comes to stopping the frogs only Yahweh has the power to do that, the magicians can’t do it. And then their symbol of life becomes the stench of death, as the piles of dead frogs rot and decompose. If you don’t know the true source of life, it only leads to death.

Which is my scholarly opinion on why Yahweh brings forth gnats, or lice, from the dust as His next mighty act. Dust is the

symbol of death in the scriptures. For example, when God curses Satan in Gen 3:14 the devil is sentenced to crawl on his belly and eat... dust. Dust is death.

So, death - dust is the natural connecting point for the third, and unannounced mighty act. Yahweh brings an outbreak of gnats up from the dust and they afflict all the people and animals in the land. They are an unseen tormentor, an invisible curse that bites and irritates and this points out the reality of all the afflictions in our lives that come from spiritual death, the afflictions of sin and our sinful nature.

So, the first three mighty acts are experienced by everyone – Egyptian and Hebrew, because they address the shared common human condition. We take what is supposed to give life and we use it to bring death, we don't know the true source of life, we are spiritually dead and we experience the afflictions of sin in this condition. And that is still true of everyone today isn't brothers and sisters.

But Yahweh introduces a distinction in the fourth mighty act, He will only send swarms of flies upon the Egyptians, not the Israelites – His chosen people, who are living in Goshen – the eastern part of the Nile delta. Now swarms of insects are very common in places like the Nile delta with all the rivers and wet-lands, and the Egyptians believed the goddess Uatchit ruled the swarming insects of these marshes.

However, we see it is Yahweh who summons the swarm of flies, controls and directs it towards the Egyptians, and away from the land of Goshen.

And if we apply the scriptural symbolism that flies represent that which is unclean, impure, foolish, we can see the point that God's distinction of no flies means He has set His people apart as clean, pure and for His wisdom.

Yahweh continues this distinction for the remainder of his mighty acts, showing how His people are set apart, protected and spared from the judgement that He is bringing upon Egypt.

So, the fifth mighty act distinguishes between the livestock of the Israelites and the Egyptians, as Yahweh sends sickness which kills off all horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, sheep and goats. There is likely an aspect of overpowering whatever Egyptian deities from whom these animals were considered sacred, but I think this act is connected to Pharaoh's attempt to change Yahweh's command.

In Ex 8:25, prompted by the plague of flies Pharaoh determines Israel could fulfill Yahweh's command to worship Him by offering sacrifices in Egypt, and gives permission for this. This is an offense to Yahweh, you don't change His commands and who is Pharaoh to determine that offering sacrifices in Egypt would be acceptable to Yahweh. As a response to Pharaoh's presumptuousness, God decided the entirety of Egypt's livestock would be offered as sacrifice, but Israel's livestock would be spared – to be offered outside of Egypt as God had commanded.

Then Yahweh inflicts His sixth mighty act upon the Egyptians, painful sores upon their skin. This would most certainly show

Yahweh's power to be greater than the gods to whom the Egyptians prayed to for their good health, but I think the significance here lies in how God initiates this plague by having Moses throwing soot from a brick furnace into the air before Pharaoh.

In response to Yahweh's initial request to let His people go, Pharaoh had multiplied the pain and suffering of the Israelites by continuing to require their quota of bricks while depriving them of straw. Now that that pain and suffering of the brick oven was being visited upon the Egyptians as the soot dust spread across the land and settled on people and caused them painful boils and sores. God will not be mocked brothers and sisters.

And as I said earlier, as we move from the sixth mighty act to the seventh there is a sense that a line has been crossed and that stuffs about to get real. Yahweh even boasts that His upcoming hailstorm will be unprecedented and unrivaled in visiting His divine fury upon Egypt.

And any notion that Pharaoh or the Priests could ward off the storm or lessen its intensity and destruction by praying to Set, the god of storms and the patron god of the Pharaoh himself, were quickly dispelled when the storm arrived. Hail mixed with divine fire - it destroyed almost everything! To the point that Pharaoh's advisors were urging him to let the people go, it was no longer worth trying to keep them as slaves.

But the line had been crossed, the final countdown had started, there's no turning back now so Yahweh will perform his eighth mighty act, the plague of locusts. Again, it is billed as something unprecedented and unrivaled and it completes the devastation caused by the hail, so there is not a green thing left in Egypt. Obviously whichever god was meant to protect from such pestilence, or was expected to provide a good harvest had been proven incompetent and impotent by this act of Yahweh... there was green nothing left.

So Yahweh has shown his supremacy and sovereignty and His power over all of the vital and sacred aspects of Egyptian life and religion. So, it is fitting that His ninth mighty act covers

Egypt in a physical darkness indicative of their spiritual impotence. There is nothing and no one in their great civilization that has any vitality left to challenge Yahweh; their gods have proven useless, their political power is of no help, and their divine ruler Pharaoh not see or understand what God is doing in all this.

Which, after all the mighty acts are said and done – save for the final judgement on the firstborn, I hope we realize that Pharaoh's resistance and stubborn hard-heartedness is only possible because God had hardened Pharaoh's heart. Brothers and sisters only God's power can stand against God's power.

What would it say about the omnipotence of God's power, the effectiveness of God's power, the goal of God's power, if Pharaoh was able to simply resist God! All the gods of Egypt are rendered powerless, but Pharaoh somehow manages to stand firm against the power of the Almighty? That wouldn't bode well for inspiring Israel or anyone else to have confidence in Yahweh would it. But it would look pretty good

on Pharaoh... he's one tough ruler! He went ten rounds with Yahweh – and Yahweh had to take out his kid in order to beat him. Do you see the problem here?

And brothers and sisters, what does it say about us when we see the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as a troublesome in our understanding of who God is and what He does? On this matter, I suspect that for all we might insist that our lives and hearts are focused on God, if it troubles us that God should harden Pharaoh's heart so that all of God's mighty acts might be displayed, then the truth is that we are still focused more on our human pride and autonomy than we are caught up in the awesomeness and majesty of God and concerned for His glory.

Something that is only remedied by spending less and less time trying to resolve how God may have hardened a heart, and more time focusing on the wonder of who God is, His awesome essence, His amazing attributes, and of course His incredible power.

But now brothers and sisters – at this point in the sermon I find myself once again in a position like movie makers Peter Jackson, or Zak Snyder - having to make difficult decisions about what gets cut out in order to fit the theatrical release time frame...

So, this is an abridged and summarized sermon, on an abridged and summarized presentation of Exodus 5-10. I've had to cut out teaching on the themes of obedience and worship, exploring the genealogy of Moses and Aaron, and I've given you very little in the way of practical application thus far... But I believe I've managed to keep the essence of this story intact by focusing on God's power in these mighty acts.

Which, I hope, the Holy Spirit will use to inspire you to pick up your copy of the director's cut and read it in all its full original detail, to be blessed with greater insight, depth and nuance.

But let me give you one important application about how God's power is at work in our lives this morning brothers and

sisters, and that is to remind us that the supremacy of God power, the focus of His power and the fullness of His power – by which all the mighty acts in Egypt were accomplished... is now living in each of us as we receive the Holy Spirit from Jesus Christ.

And if God's mighty acts in Egypt teach us anything brothers and sisters, it should be that what looks powerful to us in our everyday lives is no match for God's power, the power of the Holy Spirit. So, do not be afraid of people, of rulers, of sickness, or death, or even of your sin or the devil, of the final judgement of God.

2 Tim 1:7 reminds us *“For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power”* and Eph 1: 19-21 confirms that this power *“is the same as the mighty strength [God] exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority...”*

Brothers and sisters, God's power has defeated sin and death in Jesus Christ, God's power has given us a new heart, and God's power is at work making us more and more like Jesus, fit for an eternity in the new creation.

So you can trust God's power, its effective and more than sufficient to accomplish what God intends in your life.

He who has started a good work in you will see it through to completion brothers and sisters.

That's the power of God – Amen.