

Exodus 7:14-9:12 “Why Does God Judge? The Plagues of Egypt, Part I” Feb 26, 2017
Psalm 105
Revelation 16

The LORD *alone* is God.

And he is *your God*.

And there is *no one* like the LORD your God.

These are the central themes of the three cycles of the plagues.

Today we are looking at the first two cycles:

The LORD alone is God

And he is *your* God.

Exodus gives us three cycles of three plagues –
with the 10th plague as the capstone.

Each set of three plagues begins with a time stamp:

The first, fourth, and seventh plagues all start with Moses appearing before Pharaoh
“in the morning.”

The middle plague in each triad (plagues 2, 5, and 8)
all begin with the LORD saying to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh.”

And each set of three plagues ends with a brief plague that comes without warning.
The third, sixth, and ninth plagues are the only ones that have no warning.

The first three plagues – blood, frogs, and gnats – would best be described as nuisances.
They are annoying – but not especially painful.

The second three plagues are painful – flies, death of livestock, and boils –
afflicting the Egyptians and their livelihood –
but still not beyond the ordinary (except for the fact that Moses brings them all!).

The third three plagues are downright terrifying –
hail, locusts, and darkness –
as the judgment of God intensifies.

You can also see how these plagues signify the undoing of creation.

For instance, plagues 2, 3, and 4 have creatures that come out of three realms of creation:
Frogs come out of the water of the Nile.
Gnats come from the dust.
Flies swarm through the air.

All of creation is gradually unraveling.

Our psalm of response compares the salvation of Egypt in the days of Joseph,
with the judgment of Egypt in the days of Moses.

To put it simply,

One Pharaoh blessed the Seed of Abraham – and thus saved his people –
The other Pharaoh cursed the Seed of Abraham – and thus destroyed his people.

Sing Psalm 105

Read Revelation 16

Why read Revelation 16 in connection with the plagues of Egypt?

Because John is teaching us how to think about the plagues of Egypt.

If you just think of the plagues of Egypt as something that God did way back then,
then you will not understand them correctly.

What are the plagues of Egypt *doing*?

They demonstrate the judgment that sin deserves.

Isidore of Seville said it well:

“The plagues...were carried out corporally among the Egyptians;
they are now carried out spiritually in us,
for Egypt is the figure of this world.”

As we go through the plagues,

I want you to see Egypt as a picture of this age –
as a picture of this world – in rebellion against God.

And I want you to see Pharaoh as a picture of the Devil –
the ruler of this age who opposes the LORD and his anointed.

The plagues *start* with the LORD saying to Moses,

“Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.”

Pharaoh refuses to acknowledge that the LORD is God –
and he persists in his oppression of God’s people.

First Cycle: Plagues 1-3 – The LORD Alone Is God

1. Water to Blood: “By This You Shall Know that I Am the LORD” (7:14-21)

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.

¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. ¹⁶ And you shall say to him, “The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let my people go, that they may

serve me in the wilderness.” But so far, you have not obeyed. ¹⁷ Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. ¹⁸ The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.”” ¹⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.’”

And that is why Moses highlights the central theme of the Exodus over and over and over:

“By this you shall know that I am the LORD.”

This phrase will occur at the beginning of each cycle –
in plagues 1, 4, and 7.

And each time it will grow in strength:

here it is simply, “by this you shall know that I am the LORD,”
in the fourth plague (8:22),

“that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth”

And in the 7th plague (9:14),

“that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.”

Some have tried to explain the plagues as natural phenomena
divinely timed to strike Egypt.

It is certainly possible that God used natural phenomena –
he regularly does that sort of thing!

But we do not need to look further than the Word of the LORD for an explanation.

The same Word that created all things in the beginning
is quite capable of undoing creation and returning it to chaos and disorder.

It is important for us to remember that Exodus is not trying to provide a detailed explanation
for everything that happened.

As an example of what I mean,

some of you may have seen Darren Aronofsky’s movie “Noah.”

Aronofsky’s *Noah* does not look at all like the Sunday school version of the Flood,
but if you watch the movie carefully,

you will find that *everything* recorded in the Bible is *also* in the movie.

If the actual events of the Flood happened the way that Aronofsky told the story,
everything in the Biblical narrative would still be exactly true.

In the same way,

there are lots of things about the plagues of Egypt that are simply not recorded
because they are not necessary for us to know!

There are *lots* of ways that these things could have happened.

The things that are recorded are the things that we are to believe and obey.

And so Moses and Aaron *did* as the LORD commanded:

²⁰ *Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. ²¹ And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.*

How should we understand this?

Many have pointed out that there is a natural phenomenon in the spring
when the reddish clay from upstream washes down to Egypt,
and the Nile takes on a somewhat reddish hue.

But that does not make the Nile undrinkable.

What God is doing in the opening plague
is taking a common phenomenon in Egypt
and using a heightened version of it as a warning.

As if to say,

“You know that the Nile turns red every spring –
What if it went all the way and turned into blood?”

Now, what is meant by “blood”?

If all the water of the Nile actually turned into *blood*
the long-term ecological effects would be devastating and profound.

Yet here the whole plague is over in 7 days.

So when you hear that the water was turned into blood –
the key is that it was *red* and that it was *undrinkable*.

(Think of how the prophet Joel says that the sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood in the Day of the LORD –
no one suggests that the moon will be literally turned into blood –
but rather it will be the *color* of blood.)

In the same way, when we hear that the water of the Nile was turned into blood
we should not assume anything more.)

Further, if the text meant that all the water in the whole Nile River
throughout all the land of Egypt became blood,
then verse 22 would make no sense –

“But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts.”

If all the water of the Nile is already blood,

then there would be no water for the magicians of Egypt to turn into blood!

²² But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. ²³ Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. ²⁴ And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

²⁵ Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

So when it says that “all the water in the Nile turned into blood,”
it would be sufficient for “all the water” in view of Pharaoh and Moses –
which would then contaminate everything downstream for several days.

What is God doing?

Reversing creation.

The order of creation is being undone.

And just as in the Flood, the LORD starts with water.

The salvation of Israel moves from water to water –
from the water of the Nile to the water of the Red Sea.

The same Nile River that Pharaoh sought to drown the Israelite babies in
will be the source of the first two plagues upon the Egyptians.

And how does Pharaoh respond?

Pharaoh responds the way that unbelief regularly responds to the mighty deeds of God!

He explains it away.

He did not take it to heart.

He says to himself – “it was all a coincidence.

The Nile often turns red.

Besides, my magicians could do the same thing.

It was just a trick – just something to scare me.”

But the final word belongs to the people of Egypt:

they were digging wells along the Nile, looking for fresh water to drink!

While Pharaoh did not take this to heart –

it would appear that the Egyptians did.

2. Frogs: “There Is No One Like the LORD Our God” (8:1-15)

8 ^[a] Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ² But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. ³ The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, ^[b] and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. ⁴ The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.’”” ⁵ ^[c] And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs

come up on the land of Egypt!’’⁶ So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.

The second plague begins – like each of the middle plagues in each set of three – with the call for Moses to “go in to Pharaoh.”

Again, he says to Pharaoh “Thus says Yahweh,
Let my people go, that they may serve me.”

There is no explicit statement that Israel will never come back –
but neither is there ever a promise that Israel *will* come back!

Why frogs?

Some have tried to explain the plagues by reference to various gods of Egypt,
but most of those explanations fall short.
I think Augustine was closer to the truth when he suggested
that God chose the weak and foolish things of the world to shame the wise.
He could have used lions and tigers and bears, oh my!
But instead he used frogs and gnats and flies –
pesky little things –
“that their pride might be tamed by the most ignoble of things” (45).

At the same time, there is a certain logic to the idea that if the Nile had been contaminated,
so that the fish were dying,
then the frogs would be trying to find water elsewhere!

So from the Nile come swarms of frogs.

Frogs in your bed.
Frogs in your oven.
You reach into your kneading bowl to knead your dough,
and instead it’s a squishy, slimy frog slipping through your fingers!

And so Aaron reaches out his staff over the rivers, canals, and pools
and out come swarms of frogs...

When I was in Eritrea, I had a very minor encounter with frogs.

Every time I went to draw water from the cistern,
there would be dozens of frogs (some living, some dead) floating in the water.
This is my drinking water –
and I’m trying to be careful not to get any dead frogs in my bucket!
Let me tell you, after that, I *never* forgot to boil my water *thoroughly!*

There is almost a comical aspect to verse 7:
the magicians are able to conjure up *more* frogs!

⁷ *But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.*

So we already have frogs coming out our eyeballs –
and what are the magicians doing about it?
Let's make *more frogs!*
We can do that too!
See!!

You can almost hear Pharaoh saying,
“Uh, guys, how about coming up with a conjuring trick that makes them disappear?!”
“Oh, sorry boss, we don't know how to do that...
You'll have to talk to Moses!”

And so *for the first time*, Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron.
Until now, they had come to him – now he calls for them!

⁸ *Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”* ⁹ *Moses said to Pharaoh, “Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.”* ¹⁰ *And he said, “Tomorrow.”* Moses said, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. ¹¹ *The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile.”* ¹² *So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh.* ¹³ *And the LORD did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields.* ¹⁴ *And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank.* ¹⁵ *But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.*

Finally, there is a beginning of softening on Pharaoh's part:
Verse 8 – “Plead with the LORD” – plead with Yahweh –
Pharaoh is *beginning* to know that “I am the LORD.”
And so he asks Moses to intercede on behalf of the Egyptians.

And Moses is willing to “pray for those who persecute you” –
He intercedes on behalf of Pharaoh before the LORD,
and the LORD hears Moses and does as Moses asks.
All the frogs died in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields.

But when Pharaoh saw that relief had come,
he hardened his heart.

How often have you seen this?
How often have you done this!?

When trouble comes, you are quick to repent –
but then the trouble passes,
and you are just as quick to return to your old ways!
Pharaoh stands as a warning to all generations:
Do not harden your heart when you see the hand of the LORD!
You do not know when your time will run out!

3. Gnats: Even the Magicians Admit It: “This Is the Finger of God” (8:16-19)

¹⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.’” ¹⁷ And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸ The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹ Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

The third plague concludes the first cycle.

There is no warning with the third plague (or the sixth – or the ninth).
Each cycle of three plagues concludes with a third plague that strikes without warning.

With the first two plagues, the magicians were able to replicate the plague.

They turned water to blood.
They produced frogs from the Nile.
But they prove unable to turn the dust of the earth into gnats.

(The term “gnat” can be used of any number of small flies –
so, for instance, this could very well refer to the mosquito...
As such, you can see why the third plague is the worst of the first three –
in the ancient world, they did not have glass windows –
and not even *Pharaoh* had mosquito netting –
so try to imagine, if you will, a plague of mosquitos at night,
while you are trying to sleep!)

And so the first cycle of plagues concludes with the last word from the magicians:

“This is the finger of God.”
Moses had said that these plagues were coming upon Egypt
so that they would *know* that the LORD is God.

And now the magicians bear witness to this.
They are first Egyptians to testify: “This is the finger of God.”

The LORD – he is God!

But we cannot stop here.

If we stopped here, we might be tempted to see the holiness of God purely in terms of his transcendence.

The Notre Dame reading group has been discussing John Webster's little book, "Holiness."

I've read a number of books on Holiness before,
but Webster does a great job of showing us
that the holiness of God is not focused on his "transcendence" –
his "distance" or separation from us.

Rather, the holiness of God is revealed in his majesty and purity
as he condescends to come to us and deliver us from our sin and misery!

As Webster puts it,

"God's holiness is not simply to be associated with his transcendence,
but equally with his condescension....

God is the Holy One *of Israel*, which means to say that God is holy precisely in calling a people to be his own people, in purifying them, and in maintaining them against all threats so that they may be his own possession." (p45)

And that is what God reveals in the Exodus.

He is the Holy One of Israel –
he is the LORD in the midst of the earth –
and there is *none* like him in all the earth –
one who redeems a people for himself and brings them *near him*.

As we focus on the plagues – and the judgment that falls on Egypt –
we must never forget that the *purpose* and *plan* here
is to bring his people out of bondage *to be near him* –
so that God may dwell with his people,
and so that his people may dwell with *him*.

It is not enough to say that the LORD is *God* –
we must also confess that he is *our* God –
and that is the focus of the second cycle in plagues 4-6.

Second Cycle: Plagues 4-6 – And He Is *Your* God

4. Flies: "Making A Division Between My People and Your People" (8:20-32)

²⁰ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." ²¹ Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians

shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. ²² But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.^[e] ²³ Thus I will put a division^[f] between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen. ””” ²⁴ And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.

And here at the beginning of the second cycle, we hear once more:

“that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.”

Until now the LORD has not made a clear distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians.

One may presume that Israelites had to dig for water along the Nile –
and Israelites had frogs in their beds –
and mosquitos in their hair.

But now the LORD makes a distinction between the Egyptians and “my people.”

And so swarms of flies come upon all Egypt –
except for the land of Goshen, where “my people dwell.”
The term translated “flies” refers to swarming insects of all kinds.
It might be better translated “bugs” –
not the little gnats and mosquitos –
not yet the dreaded locusts –
but beetles and flies and bugs of all shapes and sizes!

You thought it was hard to sleep with the mosquitos buzzing in your ears!
Now there is an infestation of all sorts of bugs!!

And here in this second set of three plagues Pharaoh attempts to negotiate with God.

His magicians have persuaded him that this is the finger of God.

But Pharaoh is a polytheist –

He is used to negotiating with the gods –
playing them off one another,
trying to get the best bargain possible.

He wishes to do the same with this foreign god.

So he offers Moses and Aaron a deal:

²⁵ *Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.”*

²⁶ *But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? ²⁷ We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us.”*

In a culture where bargaining and negotiating is a regular way of life,
Pharaoh's offer is a predictable starting point.

If sacrifice to your God is the point,
well, how about I let you sacrifice here in Egypt?

Moses replies that the offerings of the Israelites will be an abomination to the Egyptians
International diplomacy often requires great tact.
A blunt negotiator will rarely obtain what he wants.

Moses is very clear on *one* point –

“We must go three days’ journey into the wilderness
and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us” –

but he couches his response in a way that appeals to Pharaoh's prejudices:

After all, there is probably *nothing* in Israelite sacrifices that would be
“an abomination to the Egyptians”

(Egyptians offered animal sacrifices all the time).

The abomination is that they would be offering sacrifices to a foreign god.

Moses is playing at Pharaoh's own game.

You think that we can offer sacrifices to Yahweh in Egypt?

Your own people would take offense to that!

²⁸ So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me.” ²⁹ Then Moses said, “Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” ³⁰ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. ³¹ And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. ³² But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

So Pharaoh offers a grudging acceptance:

“I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God...”

Pharaoh is beginning to “know” that I am the LORD.

But again, once the plague was lifted,

Pharaoh hardened his heart again.

5. Plague on Livestock: “Not One of the Livestock of the People of Israel Died (9:1-7)

9 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ² For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, ³ behold, the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your

livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴ But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.””” ⁵ And the LORD set a time, saying, “Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.” ⁶ And the next day the LORD did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. ⁷ And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

The plagues have moved from the waters to the swarming things –
and now in the fifth plague, they reach the livestock.

As in the first cycle of plagues,
the second plague in the second cycle starts with a command “Go in to Pharaoh,
and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD...’”
This is the first time that God speaks to Pharaoh of his “hand.”
“Behold, the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock.”
God had promised Moses that he would bring Israel out “with a mighty hand.”
Now Pharaoh is beginning to experience that “mighty hand.”

The magicians had spoken of the “finger of God.”
But Pharaoh had not listened.

The central point of this plague is to show Pharaoh the distinction
between those who belong to Yahweh – and those who belong to Pharaoh.

“All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died.”
Pharaoh even sends his servants to check – and behold, it was true!

Now, please do not take the “all” literally!
After all, in the following plagues, *more* livestock will die!
We should understand the “all” to refer to “all of the livestock that died from this plague
were Egyptian livestock.”

God is showing to Pharaoh and all his servants
what it means for the LORD to be God –
he reveals his mighty hand against those who oppose him –
those who oppress his people.

And verse 7 concludes with the passive voice –
“the heart of Pharaoh was hardened” –
leaving ambiguous the question of *how* Pharaoh’s heart became hard.

6. Boils: “But the LORD Hardened the Heart of Pharaoh” (9:8-12)

⁸ And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. ⁹ It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” ¹⁰ So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. ¹¹ And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. ¹² But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

And in the final plague of the second cycle,
there is again no warning given to Pharaoh.
Instead, Moses is to take handfuls of soot from the kiln
and throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh –
and it shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt,
and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land.

The magicians are mentioned for the last time.
Now, far from replicating the plague,
they cannot even stand before Moses –
because they are afflicted by the boils as well.
Pharaoh alone will stand against Moses.

Just as the third plague moved from the River to the Land,
so now the sixth plague moves from the Land to Man.

Yes, beasts are still affected – but the focus is narrowing.
Pharaoh and his people are the target of God’s judgment.
Yes, all the earth suffers under the curse *because of man*.
The creation itself, Paul tells us, groans under its affliction –
waiting for the revelation of the sons of God.
Indeed, here the land of Egypt groans under its affliction –
waiting for the revelation of the sons of God!
(Israel is my son, my firstborn – let my son go that he may worship me!)

The restoration of creation requires the restoration of the Son of God!
It is only in the resurrection of Jesus that this restoration finally begins.
And I say *begins* because Jesus is the firstfruits –
we are still waiting eagerly, as Paul says in Romans 8

“for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

The judgments upon Egypt foreshadow the Final Judgment (as Revelation 16 teaches us).

And even so the Exodus is a picture of the New Creation,
as the people of God are brought out of bondage to slavery –
out from under the dominion of sin, death, and the devil.

And that is why we have verse 12:

“But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them,
as the LORD had spoken to Moses.”

Why does God *harden* Pharaoh’s heart?

It will not do to say “Oh, Pharaoh would have hardened his own heart anyway...”
The text does *not* say that!

God is using Pharaoh as a picture of the Devil.

Sure, Pharaoh hardened his own heart repeatedly –
he *deserves* the wrath that comes upon him!

But God is not simply interested in getting his people out of Egypt.

As we saw in Revelation 16:

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.

For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve.”

Next time we’ll look more at this theme of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.

But here, in this second cycle of plagues,
the purpose of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart
is precisely the same point as in Revelation 16:
“they have shed the blood of saints and prophets.”

Why does God judge?

The Holy One will protect and defend his people.

And he has demonstrated this by raising Jesus from the dead.

Because God vindicated Jesus and seated him at his right hand –
therefore all who belong to him
now may draw near by faith.

Yes, the LORD alone is God – and he is *your God* –
who rescues and avenges his people.

And yes, that means that this is a warning to those who refuse to repent –
as Revelation 16 put it,
those who “cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues.”
If you respond to God the way Pharaoh did –
if you refuse to repent before his mighty hand –
then all these judgments will come upon you.

And so I would say to you what the apostle Peter said on the day of Pentecost:
“Save yourselves from this crooked generation!”
“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of your sins,
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”