

Exodus 5-10 Who is the LORD?

Intro: A World at War

Is the world in which we live in a state of peace or a state of war? Australia currently has about 1500 combat troops in Afghanistan, fighting the war against the Taliban. They also have peacekeeping missions in other parts of the world, such as East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

But within our own borders, we live in a state of relative peace. We don't live with the fear of being bombed when we walk out the door, and we don't worry about being shot at when we go out in the streets. We are blessed with great personal freedoms and peace in this great country.

Yet, the Bible says that wherever we live in the world today, we're engaged in an ongoing spiritual battle. There is an unseen enemy who remains hostile towards God; an enemy who seeks to undermine and destroy. He is opposed to God and His purposes in the world, and he actively works in opposition to God's people, spreading his lies and undermining the faith of God's people.

As Christians we're called to take our stand, not with physical weapons of war but with the spiritual weapons of the gospel (Eph 6:10f). We're engaged in a battle against the forces - the ideas, values, and lifestyles that stand against Jesus. We don't live in neutral territory but in a spiritual battle zone.

This is what we see in the book of Exodus. In this book, we see this conflict played out in a dramatic way between God

and Pharaoh. As we look at this conflict, and the ten plagues of Egypt, we should be reminded of who holds the power and of whom we should fear.

Context:

Last week we saw that Israel was growing under God's blessing. Pharaoh, feeling threatened by Israel's growth, turned Israel into a nation of slaves. We saw that God was working for Israel by multiplying her growth. However, in the background, unknown to Israel, God was also raising a leader in the form of Moses, who actually grew up in Pharaoh's house.

In chapters 3-4, God met Moses at the burning bush and revealed His plan to rescue His people Israel. This plan

involved sending Moses back to Egypt and commanding Pharaoh to let God's people go.

As you would've read in Community Groups last week, it took a bit of convincing for Moses to believe that he was the right person for the job. However, Moses eventually accepts his mission from God and returns to Egypt. Back in Egypt, Moses teams up with his brother Aaron, who goes with him and helps him speak to Pharaoh.

This is where we find ourselves at the beginning of chapter 5.

1. Pharaoh Rejects God's Rule 5:1-14

Moses and Aaron have just met the elders of Israel who are glad and relieved to hear that God cares about them. After

meeting the elders, Moses and Aaron boldly go up to Pharaoh and deliver God's message:

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.' "

'Let my people go to worship me and to offer sacrifices to me outside of Egypt.' And how does Pharaoh reply? He replies by saying:

"Who is the Lord? Who is the God of this poor nation of slaves? Why should I obey Him? I don't know who this God is!"

Rather than releasing Israel, Pharaoh makes life even worse for the Israelites. He tells his slave drivers to stop the supply of straw to the Israelites for making bricks. He calls the

Israelites a bunch of lazy good-for-nothings. He says to them: "From now on, you are to find your own straw and to continue making the same quota of bricks." In other words, Pharaoh rejects God's word and further oppresses God's people (Rom 1:21).

He is one of those people who neither glorifies God nor gives thanks to Him, and things still seem to go his way. Isn't it true that we often envy those types of people, people who are free to do what they want?

2. Israel loses heart

5:15-23

As soon as the Israelites' hopes for an early release are shattered, they immediately lose heart. Rather than crying out to God like they did before, they now cry out to Pharaoh. They cry out to him for a fair go, but when Pharaoh refuses to

lighten the workload, the Israelites curse Moses for making life worse for them.

*¹⁹ The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, "You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day." ²⁰ When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, ²¹ and they said, "May the LORD look upon you and judge you! **You** have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to **kill us.**"*

Not only do the Israelites lose heart, but Moses, their great 'fearless' leader, also loses heart.

²² Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent

me? ²³ Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

Moses is saying to God that things have only gotten worse since he listened to Him. He cries out to God and says:

"Why have you sent me back here only to make life worse for the Israelites? Even the Israelites no longer listen to me! Your plan has failed God. Things are worse and not better."

Israel's reaction is really no different to our own, isn't it? Isn't it true that when God doesn't give us the answers we are looking for we become easily discouraged? And when our exam results don't turn out the way we had hoped, when a particular relationship doesn't turn out as we expected, or

when serving God just doesn't seem to pay the same kind of dividends as the job or career you're investing your life into?

When we get discouraged, what do we do? We stop listening to God, and we stop listening to His word. We start doing things our own way, and our hearts start to wander away from what God is saying to us. Is that you right now? Are you in a position where you're no longer listening to God, and no longer trusting Him?

3. Everything goes according to plan 6:7, 7:1-5

How does God answer Moses' complaint that his plans have failed? God reiterates His promise in 6:1-8. God tells Moses in 7:1-5 that everything is going exactly according to plan; that Pharaoh's stubbornness and cruelty have always been part of His plan. Pharaoh will not let Israel go without a fight, and this

will be an opportunity for God to display His supreme power to Pharaoh.

7:1

¹ [Then] the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. ² You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. ³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, ⁴ he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. ⁵ And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."

God's purpose in hardening Pharaoh's heart is to display His supreme power over Pharaoh. For example, it's like Danny Green wanting a rematch with Anthony Mundine just to show who the greatest boxer in the Cruiserweight division is. Danny Green has just gotten the title but he hasn't beaten Anthony Mundine yet. However, Mundine says, "Look, there's no need to fight. I acknowledge that you're the best fighter, even though you'll never prove it against me. Let's just leave it at that." Danny Green would be frustrated, wouldn't he? He'd never get the chance to prove his power over Mundine.

But this is exactly what God will do with Pharaoh. By making Pharaoh resist God's rule, and by drawing out the fight, God will show what kind of God He is. In fact, God has already told Moses this would happen back in 3:19. In other words, everything that is happening to Israel up to this point is going

exactly according to God's timetable. Things will get worse before they get better so that He might get the glory.

Application:

This is one of the great truths that we need to take to heart today; that even when things get worse, God is still in control. He is still working out His purpose for the good of His people, and for the sake of His own glory. This is true even after we have prayed and things get worse rather than better. God is never out of control. God never loses sight of His people. He never stops caring for us, and never stops working for our good and His ultimate glory.

God is far more patient than we are. He works not from our limited perspective but from the perspective of eternity. God plans the end from the beginning. God knew that Pharaoh

would make life worse for Israel. He knew that Pharaoh would harden his heart. Pharaoh's hard heart itself is part of God's sovereign purpose so that He might show His supreme and unstoppable power to the Egyptians.

This expectation then sets the stage for the ten plagues that God is about to unleash on Egypt.

4. God Reveals His Power

7:8-10:29

In obedience to God's command, Moses and Aaron return to Pharaoh's court. Pharaoh asks them to prove themselves by working a miracle; Aaron's staff turns into a snake as a result. Pharaoh then calls in his magicians and wise men and they also turn their staffs into snakes. But Aaron's staff swallows up the other staffs.

To us, this turning of the staff into a snake might seem like a party trick. But let's see who's got the better trick. What's significant about this incident is that the snake is an Egyptian symbol of power. This symbol of power, represented by the snake, is actually found on King Tutankhamun's headdress.

God uses this Egyptian symbol of power to show that all of Egypt's power is no match for the God of Israel. Aaron's staff swallows all the others. This act is also an anticipation of the time when the Red Sea will swallow the whole of Pharaoh's army. The sign of the snake is a direct attack on Egypt's claim to power. However, Pharaoh's heart becomes hard after this incident, just as God predicted.

In response to Pharaoh's hard-heartedness, God unleashes the ten plagues on Egypt. We'll only cover the first nine this

week and leave the last climactic plague till next week. What I'll do is give an overview of the first nine plagues; then we'll look at what we can learn from them, and what we can learn about the God who delivers these plagues on Egypt.

The first plague is the plague of blood.

God turns the Nile River into blood. (7:14-25) This plague is not just an incredible act of power; it's a direct attack against Egypt's power base.

If you were to attack Sydney, what would you target? It'd be the Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, wouldn't it? These are the symbols of Sydney's greatness and beauty. But the Nile was even more significant. It was the source of life for the Egyptians, and was what made Egypt what it was as a

nation. Somehow, the magicians replicate the plague in a smaller way and Pharaoh's heart remains hard.

The second is the plague of frogs. (8:1-15)

Frogs cover and climb out of the Nile. They cover and infest the whole countryside. If you were in Egypt at the time, you would've had frogs all over your kitchen floor, in your bedroom, and climbing into your ovens.

The frog was a symbol of fertility for the Egyptians, so this plague was an attack on one of Egypt's gods - the Egyptian god Heqet, who was a woman with the head of a frog. The Egyptians are able to replicate this plague, but they don't have the power to reverse it. So Pharaoh asks Moses to pray to God to remove the frogs. But after the frogs die out, Pharaoh again hardens his heart.

The third plague is the plague of gnats. (8:16-19)

This time the Egyptians can't replicate the plague.

And in 8:19

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.

The fourth plague is the plague of flies. (8:20-32)

This time there is a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites who lived in Goshen. (v22) Pharaoh now agrees to let the Israelites go, but as soon as the flies are gone, Pharaoh hardens his heart again.

The fifth plague is a plague on the livestock (9:1-7).

Camels, donkeys, horses, and cattle, belonging to the Egyptians, are struck down and die. Pharaoh sends a messenger to check whether the Israelites are affected and finds that none of Israel's livestock is dead.

The sixth plague is a plague of boils (9:8-12).

Boils and sores come up painfully on all the Egyptians. Pharaoh's magicians, who are meant to channel the power of the gods, can't even stand as a result.

The seventh plague is the hailstorm (9:13-34).

The hail is so fierce and destructive that it doesn't just damage the trees and roof-tops, but it brings death to both man and beast that are caught out in the open.

The eighth plague is a plague of locusts (10:1-20).

What the hailstorm doesn't destroy, in terms of plants and vegetation, the locusts finish off. In 10:16-20, Pharaoh makes a feeble attempt at repentance, but his heart is again hardened. Why is this? Why does God harden Pharaoh's heart? It is because God has not yet finished with Pharaoh.

The ninth plague is the darkness (10:21-29)

This plague doesn't sound that terrible, but it would've been terrible to live through. If you've ever been through a blackout for a few hours, you would've just been waiting for the lights to come back on. This darkness of Egypt was so heavy that they could not move from where they were sitting for three days. However, the Israelites in Goshen had light.

Pharaoh calls up Moses one last time (10:27). After each warning of plagues, Pharaoh tries to call Moses' bluff with hopes that it will be his last hand, but each plague forces Pharaoh more and more to his knees, and also brings death and financial ruin to the whole Egyptian economy. By the end of the plagues, Egypt's economic power is pretty much in tatters. Even then Pharaoh holds on to the false hope that he can stand up against God.

The obvious question in all this is: Why does God, time and again, harden Pharaoh's heart? (It was not because Pharaoh wasn't responsible for his own hard-heartedness. God was just handing him over to his own rebellion and sin.) Why bring on one plague after another? Why not hit a home run on the first strike? It was because God had a greater purpose than setting His people free.

5. The purpose of the plagues

Let me now highlight three reasons why God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and why God unleashes the ten destructive plagues on Egypt.

- 1) Every plague is a judgment and punishment for their treatment or mistreatment of God's people (Ex 4:23, 6:6, Gen 15:14).

In Genesis 15:14, God had prophesied to Abraham that God would punish the nation they served as slaves, and afterwards they would come out with great possessions.

In Exodus 6:6, God said to Israel, that He would redeem them with great acts of judgment.

In other words, the God we worship is a God who judges and punishes those who refuse Him. He is not just a God who saves. We like to think of the positive aspects of being a Christian, which are God's forgiveness and love, and the promises of heaven. But what is the means of our salvation? Is it not through judgment?

Jesus bore the wrath and judgment of God instead of us. We are Christians who look forward to the day when Jesus returns. How will that day come? It will come through judgment. Each person here will be saved by God or judged by Him on that day.

The plagues of the Exodus are a demonstration of what God will do to those who ignore His word and oppress His people (Compare this to the plagues in the book of Revelation). The plagues reveal God's judgment against Egypt's sin.

- 2) The plagues unleashed on Egypt show the complete weakness and worthlessness of Egypt's gods (Ex 12:12).

In Exodus 12:12, God says that He will execute His judgments against all the gods of Egypt. All the gods of Egypt are shown to be worthless, weak, and powerless. Only the true and living God can save, protect, and provide for all their needs.

The same is true today. The gods we worship today - the gods of money, family, career, our studies, and the thing we put our trust in - all these can't ultimately provide us with security; only the God we worship can. The plagues show us the worthlessness of every other god or idol. ¹

- 3) The purpose of the plagues is to show that God alone is worthy of our worship, and that He alone might get the glory.

In chapter 9:15-17, God says to Pharaoh,

¹ Israel wouldn't have been entangled in some of the gods of the Egyptians; they would've been impressed by them. God is saying, 'Don't be fooled. There is only one God of the universe. There is no one who is like Him, no one who compares to Him, and no one who loves you like He does.'

¹⁵ For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. ¹⁶ But I have raised you up ^[a] for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

In 6:7, God says that His purpose is to show Israel who it is they worship as He reveals His power over all the forces of creation. The ultimate goal, the goal of Israel's salvation, is that they might see, know, and declare among the nations God's infinite power, His worth, and His wisdom.

What's true for Israel is true for us today. The purpose of our salvation is given for us in 1Pet 2:9:

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

This is the goal and purpose of the Christian life, to bring glory to God, and to declare His praises.

What is the first petition and request of the Lord's Prayer? "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name". We are saying to God, "Let your name be holy, let it be set apart and honoured above every other name." This is to be our constant prayer, and the reason why we wake up each morning, be it in good times or bad times.

Our prayer is that God's name be glorified; even in the darkness we have every reason to believe that everything is working according to God's perfect plan and timetable. This is the purpose of the Exodus, so Israel might see, know, and praise their great God.

This is what God calls on us to do today, to lift our eyes to see Him who is infinitely powerful, and who accomplished for us an even greater salvation at the cross, so we might be a people who declare His praises.

God's purpose is to show that He alone is worthy of our worship, and having thus experienced His salvation, that we might live for His glory.

Conclusion: An ongoing conflict.

The book of Exodus reminds us that the world in which we live is a world in conflict. There's a real battle going on, between the forces of ideas, lifestyles, and attitudes that are opposed to God and God Himself. But there's no doubt about the final outcome. There should be no doubt about the outcome for us.

Often it's scary to be on God's side because the forces against God *seem* to be in control. But Exodus tells us it's absolutely absurd to be on the anti-God side. God will one day bring all of them into judgment. And on that day, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. As God's people, let's live in anticipation of that great day when His glory and His power will be fully revealed, and when we as God's people will share in that glory.