



We had a big passage to look at this Sunday – 7v8-10v29. We considered it by exploring what we learn of the identity of the three key people within it:

Who Moses is – an obedient servant

After a shaky start and the huge setback of chapters 5-6, we see an extraordinary picture of obedience here, as Moses time and again trusts God's promises and does exactly as God commands him. This, of course, points us to Jesus, God's ultimate obedient servant.

Who Pharaoh is – a hard-hearted rebel

The description of God's judgment may feel harsh as we read it. But there are a few key points Moses (the likely writer of Exodus) makes about Pharaoh:

1 – he ignores his powerless magicians

For the first two plagues they are able to imitate Moses' signs (7v22, 8v7). But later on they are afflicted themselves (9v11) and beg Pharaoh to reconsider his opposition (8v18). But to no avail. Pharaoh has no intention of giving in.

2 – he shows no concern for his people

It is the Egyptian people who seem to feel the worst of these plagues (eg. 9v23-25, 10v13-15) and reap the consequences (eg. 7v24, 8v14). Yet not once does Pharaoh mention any concern for his people. His ego is his sole concern.

3 – he is a hypocrite

As the plagues intensify, Pharaoh frequently offers to let the Israelites go and attempts to make compromises with Moses (eg. 8v25, 28, 10v8-11, 24-26). But his offers are not genuine. After each plague, his response is the same – hard-hearted refusal to let God's people go.

But we might still feel God's judgment to be unfair as God hardened Pharaoh's heart. This is a hugely difficult topic. Here are a few tentative reflections:

- this hardening seems to be specific - it's about a specific command at a specific time, Exodus doesn't tell us that Pharaoh was decisively barred from eternal life.

- Pharaoh was still responsible - he hardened his own heart (8v15, 32, 9v34). The Bible often describes God's judgment as him giving people over to what they want – freedom from him (cf. Romans 1).

- it has to be ultimately up to God – if God chooses who will be saved, Paul argues in Romans 9, then he also chooses who will not be saved, difficult as that is for us to understand in a western culture that emphasises individual autonomy, power and freedom of choice.

Who God is – the Lord of all

In many ways, the plagues are the answer to Pharaoh's question in 5v2: "Who is the LORD?". The plagues reveal who God is. He is 1. God, 2. the *only* God, and 3. the Lord *of all*. He repeatedly explains that he is sending these plagues to demonstrate to Pharaoh, Israel and the whole earth his power (eg. 9v13-15).

And we, like Moses' descendants (10v1-2) are to hear of these extraordinary acts, and hear of the even greater revelation of God and his power in the incarnation and cross of Christ, and marvel and worship our God who is the LORD.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. What most strikes you in this narrative?
2. Who are we in the story? What mistakes might we make if we think that we are Moses or Pharaoh?
3. What parallels do we see between this story and Jesus' story?
4. How do you feel about the fact that God judges people? How do you feel about the fact that he hardens people's hearts against him? What do you think that means?
5. How is God's judgment intended as a comfort to his people? Why do we so often not feel it to be that? What could you say to someone struggling with this?