

Exod 03-04-16b

We're ready now to resume our study in the book of Exodus. And we are at the beginning of the cycle of plagues that God is bringing down upon the land of Egypt. And this first plague in Exodus chapter 7, beginning in verse 14, is given by instruction.

I'd like to step back and give you a little bit of information by way of anticipation here so that we'll have a framework to set the plagues in. I agree, different people look at this different ways, but I agree with Kyle and Dalich, which is the famous Old Testament commentary from back in the late 1800s. And I think the approach given there is good.

I think there are actually nine plagues rather than ten. And I think the slaying of the firstborn is not so much a plague as a whole separate event. The great thing about that is that if you look at these nine supernatural afflictions that God puts on Egypt, you find that they arrange into three groups of three.

And three is one of God's favorite numbers. He uses it for a lot of things. And there are characteristics that tell us that they are designed to be looked at as three groups of three.

For example, the first and second plagues are announced beforehand. The fourth and fifth, which would be the first two and the second set of three, are announced beforehand. And the seventh and eighth, which are the first two and the third set, are announced beforehand.

And then the third plague in each of those three groups is not announced beforehand. It just happens. So the third, the sixth, and the ninth are sent without any warning announcement.

The first, the fourth, and the seventh, in other words the first plague in each of these three groups, are announced to Pharaoh in the morning. The first and the fourth are by the side of the Nile. Both of those were, of course, connected with the overflowing of the river.

And in the seventh plague, which is the plague of hail, it doesn't say where he was when he announced that because that comes out of heaven. It doesn't really matter where you are. But this is not just an idle coincidence that these are arranged this way.

But the effect that the plagues produce is tied to the grouping that they are in. For example, the first ones, the Egyptian magicians try to imitate the first three. And they succeed initially, but then they are put to shame.

They imitate the first two. They manage to get some water to turn to blood. They are going to do something with frogs.

But when you get to the third, they can't reproduce it. So this first cycle is an increasing level of difficulty. And by the time you get through with the third plague, the Egyptian wise men have fallen out of the race.

The first three do them in. They kind of keep up with the first one and the second one. They did okay with the authenticating rod to snake deal.

But number three eliminates them. And this is the triumph of God's wisdom and God's messengers who are delivering the word over those who are pretenders and counterfeits and are representing the wisdom of man. Wisdom of man is his foolishness with God.

In fact, by the time you get to the sixth plague, the wise men themselves are afflicted. And not only can they not reproduce it, but they can't get away from it. It gets them.

Of course, by the time you get to what's called the tenth plague, which is the slaying of the firstborn, this is after the final refusal of Pharaoh. And this is not one that is brokered. Moses and Aaron don't do anything to bring it on.

God says, I'm going to come through the land. I will look at the doors and I will slay any who are not under the mark of the blood. And so you don't have Moses and Aaron waving a rod or any of this sort of thing.

Whereas seven of the previous nine are explicitly tied to some action by Moses and or Aaron. And there are two that are not expressly said to have been brought by them, but it just have been sent by God. And they come from his hand.

But the last one is a direct judgment of God and is distinct and separate. All of the others you could say, well, we might have seen this before. Maybe we've had an excess of frogs when the river ran dry.

Maybe the water was low. Maybe we've had odd coloration in the water. Maybe we've had darkness before.

All of these others might be explained away as natural phenomena. But when you get to the tenth plague, or what we'll call the tenth visitation from God after the nine plagues, there's no mechanism that you can explain that with. It's no kind of natural phenomena that's ever been seen before.

And I'd also like to address a little bit the timing of these. How much time elapsed from when these plagues began until they ended? It's hard to know for certain. We do know that it was mid-April when the slaying of the firstborn took place because the Passover is on the 14th Nisan, or Abib, and we know that that's April.

And we also know, when we get to the hail, it talks about the state of the barley and the fact that the grain was still in the head and so on, and that takes us back to about mid-February, and that's the seventh plague. So between the seventh and the slaying of the firstborn, we've got this period of time between February. So basically, when you figure it all out, if they were pretty much evenly spaced, this cycle would have begun in the fall, probably in October, right after the Nile River receded and went down.

It floods in the summertime and irrigates and everything. So probably along about late September or early October would be our time right now with the first plague. And this goes against the grain and natural phenomena because there were times when the Nile would be low right before the flood, and sometimes it would turn red, and people are trying to explain the Nile turning to blood by saying, well, sometimes the Nile would recede and get very, very low, and it would get brackish and be yellow-brown and all of this, and then as the river began to rise, when it began to flood, the water would turn red, and then it would run clear.

Well, this is the wrong time of year for that. This is after the flood when the Nile is going down, and it's an unexpected time for it to have any sort of natural cause for turning red here in the fall. So this probably takes place over a period measured in months.

These are not just weeks, but months, because we know that it ends up in April. So probably October to April. What do you have, October, November, December, January, February, March, April? Probably seven months.

And seven, of course, is another great biblical number, and this process apparently took place over a period of about seven months. Okay, well, let's notice a little bit about this pattern of threes that we have here. The first three plagues, God showed that He, the God of Israel, rules over nature.

Your first plagues are you have the Nile, and then you have the frogs who live in the Nile, and then we have in the New King James the lice. We'll see a little bit more about that. But these are all, and they come up from the soil, and so you have the water and you have the soil that is fertilized and made lush and fruitful by the waters of the Nile.

And God demonstrates that He controls those, and so He's in control over the forces of nature in that first three. The three following plagues, the center set of three, you have swarming creatures and so on. The dog flies, if you will, these pestering flies, this is where God makes a distinction between Israel and Egypt.

In these next plagues, this is the dividing line. Initially, the first three, Israel was not exempted in any way. All of the water turned to blood.

There were frogs everywhere. There were the lice, if you will, everywhere. But starting with these flies, these swarming flies, there is a distinction made between Egypt and Israel, proving to Pharaoh that the God of Israel was God in the midst of the land, that He could distinguish, He could preserve and protect His own people.

And this draws a line between the people of God and those who are oppressing them. And, of course, you have the first concession by Pharaoh, where he says, OK, I'll let the people go, and then he reneges in this set. And heavier and heavier plagues are sent until you get to the last three, where twice, in the first, you have one set in the middle where Pharaoh acknowledges and says, I'll let the people go, and he's going to do that twice in the third set, and he's kind of

like bending, he's starting to get desperate, and he'll say anything to get rid of the plagues.

So you see the level of pressure rising in the third set. But as soon as the plagues are withdrawn, he resumes his defiance. And so we see God stating His purpose, that He will be known as God.

His power will be manifest. He's going to show His superiority over the wise men of Egypt. He's going to show His superiority over the gods of Egypt.

He's going to show His superiority as the God of His people, in contradistinction to the people of Egypt. And He is finally going to show that He alone has the power of life and death. Let's go ahead and move into the first.

We've already seen the instructions here. In verse 17, God says, Thus says the Lord, By this you shall know that I am the Lord. I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in My hand.

And this is Moses talking. And they shall be turned to blood. All the fish that are in the river shall die.

The river shall stink. And the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river. The interesting thing about this is that the normal cycle, where sometimes the Nile River seems to look kind of reddish, is a time when it's in flood and things don't die.

It's actually a time of renewal. It's dank and marshy when it's brown and yellow. But when it starts turning red, this is the beginning of good times.

It's a time of renewal. So this is just the opposite, that things would stink and die. Now there is no natural analogy to this.

They can't really explain it away. And so the Lord spoke to Moses and He says, Meet him in the morning by the river bank. Why does He go in the morning? Well, in the morning you would expect, just like God's mercies are renewed every morning, people have an expectation in the morning, this is going to be a good day.

But why is Pharaoh at the river? Is he going down there to take a bath? Is he going down there to have a drink? Is he just taking his morning walk, his little morning constitutional? Why is he down there? More than likely, and you can see this in tomb paintings and inscriptions and things in ancient Egyptian literature, if you will, He is going down there to worship. This is an acknowledgement. This is the starting of the day.

We ought to start our day, evening and morning and at noon. I will pray and cry aloud. He shall hear my voice, Psalm 55, 17.

Pharaoh is going down and acknowledging the source of his power, the source of his strength. He is praying to the gods of Egypt, who are very closely tied to the Nile and to the sunrise and

all of this. So he goes down in the morning.

It's a ceremony. It's kind of like opening this session of Congress in prayer. He is going to go down in the morning to the river and acknowledge the gods of Egypt.

When he goes out to the water, stand by the river's bank and meet him. And the rod which was turned to a serpent you shall take in your hand. Now, Pharaoh is going to recognize that rod, right? It has already demonstrated superiority over the wise men of Egypt and over their charms and over their serpent ties with the gods of Egypt.

So, Pharaoh is going to go down and get ready to acknowledge the gods of Egypt. Here comes Moses and Aaron and there is that rod that he has already seen consume the snakes. He says, well, what next? You shall say to him, the Lord God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness.

But indeed, up to now you would not hear. Thus says the Lord, by this you shall know that I am the Lord. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood.

Fish will die, the river will stink, Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river. Of course, this is the major source of their drinking water is the Nile. It is too dry and it is marshy.

You have a difficult time getting anything but brackish water. They don't have springs in Egypt. They don't have spring water.

They rely on the Nile. So, the Lord spoke to Moses and said to him, say to Aaron, take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt. So, Moses is going to speak first.

He is going to strike the waters with the rod that is in his hand. Then he is going to hand the rod to Aaron. He says, take the rod in your hand and then stretch out your hand.

So, Aaron is going to stand there, supporting himself with the rod of God, and he is going to stretch out his hand. It doesn't say stretch out the rod, it says stretch out your hand. So, Moses starts with the rod.

He is down there by the Nile. He is going to strike the Nile. The waters of the Nile are going to turn to blood.

None of the other water has changed yet. Then Moses is going to step back and he is going to hand the rod to his brother. Aaron is going to take the rod, stand there with it, and he is just going to wave his hand.

He will probably turn a semicircle all around, facing away from the river, and just wave his hand over the land. As he waves his hand, water in the direction in which he is waving his hand is going to turn to blood. This goes way beyond any kind of algae or mud or anything else that might be in the river.

This is a supernatural act of God. Now, whether it is actual corpuscles or not, is something you could wonder about. Remember, you have other passages where it talks about the sun being darkened and the moon turning to blood.

Joel chapter 3 and verse 4 predicts that before the great and awesome day of the Lord. We don't expect that the moon is going to turn into a big ball of red blood. It is a description of its appearance.

Whether this is actually cellular material or whether it is reddish in nature, you have another case over in 2 Kings. If you remember the story about the king of Edom and the king of Israel and the king of Judah, they all get together and they are going to fight the Moabites. God says, I am going to do a wondrous thing.

I am going to send water into the land. You won't see it rain and you won't hear anything, but there is just going to be water that appears. And the Moabites look at that water and in the morning sun it looks like blood.

And they say, oh well, they have turned on each other. Judah and Israel and Edom have all just fallen on each other's swords and this is blood. And they say that the water has turned to blood.

So then they say, let's go to the spoils, Moab. And they rush in and of course they get annihilated by the perfectly healthy Judahites and Israelites and Edomites. And there is a great rout that day that God gives them over.

That is in 2 Kings chapter 3. But anyway, it says the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood. So we have some other times where water appears to be blood or looks like blood. The Moabites were so convinced, they thought that there had been a great battle and that this was blood running down from the battlefield.

So whatever it was, it appears to be blood. It causes death the way that fish try to swim around in blood. It is the oxygen that sustains the fish.

It stinks like blood. I think, if the Bible says it is blood, and I don't have any reason to take it otherwise, it is some kind of cellular blood. It is like a giant slaughter of whales upstream or something and all of this blood ran into the water.

Whatever source it was, God said it was going to be blood and it turned to blood. I think that the fact that it stank and became undrinkable and killed everything that tried to live in it, the water of the Nile is the source of life in Egypt and instead it is a source of death. Spilled blood is the picture of death going all the way back to the first murder.

The blood of your brother Abel cries to me from the ground, God says, back in the early chapters of Genesis. The picture of murder, after the ark rests on Ararat, God gives a new command to Noah. He says, if a man sheds blood, then by man shall his blood be shed.

God delegated the responsibility for capital punishment to mankind after the flood. That is when capital punishment was instituted for murder. That is the reason Cain did not die for the murder of Abel.

Capital punishment had not yet been instituted by God, but after the flood it is. The picture for murder, what if I don't shed his blood? What if I just crush his skull with a rock? What if I smother him with a straw tick or something? They didn't have pillows in those days maybe, so you are going to smother him with straw. What if you smother a guy? What if you drown him? The idea is, blood represents death.

The spilling of blood, the shedding of blood is a picture of death. The river that symbolizes life, and here is the Pharaoh coming down in the morning to worship the source of all life in Egypt. Moses turns around and strikes it with the rod of God, and that life becomes death.

Fish start floating belly up. Aaron takes the rod. What does the rod represent? Why is the rod in the view here? It is the authority of God.

This is not Moses and Aaron doing this. It is the power of God represented by that rod. That is their badge of authority.

That is the symbol of their ambassadorship from God. They are standing there as prophets of God, tellers forth of the word of God, and so they hold the rod when these things take place, and that is to remind everyone that it is the God of the universe that is doing these things. Stretch out your hand over their streams, their rivers, their ponds, their pools of water.

This is delegated authority, the hand representing authority. We have the hand being laid on. Laying on of hands is a commissioning ceremony in the New Testament, even down to this day.

They will become blood. There will be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, and you will notice buckets and pitchers is in italics in the New King James, and it just says both in wood and in stone, and there is some debate about what that means. I think it is perfectly straightforward.

What do you keep water in? You have to keep it in a stone well or a cistern. This is a reminder that it is not something that is flowing from the Nile. It is not something that came from upstream.

These isolated containers are turned to blood with the wave of Aaron's hand under the authority of God. Moses and Aaron did so just as the Lord commanded. He lifted up the rod, struck the waters that were in the river in the sight of Pharaoh, in the sight of his servants, and the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.

The other thing is, people keep trying to explain this with a natural phenomenon, but look at the timing. It is instantaneous. He strikes the waters, and I think it is just like Cecil B. DeMille.

You strike it, and the blood just emanates out the red. Aaron waves his hand, and they might have had a little jug of refreshment water there for the king so that after he said his chants and made his prayers to On and Isis and the other gods of Egypt, he turns around for a little sip, and Aaron waves his hand, and it just turns to this dank, brackish, undrinkable, bloody liquid. He lifted up the rod, struck the waters that were in the river in the sight of Pharaoh, in the sight of his servants, and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.

The fish that were in the river died. The river stank. The Egyptians could not drink the water of the river.

So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt because there are tributaries, and there are offshoots of the Nile, and these all turned to blood. This means that if it came from the Nile, it would have had to run upstream, and it didn't. All of these tributaries, ponds and creeks and things, all turned to blood.

So, verse 22, the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments, and Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. Notice, Pharaoh's heart doesn't grow hard, and he doesn't decide he's not going to heed until the magicians match it. What are they doing? They're saying, this isn't really supernatural.

We can do this same thing. Of course, they've got some kind of... There's little five-dollar magic kits you can buy where you use phenolphthalein in one thing and another, and you can turn something red and then turn it clear again. So they reproduced the semblance of this, and so Pharaoh says, well, this is just trickery.

I'm not going to be deceived. I'm not going to be fooled into letting the people go. This is some kind of an enchantment, but it isn't any stronger than the enchantments of my own diviners and magician and wise men.

Well, what is the analogy in our day and in our time? The Word of God says that it is profitable for doctrine and reproof and correction and instruction in righteousness. It can make the man of God mature. It can thoroughly furnish us for all good works.

We don't need to look anywhere else for the rehabilitation and for the equipping of our souls, and yet there are a lot of competitors who say, we can do that same thing. You don't have to be a Christian. You can go to counseling.

You can get L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetics. You can get Scientology. You can listen to this other yoyo that is on PBS every year that talks about the spirit masters of the past, and Jesus was just one of a lot of wise men.

There are counterfeits who give a semblance of progress. You can listen to Oprah Winfrey and all of the people that she gives on her show. Here's a way to prosper.

Here's a way to be happy. Here's a way to be fulfilled and be successful and have meaning in

your life. It's a counterfeit.

Well, each of us is the pharaoh of our own Egypt. We are the captain of our own ship and master of our own fate, and what a tragedy, not only for unbelievers to fall for these substitutes and alternate religions and alternate ways of life and miss the salvation that comes from God, but what a double tragedy for a believer who has been saved by the blood of Christ and who has had the potential opened up. All of those 24 things we've been studying on Tuesday night that happened at the point of salvation, the potentials that God gives us, and to be fooled and to be deceived and to be led astray by a substitute.

Well, this is just as good. This is another way. That's what the magicians do, and so Pharaoh's heart grows hard, and he turned and went into his house.

He just walks away. Neither was his heart moved by this, and you get the idea in verse 23 that his heart should have been moved by this, could have been moved by this, but his heart is not moved by this. God puts things in our path to move our heart, to change our mind.

Metanoeo is the New Testament word for it, change of mind. God sends us his word. God demonstrates his power, and we ought to be changed.

We ought to be moved. Romans chapter 1 is a classic presentation of that truth. So all the Egyptians are left to dig around the river for water to drink because they could not drink the water of the river.

Why are they digging around the river? Because the soil will filter whatever is in the water that is causing it to be blood, and it's like an earth filter. We used to have a sand filter when we lived up in Oklahoma. It had well water that was full of iron and impurities.

We had a big sand filter, and you push the water through that sand, and it gets out the solid matter, and you're left with water. So they're using however many feet or yards of dirt there is between their hole in the ground and the water to try to filter and collect enough water to drink. And they need to because this lasts for a week.

This goes on for seven days. Verse 25, seven days passed after the Lord had struck the river, and it isn't until seven days have passed that this finally relents. Notice that there is no relenting on the part of Pharaoh, no, okay, I'll let the people go.

Please take the plague away. God has it last for seven days. Seven occurs in times of judgment.

It's a fulfillment period. You have the seven fat kind and the seven lean kind that occur in another Pharaoh's experience. There are going to be seven months of these plagues, as near as we can figure it.

There is a seven-day period. It is a time of completion. So then in chapter 8, you have the Lord speaking to Moses, Go to Pharaoh and say to him, Thus says the Lord.

This is number two in the first cycle of three plagues. Let my people go that they may serve me. If you refuse to let them go, notice, if you refuse, volition is the issue in these nine plagues.

You have a choice. You don't have to go through this suffering. You can choose differently.

Let my people go. But if you refuse, I will smite all your territory with frogs. The river will bring forth frogs abundantly.

They will go up and come into your house, into your bedroom, on your bed, in the houses of your servants, on your people, into your ovens, into your kneading bowls. The frogs shall come upon you, on your people, and on all your servants. The Lord spoke to Moses, Say to Aaron, Do what? Stretch out your hand with your rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up on the land of Egypt.

So this time, Moses does the talking, Aaron does the stretching out of the hand, he's got the rod of God in his hand, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and they brought up frogs on the land of Egypt. Well, how hard is this? There are frogs in abundance.

All they've got to do is catch them and do a little magic trick, and they can make frogs come up as well. So these first two plagues are matched by the magicians. So Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, Entreat the Lord that he may take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the Lord.

Moses said to Pharaoh, Accept the honor of saying, When I shall intercede for you, for your servants and for your people, to destroy the frogs from you and your houses, that they may remain in the river only. He says, Look, to show you that you have a choice in these matters, you have a choice. God is listening to you.

God is waiting for you to decide. Accept the honor of saying. You pick the time.

This will show you that God is watching what you say and what you choose, and is responding accordingly. A lot of people like to say, Well, if man has any say, then this makes man participate in his salvation, and this puts God sort of under man's authority. Well, God can only save me when I decide I want to be saved.

Well, I'm sorry, but the Word of God says that this is a demonstration of God's power, and it is a reminder of human responsibility, and that's what you have here. God says, You pick the time, and that's when I'll remove the frogs. And when he says, Accept the honor of saying, it's a reminder that God has assigned a degree of sovereignty to our volition.

We are accountable because we are responsible. So he says, Tomorrow, let it be according to your words, so that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. This is not so that you may know that you can control our God.

God set the parameters of this. But God says, You choose, and I will do it when you choose. You have many examples of this in Scripture.

But it is so that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. The frogs shall depart from you, from your houses, from your servants, from your people. They shall remain in the river Oman.

Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh. Moses cried out to the Lord concerning the frogs which he had brought against Pharaoh. Notice, they don't just wait until tomorrow for the frogs to disappear.

Moses stands outside in a public place and cries aloud to the Lord God of Israel. This is a testimony. This is a reminder.

It's just like when Jesus prays in John 11 before he brings Lazarus forth. He says, Father, I am praying so that these who hear me may know that it's you who are in charge of these things. Verse 13, So the Lord did according to the word of Moses.

Now this is kind of backward of what we saw earlier when it said Moses and Aaron did according to the word of the Lord, right? But God is authenticating. God is substantiating the credentials of his messenger. And he says, Look, you people, if there's any doubt, here's Moses crying out.

And at Moses' word, the frogs recede. And they must have just gone like a wave. It must have been like a plague of locusts that come and then you see the last of them.

And then they recede. And here's the frogs and they're like lemons going to the sea. They all are like turtles that hatch out and have to go to the ocean water.

The frogs, as soon as Moses speaks and cries out to the Lord, all the frogs just start hopping and crawling and fleeing to the river. And it's just very obvious. People see them all going at once.

It's as though they went on command. It's like Moses is the Pied Piper of frogs. And away they go.

The Lord did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out of the houses, out of the courtyards, out of the fields. They gathered them together in heaps and the land stank.

So the ones that couldn't make it back to the river just died in place. And they're just shoveling them up and piling them. As soon as Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.

The Lord had told Moses ahead of time, don't think when he relents that this is going to be a permanent thing. He's going to stick to his course. What do we learn from this? Beware of the fair weather friend.

Beware of the person who gets under pressure and suddenly develops an interest in the things of God and says, oh yes, if God wants me to go to church, I'll go to church. If God wants me to give up smoking, well, I'll give up smoking. If God wants me to lay off of wine women in song or wine men in song, depending on their gender, or maybe not depending on their gender, well, I'll do that.

Anything to get relief from this pain. And we encounter people in our periphery. Sometimes we are even this way.

And we hope we don't find that in our own soul where when the discipline is on and the pressure is there and the pain is inflicted, we're ready to do whatever it takes for the pain to go away. As soon as the pain is gone, we go back to our previous behavior. People see their life improve when they start paying attention to God's laws and God's commands.

And they see things get better. And once they do, they say, well, that's a relief. And then they quickly forget God.

The sad thing is, Israel is watching all of this. Israel is the silent audience here. Seeing Pharaoh relent under pressure and then go back to his old ways.

What are they going to do when they get in the desert? They're going to do this very same thing. They do not learn by watching. My favorite Yogi Berra-ism is you can observe a lot by watching.

And if the Israelites had paid attention and learned this object lesson, God is playing this out before their eyes. He is the God who has the power to make these things happen. And if Pharaoh would obey the word of God, he would not suffer these indignities and these sufferings.

And his people would not suffer them. But he relents only long enough for the pain to go away and then he reverts to his former attitude. And these very Israelites who are being delivered by this process are going to follow this pattern in the wilderness.

And because of it, they're never going to enter the land. Only two of them are going to actually cross the Jordan. And they ought to learn.

And the message for us is, we are observing these things in the word of God. Why repeat this very syndrome ourselves? And why be taken in by people who repeat this syndrome in our periphery and in our observation? We have high hopes for someone in our family or someone in our workplace or someone in our circle of friends who seems to have an interest in the things of God because their life is a mess. And we say, you know, if you would just pay attention to God and His word, things would be so much better.

And they say, well, okay. Well, let me come to church with you. Let me go to Bible study with you.

Let me pray with you. And God does relieve some of their pain and some of their pressure. And as soon as they're out from under it, they immediately are no longer interested.

It's just a flash in the pan. It's a sunshine interest. And as soon as the sun breaks out from the clouds, why, they're no longer interested.

We have to be aware that that happens. We have to watch for it in ourselves. Do we really have to be spanked by God before we'll go in the right direction? And once we're in a period of prosperity, we lose our motivation, we lose our momentum, we lose our direction.

We ought to learn from observation. We ought to learn by seeing this example in Pharaoh and much more so in the children of Israel who ought to know better. But he's going to harden his heart and does not hearken, just as the Lord had said.

Well, this third plague is coming up. We're going to save it for next time. It is going to complete this cycle of the first three that have to do with nature.

God demonstrating that he is God, that he does control life, he controls death, he controls nature. And it is up to us to wake up and recognize that God controls our lives and God controls the factors that surround us. We think hardship comes from evil people.

It wouldn't come unless God allowed it. We are enmeshed in a culture and we are subject to what happens on a national level in terms of our economy and how much we pay for gas and how much our taxes are and so on. All of these things are in God's hands.

Nothing slips through. Nothing gets by his notice. And if we are conformed to his plan and purpose, if we are the called, then all of these things will work together for good.

Remember, the Israelites were suffering through these first three plagues, just like the Egyptians. Pretty soon God will be drawing that distinction. Well, we've covered quite a bit of ground for tonight.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you that we belong to you. We are called by your name.

You have entered us into your plan and purpose. You have assigned us a destiny. You have tied us forever to your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that we can be sensitive to our calling, that we will remember the identity that you have assigned us as sons of God, as those brethren who acknowledge the firstborn, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that we can take these things to heart, that God the Holy Spirit will impress them on us so that even as we go through the mundane details of our daily life, we can convert what seems like a small test or a small situation into an eternal weight of glory because we recognize that it all depends on what we choose. You are judging the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

We ask your blessing on us as we go through the remainder of this week and as we remember in particular what the Lord Jesus Christ went through so long ago in this very week. We are grateful for his work on our behalf. We pray that we can be counted worthy to stand on the day of judgment because of what we see in your word.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.